



Merri-bek
City Council

Moving Around Merri-bek

**A Discussion Paper to inform
our new transport strategy**

24 July 2023



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Acknowledgement of Country

Merri-bek City Council acknowledges the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people as the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waterways in the area now known as Merri-bek. We pay respect to their Elders past, present, and emerging, as well as to all First Nations communities, who significantly contribute to the life of the area.

Introduction

Merri-bek City Council is developing a new transport strategy. This strategy will guide our future transport projects and shape the way our community moves around our municipality. A transport strategy is a requirement under the *Transport Integration Act 2010*.

This Discussion Paper is the first opportunity for the Merri-bek community to be involved in the creation of this new strategy.

This Paper outlines 6 major themes, challenges and considerations that apply to transport in Merri-bek. It puts forward ideas for how we can plan for and deliver a future transport system for our community that is sustainable, accessible, and inclusive, while harnessing new opportunities and responding to some of the big challenges we face today.

This Paper is intended to generate discussion between community members and Council about the daily realities and challenges of travelling through Merri-bek, and the opportunities for improvement. Whether you walk, ride, skate, scoot, catch public transport, or drive, we want to hear about the constraints you face, and the things you need from us to make your trips around our municipality safe, sustainable, and inclusive.

Our previous transport strategy was adopted in 2019, and in the time that has passed since, a lot of things have changed. These changes include amendments to the Council Plan, a heightened focus on the climate emergency, new developments in transport technology-such as e-scooters and electric vehicles-and of course, the significant and lasting impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. These factors, coupled with policy changes based on feedback from the 2019 strategy, prompted the need for a new strategy that best meets new community needs and expectations.

The following section discusses each of the key changes in further detail.

Increasing transport choice

When planning transport projects and solutions, the differing needs of all commuters and travellers must be considered. The Moreland Integrated Transport Strategy 2019 (MITS 2019) was ambitious in its objectives of reducing car use to decrease transport emissions, traffic congestion, and parking constraints. To achieve these objectives, significant changes to the way we plan for, and manage, car parking were proposed. Despite best intentions, this approach ultimately pitted different transport users against each other.

The vision for this new transport strategy is one that gives community members greater choice in how they move around Merri-bek. We will ensure the strategy addresses the needs of all transport users and takes a people-centred approach, aligning with Council's Promise and Community Vision.

Community at the heart of our work

Merri-bek City Council's Promise is a shared commitment to keeping community needs at the heart of all we do.

This commitment is something we are constantly working to enact on and improve. Our Council Plan 2021-25, the Community Vision 2021-2031, and Community Engagement Plan 2023 reconfirm this commitment and provide a consistent framework for working with and hearing from our community, and we will use this to ensure the new transport strategy meets our community's needs and expectations.

In fact, moving and living safely within Merri-bek is 1 of the 5 themes and strategic objectives outlined in our Council Plan and Community Vision, and developing this new strategy in consultation with the community is named as an action within the Plan.

We are committed to working collaboratively with our many diverse communities, businesses, workers, residents, and stakeholders when developing this strategy-and all our projects-in order to deliver on our Promise.

Integrating land use and transport planning

As our community grows and changes, the way we plan to use land and how we will move around Merri-bek needs to be carefully considered.

By creating well-designed neighbourhoods that are connected through a mix of land-uses, housing types and access to quality public transport, walking and bike riding tracks, we can create more healthy, liveable communities.

The Transport Integration Act (2010) outlines that land use planning and transport planning must be integrated and balanced.

Our new strategy will include a focus on the future implementation of transport corridors and routes between important community facilities. This will align our strategy with the Act, and help make it safe, convenient, and attractive to move around Merri-bek.

Land-use planning is already an important consideration for Council. The Merri-bek Planning Scheme specifically mentions encouraging new growth and density around activity centres, such as schools, shopping strips and centres, parks, playgrounds, and other facilities. This helps make these well-loved parts of our neighbourhoods more easily and safely accessible via a wide variety of transport options.

COVID-19 has changed the way we live and work

The COVID-19 pandemic, and its ongoing presence and affects, significantly changed the way people live, work, and get around. However, despite working from home becoming standard practice for many workers, traffic density on our roads has remained the same (and sometimes higher) than pre-COVID-19¹. At the same time, we know anecdotally that more people working from home means that more people are walking and cycling to local destinations.

The new transport strategy will need to consider how our future transport projects should consider and adapt to the changes that COVID-19 brought about, considering the unique needs and aspirations of Merri-bek.

Electric transport growth

Electric vehicles, e-bikes, and e-scooters are becoming more and more common on our streets, and their benefits, particularly their reduced emissions and reduced long-term running costs, make them a compelling transport option as part of a wider modal shift/alternatives and in response to the Climate Emergency.

It is because of these benefits that the Victorian Government pledged to accelerate the transition to zero-emission vehicles (ZEVs) by setting a 50 per cent ZEV target for all new light-vehicle sales by 2030. This target is part of Victoria's Climate Change Strategy and is backed by a \$100 million package of new policies and programs.

Electric vehicles are not the only mode of electric mobility, though, and the emergence of e-bikes and e-scooters are providing an affordable, compact, and accessible alternative to internal combustion engine vehicles.

Merri-bek operates the largest public charging network of local councils in Victoria and will continue to expand the network of public charging stations as well as looking to incentivise private investment in such infrastructure. Our Zero Carbon Merri-bek Framework 2040 and associated Zero Carbon Merri-bek- Climate Emergency Action Plan 21-25, re-affirm the commitment to active and Zero Emissions Transport.

As ownership of these new, electric forms of transport increases, safety for pedestrians and other vulnerable road users will become even more important, and consideration for the rise of these electric modes of transport must be made in our new Strategy.

¹ [Behaviour Change Impacts of COVID-19 - Infrastructure Victoria](#)

Transport and cost of living

Transport can have significant implications for the cost of living, and this is particularly important to consider in 2023 as the overall cost of living continues to rise. Analysis by the RACV² has found that it costs over \$16,000 per year to run a mid-sized SUV, which make up about 40 per cent of all vehicles in Australia. With high inflation, market shifts towards bigger cars that are more expensive to run, and high-cost entry points for electric vehicles, cars are simply not an affordable option for many individuals. As well as car costs, public transport costs can add significant financial burden to households. Myki rates have recently gone up to \$10 a day for full fare and are slated to rise again in the new year.

