

AUSTRALIAN LOCAL
GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION



Submission

Australian Government

**Walking, Riding and Access to Public Transport
Draft Report for Discussion - October 2012**

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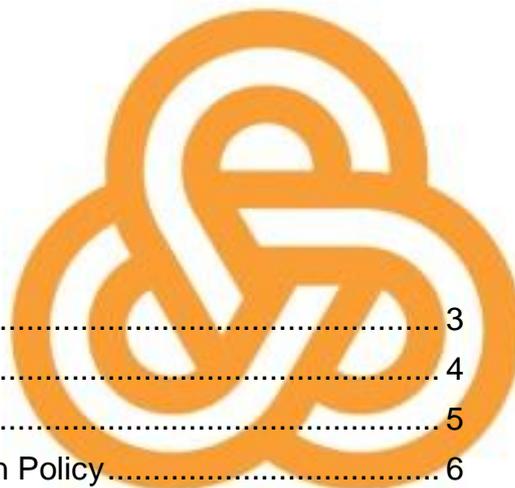


Table of Contents

1	Introduction	3
2	Roles Played by Local Government.....	4
3	Local Government and Active Transport Policy	5
4	Integrated Policy Framework and National Urban Policy	6
5	Investment in Infrastructure Provision (especially local and regional).....	8
6	Conclusion	9

References

1 Introduction

The Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) as the peak national body for Local Government in Australia, is pleased to make this submission on the Australian Government's Walking, Riding and Access to Public Transport - Draft Report for Discussion (October 2012).

ALGA would like to firstly acknowledge the Government's action in releasing this document and highlighting the importance and value of encouraging more participation in active transport modes such as walking, riding and use of public transport. Local governments have long argued the importance of having a diverse yet integrated transport system and how this in turn needs to be closely aligned with land use planning and quality urban design solutions.

ALGA also acknowledges that the Draft Report is well researched and provides many useful policy suggestions on how greater rates of non-car based travel can be achieved. ALGA agrees that increasing the share of walking, cycling and public transit will have multiple community benefits including, but not limited to: making more efficient use of existing transport infrastructure, enhancing the overall environmental and urban amenity, generating greater positive health and wellbeing benefits and promoting social inclusiveness by catering for the diverse needs of all segments of society.

Local government also believes that it makes good economic and financial sense to promote greater active transport participation and that spending in this area should be based on greater levels of investment and not on diluting existing and already stretched transport resources.

The Draft Report makes a valuable contribution in discussing the challenges of increasing the mode share of walking, riding and public transport and proposing multiple policy options on how this may actually be achieved.

ALGA has long held the view that it is legitimate and necessary for the Australia Federal Government to play a more active role in promoting a comprehensive and integrated approach to transport policy, and that this in turn must be part of a larger package of initiatives that also tackles questions relating to Australia's urban, health, economic, social and broader sustainability challenges. A National Walking, Riding and Access to Public Transport Strategy is long overdue.

ALGA is a federated body, comprised of all state and territory local government associations and the ACT Government which represents the interests of local government at a national level. This submission should not be read in isolation from any other submissions the Australian Government receives from the state and territory local government associations or individual councils. Local government is a diverse institution and its very nature makes it necessary to respond to national challenges and policy development issues in ways that best reflect the particular circumstances and geography of individual communities.

This submission has been drafted to provide an overarching comment on the many broad questions asked in the discussion paper and to reinforce the specific expectations that local government has previously espoused in The Healthy Spaces and Places - A National Guide to designing places for Healthy Living (2009), The National Local Roads and Transport Policy 2010 - 20 (2010), An Australian Vision for Active Transport Report (2010), and The Local Roads Funding Gap (2012) - Study of Local Roads Funding in Australia 1999-2000 to 2019-2020 and the following submissions: Draft report of the Review of the Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport (2008); Infrastructure Australia (2008); The Senate Standing Council on Rural and Regional Australia Affairs and Transport - Inquiry into the Investment of Commonwealth and State Funds in Public Passenger Transport Infrastructure and Services (2009); Our Cities - Building a productive, sustainable and liveable future Discussion Paper; and A Sustainable Population Strategy for Australia Issues Paper (2011).

ALGA is currently working together with other national and industry organisations as part of the Moving People 2030 Taskforce. The goal of the Moving People 2030 Taskforce is to advocate for national non-partisan leadership to deliver policies and programs that will lead to stronger and extensive active transport networks in Australia.

The Taskforce will outline a whole of system approach to how Australia should fund transport infrastructure and create more effective and efficient transport networks at a policy launch to be held in Canberra in March 2013.

