

## 7.2 Elizabeth Street - Protected Bike Lanes Trial

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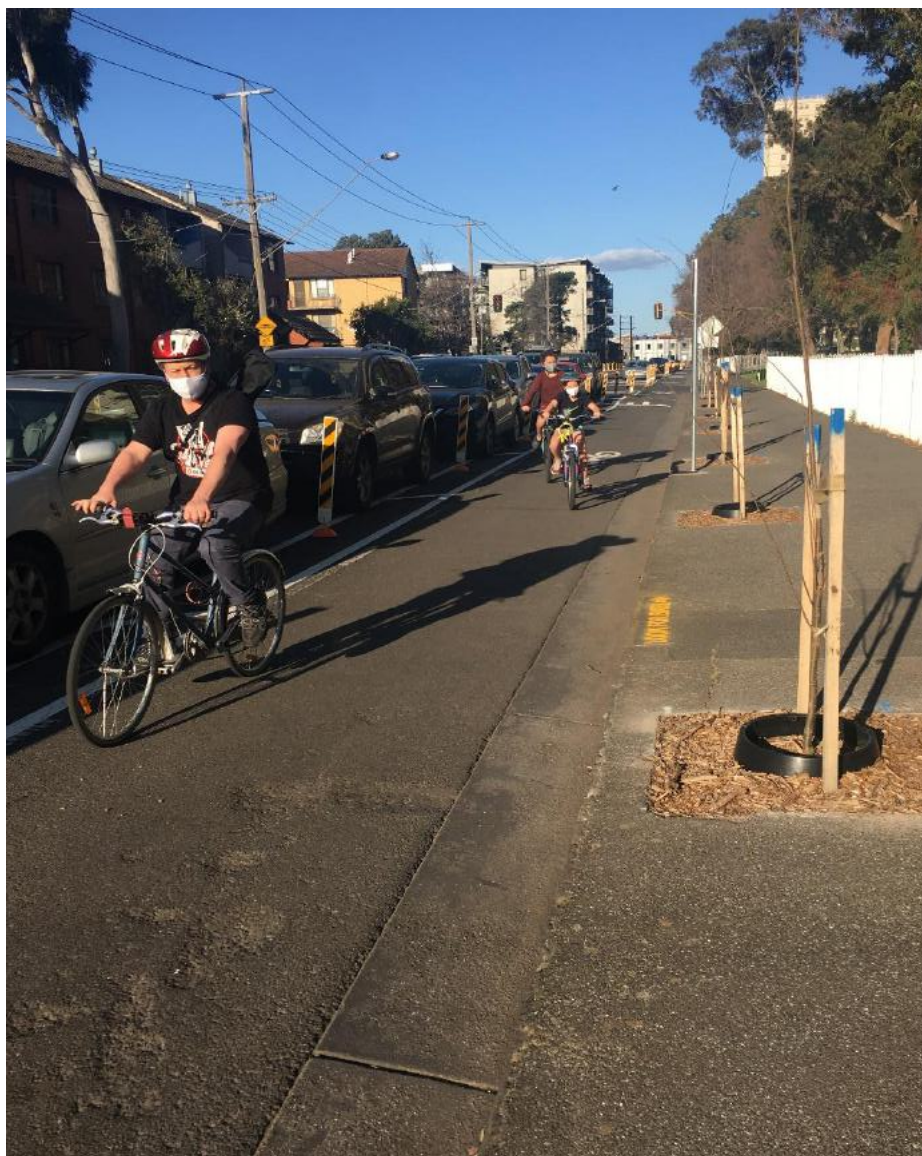
### Purpose

1. A trial of protected bike lanes on Elizabeth Street in Richmond has been in place since July 2020. Over this time, Council has undertaken extensive data collection and community consultation.
2. The scheduled trial period has now concluded, and a decision is required on the future of this bicycle infrastructure. Officers have reviewed the data and presents to Council information regarding options.
3. If Council seeks to make protected bike lanes a permanent street design outcome, then various options are available to do this. High quality protected lanes are expensive in the context of the Council budget, hence options which maximise the potential opportunities to receive external funding are desirable albeit it may take some time to secure this outcome. Other potential options include extending the existing trial or returning the road to its pre-trial layout. The pre-trial layout consisted of painted bike lanes located between parked cars and passing traffic.

