

June 2024

# AMA Queensland Active Travel Position Statement

## Key message

AMA Queensland recognises the health of our patients and communities is linked closely to the quality of our environment. Decarbonising transport in Australia will achieve benefits for individual, community, and environmental health.

Fossil fuel powered vehicles, cars, trucks and buses contribute 20% of our total emissions, causing air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions.

Queensland's Department of Transport and Main Roads concludes that well positioned active travel infrastructure returns \$5 for every \$1 invested.

Promoting active travel will realise co-benefits for our community, young people and overloaded health system.

## Preamble

AMA Queensland recognises the impact of climate change on health and its major contribution to current and future health inequities.

Our urban design has facilitated Queenslanders' reliance on private motor vehicles. In Australia, road transport emissions have grown more than any other sector, increasing nearly 60% since 1990 and accounting for 19% of Australia's overall emissions.

The modal share for commuting and short trips in Queensland is dominated by our cars – 80% of commutes and short trips (< 5 km) are undertaken by car, with 15% being by public transport and just 5% being made by bicycle or on foot.<sup>1</sup>

This is a major contributor to our lack of physical activity - less than 25% of Queenslanders are reaching acceptable activity levels in early 2024. Recent data show six in 10 adults, three in four seniors and eight in 10 kids and young people are not protecting their hearts and minds with exercise.<sup>2</sup>

Air pollution is the world's single greatest environmental cause of preventable disease. In Australia, the University of New South Wales estimates it's linked to more than 3,200 deaths a year at a cost of \$6.2 billion and even small improvements in air quality will have measurable benefits.<sup>3</sup>

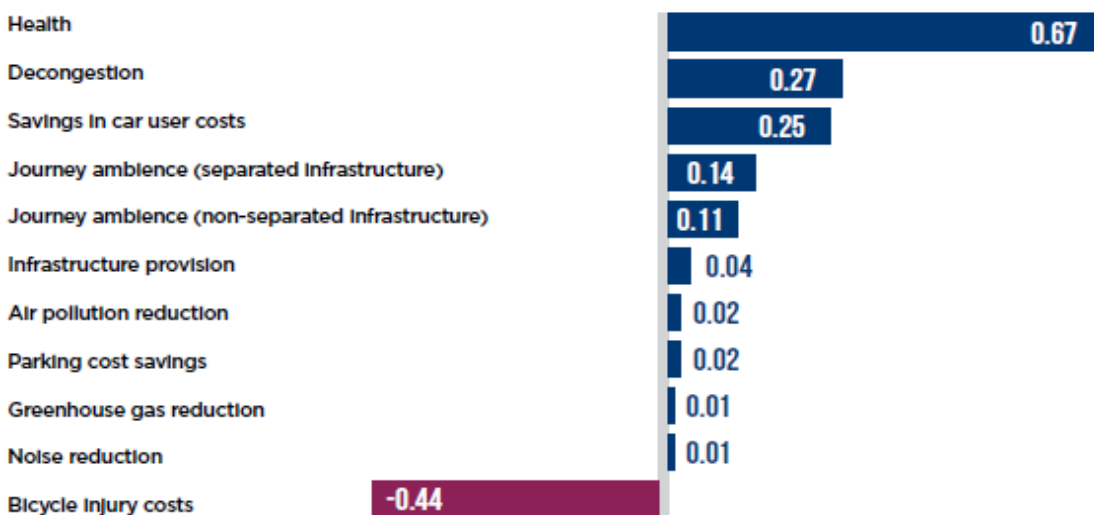
Reducing our car dependence and decarbonising our transport systems will reduce particulate and carbon emissions and result in co-benefits for global warming and for health. This is why public transport and active travel are included pillars in infrastructure plans to support sustainability and change.<sup>4</sup>

Active travel is the mix of walking and cycling, integrated with public transport, used for commuting and short trips, instead of private motorised vehicles and taxis/ridesharing. Active travel promotes individual and community health and wellbeing by incorporating activity into daily life.<sup>5</sup>

As little as 30 minutes physical activity daily helps to improve physical fitness. Even moderate exercise promotes psychological wellbeing, reduces chronic diseases, improves co-ordination, increases bone strength and reduces injury risk. Therefore, physical activity, some of which can be achieved through active travel, is vital to promoting community health and unloading our strained health system.

Data show for every \$1 invested in active travel \$5 is returned to the community overall with health being the biggest beneficiary.<sup>6</sup>

**FIGURE 1.8** ECONOMIC VALUE OF BENEFITS PER KILOMETRE CYCLED (\$AUD)



Source: Queensland Government Department of Transport and Main Roads • Created with Datawrapper

AMA Queensland recognises that health is a large employer. Medical practitioners can help lead this change and our health workforce will facilitate the change permeating through our communities.

It also notes the Queensland Government’s inclusion of active travel in its policy ‘Making Healthy Happen 2032: A strategy for preventing obesity in Queensland’ (May 2024), particularly the aim to have communities and neighbourhoods ‘designed to encourage physical activity and provide easy access to local outdoor recreation and active travel opportunities’. These are important measures and must be supported with requisite legislative changes and associated funding.

***A healthy workplace is one in which workers and managers collaborate to use a continual improvement process to protect and promote the health, safety and wellbeing of all workers and the sustainability of the workplace.***

*World Health Organization, 2010*

AMA Queensland calls on our governments to implement, with greater urgency, a range of strategies to improve both the health of our community and our ecosystems.