Affordability can be a huge barrier towards transport choice, and our strategy must consider creating more diverse, reliable and affordable transport options in an effort to help people reduce their transport costs.

The growth of shared mobility

The landscape of shared mobility, that being transport options where multiple passengers are involved, has continued to evolve in recent years. Services such as car share, rideshare, bike share, and now scooter share are popular and mainstream where they operate.

Such schemes are not without their challenges. Rideshare vehicles potentially increase the number of vehicle movements as they displace trips by public transport, and footpath riding and errant parking of shared mobility devices can impact those with limited vision or mobility. Repurposing on-street parking bays to provide space for these new forms of transport can be challenging in high-demand areas.

The new transport strategy will consider how the benefits of shared mobility can be harnessed, and the challenges associated with such schemes minimised.

Changes to State and Commonwealth Policy

There have been significant changes to State and Commonwealth Government policies and projects in recent years that will directly affect the way we plan for and experience our local transport system.

Projects such as the Suburban Rail Loop, Level Crossing Removal Projects on the Upfield and Craigieburn Lines, as well as increased support for electric vehicles and new forms of mobility need to be included in our transport strategy.

New approaches to transport planning, such as the State Government's Movement and Place Framework, also need to be incorporated into the transport strategy.

Increasing urgency to reduce our emissions

Despite reductions in emissions in other sectors of our economy and society, transport emissions continue to grow. In fact, they are the second highest source of emissions in Victoria and are growing while other sectors are seeing reductions to their emissions³.

We have heard from our Merri-bek community that they want to reduce their emissions, including transport emissions, but are keen to see Council take action to support them in doing so.

Our new transport strategy will outline our commitments to reducing transport emissions, in line with our Zero Carbon Merri-bek Framework and chart a viable pathway to a zero-emission transport system.

² RACV Car Running Costs Survey 2022

³ [Greenhouse gas emissions \(climatechange.vic.gov.au\)](https://climatechange.vic.gov.au/greenhouse-gas-emissions)

We've made significant progress

Despite the challenges of the last few years, and the elements of MITS 2019 that were set aside, we've been able to make significant headway in completing the actions we set out to achieve in the previous transport strategy.

Of the 18 actions listed in the implementation plan of MITS 2019, we have completed 10 of the actions. We are well underway with completing another 3 actions. The time is ripe for us to update the transport strategy to make sure our actions meet communities' needs and are fit-for-purpose to deliver an improved transport system for everyone in Merri-bek.

Beyond the actions within MITS 2019, we have continued progressing transport projects and programs. This includes our popular Ride n Stride and Open Streets program⁴, delivering walking and cycling infrastructure from our 10-year capital works program, increasing our active transport budget to \$10 per capita, and delivering innovative projects such as the shared zone treatments in Brunswick East.

Other projects

As we work on this strategy, we have lots of other transport projects happening this year, including changes to the Parking Management Policy, in response to decisions by Council in December 2020 and April 2021⁵. These changes predominately relate to how Council officers manage changes to public parking and allocations of parking permits. Consultation on these changes will take place in late 2023 after consultation on this Discussion Paper closes.

Project outline and next steps

Prior to this Discussion Paper, we commissioned independent social research to better understand what our community currently thinks about transport and the opportunities to make transport in Merri-bek better for everyone. We will be weaving the key findings from the social research into this Discussion Paper. If you'd like to read the full Social Research Report, you can find it [here](#).

The Social Research Report included a randomised sample survey of 600 residents from across Merri-bek and 6 focus groups to better understand our community's existing transport needs and aspirations.

We want to hear what you think of the themes, ideas, potential solutions and questions that are outlined in this paper. There will be a number of opportunities and ways to do so over the weeks following its publication.

We look forward to talking with you at pop-up events, workshops, and stakeholder meetings. We will be engaging our broader community, as well as our Advisory Committees and Reference Groups - who were appointed in early 2022 following an application and selection process - groups of individuals who represent key priority groups within our municipality.

An online survey will also be available for you to provide feedback.

If you'd like to complete this survey, find out more about these activities, and for other ways to talk to us about transport, visit the Conversations Merri-bek project page:

www.conversations.merri-bek.vic.gov.au/moving-around-merri-bek

Engagement on this discussion paper will close on Saturday 2 September. We will then take community feedback and use it to develop a draft transport strategy. This document will be released in November this year with more opportunities for the community to have their say.

We are looking forward to hearing from you, our community, and building this strategy alongside you.

⁴ [Ride & Stride - Zero Carbon Merri-bek](#)

⁵ [Council meeting minutes and past agendas \(merri-bek.vic.gov.au\)](#)

Policies guiding transport

We are building on local and state government policies, programs, and legislation to inform our transport strategy. The relevant policies and legislation are listed below.

Merri-bek City Council

Accessible & Inclusive Communications Policy

Ageing and Living Well Framework

Merri-bek Planning Scheme

Active women and Girls in Merri-bek Strategy

Children, young people and families

Climate Risk Strategy and Foundational Action Plan

Community Engagement Policy

COVID-19 recovery plan

Disability Access and Inclusion Plan

Gender Equality statement of Commitment

Fawkner Transport Study

Human Rights Policy

Integrated Water Management Strategy + Action Plan

Later years Strategy

LGBTIQA+ Action Plan

Long Term Financial Plan

Merri-bek Community Infrastructure Plan

Industrial Land Use Strategy

Open Space Strategy (draft)

Parking Management Policy

Road Management Plan 2021-2025

Shopping Strip Renewal Policy

Social Cohesion Plan

Urban Forest Strategy

Urban Heat Island Effect Action Plan 2016 – 2026

Upfield Corridor Action Plan 2018-2029

Zero Carbon Merri-bek Framework + Action Plan

10-year Financial Plan (2021 – 2031)

