

Thank you, Harry [Barber, CEO Bicycle Victoria] and good evening, and my condolences for the tragic loss of so many as a result of the bushfires in your state.

It's terrific to see the growing level of interest in cycling. Planners, politicians, transport economists, environmentalists and urban designers are all taking a fresh look. So, too, are city workers, city businesses, and families.

It's a nation-wide phenomenon and I'm sure the experience in Sydney is being replicated in other capitals.

Surveys within the City of Sydney Local Government Area tell us that over the last five years, there's been a 37 per cent increase in residents cycling to work. In Alexandria, immediately to the south of the central City, there has been a 74 per cent increase since 2001.

This renewed interest is a response to a range of issues including urban congestion, global warming, health issues and the global financial crisis.

In 2004, when my team of Independents were first elected to the City Council, it was obvious that global warming was our major challenge.

How did we build Sydney's capacity to meet the challenge?

What were the infrastructure changes that would reduce our greenhouse emissions and at the same time, make us a more efficient and competitive global city?

How could the City provide leadership on these issues?

In response to these questions, we developed a strategy for Sydney over the next generation, which we've called Sustainable Sydney 2030.

Preparation of the strategy entailed extensive consultation with the City's residents, business leaders, visitors and others.

We assembled an expert team to research and analyse trends and options and advise on how we might implement our new vision for Sydney.

Throughout our extensive consultations, it became apparent that global warming was an overriding concern for our residents and businesses. Ninety-seven per cent told us they wanted us to take urgent action to reduce greenhouse emissions.

Closely linked with that was widespread concern about increasing traffic congestion, and the city's public transport system failing to keep up with urban development and population growth.

The finalised strategy – unanimously adopted by Council last year – makes transport infrastructure a priority, with a safe cycling network having a significant role in the new system.

The 2030 strategy was prepared at a time of relative optimism, and it was aimed at securing Sydney's position as a globally competitive, globally connected and environmentally sustainable city. While we could not have predicted the global financial crisis, the extensive research and analysis undertaken now provides a solid foundation for fast-tracking investment in Sydney's future.

Transport is the key element in the creation of sustainable, efficient and competitive cities. And given that our cities are the drivers of the national economy, transport infrastructure investment has to be the priority for both State and Federal governments.

The current global financial crisis and the Federal Government's 42 billion dollar stimulus package creates new opportunities to fast-track urgently needed urban transport projects. As well as stimulate economic activity, these projects can also serve to reduce emissions and address global warming at the same time.

We need to prepare for a more sustainable future, so investing in green infrastructure, to facilitate a transition to a new lower carbon economy makes even more sense.

The fact is that unless we actively promote a shift to public transport, to cycling and walking as alternatives to private vehicles, we will fail to meet the necessary reductions in city congestion and in greenhouse gas emissions.

In Sydney's case, the Bureau of Transport Economics has estimated that, under a do-nothing scenario, the cost of congestion would rise from about \$3.6 billion a year in 2005 to \$8 billion a year in 2020. The associated health and environmental costs across the Sydney Region are already estimated at \$1.4 billion a year.

We are also faced with the frightening prediction that over the next two years, greenhouse emissions from transport within the City could rise by 47 per cent from 1990 levels.

Clearly, we cannot continue on a business-as-usual scenario.

What's needed in Sydney is a massive expansion of our public transport system, particularly the suburban railway network.

We also need a high-capacity light-rail system in the inner-city areas, where traffic congestion means buses are completely inadequate to the task of moving large volumes of passengers efficiently.

The State Government's commitment to investing in new public transport infrastructure such as the new CBD Metro line is welcome.

The City of Sydney is investing \$67 million dollars over the next four years in constructing a network of separated cycleways within the local government area.

We've made a submission to Infrastructure Australia along with 15 surrounding Councils and the NSW Department of Environment and Climate Change to fund an inner Sydney cycle network -- to provide safe separated cycle access, into and around the city.

We argued strongly that as a global city, Sydney warrants national investment in its transport infrastructure in order to maintain its productivity, sustainability and liveability, and position Australia well for the future when the world economy picks up again.

We also proposed two light-rail loops, one for the City centre and the other to connect to the Green Square urban renewal centre to the south of the CBD.

Our Sustainable Sydney 2030 strategy proposes a liveable green network to provide high-quality, safe and continuous routes for pedestrians and cyclists.

It envisages a network that is safe enough for children to use, giving priority to separated, dedicated cycleways as a viable alternative to private cars or congested public transport.

