Framing walking and bike riding
Message guide

Foreword

This message guide contains evidence-based recommendations that will help you build public support for more walking and bike riding measures. These are ways governments can make walking and bike riding safer and more enjoyable, thereby enabling more people to move around on foot or by bike. Measures include new or improved footpaths, bike lanes and pedestrian crossings, as well as safer speed limits.

The guide is written for walking and bike riding advocates and allies who want to create more consistent, compelling and effective narratives on this issue in Australia.

Contents

Introduction

The recommendations presented here build on a wealth of Values Based Messaging research and guidance, including the Healthy Persuasion message guide. They are based on our analysis of advocate interviews, media articles, advocate websites and social media posts that express support for or opposition to walking and bike riding measures, as well as a quantitative public survey in which we tested a number of messages.

It is important to note that the research focuses primarily on building public support for governments to provide more measures, rather than on complementary efforts encouraging individuals to change their behaviours. However, many elements of this research will also be useful for those working in behaviour change, such as appealing to people's values rather than using facts and fear, and avoiding repeating or mythbusting our opponents' assertions.

We emphasise that there is *no one right way* to apply the recommendations presented here. You will need to choose the message elements that best fit the purpose and medium of your communication. A media release, for example, will call for a different story structure and emphasis than a social media post or promotional video. Also note that messages are effective for walking and bike riding together or separately, so you can adapt and use the messages for only walking or riding as appropriate.

As you go about putting the recommendations into practice, we encourage you to look out for differences in the way your audiences are responding to the messages. We also encourage you to share with us any new insights you gain in the process, so that all of us can learn and build on the recommendations presented here.

Finally, we emphasise that messaging is no silver bullet: it is but one part of broader, deeper engagement strategies for new measures. Whether temporarily opening streets to kids without car traffic for National Ride2School Day, or permanently changing on-street car parking, new measures can cause significant changes to residents' and visitors' daily routines. At those times, opposition frames may be particularly compelling to people who are frustrated and upset at their perceived loss and inconvenience. To help create better situations from the outset, good community engagement can involve people in design and review early and often, and bring people together to appreciate each other's views and wider community benefits.

The remainder of the guide outlines our approach including the research methodology. This is followed by a set of tips that will help you tell a compelling story about the need for governments to provide more walking and bike riding options for everyone, and the benefits of doing so. We then suggest an effective message structure, and provide guidance on common words and phrases to avoid, because they fail to communicate our frames effectively, and some alternatives our research showed will serve us better. The guide concludes with suggestions for responding to common opposition frames by pivoting to our frames.

STREETS ARE FOR EVERYONE

Approach

The research and recommendations outlined in this guide are based on the Common Cause approach to community engagement. This approach is based on decades of research from the fields of social psychology, cognitive linguistics and behavioural economics.

A key finding of this research is that **most people think about social issues from multiple and often conflicting perspectives. Some of these are helpful to our cause, others not**. Importantly, these different perspectives operate mostly at a subconscious and emotive level, which means people's attitudes and behaviours are often driven by factors beyond their conscious awareness.
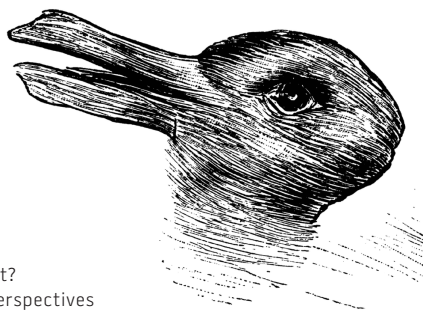
Duck or rabbit?
Conflicting perspectives

In our research, we sought to identify perspectives or *frames* that make people feel at a gut level that walking and bike riding measures are both valuable and necessary. We also sought to understand which frames moved people into an oppositional mindset in which measures feel unnecessary or harmful. Identifying these persuasive oppositional frames is important because it tells us which ideas to avoid activating in our audiences.

A growing body of research from around the world demonstrates the importance of *values* in shaping people's attitudes and behaviours.[1] Values concerned with care for others and self-direction (freedom of thought and action) are associated with greater support for a range of social and environmental issues. Conversely, values such as wealth, power over others and preserving one's public image are associated with less support for these issues. Security values, activated when safety and stability are perceived to be threatened, are linked with fear rather than pro-social action. Importantly, values are not static but can be activated or 'switched on' by different message frames. Based on the values science, messages that engage people's care for others and self-direction are likely to be helpful in building support for walking and bike riding measures.

Methodology

In order to identify the dominant frames that people in Australia use to think and talk about walking and bike riding and enabling measures, we conducted a national public discourse analysis. This involved collecting and coding over 25,000 words of language data from dozens of publicly available sources on the topic – including media articles, opinion pieces, advocate and opponent websites, social media discussions and popular culture.

In addition, we conducted 13 confidential one-on-one interviews with walking and bike riding advocates from a range of organisations, locations and perspectives.

This language data, comprising public discourse and interview transcripts, was then coded and analysed based on key metaphors, values and story logic in order to identify the dominant supportive and oppositional frames used by Australians to think and talk about the topic.