A list of transport related reports and previous submissions made by ALGA are documented as references and can be accessed via www.alga.asn.au

2 Roles Played by Local Government

Local government in Australia is a dynamic and extremely diverse sector, consisting of more than 560 councils. Whilst it is the sector that is largely responsible for building and maintaining local street and road networks, it is also the level of government that builds and maintains the extensive infrastructure used by pedestrians and cyclists. It also has, in some instances, responsibility for providing ancillary public transport infrastructure in the form of bus shelters and signage and responsibility for promoting a range of community safety, health and environmental programs. These responsibilities, together with the role councils play in the urban structure and development planning process, mean that local governments have direct and indirect interests in active transport.

Local councils provide a range of essential services and infrastructure that serve as the foundation for local and regional communities. For many rural, regional and remote communities, local government is often the primary institutional presence and one of the key players in both shaping the local physical community and delivering and maintaining the things on the ground that makes a difference to people's lives.

It is widely accepted that the key benefits and strengths of local government include:

- wide and established networks of political governance and public administration;
- strong links and accountability to the communities they represent;

- extensive understanding of local needs and concerns;
- practical service orientation and sound organisational skills which make it capable of innovative, timely and flexible responses;
- its role in implementing integrated planning and place based solutions; and
- extensive experience in playing a significant role in all aspects of planning and development, including direct provision and management of local and regional infrastructure.

Local government is committed to meeting its transport and accessibility related responsibilities. It has a proven record of reform and has shown that it quickly adopts new technologies in order to provide effective services to the diverse range of local communities. Local government has also at times been highly innovative in providing solutions to the transport needs of the community, through planning, design, funding arrangements or the provision of community education and healthy living programs.

However local government, despite its best efforts and commitments, does not have the resources to fully meet the extensive challenges in delivering its part of the national transport system in the decades ahead. As demonstrated in ALGA's Study of Local Roads Funding in Australia 1999-2000 to 2019-2020 (The Local Roads Funding Gap, 2012) "expenditure on local roads will need to increase by an average of \$1.2 billion per year for the next 15 years to avoid further and possible acceleration of service level deterioration" and "there is significant growth in local government transport infrastructure with no corresponding addition in revenues".

As previously argued, ALGA has commissioned a number of reports over recent years that provide evidence that local government legitimately needs substantive support from other levels of government, especially the Federal Government in tackling transport related infrastructure requirements.

Active transport initiatives as highlighted in the Draft Report are commendable given the diverse social, environmental, economic and health benefits that accrue to society. It is a fact, however, that additional funding support is clearly required for councils in order for them to play the most effective role in this area.

3 Local Government and Active Transport Policy

Whilst local government continues to argue strongly for ongoing and substantial local road funding through specific programs like the high successful Commonwealth Roads to Recover Program, it has argued this as part of a larger integrated transport policy position it has adopted. Roads and streets are critical pieces of economic and social infrastructure, especially in regional and rural Australia.

ALGA's National Local Roads and Transport Policy Agenda 2010-20 has a transport vision that complements much of what is contained in the Draft Report. That is, *an integrated and safe transport system that enhances the social, environmental and economic wellbeing of local communities*. Furthermore it has also adopted a policy position that *a sustainable and healthy future for Australia requires action to encourage more Australians to use active transport - walking, cycling and using public transport*. (An Australian Vision for Active Transport 2011)

The provision of walking and cycling infrastructure is one of the core responsibilities of local government. Local governments, especially in outer metropolitan areas and regional locations experiencing rapid population growth, face a difficult task in providing the facilities expected and required by local communities.

Local government is already actively and extensively involved in initiatives to encourage walking and cycling. For example, through the Healthy Spaces and Places initiative (a joint project between ALGA, the National Heart Foundation and the Planning Institute of Australia, with funding support from the Department of Health and Ageing), local government is playing an important role in helping to encourage greater physical activity and overall community wellbeing.

The planning guide and web resources 'Healthy Spaces and Places' was developed to encourage the design and development of built environments that support the health and wellbeing of the community and enhance the success of public health campaigns and preventative health measures.

Evidence supports the benefits that result from increasing physical activity and that greater effectiveness is achieved when complemented by supportive changes to the physical built environment. Such changes include improved and attractive public spaces, parks, well designed, signposted and maintained walking and cycling routes, and improved and accessible public transport as well as better connectivity, mixed land uses and increased housing choices and densities.

Public transport is an integral feature of the built environment which requires quality buses, light or heavy rail systems, networks, timetabling, marketing and supporting infrastructure so that people of all ages and life stages can access and participate in community life, for both social and economic reasons.

