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SUBMISSION TO VICTORIA'S DRAFT 30 YEAR INFRASTRUCTURE STRATEGY

Thank you for the opportunity to input to planning for infrastructure as set out in the strategy.

Due to limited capacity we have reviewed the document only briefly. This submission focuses primarily on the key need relating to walking – “enable physical activity and participation” and the options identified to achieve it, along with some other key recommendations.

To discuss any aspect of this submission or for any further information relating to walking, please contact Duane Burt, Senior Advisor on 9662 3975 or dburt@victoriawalks.org.au.

Background – Victoria Walks

Victoria Walks is a walking health promotion body, established by VicHealth in 2009, working to get more Victorians walking more every day. Our vision is for vibrant, supportive and strong neighbourhoods and communities where people can and do choose to walk wherever possible.

Our cities, towns, neighbourhoods and urban areas have become largely automobile dependent and less walkable. This has contributed to the emergence of more sedentary lifestyles in which Victorians do not engage in the recommended levels of physical activity. Physical inactivity is a significant factor in the dramatic rise in the levels of obesity and preventable diseases such as Type II diabetes and cardiovascular disease.

Walking-friendly neighbourhoods and urban spaces are essential to encourage and enable people to walk. Walking is associated with positive health outcomes, improved fitness and better physical, social and mental health. Making towns, cities and suburbs more walkable has many health, environmental and economic benefits.

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Importance and value of investment in walking and active transport

Investment in active transport infrastructure (which includes people walking to a bus stop or railway station), reduces the need for 'investment' in health care and hospitals.

A global review of the cost-benefit of active travel projects for the UK Department of Transport (Davis 2014) found they provide excellent value for money. The report assessed 16 British and international studies of the cost and benefits of walking and cycling programs or infrastructure. It found an average benefit cost ratio (BCR) of 5.95.

The report concludes:

"Consequently, environmental and other interventions to facilitate increased population physical activity through cycling and walking are likely to be amongst the 'best buys' across many areas of public policy i.e. public health benefits, cost savings for health services and for transport planning. The significant BCR values reported here should have a substantial influence in informing national transport ambitions."

A study in Melbourne (Beavis and Moodie 2014) included some conservative economic modelling of the benefits if more people used active transport. If the people living in Melbourne's outer suburbs achieved the same level of exercise through transport as inner suburban residents, the gains would be:

- 160 deaths avoided per annum (272 if inner city exercise rates achieved)
- 531 disease cases avoided per annum (inner city 903)
- Productivity gains of \$13.5 million per annum (inner city \$22.9 million)
- Health sector cost reduction of \$7.2 million (inner city \$12.2 million).

Victoria Walks notes that the Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan (State of Victoria 2015) identifies pedestrian-friendly neighbourhoods as a key health solution.

In May 2015 the National Heart Foundation and Cycling Promotion Fund conducted an online survey of more than 1,000 adults aged 25-59 in Australian capital cities. People had mixed views on the adequacy of walking infrastructure in their neighbourhood, but overall there was good support - more than 70% - for an increase in Government funding for cycling, walking and public transport.

Recommendations

1. Retain recommendations 1.1 and 11.1, with implementation that:
 - a) Establishes a state driven process that identifies areas for increased development density and ensures they are zoned accordingly.
 - b) Links funding for place-making and infrastructure investment to areas where development density is being increased.
2. Retain the following recommendations:
 - a) 4.1.2 – cycling/walking data
 - b) 10.2 – transport network pricing regime

- c) 1.4.1 and 5.2.1 – opening up more state government land for public use and recreation.
3. Retain recommendation 4.1.3 – cycling paths and walking improvements, and note that the Safer Cyclists and Pedestrians Fund is focused on safety improvements and may not assist in meeting Need 4 of the Draft Strategy, particularly in relation to walking.
 4. Retain recommendation 4.2.1 – cycling/walking in established areas, but expand this program to include 10 pilot projects, with sufficient funding to apply comprehensive walking improvements across the walkable catchment of the activity centre, not only the centre itself.
 5. Retain recommendation 4.3 and ensure that activities that have high rates of participation are considered favourably in future funding criteria for sport and recreation.
 6. Retain recommendations 1.5.1, 2.4.1 and 11.1.2, which seek to better integrate government service and infrastructure planning, and amend to ensure both public and private community infrastructure providers make decisions that are consistent with the Government’s spatial planning policies.
 7. Retain other recommendations that facilitate public transport, except where they facilitate access to public transport by car.
 8. Include a recommendation in support of Bicycle and vehicle fault allocation (BVA); or give broader consideration to options that reinforce the need for drivers to give way to walkers and cyclists and ensure that drivers who cause crashes are held accountable for their actions, thereby discouraging poor driving.

The rationale behind these recommendations is explained in the remainder of this submission.