Inter-Council Strategies

Northern Region Transport Strategy

North and West Melbourne City Deal Plan 2020-2040

Victorian State Government

Planning and Environment Act 1987

Plan Melbourne 2017-2050

Road Management Act 2004

Transport Integration Act 2010

Road Safety Act 1986

Climate Change Act 2017

Local Government Act 2020

Gender Equity Act 2020

Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006

Victorian Cycling Strategy 2018 – 2028

Victoria's Bus Plan

Victorian Road Safety Strategy 2021 – 2030

Victoria's Climate Change Strategy

Victoria's Zero Emissions Vehicle Roadmap

Victoria's Bus Network Reform – Melbourne's Northern Suburbs

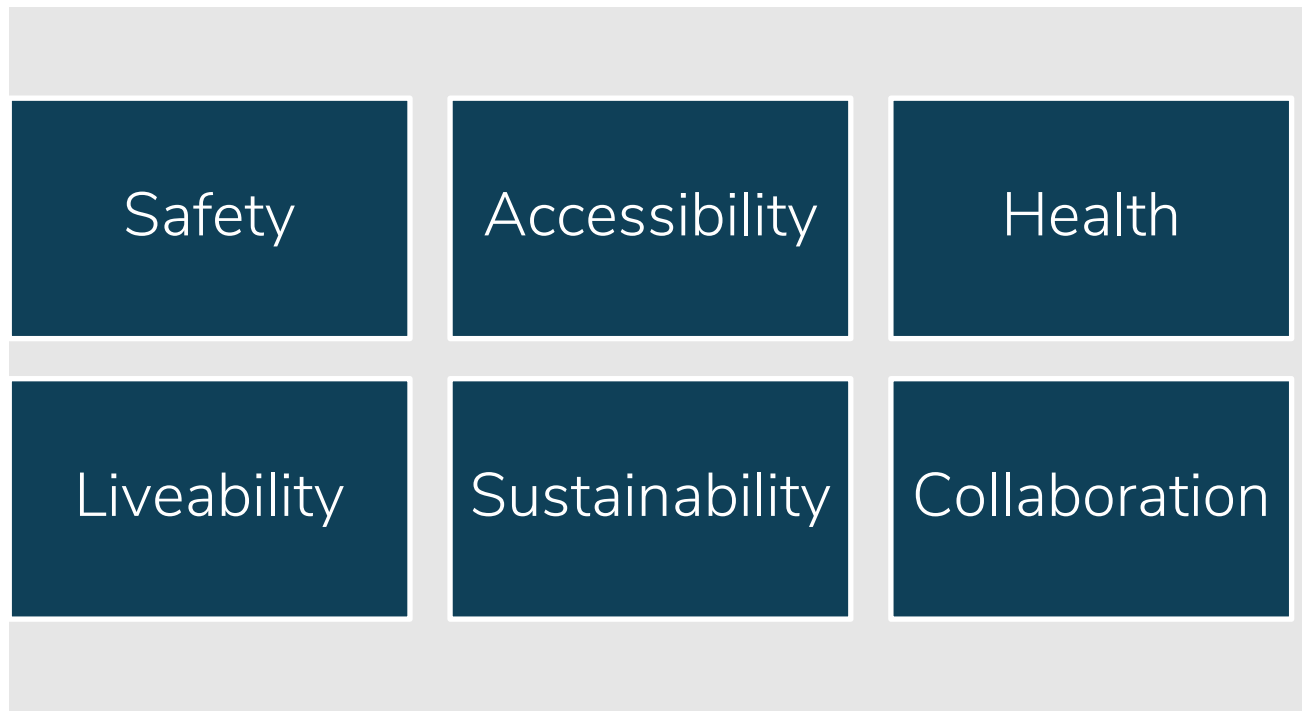
Victorian Movement and Place Framework

Themes

The content of this Discussion Paper is built upon research, experience, established policy, and the many diverse voices of our Merri-bek community. It pulls all these elements together to give a picture of not only how we get around Merri-bek, but the many different aspects of daily life which relate to transport.

Our themes are the overarching values that guide our work at Merri-bek. They ensure that all our work contributes to bettering our city, and our transport system, in the ways that are important to us. We have identified 6 core themes that drive us and our community.

Our vision for each theme is discussed further below.



Safety

Safety includes the impact from traffic collisions, but also whether we feel safe or not when walking along streets or in public spaces. We will work to reduce collisions and road trauma on our transport system. We will take a holistic approach to minimise, and where possible eliminate, crashes that result in death or serious injury. We will work towards making our streets and paths are safe for everyone by improving street lighting, passive surveillance, and well-maintained infrastructure so that everyone feels safer, day or night.

Accessibility

Our transport infrastructure should enable everyone in Merri-bek to access their daily needs, including work, education, healthcare and social and recreational activities, no matter their age, background, or abilities. We will work to make our infrastructure accessible to all within our projects. We will also advocate to the State Government for change where accessibility does not meet community needs in Merri-bek, such as level access tram and bus stops, and accessible trams.

Sustainability

We will work to reduce our transport emissions, including air and noise pollution. We will do this by providing more options for people to travel sustainably, whether by foot, bike, e-scooter, bus, tram, train, or zero-emission vehicles. We will protect and enhance our environmental corridors. We will look at the physical impacts of climate, such as heatwaves and stormwater flows, to our infrastructure and their useful life.

Health

We will work to ensure our transport system will help improve our community's mental and physical health by making it easier to walk or ride for fitness, recreation, and everyday transport trips. Our local streets and activity centres will bring us together as a community, so we can meet our social needs and participate in the local community. We will work to reduce the impact that our climate has on people, and the environment in which we live work and play by reducing the urban heat island effect and increasing trees and green space close to where we live.

Liveability

We will plan our transport and land-use systems work together to ensure shops, goods, and services, as well as workplaces, are located within a comfortable distance of all kinds of transport, including walking. We will work to improve the quality of our transport infrastructure and urban amenities, such as seating, lighting, and landscaping, and to design them in a way that reflects and honours our unique community. Walkable and vibrant streetscapes create vibrant spaces and support our local economy, as well as community well-being. Having more transport choice will also help reduce the cost of transport for our community.