With the exception of Brisbane City Council, it should be noted that the provision of public transport is the prime responsibility of state and territory governments. Local governments acknowledges that it has a supporting role to play but has long argued that the Federal Government must accept greater responsibility in working with the jurisdictions in tackling the extensive yet critical policy challenges and opportunities in this policy space.

4 Integrated Policy Framework and National Urban Policy

ALGA is pleased that the Draft Report acknowledges the substantive and wide ranging national and Commonwealth policy positions that have been developed to date. It is important that a future national active transport strategy seeks to build on these initiatives and not see the challenge of pursuing active transport as a responsibility of just a single line agency or policy sector.

The Commonwealth's ongoing interest in urban policy and urban design is another example of the importance of appreciating the diverse challenges facing Australia's cities and towns and the need for cross-sectoral policy approaches to achieve higher order national goals. Local government continues to support national engagement and leadership in this area and is pleased that the Major Cities Unit has been able to progress work in this area through the release of the State of Australian Cities

reports and policy development in areas such as Urban Design and Walking, Riding and Access to Public Transport.

ALGA also welcomed the COAG initiative and subsequent agreement for states and territories to develop capital city strategic plans that are consistent with the nine criteria for future strategic planning of capital cities. This action, designed to promote Australian cities to be globally competitive, productive, sustainable, liveable and socially inclusive is an equally positive and worthwhile national initiative.

However, implementing the national urban policy will be dependent on several other contributing factors. These include adequate and agreed funding arrangements, more integrated strategic planning frameworks, efficient and transparent development assessment processes, rollout of eplanning systems, explicit performance criteria and real opportunities for community involvement and engagement.

A national conversation on the future shape and character of the Australia's cities and regional centres, the engine rooms of growth, innovation and opportunity is important. Many of the barriers and opportunities to increasing walking, cycling and public transport must be considered within such a national urban policy context.

Consistently implementing an integrated National Urban Policy will:

- better connect infrastructure with work and opportunity in our cities so we can reduce people's dependency on the car;
- develop high quality public transport and infrastructure systems to ease congestion and improve quality of life;
- reduce the carbon footprint of our cities and adapt them to the consequences of climate change;
- improve urban planning and design to better reflect Australia's increasingly diverse lifestyles and boost access and affordability;
- get the right mix of urban density and renewal strategies; and
- provide the necessary guidance from a national perspective for all levels of government, the private sector and the Australian community to meet the long term needs and aspirations of the nation.

Local government agrees that national leadership is vital, but appreciates that lasting and meaningful change will only be achieved when all three levels of government are sharing the responsibility and working together to achieve agreed outcomes. Local government accepts that it has a role in contributing to national goals, but is heavily reliant on resource and policy support from the other levels of government.

The integration of transport and land use planning is critical to reducing the need for unnecessary travel, improving access to services and employment and reducing car dependency by providing other legitimate choices for getting around. Active transport will contribute to more liveable, prosperous and sustainable communities.

5 Investment in Infrastructure Provision (especially local and regional)

Whilst major infrastructure for our cities and towns are required (telecommunications, heavy and light rail, airports, ports, water and sewer, waste management, teaching institutions, hospitals, stadiums and so on), local and regional infrastructure is equally important.

Local government is responsible for more than \$12 billion of community infrastructure (not including local roads). This infrastructure provides the social and economic backbone for many communities throughout Australia, particularly those in rural and regional areas that are continuing to experience economic hardship exacerbated by increasingly unfavourable weather and climatic events.

The funding allocated by the Australian Government to support the Regional and Local Community Infrastructure Program during the global financial crisis was warmly welcomed by local communities across the nation. Further, local government welcomed the financial stimulus that was provided under the Australian Government's *Nation Building - Economic Stimulus Plan* to also deliver regional and community infrastructure. This funding has made an important contribution in helping councils to meet the backlog and underspend on this community infrastructure that has accumulated over recent decades.

However, feedback from the local government sector indicates more needs to be done. Well-located, well-designed and properly maintained community infrastructure helps produce better quality outcomes for Australian communities and facilitates social inclusion. It also helps achieve other important social and regional policy outcomes, including attraction and retention of skilled workers, healthier communities (through the use of walking tracks, cycle paths, swimming pools, parks and other recreational facilities), social cohesion and tolerance (for example, positive ageing), builds social capital and enables broad-based education and learning (through the provision of galleries, libraries and museums). For some groups in the community, local government facilities are their only means to access ongoing lifelong learning, interact socially and undertake mental and physical health and fitness activities.

