

Getting Victorians back on their feet

Investing in walking



People around the world are rediscovering the oldest form of transport – walking. A truly liveable community is a walkable community. Lots of people walking is a sign of a healthy, vibrant and connected community.

Victoria is at a crossroads. This rapidly growing state faces many major challenges, such as the rising costs of road congestion, obesity and social isolation. These challenges can all be addressed with targeted investment in walking and walkable neighbourhoods.

Walking is already the most popular recreational activity, particularly for women and seniors. Walking accounts for well over half the total physical activity for Victorians over the age of 25. But the value Victorians place on walking is despite, not because of, government planning and investment, which has been negligible.

So, what do we need to do?

1 Develop a plan

Challenge

- With no owner in Government, walking falls through the policy and investment cracks and its potential health and economic benefits go unrealised.

Solution

- A whole-of-government plan to get Victorians on their feet and walking more will help ensure a healthy, liveable and economically strong future.

Walking is so simple and essential it has been undervalued and ignored by successive state governments, to the detriment of all Victorians. Walking cuts across many areas of government including health (physical and mental), transport, planning, environment, ageing, sport and recreation, and economics.

It is vital Victoria has a walking strategy with clear actions and targets to guide and steer investment in a coordinated way.

Cost

- \$300,000 to develop the plan.



2 Invest in walking to train stations

Challenge

- Reduce pressure on our roads by making it safer and easier for people to walk to and from train stations and activity centres.

Solution

- Fund the development of safer, convenient routes (Principal Pedestrian Networks) within a 15-minute walk of 50 train stations and/or activity centres.

Walking is fundamental to our transport system – 17% of Melbourne’s week-day transport trips are taken entirely on foot, which is more than train, tram, bus and bicycle trips combined. Walking is also the most common way for people to access public transport. The Government has taken steps to make train stations cleaner, more appealing and safer, like funding Protective Services Officers, but little has been done to improve the journey to and from train stations. Subsequently, Victoria is losing opportunities to get more people walking to help manage traffic congestion.

A walking route is only as good as its worst barrier – a single hazard or missing link stops many people walking. The Government needs to plan and invest in walking like it does for motorised transport.

Provide quality footpaths, convenient pedestrian crossings, better lighting, and landscaping to boost pedestrian traffic, improve public space and promote community wellbeing and safety through encouraging more ‘eyes on the street’.

Cost

- \$100m over 4 years.

3 Get women walking more

Challenge

- Concerns about personal safety are a major barrier to many women walking, staying active and participating in community life.

Solution

- Support the expansion of Victoria Walks *Let’s Walk* program that works with councils and local communities to develop, map and promote safe and appealing neighbourhood walking routes for women across a region of Melbourne.

Victoria’s growing physical and mental health costs mean it is essential Victorians are physically active and for many women, walking is more appealing than organised sport.

Populating neighbourhood streets with walkers will result in safer, more social towns and suburbs. Developing neighbourhood walking routes that specifically target women will support them to walk more often. This involves planning and delivering routes that are relevant to their everyday lives with things like shops, services, schools, community facilities and spaces. Some identified walking routes will need small infrastructure improvements to ensure they are safe and convenient.

Cost

- Funding of \$5m over 3 years.

4 Invest in 'green' walks

Challenge

- › Many Victorians do not have access to local nature walks, so they cannot reap the significant health benefits of everyday physical activity.

Solution

- › Provide matched funding with councils and land management agencies, such as water authorities, to ensure every Victorian has a high quality 'green' recreational walking route near them – in parks, reserves and near local waterways – places where they can escape traffic and urban life.

Improving access to green spaces in urban areas is a worldwide trend as time in natural environments is a key motivator to healthy living. Time spent outdoors in green space is good for our physical and mental wellbeing, yet there is very little funding to enable Victorians to access local nature walks.

Cost

- › \$10m per annum.



Victoria
walks

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5 Safe streets for seniors and children

Challenge

- › Road safety and traffic issues impede many seniors walking short trips and children walking to school and around their neighbourhoods. This is contributing to rapidly growing costs of obesity, ill health and road congestion.

Solution

- › Establish an ongoing council grants program to make the walking journey from homes and retirement villages to schools, shops, services, and social activities safer and more convenient for seniors and children.

Walking is extremely important to seniors and is their main source of physical activity, while children who walk to school and around their neighbourhood are more likely to attain the recommended level of daily physical activity. But road safety concerns limit the ability of both age groups to walk and be active.

Senior walkers are extremely vulnerable in road crashes. People aged 70 and over are 10 per cent of the Victorian population but make up 33 per cent of pedestrian fatalities. In most instances senior pedestrians injured or killed in crashes are not at fault – they are often hit by drivers who were legally required to give way to them. Slips, trips and falls in the street – often because of poor quality paths – send nearly 2000 seniors to hospital each year with often dire consequences. Up to 40 per cent of hip-fracture patients die within 12 months.

Meanwhile, the number of children walking to school has declined dramatically from 50% in the 1970s to 20% in 2011 and childhood obesity levels are on the rise. Only one in five children aged 5-17 years get the recommended amount of physical activity every day.

Children want to walk to school and around their neighbourhoods but poor road design and driver behaviour are major barriers to parents allowing this.

It is an economic imperative that Victoria's seniors remain active, healthy and walking for as long as possible and that children are physically active to get a healthy start in life. Making Victoria's urban areas safer for seniors and children to walk with quality footpaths, safer crossing opportunities, better lighting and improved safety is a very sound investment.

Cost

- › \$25m per annum.

6 Invest in street trees

Challenge

- › Street trees encourage walking and have many other benefits, yet most of our urban areas lack sufficient tree canopy to keep streets cool, beautiful and walkable.

Solution

- › Provide matched funding to select local councils for significant street tree planting and maintenance programs and water-sensitive urban design.

The presence of trees encourages people to walk for exercise and transport and is associated with reduced incidence of heart attack and type 2 diabetes.¹

Street trees are extremely important in facilitating walking and healthy communities. They provide shade and separate walkers from traffic. Trees improve air quality and can lower surface temperatures by as much as 10-25°C and provide a connection with nature to improve overall emotional and mental health. Tree-lined streets even add value to adjacent properties (from 2-30 per cent) and help mitigate the impact of severe weather.

A University of Melbourne study of tree canopy cover over parts of Western Melbourne found an average total tree canopy cover of 17%, ranging from 5% to 29%.² The largest proportion of the canopy occurs on private property, but this is declining as new infill houses are built or existing houses are extended. Streets and parks offer space for the larger trees that no longer fit in suburban back yards. A number of councils have urban forest strategies with targets to approximately double their total canopy cover to around 30-40%.

The Victorian Government would reap health and economic benefits from increasing physical activity levels associated with significantly expanding tree canopy cover on local streets.

Cost

- › \$50m over three years to 25 councils.

¹ *Making the case for investment in street trees and landscaping in urban environments*, April 2013, Heart Foundation.

² Cook, N., Hughes, R., Taylor, E., Livesley, S. and Davern, M. (2015), *Shading Liveable Cities: exploring the ecological, financial and regulatory dimensions of the urban tree canopy*. Working Paper 1, The University of Melbourne.