
**MORE THAN “TAKING RESPONSIBILITY”:
BASED ON BICYCLE NSW’S EXPERIENCE, INDIVIDUALS ARE
KEEN TO TAKE ACTION FOR THE HEALTH COSTS RELATED
TO PHYSICAL INACTIVITY...**

**THEY JUST NEED A NETWORK OF SAFE AND USEFUL
PLACES TO RIDE THEIR BIKES.**

As recently reported in the Sydney Morning Herald (30 January 2008), the obesity epidemic is very real and costly to the NSW health budget. The cost of physical inactivity of course involves a lot more than specialist hospital facilities for obese patients – for example, recent figures indicate a 44% jump in expensive pathology tests largely due to suspected cases of type 2 diabetes. The Premier's Council for Active Living (PCAL) *Why Active Living?* Statement highlights that physical inactivity costs Australian tax payers \$15 billion a year, due to the increased risk of chronic diseases including type 2 diabetes, heart disease and cancer.

The PCAL Statement identifies that the cost is more than just monetary: physical inactivity is associated with less connected communities, a less productive economy, and environmental problems associated with car dependence, such as congestion and air pollution.

With the right infrastructure, bike riding is a very convincing and effective part of the solution.

For the individual –focussing here only on the health benefits – bike riding

1. is a low impact, easy, enjoyable physical activity, which according to the NSW Department of Health reduces the risk of heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes and cancer;
2. is a highly flexible form of exercise that can be done socially, with family or individually;
3. can be done throughout the life span from 4 years to 104 years;
4. addresses time pressures since bike riding for transport can be easily incorporated daily as an ‘incidental’ exercise – whether to work, to school, to run errands, and on weekends. 50% of car trips are under 5 km, so these are ideal to replace with a bike. Similarly for car trips to school: the majority of car trips to school are under 3 km yet 1 in 5 car trips in peak hour traffic are trips to school;
5. offers a great way to feel connected with your community, alleviating the social alienation and aggression associated with car dependence. This has been reported by Londoners who have taken to bike riding in significant numbers in recent years.

For the community, more people bike riding more often directly contributes to

1. a physically active community, which reduces pressure on the health system.
This means money in the health budget dedicated to addressing medical conditions associated with inactivity could be reallocated to other urgent health issues such as improving treatments for cancer, mental illness and children's diseases;
2. more productive and happy workforce and school population;
3. less traffic congestion and car emissions;
4. a more liveable community, where citizens are healthy, happy, and more able to freely interact with each other;
5. a healthier economy related to household savings on spiralling transport costs.

In spite of these inter-connected benefits, Bicycle NSW's experience shows that the single biggest obstacle to more people bike riding is a lack of infrastructure.

Alex Unwin, CEO of Bicycle NSW said,

"Bicycle NSW applauds the development of safe bike riding and walking infrastructure such as the shared use paths (SUPs) alongside Epping Road and the M7 cycleway, as well as the recently opened Western Sydney Parklands Track.

"But to be effective infrastructure needs to be coupled with behaviour change programs such as the highly successful National Ride 2 Work and Ride 2 School initiatives, and our popular bike riding workshops and events designed specifically for women. Such events promote the use of existing and emerging bike riding infrastructure and provide a safe and navigable route to ride, offering the community a fun opportunity to embrace a healthier lifestyle.

"For example, on March 8 this year, coinciding with International Women's Day, Bicycle NSW is holding the inaugural *Gear Up Girl Challenge* which is an all women's bike ride with either a 15 km or 55 km option. These routes use 90% cycleway/SUP and have been specifically designed to cater for the increasing demand from women for novice bike riding options.

"*Gear Up Girl* is just part of our City of Sydney Spring Cycle Series being developed over the next 5 years, consistent with the NSW State Plan. This is an ever expanding event that takes in the various cycle-way routes across greater Sydney, which will be held this year on October 19."

Enquiries:

Alex Unwin CEO Bicycle NSW

0425221060