We then tested these findings in an online quantitative survey of more than 1,200 Australians, who were representative of the adult Australian population by age, gender and state/territory. As well as testing participants' levels of support with many short and contrasting statements, the survey included a dial test of five 30-second audio-recorded messages. Participants moved a dial up and down on their screens as they listened to each message to indicate their level of agreement with what they were hearing. This provided us with a moment-by-moment view of the persuasive effect of each message and allowed us to isolate specific words and phrases that most resonated with audiences.

Throughout the research process, walking and bike riding advocates in the Post COVID19 Working Group and a project Steering Group provided input. They ensured we built on existing wisdom, such as the finding that the term "cyclist" often has negative connotations, bringing to mind an exclusive club of lycra-clad speedsters[2]. The Working Group also provided input on an interim message guide prepared in September 2020 based on a small discourse analysis and existing Values Based Messaging findings. Some examples of their communications putting the interim and subsequent recommendations into practice are included in this guide.

[1] Crompton, T. 2010, Common Cause: The Case for Working with our Cultural Values, WWF UK
[2] In addition, City of Sydney Council found that only a small percentage of people who ride bikes describe themselves as a "cyclist".

Attitudinal Segmentation

Our research identified 3 attitudinal groups on the topic of walking and bike riding measures:

Supporters   **Persuadables**   **Opponents**

- **Supporters:** people who strongly and consistently **agree** with messages suggesting that *more walking and bike riding measures are necessary and beneficial*
- **Persuadables:** people who hold ambivalent or conflicting attitudes towards measures and move between supportive and oppositional perspectives
- **Opponents:** people who strongly and consistently **disagree** with messages suggesting that *more walking and bike riding measures are necessary and beneficial*.

Messages that appealed strongly to supporters and also shifted persuadables into a supporter mindset were identified as most useful for future messaging. Conversely, messages that appealed strongly to both opponents and persuadables were identified as harmful messages because they move the latter into an oppositional frame of mind.

It is important to understand that we are not trying to appeal to entrenched opponents. In fact, as we'll see, the central opponent frame of *"roads are for cars"* is antithetical to ours, *"streets are for everyone"*. In sum, effective messages:

- Motivate existing **supporters** ('the choir') to speak to others about the issue and encourage their support too
- Move **persuadables** to support walking and bike riding measures
- Differentiate from **opponent** frames, and thereby often antagonise opponents. We should get comfortable with this as a natural reaction and a sign that we are truly voicing *our* frames, not theirs.

Encouragingly, our survey found a quarter of respondents (25%) were supporters, while only 15% were entrenched opponents. Meanwhile, close to 2 in 3 people (60%) were persuadable on the topic and toggle between support for and opposition to measures.

We found supporters report riding much more frequently than persuadables, who report riding much more frequently than opponents. However, it is worth pointing out that just over half of our supporters report never riding a bike, and a small number say they never or almost never walk. Clearly, one doesn't need to walk or ride to be supportive: many people support measures for the benefit of the broader community.

Secondly, note that the majority of people we surveyed across Australia, both bike riders and non-riders, are persuadable, meaning that **their level of support for or opposition to measures depends on how the issue is framed. This is our opportunity.**

Overall, the statements that generated the most (and least) support for measures were very similar across states and territories – meaning that the frames that move persuadables in NSW or WA are likely to also move persuadables in Victoria or other parts of the country. This is because **the most effective frames are those that tap into deep-seated, widely-held cultural values of equality, freedom and friendship.**

In the area of walking and bike riding, our survey showed the following:

SUPPORTERS
25%

PERSUADABLES
60%

OPPONENTS
15%

Tip #1:
Use values (not facts) to persuade

Facts alone do not change people's minds. Indeed, research shows that confronting people with facts that contradict how they feel about an issue only serves to entrench their position further[3]. Appealing to their deeply held values, however, can shift people's attitudes and behaviours by changing the way they feel about the issue. In line with the worldwide body of research on values, we found the most effective messages were those that activated values such as freedom, equality, social justice and friendship.

We should also avoid activating values such as concern for wealth or image. Our argument is not for measures because they're good for the economy but because they facilitate what people want in their lives and for their community. Livelihoods flow from that as people willingly walk or ride to their local streetside cafe and catch up on the morning's happenings with their baker or grocer.

In our discourse analysis, we found that advocates sometimes omit our vision and values, and/or employ economic arguments that risk activating values of wealth and competition (see 'FROM' statement below). These statements leave our audience open to thinking that 30:1 funding might be the right balance since we all need to drive, and it's even cheaper *not* to build more footpaths and bike lanes. Instead, be sure to establish our values-based narrative, including why walking and bike riding measures matter, and then if you wish, add a powerful fact or two to back it up.

Values and emotions trump facts. Engage your audience's values of freedom, equality and friendship. Avoid economic arguments that risk activating values of wealth and competition

MESSAGE SHIFT

FROM For every $30 the government spends on roads for cars, it spends only $1 on walking and bike riding. It's much cheaper to build more footpaths and bike lanes than to upgrade or build more roads.

TO No matter where we live, it's important for everyone in our community to access and enjoy our streets. That means joining up the missing links in our walking and cycling networks with more footpaths and bike lanes.

[3] Baumeister, R. F et al (eds) 2007, Encyclopedia of Social Psychology, Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage. pp. 109–110.

