

A submission in response to the

Our Cities
Discussion Paper
2010 – A national strategy for the future of Australian Cities

by the NSW Premier's Council for Active Living (PCAL)

March 2011

1. Purpose of this Submission

This brief submission has been prepared by the NSW Premier's Council for Active Living (PCAL) in response to the Discussion Paper, Our Cities 2010 - for the development of a national strategy for the future of Australian cities.

2. NSW Premier's Council for Active Living (PCAL)

PCAL aims to encourage more people in NSW to be more active every day. The Council works with government, business and community partners to:

- promote greater involvement in active living across all population groups;
- build and strengthen the physical and social environments that facilitate and support active lifestyles that are built around individual, incidental everyday activity as well as more formal activities such as fitness and sports programs;
- ensure that government policies and strategies provide every opportunity for the citizens of NSW to embrace active living through all stages of their life.

The changes needed to increase active living inevitably require the involvement of multiple agencies, more than one level of government and often the private sector as lead change agents. As a result, PCAL comprises senior representatives from NSW Government agencies, and members from the business and community sectors. The Council provides an important forum for interagency and intersectoral collaboration through the promotion and implementation of active living principles. PCAL's priorities include active travel, healthy urban planning and the liveability of NSW cities and towns.

PCAL has developed a number of resources to facilitate implementation of Active Living / Active Transport by state government, local councils and the development industry. *Designing Places for Active Living* (www.pcal.nsw.gov.au/planning_and_design_guidelines) is a web-based product which provides key design considerations for walking and cycling routes, public transport, streets, open spaces, shopping centres and workplaces as well as links to key references and other resources for more detailed guidelines and specifications.

Development and Active Living: A Development Assessment Resource provides relevant matters (by NSW Planning Development Type) for consideration in the preparation of Local Environment Plans, Development Control Plans and in the assessment of major development applications. *Development and Active Living: Developer's Checklist* is a companion document to the Development and Active Living Resource providing a voluntary tool for developers to self assess their development and respond to policy directions outlined in the NSW Department of Planning Position Statement: Planning for Active Living.

The *Active Living Integrated Planning and Reporting (IPR) Resource*, prepared for PCAL and the NSW Division of Local Government (DLG), Department of Premier and Cabinet, provides guidance to NSW councils on how to address active living principles and practices, as councils prepare and implement the new IPR Framework.

For more information on the above resources go to: www.pcal.nsw.gov.au/local_government.

3. Why Active Living Statement

There is a rapidly growing body of evidence which shows that being active in everyday life not only has substantial positive impacts on our individual health, but also offers environmental, social and economic benefits. However only just over half the adult NSW population meets the recommended level of at least 30 minutes of physical activity on most days of the week required to obtain health benefits.¹

PCAL has summarised in its 'Why Active Living Statement'² the key evidence demonstrating the benefits of active living and the individual and social costs of a sedentary lifestyle. Key points highlighted within the statement include:

- Inadequate physical activity is a serious health problem that results in poor health outcomes including a greater risk of obesity, heart disease, stroke, type II diabetes, colon and breast cancer, depression and more.
- These chronic conditions impose enormous direct and indirect health costs³ – heart disease, stroke and type II diabetes cost well over \$4 billion nationally in direct costs; obesity costs as much as \$2 billion.⁴ Of these direct costs over \$1.5 billion is attributable to physical inactivity.
- Physical inactivity is a major contributing factor to obesity – approximately 25 per cent of school students are either overweight or obese – this figure has doubled in the past 20 years.⁵ Encouragingly, recent data indicates that the child overweight and obesity rate has plateaued in NSW.⁶
- In Sydney, 55% of all car journeys are less than five kilometres and 33% are less than three kilometres.⁷
- Since 1981, the proportion of children driven to school has doubled to more than 50%, while the share of children walking and cycling has almost halved to about 20%.⁸ These car trips to school tend to be short and contribute significantly to the demand by families for a second car.⁹
- The transport sector is NSW's second-largest source of greenhouse gas emissions.¹⁰ Car emissions are a major source of air pollutants which coupled with an inactive lifestyle, may lead to respiratory and cardiovascular diseases and early mortality.¹¹

The solution to these challenges is to create more supportive social and physical environments and policies so that people find it easier to incorporate physical activity into the routines of daily life.

