

Victoria Walks – standing up for older pedestrians

Australia is facing significant challenges to the health of the nation with the ageing of the population. It is an economic and social imperative that our seniors remain physically active and healthy for as long as possible.

Unfortunately, older people are the most physically inactive population age group. At a time of life when many people are unwilling or unable to participate in high intensity exercise, walking is critically important to the health of older people.

Seniors are, however, highly vulnerable road users. In the 10 year period between 2004 and 2013, people aged 70 years or over represented 10% of the population of Victoria, but 33% of all pedestrian fatalities.

Consistent with an 8-80 cities approach, Victoria Walks believes that if we can cater to our most vulnerable road users (older walkers), we will provide a walkable and sustainable transport system for the whole community.

This submission outlines our research and advocacy for older pedestrians and nominates this work for the ITEANZ Sustainable Transport Award 2018.

Senior Victorians and Walking

Victoria Walks' research and advocacy for older pedestrians began with the study '[Senior Victorians and walking: obstacles and opportunities](#)', undertaken in partnership with the Council on the Ageing, and conducted by Dr Jan Garrard. It comprised a literature review, analysis of existing walking data, focus groups and a survey of 1128 seniors, including a large number over 80 years of age (n=110).

The research found that walking for transport is particularly important for older seniors, both for exercise and to live their everyday lives. For those aged 80 or over, 81% of walking trips are for shopping or personal business. The research confirms that older people are more likely to walk and less likely to drive if they live in a more walkable community.

Advocacy

Victoria Walks engaged directly with the Commissioner for Senior Victorians, who launched the research report, with state-wide television and newspaper coverage. Walking was subsequently recognised as an important element in Victoria's [Seniors Participation Action Plan](#).



The research has informed detailed submissions at all levels of government on road safety and walkable urban design, including the [Australian Senate Inquiry into Road Safety](#). Presentations have been made to a range of local, national and international forums and conferences.

The project was Highly Commended in the 'research into action' category of the 2014 Victorian Health Promotion Foundation Awards.

In May 2015 a media campaign on senior pedestrian road safety resulted in feature stories in [The Age](#) and the main national newspapers, as well as major television and radio coverage.

Shared paths research

In the research on seniors, 39% said that sharing paths with cyclists was a moderate or major constraint to their walking. Victoria Walks subsequently developed [Shared paths – the issues](#), a comprehensive report that included a literature review and stakeholder consultation with subject experts, VicRoads and 18 local councils. This was then summarised in a position statement, [Shared paths – finding solutions](#).

Both walkers and cyclists prefer segregated or separated paths, when user numbers are high. In a survey of over 600 Victorian cyclists, 66% said they 'really like' riding on a segregated path, compared to 7% for a shared path.

This research sets out a practical position on when and where shared paths should or should not be constructed. In summary, shared paths with high volumes of cyclists (more than 50 per hour in the commuter peak) should be identified for separation/segregation, or consider options where cyclists can safely ride on roads.

The ongoing impact of this work is illustrated by VicRoads current work on the intersection of walking and cycling. Many in the transport portfolio have remarked that Victoria Walks' work was essential to this occurring.

Advocacy

Victoria Walks instigated an extended session on shared paths at the Smart Urban Futures conference in March 2015, with Bart Sbeghen from Bicycle Network providing a cycling perspective. Shared paths have been the focus of a number of other Victoria Walks presentations of workshops, including the [Institute of Transport Engineers, May 2015](#), MAV walkability champions forum October 2015 and Bike Futures Conference in October 2015.

The shared paths research has been incorporated into many aspects of Victoria Walks work, such as our submission on the Victorian Cycling Strategy, December 2015, where we argued for the creation of a network of dedicated high speed cycling paths.

Shared paths – finding solutions
Position statement and recommendations

Victoria Walks

The issues, the facts

Cyclists and Walkers

Cycling ridership is growing very quickly and shared walking and cycling paths are the most common form of off-road cycling facility in Australia. Some shared paths are carrying very high numbers of cyclists and for some council areas shared paths are their busiest cycling routes.