Tip #2:
Tell our story, not theirs

By definition, persuadables have not made up their minds about walking and bike riding measures: they toggle between our frames and our opponents'. Enthusing our supporters and shifting persuadables to our point of view requires us to consistently and repeatedly tell our story and avoid telling our opponents' story. In order to do this, it is important for us to first understand what these frames look like.

The discourse analysis revealed one core advocate frame that is fundamental to supporting our measures, *streets are for everyone*, and a completely opposite core opponent frame, *roads are for cars*, as detailed below. In our survey, each time we told elements of the *streets are for everyone* frame, persuadables supported our measures. Conversely, invoking *roads are for cars* always undermined support.

Tell our story, *streets are for everyone*, where everyone has a range of movement options to enjoy. Avoid telling our opponents' story, r*oads are for cars*, by not focusing on 'easing congestion' or 'convenience'.

ADVOCATE STORY

- Streets are for everyone
- People love walking and bike riding, but don't always have options to do so
- Government should make sure everyone has options to walk and bike ride

In detail:

Streets are public places for all where we connect, play, explore and relax. As such, there's a role for government to make decisions in everyone's best interests: providing options for people to get around and stay healthy, for communities to come together, and kids to become independent. The overarching goal is for everyone to have a range of options for getting around and enjoying our streets and neighbourhoods.

Streets are for everyone rests on car drivers giving way to people walking and bike riding, and going at speeds at where they are much less likely to cause injury. As one advocate put it: *"It's the responsibility of motorists to ensure people walking and cycling are safe, not the other way around. Cars are like guests in residential areas."*

OPPONENT STORY

- Roads are for cars
- Everyone needs to drive or be driven
- Government shouldn't give special treatment to pedestrians and cyclists – who get in the way of cars

In detail:

Drivers of cars and other motor vehicles are entitled to use roads unhindered by others, where the goal is *fast movement of cars*. Other road users, such as people walking, bike riding or playing in their local street, are not automatically entitled to use roads and can only do so in ways that don't hinder car traffic.

The oft-used "road closed" sign assumes that roads are for cars. Usually such roads are closed only to motor vehicles, and are in fact open to people walking and bike riding. Similarly, when "traffic" refers only to car traffic but "car" is omitted, cars are understood to be the normal or default users of roads.

Telling the equity story

Equity is a central element of *streets are for everyone* – ensuring that literally everyone can access and enjoy our streets. In our survey, supporters and persuadables strongly agreed with governments providing the options everyone needs to move around, particularly when we mention kids, elderly people, people using wheelchairs and the 1 in 4 Australians who can't afford a car.

Opening streets

Talking about "opening streets" rather than "closing roads" results in a huge boost in supporter and persuadable agreement. Even replacing one word, "roads" with "streets", works in our favour.

MESSAGE SHIFT 💬

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FROM So that more people can enjoy getting around safely, we should close more roads to cars.

TO **So that more people can enjoy getting around safely, we should open more streets to people walking and bike riding without car traffic.**

Avoid talking about congestion and convenience

Conversely, advocates inadvertently reinforce *roads are for cars* when they use "road closed" signs or speak of "Low Traffic Neighbourhoods" (they're *high* traffic in terms of walking and bike riding).

Another way advocates reinforce *roads are for cars* is by focusing on **congestion**. For persuadables and even some supporters, the most compelling element of the opponent story is *we all need to drive or be driven and so it's important to keep car traffic flowing smoothly*. This is what "easing congestion" really means – allowing cars to travel more quickly, unhindered. **That's not our frame, it's the opposition frame**. We actually want cars to travel much more *slowly and responsibly* to allow everyone to use and enjoy our streets. (However, in our communications we would suggest using the term "safer speeds" rather than going "slowly" – see tip #8).

Making **convenience** salient, for example when we promise that measures will make walking and bike riding "more convenient", is also not useful because most people believe cars are the most convenient option. Both supporters and persuadables agree that: *"cars are our quickest, easiest, and most convenient way of getting around, whether you're an elderly person, a parent ferrying around young children, or doing your weekly shop at the supermarket."*

Our survey showed that most people do regularly drive or travel as a passenger, as easy ways to get done what they need to do. That strong lived experience of the convenience of cars means that when we talk convenience (even in the context of walking and bike riding), we are likely to also remind people of how convenient cars can be. Instead, focus on what car driving can never have over walking and bike riding: walking hand-in-hand, feeling alive going up a hill, clearing your head and unwinding, doing something for climate and clean air[4].

MESSAGE SHIFT 💬

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FROM More footpaths, crossings and bike lanes will ease congestion on our roads.

TO **More footpaths, crossings and bike lanes help families to stay healthy and spend quality time together.**

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FROM More footpaths, crossings and bike lanes make walking and bike riding more convenient.

TO **More footpaths, crossings and bike lanes make walking and bike riding more accessible and enjoyable.**

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[4] We found a large majority of persuadables agreed that *"Walking and bike riding are great ways for individuals to take action on climate change"* and *"For cleaner air and a healthier environment, we need to shift to less polluting ways of getting around such as walking and bike riding."*

Avoid mythbusting

Finally, advocates reinforce opponent frames by **negating** those frames ("it's *not* X") or **mythbusting**: using our arguments to show how wrong opponent arguments are. It's tempting to weigh into debates against a vocal minority of opponents who are proclaiming falsehoods or unhelpful ideas. Unfortunately, research shows that every time people are exposed to a particular concept – even when framed as untrue – it is reinforced in our minds and more likely to be activated next time we think about that issue. Mythbusting, therefore, has the counterproductive effect of reinforcing the very ideas we seek to dispel.