Although more people are already turning to cycling, our research for Sustainable Sydney 2030 showed that 75 per cent of non-regular cyclists said that they would cycle more regularly if there were dedicated bicycle lanes and off-road routes, and if there were adequate end-of-trip facilities.

Seventy-one per cent of residents in adjoining council areas said the same.

Separated cycleways work in London, New York, Paris and Amsterdam – as they do here in Melbourne. They can work in Sydney, too.

Our goal is to have 10 per cent of all trips undertaken by bicycle by 2017 – that’s a 500 per cent increase – and to have safe cycling – and walking, of course, as viable and attractive options for residents and workers.

We will have a City cycling network of about 200 kilometres, including up to 55 kilometres of separated cycleways, and another 145 kilometres of cycleways, dedicated cycle and shared paths.

Last December, Council unanimously endorsed our Bourke Street cycleway, a 4.5 kilometre-long stretch of our liveable green network, with 3.1 kilometres of it separated.

Construction of this major urban streetscape upgrade will begin this year. We’re about to start construction on our lower cost, traffic engineered priority network in Alexandria, with a 2.8 kilometre separated cycleway.

We have approved, or are consulting the community on another 3.8 kilometres of this cycleway. We will soon open our first separated cycleway in the CBD, on King Street, which will provide an important safe connection for cyclists into the City.

Our research shows that 56 per cent of occasional cyclists will not cycle because of the perceived danger from other traffic. But 60 per cent said they believed separated cycleways would make cycling in the City safer.

That perception corresponds with the proven experience from separated cycleways in German, Dutch and Danish cities.

We’ve made a 20-fold increase in our current budget for cycling infrastructure – bringing investment in the current financial year to more than \$20 million, and investment in the four years to 2012 to \$67 million.

To reach its full potential, however, the City of Sydney's investment in cycleways needs to be supported by investment in surrounding areas, so we have a connected network right across the city, but most local councils simply can't afford it. Federal Government investment is needed, and it would help achieve declared national goals of reducing road congestion, reducing emissions and improving public health.

There are also potential off-setting economic benefits. One estimate, based on Sydney's Anzac Bridge, shows that by diverting 10 per cent of car occupants to bicycles – or about 730 cyclists each hour – the life of the current bridge would be extended by about eight years – giving a saving of \$46 million based on present-day construction costs.

The development of a cycling culture will also have significant health benefits for a country like Australia, where adult obesity ranks highly among OECD countries. According to a recent paper from the National Preventative Health Taskforce, the health-care system could save \$1.5 billion a year if more people were physically active for 30 minutes a day. It recommends investing in cycling infrastructure as – and I quote – “a major imperative”.

Bicycles, of course, also take up less road space than cars – an important consideration in the narrow streets of Sydney's CBD. This gives us room to upgrade and improve our streetscapes for pedestrians, to plant more trees to further reduce greenhouse emissions, and to reconfigure our cities as healthier, more usable and more pleasant places to be.

In Sydney, we have been enormously encouraged by the response of businesses to the needs of cyclists, with more companies providing end-of-trip facilities as a matter of course.

Smart businesses are well aware of the environmental imperatives, and many are starting to adopt “green charters” and staff travel plans which include the provision of facilities for those who cycle to work.

We're now rolling out bike parking across the entire city, with racks being installed outside local shops and at council properties, and once we have a safe cycle network in place, we plan to introduce a bike-hire system, like that recently announced here in Melbourne.

In April, we're introducing our newly-created Cycling Confidence Courses, directed mainly at people who would like to ride, not just to work but for shopping, socialising and recreation, but who lack the confidence. These courses are free.

To sum up, our cycle strategy will provide Sydney workers, residents and visitors will an integrated network of safe cycling routes so that people of all ages can use this quiet, non-polluting and healthy form of transport to get into and around our city.

Most citizens are well ahead of their governments in realising the need for urgent action to ensure a sustainable future.

And while some predict that sustainability will become the first victim of the current global financial crisis, longer-term thinking suggests that those cities which embrace and prepare for a transition to a new lower carbon economy will be better positioned when the crisis has passed.

I'll conclude with the words of the UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, who recently articulated the challenges of today as requiring collaboration and co-operation – to fight climate change, rebuild the global financial system, and promote sustainable development.

“In this interconnected world,” he wrote, “the challenge is to see the nexus between these three sets of problems. With vision, we will find solutions to each that are solutions to all.

“But it will take leadership to translate that vision into action, just as it will take leadership to balance our larger long-term interests against the fierce urgencies of now.”

His words are a message, and a challenge, for all of us. And it is very clear that cycling is one of those solutions.

Thank you.

[1892 words]