### Critical analysis

#### History and background

4. Elizabeth Street is designated as a Strategic Cycling Corridor (SCC) Primary Route (C1) by State Government. These routes are intended to be key arterial routes for bikes (and now increasingly e-scooters) on Victoria's bicycle network. Elizabeth Street also forms a key part of the 'New Deal for Cycling' network as defined in the Yarra Transport Strategy (YTS).
5. The intention of the New Deal network is to provide strategic bike linkages throughout Yarra that are genuinely safe and comfortable for people of all ages and cycling ability to use. Particularly women and children who are underrepresented in cycling data sets. This will broaden the bicycle user base as much as possible to significantly increase the numbers of people cycling and scootering each day in line with Council objectives.
6. Attachment 1 shows a map of the New Deal for Cycling Network. At this moment in time, 39% of the New Deal Network (approximately 17km's) is compliant with Council cycling safety and comfort criteria. The YTS target is to make the remaining 30km of the New Deal Network compliant by 2032.
7. Elizabeth Street is currently New Deal compliant as it contains protected bike lanes which are of an appropriate width. These were installed in early 2020 after Council resolved to run a 12-month trial in December 2019. Council then extended the trial by 12 months in September 2020 and again in December 2021. Protected bike lanes on Elizabeth Street were first proposed in Council's 2010- 2015 Bicycle Strategy.
8. The image below shows the protected bicycle lanes on Elizabeth Street which have been installed on a temporary basis using plastic strips, bollards and line marking.



### Discussion

9. The objectives of the trial were to:
  - (a) Install protected bike lanes for cyclists as quickly as possible following a Council decision to proceed;
  - (b) Increase levels of cycling generally;
  - (c) Increase cycling rates across a broader cross-section of the community from the ages of 8 to 80 (including more women and children);
  - (d) Assess the impacts and benefits of protected bike lanes on the street and gather local community feedback in a real world setting;

- (e) Respond quickly to any safety and risk issues as identified by officers, stakeholders and community members by making tweaks to the original design (under Group Manager delegation);
  - (f) Gather general community views and comments on what people want to see in the street more broadly (e.g. trees, disabled parking bays, bike parking etc); and
  - (g) Gather bike lane user views on the facilities that Council have provided for them.
10. A significant amount of detailed data and community feedback has been obtained over the 30 months since the trial commenced. The pandemic has impacted the ability of Council to collect data regularly on a quarterly basis and it has also impacted peoples travel patterns and the demand for travel. Notwithstanding this, quarterly update reports have been provided throughout the trial. The reports detail the number of people using the bike lanes, who is using them, traffic speeds, car parking occupancy and levels of community satisfaction via intercept surveys, and Your Say Yarra.
11. The pandemic presents some challenges in determining how success is defined as net cycling volumes on the Elizabeth Street are lower than they were pre-trial.
12. Data is showing however that, bike volumes across Melbourne are starting to trend back to pre-pandemic levels. In the medium to longer term, multiple factors will drive up the demand for access to safe and comfortable bike lanes in Yarra. These include:
- (a) high levels of population growth (Melbourne is one of the fastest growing cities in the world);
  - (b) rising levels of traffic congestion;
  - (c) packed public transport services;
  - (d) increased bike freight (deliveries etc);
  - (e) the 'cost of living crisis' (particularly food, fuel and housing costs);
  - (f) high electric car prices;
  - (g) low unemployment; and
  - (h) the rise of e-scooters/electric bikes.
13. Notwithstanding the recent impacts of the pandemic, the data shows that the installation of protected bikes via a trial has been a success when judged against key project objectives for the following reasons:
- (a) There is broad community support for the protected bike lanes, average levels of satisfaction (over 7 on street surveys of nearly 1,500 people travelling by various modes of transport) was 6.5 out of a possible 10;
  - (b) Cyclists and e-scooter users like using the protected bike lanes based on interviews;
  - (c) The amount of community engagement with the trial has been very high;
  - (d) 32% of bike lane users are women which is more than double the pre-trial percentage;
  - (e) The number of children using the bike lanes has increased by a factor of 15 from the pre-trial level (albeit off a low base);
  - (f) Increases in cycling by women and children strongly indicate that total cycling levels are higher than they would have been if protected lanes hadn't been installed regardless of the impact of COVID-19;
  - (g) Average vehicle speeds are slightly lower, as are traffic volumes;
  - (h) There has been a decrease in the number of recorded crashes causing serious injuries to cyclists along Elizabeth Street;
  - (i) A number of 'tweaks' were made having considered community feedback where this was appropriate, demonstrating that trials are adaptable and responsive; and

- (j) Officers were able to respond to community feedback by making adjustments to the trial through such things as new signage, provision of disabled parking bays, changes to parking operations and removal of street furniture that was causing visual clutter.
14. Attachment 3 provides a detailed summary of the data collected from 1,457 on street intercept surveys on Elizabeth Street, 110 survey responses through Your Say Yarra and 318 map pin comments via Your Say Yarra.