In short, stop telling your audience what *not* to think and tell them *our* story instead.

Instead of telling your audience what not to think, tell them *our* story.

MESSAGE SHIFT 💬

| FROM | We're not anti-car. | TO | We want streets that work for everyone. |

| FROM | Bikes don't block car traffic, we have every right to be on the road. | TO | Our streets are for everyone to move around – bikes belong here. |

Tip #3:
Desire and social norming

It's clear people *want* to walk and bike ride. They like and want our measures. In fact, amongst supporters and persuadables, we saw remarkable levels of support for a range of measures from paths and crossings to our stretch goal, safer speed limits.

We can take heart from this and tell the story of their desire and support. Paths, crossings and so on provide options not just for people to move, but to get around in ways they love.

Our supporters and persuadables also tell us they value walking and bike riding for good health, for the great communities they help to create, and for protecting our environment and climate.

However, in several public sources, advocates justify measures on the promise that they would "stimulate the economy" (see tip #1), or improve driving, for example by "reducing congestion" (see tip #2). These unhelpfully displace the story of people's desire for walking and bike riding.

MESSAGE SHIFT

FROM Building new footpaths and bikepaths will stimulate our economic recovery.

TO People everywhere want to enjoy commuting and staying healthy on better paths and calmer streets.

Ground our story in people's desire to walk and bike ride. Showcase the attitudes and behaviours we *want*, not those we *don't want*.

We know that people are more likely to accept an idea if they believe most other people accept it too. This tendency to follow the herd is particularly strong among persuadable audiences who do not hold firm opinions one way or another on an issue. One way to increase support for an idea, therefore, is to point out that other people already support it. This is often referred to as *social norming*.

Here, we can lead with a values-based statement about people's desire for walking and bike riding measures, and back it up with the facts and stats.

MESSAGE SHIFT

FROM Currently, only 2% of Victorians commute to work by bike and 10% by walking. We must provide more paths and crossings and calmer streets so that more people feel safe walking and bike riding.

TO All of us enjoy a good walk or bike ride, whether for leisure or commuting. In fact, 76% of Victorians tell us they want to walk and bike ride more, and would do so if they had more paths and crossings and calmer streets.

Social norming means showcasing the attitudes and behaviours we *want*, not those we *don't want*. While both of the following statements are true, the first normalises driving, the second, schools taking action and kids walking and bike riding:

MESSAGE SHIFT 💬

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FROM   More and more parents are driving their kids to school.

TO   **Many schools are encouraging kids to get to school in ways *they* want to. Kids tell us they want to walk, scoot or bike ride, especially with their friends.**

Tip #4:
Be positive: more of, not less of

Across our messaging research, we have consistently found that persuadable audiences are more motivated by messages that focus on the positives of vision and solutions, than those elaborating on the problem.

While it's still important to outline the barriers that stand in our way, we should spend far more time showing how we can overcome them – and the positive outcomes that result.

Often it's a simple task to flip problems into solutions:

MESSAGE SHIFT

FROM Our government isn't doing enough to create streets that are accessible to all of us. That's limiting the options people have to move around safely and enjoyably.

TO There's plenty our government can do to create streets that are accessible to all of us, to give people more options to move around safely and enjoyably.

Focus on our solutions and outcomes, more than problems they address. Talk about positive outcomes *before* any challenging actions required to achieve them.

In addition to focusing on positives more than negatives, the *order* also matters. In our survey, persuadables more strongly agreed with the need for safer speed limits when we led with a positive outcome before mentioning the less palatable action required to achieve it, as in the 'TO' statement below.

MESSAGE SHIFT

FROM We need safer speed limits on our streets, to make walking and bike riding good options for everyone.

TO To make walking and bike riding good options for everyone, we need safer speed limits on our streets.

Focusing on *more of* rather than *less of* also means talking about more footpaths and bike lanes leading to more people walking and riding, rather than to fewer people driving. Our positives of being able to move around in healthy, enjoyable ways are compelling in their own right; we don't need to contrast them against the negatives of being "trapped inside cars" or otherwise suggesting that driving is a bad choice.

In fact, our survey showed that when we do this, we *reduce* support for measures. This may not make sense logically, but it does emotionally. People don't want to feel guilty or foolish for driving.

MESSAGE SHIFT

FROM More paths, crossings and calmer streets help us to enjoy walking and bike riding, instead of being trapped inside cars on loud and busy roads.

TO More paths, crossings and calmer streets help us to enjoy walking and bike riding.

Tip #5: Humanise: make your audience feel included – and let them tell their stories

Helping our audiences to see "pedestrians" and "cyclists" as people rather than labels, starts with calling them people: "people walking", "people bike riding", and similarly, "people driving" rather than "motorists"[5]. We can connect even more closely with our audiences' emotions and care for others by illustrating "people" in detail. For example, "kids and families" boosts support for our measures, over "people".

