OraTaiao:NZ Climate and Health Council

Active Transportation Policy Statement

Policy Statement

OraTaiao recognises the strong link between improving climate health and population health through policy and infrastructure that supports and facilitates active transportation across New Zealand's population.

Background

For better health outcomes, the World Health Organisation (WHO) recommends regular physical activity by all children, adults and older adults and to limit time spent being sedentary. The WHO recognises the value of active transportation for increasing physical activity levels, and that global growth in personal motorised transport has increased sedentary activity (World Health Organisation, 2020).

Commuting by active transportation (any self-propelled mode of transport) has been shown to improve the health of humans through both increased physical activity levels and reduced air pollution from vehicle emissions. Policy and infrastructure which supports and provides for safe active transportation therefore results in improved population health with reduced prevalence of cardiovascular disease, respiratory disease, cancer and all cause-mortality; and further contributes to improved mental health, social cohesion and greater independence for children and youth. Specifically, research demonstrates that cycling to work is associated with lower risk of cancer, heart disease and premature death (Celis-Morales, et al., 2017).

Subsequent lower density of motorised vehicles improves air quality and reduces carbon emissions, which contributes to better population health and planetary health. Further reduced road traffic density correlates to reduced road traffic accidents and therefore improves health (Macmillan, et al., 2020).

New Zealand's current motorised dominated land transport system contributes to inequities, with those living in higher deprivation, especially Māori, having less access to safe and legal personal vehicles, which impedes their ability to access employment, education, healthcare and other necessities (Macmillan, et al., 2020; Raerino, et al., 2013). Due to the current lack of investment in walkways and

cycleways, those persons using them are at higher risk of traffic injury and crime, especially women and children (Macmillan, et al., 2020).

Perceived and actual lack of safety and risk of injury and crime, along with accessibility, are barriers to active transportation for the majority of the population (Jones, et al., 2020; Macmillan & Mackie, 2016; Macmillan, et al., 2020).

Policy Recommendations

We call for action to improve the population's health, reduce health inequities and take action on climate health by increasing active transportation.

OraTaiao makes the following recommendations for New Zealand's policy on active transportation.

1. Target inequity when planning, implementing and evaluating active transportation networks to achieve equity for vulnerable and diverse groups in New Zealand.

2. Fulfil obligations to Te Tiriti o Waitangi with tino rangatiratanga (Māori co-governance and self-determination) and using Māori frameworks to guide planning, implementation and evaluation of active transportation networks.

3. Create safer streets for active transportation so that people's perception of safety and actual crime and injury rates are reduced. This can be done by improved lighting around footpaths and cycleways and by facilitating active transportation, more people and community in the area thus reducing isolation. Increased lighting is particularly important during daylight savings as it is dark during the time that many people are commuting to and from employment or education.

4. Ensure that all new active transport infrastructure optimises both access and safety for disabled people. Make footpaths continuous, with on/off ramps at public transport interchanges to allow for continuous journeys for those persons who are unable to make the journey entirely by active transportation.

5. Provide separate pedestrian and cycling infrastructure, recognising this is the safest as cyclists and pedestrians travel at different speeds and behave differently.

6. Design cycleways that have safety and accessibility as primary concerns, including fully separated cycleways on all arterial roads. This will increase safety to cyclists and reduce road traffic injuries.

7. Make active transport routes direct and accessible, and lead where people need to go including employment, education and healthcare facilities. They

must be complete rather than partial routes, so that people are encouraged to commute via active transportation to get to their destinations safely.

8. Implement traffic calming measures where footpaths and cycleways are, to reduce actual and perceived risk of traffic injuries to non-motor vehicle users
    i. Reduce vehicle speed in suburban areas through the use of physical traffic calming infrastructure (e.g., speed bumps or chicanes), and reduced speed limits.
    ii. Create low traffic neighbourhoods by reducing access to certain roads to motorised vehicles and/or making certain streets one-way for vehicles.
9. Provide guaranteed spaces in trains and buses for bicycles, to allow for journeys that would otherwise be possible only by car. Locate public transport interchanges along cycle and footpath routes.
10. Provide bicycle parking in areas of usage, which are easily visible to reduce theft, along with other theft prevention measures.
11. Ensure all legal and regulatory frameworks and processes prioritise, promote and support active transport at all levels and sectors.

References

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