



**CONSERVATION
COUNCIL** ACT REGION

Submission to Jo Clay MLA: 6 Steps to Active Travel

May 2022

The Conservation Council ACT Region is the peak non-government environment organisation for the Canberra region. Since 1981, we have spoken up for a healthy environment and a sustainable future for our region. We harness the collective energy, expertise and experience of our more than 40 member groups to promote sound policy and action on the environment.

We campaign for a safe climate, to protect biodiversity in our urban and natural areas, to protect and enhance our waterways, reduce waste, and promote sustainable transport and planning for our city. Working in the ACT and region to influence governments and build widespread support within the community and business, we put forward evidence-based solutions and innovative ideas for how we can live sustainably.

At a time when we need to reimagine a better future, we understand that the changes we need will only happen with the collective support of our community.

For further information please contact:

Helen Oakey, Executive Director, director@conservationcouncil.org.au.

Introduction

The record-breaking heat, fires, rainfall, floods and species extinctions of the past few years clearly demonstrate that global climate change is already having dramatic impacts on the lives of Australian people and natural ecosystems. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has warned that we need immediate, deep and sustained emissions reductions to avoid climate catastrophe.

Canberrans traverse the city daily for social, recreational, household and employment activities. Transport emissions contribute 60% to the ACT's direct greenhouse emissions, primarily through the use of petrol and diesel vehicles. Our transport choices have a significant impact on our environment, the liveability of our city, and our productivity, health and wellbeing. While replacing the city's petrol vehicles with electric versions would reduce direct emissions, this alone would miss the opportunity to achieve a range of other benefits including addressing the ACT's excessive ecological footprint and scope 3 emissions that result from our world-leading per capita consumption of goods and materials.

We need to build a strong public transport network and enable active transport as a viable and attractive option for commuters, and transition to an electrified transport system, which can run on 100% renewable energy.

It is widely accepted that an increase in active travel (away from private car travel) delivers a broad range of benefits for a city, including greater connection to and appreciation of nature, improved personal fitness and mental health, lower public health costs, activation of street fronts and walk-in retail, increased productivity of workers, greater equity in access to travel, cost savings for families, reductions of traffic congestion, opportunities for higher-value uses of land otherwise occupied by carparks and roads, and, critically, reductions of greenhouse gas emissions that contribute to climate change and improvements in air quality.

Make the Move active travel program

In 2021 the Conservation Council together with the Canberra Environment Centre and funding from the ACT Government developed the Make the Move project to help Canberra commuters move from daily car travel to active and public transport alternatives. The project included a comprehensive website makethemove.org.au and a workplace-based program to engage employers and commuters, offering employees the opportunity to try commuting with an electric bicycle in a supported environment.

Four Canberra workplaces took part in the program: two small businesses located in the city centre, a business with around 40 employees located in Fyshwick, and a utility provider with over 300 employees located in Mitchell. The following data are preliminary results from the 66 participants across those locations who completed a survey before participating in the program: post-program evaluation will be completed in June 2022.

The survey found that 75.8% of respondents commute primarily by car, 12% by public transport (light rail, bus or multi-modal) and 7.5% by active travel (walking or cycling). 65% of respondents combine their commute with other stops or errands (such as grocery shopping or picking up children) at least once a week, demonstrating the need for flexibility and

load-carrying capability. 66% of participants live in a household of 2 adults, and 94% of households have at least one car, with 59% of households owning 2 or more cars.

Interestingly, 28.8% of respondents affirmed they have considered reducing the number of cars and 62.1% indicated they are keen to make changes to their commute, suggesting that the Canberra community is receptive to changing their travel habits. With 63.6% of respondents already owning a bicycle and 48.5% in possession of a Transport Canberra MyWay card, there is huge potential for rapid adoption of active and public transport with the right support.

The most prevalent reasons cited by respondents that prevent them from taking active or public transport are “distance and hills” (48.5%) and “don’t have time” (33.3%), with transporting children, carry heavy loads, concerns about safety, weather, and sweat each being mentioned by around 20% of respondents. The Make the Move program’s focus is on electric bikes for their potential to overcome many of these obstacles, and the appeal is clear, with 45% of respondents neutral, likely or very likely to purchase an e-bike in the next 12 months compared to just 30% for a push bike.

