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About Victoria Walks

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

Our 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 cities more walkable has much health, environmental and economic benefits.

Neighbourhoods in which people walk are more welcoming and inclusive: they exhibit a stronger sense of 'community'. People who live in walkable areas are more likely to know their neighbours, participate politically, trust others, and be socially engaged. When people walk, it also creates a stronger sense of safety and security.

Purpose of the Plan

Victoria Walks supports the Purpose of the Bicycle Plan to assist people from 8 to 80 years to cycle more often and make cycling a more dominant mode of travel. Victoria Walks recognise the need, and supports the intention, to better cater for commuter cyclists and to make all roads safer. Victoria Walks believes that increasing the modal shift from private automobiles to cycling will, if done appropriately, create a safer walking environment and a more walkable and economically prosperous Melbourne.

Victoria Walks supports the Vision of the plan that the City of Melbourne becomes a cycling city.

Victoria Walks recommends the addition of a further Goal to the Plan: Reduce conflict between cyclists and other modes of transport, particularly walking.

Walking and cycling issues

Walkers and cyclists have much in common. Both are often classed as 'vulnerable road users' and both have been greatly neglected in the design of Australia towns and cities. Dramatically increasing the levels of walking and cycling will have an enormous impact on the health and well being of the Australian community. The most liveable, vibrant and economically strong cities around the world are those where large numbers of the population are able to walk and/or cycle every day. Citizens of these cities generally have lower levels of obesity.

There are also significant differences between walking and cycling. Unless incapacitated, every one walks, much fewer people cycle. The modes have different infrastructure and social needs, yet are too frequently lumped together and/or placed in conflict.

Victoria Walk believes that conflict between cyclists and walkers appears to be increasing due to cycling behaviour (see cycling on footpaths) and shared paths where there is inadequate infrastructure or conflicting needs and uses. Pedestrian-cyclist conflict is common with significant volume of cyclists and pedestrians or a mix of recreational pedestrians and commuting cyclists.

Victoria Walks recommends that safe on-road solutions must be found for commuter cyclists travelling to and from the city, particularly as the significant increase in cycling numbers over recent years is expected to continue. For example, it is essential that on road solutions be found for cyclists on both Northbank and Southbank.

Footpaths

Victoria Walks is concerned that there appears to be a significant increase in the number of cyclists illegally riding on footpaths and on pedestrian crossings (including pedestrian zones on signalised crossings) throughout the municipality. Victoria Walks recommends the City of Melbourne address this issue in collaboration with Victoria Police.

Conflict occurs between cyclists and people walking at numerous signalised crossings across the municipality, particularly those where it is illegal to ride bicycles. An example is the crossing on Clarendon St and Normanby Road, particularly on the Western side. Apart from being an extremely badly designed crossing for pedestrians cyclists appear to routinely disobey road rules and ride on the crossing often in an aggressive manner towards pedestrians.¹

Cycling in parks and gardens

Victoria Walks is greatly concerned about the lack of detail in the draft plan concerning the intention to “Review policies for cycling through parks and gardens as management plans are Updated”.

Victoria Walks strongly recommends the continuation of restricting cycling to families with children under 12 years in areas of intense cycling routes such as Carlton Gardens. Parks and Gardens such as Carlton Gardens, are not only pedestrian walking routes, they are spaces to sit, play, talk, relax, learn, play and have fun. Melbourne’s world standard parks and Gardens should not be turned into vehicle transport routes.

Victoria Walks is extremely concerned that the Inner Municipality Action Plan (IMAP) bicycle network map, that “was developed to coordinate bicycle infrastructure investment across the inner Council’s of Melbourne, Yarra, Stonnington, Port Phillip and partner organisations”, has been included in this Draft without adequate explanation of its status. The IMAP network map includes the construction of paths through areas where cycling is not currently permitted, such as Carlton Gardens. The status of the map and the intentions of the City of Melbourne should have been clearly stated in the draft and comments invited. What is the intent?

¹ In June 2011, Victoria Walks conducted a walkability audit of the area for approximately 30 international delegates of the International Society for Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity conference and was dismayed to find that when walking directly across the crossing many delegates were forced to stop for fear of being hit by a nine commuter cyclists illegally riding on the crossing and cutting off their path.

Infrastructure improvements

Victoria Walks strongly supports the need to introduce infrastructure improvements such as speed limits, traffic calming, early starts, line marking and the exclusion of heavy vehicles so as to reduce the likelihood of accidents involving cyclists. Such improvements will also improve the walking environment.

Victoria Walks supports the plan to develop three new physical separated bicycle routes through the central city by 2016 as long as they do not impact negatively on pedestrian movement and amenity.

Bicycle parking

Victoria Walks believes greater investment is needed in the provision of bicycle parking across the City of Melbourne. However, as is occurring in many world cities, footpaths need to be de-cluttered of objects that diminish walkability and public space more generally and this includes bike parking. Victoria Walks recommends that bicycle parking should be installed on roadways not footpaths as a matter of course. Victoria Walks recommends greater investment in converting car parking spaces to bicycle parking around the municipality as has happened adjacent to Lygon Court.

Victoria Walks supports the Melbourne Bike Share scheme but recommends the removal of the Bike Share scheme bicycle stations from the footpaths and onto roadways.

Shared paths

Pedestrian-cyclist conflict is common on shared paths with significant volume of cyclists and pedestrians or a mix of recreational pedestrians and commuting cyclists. The numbers of path users and the speed at which some bicycles travel results in many paths being unsafe for pathway users including persons with disabilities and visual impairments.

Victoria Walks believes that shared paths are increasingly problematic, construction of them should be avoided and in some instances existing shared paths should be dismantled. Footpath space should not be given over to bicycles as has occurred with the creation of the Nicholson Street shared path which is highly disadvantageous for pedestrians and not ideal for cyclists. It has also created the situation where many bike riders continue to ride on the footpath, and across signalised crossings, beyond the end of the shared path (e.g. crossing Victoria St and along Nicholson St). This is in part due to the mixed and confusing message the shared path sends to bicycle riders (where the path starts and ends and what riders legal obligations are). Clearly, in being vehicles, bicycles belong on the road; the issue is the roads need to be made safer for bike riders. There needs to be better policing of illegal bike riding on footpaths and on crossings.