In our survey as well as in written feedback, we found that people who use wheelchairs and motorised mobility devices generally understand their ways of moving around to be covered by the terms "walking" and "bike riding", so we don't need to always add "and using a wheelchair". However, we heard that they also appreciate being explicitly recognised and included. In our communications, this might mean including an early statement along these lines: *"Whether you are on foot, moving with the help of a mobility device like a wheelchair, or pushing a child in a pram, walking is an important part of life for everyone."*[6]

In messaging research, we have found that telling stories about real people helps our audiences connect and relate more so than when we talk about abstract principles or policies. Secondly, allowing people to tell their own stories of lived experience is more engaging and effective than when we tell their stories for them. In other words: the *messenger* matters.

Invite people to tell their stories. Encourage them to speak from the heart about why they love walking and riding, to remind our audiences that they do too.

Humanise your communications by talking about "people walking", rather than labels such as "pedestrian". Invite people to tell their own stories from the heart.

MESSAGE SHIFT

FROM Dedicated bike lanes allow people to ride instead of drive.

TO Because of what you've done on Elizabeth Street, I can now cycle instead of driving.[7]

FROM Walking helps build connected communities where people know their neighbours and shopkeepers.

TO I can easily walk… to the charming village of Eaglemont itself, where our beloved Ivan keeps the little supermarket, and keeps the heart of our village beating.[8]

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[5] We recommend avoiding all labels. "Motorist" subtly invites people to choose their 'camp' or label, and we anticipate that many persuadables would choose "motorist".
[6] Queensland Walking Strategy: https://www.tmr.qld.gov.au/Travel-and-transport/Pedestrians-and-walking/Queensland-Walking-Strategy
[7] Community response at Your Say Yarra: Trialling a safer Elizabeth Street | Your Say Yarra
[8] Reported in Department of Transport Victoria (2010) Pedestrian Access Strategy

Tip #6:
Steer clear of 'space' arguments

In public discourse, we noticed that advocates and opponents alike often talk about 'space' (road space, public space): who's using it, and who *should* be using it. Advocate examples include pointing out how much space cars take up compared with bikes, and how road space could be efficiently reallocated to footpaths and bike lanes.

These statements unhelpfully focus our audience's attention on one group's gain at another's loss (a 'zero sum game'). Some statements even paint our fellow humans as competitors, for example: *"every person walking or cycling for transport is another car that you don't have to compete with for parking."* As such, this frame is likely to engage people's values of power and achievement rather than empathy and care.

When opponents and some persuadables assume that all road lanes and parking spaces *belong to car drivers*, it's clear this comes from an understanding that *roads are for cars*. The most effective thing advocates can do to shift persuadables is to consistently and repeatedly use our *streets are for everyone* frame and avoid *roads are for cars* (tip #2). Over time, this will reinforce *streets are for everyone* in persuadables' minds and help to displace roads are for cars.

When we engage the *streets are for everyone* frame, we can sidestep 'space' arguments about who's entitled to use road space; it only makes sense for everyone to have options to move around safely. Amongst our supporters and persuadables, we saw the broad appeal of this central idea that is grounded in equity and freedom. Conversely, the status quo statement below ('FROM') about reallocating road space led to flat or reduced support.

Avoid engaging in 'space' arguments about how road space should be (re)allocated, where one group's gain is another's loss. Reframe to *streets are for everyone*.

MESSAGE SHIFT 💬

FROM Too much road space has been given to cars, and we can rebalance this by putting pedestrians and cyclists first. This means giving pedestrians priority at traffic lights and turning car parks into bike lanes.

TO Streets belong to every person who walks, rides, plays and drives. We're upgrading streets that currently only really work for one use so that everyone is welcome to enjoy them.

Tip #7:
Talk safe outcomes, not dangerous problems

As highlighted in tip #3, **people already want more walking and bike riding measures**. Don't assume that you need to show how dangerous walking and bike riding currently are, in order to build public support for more measures.

Head-to-head in our survey, we found that a message about the hazards people face when walking and bike riding was no more effective than a message about people needing to *"get where they need to go safely and easily"*. In fact the former 'danger' message may be doing damage by activating audiences' security values (feeling under threat). The risk is that while we may or may not get more measures in place, we simultaneously erode the public's willingness to actually go walking or bike riding[9].

Our task is to find language that builds people's support for measures as well as their enthusiasm for the activities of walking and bike riding. It is not helpful to make people fearful or remind them how dangerous these activities can be (even though this is true in some places). Instead, simply point out that our solutions allow everyone to get around *safely* – and tie this outcome to positives such as everyone having access to participate in their community, to commute in healthy, timely, enjoyable ways, to relax and unwind, and for kids to become independent. In sum, talk safe outcomes, not dangerous problems.

Highlight the benefits that *safe* options give us. Avoid suggesting that walking and bike riding are *dangerous* activities.

MESSAGE SHIFT

FROM Anything can happen when you're out riding a bike: branches, drains, even car doors opening. Cycling or walking to the station can be a dangerous ordeal.

TO All kids and families should be able to enjoy getting where they need to go safely – with good footpaths and bike paths, plenty of crossings and calm streets.

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[9] This seems to have been the outcome of US campaigns highlighting bike rider fatalities. See data presented at: https://bike-lab.org/2019/03/12/changing-the-conversation-a-bad-idea/.

