

Mr Keir Delaney
Secretary, Standing Committee on Environment and Planning
Department of the Legislative Council
Parliament House
Spring Street
East Melbourne, 3002

6 July 2011

Submission to:

Inquiry into Environmental Design and Public Health

There is now compelling evidence to show that the health of communities is significantly dependent on a public realm that both enables and encourages physical activity and community involvement. However many people, especially in areas beyond inner Melbourne, have limited access to attractive, healthy places. The consequence is that people are reluctant to leave their homes and cars, and remain disconnected from their neighbourhood, local environment, and from activity opportunities.

We've previously detailed our concerns with the lack of planning for cycling provision in outer suburbs in our submission to the Inquiry into Liveability Options in Outer Suburban Melbourne (text attached). Similar concerns are also valid for inner Melbourne and regional Victoria where the public domain lacks places to ride to, and ride in, and which connect home to work, school and community attractions.

Provision of cycling facilities is an essential pre-condition to more people riding.

If we don't provide places to ride then efforts to encourage riding will be fruitless – it's a bit like encouraging people to swim and providing swimming lessons but not providing a pool. People are keen to ride and most have access to a bicycle but what they lack is a network of cycle routes that they can ride their bikes on.

Travel research in Victoria (VISTA and VATS survey results and Census Journey to Work data) shows that cycling for transport is nearly non-existent in outer suburbs. Rates in these areas average less than 1% of transport trips, whereas in parts of inner Melbourne these rates are as high as 20% of trips to work by bike. Partly this is due to the distances involved in outer suburbs, especially long trips to work and tertiary education, but much can be explained by the lack of a network of cycle routes that connects people to their destinations: crucially, most trips in outer suburbs remain below 5km, especially trips to school and shops. The network is a pre-condition for people being able to ride because most of the population does not consider it safe to ride on roads shared with faster moving motor vehicles.

Recent population wide surveys of cycling participation (Australian Bicycle Council and Bicycle Victoria - Cycling Participation Survey – results to be released July 2011) show that cycling participation rates for all types of cycling (not just for transport) are relatively equal across Victoria with slightly lower rates in inner Melbourne relative to the rest of Melbourne SD and other parts of Victoria. The participation survey shows that most cycling in Australia is done by children but that rates are much lower than they have been historically. In Melbourne, nearly 20% of people ride

weekly, and 40% yearly. These rates are slightly higher for regional Victoria. This is despite 60% of people having access to a working bike.

We can compare this internationally to [Copenhagen](#), Denmark where the rate of weekly cycling is up to 68% and 84% of people have access to a bicycle (Copenhagen Bicycle Account 2010). Other cities also have weekly cycling rates above 50%. They've achieved this by making cycling comfortable (which encompasses safe) and easy for all members of the population. This means a high quality network of cycle paths mostly separated from motor vehicles so both the young and the old can ride.

The Australian Cycling Participation Survey shows that, for people that are riding, the main reasons is for leisure or recreation followed a distant second by commuting then shopping, visiting friends/relatives, travel to education and other. In the inner Melbourne, riding by adults for transport is more prevalent while riding by children is less so. This is reversed in non-metro areas.

A recent survey of 1000 people across Australia by the Cycling Promotion Fund re-emphasises the importance of safe places to ride. Most people want to ride more but would only do so if there were more places to ride separated from fast traffic. ([Riding a Bike for Transport - 2011 Survey Findings](#))

The recent review by the [Australian Institute of Health and Welfare](#) (Health and the environment: a compilation of evidence, 2011) of the influence of the physical environment on health found healthy and the environment are closely connected. In particular it found, on reviewing the evidence, that those living in more walkable (and rideable) neighbourhoods are more likely to be physically active. This is backed up by a review of the active transport literature in 2009 for Victoria's department of transport which found that the physical environment is a major influence on people's decision to ride but was less important for those walking ([Walking and Cycling International Literature Review, Krizek et. al, 2009](#)).