ALGA has asked the Australian Government to commit further local government community infrastructure funding in the 2013-14 Budget, at the level of \$300 million per annum over the next 4 years. This will enable all local councils to plan and deliver adequate and appropriate community infrastructure across all areas of Australia and enhance their resilience in the face of extreme weather events and climatic conditions

In its Federal Budget submission for 2013-14, ALGA also calls on the Australian Government to commit further funding to the National Bike Paths Program at a level of \$30 million per annum over the next four years.

The National Bike Paths Program was established in 2009 as part of the Australian Government's Job Fund with funding of \$40 million available for the construction of new bike paths or for extensions or refurbishments of existing bike paths. The Program was extremely popular with local government and its local and regional

communities. The eligible funding bids greatly exceeded the funding that was made available.

The popularity of the Program reflects community interest in cycling in a safe environment that is provided by bike paths in both urban and regional Australia. There are also significant health benefits from increased cycling and proven valuable tourism benefits, especially in regional Australia. With the end of this program in June 2010, there is no dedicated Australian Government program to support cycling infrastructure.

6 Conclusion

Successfully meeting the transport and accessibility challenge facing the nation will require collaboration between all levels of government on the planning, delivery and funding of active transport infrastructure at the local, regional, state and national level. Local government supports the need to improve the capacity of all modes of transport and find smarter ways of using and maintaining such infrastructure, given the limitations on available public funding, demographic influences, and the ongoing impact of changing climate and weather patterns.

In response to the broad set of questions raised in the Draft Report, ALGA wishes to reinforce the importance of adopting the following actions:

- i. Develop an integrated national active transport strategy that embraces policy and planning for the major components: walking; cycling; and public transport.**
 - National, funded and integrated strategy for active transport.
 - Establish an independent national active transport authority.
- ii. Develop clear and realistic targets for active transport and physical and wellbeing activity outcomes.**
 - Provide federal facilitation and reward payments to accelerate activities already under way.
 - Establish a national active transport agreement and partnership to achieve change ensuring health and wellbeing considerations are included.
- iii. Provide local government authorities with substantial, sustained and targeted funding for active transport.**
 - Fund community infrastructure and complementary programs to support active transport and work in partnership with local governments.
- iv. Support the ongoing development and widespread application of Healthy Spaces and Places planning principles.**
 - Continue to support implementation of Health Spaces and Places guidelines and ensure they are adopted as standard operating procedures at all levels of government and industry.
- v. Encourage active domestic tourism by funding major regional projects such as rail trails, cycle routes and hiking tracks.**

- Develop an overarching strategic vision in place of ad-hoc funding for projects.
 - Fund an extension of the National Bike Paths program or equivalent to cater for this specific needs.
- vi. **Promote a safe environment for people who choose to walk, cycle or take public transport and review jurisdictional approaches to the legislative protection of vulnerable road users.**
- Adopt a nationally consistent approach (including design) to traffic and speed management in areas of high pedestrian and cycling use.
 - Consider wider health and sustainability issues in road rule changes and road safety strategies.
- vii. **Fund social marketing programs to promote the many benefits of walking and cycling for people of all ages.**
- Promote programs and opportunities in communities, schools and workplaces such as those rolled out by the National Heart Foundation.
 - Implement strategies to encourage changes in travel behaviour and increased use of active infrastructure and services.
- viii. **Support cycle training and pedestrian education in schools**
- Implement programs that encourage walking and cycling to school.
 - Identify and develop safe walking and cycling routes with appropriate signage.
 - Establish a national coordinating body for walking and cycling to school and sporting events within the active transport authority.
- ix. **Provide incentives for employers to encourage employees to walk, cycle or take public transport to work.**
- Provide incentives such as fare rebates, passes or tax deductions.
 - Install shower and end-of-trip facilities including safe bike parking.

Matters relating to active transport policy are a concern of all spheres of government. As such, all governments need to work together to address the issues facing our cities and towns. Future urban development needs to reduce its ecological impact and demonstrate best practice standards of infrastructure and design and promoting greater levels of walking, riding and transit are ideal ways of achieving this.

All Australian communities will need new investment in infrastructure to enhance equity of access and to be globally competitive. In every respect, governments, the private sector and broader community will need to contribute to the creation and maintenance of sustainable (social, economic and environmental) communities and participate in achieving an extensive and resilient active transportation system.

Finally, ALGA wishes to place on record its view that any national active transport policy and strategy must be complementary, avoid creating unnecessary duplication and be based on a collaborative network model involving all levels of government and the private and non government sectors. Any future programs/initiatives must be designed on the basis of strong coordination and sufficient funding, and be

cognisant of such guiding principles as adaptability, resilience, equity, innovation, integration, efficiency, place based, and subsidiarity.

ALGA looks forward to the next stage of this strategic policy process and would be pleased to further contribute to its development.

References

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