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Submission – A National Urban Policy for Australia Consultation Draft May 2024

Executive summary

Victoria Walks supports the principles and objectives outlined in the draft National Urban Policy for Australia (the Policy). The Policy explicitly acknowledges the wide-ranging benefits of active travel and walking, particularly for health and sustainability.

Victoria Walks warmly welcomes the government's recent decision to begin investing in walking and cycling specifically, with an announcement of \$100 million in funding for active transport. However, \$100 million is a tiny fraction (less than 1%) of the broader investment in transport. The UN recommends that 20% of total transport budgets should be directed to non-motorised transport. A high proportion of councils (83% in Victoria) cite funding as a barrier to delivering walking and cycling projects.

Vehicle ownership is not universal in Australia – at the 2021 census, there were 673,969 Australian households that did not own a car. Over a quarter of the population does not have a license. Ensuring equitable access to non-car transportation alternatives is crucial for fostering inclusive communities.

Frequent mention of active travel throughout the Policy is encouraging, but the broad classification is not always useful or appropriate, as walking and cycling are different in many ways. Walking is much more broadly utilised than cycling and the two modes have different infrastructure requirements. 'E-mobility' should not be categorised as active travel, as it generally does not involve physical activity.

Conversely, walking and public transport are highly inter-related, with most public transport trips involving a substantial walking component. Reliable and accessible public transport promotes walking to public transport stops, while well-designed walking routes to public transport hubs increase the attractiveness of public transport. Strategic investment aimed at enhancing the symbiotic relationship between walking and public transport will be pivotal in delivering a range of urban policy benefits.

Recommendations

1. In line with United Nations best practice recommendations, the Policy should commit to dedicating 20% of Australia's transport budget to active travel. At least half of this should be allocated to walking.
2. Under the objective "No-one and no place left behind" the discussion (p 23) should acknowledge that not everyone has access to a car, and that this leaves them dependent on other modes, usually walking and public transport, to travel and participate in community life.
3. Include acknowledgement that walking and cycling have different infrastructure needs.
4. The Policy should not categorise e-mobility as active transport.
5. The Policy should recognise that walking is almost always a part of public transport trips. This might be best placed under the objective *No-one and no place left behind*, where it states that "Access to transport, including public transport, is vital in facilitating settlement and integration, including access to education and work" (p 23.)
6. Under the goals of *liveable* and *equitable* in section 3, walkability should be explicitly mentioned.
7. The summary of objectives (p21) in Objective 5 "Our urban areas are safe" active travel is not specifically mentioned, despite it being discussed as a 'key urban challenge' later (p28). In the summary 'road safety' or 'safety of movement' should be explicitly mentioned as a purpose of the objective.

Detailed submission

Introduction

Victoria Walks supports the re-engagement of the federal government in urban policy through the new National Urban Policy.

Victoria Walks supports the principles and objectives outlined in the National Urban Policy for Australia Draft (the Policy). The Policy recognises the pivotal role of the transportation sector in addressing the climate crisis and adhering to the emissions reduction targets of the Paris agreement. Additionally, it underscores the potential of the transportation system to enhance the quality of life in urban areas. Victoria Walks notes the federal government's significant responsibility in investing in and supporting states as they transition towards a cleaner transport system.

Victoria Walks supports the Policy's emphasis on the critical role the government will have in driving increased uptake in active travel and walking in urban planning moving forward. It underscores the necessity for enhancing road safety for pedestrians and other vulnerable road users, alongside investing in expanded and improved active travel infrastructure. The Policy explicitly acknowledges the wide-ranging benefits of active travel and walking, particularly for health and sustainability. For instance, on page 32, it states, "Modal shift to public transport and active transport... contribute to lowering emissions in our cities." This strategic shift is essential, and Victoria Walks supports this stance. Additionally, the Policy draws attention to the risks posed by vehicles to pedestrians (p31) and proposes that a *possible action* could be "delivering safe, accessible active transport infrastructure to encourage walking and cycling, improving health outcomes and reducing emissions" (p35).