¹ Centre for Epidemiology and Research. *2008 Report on Adult Health from the 2004 New South Wales Population Health Survey*. NSW Department of Health, 2009.

² NSW Premier's Council for Active Living, 2010, *Why Active Living Statement*. Available at www.pcal.nsw.gov.au

³ *The cost of physical inactivity – What is the lack of participation in physical activity costing Australia?* Medibank Private. August 2007.

⁴ *The Growing Cost of Obesity in 2008: Three years on*. Report by Access Economics for Diabetes Australia. 2008. Available from <http://www.diabetesaustralia.com.au/Pagefiles/7832/FULLREPORTGrowingCostOfObesity2008.pdf>

⁵ *Schools Physical Activity and Nutrition Survey (SPANS) 2004: The Short Report*. NSW Centre for Overweight and Obesity. Sydney, 2006.

⁶ *Schools Physical Activity and Nutrition Survey (SPANS) 2010. Executive Summary*. NSW.

⁷ *Sustainable Cities (Report of the inquiry into Sustainable Cities by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Environment and Heritage)*. The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, August 2005.

⁸ *Sydney Metropolitan Strategy – City of Cities: A plan for Sydney's Future*. NSW Department of Planning, Sydney, December 2005.

⁹ Smith and Scott, 2006. *Living Cities: An Urban Myth? Government and Sustainability in Australia*. Rosenberg Publishing, Dural, Sydney 2.4

¹⁰ *NSW State of the Environment 2006*. NSW Department of Environment and Conservation, Sydney, Dec 2006.

¹¹ *NSW State of the Environment 2006*. NSW Department of Environment and Conservation, Sydney, Dec 2006.

4. The link between health, active living and the built environment

Infrastructure Australia in its State of Australian Cities Report¹² highlights that ‘the design of urban environments can contribute to the health and well being of communities by supporting active living, physical activity through walking, cycling and using public transport and opportunities for social interaction’.

Characteristics of urban environments that have demonstrated links to increased physical activity include;

- Mixed land use and higher density
- Footpaths/cycleways & facilities for physical activity linking key destinations
- Street connectivity and design
- Transport infrastructure systems, linking residential, commercial areas
- Neighbourhood aesthetics, including access to public open space.¹³

Australian research¹⁴ has also demonstrated a negative relationship between urban sprawl and physical activity. For example, people living in outer Sydney suburbs tend to be 30-50% more at risk of being overweight and 40-60% less likely to be adequately active than inner-city counterparts. Furthermore, a higher proportion of people in the lowest socio-economic groups live in areas characterised by poor urban design, and inadequate infrastructure.¹⁵

There is widespread agreement that there are benefits in modifying the built environment to encourage healthy, active and more liveable communities.¹⁶ COAG’s National Criteria for capital city strategic planning systems includes addressing health, liveability and community wellbeing.¹⁷ Infrastructure Australia in its State of Australian Cities Report recommends active living related indicators such as ‘the proportion of people not engaged in sufficient physical activity to confer health benefit’ and ‘access to quality open space’ as active living related indicators of liveability.¹⁸

The NSW Division of Local Government’s Long-term Integrated Strategic Planning Reform Manual¹⁹ also includes evidence based active living indicators (pg 52-54). The intention of the indicators is to provide local councils with a selection of evidence-based measures that will help demonstrate progress towards the development of more supportive environments for active living.

¹² Major Cities Unit (2010), *State of Australian Cities*, Major Cities Unit, Infrastructure Australia, Commonwealth of Australia. Available at: www.infrastructureaustralia.gov.au/mcu.aspx

¹³ National Heart Foundation of Australia, 2009. *The built environment and walking*, Position Statement prepared on behalf of the National Physical Activity Program Committee (Chief authors: Gebel, K., Bauman, A., Owen, N., Foster, S., Giles-Corti, B.)

¹⁴ Garden, F. and Jalaludin, B. (2008) *Impact of Urban Sprawl on overweight, obesity and physical activity in Sydney, Australia*. *Journal of Urban Health*

¹⁵ Giles-Corti B. and Donovan, R. (2002). *Socio-economic status differences in recreational Physical activity levels and real and perceived access to a supportive physical environment*. *Prev Med*; 35(b): 601-11

¹⁶ National Heart Foundation of Australia, 2009. *The built environment and walking*, Position Statement prepared on behalf of the National Physical Activity Program Committee (Chief authors: Gebel, K., Bauman, A., Owen, N., Foster, S., Giles-Corti, B.)

