



LETTER TO THE EDITOR

30 May, 2011

Dear Sir/Madam,

One of the best markers of a healthy community is the number of children walking to school and around their neighbourhood.

When children walk it shows we have vibrant, safe and friendly communities. Sadly, we are not doing very well. There has been a massive decline in walking since the 1970s.

With less walking, it is not surprising that 25 percent of Australian children are overweight or obese. Over the long term, this will cost Australia billions of dollars.

We all know that our streets are congested around school times (in Melbourne, 17 per cent of the morning peak is the school run). Imagine how much less traffic there would be if kids were able to walk.

One of the great barriers to parents letting their children walk is traffic speed.

School zones currently have limited impact because they mostly centre on the area around the school gate, not the journey to school. If we want children to walk more, we have to lower speed across school catchment areas.

Victoria Walks is leading the call for lower speed limits to 40 km/h on residential streets and 30 km/h in high volume pedestrian areas, such as busy shopping strips.

It's also up to us all to walk more: safe streets are populated streets.

If we create a more walkable world there will be less need to jump in the car. Imagine how much we would all save on petrol.

The Victorian Government has been reviewing speed limits since November 2011. Victoria Walks hopes it recognises the vital role of streets as social and community spaces and how important it is for our social, physical and economic health to once again hear children's footsteps in great numbers.

**Dr Ben Rossiter
Executive Officer, Victoria Walks (funded by VicHealth)
Carlton, Victoria**