Victoria Walks specifically supports:

- Recognition that “A modal shift to active travel, public transport and electric vehicles are critical for emissions reduction” (under the objective Our urban areas are sustainable on p31)
- Inclusion of objectives to create safe roads for all and agrees with the Policy’s acknowledgement that private vehicles pose a threat to safety (p29).

Funding

A dedicated commitment to funding is imperative to align policy goals with global sustainability standards and to meet the growing demands of urban populations effectively. Such funding is crucial not only for achieving immediate improvements in urban mobility but also for fostering long-term environmental and societal benefits in line with international recommendations.

Victoria Walks warmly welcomes the government’s recent decision to begin investing in walking and cycling specifically, with an announcement of \$100 million in funding for active transport in the 2024–25 Federal Budget (DITRDCA, 2024). However, \$100 million is a tiny fraction of the broader investment in transport. Actual and estimated annual federal spending on transport between the 2021-2022 and 2025-2026 financial years ranges from \$9,562 million to \$15,530 million, averaging \$13,836 million (Parliament of Australia 2022). The timeframe for the new National Active Transport Fund is not clear, but even if it was an annual allocation it would make up less than 1% of projected total transport spending (0.72% of the average).

The United Nations (UN) underscores the critical link between funding and outcomes, particularly in promoting walking and cycling as essential components of sustainable urban development. The *Global Outlook on Walking and Cycling*, with analysis of sample cities in Africa and Asia, recommended that 20% of total transport budgets should be directed to non-motorised transport “at national and city level” (UNEP 2016: 36). The Policy should emphasise this necessity by outlining funding mechanisms for ensuring adequate and continual financial investment.

The latent demand for investment in walking is significant. In Victoria, many walking projects are ‘shovel ready’ and only require funding to go ahead, demonstrating a base level of need for walking investment. In March 2022, Victoria Walks asked local councils to indicate the walking projects they had planned and costed but lacked the funding. A total of 39 councils (half the councils in Victoria) and two water authorities put forward 522 projects worth \$469 million (Victoria Walks 2022). Additionally, an earlier survey by the Municipal Association of Victoria found that for 83% of councils, funding was a barrier to delivering walking and cycling projects (MAV 2021).

Serious investment in local walking is needed to meet government transport and environment objectives and shift short car trips to walking. People will not decide to stop driving to their closest shops or station and walk instead without being supported and encouraged to do so. The minimal funding currently available will not be enough.

The primary role of the Federal Government in transport and in many other areas of urban policy is as a funding partner. In the purpose of the document (p9) The Policy should explicitly discuss funding priorities and targets.

Transport equity

The recognition that many people cannot or do not own a car and the possible ramifications of that is important to the discussion of “No-one and no place left behind” (p23.)

Vehicle ownership is not universal in Australia – at the 2021 Australian census, there were 673,969 households that did not own a car (ABS 2021). Cost, disability, age and cultural factors can all influence vehicle ownership. Additionally, the costs of owning and maintaining a car can be prohibitive or take up an extremely significant portion of household budget.

Aside from owning a car, users must hold a driver’s license or have someone to drive them, which requires a time investment. Over a quarter of the population doesn’t have a license, including about 30% of people aged over 75 (BITRE 2017). Many people are excluded from getting a license as a result of age or disability. Given the prevalence of car dependent design, and the substantial portion of the population unable to drive, there is a pressing need for urban policies to prioritise alternative transportation options that are accessible to all citizens.

Analysis of VISTA data shows an inverse relationship between car ownership and walking, highlighting the importance of ensuring adequate options for people without a car (Eady and Burt, 2019).

Figure 1. Proportion of adults that walk compared to vehicles in a household (Eady and Burt, 2019)

Description of household¹	Proportion of all households	Proportion of adults in these households who walked²
<i>No vehicles owned</i>	17%	49%
<i>More adults than vehicles</i>	40%	36%
<i>Equal number of adults and vehicles</i>	40%	31%
<i>More vehicles than adults</i>	2%	26%

Table notes:

¹ Vehicles include all motorised vehicles (for example, car, motorbike, truck, etc) owned or used by members of the household parked at or near dwelling the previous night. It includes vehicles owned by the household as well as company cars.