Collaboration

We will work together with our community and stakeholders to shape the transport system to meet our transport needs. We will advocate to higher levels of government on behalf of our community for increased funding and improved transport services in Merri-bek.

Safety

Feeling safe while walking, riding, scooting, or driving is a key determining factor in how our community chooses to get around Merri-bek. Despite significant efforts across all levels of government in recent decades, people continue to be killed or seriously injured on our roads every year. We also know that when people walk or ride a bike, they are more vulnerable to serious injury or fatality.

In response, governments around the world have begun work on a new way of thinking and acting on road safety issues. The first is the increasing adoption of a Safe System Approach to road safety, which looks at the conditions that lead to unsafe situations on our roads holistically. This safe system is divided into 4 sections: Safe Roads, Safe Speeds, Safe Vehicles, and Safe People.

Embedded within a Safe System approach is the reality that humans are fallible; we make mistakes. In response, our transport system should ensure that the consequences of those mistakes are avoided or minimised as much as possible. The second development in road safety is Vision Zero, a long-term target of eliminating deaths and serious injuries on our roads by 2050. Some jurisdictions, such as Oslo Norway, have already reached this goal. In Victoria, and here in Merri-bek, we still have work to do.

However, safety in our transport system goes beyond reducing collisions between road users. It needs to consider the surrounding environment. Poor street lighting, uneven or missing footpaths, and inadequate passive surveillance are just as important for how safe people feel while undertaking transport trips. And this is felt within our community. While 92 per cent of Merri-bek residents reported feeling safe in their area during the day, only 72 per cent felt safe in their area at night⁶. We also know that within these aggregate statistics, perceptions of safety can differ significantly depending on someone's lived experience, background, gender, or ability. A VicHealth Community Indicators Survey from 2015 found that only 26 per cent of women in Merri-bek felt 'very safe' or 'safe' compared to 68 per cent of men⁷ when walking along Merri-bek streets or being in public spaces.

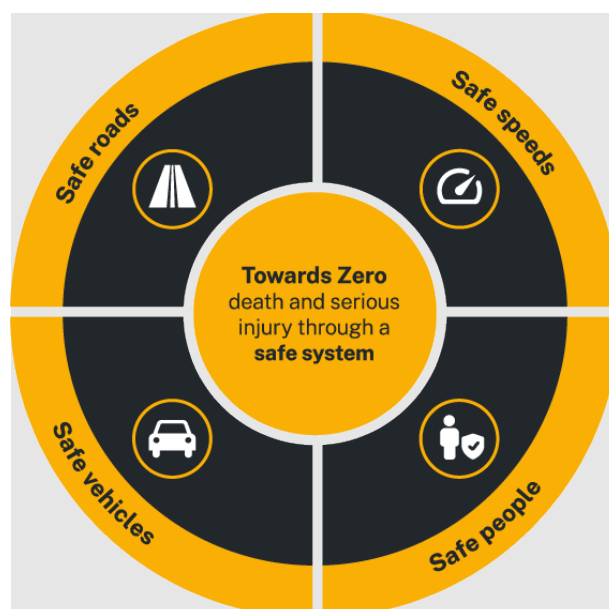


Figure 1 A Safe System Approach

These findings have been confirmed in other research, such as the research commissioned by Council in 2020⁸, outlined the extent of safety issues facing women in public spaces. The survey confirmed that isolated areas, such as road underpasses, often lacked lighting, had narrow paths, and poor sightlines. In contrast, activated areas, such as community gardens, felt safer. This research, and the information provided by women as part of the study, highlights our need to ensure our new transport strategy considers the different experiences and needs of people in our transport system.

We know that making changes to our streets can make our community feel safer and more willing to walk or ride for local trips. As part of our Open Streets Program⁹, which saw streets closed to vehicle traffic during drop-off and pick-up times at local schools, 97 per cent families surveyed from participating schools said that the street felt safer than normal, and the program contributed to a 19 per cent increase in active travel at those schools.

As part of our social research, we found that safety was a top concern for our community. For people walking, poorly lit streets, deserted streets, and uneven footpaths were highlighted as issues, while a majority of respondents (53%) said that bike riding is unsafe, noting a lack of safe infrastructure. E-scooters were flagged as a potential safety issue (3 in 5 respondents thought

⁶ [Community Indicators 2018. Analytical Report](#)

⁷ [Safe environment Moreland City Council Health Profile 2020](#)

⁸ [Help make Merri Creek a safe and welcoming place for all | Conversations Merri-bek](#)

⁹ [Ride & Stride - Zero Carbon Merri-bek](#)

that e-scooters were too dangerous), with survey participants flagging footpath issues where shared scooters operate in the Cities of Yarra, Melbourne, and Port Phillip. This view was particularly pronounced with older residents (75% for those 60 years or older, compared with 60% overall).

"I could take my son on my bike, but it's just not safe. I wouldn't live with myself if he got hurt. If there's not a dedicated bike path that does not have cars on it, I won't take him. A deal breaker." (35-54 years)

In overcoming safety issues, there were high levels of support for increasing separated bike lanes (77% agreement) and a focus on improving lighting along paths (89% agreement), echoing the need to reduce threats to safety for those who walk, or want to walk, for everyday trips.

