

Active transport

Social pressures and newer transport options are driving a renaissance in active transport. Widespread adoption can significantly improve physical activity, and potentially lead to greater involvement in sport and active recreation. However, a variety of factors create barriers to wider adoption.

What we're seeing

Increasing support for active transport

There are increasing demands for multi-modal transport systems in cities. The pandemic, and electric micromobility options, have spurred interest in travel options that reduce infection risks.¹ Bike networks are being expanded in many cities. Tactical urbanism is often used to test new lanes before permanent changes are made.²

Opposition to bike lanes

Adding cycleways though is not always welcomed. Some opponents suggest they create more congestion, but this isn't supported by research.³ Others fear the loss of car parks disadvantages residents and small businesses.⁴ However, research is also showing that improving public and active transport can have benefits beyond health and reduced traffic congestion.⁵

Kiwi kids are less likely to walk or bike to school

The prevalence of walking and cycling to school in NZ is low, and has been declining over recent years. Socio-economic factors contribute to this.⁶ So too do concerns about safety, and time demands on parents.⁷

E-bikes are great, if you can afford them

Electric bikes considerably expand mobility. One study found a five-fold increase in distance, from 3 to 15km. But e-bike cost is a significant barrier, especially for people on lower incomes who could benefit the most from them.⁸ Some employers in the public sector provide a subsidy scheme,⁹ but that may largely just help employees who could afford one anyway.

Micromobility risks

First time users account for about 1/3rd of e-scooter accidents. As experience increases, accident rates fall.¹⁰ Infrastructure and regulatory changes could also reduce risks.¹¹

Untapped walking potential

Walking makes up 17% of transport-related trips in NZ. Most of those trips do not include use of public transport. Walking is more common in Wellington than in some other large cities. Most walks are less than 2km and under 30 minutes. However, 12% of car trips are less than 1km, so there is still considerable scope to reduce car use. Barriers to walking are usually time, and safety concerns at night and for school children. Improved urban design and more attractive public transport options can boost walking.¹²

National strategies and targets desirable

There are calls for a national strategy for active transport in NZ. This would encourage greater development and coordination of transport infrastructure, and also stimulate adoption. Though, as already noted, infrastructure isn't the only barrier.^{6, 13}

Potential implications

Create

- A more physically active and healthy population
- Improved physical literacy

Relate

- Improved connections to local environments through active transport

Consume

- Increased involvement in physical activities beyond active transport

Degrade

- Cities become less car-centric
- Reduced economic and safety obstacle to active transport

Connect

- Increased social connections through improved mobility options

Define

- Towns and cities defined by multi-modal transport options
- Active transport a critical part of physical activity

More information (links)

¹ [Active transport – the new era of cycling and walking](#)

² [Active modes quarterly snapshot – Auckland Transport](#)

³ [Why bike lanes don't make traffic worse](#)

⁴ [Island Bay cycleway delayed](#)

⁵ [Active cities: a guide for city leaders](#)

⁶ [Trends and measurement issues for active transportation in NZ](#)

⁷ [Barriers to active transport for primary school kids](#)

⁸ [Electric city](#)

⁹ [Employer e-bike purchase support schemes](#)

¹⁰ [Three years of e-scooters: the true cost of convenience](#)

¹¹ [Micromobility risks study](#)

¹² [Walking activity and trends in New Zealand](#)

¹³ [Key policy recommendations for active transport in NZ](#)