Victoria Walks has significant reservations regarding shared paths and how they impact walking, particularly by more vulnerable walkers. Generally, slow moving recreational cyclists may be able to share paths with walkers. However, walkers do not generally mix well with commuter or sports cyclists, who typically travel at higher speed.

The Australian guidelines on this issue are overseen by Austroads, the association of Australasian road transport and traffic agencies. It recommends building shared paths when pedestrian and cyclist volumes are low (each less than 50 per hour), or when the pedestrian volume is low and cyclist speeds are below 20km/h.

This position paper is based on *Shared Paths – the issues*, a comprehensive research paper produced by Victoria Walks in May 2015. It included a literature review and stakeholder consultation with subject experts, VicRoads and 18 local councils.

Walking is the most popular form of leisure related physical activity in the Victorian population and at the same time, cycling ridership is growing very quickly in Victoria (a 5% increase between 2013 and 2014¹). This, combined with the fact that shared paths are a popular choice for off-road cyclists, has resulted in a significant problem starting to emerge.

"Almost three-quarters of recreational paths on the Metropolitan Trail Network, originally intended for leisure and low levels of transport use, now have high levels of transport use."²

Councils and other agencies have provided shared paths in good faith, in order to encourage walking and cycling, but some paths have exceeded expectations for cycling. At the extreme, the Main Yarra Trail/Capital City Trail records 814 riders per hour in the peak.³

Recent evidence suggests that shared paths can be particularly hazardous for cyclists. For example, a study of cycling crashes in ACT found 36% were on shared paths.⁴ However the safety issues for walkers on shared paths do not appear to have been assessed by quality research – a significant gap given that shared paths are common infrastructure.

"There is substantial evidence of the incompatibility of cyclists and motor vehicles but little to justify shifting the risk to shared paths where similar incompatibility exists between pedestrians and cyclists."⁵

1. Australian Census, Guide to Social Design Year 66, Pedestrian and Cyclist Paths.
2. Bicycle Network (2014), Super Strategy that Connected to Victoria City.
3. State of Victoria (2014), Cycling into the Future 2014-2020, Victorian Cycling Strategy.
4. The ACT, Research, Science and Innovation, 2014, Canberra, ACT, and page 4 of 10.
5. "The Incompatibility of Motor Vehicle and Pedestrian Use on the Australian Capital Territory's Public Transport Infrastructure."

There is strong evidence that this work is influencing practice by key agencies:

- VicRoads commenced a project on Management of User Safety on Shared Paths: Addressing Cyclist Speed in late 2015. The draft recommendations of that study align closely with the recommendations of Victoria Walks' research.
- The Metropolitan Planning Authority (MPA) advised that they would consider it in the development of precinct structure plans.
- VicRoads guidance on growth areas planning was reviewed in 2015. After advocacy from Victoria Walks, backed by the research, VicRoads and MPA moved away from shared paths in the road environment and [Guidelines for Planning Road Networks in Growth Areas](#) now promote separated walking and cycling paths on arterial roads.
- Infrastructure Victoria included Bicycle and Walking Path Separation in *Victoria's 30-year Infrastructure Strategy*.

Related to this work, Victoria Walks has successfully resisted calls from some cycling advocates to allow greater cycling on footpaths. The position statement '[Footpaths are for Feet](#)', was endorsed by Vision Australia, COTA and National Disability Services, forming the basis of a joint advocacy campaign targeting Members of Parliament, with positive media coverage. Our success in securing bi-partisan agreement in Victoria that adult cycling should not be allowed on footpaths contrasts with recent changes in SA and WA.

Falls research

Falls are a major public health problem. However previous research has focused on falls in and around the home and in aged-care facilities.

In 2015 Victoria Walks, with the support of VicHealth, commissioned the Monash University Accident Research Centre (MUARC) to fill the gap in knowledge around falls in the street environment. The resulting report [Fall-related Injuries While Walking in Victoria](#) was prepared by Dr Jennie Oxley and Steve O'Hern from MUARC, with input from Duane Burt and Dr Ben Rossiter of Victoria Walks.