² As a proportion of those that travelled on the survey day; those who did not leave home have not been included.

Households without any vehicles show the highest proportion of adults walking (49%), compared to households with more vehicles than adults (26%). This highlights that walking is a critical component of life without a car. Given the importance of mobility and transport, discussing the implications of accessibility (likely through walking) to important services should be considered under this objective of the Policy.

Research has shown that not having access to a car can exacerbate social isolation and exclusion, particularly in areas with limited transport and service options. This situation disproportionately affects disadvantaged populations who are typically overrepresented in such areas and may already face barriers to accessing essential resources and participating fully in societal activities. Therefore, ensuring equitable access to non-car transportation alternatives is crucial for fostering inclusive communities and mitigating the negative impacts of car dependency and should be discussed as a core component of the objective.

Differences between walking, cycling and e-mobility

Frequent mention of active travel throughout the Policy is encouraging, but the broad classification is not always useful or appropriate, as walking and cycling are different in ways that are critical to the purpose of the Policy:

- Walking is much more broadly utilised than cycling. Around 90% of active transport trips are made by walking (Eady 2023).
- The two modes have different infrastructure requirements. For walking, footpaths are available on most urban streets, so road crossing is the key safety concern and infrastructure requirement. Uptake of walking is also driven by a range of broader urban planning considerations such as density of development, street connectivity and factors relating to the convenience of driving, such as car parking availability. For cycling, the primary concern is around safety and the key infrastructure needs are protected bike lanes or separated paths on major roads, with traffic calming and safer speed limits (ideally 30 km/h) on local streets.
- Different people use different modes – walking is more accessible to people with disability or those who are less physically fit.
- The modes are used for different trip lengths and purposes. Cycling can generally replace longer trips where walking would not be suitable, but walking often combines with public transport for longer trips.

While the Policy recognises modal shift as crucial for the transport sector's transition, Victoria Walks notes a missed opportunity in adequately acknowledging the interplay between walking and public transport as well as the distinction between active travel modes (mainly walking and cycling.) This oversight raises concerns about potential underfunding of walking projects, given the reality that the infrastructure requirements are not the same between walking and cycling. Victoria Walks advocates for a more nuanced approach that recognises and prioritises walking within transportation policy frameworks as a distinct category. This is particularly crucial because walking serves as a highly accessible mode of transportation and recreational physical activity, especially for vulnerable road users such as the elderly, culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) individuals, and women.

Under the productivity objective, one possible action is “increase the quality and availability of infrastructure for active transport, such as walking, cycling and e-mobility...”

E-mobility should not be categorised as active travel, because devices such as e-scooters do not involve any physical activity. They are just as likely to displace active transport trips as vehicle trips. The government may wish to support their uptake, and they have similar infrastructure needs to cycling, but that does not make them ‘active.’ We do however support the categorisation of e-bikes as active travel.

Walking and public transport

Recognising the relationship between active travel and public transport is crucial. Most public transport trips involve a substantial walking component (Loader 2013), making the integration of these modes essential for replacing longer private vehicle journeys with more sustainable alternatives.

Walking is particularly important for accessing bus and tram stops, with analysis finding that in Melbourne 94% of trips from home to tram or bus stop are walked (Eady and Burt, 2019). Despite free parking at many suburban train stations, about half of people walk from home to the station. When trips to train stations from all locations (including from workplaces) are considered, two thirds of trips accessing the train system are walked.

Research found that over half of people say they don't use public transport because there is none available, or it doesn't operate at a convenient time. Improving public transport has the potential to significantly reduce the number of vehicle trips, with only 10% of people requiring their own vehicle for work and 8% using it to carry work items or other people (McCrimdle Research 2014).