The [cycling demonstration towns project](#) in the UK between 2006 and 2009 showed that relatively modest improvements to the cycling network will get more people cycling. What's more, the rigorous population wide monitoring before and after the interventions showed an increase in physical activity levels of 3% and that the biggest impact was made in making inactive people more active. In terms of population health the greatest gains in overall quality of life outcomes result from this shift of inactive people into the somewhat active group rather than making active people more active.

It's relatively more expensive to retrofit cycling facilities into existing suburbs as they did in the UK cycling demonstration towns but the opportunity in new suburbs is to provide the facilities from the start that will allow more people to improve their health by cycling.

Providing for cycling is an effective way to increase the health of the general population. This improved health comes about not just through increased physical activity. It also because easy mobility enables people to get out and meet people in their local neighbourhood and gives them better access to their friends, family, shops, recreational facilities (parks, sporting fields, playgrounds etc) and local destinations. The more people out on the street, the safer and more inviting it is for everyone, especially the more vulnerable who would not venture out alone or would have needed a car or transport service to allow them to make local trips or meet their friends or family.

So removing the barriers to cycling can bring about an increase in community health and well-being. And it can do so in a preventative way – more cycling help prevents the development of chronic diseases such as heart disease, diabetes and depression, diseases that not only reduce the quality of life for many but are expensive to treat and are a massive cost due to reduced productivity. Preventative measures are much more economically effective in terms of cost benefit of health treatments. And cycling is a relatively cost effective preventative measure – it can bring about a widespread increase in physical activity and social inclusion at a relatively low cost compared to the cost of a hospital bed.

But in Melbourne and Victoria we have lacked the commitment needed to bring about the jump in cycling participation that would deliver significant health payoffs. While the monetary commitment has increased and has been relatively consistent it has not been enough to allow retrofitting of comprehensive network in established suburbs. And the lack of planning across jurisdictions has meant that it has been hard to remove barrier to the provision of cycle routes. One example is the difficulty in providing cycle routes along disused railway land. Another is the lack or clarity about management of public land along rivers or other corridors along which cycling routes can pass. And in new suburbs there is a lack of consistent planning guidance that would allow provision of a cycling network that would allow everyone to ride and enjoy the health benefits that come with it.

We trust these points are of use to you in your inquiry into environmental design and public health. Bike riding is a small but key part of creating healthier communities. Please let us know if you need anything further.

Kind Regards



Harry Barber
CEO
Bicycle Victoria

Attached: Bicycle Victoria Submission to Parliamentary Inquiry into Liveability Options in Outer Suburban Melbourne (13 May 2011)

Dr Vaughn Koops
Acting Executive Officer
Outer Suburban / Interface Services & Development Committee
Parliament of Victoria
East Melbourne VIC 3002

13 May 2011

Submission to
Outer Suburban / Interface Services & Development Committee

Australians like suburban life and are investing heavily in building new lives for their families in outer suburbs. But Melbourne is now at such a scale that the provision of the facilities and services that underpin liveability has become a challenge.

Bike riding is an important part of the liveability of suburbs. Many developers use images of families riding their bikes as selling tools for their estates because it reflects the values that people see as important. People are looking to lead more active and sociable lives in their new communities, and they consider bike riding opportunities to be essential to family and community development.

Riding bikes not only helps people get together, it keeps them active and allows more transport choices. Bikes are not only important for recreation (a major use) they are rapidly becoming a vital part of Melbourne's transport system. Bikes enable people to travel distances up to 10km quicker than they can by car. But the "sweet spot" for bikes is the 2km to 5km range, which is a bit far to walk and a bit short for most motorised trips (car, bus, tram, train).

In outer suburbs most destinations are within 5km for the majority of people. For those destinations that are not (e.g. work, tertiary education) then bikes can get people to the train (or tram or bus) station just as quickly as by car, which may allow the person at home more flexibility (or economy) about how they get about during the day.