Objectives

1. Improve road safety outcomes and create safe streets for all people to walk, ride and drive in Merri-bek
2. Prioritise, where possible, creating streets suitable for walking and cycling for people of various skills and abilities
3. Ensure our streets and public spaces are safe for all people and inclusive of all genders, backgrounds, and abilities

Ideas

- Adopt a Safe System Approach to road safety
- Investigate opportunities to reduce fatalities and serious injuries on Merri-bek managed roads.
- Advocate to the State Government to address safety issues on the arterial road network.
- Continue rolling out safe speed limits on local streets across Merri-bek
- Work with the State Government to trial a 30km/h speed limit in a suitable area.
- Make our streets and public spaces feel (and be) safer for those walking, jogging, or cycling, considering the needs of women and non-binary people
- Undertake an assessment of building interfaces and public realms that require improvement and integrate the findings into the Planning Scheme via a Developer Contributions Plan
- Work with priority groups and communities to implement strategies that reduce discrimination and harassment in and around public transport.
- Work with State Government to improve safety and security on and around public transport
- Construct safe and connected high-quality bike links that take us where we want to go
- Support pedestrian priority at signalised intersections
- Create more room for people walking in our busiest locations
- Ensure crossings are close to school entrances and on direct walking routes
- Calm traffic and reduce traffic volumes on streets near schools
- Deliver local traffic management improvements that make streets safer for all road users
- Design and implement behaviour change programs which encourage people to use sustainable transport, which may include initiatives such as:
- Introduce a targeted safety campaign across Merri-bek to minimise dooring incidents and encourage cycling.
- Develop and deliver a series of sub-neighbourhood (i.e. street or block) trials. This might include events that open streets for the day for people to experience them differently on foot or by bicycle
- Ensure priority is given to pedestrians and bike riders at roadworks and construction sites.
- Remove hazards from our road network including ineffective guard rails and roadside barriers

Accessibility

The way we plan and operate our transport system needs to enable everyone to participate fully in society, regardless of ability. People with disability make up approximately 20 per cent of the Victorian and Merri-bek population¹⁰, and must be considered within this context. However, accessibility goes beyond supporting those with disability. Elderly people, parents using a pram or stroller, people using a personal shopping trolley, and people with short-term mobility issues (such as an injury) need similar levels of infrastructure to support their daily travel needs.

Trains, trams, and buses are essential services for many people in our community. They provide access to everyday needs that might otherwise be too far to walk or ride a bike, or for those who don't, or can't, drive a car.

Universal design features are critical throughout the transportation network, making it possible for any street user to comfortably and conveniently reach every transit stop. Universal street design facilitates station access, system equity, and ease of movement for all users, especially people using wheelchairs or mobility devices, the elderly, people with children and strollers, and people carrying groceries or packages.

Tactile, visual, and audible design elements are important to guide people of all abilities through the street environment. Consistently using detectable surfaces, colour contrast, and audible warnings assists all users, enhancing safety and accessibility would enhance our streetscapes for everyone.

Merri-bek has many public transport options, especially for north-south trips, but some community members report having trouble getting directly to their location and having to wait too long to swap between different services, particularly east-west and areas north of Bell Street. As a result, we have strategic advocacy priorities with the Victorian Government that are found on our Council website¹¹ to push hard for making our public transport system fully accessible to all our residents and visitors.

In late 2022 and early 2023, Council undertook significant consultation with the Merri-bek community on physical access barriers¹² faced by those with a disability. This included focus group conversations and a whopping 458 individual contributions on a digital map. This consultation highlighted the many areas where we still need to work hard to improve access for all members of our community. Particular barriers highlighted by participants included a lack of footpaths in some areas, lack of continuous accessible paths of travel for those with mobility issues, limited or no access ramps where needed (including for shop entrances), steep paths, inaccessible tram stops and trams, a lack of disabled parking spaces, as well as difficulties streets that are difficult or feel dangerous to cross.

While conducting social research in the lead up to this project, 38 per cent of respondents indicated that they have mobility issues that make it hard to walk or ride a bike (23% strongly agree and 15% somewhat agree). For older people, 57 per cent of respondents indicated having mobility issues.

Improved access to public transport was highlighted as the top accessibility priority. Tram stops across Merri-bek, with the exception of the 96 tram that runs along Nicholson Street, are all inaccessible for people with limited mobility. In addition, much of the tram fleet that operates within Merri-bek do not have level access boarding. The State Government has missed their deadline to comply with the requirements of the *Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport 2002 (DSAPT)* to have all tram stops fully accessible by 31 December 2022. The State Government has until 31 December 2032 to deliver a fully compliant tram fleet. With the Upfield railway line set to be shutdown to allow for the removal of the remaining level crossings, there is urgent need for accessible tram and bus upgrades to ensure everyone in Merri-bek can fully participate in society while the rail shutdown occurs.

¹⁰ <https://dtp.vic.gov.au/-/media/tfv-documents/accessible-pt-action-plan.pdf?la=en&hash=0084397C5591EA981F50AA8D5F1AD73D>

¹¹ [Merri-bek Strategic Advocacy Priorities](#)

¹² [Help us locate physical access barriers in Merri-bek | Conversations Merri-bek](#)

Another accessibility issue highlighted in the social research was the introduction of e-scooters to the transport mix. This was raised both in the context of feeling unsafe with scooter users riding on the footpath in areas, and in the context of footpath clutter. While Merri-bek currently does not have a shared scooter scheme, further work is required to minimise conflicts on our footpaths.

Objectives

1. Our transport system enables everyone in Merri-bek to meet their daily needs and to fully participate in our community.
2. Transport infrastructure and services belonging to the state, particularly public transport, is accessible to everyone

Ideas

- Prioritise public transport, walking and cycling during disruption
- We will ensure temporary footpath and road occupancy permits consider safe and accessible access for everyone
- We will advocate to the State Government for equitable access during Big Build project disruptions and other State Government projects
- Actively reduce obstructions on footpaths, where possible, particularly along activity centre streets and narrow footpaths across Merri-bek.
- Ensure that the pedestrian environment caters for those who are blind or have low vision by integrating guidance tools (braille, clear tactile treatments, colour-contrast) into the pedestrian and wayfinding environment.
- Provide additional accessible (disabled) parking bays, particularly in Activity Centres, around essential services and in areas with parking restrictions
- Incorporate universal design into our streetscape enhancement projects
- Prioritise access to Council services and account for accessibility to services in the prioritisation of new community infrastructure projects.
- Close accessibility gaps in our service network by working with organisations and the Victorian Government to plan for and attract the services we need to the communities that need them
- Provide more publicly accessible seating, (with backs) and upgrade existing seating to meet those standards, toilets, shade and water

fountains

- Advocate to the Victorian Government for accessible public transport stops, well-designed bus and tram stops and stations and safety on public transport outcomes
- Undertake cross-generational audits of our walking network to make all footpaths compliant with accessibility standards
- Provide more accessible parking bays at key locations with accessible ramps
- Use the evidence from recent community mapping engagement on accessibility barriers in Merri-bek for planning and prioritising removal of hazards/barriers, new and upgrading of transport infrastructure
- Ensure public electric vehicle chargers are accessible where possible.