#### Discussion

15. On Elizabeth Street, there are two factors to consider over the coming years when deciding what happens, when it happens and who will fund the works.

#### The road surface is nearly worn out

16. The road surface requires a road re-sheet which is being planned for. In advance of this, road surface patching can be done annually as needed at a cost of up to \$30K. This is not something that can be done indefinitely and officers will keep Councillors informed as time goes by should the road surface start to deteriorate beyond patch up repairs.
17. Re-sheeting the road costs approximately \$800k and is budgeted within the 10 year capital works plan. The re-sheet is a key trigger point for the installation of permanent protected bike lanes or another treatment on Elizabeth Street. The installation of permanent protected bike lanes is not within the 10 year capital works budget and is estimated to cost between \$700k to \$1.5m plus depending on the scope of works. Scope potentially includes not only protected bike lanes but other upgrades like trees, new pedestrian crossings, kerb outstands and other street features. The scope of a permanent bike lane treatment is not proposed to be considered by this report in detail and will require further investigation.

#### The North Richmond Master Plan

18. The North Richmond Master Plan will be delivered by Homes Victoria and was first announced by State Government in 2020 as a priority project. Stage One of construction has planning approval for a site on the north side of Elizabeth Street with construction scheduled to commence 2023. Future Stages and finalisation of the Master Plan are unknown at this stage but a five-to-10-year timeframe for completion is a reasonable assumption.
19. Over this time, large amounts of heavy construction traffic will wear the existing road surface down further and may cause some damage to street furniture (kerbs, bollards and other fixtures and fittings).
20. As a result of wear and tear on the road, Homes Victoria may be required to contribute to some or all of the re-sheet to return the road surface back to an acceptable condition.
21. Other State Government contributions may also contribute to the installation of permanent kerbed protected bike lanes and other street upgrades to support the future Masterplan for the North Richmond Estate and deliver on State transport policy, noting the strategic importance of Elizabeth Street as a bike route.
22. The immediate decision to make the protected bike lanes a permanent street feature does not mean that the existing temporary infrastructure needs to be removed quickly and/or replaced with more permanent concrete kerbing and other street furnishings. The existing temporary infrastructure can be left in situ and maintained at a cost of approximately \$10k per annum for the foreseeable future and will continue to protect cyclists from passing traffic and car dooring hazards. Elizabeth Street will also continue to be compliant with the new Deal For Cycling.
23. A permanent treatment can then be installed at a future time that on balance best suits Council when construction impacts and external funding opportunities are considered.

#### Options

24. The scheduled trial period has now concluded and a decision on next steps is required.

25. There are five main options presented in this report for Council to consider:
- (a) Option One - Keep the protected bike lanes. Leave the existing infrastructure as is and maintain it. Explore State funding opportunities;
  - (b) Option Two - Keep the protected bike lanes. Install new permanent protected bike lanes as quickly as possible via a Council funded road re-sheet;
  - (c) Option Three - Continue trial for at least an additional 12 months;
  - (d) Option Four - Remove the protected bike lanes. Return the original line marking immediately on the existing road surface; and
  - (e) Option Five - Remove the protected bike lanes. Return the original line marking via a Council funded road re-sheet.
26. A table summarising the options is provided as **Attachment Four**.

#### Option One

27. Leave the trial protected bike lanes as they are for now (with plastic bollards etc). Install permanent infrastructure (concrete kerb separators etc) as part of a future road re-sheet program (which may include a contribution from Homes Victoria) and explore opportunities for State funding for the permanent bike infrastructure. The timing of this will be governed by the actioning of the Homes Victoria masterplan and any future construction out of the Master Plan process. Funding of up to approximately \$40k per year will be required to patch the road surface (\$30k) and maintain the plastic bollards, signage and other trial furniture (10k);
28. Undertake an audit of the existing trial infrastructure as quickly as possible to see what condition it is in replacing it and cleaning it as appropriate. Beyond that the trial infrastructure will be maintained on an ongoing basis as appropriate with any existing damaged or missing plastic strips and bollards replaced.

#### Option Two

29. Install new permanent protected bike lanes as quickly as possible by Council bringing the road re-sheet forward and not tying it to Homes Victoria construction. The minimum timeframe for commencement of the installation would be three years once sufficient capital budget and officer resources are allocated in the Council budget. The road surface and bike lanes are then likely to be impacted by construction associated with the North Richmond Housing Estate re development.
30. Undertake an audit of the existing trial infrastructure as quickly as possible to see what condition it is in replacing it and cleaning it as appropriate. Beyond that the trial infrastructure will be maintained on an ongoing basis as appropriate with any existing damaged or missing plastic strips and bollards replaced.