Figure 2 Access mode to bus and tram stops (Eady and Burt, 2019)

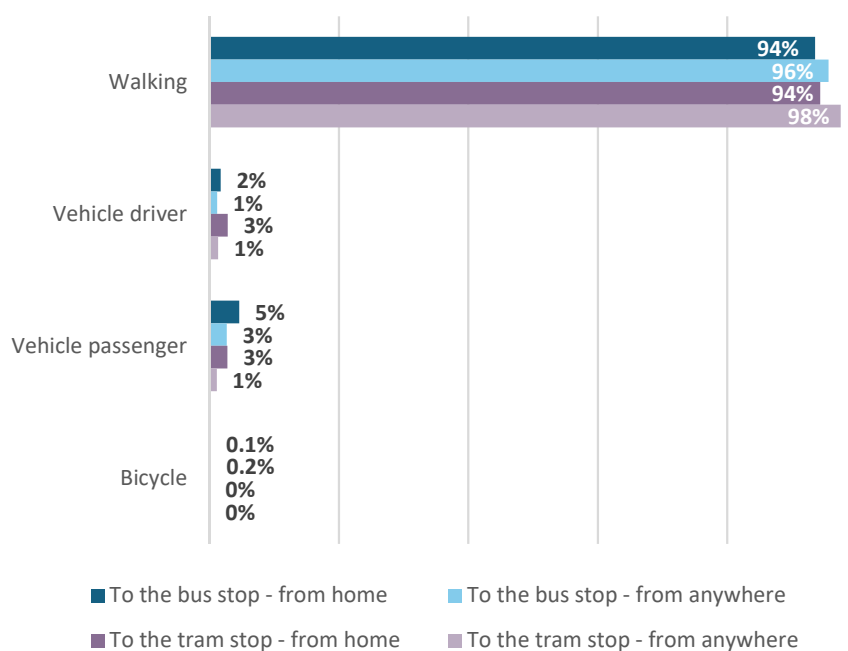
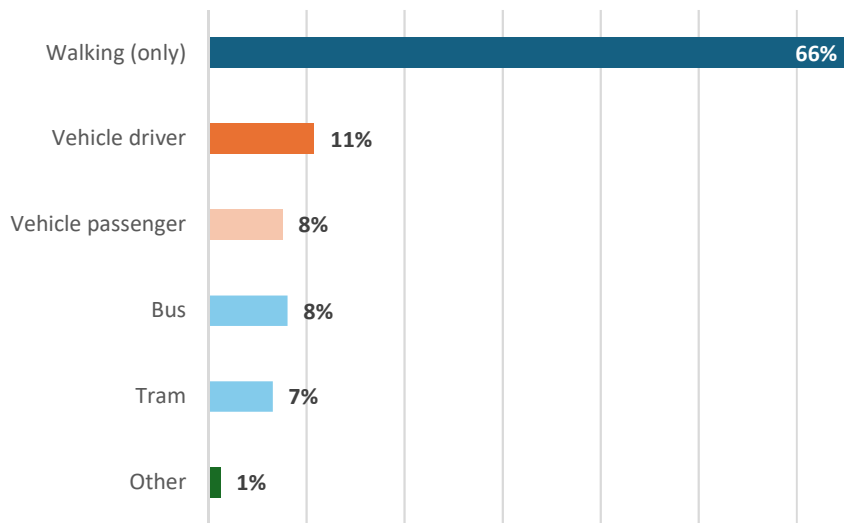


Figure 3 Trips by mode to the train station: blue = trips involving some walking (Eady and Burt, 2019)



Reliable and accessible public transport promotes walking to public transport stops, while well-designed walking routes to public transport hubs increase the attractiveness of public transport. Strategic investment aimed at enhancing the symbiotic relationship between walking and public transport will be pivotal in delivering modal shift towards more sustainable transportation choices. The Policy should highlight this as a priority and propose actions that will foster this integration. Active and public transport are mentioned together multiple times in the report, but it is not made clear how walking and public transport are particularly intertwined.

Victoria Walks would be happy to work with the Department to further discuss the recommendations in this document.

Victoria Walks gives permission for this submission to be made public.

If you have any queries regarding this submission please contact Duane Burt, Principal Policy Advisor, on dburt@victoriawalks.org.au or 9662 3975.

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