Sustainability

Under the umbrella theme of Sustainability, there are 3 major considerations that relate to our transport projects within Merri-bek.

Firstly, we must work to minimise and the impacts of the climate emergency. Secondly, we must ensure we are adapting to the existing effects of climate change by protecting and growing our green space and environmentally significant corridors. Third, a hotter and more unpredictable climate requires us to change the way we design our infrastructure¹³.

As previously stated in this discussion paper, transport is a huge source of carbon emissions via 2 main sources. Firstly, our transport trips create greenhouse gas emissions, particulate, and noise pollution. Secondly, our transport infrastructure consumes physical space in our city, using concrete and asphalt. These materials contribute to the Urban Heat Island Effect and reduce the space available for nature.

Approximately 221,000 tonnes (equivalent) of carbon dioxide were generated by transport trips in Merri-bek in 2022, up 14 per cent from 2021¹⁴. Most of these emissions come from passenger and light commercial vehicles. This is approximately a quarter of all emissions produced within the borders of Merri-bek.

We are increasingly feeling and seeing the impacts of climate change within our community and environment, and more widely across Australia and the globe. Council's adopted goal for Merri-bek is to achieve a 75 per cent emissions reduction by 2030 (against the baseline year of 2011/12), net zero by 2035 and drawdown ('negative emissions') by 2040¹⁵.

Based on how our community currently move around, there are considerable opportunities to reduce our transport emissions by making more sustainable travel choices, such as walking, riding bikes, car share, or using public transport.

Within our Social Research Report, we heard that our community are keen to reduce their carbon

footprint but face several barriers to taking low or zero emission transport trips. This includes 79 per cent of people who express that electric vehicles are too expensive to purchase. Respondents also spoke to the challenges of walking or riding a bike in an environment where it is safer and more convenient to drive (82% of whom agreed with this statement). Meanwhile, bus reliability and a lack of viable east-west connections made public transport a less viable option.

Geographic barriers were also evident in the Social Research Report. Those living in the northern parts of Merri-bek were half as likely to consider walking or bike riding for everyday transport trips than their southern neighbours. Distance to key destinations, lack of safe infrastructure, and perceptions of feeling unsafe in public spaces (especially at night and in quieter streets) were listed as barriers.

However, despite these barriers, overall, 83 per cent of respondents to the Social Research Report found it important to improve sustainable transport options. Key actions supported from the Social Research Report include significant upgrades to public transport services, a decrease in Myki costs, and improving cycling infrastructure.

Residents also noted the benefits of moving to a more multi-modal transport system, including a reduction in transport congestion, managing constraints from population growth, and reducing transport emissions.

Merri-bek has an established built environment, with many parts highly urbanised. Asphalt, concrete, and bitumen make up a significant part of our public spaces, including footpaths, shared paths, bike lanes, roads, and car parks. This has implications for the way we manage water run-off and drainage. It also increases the Urban Heat Island Effect, as these hard surfaces attract and retain heat, creating a localised greenhouse effect. These effects have sped up a decline in local tree and animal health and increased the risk of overheating and heat-related death among our human population. Our Urban Heat Island Effect Action Plan (2016-2026)¹⁶ mapped out locations

¹³ [Practice Note 12.1: Climate Change Impacts on the Useful Life of Infrastructure - Institute of Public Works Engineering Australasia \(ipwea.org\)](#)

¹⁴ [City of Merri-bek - Transportation emissions - Google Environmental Insights Explorer - Make Informed Decisions \(sustainability.google\)](#)

¹⁵ [Zero Carbon Merri-bek – Climate Emergency 2040 Framework](#)

¹⁶ [Moreland Urban Heat Island Effect Action Plan](#)

where land surface temperatures were hottest. Highly urbanised, including the Glenroy Activity Centre and Sydney Road corridor, and industrial areas retained heat, while parks and creek corridors had the lowest surface temperature.

Increasing our tree canopy and proportion of open space are 2 of the most important actions we can take to combat these effects. Our transport system has an important role to play in this reduction. The way we manage our transport system intersects with our decisions on the placement and frequency of street trees, as it does with the provision of open space and how or if open space is expanded.

Our climate has already changed, and is forecast to change further in the coming decades. This has implications for how we design, build, and maintain our infrastructure, including roads, footpaths, bridges, and more. We need to begin planning for how our infrastructure can be fit-for-purpose in a changing climate.

Objectives

1. To support our community to reduce their transport emissions as rapidly as possible by providing increased transport choice and supporting a transition to zero emission vehicles
2. To use our transport system to increase the size and quality of our green spaces.
3. To adapt our transport infrastructure and services to meet the demands of a hotter and more unpredictable climate.

Ideas

- Advocate to the State Government to increase public transport services to help facilitate mode shift
- Advocate to the State Government to fund the Bus Reform pilot project for the northern suburbs
- Create a connected cycle network plan using a mixture of off-road paths, protected on-road bike lanes, and bicycle boulevards on quiet local streets.
- Prepare a walking plan to make our streets suitable for people of all ages and abilities, including identification of locations to increase the reach of walking as a mode of transport (seats, toilets, shade, etc)

- Create new car share spaces near shopping strips and near every residential area making it as easy as possible to access car share
- Investigate opportunities to have electric car share operators
- Encourage new developments to provide car share spaces on-site
- Work with car share companies to encourage more competition, deliver more options and improve affordability for our community
- Encourage car share providers to transition to electric vehicle options
- Use publicly available data to track our transport emissions to make sure we meet our emission reduction targets
- Create an electric vehicle charging plan to meet current and future resident and visitor charging demand
- Investigate opportunities to create a holistic program of infrastructure upgrades and behaviour change programs to support mode shift.
- Work with climate and resilience, and asset management teams to better understand how to adapt our transport infrastructure in a changing climate.
- Increase tree canopy in all streets, with a focus on activity centres, schools, and public spaces where possible
- Activating Cool Routes to enable our residents and community to move safely in heat waves and to still be able to visit our 'high street' shopping precincts to access goods and services.

