

In conversation with Bart Sbeghen.

Bicycle Network Victoria
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I interviewed Bart Sbeghen, the Bike Futures Manager from Bicycle Network to understand challenges and opportunities of designing bicycle friendly neighbourhoods and how we can establish healthy behaviours.

As a peak body what is the main aim of Bicycle Network?

We want to make it easy for everyone to ride; we want bike riding to be part of the everyday. As a health promotion charity we believe there are many good reasons why you should ride but the number one thing is people's health.

How can riding support the quality of community life and connections?

Riding a bike everyday not only allows you to get your daily dose of physical activity but also increases your social interactions because you can observe and interact with your neighbourhood.

What different types of bike riders do we need to plan for?

At the moment 80% of the people riding are doing it for recreation. You can break cycling down into four categories - high intensity, low intensity, transport and recreation.

- High intensity transport are commuters, they are usually going a bit faster.
- High intensity recreation, are those people typically portrayed as 'cyclists' and would call themselves cyclists.
- Low intensity transport is your local trips to school, shops or friends. This makes up most of the transport in local communities.
- Low intensity recreation is riding with your friends or family on the paths.

Below these categories is 'no intensity' which accounts for most people currently.

What happens is people usually transfer from 'no intensity' up into 'low intensity' when they first go riding on the paths or local streets. Once they become more confident they go to the next level, perhaps riding to work or for sport.

“*Bicycle Networks aim is to get people from 'no intensity' to 'low intensity'. This is where the biggest health benefits can be achieved.*”



Bart Sbeghen

If you can shift people from 'no riding intensity' to some riding intensity which means you've achieved 50% of the potential health benefit from physical activity. If we manage to get them to a fairly high intensity, you can achieve another 47% improvement.

What is the biggest barrier to riding?

The major reason people don't ride is because they are afraid of dying, so they don't do it. 60% of the population have a bike, 60% of the population say they'd like to do more riding and 60% of the population say "I just don't want to die." This is simply what it comes down to.

You have to make it possible for people to ride from the origin to destination, and that's got three things, the origin, the destination, and the riding. If you can get those three things right, you're done.

What should we consider when planning growth area communities?

The number one thing to making bike riding possible is creating those connections in the first place.

We have developed a tool, the *Planning Checklist for Cycling*, which maps riding criteria against the Victorian Planning Provisions. The concept was to make a tool for anyone to use, people can assess their own planning process across three levels; the whole community, the neighbourhood level and then the streets and parks.

How can path and street design encourage riding?

Our local streets must look like a place that has plenty of walking and cycling, like a caravan park or retirement village. Cars should give way to pedestrians as they are the guest in places where people live; there's not even a need for a footpath.

Where the speed of vehicles goes above 30kmh you have to start separating. At 40kmh you need a bike lane using visual and tactile methods. Once you get above this speed physical separation is required, one of the best ways is vertical separation – the path goes at the footpath level not on the road level.

Image 01 A low intensity transport biker in Queens, NY, USA



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02

Who does create the best riding places, with a focus outside of cities?

The Dutch are probably the ultimate; they do it completely separated because they have such a great volume of bike riders. In the end if you're really planning for success you want a separate space for bike riders and pedestrians, and most of that space will probably come from where you currently put the on-street parked cars.

Do you know of any good local examples?

Mernda is a great example where they put the shared path between the two railway stations and 'Parkiteer' bike cages. The cages were fully registered the day they opened.

“If we want people to use their bikes then we must connect in with public transport.”



03

Image 02 The Dutch model of cycleway - Elizabeth Street, Melbourne VIC

Image 03 The French model of cycleway - College Street, Sydney NSW

We have a few examples around Melbourne city now. There are two different ways of doing it, the Dutch model having one way on each side and the French model having two ways on one side. We prefer one way on each side because it's easier to deal with cross streets.

Shared paths can work but only at lower volumes and slower speeds. You can't rely on shared paths for commuter cyclists because then you're stopping people from walking, which is wrong. Shared paths are good, but once you get more than 100 bikes per hour then you have to separate the bike riders from the walkers.

Particularly in outer areas where most people work somewhere else.

How can you shift or set good transport behaviours in growth areas?

It's about putting things in first. The local shops have to be there, some green spaces, place that let people walk and ride to that park and community centre giving you a base to build up from. It's about deciding what the most important factors will be for developing the lifestyle and behaviour you want early on.

We work with school communities through Ride2School programs, but the best thing you can do is make it part of the curriculum or part of the building program. That means it's not just about the buildings and facilities, it's about the riding program that goes with it. Schools are facilities around education programming; Ride2School is a community learning program.

After the Planning Checklist we want to have a green travel plan or induction plan for all sorts of things; community centres, schools. We want people to make decisions about riding right from the start and we need a plan for doing it. We can't just wait and let it happen.

Do change and storage facilities increasing participation rates?

We know it helps, but of the three things, the weather, the connections and end of trip facilities, end of trip facilities is the least important.

“The pathway to the destination is the most important thing you can provide.”

If you could change one thing about the way we currently create communities what would it be?

You must have an understanding of riding embedded right at the start, at the concept stage, there's no point at the end. I know places that have got lovely bike paths that look great but there's no one on them because it doesn't connect anywhere.

“Having unconnected paths is like putting a pipe out in the middle of a paddock and wondering why it's not carrying water.”

Image 04 Parkiteer cage at Sunshine Railway Station, Melbourne VIC



Image sources - 1. Will Sherman, <http://cityphile.com/photos/queens-plaza-bike-path-12/>; 2. <http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/just-50-a-head-will-make-melbourne-a-better-city-for-cyclists-20150429-1mvxm8.html>; 3. <http://bicyclecanberra.blogspot.com.au/2011/08/infrastructure-left-turn-slip-lanes.html>; 4. Reinthal, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Parkiteer_bike_cage.jpg