¹⁷ *Council of Australian Governments Communiqué from meeting 7 December 2009*

¹⁸ Major Cities Unit (2010), *State of Australian Cities*, Major Cities Unit, Infrastructure Australia, Commonwealth of Australia. Available at: www.infrastructureaustralia.gov.au/mcu.aspx

¹⁹ NSW Division of Local Government (2009). *Integrated Strategic Planning Reform Manual*.

5. Prioritisation of Walking and Cycling

There is a growing body of evidence demonstrating the positive economic advantages of investment in active transport infrastructure. For example, at the request of the NSW Premier PCAL oversaw the development of an updated NSW BikePlan. Background studies were commissioned to inform development of the BikePlan including a cost/benefit analysis of financial investment in select cycling programs and projects in NSW.²⁰ Results demonstrated significant positive returns from proposed shared-pathway infrastructure development due to health, environmental and congestion reduction co-benefits.

PCAL was also requested by the NSW Premier to lead the development of a Draft NSW Walking Strategy. Background studies were once again commissioned to inform development of the draft strategy including a data analysis of walking for travel and recreation in NSW.²¹ Key findings from the data study included;

- Rates of walking to work in Sydney are on par with other capital cities (see figure 1)
- Population rates for walking in metropolitan Sydney have steadily increased over the last decade (from 20.8% of all trips in 1999 to 22.4% in 2008) (see figure 2)
- Walking for short journeys is more common in denser, urban areas
- The highest rates of fatal pedestrian crashes are in urban areas
- Walking is the most popular recreation activity – but people are less likely to walk regularly (ie three times or more per week)
- Children are continuing to walk/cycle less and be driven more to school (see figure 3)
- There is a significant opportunity to shift existing short car trips (less than two kms) to walking. For example there are more than half a million vehicle driver trips of less than one km (less than a 15 minute walk) every weekday in the Sydney metropolitan area (see Figure 4).

The opportunity to increase active travel mode share for short trips within the Sydney metropolitan area is also strengthened given that almost half of Sydney's population lives within two km of a train station and almost half of all jobs are within one km of a train station.²²

PCAL also commissioned PWC to estimate the benefits of achieving a 5% and 10% switch of vehicle trips of less than one kilometre in length within the Sydney Metropolitan area to walking. PWC estimated benefits of \$134 million and \$214 million as a result of a switch to walking.²³

This will require a consolidated approach across all levels of government and a diverse range of government agencies to maximise return for limited available resources to encourage people to walk and cycle. It will also need Government, industry and the community sector to work together to capture and share best practice examples.

²⁰ PricewaterhouseCoopers (2009). *Evaluation of the costs and benefits to the community of financial investment in cycling programs and projects in NSW.*

²¹ GTA (2011). *Walking for travel and recreation in NSW: What the data tells us.*

²² NSW Government (2010). *Metropolitan Plan for Sydney 2036.*

²³ PricewaterhouseCoopers (2011). *Estimating the benefits of walking. Developing a cost benefit methodology .*

Figure 1: Rates of walking to work in Sydney are on par with other capital cities
 (GTA, 2011 Walking for travel and recreation in NSW: What the data tells us)