Health

Our transport system directly and indirectly affects our health and wellbeing. It can help or hinder our access to employment, goods and services including health services, and sports and exercise facilities, as well as enable or restrict our ability to exercise and socialise. As well as these practical inconveniences, the system and the vehicles that operate on it produce air and noise pollution that can negatively impact our health in several significant ways.

We are in the midst of a health crisis, caused, in part, by our transport system. Firstly, from emissions. Across Australia, 900 to 2,000 people prematurely die from air pollution from vehicles each year. Another 900 and 4,500 cases of bronchitis, cardiovascular and respiratory disease occur each year from motor vehicle pollution, at an estimate cost of between \$1.5 and \$3.8 billion¹⁷. Our ability to transition away from a fossil fuel transport system will help reduce these health impacts.

The health crisis continues with the impacts of movement, or lack thereof. More than half of Australian adults do not get their daily exercise needs, increasing to 70 per cent of children (2-17 years old). Meanwhile, only an alarming 2 per cent of teenagers currently meet health guidelines for daily physical activity¹⁸.

We're also in the grips of a social isolation and loneliness epidemic. One-third of Australians report feeling lonely in the week preceding the Australian Government's survey on social isolation and loneliness¹⁹. Increased incidences of loneliness in older age groups were also identified.

The way we move, and our ability to do so, can directly improve these issues. Quality streets and public spaces help to improve our physical and mental health through incidental exercise from walking and cycling but also by creating incidental opportunities to socialise with our neighbours and members of our local communities.

Parts of Merri-bek live close to freeways such as the M80 and other arterial roads with high traffic volumes and high noise pollution. Reducing the impact of these noise levels are important to

improving our communities' health. Noise pollution can affect our stress levels, impact our sleep, lead to high blood pressure, and reduce our productivity.

Our Council Plan 2021-2025²⁰ supports strong action for improving the health and wellbeing of our community. Theme 2, *Moving and living safely in Merri-bek*, supports an increase in safe, accessible, physically active, and enjoyable ways to get around Merri-bek. Theme 3 of the Plan, *A Healthy and Caring Merri-bek*, focuses our work towards becoming a more connected, inclusive, healthy, and caring community. These objectives will help guide our work in developing the new transport strategy.

Respondents to the Social Research Report saw the health benefits in taking more walking and cycling trips. About 84 per cent of respondents agreed that sustainable transport provides physical and mental health benefits (59% strongly agreed) and a similar proportion of respondents also saw the health benefits and importance of reducing vehicle emissions.

Academic research has found that you don't need to be walking or cycling intensely to gain health benefits. In fact, people who use e-bikes can get 70 per cent of the health benefits compared to using a conventional bicycle. However, as noted in the Report, respondents noted a lack of supporting infrastructure to enable people to make more walking and cycling trips.

Objectives

1. Reduce air and noise pollution generated from vehicles
2. Improve the mental and physical health of everyone in Merri-bek
3. Create streets and public spaces that encourage socialisation amongst local communities
4. Increase opportunities for people to meet their daily exercise needs.

¹⁷ [Sustainable transport in healthcare](#)

¹⁸ [About physical activity and exercise | Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care](#)

¹⁹ [Social isolation and loneliness - Australian Institute of Health and Welfare \(aihw.gov.au\)](#)

²⁰ [Merri-bek Council Plan 2021 – 2025](#)

Ideas

- Provide more safe walking and riding options as a practical option for people preferring to not catch public transport and want to reduce their reliance on a car.
- Investigate opportunities to increase Ride and Stride and Open Streets initiatives to every school in Merri-bek.
- Investigate opportunities to create transport behaviour change initiatives for staff in medium-large employers in Merri-bek, including Council.
- Incorporate a life-span approach to understanding and overcoming barriers people face to meet their exercise and social needs at different life stages
- Advocate to the State Government for improved noise barriers along the M80 and other noise generating transport corridors.
- Falls prevention strategy, accessible and safe footpaths and continuous accessible path of travel

Liveability

Our streets, public transport, and public spaces allow us to connect with our neighbours, develop local communities, and support our local businesses. Liveability, for us, is about creating vibrant and welcoming spaces for people to come together. This includes having access to high-quality shops, services, and community facilities. It also means having parks, schools, housing to suit different needs, and local employment opportunities. And finally, to ensure we can reach these destinations, having beautiful streets and paths that are welcoming and attractive.

The cost of transport inevitably impacts liveability. Higher transport costs reduce our standard of living and increase financial stress for individuals and households. Analysis by the RACV²¹ has found that it costs over \$16,000 per year to run a mid-sized SUV, which make up about 40 per cent of all vehicles in Australia. Having key destinations close to home reduces the need for people to own a car, or multiple cars, to meet their daily needs.

Research has found that better linking land use and transport planning is critical to increasing liveability. Increasing densities around activity centres and transport nodes, improving public transport services, and providing safe walking and cycling infrastructure are all noted as key levers to improving the liveability of an area. The Creating Liveable Cities in Australia Report²² confirmed the positive effect each of the above actions has on the liveability of an area.

Our Social Research shows that Merri-bek residents really value the diverse range of facilities and activities on offer that make our municipality more liveable. In particular, the diverse offerings of restaurants and cafés, parks and recreation, and sporting clubs and facilities were noted as highly valued. In addition, the close proximity to the CBD was also valued. Merri-bek is also seen as a place that caters well to the needs of children. Parents noted the many services and facilities available for infants and children in the municipality.

In addition to these positive attributes, threats to liveability were also noted in the Social Research Report. These included reports of feeling unsafe in parts of Merri-bek, pressures from increased population, traffic and parking congestion, poor

street cleansing in some areas, and challenges with waste collection services.

Parking is an important component of the transport system. It provides access to shops and services, allows businesses to send and receive goods, and allows friends and family to visit our homes. Ensuring adequate access to parking is an important component of liveability, especially when there are limited alternatives for people. As a consumer of space in the public realm, there is increased pressure on parking in high-demand areas. To improve other forms of transport, such as walking and cycling, space sometimes needs to be reallocated from its existing use, including space currently used for car parking. This is an inherent tension for the liveability of Merri-bek and a process that we need to work through carefully and considerately with our community.