## Partners

AMA Queensland recognises the many other organisations who have been working to facilitate change and calling for similar action, including the:

- Climate and Health Alliance;<sup>7</sup>
- Public Health Association of Australia;<sup>8</sup>
- Queensland Nurses and Midwives' Union;
- Royal Australian College of General Practitioners;<sup>9</sup>
- Royal Australasian College of Physicians;<sup>10</sup>
- Doctors for the Environment Australia;
- Rural Doctors Association of Australia;
- Queensland Walks;
- Bicycle Queensland;
- Birdlife Australia;
- Heart Foundation; and
- Queensland Ambulance Service.

We must work together to motivate urgent action from our governments and facilitate change in our communities.

## Immediate Actions

AMA Queensland calls on all governments, health organisations and individual clinicians to boost active travel by taking the following actions across three broad areas – transport systems, within the health sector and as individuals.

### Transport systems

1. Working together across all levels of government to achieve change – it cannot be done by one group or department alone.
2. Ensuring urban design embeds active travel infrastructure through land use planning and development.
3. Increasing investment in zero emission public transport, including:
  - infrastructure – trains, light rail, trams, ferries, buses; and
  - innovations to support subsidised travel on public transport.
4. Significantly increasing investment in active travel infrastructure, including safe, well lit, shaded, connected walkways and cycleways that incorporate health and educational facilities.
5. Building networks by extending existing cycleways and walkways using lighter, quicker, cheaper design and construction materials.

6. Assessing the impact of, and community support for, lowering speed limits on neighbourhood streets to reclaim them as public spaces, safe for kids to walk and bike to school and for active travel by adults.
7. Striving for equity in implementing change across all areas of our dispersed state.
8. Reducing investment in metropolitan road expansions with savings directed towards requisite public transport and active travel initiatives.
9. Reviewing tax breaks for non-fuel-efficient vehicles and subsidies for diesel/petrol for commercial and private transport.
10. Implementing best practice fuel efficiency standards for road freight and private vehicles.

### The health sector

1. Ensuring all new Queensland Health builds have:
  - connected active travel infrastructure within a 5 km radius of the health facility – cycleways and walkways; and
  - frequent bus services with well lit, safe interchanges.
2. Incentivising the use of e-mobility and public transport for health staff both in Queensland Health and the private sector.
3. Upgrading all Queensland Health facilities to provide adequate end-of-trip facilities.
4. Working together with all health craft groups to advocate for urgent government investment in active travel to promote change in health staff commuting.
5. Incentivising alternatives to staff parking at health campuses, particularly to encourage options other than driving between 8am and 4pm.
6. Investing in the Queensland Ambulance Service's paramedics on bikes initiative.

### Individual clinicians

AMA Queensland will work to support individual clinicians to promote active travel with colleagues and patients by:

1. Publishing relevant advocacy and educational web resources.
2. Encouraging its own staff and members to use active travel and public transport.
3. Participating in community action led by other aligned organisations.

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<sup>1</sup> Queensland Government Department of Transport and Main Roads, 'Queensland Travel Survey, How Queensland Travels' (Brisbane, 2023) available at: <https://www.tmr.qld.gov.au/community-and-environment/research-and-education/queensland-travel-survey>.

<sup>2</sup> Health Wellbeing Queensland, 'Snapshot: Queensland's health' (2024) available at: <https://hw.qld.gov.au/blog/queensland-obesity-rates/>; Burke M SJ, Duncan M, et al, 'Action area 4: Active transport' in National Heart Foundation of Australia, 'Blueprint for an Active Australia' (3rd ed, Melbourne, 2019) available at: <https://www.heartfoundation.org.au/Bundles/For-Professionals/physical-activity-blueprint>; Australian Bureau of

Statistics, 'National Health Survey' (Canberra, 2024) available at: <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/health/health-conditions-and-risks/national-health-survey/2022>.

<sup>3</sup> The Conversation, '3,200 deaths a year: 1 of many reasons air pollution in Australia demands urgent national action (September 2023) available at: <https://theconversation.com/3-200-deaths-a-year-1-of-many-reasons-air-pollution-in-australia-demands-urgent-national-action-212973>.

<sup>4</sup> Queensland Government Department of State Development, Local Government and Planning 'State Infrastructure Strategy' (2022) available at: <https://www.statedevelopment.qld.gov.au/news/queensland-gets-moving-how-were-planning-for-active-transport>.

<sup>5</sup> Burke M SJ, Duncan M, et al, 'Action area 4: Active transport' in National Heart Foundation of Australia, 'Blueprint for an Active Australia' (3rd ed, Melbourne 2019) available at: <https://www.heartfoundation.org.au/Bundles/For-Professionals/physical-activity-blueprint>.

<sup>6</sup> Manojkumar Kanani R NR, 'Riding the Revolution. A new approach to active transport in South East Queensland' (Brisbane 2020) available at <https://mckellinstitute.org.au/research/reports/riding-the-revolution/>.

<sup>7</sup> Climate and Health Alliance, 'Clearing the air | Transport decarbonisation and health' (2023) available at: <https://www.caha.org.au/resources>.

<sup>8</sup> Public Health Association of Australia, 'Low Emissions and Active Transport - Policy Position Statement' (Canberra, 2024) available at: <https://www.phaa.net.au/Web/Web/Advocacy/Policy-position-statements.aspx>.

<sup>9</sup> Pistoll C, Furler J, 'Transport on prescription: How can GPs contribute to the promotion of active transport?', Aust Fam Physician (2017;46(10):783-8).

<sup>10</sup> Royal Australasian College of Physicians, 'Climate change and health' (Sydney, 2016) available at: <https://www.racp.edu.au/policy-and-advocacy/policy-and-advocacy-priorities/climate-change-and-health>.