

Changing the focus: providing an equity lens over capital works delivery

A Kyrkou¹, B Harries¹, D Wilson¹

¹City of Whittlesea, Melbourne, VIC

Subdivision development across the municipality is often delivered out of sequence which in the growth areas has resulted in a patchwork of new development interspersed between Greenfield areas. This physical disconnection limits pedestrian and cyclist access to services, undermines social cohesion in growth areas, increases car dependence and poses significant safety concerns, with the community forced to use unsafe pathways or travel on road shoulders.

In response to these concerns, in 2015, the City of Whittlesea developed the Missing Links Program. This program ranks various gaps in the pedestrian and cycling network using a suite of criteria, such as road classification, patronage numbers, and proximity to schools, commercial precincts and places of gathering.

A recent Equity focussed Health Impact Assessment (EfHIA) evaluated the potential health impacts and the distribution of those impacts to the community of the program. The six-stage process analysed relevant technical data and community consultation to determine a series of recommendations that minimised negative health outcomes and ensured the infrastructure benefits were shared equally amongst target cohorts.

The final EfHIA report provided 28 recommendations across six key themes: physical activity and social cohesion, traffic safety, safe environments, connectivity and key destinations, walkability, and community engagement; with many of the recommendations relating to the program's evaluation criteria and project-specific scope improvements.

All recommendations were adopted by Council to ensure both the ongoing success of the Missing Links Program, and continued positive net-community benefit outcomes.

Subsequent municipal-wide studies have demonstrated that the community's perceptions of social cohesion and safety have increased, with participation rates of active travel behaviours (walking and cycling) are increasing.