Anecdotal evidence from the Make the Move program demonstrates that direct, practical, hands-on engagement is the most effective method of encouraging behaviour change. The project provided four different levels of engagement:

- A website, providing informative videos and step-by-step instructions for getting active
- A pre-program survey that prompted participants to think about their current behaviours and potential for change
- A workshop that presented how-to information about active travel and included interactive activities to stimulate discussion as well as a hands-on demonstration of an electric bicycle
- The loan of e-bikes for participants to take home and trial cycling for themselves.

While post-program data is yet to be evaluated, preliminary results suggest that the interactive workshop prompted people to visit the website to find information about cycle routes, public transport and how to prepare for cycling; and the hands-on opportunity to try an e-bike in a supportive environment was most useful in helping people to realise that they could overcome barriers such as fitness, distance, sweat and time. At least one participant sold their car and bought an e-bike as a direct result of participating in the program. In other words, information alone is not sufficient to change behaviour: a positive experience is essential.

Conservation Council travel-related policies

The Conservation Council supports active and low-emissions travel. The following positions were published in [‘Our environment, our future: ACT election priorities 2020’](#) in consultation with our member groups, including Pedal Power ACT, Living Streets Canberra, Public Transport Canberra, Canberra Environment Centre and SEE-Change.

1. Establish a transport strategy for Canberra that drives down emissions while maintaining liveability and equity of access.
2. Legislate targets for all modes of transport that are consistent with emissions reduction targets, and which reflect a strong ambition to decrease car journeys, and increase active travel and public transport journeys.
3. Establish a Ministerial Advisory Council on Transport to advise the government and monitor the implementation of an integrated transport strategy.

4. Fund a network of separated cycleways across the city via an expanded annual capital works budget for new active travel infrastructure of at least \$30m by 2022.
5. Fund an increase in the recurring annual maintenance budget for active travel infrastructure from \$5m to at least \$12m by 2023, with an additional \$14m over 4 years to address the maintenance backlog.
6. Extend funding for the Slower Streets program that implements design changes in consultation with local residents that calm suburban streets.
7. Invest at least \$4m per year towards community engagement programs that support and incentivise people to make sustainable transport choices.
8. Offer incentives to purchase electric bikes.
9. Continue to deliver an integrated light rail and bus network that delivers frequent and reliable service, enabling people to rely on public transport for work and personal travel.

Other measures that support, facilitate and encourage active travel while delivering co-benefits for the long-term sustainability of the city include planting biodiverse greenery along cycle routes to provide shade in summer, wildlife habitat and climate resilience; and urban densification and mixed-use zoning that brings services within easy reach of residents whilst containing the city's ecological footprint. Greater priority needs to be given to cyclists and pedestrians throughout the city, for instance, residential streets often have no footpath, forcing cyclists and pedestrians onto the roads with vehicles travelling at up to 50 km/hr. These conditions reinforce the perception that Canberra is designed for cars, locking people into a feedback loop that reinforces driving as the preferred mode of travel.

Separated cycleways (rather than shared paths) improve safety for pedestrians and speed for cyclists. Car drivers need to be educated about cyclists' safety, and ongoing public communication is needed to shift the culture from car driving to active and public travel as the norm.

As demonstrated by the Make the Move program and the Canberra Electric Bike Library managed by SEE-Change, in-person hands-on experience is an essential engagement tool that needs to be properly funded on an ongoing basis and accessible at more locations across Canberra.

Refurbishment (such as through Canberra Environment Centre's ReCyclery) and recycling of unusable bicycles also needs to be addressed as part of a circular economy approach to sustainability. This is particularly important with the uptake of electric bikes and scooters and the environmental impacts of batteries both during manufacture and disposal.

Response to '6 steps to active travel' discussion paper

The Conservation Council broadly supports the concepts and the steps presented in the discussion paper and would welcome ongoing discussion with the Canberra community and relevant experts about the issues raised within it.

While the Council acknowledges the importance of evidence-based planning, we contend that enough is known about what is required to support active travel – what is needed is properly funded, accelerated action that matches the urgency of the climate crisis.