Shared mobility services, such as shared e-bikes and e-scooters, were seen by some as important new innovations that would increase their travel choice and improve liveability. Others noted the risks associated with these new forms of travel, particularly when they are parked haphazardly or when a lack of infrastructure forces their users onto footpaths.

Respondents to the social research survey agreed that reducing transport costs was a motivating factor to consider switching to other modes of transport. Almost three-quarters of respondents supported actions to help reduce transport costs.

Objectives

1. Create high-quality and well-designed spaces that are vibrant and well-loved by all
2. Ensure local businesses and activity centres are supported to provide goods and services for our community
3. Help reduce cost of transport for residents by having an increased range of travel options

²¹ RACV Car Running Costs Survey 2022

²² [Creating liveable cities in Australia](#)

Ideas

- Provide more public seating, toilets, and water fountains to make our streets more liveable places
- Create more space for street trees that make our streets cooler, greener, and great natural habitats for all our wildlife
- Integrate the Victorian Government's Movement and Place Framework into our work practices
- Create design guidelines for streets based on their function and characteristics
- Implement innovative street treatments including rolling out more shared zones and local road closures
- Investigate opportunities to provide new and innovative forms of transport to Merri-bek
- Revitalise our local shopping strips to support small businesses and bring people together
- Undertake periodic surveys to understand customer travel and shopping behaviour in our key activity centres
- Support the transport needs of businesses, including delivery of goods and freight access
- Ensure services are planned together and make it easier to get between different places
- Assess the municipality to identify areas that have reduced access to shops and services and investigate opportunities to address this
- Ensure a mix of housing and employment options are included in our activity centres to support jobs in Merri-bek
- Review the Long-Term Financial Plan to ensure sustainable rates funding for Transport Infrastructure is clearly identified and there is a tangible list of project priorities that will be designed and delivered over that time
- Work with the business community to improve the operation of loading areas and maximise use of laneways and rear accessways for freight and service movements.

Collaboration

At Merri-bek, we are committed to putting the community at the heart of everything we do.

Our Community Engagement Plan and Council Plan guide all our work, including transport projects, to make sure we consistently deliver genuine opportunities for our community to take part in the work we do. As part of that Plan, Council made a commitment to improve the way we engage with the community and local businesses on transport projects. This included the use of plain language in reports, access to evidence used to support decisions, and providing genuine opportunities for the community to provide input.

As part of our commitment to improving the way we engage and collaborate with the community, we have developed an engagement plan for future bike lane projects²³. This outlines the approach to engagement across the lifecycle of a project, from the capital works plan, to concept designs, function designs, the final detailed designs, as well as post-implementation.

We are committed to working in partnership with our Council Advisory Committees and Reference groups, particularly the Sustainable Transport Advisory Committee, Disability Reference Group, Age-friendly Reference Group, Gender Equality Reference Group and LGBTIQ+ Reference Group to ensure accessibility and inclusion are at the core of any transport response.

We also run programs in partnership with schools throughout Merri-bek to improve sustainable and safe ways to school as part of the Ride & Stride and Open Streets programs.

These programs have demonstrated great successes in encouraging this behaviour change. When combined with infrastructure for safer walking and riding routes to school, they will embed this behaviour in the next generation.

We also work collaboratively with our neighbouring councils, via groups such as M9, the Northern Council Alliance, Northern Alliance for Greenhouse Action, and transport specific forums including the Metropolitan Transport Forum.

Further, our Level Crossing Removal Project Position Paper, Reshaping Brunswick, outlines a collaborative approach to improving transport infrastructure and amenity along the Upfield Line and Sydney Road Corridor with the State Government, local trader associations, stakeholder groups, and community members²⁴.

In the Social Research Report, we heard that about a third of respondents prefer to get their Council information via email or letter. Another 21 per cent prefer staying up-to-date via social media platforms, such as Merri-bek's Facebook and Instagram pages. Council newsletters were flagged as important for our older residents.

Objectives

1. Work collaboratively with our community and stakeholders to improve our transport system.
2. Work with neighbouring councils and other levels of government to provide coordinated solutions to transport challenges.
3. Actively co-create solutions, on a case-by-case basis, to transport issues with local communities and key stakeholders.

Ideas

- Partner with community groups and organisations to support walking groups and tours of our community
- Work in partnership with adjoining municipalities to connect bike routes, provide wayfinding signage across borders, and coordinate infrastructure planning.
- Work with our local traders, stakeholder groups, community members, and the State Government to improve outcomes as part of the level crossing removals along the Upfield Line.
- Support programs that encourage people to ride more often such as cheaper access to bikes, partnering with local organisations for ride to work-days, and working with schools to support riding to school.
- Expand the school-led Open Streets program. Create a case study box for this section

²³ https://conversations.merri-bek.vic.gov.au/download_file/3661/551

²⁴ [Reshaping Brunswick | Conversations Merri-bek](#)

- Develop and implement consistent signage across the municipality in collaboration with neighbouring councils along all our paths, trails and in our Activity and Neighbourhood centres
- Partner with neighbouring councils to strengthen our advocacy approach and outcomes
- Design and implement behaviour change programs which encourage people to use sustainable transport take ownership of the vision for Merri-bek future Transport network
- Develop place-based solutions that support local living

Conclusion and Next Steps

Merri-bek City Council invites you to provide your feedback on the ideas shared in this Paper

You can have your say via Conversations Merri-bek or through our many engagement activities planned between Monday 24 July and Saturday 2 September 2023.

More information is available online via the Conversation Merri-bek project page.

www.conversations.merri-bek.vic.gov.au/moving-around-merri-bek

Following community engagement and feedback on the Discussion Paper, a draft transport strategy will be prepared that addresses feedback from the community and ties together Council's and the community's aspirations for a future transport system. Further engagement will occur on the draft transport strategy in late 2023.

The new Merri-bek transport strategy will replace the Moreland Integrated Transport Strategy 2019.