



Active Towns Pilot Program

Evaluation summary



Queensland
Government



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Active Towns pilot program

The Active Towns program was a Queensland Government initiative in partnership with local councils to combine active transport infrastructure with encouragement programs.



Executive summary

The Department of Transport and Main Roads (TMR) vision is to create a single integrated transport network accessible to everyone. TMR developed the *Queensland Cycling Strategy* to help make it convenient and safe to ride a bike in Queensland, whether you are an experienced bicycle rider or just getting started.

To help realise the Queensland Government's vision for *more cycling, more often*, the signature Active Towns project was developed and piloted in the three regions of Gold Coast (Robina), Cairns and Mackay over three years between July 2012 and June 2015.



The purpose was to:

- increase the number of people riding bicycles and walking
- create a more positive perception of bike riding and walking throughout the community.

More specifically, this pilot was focused on **infrastructure delivery alongside encouragement initiatives**. This involved the design and delivery of safe and practical infrastructure, such as dedicated cycling and walking paths, together with awareness campaigns, participation events and other encouragement initiatives.

This evaluation report shares analysis and learnings from the Active Towns pilot program.



Infrastructure

- bicycle paths
- bicycle parking
- end of trip facilities
- lighting and amenities



Encouragement

- outreach/events
- inspiration and encouragement
- information on where to ride



Active Towns program

Program overview

The concept of an Active Town was developed to demonstrate that focused funding and a coordinated package of infrastructure, policy and behaviour change projects could have a significant positive impact on levels of walking and bike riding participation in local communities.

Active Towns aimed to rapidly increase bicycle riding and walking through best practice infrastructure and promotion. The pilot program was conducted in three communities—Gold Coast, Mackay and Cairns. The Department of Transport and Main Roads managed the three-year pilot in collaboration with the councils of the three pilot sites—the Gold Coast City Council, Mackay Regional Council and Cairns Regional Council.

Councils were encouraged to be creative and innovative in developing active transport projects that promoted walking and bike riding. Potential initiatives included:

- infrastructure provision and network construction
- building bicycle centres, end-of-trip facilities and bicycle parking
- bicycle education
- travel behaviour change programs
- bike riding and walking champions
- bicycle week events
- ride/walk to work or school days
- promotional events or activities
- providing information to target audiences about active transport.

The pilot was assessed over two phases in March 2014 and March 2015, with quantitative and qualitative research into awareness, attitudes and behaviours together with actual cyclist and pedestrian counts. A final evaluation report was completed in June 2015.

Program aims

The Active Towns program aimed to improve awareness, attitudes and behaviours in each of the three pilot locations.

Awareness

Awareness of infrastructure is a key driver of its use. Promotion of available facilities was arranged through media advertising, orientation days at universities and schools, local activities and events.

Attitudes

Attitudes and perceptions of community members towards the quality, safety and convenience of available infrastructure is important for their engagement in walking and bicycle riding. Residents were surveyed before and after the pilot program to identify any change in attitude.

Behaviour change

Behaviour change was the most effective way of the effectiveness of the pilot program. However, it is considered a lagging indicator. To account for this, community members were surveyed on the consistency of their active travel and change in bike riding frequency as well as their future intentions to walk or ride a bicycle.





Evaluation overview

Change in usage

Usage of new active transport Infrastructure varied in each pilot location:



- Use of active travel infrastructure **increased strongly in Robina.**



- Awareness of infrastructure improved and usage **increased slightly in Cairns.**



- Awareness of infrastructure improved and usage **remained steady in Mackay.**

Key observations

Some of the common themes and key findings to emerge from this evaluation process include:

- For infrastructure funded and promoted under the Active Towns pilot, there were high levels of community awareness.
- Community members had positive attitudes towards the investment in Active Towns infrastructure.
- Infrastructure was most popular when built in a concentrated area and providing direct connections to key locations.
- Health and fitness benefits were cited as the major reason to ride a bicycle.
- While there was minimal short term change in bike riding attitudes and safety perceptions, improved awareness of some key laws relating to bicycle riding was observed.
- Self-reported changes in both bicycle riding intentions and behaviour were mixed.
- Counts along new infrastructure typically recorded 10–20+ per cent growth rate from the start to end of the pilot program.

In evaluating the relative performance of Active Towns pilot sites, it's important to note that:

- each community represented different spatial, logistical and population challenges and opportunities
- each pilot program trialed a unique combination of new active transport infrastructure and encouragement initiatives.

Active Towns Gold Coast (Robina)

Program overview

- Focused on the Robina and Varsity Lakes area.
- Eight new walking and bicycle riding paths.
- A total of almost eight kilometres of new paths.
- Almost ninety per cent of local residents within one kilometre of walking and bicycle riding paths.
- Aimed at connecting four key destinations—Robina State High School, Robina Town Centre, Robina State School and Bond University
- Thirty-two active transport promotion events.
- Promotion reach of over 75,000 people.



Behaviours

- Overall there was a significant increase in bike riders and pedestrians taking advantage of new infrastructure.
- There was a 153 per cent increase in use of the Lake-side Path and a 36 per cent increase in use of Green Bridge.

Insights

- Localised cinema advertising provided the single largest source of reach (27,000 people).
- Social media, mobile apps and innovative promotions such as pop-up booths were identified as opportunities.
- Letterbox drops with maps were consistently mentioned as a means to improve awareness.
- Knowledge that it is legal to ride on the footpath is low, and therefore an opportunity to increase bicycle riding.

Awareness

- Infrastructure awareness has increased over the evaluation period.

