Recommendations

1. The NSW Government should fund the State Cycling Plan to a minimum of 1-2% of the roads budget to improve bicycle infrastructure and provide safe, attractive and enjoyable on and off road bicycle routes as well as high-quality end-of-trip facilities (eg showers, secure bicycle parking).

2. The NSW Government and local councils should adopt a consistent and pro-active approach to lowering speed limits to 40 km/hr in areas of high pedestrian and cycling use.

3. The NSW Government should provide local government authorities with substantial, sustained and targeted funding for cycling promotion, and specifically fund cycling infrastructure and complementary behavioural programs, such as TravelSmart, Ride to Work, and Ride to School programs.

4. The NSW Government should support bicycle events that provide a supportive social environment to encourage infrequent and novice cyclists.

5. National and State Governments should implement mass marketing campaigns to promote the health, environmental, transport, economic and social inclusion benefits of cycling.

6. National and State Government mass marketing campaigns should address perceived barriers such as safety, required fitness level and road user behaviour.

7. National and State Governments should support bicycle education programs to increase confidence and skill levels in both children and adults.

8. Governments and the private sector should consider urban design issues to create a physical environment more conducive to cycling, such as higher density, mixed use development and shorter trip distances.

9. Government funding should be drawn not just from the transport sector, but from health, sport and the environment, with support from all levels of government, to reflect the role and value of cycling.
Policy context

The Australian National Cycling Strategy aims to double the number of people cycling by 2016.(1) However, it is unfunded and is managed by Austroads, whose primary interest is in roads and motor transport.

Most Australian States have a cycling plan, including NSW(2). The NSW State Cycling Plan has set a target to increase the proportion of trips in the Greater Sydney region made by bicycle to 5% by 2016,(3) and has published a BikePlan which outlines how this target can be achieved [10][2].

Most local government areas also have a policy or plan to increase levels of cycling or make cycling safer, including the City of Sydney, which has set a target of 10% of trips to be made by bicycle by 2016.(4)

Active travel, including cycling, is now being encouraged by new policies at the federal level, particularly through the Major Cities Unit, Department of Infrastructure and Transport.(5) This group may take on responsibility for the National Cycling Strategy.

Active transport can reduce the energy demands of the transport sector, moving trips away from cars. Individual car travel is a considerable individual and national expense, the cost of which will continue to grow as conflict in oil-producing countries and declining production affect availability. Such a price burden can form an important incentive for active transport, but this incentive can only be effective if there has been sufficient prior public investment in alternative transport, such as walking and cycling infrastructure.

A number of Australian organisations have called for a national approach to encouraging active travel. These include the Australian Local Government Association, Bus Industry Confederation, Cycling Promotion Fund, National Heart Foundation of Australia, and the International Association of Public Transport.(6)

Research evidence

Cycling can contribute to total physical activity levels, is accessible by all ages and population groups, and is independently associated with improved health outcomes.(7)

Surveillance data show that approximately half of the Australian population is not sufficiently physically active to meet minimum health guidelines.(8) New strategies are needed to increase population levels of physical activity; and active travel (walking, cycling or using public transport) has the potential to achieve this goal.(9, 10) Walking, cycling and public transport options need to be available to accommodate different trip distances and purposes. A small proportion of commuters cycle regularly.

(1)

Physical activity achieved through active travel is more likely to be cost-effective and sustainable over the longer term than gym-based activities.(11) Economic benefit models of active travel indicate strongly positive benefit ratios, especially when all co-benefits are taken into account.(12, 13)

Strategies to increase population levels of cycling are well understood(14) and include higher density
and mixed use zoning policies to increase destinations of interest within shorter distances,(15) investment in cycling infrastructure such as bike paths and on-road bike lanes which are connected,(16) and ‘invisible infrastructure’ such as traffic calming strategies which lower speed limits and close roads to through traffic to increase bicycle friendliness. (17)

Behavioural programs to encourage more cycling have also been effective. Cycling skills courses for children and adults,(18) ride-to-work programs(19) and public cycling events (20) all encourage cycling.

Positive news stories and social marketing strategies which endorse and legitimate cycling are also necessary to create a positive social environment.(21, 22)

End-of-trip facilities, such as showers, changing rooms and bicycle storage in workplaces make active transport to work more feasible(23).

*The Prevention Research Collaboration (PRC) is a specialised research group within the School of Public Health, University of Sydney. The PRC has expertise in public health nutrition, physical activity, obesity prevention, epidemiology and health promotion research, as well as other aspects of primary prevention. PRC seeks to achieve excellence and policy-relevance in its research, and to actively disseminate and communicate research findings.*

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References