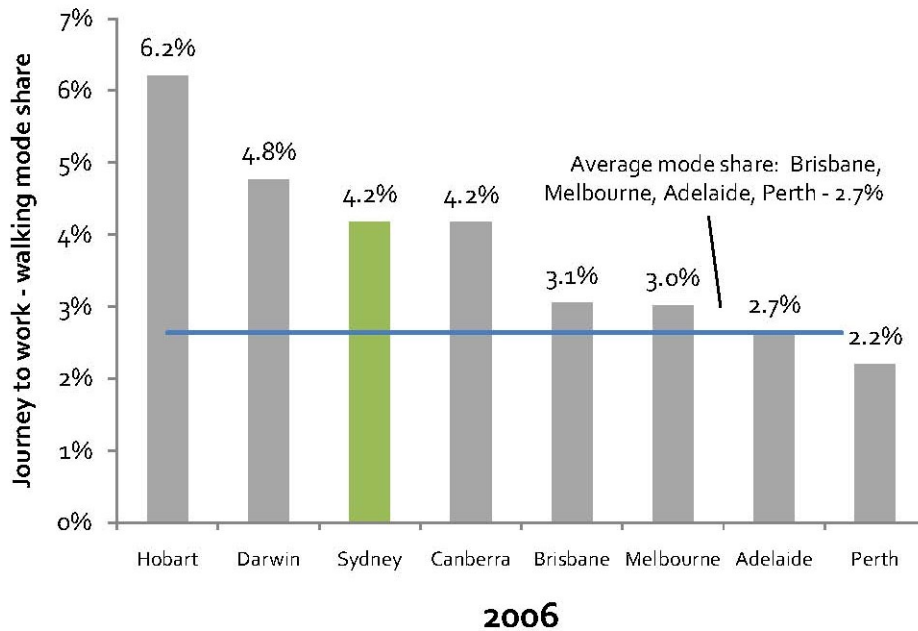
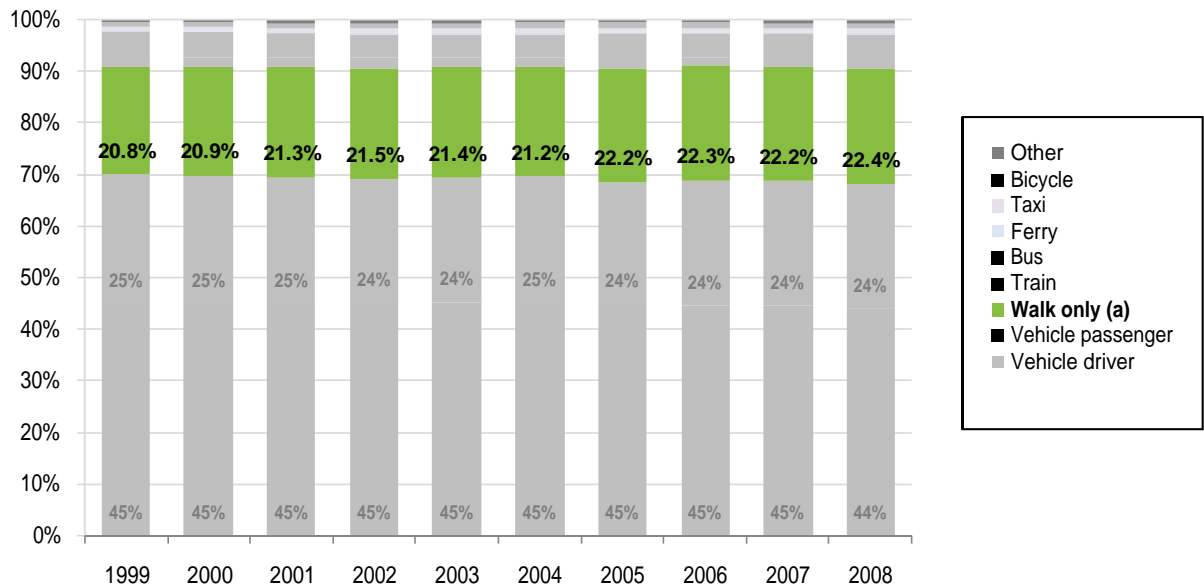


Figure 2: Rates of walking for travel in Sydney Metropolitan Area (all trips, average weekday)
 (1999 – 2008 Household Travel Survey)



a – The Household Travel Survey does not collect data for trips which include walking in combination with another mode.

Figure 3: School children are continuing to walk less and be driven more to school (2004 Household Travel Survey)

