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Around the world, in the face of COVID-19, [cities are converting road space](#) to provide more capacity for cycling. Sydney must do this too.

Luckily, the NSW Government already has a plan to deliver a cycle network for Greater Sydney. Unluckily, the current rollout will take 36 years. The Committee for Sydney believes this program should be accelerated as a key piece of post-COVID-19 economic stimulus and delivered in 3 years.

People want to cycle.

However, Sydney is not a cycling city today; our cycling mode-share is less than 1%. This isn't due to a lack of interest – 70% of NSW residents would cycle every week if it was safe. It's not because of a lack of opportunity – before the coronavirus pandemic there were 2 million car trips of less than 2 kilometres every weekday in Sydney, many of which could comfortably be completed by bike.

Fundamentally, people don't cycle in Sydney because of a lack of infrastructure to support it. Every other city that has invested heavily in their bike networks – especially New York and London – have seen dramatic increases in cycling mode share.

Cycling must be safe before people will undertake it – and separated bike lanes along major roads, and slow speeds on shared roads, are required for people to feel safe. Where it works – Bourke Street, Surry Hills or along the Parramatta River – streets are great places to be, while also allowing for people to travel along them.

Cycling has the benefit of delivering safety on an immediate issue – being one of the best ways to move large numbers of people while maintaining physical distancing. But it also positions Sydney to be a more resilient city in the long run, providing another option beyond automobile and public transport.

The Principal Bicycle Network

In the NSW Government's Future Transport Strategy, there is a commitment to deliver a Principal Bicycle Network (PBN) where cycling was enabled within 10 kms of CBDs and 5km of the 25+ strategic centres across Sydney.

To deliver this, Transport for NSW has developed a PBN plan covering over 5000 km of cycling infrastructure in three tiers of importance, from separated bike lanes to neighbourhood shared streets. Completing this program is predicted to push cycling mode share up to 5% (from 0.9% currently).

Sydney under-invests in Cycling

Delivering this network would mean spending much more than we currently spend on cycling, but nonetheless would take 36 years to be completed.

Currently Sydney spends less than \$10 per person, per year on cycling

infrastructure. This compares poorly to \$41 per citizen per year for London and \$50 for Vancouver. Delivering the PBN by 2056, per current government plans, would likely raise our spend to around \$30 per Sydneysider per year – still substantially less than other cities we aspire to emulate. Delivering this project over 3 years would substantially increase this number as a means to help Sydney catch up.

There is no other investment that can accommodate 5% of all trips in Sydney so cost-effectively; every other alternative costs vastly more.

Cycling infrastructure as Fiscal Stimulus

There is an immediate need during the COVID-19 'transition' period, while physical distancing requirements are still in place, to transport large numbers of people. For many reasons (including parking capacity in CBDs), this cannot only happen in cars – we will need much greater cycling capacity to cater to this.

Many of the challenges of construction are minimised right now – the disruption that building cycle lanes will cause to traffic will be less as there are fewer vehicles on the road.

The stimulatory effect of investing in cycling infrastructure would be broad:

- The program would involve lots of little projects in every area – every community would benefit from it.
- The scale of each of these projects means supporting small firms to access a pipeline of work from the project.

According to the [American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials](#), cycling infrastructure projects deliver more jobs per dollar than other transport infrastructure – at an average of 11 jobs per \$1 million AUD vs. 8 per \$1 million AUD for road projects.

What needs to happen

We call on NSW Treasury to allocate funding to roll out Sydney's cycling network immediately.

There will be a number of steps to this:

- Provide initial funding to Transport for NSW to undertake "tactical urbanism" style re-allocation of road space to cycling, aligned with the ultimate cycle network. This is a model many cities are undertaking, meaning people can start cycling as soon as we emerge from lockdown.
- Through the recovery stimulus process, provide funding to any local government with 'shovel ready' parts of the PBN ready to be designed and built in 2020.
- Fund road owners – both local councils and the NSW Government – to commencing tendering of the design and construction of the cycling network in each area over the next 3 years.

COVID-19 will change a lot of things about the way our city operates. Let's make one of them a positive change and use this opportunity to make Sydney one of the great global cities for cycling.