#### Option Three

31. The trial would continue for at least an additional 12 months with no commitment made to keeping the protected bike lanes at this moment in time.
32. This would require funding for four more quarters of data collection and maintenance as required. The approximate cost of this would be \$130k per additional year.
33. Undertake an audit of the existing trial infrastructure as quickly as possible to see what condition it is in replacing it and cleaning it as appropriate. Beyond that the trial infrastructure will be maintained on an ongoing basis as appropriate with any existing damaged or missing plastic strips and bollards replaced.
34. Officers do not recommend this option as it would require significant officer time and capital expenditure at minimal value given Council already has 30 months of data.



#### Option Four

35. Remove the protected bike lanes and return the original line marking to the existing road surface in advance of a road re-sheet that may include some State funding. Under this option changes to line marking would be done a minimum of six weeks from a decision. The line marking would need to be done again once the road is re-sheeted.
36. Officers do not recommend removing the protected bike lanes as this would be contrary to the Yarra Transport Strategy.

#### Option Five

37. Remove the protected bike lanes and return the original line marking as part of a Council funded road re-sheet program. Under this option changes to line marking on the existing surface would be done a minimum of six weeks from a decision. The minimum timeframe for doing the road re-sheet would be 18 months. Homes Victoria will not pay for this road re-sheet as it is prior to the completion of their works. They will need to pay for repairs to the newer road surface after their works are completed.
38. Officers do not recommend removing the protected bike lanes as this would be contrary to the Yarra Transport Strategy.

#### Recommended Option

39. Officers recommend Option One as this enables protected bike lanes to remain at the lowest short term cost to Council whilst also maximising the opportunity for securing external funding opportunities for a new road surface and a permanent bike infrastructure.
40. The officer's view is that on balance Option One should be taken which is:
  - (a) make the protected bike lanes a permanent street feature. Leave the existing bollards as they are and look for opportunities for State Government funding to contribute to a road re-sheet, permanent protected bike lanes and other street improvements; and
  - (b) undertake an audit of the existing trial infrastructure as quickly as possible to see what condition it is in replacing and cleaning it as appropriate. Beyond that the trial infrastructure will be maintained on an ongoing as appropriate with any existing damaged or missing plastic strips and bollards replaced.
41. Under this option, officers will update Councillors on progress with advocacy to secure external funding and will advise on potential delivery timeframes for the road re-sheet and permanent bike lane install.

#### Community and stakeholder engagement

42. An extensive community engagement strategy has been implemented over the 36 month trial street despite the challenges presented by the COVID-19 Pandemic.
43. This has included:
  - (a) Posting information and receiving feedback through the Your Say Yarra webpage;
  - (b) Popup in-person engagement sessions targeted at CALD communities;
  - (c) In-person and random intercept surveys conducted by an independent consultant;
  - (d) Receiving feedback by email and phone;
  - (e) Various letter drops and information posters;
  - (f) In person meeting with residents and business to discuss the project;
  - (g) Community engagement during the development of the Yarra Transport Strategy 2022-32; and
  - (h) Direct notifications to abutting property owners and occupiers.

44. Officers have employed various strategies to engage ‘hard to reach’ groups and CALD communities as much as possible. This has included the use of interpreters and bilingual written material.
45. Key topics the community raised include:
  - (a) Safety benefits, especially for women and children cycling and walking;
  - (b) Safety, such as narrower widths of driving and car parking lanes;
  - (c) Community engagement approaches generally and the use of trials;
  - (d) Concerns over reductions to on-street car parking and suggestions regarding changes to parking management;
  - (e) When the bicycle lanes will be made permanent; and
  - (f) Various observations over the visual appearance of the trial infrastructure.
46. **Attachment Two** contains a detailed summary of community engagement results.

## Policy analysis

### Alignment to Community Vision and Council Plan

47. Alignment to Community Vision and Council Plan
48. Strategic Objective 5 of the 2021-25 Council Plan is that “Yarra’s transport network is sustainable and recognises that streets are important shared public spaces. Transport and movement is accessible, safe and well connected.” Indicator (i) of the Transport and Movement Theme measures kilometres of separated cycling lanes delivered, which this project works towards.
49. Theme 4 of the 2036 Yarra Community Vision identifies a future priority for Council to create “a transport system that is innovative, efficient, sustainable and accessible”. This project helps to deliver this priority.
50. The Yarra Transport Strategy 2022-32 identifies several objectives and policies that support this project. This includes the New Deal for Cycling (Policy 4), using pop-ups, pilots and trials to deliver projects (Policy 5) and prioritising walking, cycling and public transport over car use (Policy 1).