This Australian-first study included examination of hospital admissions and Emergency Department (ED) presentations as a result of falls while walking in the street environment in Victoria over a five year period between July 2009 and June 2014.

The study found that while collisions with vehicles result in approximately 1,600 pedestrian casualties in Victoria each year, pedestrian falls while walking in the street account for an average of 1,680 hospital admissions and 3,545 ED presentations.

Falls in the street affect all adult age groups, but there is a much higher rate of serious injury for older walkers. Pedestrians aged 75-84 had a hospitalisation rate 9 times greater than those in the 35-64 year age group.

Advocacy

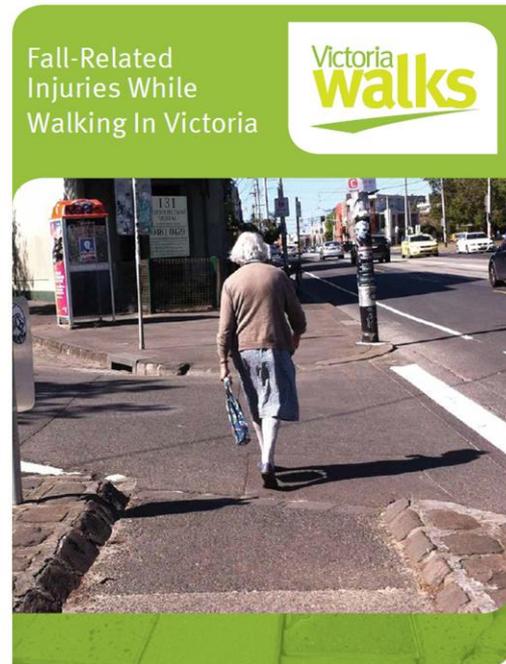
The research was released in March 2016 and was well covered by media. The Age ran an excellent story headlined '[Walking into danger: pedestrian falls put 5000 a year in hospital.](#)'

Victoria Walks' Executive Officer Ben Rossiter was interviewed on prime time 3AW and ABC774 breakfast radio and Dr Oxley was interviewed for the ABC radio news.

A letter to the editor on the research was printed in at least 24 Victorian newspapers, along with two in SA and one in NSW.

Work to promote this research has included:

- Dr Oxley presented the research to the Smart Urban Futures conference in March 2016.
- The research has been incorporated into relevant Victoria Walks presentations, for example the ITEANZ [seminar on Age-Friendly Transport](#), June 2016.



MONASH University
Accident Research Centre

Supported by:
VicHealth

Safer Road design for older Pedestrians

[Safer Road Design for Older Pedestrians](#) identifies ways to provide safer street environments for pedestrians 65 years or older. The report includes:

- A review of the literature on safety for older pedestrians and effectiveness of street design for pedestrians
- Assessment of 1,149 older pedestrian crashes between 1 July 2008 and 30 June 2013.

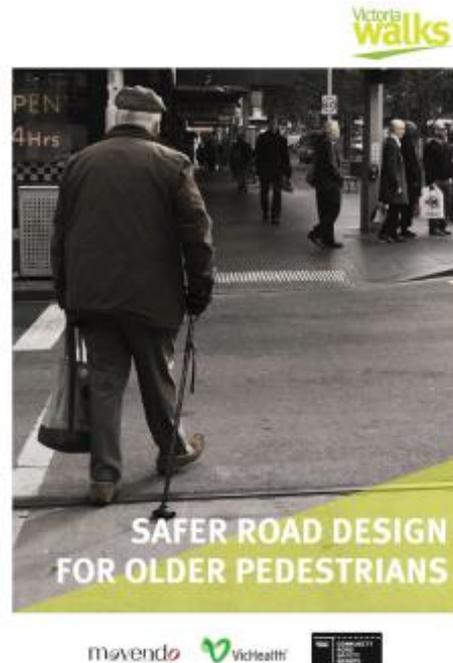
The report was prepared by transport consultants movendo (lead author Jose Mantilla) and Victoria Walks (Duane Burt), in collaboration with the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV). Funding was provided by a Community Road Safety Grant from the Transport Accident Commission (TAC).