Tip #8:
Show what safer speeds make possible

As a general messaging principle, for more challenging proposals like safer speed limits[10], it helps to start by spelling out the positive outcomes they enable. We want to maximise talking about all the good things people want that safer speeds make possible, and minimise talking about number limits in km/hour or reducing or lowering limits (taking away).

Speed limits are clearly at the pointy end of the *streets for everyone* versus *roads for cars* framing contest – where streets/roads are either for everyone to enjoy and co-exist, or for cars to travel quickly with as few hindrances as possible. It's no surprise then, that talk of "speed limits", "slow down" and "calm traffic" polarises our supporters and opponents. For example, no supporters disagreed, and no opponents agreed, with the statement: *"To make walking and bike riding safer and more enjoyable, governments should calm traffic with lower speed limits on local streets"*.

Throughout our survey, persuadables consistently responded to *streets for everyone* framing, and so it's also unsurprising to see their support for "calm traffic" and "safer speed limits" as part of that frame. However, we lost their support when we specified that this means 30km/hour. As found in previous research: people may agree with a general principle but get cold feet when they contemplate the specifics. This doesn't mean you shouldn't ever mention a km/hour limit, just don't headline it. Lead with and focus much more on the positive outcomes of calmer traffic.

More than anything else, what we want to do is pair together and build up a positive picture of places with safer speed limits – more pleasant friendly neighbourhoods where people driving look out for and give way to people walking and bike riding, attractive suburbs and streetside cafes where people walk, ride their bikes, mingle and linger. As illustrated in the statement and images below, safer speed limits are essential to making all of these good things *possible*.

Focus on the benefits of calmer streets where people can enjoy walking and bike riding. Safer speeds make this possible.

MESSAGE SHIFT 💬

FROM Speed limits of 30 and 40 km/hour make our streets safer.

TO **We all enjoy walking to streetside cafes and bike riding in pleasant neighbourhoods. That's what becomes possible with calmer car traffic, when we drive at safer speeds.**

[10] We recommend talking about "safer" speed limits (more of: giving more safety) rather than "lower" speed limits (less of: lowering, taking away). Safer (rather than safe) doesn't necessarily imply current danger, just that we can make our streets even safer and better.

Image courtesy of Victoria Walks

Our research reveals that the common advocate argument of lower speed limits having "very little impact on travel times" garners less support than "more people, including kids and the elderly, walking or riding their bike."

Not only is "travel time" a less effective frame, it's also unhelpful because it suggests to our audience that *fast car travel* is important – the opposite outcome to what we want.

MESSAGE SHIFT 💬

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FROM Lower speed limits have very little impact on travel times.

TO **More people, including kids and the elderly, walk or ride their bikes on streets with safer speed limits.[11]**

[11] Also note the focus on 'more of', not 'less of' – see tip #4.

Tip #9:
A picture paints a thousand words

As the saying goes, "a picture paints a thousand words". Our brains process images many times faster than words – meaning that your audience will likely 'get' the narrative based on an image, before they read the words.

In short, we want our images to say: *everywhere we have good paths, crossings and calm streets, a whole range of people walk and bike ride for a whole range of reasons – and they love it. This could be you, your family and your street, too.*

We therefore want our audiences to identify with the people they see in our images. In communications for the general public, this might best be achieved by depicting a diverse range of ages, body sizes, genders, cultures and socio-economic backgrounds. If targeted to a particular street or initiative, then the images might best depict 'people like me' – those most similar to the target audience, or even better, showing fellow members of that audience (e.g. from the same street or school).

Bringing together the preceding 8 tips, we recommend:

- humanising messages by showing people's happy faces, 'everyday' people and/or families. Avoid elitism (e.g. expensive racing bikes) and images where we cannot see people's faces, including shots from behind or blurred cyclists whizzing by

- showing *what we want* (the solution), not *what we don't want* (the problem). Show people using paths, calm streets and crossings, rather than being squeezed into the gutter or waiting forever to cross. Also avoid showing empty paths and crossings, implying they are unneeded and unwanted.

- using photos rather than symbols or icons, and candid rather than stock photos, to help bring to life the people depicted.

Help your audience to see themselves in our images, and imagine using more paths, crossings and calmer streets in their own neighbourhoods.

MESSAGE SHIFT

FROM

TO

City of Sydney / Chris Southwood
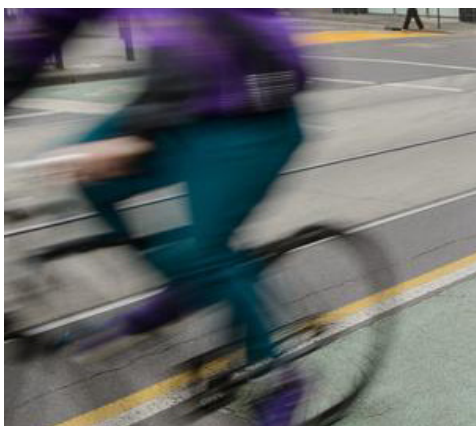
# Our persuasive story: Vision-Barrier-Action

In our testing, we found the following narrative structure to appeal strongly to supporters and persuadables. Below we outline the core ingredients and persuasive examples of each part of our narrative.