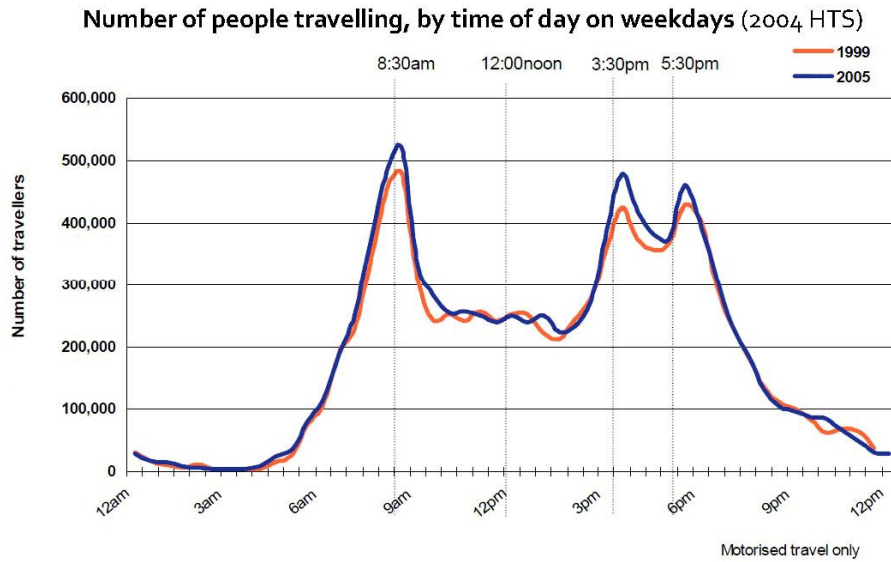
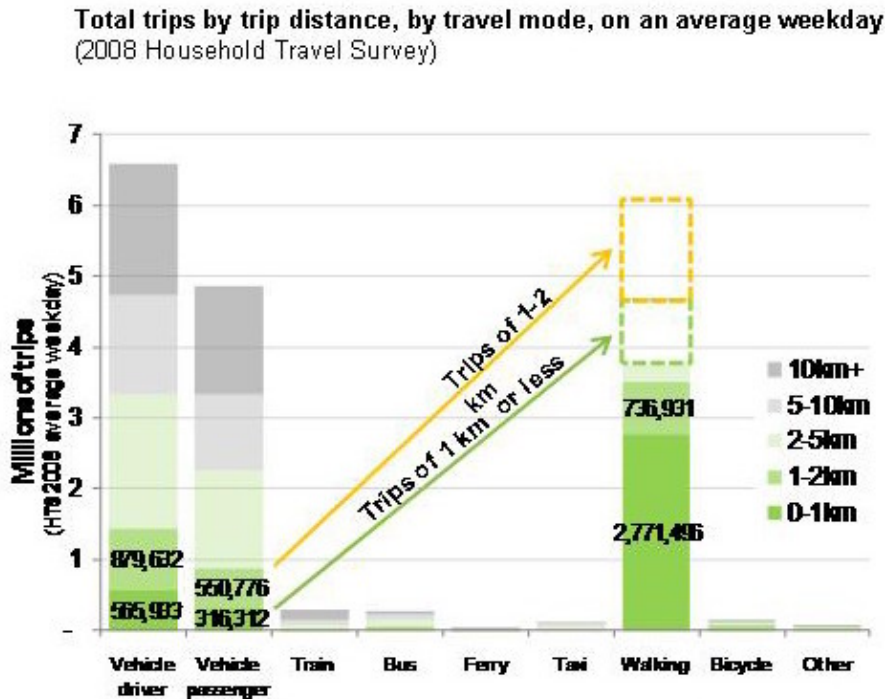


Figure 3 illustrates the increase in motorised demand that occurred at school times between 1999 and 2005. A greater increase in traffic demand occurred in the afternoon school peak (3-4pm) compared to the increase in the conventional afternoon peak period (5-6pm) further demonstrating the ongoing trend of more children being driven to school.

Figure 4 Opportunity to shift existing short car trips (less than two kms) to walking



6. Response to Discussion Paper

The work of PCAL primarily focuses on matters relating to Chapter 4 “Liveability” of the Our Cities Discussion Paper. Subsequent comments are confined to this Chapter but also include governance recommendations.

PCAL supports the strategies outlined in Chapter 4 of the Our Cities Discussion Paper to achieve liveable urban environments such as, balancing infill and greenfield development; improving transport options and reducing our dependence on private vehicles; improving the quality of the public domain to ensure they encourage social interaction and activity; and improving public health outcomes through better designed built environments and transport networks that encourage active travel.

PCAL notes that a comprehensive body of evidence exists that demonstrates the urgent need to build more supportive environments for active living. The benefits of building healthy and active communities are multifactorial and include individual and community health and improved liveability of our cities via reduced traffic congestion and greenhouse gas emissions and improved air quality.