Development in established areas and around employment centres

Recommendations 1.1 and 11.1 promote development in and around employment centres and in established areas, particularly around the Principal Public Transport Network.

Victoria Walks strongly supports this option, which has many benefits beyond encouraging walking, as noted in the options document. From a walking perspective however, having destinations such as shops, offices and quality public transport in close proximity is arguably the most important single factor in encouraging walking for transport. Put simply, people will not walk for transport if they have nowhere to walk to.

This reality is reflected in the fact that people living in the inner city and suburbs, where there are typically destinations within walking distance, get a substantial amount of exercise through travel. A study in Melbourne found only 9.5% of people in outer suburbs gained adequate exercise through active travel, compared to 23.5% of inner suburban residents and 33.3% in the inner city (Beavis and Moodie 2014).

Increased density of development should be promoted in and around activity centres and public transport, where this does not compromise heritage values. Density in key locations allows more people to live and work within walking distance of destinations or walk to public transport, enabling them to access destinations further away.

It is not necessary to increase density everywhere. It is quite possible to promote a walkable city while allowing the suburbs outside centres and corridors to retain their current character.

Until recently, the same controls on medium density housing applied almost uniformly across Melbourne and even regional towns. The random increase in density this produced may not be particularly helpful in creating a walkable city. Melbourne is around 50% more dense than Brisbane, Canberra, Hobart and Darwin, yet all of those cities have a higher level of walking to work than Melbourne (Bauman et al, 2012).

It is also important to understand that increased density, even in appropriate locations, will not generate the desired levels of increase in walking (or cycling and public transport use) unless the environment is designed to support it. Hence the need for a strong focus on walking as a mode of transport in its own right.

It should not be left entirely to councils to determine where increased density should go, as it was in implementing (or not implementing) Melbourne 2030. We need a metropolitan response, not an ad hoc response. The Government should set clear parameters for councils, but perhaps allow them to retain some flexibility. The ultimate outcome must be that areas for increased density are clearly delineated in the planning scheme and zoned accordingly.

Funding for infrastructure and place making (such as improved public transport, walking infrastructure, and greener, better quality streets and public spaces) should be tagged to areas where density is being increased. People are more likely to support change – especially after the fact – if it includes improvements to the amenity of the area. Councils are more likely to support intensification and its associated political risks if it is linked to funding that enables them to ‘give something back’ to the community.

Rec 4.1.2 cycling/walking data

Victoria Walks supports this recommendation. Data collection in relation to walking is comparatively poor. Where it is collected, it is often not reported or poorly articulated. For example a recent summary of the Victorian Survey of Travel and Activity provided information on weekday mode share, but conflated walking and cycling to give information on ‘active transport.’ This rendered the information worthless in considering either walking or cycling as an individual transport mode (Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources 2016).

Data capture is critical to building evidence based action on walking infrastructure and without it there will probably continue to be under investment in walking.

Rec 4.1.3 Cycling paths and walking improvements

Victoria Walks strongly supports the first two elements of this recommendation:

“expanding walking and cycling networks, including to address missing links (ref. BWP2)

improving standards for existing walking and cycling networks, in particular the separation of walking and cycling paths and also from other road users (ref. BWP3).”

The Options Book recommends specifically “that the government commit to funding beyond the \$100 million allocated to the Safer Cyclists and Pedestrians Fund.” It is important to note

also that this Fund is focused on safety improvements. This will drive the choice of investments and Victoria Walks is not confident that the Fund will have any significant benefits for participation in walking (cycling may be different). It is not clear whether the Fund will assist significantly in meeting Need 4 of the Draft Strategy (enable physical activity and participation). Investment in addition to the Safer Cyclists and Pedestrians Fund is clearly required.

We note that it is still not entirely clear what is envisaged by option BWP3 – Bicycle and walking path separation. However we strongly support separated walking and cycling paths, rather than shared paths, where there is a high level of cycling.

For a description of the circumstances in which existing shared paths need to be replaced and alternative infrastructure provisions that work for both walkers and bike riders, see *Shared Paths – the Issues* (Victoria Walks 2015).

Rec 4.2.1 Cycling/walking in established areas

While Victoria Walks supports this option, we are concerned that it has been scaled back to three pilots at an estimated cost of only \$16.5 million. The option was conceptualised as an initial ten projects.

There is some merit in focusing on particular areas and piloting approaches and evaluating outcomes. Historically, the very limited investment in walking has been spread so thinly that a significant local impact on walking participation is unlikely and evaluating impact is very difficult. Notwithstanding this, the minimal level of investment proposed is very worrying.

As noted in the Draft Options Book (Version Two):

“retrofitting established suburbs will be necessary to achieve the state’s policy of ‘20-minute cities’.”

Given how fundamental the 20 minute cities concept is to Plan Melbourne, it is hard to reconcile that acknowledgement with such a minimal level of investment, compared to other infrastructure options.