The report recommends various infrastructure treatments to provide safer streets for older pedestrians. For ease of reference for busy traffic engineers, a series of factsheets were produced on [traffic signals](#), [unsignalised intersections](#), [roundabouts](#), [mid-block locations](#) and [footpath management](#).

Advocacy

Release of the research in September 2016 received an exceptionally high level of media coverage:

- It was the front page story in the [Herald Sun](#) (leading to 15 mostly supportive letters to the editor on the following day). The Age also ran a [substantial article](#), and there were stories in four regional papers.
- Our Executive Officer Ben Rossiter was interviewed on prime time radio 774ABC and 3AW (twice) and there was extensive news coverage on radio stations around Victoria and Australia.
- Television coverage involved stories on Seven News Vic and eight related stations in Victoria and Southern Cross Darwin; TEN Eyewitness News and six related stations in Victoria and Tasmania; National Nine News and eight regional stations; and WIN News across regional Victoria.
- There was extensive social media, notably [The Project](#)'s Facebook post attracting 700 likes and 300 comments.



A letter to the editor encouraging drivers to watch for walkers was published in The Age and 19 other newspapers.

Findings of the research have been incorporated into Victoria Walks advocacy. In addition to engagement with practitioners in developing the report, the research has been presented to a range of audiences, in at least 8 different fora.

Transport consultants including Safe System Solutions have advised that they use the report in their work on road safety.

In early 2018, Victoria Walks highlighted the need to protect older pedestrians in particular in a number of [media stories](#) relating to pedestrian safety. This included an extensive interview on [ABC News Breakfast](#), broadcast nationally.

Transferability to other jurisdictions

While Victoria Walks seeks to use local data to maximise the relevance to a Victorian audience, all of this work raises general issues that are applicable to other jurisdictions.

Victoria Walks has presented elements of this work to interstate and international audiences including:

- Walk21 Conference, Hong Kong, October 2016 (plenary)
- Hobart City Council West Hobart workshop, November 2016 (keynote)
- The [2WalkandCycle Conference](#) in New Zealand, July 2016 (keynote)
- Planning an Active Western Sydney, October 2015 (keynote)
- Australian Walking and Cycling Conference (Adelaide), July 2015 (plenary)
- [Walk21 Sydney](#), October 2014

The *Safer Road Design for Older Pedestrians* research has also been utilised or promoted by groups and media including [Safer Streets for Walking - Hobart](#); [Living Streets NZ](#), [Transportation Research Board](#) (USA), [Scoop](#) (NZ). The shared paths research has been cited by the [Nelson Mail](#) (New Zealand) and the [Walk Auckland website](#).

The falls research has attracted interest amongst the international walking community, including Living Streets in the UK. Dr Oxley presented the research to the [Road Safety on Five Continents \(RS5C\) conference in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil](#), in May 2016. The conference paper was included in a special edition of the prominent international journal *Accident Analysis and Prevention*.

In an increasingly nationalised media landscape, much of the media coverage we have received has been repeated in interstate or national media.

Conclusion

Efforts by Victoria Walks and partners to influence practice in this area will be ongoing, but there has already been considerable success.

While this work has been unashamedly focused on improving facilities for older pedestrians, the benefits of supporting more people walking are broader, including reducing greenhouse emissions and air pollution and reducing car dependency.

This research has addressed technical issues, filling gaps in knowledge such as the impact of falls in the street and providing design guidance for shared paths and street infrastructure to improve safety for older pedestrians. It has successfully grappled with political challenges such as the need to stand up for vulnerable walkers while respecting the rights of cyclists, on some issues where they potentially conflict. And it has championed the ability of older people to remain socially engaged and connected with their community. The work has been exceptionally cost-effective, addressing the financial challenges faced by a small charity.

Victoria Walks will continue to advocate for older pedestrians, based on this research.