



17 April 2025

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## 20-year preventive health strategy

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Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the Tasmanian Government's 20-year preventive health strategy.

Bicycle Network represents over 46,000 members nationally. We are dedicated to making it easier for more people to ride more often because of the physical and mental health benefits that regular activity brings.

### **Making activity everyday**

Tasmanians' level of physical activity is well below the recommended daily minimum of 30 minutes of moderate exercise to stay healthy. We need a dramatic turn-around in these levels if we are going to be considered one of the nation's healthiest populations.

Physical activity should be a focus for the preventive health strategy as it has the double benefit of helping to avoid major illnesses such as diabetes, cancer and heart disease, and improving quality of life.

Physical activity is important for regulating weight, contributing to regular sleep, regulating mood, strengthening bones and muscles for better balance and stress reduction. All of these lead to healthier humans who can participate in society and work and reduces the burden on the acute health system of illness and disabilities.

People working full-time with caring and other duties find it difficult to make time to exercise, it becomes yet another chore to fit into the day. Many people work in sedentary jobs and thanks to technology we don't get the incidental exercise we once did from looking after houses and gardens, participating in community activities or moving from point A to B.

While sporting teams and activities are a great way to maintain physical activity and social connection, only a small percentage of the adult population engages in team or organised sport, preferring walking, gyms, swimming and cycling as their main physical activity, either alone or with friends and family.<sup>i</sup>

That's why governments should be doing all they can to redesign our streets so physical activity is part of everyday life.

Our environment has a big impact on our transport and recreational choices. Streets that are designed around car use will encourage more car use and the pollution, inactivity, economic and road safety problems that come with that.

Streets designed so that walking and riding are on an equal footing with car use, or in some medium- and high-density environments prioritised over car use, mean that more people will choose those modes and all the benefits to the individual and society that come with that.

## **But we can walk and ride now**

While it's easy enough in many places to walk, as soon as you get outside of major towns footpaths disappear. This is also the case in suburbs with housing estates built in the 1970s and 1980s without footpaths.

Where there are footpaths, they are often cluttered with power poles and signage that eats up the usable footpath width making them impassable for people in mobility devices, pushing prams or trolleys, or riding bikes.

Pedestrian crossings are few and far between and while the road rules require drivers to give way to people walking across roads, too many Tasmanian drivers expect people walking to wait for them to pass.

Standard footpaths are often too narrow for people to comfortably ride on with pedestrians, and so people are left with little choice but to ride on the road.

The majority of the population are not comfortable riding on the road with traffic. A recent international study found that sharing the road with vehicles is the leading global barrier to riding.<sup>ii</sup> The 2021 National Cycling Survey<sup>iii</sup> asked Tasmanians about their interest in riding and infrastructure and found the following results:

- Not interested in riding: 43%
- Interested in riding, but not with traffic: 40%
- Currently ride but are cautious to avoid traffic: 15%
- Ride and are not worried about traffic: 2%

The lack of safe cycling infrastructure and poor quality footpaths mean riding and walking become a challenge to overcome rather than the natural choice for getting to school, work, shops, services and recreation.

By making streets safer for riding the government can expand the catchments of likely active transport trips and the type of trips taken. Riding allows people to cover longer distances and carry more than they could if they walked.

Electric bicycles mean the option of riding is open to more people and extends distances travelled and loads carried.

While e-bikes provide motor assistance to riders it's only when the pedals are being turned and only up to speeds of 25km/h. This means e-bike riders are still getting moderate exercise – one review found that people who started riding e-bikes were more likely to ride more often and over longer distances than regular bike riders.<sup>iv</sup> And even when people buy e-bikes to get more exercise, the convenience of the bikes means they are also used for trips that would have previously been taken by car.<sup>v</sup>

## **Infrastructure funding the key**

Governments need to invest the money in making walking and cycling attractive options for getting around. This would be a lasting health investment that will keep providing benefits for decades. Our streets should be seen as valuable health infrastructure to keep people active, keep them connected, reduce road trauma and contribute to business success.

Much of our cycling infrastructure funding is being spent on those 15% of people who currently ride but are cautious. To reach the 40% who are interested in riding we need to build all ages and abilities (AAA) infrastructure that is mostly separated from high-volume, high-speed traffic.

While we have plans in place for a AAA transport cycling network in greater Hobart, we don't have the secure funding and state government leadership that will enable it to be rolled out at the pace we need. We still don't have a AAA greater Launceston network planned and the coastal pathway, which would connect north-west towns, is being held up because two sections need more funding to create a continuous path.