PCAL therefore provides the following recommendations in response to Enhancing our Liveability: Questions 22, 23 and 24 in the Our Cities Discussion Paper.

Question 22: What actions, incentives and disincentives do we need to reduce people’s dependency on private motor vehicles in urban areas?

- **Establish a formalised mechanism to champion inter-departmental collaboration towards the generation of more liveable cities, including promotion of active travel.** Engagement of related agencies as early as possible will enhance future cross-sectoral partnerships and implementation collaborations. Clear explicit articulation of the co-benefits of strategic actions and policies that planning for more healthy, liveable cities has across portfolios such as health, transport and environment is recommended. For example, all major transport, land use and trip generating development projects should provide for active travel from conception, and at all stages throughout the process. This will minimise costs for future provision of Active travel and should apply to both government initiated and private development projects assessed by government.
- **Planning for healthy and active communities needs to be given more prominence and support for its application across all levels of planning and development.** While many of the healthy planning principles are consistent with best practice in local planning, the longer term objective would be that creating supportive environments for physical activity is accepted as part of mainstream planning. PCAL’s ongoing engagement with local councils, developers and consultants through healthy planning capacity building workshops and forums has demonstrated that strengthened guidance and direction in the development of more supportive environments for active living would significantly assist in achieving such increased acceptance.

- **Prioritise walking and cycling for short trips in urban centres to support transport related walking and cycling, public transport use and active recreation.** This will require a consolidated approach across all levels of government, the community sector and private industry.
- **Designated national active travel infrastructure funding.** As identified in Section Four and Five of this PCAL submission, there is an increasing body of evidence linking specific urban design factors to enhanced walking and cycling. A co-ordinated, national approach to the prioritisation of active travel within our Australian Cities is required. Consequent funding of key active travel infrastructure can then capitalise on existing local council and/or state identified priority projects.
- **Establish an evidence based protocol to access guaranteed funding for active travel infrastructure.** The protocol should include preparation of an evidence based rationale and where possible coordinate with identified strategic priorities across all levels of government. For example fund the provision of infrastructure to deliver strategic links in the Sydney Metropolitan Bike Network to connect Sydney's centres, thereby increasing the number of people able to ride into each centre from its surrounding catchment and the choice of centres within easy cycling distance of any given suburban location.
- **Standardise transport infrastructure cost benefit methodologies to include the positive benefits that arise from a walking and/or cycling trip.** Currently not only are few active travel related cost benefit studies undertaken nationally but the positive benefits of active travel components of blended trips (eg walking as part of a public transport journey) are not considered.
- **Encourage the development and implementation of precinct wide Transport Management Associations (TMA) that utilise travel behaviour change strategies to maximise return on infrastructure investments. A TMA or individual Workplace Travel Plan (WTP) typically includes support for walking, cycling, public transport and car sharing reinforced with promotion and incentives and the management of workplace parking.**
- **Fund mass media public education programs that aim to encourage walking and cycling for short trips and promote ways to overcome barriers to active travel.** A key barrier to active travel can be misleading perceptions of walking and cycling; especially about walkable and bikeable distances, safety issues, and routes. People are more willing to walk and cycle if the time and the distance are clearly signalled, and the pathway is understood.
- **Modify local infrastructure and travel to school behaviour to increase active travel among school children.** There is an urgent need to investigate a new coordinated approach to modify travel to school behaviour to increase active travel among children and reduce congestion.

Question 23: How can active transport (walking and cycling) and public transport be most effectively used to meet the transport challenges of our cities?

- **Make walking and cycling integral components of the transport hierarchy.** Provide safe, separated on-road bicycle lanes and shared pathways and ensure that walking and cycling are considered fundamental in the design of transport interchanges. End of trip facilities (showers, lockers and secure bicycle storage) need to be a compulsory requirement of all new workplaces and major transport interchanges.

Question 24: What characteristics of the urban environment can encourage people to walk and cycle more?

- **Support the definition of walking and cycling catchments for new and existing urban centres.** For example a key objective of the Metropolitan Plan for Sydney 2036 is to provide 80 per cent of Sydney's additional housing within walking catchments of new and existing centres to enable more people to live near shops, public transport, schools, community facilities and other services. Walking catchments are defined for different types of centres and PCAL recommends expansion of catchment definitions to include bikeable local communities as well.