Attitudes

- Overall there was little change in people's attitudes.
- General attitudes remained the same between phases, though these were already quite positive.
- There was a decrease in the number of people who selected 'Health and Exercise' as a reason to ride a bicycle. This suggests a shift towards bike riding being considered a practical means of travel rather than just a recreational activity.
- People felt marginally safer riding in their area, with the average score increasing from 2.4 to 2.6 (scale = 0 to 4).
- Knowledge of road rules remained similar throughout the phases, however the two knowledge gaps that were focused on post phase 1 (i.e. footpath and two abreast myth) each showed a 3 per cent improvement.
- No difference was observed between phases in self-reported change, bike riding intentions or advocacy.

Active Towns Mackay

Program overview

- Focused on strengthening the existing pedestrian and bicycle riding path network.
- One kilometre of new walking and bike riding paths completed at time of evaluation and four kilometres completed after.
- Two new CBD bicycle storage facilities.
- 21,000 people within 500 metres of walking paths.
- Fifty-five per cent of local residents within one kilometre of walking and bike riding pathway.
- Targeted promotion and education amongst primary and secondary school students.
- Promotion reach of 3250 people.



Awareness

- Both awareness and use of active transport infrastructure increased over the evaluation period.

Attitudes

- Overall there was little change in people's attitudes.
- As with the Gold Coast, attitudes remained largely stable, however there was an improvement from 2.1 to 2.3 (scale = 0 to 4) for the question 'walking and bicycle paths go where I want to go.'
- For three of the four bicycle riding road rules, there were statistically significant improvements of at least five per cent in the number of people who knew the correct rules.
- 'Health and Exercise' remained the top reason for bike riding followed by 'Enjoy the Natural Environment.'
- There was no change in perceived safety which remained relatively low.
- Between phases, there was no lift in self-reported behaviour however nearly twice as many people stated they had increased bike riding over the past 12 months.

Behaviours

- Overall there was little change in actual behaviour.
- Daily infrastructure use increased by 10 per cent on the Bluewater Trail, which remains Mackay's most used bicycle riding path.
- There was little change across other paths except for the Cross City Link, which increased by 20 per cent.

Insights

- Bicycle riding community events have the potential to increase bike riding behaviour even without new infrastructure.
- Measurement frameworks should be linked to the targeted approach (e.g. primary and secondary children).

Active Towns Cairns

Program overview

- Focused on connecting more distant suburbs with CBD.
- Improvement in student transport via connections to two of Cairns' biggest schools.
- Almost twelve kilometres of new walking and bike riding paths completed and even more after the evaluation.
- Thirty-eight per cent of local residents within one kilometre of bicycle riding pathways.
- Approach to raising awareness via events instead of mass market advertising.
- Thirty-two events and promotions delivered.
- Promotion events reached 1954 people.



Awareness

- Awareness of active transport infrastructure remained largely the same between phases.

Attitudes

- There were small but statistically significant increases in average scores for bicycle riding safety.
- For knowledge of road rules, there were small gains experienced in some areas.
- Attitudes remained consistent between phases but were positive towards bike riding.
- 'Health and Exercise' remained the main reason for bicycle riding followed by 'Enjoy the Natural Environment.'
- There was an increase in the reason 'Taking the Kids to or from School' being selected.

Behaviours

- The Cairns market generally showed an increase in active transport behaviour.
- Ten per cent increase in usage of the Upward Street cycleway and 18 per cent increase with Aeroglen. Smith Street was down by 3 per cent.
- In the second evaluation phase, almost 85 per cent of respondents reported bike riding more or as much as in the prior year.

Insights

- A broad reach media campaign may be useful in reaching a wider audience
- Safety related campaigns and initiatives may be required to help improve perceptions
- Motivators other than health and exercise could be opportunities to increase bike riding activity
- Changes to bike riding attitudes and behaviours tend to be slow and require time.

Key implications

Overall, the results of the Active Towns pilot programs were mixed but did deliver a range of successful outcomes and provide useful insights.

Newly built infrastructure should not rely on self-discovery or word of mouth.

- Infrastructure in close proximity to residents needs to be more proactively managed and promoted
- This includes providing compelling information on active transport alternatives to existing routes
- A more expansive usage of different channels may increase both exposure and engagement
- This could include leveraging social media, mobile apps and promotional activities (e.g. pop-up booths)
- Local area marketing initiatives such as letterbox drops, cinema and outdoor provide the opportunity to deliver highly customised and relevant communications.

Positive steps must be taken to decrease 'fear' of bike riding in a community and therefore encourage more participation.

- Education campaigns around rules have proven to increase knowledge, but not necessarily result in a feeling of greater safety
- Whilst a focus on health and exercise will resonate most with existing riders, this may not be the case for lapsed or non-riders who form the apathetic majority.

The pilot programs also suggest that in communities where awareness of infrastructure is already high and attitudes are already positive, there may be limited improvements, perhaps because bike riding has reached saturation point amongst those most inclined.

- This may help guide future programs to invest in communities where connected infrastructure is lacking, or encouragement initiatives that focus more on engaging lapsed riders.

Successful outcomes can be enhanced by ensuring the infrastructure is safe and practical, connecting population hubs with popular destinations.

Investing in cycling infrastructure in conjunction with encouragement initiatives will:

- increase the number of people cycling
- improve the perception of cycling in a local community.





Whatever approach is taken, it should be noted that positive changes in attitudes and behaviours takes time.

This suggests that any Active Towns style program should set realistic, long term goals based on 'nudging' the most susceptible residents to deliver more bike riding, more often.

It is advised that any short term improvements should be embraced, leveraged and learned from.



To find out more about bike riding
in Queensland, please visit
www.tmr.qld.gov.au/cycling