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Submission to  
**Outer Suburban / Interface Services & Development Committee**

Australians like suburban life and are investing heavily in building new lives for their families in outer suburbs. But Melbourne is now at such a scale that the provision of the facilities and services that underpin liveability has become a challenge.

Bike riding is an important part of the liveability of suburbs. Many developers use images of families riding their bikes as selling tools for their estates because it reflects the values that people see as important. People are looking to lead more active and sociable lives in their new communities, and they consider bike riding opportunities to be essential to family and community development.

Riding bikes not only helps people get together, it keeps them active and allows more transport choices. Bikes are not only important for recreation (a major use) they are rapidly becoming a vital part of Melbourne's transport system. Bikes enable people to travel distances up to 10km quicker than they can by car. But the "sweet spot" for bikes is the 2km to 5km range, which is a bit far to walk and a bit short for most motorised trips (car, bus, tram, train).

In outer suburbs most destinations are within 5km for the majority of people. For those destinations that are not (e.g. work, tertiary education) then bikes can get people to the train (or tram or bus) station just as quickly as by car, which may allow the person at home more flexibility (or economy) about how they get about during the day.

Bicycle Victoria has been studying how to encourage more people to bicycle in new suburbs in urban growth zones as part of a three year project funded by VicHealth. We are now finishing the first year of the project which has involved extensive research and consultation. The project has taught us that:

- There is no systematic planning or provision for bicycle riding in outer suburban areas.
- This has led to a piecemeal supply of bike routes that do not connect well to destinations and do not provide the correct type of routes that will enable and encourage people to cycle.
- Consequently cycling rates in the outer suburbs are very low (less than 1% of all trips). But we know that people will ride their bikes if they have the right environment to do so (modal share for riding to work in the inner north is over 15% and rates of cycling to school are over 80% of year 5/6s in some schools in outer suburbs). We also know that most households have bikes that they want to use.

- The travel data (VISTA, VATS) tells us that, although there are less trips and longer trips in outer suburbs (especially to work and tertiary education), still the majority are short, rideable distances. The potential for riding (as with walking) is huge but poorly catered for. These shorter trips include trips to primary and secondary school (average of 2 and 5km).
- For trips to school for younger riders we need a good supply of off-road paths, separated from motor vehicles. Footpaths are not sufficient as they don't provide the width for bike riding or allow enough clearance and clear sight at property boundaries and driveways.
- For trips to work and tertiary education we need good connections to public transport (trains, buses and trams) so people can ride to the station and complete their journey by PT. Also, in outer suburbs there are many activity centres and employment areas that can be reached by bikes *after* a trip by public transport. Secure bike parking is essential at public transport stops, especially train stations but also at bus and tram stops.
- Bikes need to be integrated into the planning system with a more prescriptive approach in order to provide a cycling network which is well used. Currently many of the planning laws only require "consideration" of bicycle facilities rather than insisting on them or telling proponents what sort of facilities are required. This has led to some bizarre outcomes—for instance a shared path encircling a school but no connections to the wider path network. Or bike lanes being placed on high traffic and high speed roads even though off-road paths are advised in the Austroads Guidelines for such locations.
- A checklist system is required to ensure bikes are planned and provided for at all levels of the planning system. If bikes are left out of the early stages of planning (Victorian Planning Policies, Growth Area Framework Plans, and Precinct Structure Plans) then it is very hard and expensive to cater for them at the latter stages;
- At planning provision level the general principles have been outlined but the guidelines are not well understood (the relevant Austroads Guidelines are large documents and take some expertise to implement and interpret)
- At Growth Area Framework Plan level the arterial bicycle corridors must be delineated and documented. At the moment the Metro Trail Network of arterial off-road paths are mapped but these are mostly for linking parks and for recreation trips. (Although they do provide for some transport, this should not be their main purpose because the speeds of commuting bike riders are markedly different than a path cruiser). Problematically, the network of routes along roads, rail and other corridors that make up VicRoads' Principal Bicycle Network are not shown. This means links to major destinations are missing but also that the "skeleton" of the bicycle network is lacking. So more local routes cannot connect to the arterial network to allow trips to local destinations.
- At Precinct Structure Plan level there is currently relatively good guidance through the VPPs and guidance from the Growth Areas Authority, but what is lacking is the guidance and prescription of what sort of bicycle facilities and link is required for different situations. For instance all schools should have off-road bike path connections to the surrounding off road-path network. They also need safe crossings of roads and other barriers and clear direct connections to their homes (not long, windy paths which force detours to cross roads).

Also needed is a requirement for a network of separated bike paths on major roads, shared paths and bike paths in green reserves (creeks, pipe reserves, electricity reserves, rail reserves etc) bike lanes on quieter roads and shared routes on slow, calm, local streets. Together they give a network of routes that provide a choice of routes to destinations which suit all types of potential riders, not just the confident ones or those comfortable in lycra.

- At permit planning level the existing guidelines (Austroads, VicRoads Cyclenotes and the Bicycle Victoria Good Design Guides) provide all the detail required but they are not well followed or enforced by proponents and councils. This leads to inappropriate facilities (bike lanes instead of paths as links to schools for instance). If the first three stages of planning above are clear then there is less confusion at this level so the developer and council are both clear on what is required.

We trust these points are of use to you in your inquiry into the liveability of outer suburbs. Bike riding is a small but key part of making these suburbs better places to live for the families that chose them. Please let us know if you need anything further.

Kind Regards



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