### Climate emergency and sustainability implications

51. Transport is the third-largest and fastest-growing source of emissions in Yarra. In 2023, the vast majority of these emissions are generated by private cars.
52. The Victorian Cycling Strategy, Yarra Transport Strategy 2022-32 and the Yarra Climate Emergency Plan 2020 all identify that mode shift away from private cars and towards sustainable modes of transport are essential for climate mitigation and adaptation.
53. Unsafe bicycle infrastructure is the main barrier to getting more people cycling more often. This can be overcome by providing comfortable and attractive conditions for cycling. Protected bicycle lanes, such as those on Elizabeth Street, provide a much safer road environment that encourages cycling.

### Community and social implications

54. This project seeks to make Yarra’s transport network more equitable, inclusive and accessible.
55. Council undertook extensive community engagement throughout the trial period. This included specific outreach to communities that are traditionally underrepresented in project consultations. Details of the methodology and results are included in this report.

### Economic development implications

56. Projects that make it easier and safer for people to ride have consistently shown economic benefits. Improving facilities for people riding bikes has ancillary benefits, such as improved street amenity, increased natural observation, as well as direct benefits, such as more customers visiting businesses nearby.
57. No known economic implications are associated specifically with this project.

### Human rights and gender equality implications

58. Data has shown significant increase in the proportion of women cycling on Elizabeth Street. This result correlates with research and results from other projects that make it easier and safer for people to ride.
59. This project has been assessed under The Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 and Gender Equality Act 2020 and no implications have been identified.

## Operational analysis

### Financial and resource impacts

60. The financial implications of the projects depend on the option selected by Council.
61. Other permanent works of this scale, such as on Wellington Street in Collingwood, are often partly or fully funded by the State Government as any changes to a street layout align with State objectives for transport.

### Legal Implications

62. There are no known legal implications of making the trial permanent. Council retains the necessary powers under legislation including the Road Management Act 2004 and Local Government Act 2021.

## Conclusion

63. The Elizabeth Street Protected Bike Lane Trial was installed in July 2020. The trial has since been extended by Council in 2020 and 2021.
64. The route is one identified by several Council and State Government policies and strategies as one of the highest importance to upgrade. These include the Yarra Transport Strategy 2022-32 and the Department of Transport's Strategic Cycling Corridors.
65. The trial was intended to inform a decision by Council on any permanent solution by monitoring its operation and identifying issues. An extensive catalogue of data and community feedback has been collected and analysed.
66. Officers consider that all objectives set out by Council have been achieved. Community engagement has been high and users of the protected bike lanes have provided positive feedback and want it to be retained. The trial has also resulted in more women and children using the bike lane which is a key indicator in the context of council objectives to increase the amount of travel by active transport.
67. The Homes Victoria proposal presents an opportunity for the State Government to be involved in funding or partially funding a long term vision for the street including kerbed protected bike lanes and potentially other street features such as kerb outstands, trees, and additional pedestrian crossings. There are also opportunities for State Government to contribute funds to a road re-sheet so the road is in an appropriate condition when construction works are finished.



## RECOMMENDATION

1. That Council:
  - (a) note the findings of the Elizabeth Street bicycle lane trial;
  - (b) determine to retain the protected bicycle lanes on Elizabeth Street; and
  - (c) leave the existing temporary protected bicycle lane infrastructure in situ, conducting necessary maintenance and cleaning as appropriate, including to the bollards, plastic strips and road surface.
2. That in recognition of the adjacent Homes Victoria redevelopment project, Council explore funding opportunities as part of that project for:
  - (a) partial or full road re-sheeting of Elizabeth Street;
  - (b) the installation of permanent protected bike lanes (using concrete kerbs etc.); and
  - (c) other complimentary street works (trees, pedestrian crossings etc.).
3. That officers keep Council up to date on the road asset condition, timeframes for completion of the Home Victoria works and progress with securing State funding for a re-sheet, construction of permanent protected bike lanes and other treatments on Elizabeth Street.

## Attachments

- 1 Attachment 1 - New Deal for Cycling Map
- 2 Attachment 2 - Elizabeth Street Engagement Report
- 3 Attachment 3 - Elizabeth Street Data Summary
- 4 Attachment 4 - Elizabeth Street Options