You can choose from these or create your own vision, barrier and action statements to suit the purpose of your communication.

In sum, our vision is for everyone to be able to walk and bike ride as much as they want, where they want. Since the barrier is that most streets are still designed for car driving, the solutions revolve around changing our streets so that they provide these options for everyone.
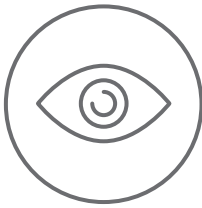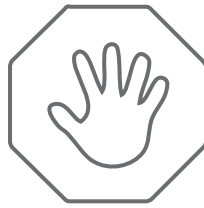
1. Vision   2. Barrier   3. Action

1. Vision

To set a positive tone for our communications, it is important to start by articulating a values-based vision. This helps us frame the message in terms of shared values that appeal powerfully to both our supporters and persuadables.

Core ingredients:

- Visions are a mixture of aspiration and common sense. The response we want to evoke in our audience is, "well that's obvious – why can't we have that?"
- Focus on shared values like freedom, equality, friendship, meaning in life and protecting our environment.

Examples of persuasive visions:

- *Streets are for everyone. They're public places where we are free to play and explore our neighbourhoods.*
- *Walking and bike riding help us slow down and focus on what's important in life. Saying hello to new and familiar faces on our morning walks creates friendlier neighbourhoods. And dropping into local shops on our rides home builds community.*
- *Every person in our community deserves the chance to move around their city, town and neighbourhood with ease.*

2. Barrier

The barrier part of our narrative tells our audience what stands between us and the vision we seek. It establishes the problem and sets the stage for why our solutions are necessary.

Core ingredients:

- By focusing on a lack of walking and bike riding enabling measures, we have usefully *externalised* the problem (made it external to our audience as individuals)[12]. So here, the problem is governments designing streets for cars, not for people (rather than: the problem is individuals' lack of confidence or ability to walk or bike ride).
- Talk of "options" rather than individual "choices" helps to keep the focus on the lack of measures, and our solution to therefore provide those measures.

Examples of persuasive barriers:

- *But our government isn't designing our streets for people, they're designing them for cars.*
- *But over time, we've allowed our streets to become noisy, traffic-filled roads and it's keeping us from making journeys that make us feel great by walking or riding a bike.*
- *Many people who currently drive would rather walk or ride a bike, but those options are not yet available to them where they live and work.*

3. Action

Here is where we explain what should be done to remove the barrier that stands in our way.

Core ingredients:

- Frame solutions as tools that help people do what they *want* to do, rather than have to do.
- Pivot from general to specific tangible actions to create a clear picture in people's heads, e.g. *"We need to create streets that are accessible to all of us. That means better footpaths and crossings, separated bike lanes, and calmer traffic so everyone in our community can move around freely."*
- Where possible, point to success stories to show the solution is both accepted and effective.

Examples of persuasive actions:

- *Governments can make sure everyone has the freedom to use and enjoy our streets, by creating wider footpaths, more crossings, and bike lanes that give people more options to walk and ride a bike.*
- *It's time our government made getting around easier and more enjoyable. This means building more crossings and bike lanes, and slowing down traffic around schools, cafes and shops.*
- *The good news is that where governments create streets for everyone with more paths and crossings and calmer traffic, people use them wholeheartedly – walking and riding their bikes.*

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[12] For more on this, see Tip #1 of the Healthy Persuasion message guide.

Words to use and lose

Based on our research, the following are suggestions for words and phrases we should either use or lose to build public support for walking and bike riding measures.

LOSE	USE	WHY
… so that people choose to walk and bike ride	… so that people *have options* to walk and bike ride	Externalise the barrier (see <u>BARRIER</u>, above). If options are missing, we need to provide them, whereas people making poor choices suggests we need to educate them or build their skills and confidence.
Measures reduce congestion; make walking and bike riding more convenient	Measures give us freedom, health, community connection, equity, e.g. "We all value our health and wellbeing, doing things we love like walking and bike riding."	"Congestion" and "convenience" activate opposition frames around fast car travel. Instead, focus on what walking and bike riding measures give us, that cars can't.
The business case; invest in measures because they deliver an economic return	People everywhere want to access safer and more enjoyable walking and bike riding	People want it and it's the right thing to do. Avoid replacing people's intrinsic desires with extrinsic financial motivations.
Infrastructure	Footpaths, bike paths, crossings	Turn abstractions into visible or tangible things that people use and can easily imagine.
Temporary bike lanes (installed in response to COVID)	Separated or dedicated bike lanes	Avoid suggesting that bike lanes are not widely wanted or needed or only an immediate response to COVID social distancing. People want to ride (see tip #3) – start out by setting expectations that the lanes will stay.
Traffic (meaning car traffic)	Car traffic	"Traffic" normalises that roads are for cars – it is taken for granted that they are traffic and walkers and bike riders are outliers (or obstacles).
Roads	Streets	In message testing, people support measures when we use the word "streets" more so than "roads".
Road closed; road closed to cars; cars banned	Open street; street open to walking and bike riding – without car traffic; street open to non-car traffic	"Road closed" assumes that roads are for cars (since they're usually still open to people walking and bike riding). "Closed" or "banned" is *less of*, shutting down; "open" is *more of*, opening up, making options available.
Transport corridor; road corridor	Streets	In a house (metaphor for a city or community), we have rooms (places) where we live, work and play. The sole purpose of corridors (roads) is free-flowing movement between rooms. "Corridor" therefore works against the streets are for everyone concept of streets as places to linger, enjoy, explore and meet people.