Bicycle Victoria has been studying how to encourage more people to bicycle in new suburbs in urban growth zones as part of a three year project funded by VicHealth. We are now finishing the first year of the project which has involved extensive research and consultation. The project has taught us that:

- There is no systematic planning or provision for bicycle riding in outer suburban areas.
- This has led to a piecemeal supply of bike routes that do not connect well to destinations and do not provide the correct type of routes that will enable and encourage people to cycle.
- Consequently cycling rates in the outer suburbs are very low (less than 1% of all trips). But we know that people will ride their bikes if they have the right environment to do so (modal share for riding to work in the inner north is over 15% and rates of cycling to school are over

80% of year 5/6s in some schools in outer suburbs). We also know that most households have bikes that they want to use.

- The travel data (VISTA, VATS) tells us that, although there are less trips and longer trips in outer suburbs (especially to work and tertiary education), still the majority are short, rideable distances. The potential for riding (as with walking) is huge but poorly catered for. These shorter trips include trips to primary and secondary school (average of 2 and 5km).
- For trips to school for younger riders we need a good supply of off-road paths, separated from motor vehicles. Footpaths are not sufficient as they don't provide the width for bike riding or allow enough clearance and clear sight at property boundaries and driveways.
- For trips to work and tertiary education we need good connections to public transport (trains, buses and trams) so people can ride to the station and complete their journey by PT. Also, in outer suburbs there are many activity centres and employment areas that can be reached by bikes *after* a trip by public transport. Secure bike parking is essential at public transport stops, especially train stations but also at bus and tram stops.
- Bikes need to be integrated into the planning system with a more prescriptive approach in order to provide a cycling network which is well used. Currently many of the planning laws only require “consideration” of bicycle facilities rather than insisting on them or telling proponents what sort of facilities are required. This has led to some bizarre outcomes—for instance a shared path encircling a school but no connections to the wider path network. Or bike lanes being placed on high traffic and high speed roads even though off-road paths are advised in the Austroads Guidelines for such locations.
- A checklist system is required to ensure bikes are planned and provided for at all levels of the planning system. If bikes are left out of the early stages of planning (Victorian Planning Policies, Growth Area Framework Plans, and Precinct Structure Plans) then it is very hard and expensive to cater for them at the latter stages;
- At planning provision level the general principles have been outlined but the guidelines are not well understood (the relevant Austroads Guidelines are large documents and take some expertise to implement and interpret)
- At Growth Area Framework Plan level the arterial bicycle corridors must be delineated and documented. At the moment the Metro Trail Network of arterial off-road paths are mapped but these are mostly for linking parks and for recreation trips. (Although they do provide for some transport, this should not be their main purpose because the speeds of commuting bike riders are markedly different than a path cruiser). Problematically, the network of routes along roads, rail and other corridors that make up VicRoads' Principal Bicycle Network are not shown. This means links to major destinations are missing but also that the “skeleton” of the bicycle network is lacking. So more local routes cannot connect to the arterial network to allow trips to local destinations.
- At Precinct Structure Plan level there is currently relatively good guidance through the VPPs and guidance from the Growth Areas Authority, but what is lacking is the guidance and prescription of what sort of bicycle facilities and link is required for different situations. For instance all schools should have off-road bike path connections to the surrounding off road-

path network. They also need safe crossings of roads and other barriers and clear direct connections to their homes (not long, windy paths which force detours to cross roads).

Also needed is a requirement for a network of separated bike paths on major roads, shared paths and bike paths in green reserves (creeks, pipe reserves, electricity reserves, rail reserves etc) bike lanes on quieter roads and shared routes on slow, calm, local streets. Together they give a network of routes that provide a choice of routes to destinations which suit all types of potential riders, not just the confident ones or those comfortable in lycra.

- At permit planning level the existing guidelines (Austroads, VicRoads Cyclenotes and the Bicycle Victoria Good Design Guides) provide all the detail required but they are not well followed or enforced by proponents and councils. This leads to inappropriate facilities (bike lanes instead of paths as links to schools for instance). If the first three stages of planning above are clear then there is less confusions at this level so the developer and council are both clear on what is required.

We trust these points are of use to you in your inquiry into the liveability of outer suburbs. Bike riding is a small but key part of making these suburbs better places to live for the families that chose them. Please let us know if you need anything further.

Kind Regards



Harry Barber
CEO
Bicycle Victoria