

## It's time to boost the bike budget

In an era of evolving transportation needs, infrastructure poorly suited to metropolitan Adelaide's ever-growing population and footprint, and growing consciousness towards sustainability, it's time for South Australia to think beyond the car and the multi-lane road.

It's time for our state to boost the bike budget.

For many years, South Australia's State Bicycle Fund has been an important source of funding for local governments to deliver improvements on active transport.

In January this year, the active transport community was disappointed by a State Government media release detailing a reduction in funding allocated for cycling projects from \$3 million to \$2 million

When projects like a signalised crossing on Military Road costs \$1.1 million, it is clear that \$2 million will amount to little more than a fresh coat of paint across the state's bicycle infrastructure.

It's true: times are tough, budget resources are scarce, and the state is facing difficult challenges.

But it's because of these challenges that the bike budget is so important. Despite the cliches, the South Australian cycling community is more than its lycra-clad members, and the benefit of improved cycling infrastructure extends beyond the existence of a nice path or a way to spend time on the weekend.

**A state that invests in cycling infrastructure is investing in the health of its population, environmental and economic sustainability, and tourism.**

Cycling leads to healthier communities as regular physical activity lowers the risk of many chronic illnesses. It is also a mood booster, creates a positive sense of wellbeing and is an excellent shared activity that can bring people together and reduce the ["loneliness epidemic"](#).

Additionally, each new person biking to work is one less person driving, which reduces air pollution, contributing to cleaner air and fewer respiratory ailments.

In this way, active transport – cycling along with walking and other forms of micro-mobility – is vitally important to the design of our future cities.

Huge strides are being made, particularly in South Australia, in the transition to renewable energy and electric vehicles are a part of moving towards net zero.

Unfortunately, there is nothing about electric vehicle technology that reduces congestion. A South Australia that eliminates internal combustion engine vehicles but keeps building conventional traffic infrastructure will be just as congested in 2034 as it is today, if not more. Those vehicles will use less fossil fuels but continue to strain the energy grid. The fuel powering our traffic may be renewable, but it will not be resource efficient.

The only solution is to strategically invest in alternative transport options, and bike infrastructure is the perfect choice. After all, Adelaide is largely flat, sunny, and easy to cycle in year-round.

Furthermore, when compared to all other Australian states, South Australia has one of the shortest average commute distances. Australia doesn't need to become Denmark or the Netherlands, but fewer kilometres and less time spent in the car would have net positive impact on our health and resource use.

It would also benefit our wallets as choosing to cycle instead of driving can have significant cost savings for individuals. Many of the expenses associated with owning and maintaining a car would be greatly reduced by subbing a bicycle for most quick trips, and the benefit of this is even more significant for the least well-off among us. But to unlock the cost-of-living benefits, there needs to be infrastructure that is safe and accommodating for cycling.

Improved bicycle infrastructure could bring financial benefit to the state as well by functioning as a tourism drawcard.

Each year, thousands of tourists visit the state for the Tour Down Under. South Australia could capitalise on this by developing the state into Australia's premiere cycling destination, positioning itself as a location that not only inaugurates the UCI World Tour every year but recognises the economic potential of bicycle tourism and cares about the safety of cyclists on the roads.

While South Australia's bicycle network has a strong foundation, it's largely still a patchwork. The Barossa Trail is a wonderful path that enables residents and visitors alike to enjoy one of Australia's preeminent wine regions without relying on a car. Yet, there's a missing 2km link between the Gawler Central Railway Station and the trailhead.

Similarly, the Linear Park Trail bisecting the Adelaide metro area is a jewel of the state. But wayfinding signage is lacking, making navigation difficult for visitors and locals alike, and gaps remain in the system.

In recent, welcome cycling news, a state-federal-council partnership will see The Amy Gillett Bikeway in the Adelaide Hills extended. But visitors without a car still cannot access it without white-knuckling it up two-lane roads into the hills. Unlike other capital cities in Australia, bicycles are not permitted on Adelaide Metro buses – a simple solution that would help link patches in the cycling network, not to mention expand the catchment zone for those who rely on the public transit system.

Much the same way a regional train connecting Adelaide and Melbourne has the potential to [boost regional economies along the route](#), a more integrated statewide bicycle network is an excellent way to deepen the links between the metro and the regions while taking strain off the road infrastructure servicing those regions.

Perhaps this is an overly blue-sky way of thinking about the future of cycling in South Australia. But cycling infrastructure is a classic case of "if you build it, they will come". As cycling becomes safer and easier, people become more comfortable with using cycling as a way to meet their needs, be it commuting, running errands, or just a fun and healthy way to spend the day with family and friends.

There's big upside to be gained from what amounts to a small investment in the bike budget. But it starts with a bigger vision for what the State Bicycle Fund can do. It's time to gear up for the future and think about building a healthy, sustainable and well-connected South Australia.

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