There is also a question as to whether \$16.5 million will be adequate to substantially retrofit three activity centres. We note that it is important to retrofit not just the activity centre itself, but the walkable catchment around it. If the activity centre is pleasant and convenient to walk around, but the surrounding neighbourhood remains unpleasant, people are likely to continue driving to the centre.

Having only three pilots also limits the potential to trial differing approaches.

Rec 4.3 Sport and recreation facilities

Victoria Walks supports this recommendation, to develop a stronger evidence base and more transparent decision-making on investments in culture, sport and recreation.

Walking has been under-resourced compared to organised sport. In the current financial year, \$46.4 million has been allocated to sport and recreation (Victorian Government 2016), but the proportion of that funding allocated to walking is negligible, although there is some separate funding for walking through VicHealth. The non-investment in walking through sport and recreation is despite the fact that ‘walking for exercise’ is the most popular form of

sport or recreation in Australia, with 19.2% participation, followed by 'fitness/gym' at 17.4%, while no other activity exceeds 7.5% (ABS 2015). In addition to those walking for exercise, 1.5% of the population participate in bush walking.

Activities that have high rates of participation should be considered favourably in future funding criteria for sport and recreation.

Rec 10.2 Road pricing

Victoria Walks supports recommendation 10.2 - "Introduce a transport network pricing regime to manage congestion and obtain the most efficient use of the transport network."

While the debate around this policy is understandably focused on issues of cost allocation, equity and congestion, this policy can be expected to have a significant positive impact for walking (and cycling).

In 2009 the Department of Transport commissioned an international review of the literature regarding techniques to promote walking and cycling. This review found that the costs associated with driving were one of the key factors that determined the choice between driving and walking or cycling.

"Pricing factors are tremendously important for spurring non-motorised travel. Auto and fuel taxation and parking are two factors that stand out." (Krizek, Forsyth and Baum 2009)

Effective road pricing can be expected to encourage walking for transport, both on its own and in association with public transport.

Road pricing should be implemented in a way that addresses equity issues and in association with a significant improvement in public transport.

Support for other recommendations

Victoria Walks supports recommendations 1.4.1 and 5.2.1, opening up more state government land for public use and recreation.

Victoria Walks supports recommendations 1.5.1, 2.4.1 and 11.1.2 which seek to better integrate government service and infrastructure planning. There is also a particular need for both public and private community infrastructure providers (planning schools, hospitals, childcare and community centres) to make decisions that are consistent with the Government's spatial (land use and development) planning policies.

Bicycle and vehicle accident fault allocation (BVA)

Victoria Walks strongly supports this option, which is commonly described as 'strict liability.' In countries such as the Netherlands this assumes drivers are at fault whenever they hit a cyclist or pedestrian, unless proven otherwise. We are disappointed that this option, which was previously included for consideration, has not been adopted in the Draft Strategy.

This option has excellent potential to address a key pedestrian safety issue, which is drivers failing to give way to pedestrians when they are legally required to do so. Victoria Walks recently released a publication on *Safer Road Design for Older Pedestrians*. A detailed

review of the crash information for older pedestrians contained in the VicRoads CrashStats Restricted Access database was undertaken. This analysis included review one-by-one of the descriptions and diagrams in police reports for 1,149 crashes affecting pedestrians aged 65 or older, recorded in Victoria between 2008 and 2013.

The crash data showed that, at unsignalised intersections, motorists had an obligation to give way in at least 42% of crashes involving older pedestrians, as they collided with a pedestrian crossing the road the vehicle was entering. At signalised intersections, motorists had an obligation to yield in at least 72% of crashes (Mantilla and Burt 2016). It is likely that a legal framework that held drivers accountable for failing to give way (let alone in other situations) would dramatically improve pedestrian safety.

While we have not sought to find evidence on the effects of strict liability on rates of walking and cycling, it is clear that those countries that feature it have much higher rates of walking and cycling than Australia.

In addition to improved safety encouraging more walking and cycling, strict liability would send a strong message that walkers and riders are valued by society. This is likely to flow into further increased participation.

We note that this option was not retained in the Draft Strategy because, in summary, there was community opposition; it was seen as conflicting with the no fault insurance scheme (TAC); and it is not an 'infrastructure' solution. Victoria Walks submits that rather than discarding this option altogether, broader consideration should be given to options that reinforce the need for drivers to give way to walkers and cyclists and ensure that drivers who cause crashes are held accountable for their actions, thereby discouraging poor driving. While this may not be an infrastructure action, other key recommendations in the Draft Strategy are not infrastructure responses either. Like recommendation 10.2 (road pricing), there is enormous potential in an option that costs very little to implement, but has the potential to significantly reduce economic costs, in this case primarily health spending.

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