Walk21: Matters of relevance for CAW

Basic message running through the conference

- Inactivity is the new tobacco, affecting a wide range of health conditions (heart, diabetes, dementia, some cancers). The health sector were heavily represented at Walk21, and are increasingly focused on this issue. The US Surgeon General is due to release a statement on inactivity, similar to the one he issued on tobacco.
- The guidelines are that people should get a minimum of 30 minutes a day moderate exercise (e.g. walking), 5 days a week. 60% of Londoners and 50% of people in an Australian study don't achieve that.
- The easiest way to ensure the minimum is achieved is to build exercise into the daily routine – particularly through making walking or cycling at least part of the daily transport journey.
- If people are going to choose those modes, they need to live in walkable cities. The Australian Heart Foundation released a discussion paper at the conference identifying the things neededto make walkable neighbourhoods:
    - Density
    - Availability of public transport at a reasonable distance
    - Accessibility of destinations
    - Mixed landuses – mix of housing and business, and mix of housing types
    - Walking (and cycling) infrastructure design – intersections, street connectivity. Particularly avoiding the cul-de-sac design and having grid systems to shorten distances between points within the suburb.
    - Traffic demand management by managing parking availability
    - Placemaking
- Cities that are walkable are also more economically successful
    - walkable neighbourhoods have higher market value
    - walking/cycling infrastructure is far cheaper to provide than car infrastructure
    - higher density cities, and less road space, means higher agglomeration, which is important for economic success
    - walking encourages informal transactions that are particularly important in knowledge economies

Walking and cycling interactions

A number of papers on this, and a fairly contentious issue. In summary:

<u>Shared spaces</u>

Cyclists and pedestrians should be separated from cars if traffic speed is above 30kph.

Below that speed shared spaces can work well, if the space looks like a shared space, not a road.

- Preferably no footpath or kerb/channel system. A footpath sends a signal to cars and pedestrian that pedestrians belong on the footpath.
- Low speeds – achieved through speed limits and/or design features
- Design features that make it look different to the adjacent roads – seating, plants, paving, etc.

Conversion of roads to shared spaces, or formalisation of shared space status, is becoming more common, because the resulting spaces are successful.

One trend is the adoption in a number of countries of the Jan Gehl approach – removing all road markings and forcing road users to make eye contact and make decisions on what is safe at that point in time.

Streets

Streets are not roads – streets are public open spaces used for multiple purposes, and should be designed with that in mind. So even if it isn't a shared space, and has separated footpaths, it should not be a car dominated space that pedestrians are reluctant to cross.

One statement was "if you need a sign to tell people to slow down, you've designed the space wrong".

Shared cycling/walking paths

A Vic Walks international literature study found that the high use of shared paths in Australia was quite unusual – in Europe the focus is for separated facilities.

One of the papers argued that if you are going to have shared cycling/walking paths, they should be at least 3m wide. If you make narrow ones, either they won't succeed or they will become crowded.

A problem identified with shared paths was that the local authorities, Police, newspapers, etc tend to treat them as cycling paths. For example in one case Police blamed a pedestrian for "being on a cycle path" and therefore causing a crash, when it was a shared path and therefore the pedestrian had legal priority.

Cyclists/pedestrian interactions on footpaths and shared paths

An Australian study found significant numbers of cyclists on footpaths. But interviews of those cyclists found that most were reluctant to be on footpaths, and the most experienced cyclists the most reluctant. Footpath use was more common for utilitarian trips, and less common for recreational and social trips.

The overall conclusion of the study was that cyclists were forced onto footpaths by poor cycling infrastructure.

There is a 50:1 kinetic difference between a car and a cyclist, and between a cyclist and a pedestrian. Fast cyclists and pedestrians should be mixed together.

The studies reported didn't find many crashes between cyclists and pedestrians on shared paths. Most cyclist accidents were falls, not crashes. But:

- older pedestrians are at particular risk, and a minor accident can result in subsequent death
- older pedestrians in particular therefore perceive cyclists as a hazard, and may avoid walking if there are cyclists on the footpaths. One study found that 38% of elderly walkers cited cyclists on footpaths as the major barrier to them walking, and cyclists were one of the highest risks cited.
- where there are fast cyclists on shared paths, walkers tended to move to the edge or right off the path, suggesting that they don't feel safe
- perceptions of safety are more important in their effects on walking levels than actual crashes

Another problem was that cyclists and pedestrians have different perceptions of what is an appropriate speed for the cyclist when passing a walker. Pedestrians in the survey considered that cyclists didn't slow enough, while cyclists thought they were slow enough. Cyclists slowed down less near a pedestrian if there were a lot of other cyclists.

High speed cyclists are not only the most dangerous, but also the hardest to reach by education.

Is footpath cycling a good idea

The Vic Walks paper found that converting small sections of footpath to shared path was undesirable because:

- if cyclists are coming off a road and about to go back onto the road, they will be moving at high speed
- it creates a lack of clarity about the rules, and cyclists are more likely to stay on the footpath or use other footpaths

A US literature review showed that riding on the footpath creates greater risks for the cyclist – particularly at intersections.

Conclusion

Make streets safe for cyclists, or provide separate cycling facilities. Don't try to solve the problems cyclists face by making walkers less safe and making walking less attractive.