An added benefit of investing in safe, connected active transport infrastructure would be the possible reduction in road trauma. Last year in Tasmania 4 people died and 42 people were seriously injured while walking, scooting and riding on our roads. Serious injuries vary in intensity but some of these people would have been left with life-long disabilities as a result of road trauma.<sup>vi</sup>

## **Behaviour Change adds benefits**

While we know safe infrastructure is the key to getting more people riding, once it's in place behaviour change programs can help people who don't always realise they can use that infrastructure, especially if it is hidden from the main road networks.

One participant in our Back on your Bike program exemplified this. She lived in Spring Farm and worked in Kingston and even though it's a short distance she always drove to work. When the council upgraded the Whitewater Creek track to a sealed, 3m wide path she could see the potential for swapping her car trips for a bike. But she hadn't ridden a bike for a long time and didn't own one so it all felt too hard. When she saw Back on your Bike being advertised in her area she jumped at the opportunity and after only a handful of sessions she'd bought a new bike, gained confidence in her riding skills and started riding to work.

The same goes for children. Some parents don't know where they can take their children to ride safely and are understandably reluctant to let them ride on footpaths and roads without the necessary practice. Helping children to improve their riding ability and creating places close to where people live that are AAA rated can give children the option of riding to get around rather than being chauffeured by parents.

## Wellbeing more than just physical

The benefits of bike riding for mental health are well known. Regular exercise can reduce the symptoms of anxiety and depression and cycling is up there as one of the forms of exercise that helps the most.<sup>vii</sup>

It's not only that cycling gets the endorphins pumping, but it can be a social connection when people ride in groups or are able to use a bike to get to events and activities where they can be with other people. We've had several participants come along to our Back on your Bike sessions who want to meet other people to ride with and enjoy those social connections to improve their wellbeing.

Our volunteers run regular social rides across the state which are as much about connecting new bike riders to other people as they are about building the bike riding confidence and knowledge of local paths.

And multiple studies have shown people who regularly ride to work report feel less stress<sup>viii</sup> than people who drive and tend to be healthier, taking fewer sick days compared to their car-driving colleagues.<sup>ix</sup>

## How we can change the way our streets operate

1. Changing the balance of the road infrastructure budget by increasing spending on AAA cycling and walking infrastructure to 20% of overall spend.<sup>x</sup>
2. Dropping traffic speed limits to safer levels, especially in built-up areas where people are walking and riding. 30km speed limits should be the norm in the hearts of our cities and towns and around schools and aged care facilities.
3. Providing separated cycling infrastructure on streets with speeds above 30km and high traffic flows.
4. Ensuring governments account for health impacts in all infrastructure builds. Providing safe pedestrian and cycling infrastructure in all road projects should be the norm and not something added on at the end, or left out completely.
5. A planning system that mandates safe, comfortable AAA rated cycling and walking infrastructure and end of trip facilities in all new developments and street upgrades.
6. Providing recurrent funding to behaviour change programs which have positive results for long-term physical activity levels, such as our Ride2School and Back on your Bike programs.

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<sup>i</sup> <https://theconversation.com/australians-love-sport-but-which-ones-do-they-actually-play-national-survey-results-paint-a-surprising-picture-242593>

<sup>ii</sup> Pearson, L., Berkovic, D., Reeder, S., Gabbe, B. & Beck, B. Adults' self-reported barriers and enablers to riding a bike for transport: a systematic review. *Transport Reviews*, 1-29, doi:10.1080/01441647.2022.2113570 (2022).

<sup>iii</sup> C. Munro. *National Walking and Cycling Participation Survey 2021*, Cycling and Walking Australia and New Zealand, 2021.

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<sup>iv</sup> Bourne, J. E., et al. (2020). "The impact of e-cycling on travel behaviour: A scoping review." *Journal of Transport & Health* 19: 100910.

<sup>v</sup> Washington, Heesch and Ng, *E-bike Experience: Survey Study of Australian E-bike Users*, Queensland University of Technology for the Queensland Government, 3 March 2020 and Marilyn Johnson and Geoff Rose, "Extending Life on the Bike: Electric Bike Use by Older Australians", *Journal of Transport and Health*, Volume 2, Issue 2, June 2015, pp 276–283.

<sup>vi</sup> [https://www.transport.tas.gov.au/road\\_safety\\_and\\_rules/crash\\_statistics](https://www.transport.tas.gov.au/road_safety_and_rules/crash_statistics)

<sup>vii</sup> [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpsy/article/PIIS2215-0366\(18\)30227-X/abstract](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpsy/article/PIIS2215-0366(18)30227-X/abstract)

<sup>viii</sup> <https://theconversation.com/walking-and-cycling-to-work-makes-commuters-happier-and-more-productive-117819>

<sup>ix</sup> <https://www.sciencealert.com/people-who-cycle-to-work-take-fewer-sick-days-but-why>

<sup>x</sup> <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2016/10/un-environment-report-put-people-not-cars-first-in-transport-systems/>