

# Healthy Built Environments

## Sharing the path



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As our cities grow to accommodate more people in high rise apartment buildings, close living will become more the Australian norm. So too will sharing public facilities such as recreational facilities and pathways. Together with the popularity of active transport, cycling and walking along shared pathways will be commonplace. Planners need to be aware of the issues related to shared pathways as more and more people use these facilities for transport and recreation.

Walking and bike riding are healthy, cost effective and efficient modes of transport. Encouraging more people to walk and cycle for short trips is an economically beneficial solution to many of our urban transport challenges. Numbers have been steadily increasing for both modes of transport. The 2013 *Sydney City Centre Access Strategy* reports that 92% of all weekday journeys in the City are walking trips and, along with cycling, this mode of transport is expected to continue growing.

There is mounting pressure for active transport infrastructure provision, with shared pathways providing one design solution. Integration increases the likelihood of conflict, particularly for pedestrians. As our population ages, mobility devices will be more regularly utilised on shared pathways, and a greater percentage of pedestrians will have vision and hearing impairment.

### Safety

The interaction between pedestrians and cyclists on shared pathways is causing increasing safety concerns. However, the perception of danger is much greater than the actual risk. Observations of 50,000 pedestrians and 12,000 bicyclists on NSW shared pathways found only five near misses and no actual contact between cyclists and pedestrians.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, we cannot simply dismiss perceptions, as the perceived risks can be a significant barrier for walking, particularly for older people. Management of shared pathways is becoming increasingly important as cities densify and we compete for limited space to commute and recreate.

While there is no single conflict generating mechanism, numerous factors have been identified as significant. The behaviour of people using the shared path and the physical environment, together with interaction between these two factors, can impact upon shared path conflict. Path widths and cycling speeds are also key factors influencing pedestrian perceptions of safety on shared paths.

### Solutions

To minimise conflict, we need holistic solutions that meet the requirements of both bike riders and pedestrians. A suite of solutions are necessary to address local environmental, demographic and cultural circumstances. Broad measures to minimise conflict between cyclists and



*Sharing the path safely: Fernleigh PCAL case study (Source: PCAL)*

pedestrians include integrated strategy and planning, engineering works, traffic management, urban design, place making, and education/behaviour change programs.<sup>2,3</sup>

A special session at last year's *Walk21* conference explored evidence based measures for managing conflicts between cyclists and pedestrians on shared paths.<sup>4</sup> Practical solutions include duplicating paths to promote walking and cycling separation, widening shared paths to increase capacity, safety reviews and subsequent design solutions to minimise potential shared path hazards, rule enforcement, and behaviour change programs.

### Where to from here?

One well researched behaviour change program is the City of Sydney's 'Share the Path' awareness campaign, which aims to educate pedestrians and bike riders on how to use shared paths safely and considerately. The program uses face-to-face sessions between bike riders, pedestrians and council staff at sites with high foot and bike traffic during peak commuting periods to disseminate key messages and reward target behaviour (such as cyclists' bell ringing). The program also provides suggestions for establishing a similar program in other local government areas.

Other specific conflict management strategies and numerous best practice case studies from across the country are provided on the Australian Bicycle Council website<sup>5</sup> and there are NSW specific case studies on the PCAL website.<sup>6</sup> ■

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> NSW Roads and Traffic Authority (RTA) 2009, *Research Report: Study of Bicyclist and Pedestrian Safety on Shared Paths*, RTA, Sydney.

<sup>2</sup> Austroads 2006, *Austroads Research Report: Pedestrian-Cyclist Conflict Minimisation on Shared Paths and Footpaths*, Austroads, Sydney.

<sup>3</sup> Queensland Transport 2006, *Reducing Conflict Between Bicycle Riders and Pedestrians*, Queensland Transport, Fortitude Valley, Queensland.

<sup>4</sup> See: [www.walk21sydney.net/presentations/](http://www.walk21sydney.net/presentations/)

<sup>5</sup> See: [www.bicyclecouncil.com.au](http://www.bicyclecouncil.com.au)

<sup>6</sup> See: [www.pcal.nsw.gov.au/case\\_studies](http://www.pcal.nsw.gov.au/case_studies)