LOSE	USE	WHY
Reduce or lower speed limits; slow speed	Safer speed limits; calmer traffic	"Reduce"/"lower"/"slow" unhelpfully emphasise taking something away (*less of*). "Safer" and "calmer" focus on the benefits (*more of*).
Reallocate road space	Provide walking and bike riding options for all	Avoid the 'space' frame, allocating to one group at the expense of others. Instead, we're creating options for all.
Jargon in public discourse: mobility systems; active transport; filtered streets; road trauma	Walking and bike riding; streets for everyone; injuries and deaths	Technical terms are often confusing to the public, making it difficult to build public support. Use plain English wherever possible.
The road hierarchy; Let's put pedestrians first, not last	Create streets for everyone; people driving bigger, faster vehicles are responsible for giving way to those walking and bike riding	Hierarchy is a zero-sum game where some people are more important than others (the opposite of equality). If some are at the top, others are at the bottom. Instead focus on how people can co-exist well.

Dealing with opposition frames

The messaging recommendations in this guide apply to crafting your own communications as well as dealing with opposition frames – whether delivered by opponents themselves or by journalists putting forward those positions for your response.

The golden rule is: Always speak from *our* frame. Avoid negating the opposition frame.

Don't engage with the opposition statement put to you. Try not to repeat it, since repetition reinforces ideas in people's minds. Resist the temptation to mythbust (see tip #2).

Often this means 'pivoting' away from the opposition statement, with the help of phrases such as:

- *"What we're really talking about here is X"* – whichever element of our story you want to focus on
- *"What we're talking about is just plain human decency – looking out for each other and making sure everyone has what they need. Here, that means doing X."*
- *"This is just a diversion from solutions that we know work, like XYZ."*

They say	Their framing	We pivot to say	Our short version
Don't take away my car parking spot	**'Space' frame: zero sum game** **Streets/roads are there for individual benefit: it's my spot**	*[Re-frame from 'space' to 'streets for everyone', and from individual to collective focus]* Streets are collectively owned by all of us, they are there for the public good, for everyone. *[Avoid talking about making decisions on 'who uses space', instead it's decisions about 'how to provide options for everyone']* Together we're working out how best to provide options for everyone to move around our streets and neighbourhoods, whether they are walking, bike riding, catching the bus, driving or something else.	**Streets are for everyone to use**
Without car parking, customers won't come to my shop	**Everyone drives: roads are for cars**	Many people walk or ride a bike to their local shops – but we might not always notice that they do, compared with seeing cars parked out the front. The key is making walking and bike riding along this street an enjoyable experience. When people enjoy coming here, they linger and visit more shops. *[anecdote about a tangible example]* When we upgraded X street with a new bike lane and a crossing straight to the shops, people took up the offer and walked and rode to those shops like never before. *[To back this up, you could add "we saw x% increase in trade", if you have the data. Even more effective would be someone telling their personal story about enjoying walking or riding to the shops.]*	**Many people walk or ride a bike to their local shops – and many more do where it's safe and easy**

They say	Their framing	We pivot to say	Our short version
People caught texting while crossing the road should be fined $200	**Personal responsibility frame: people walking and bike riding are responsible for their own safety**	*[Re-externalise the barrier to cars and the solution to speed limits]* This is just a diversion from the real solutions that make for safer walking. They are: having ample paths and crossings and especially, safer speed limits. That's why, across Australia, we now have residential speeds of 50, 40, 30 and 20km/hour. The proof is in, and it's what we all know: when we drive at safer speeds, *everyone* on our streets is safer.	**The real solutions for safer walking are paths, crossings and safer speed limits**
Just like drivers, cyclists should pay rego to pay for the roads they use	**Roads are for cars**	*[frame the factual correction within Streets for everyone]* Our streets are essential public places for everyone to move around – whether they're walking, bike riding or driving. That's why we pay for our streets through tax, not registration. Most people enjoy riding their bikes and we should encourage them. But we know from bike rego trials that while the most dedicated riders sign up, needing to register deters kids and families who occasionally get the bike out of the shed. We should do everything we can to encourage them, not keep them away.	**Our streets are essential for everyone, so we pay for them through tax**

More generally, there are a few general principles underpinning *streets are for everyone* that you can invoke to help shift people from an individualistic to a more collective and generous frame of mind:

- Do unto others *(if you put yourself in the shoes of people walking and bike riding in your area: does that currently feel safe and enjoyable? What would you want to be different?)*
- We look after each other, so bigger, faster, heavier vehicles give way *(relevant to cars around people walking and bike riding, and bikes and e-scooters around people walking)*
- We make sure everyone has the basics they need *(here, this means options for moving around).*

VicHealth is committed to health equity, which means levelling the playing field between people who can easily access good health and people who face barriers, to achieve the highest level of health for *everyone*.

VICTORIA
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Government

VicHealth acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land. We pay our respects to all Elders past, present and future.