

Your boots are made for walking but what about the neighbourhood?

One of the key strategies to fighting climate change lies at our very feet. As Nancy Sinatra once sang, 'These shoes are made for walking', and that's just what they must do to help our urban life become more responsive to overcoming challenges of congestion, civic engagement and energy wastage that contributes to climate change. A recent article by Richard Florida reinforces the idea that urban density and walkability are very complementary, and can even have a positive effect on property prices.

'If walkability has long been an "ideal," a recent slew of studies provide increasingly compelling evidence of the positive effects of walkable neighborhoods on everything from housing values to crime and health, to creativity and more democratic cities.' Richard Florida

Other walkability spin offs can be greater productivity through reduced time lost in traffic, better health with pedestrian exercise, improved local economies through increased foot traffic past shops on main streets, scope for community engagement that comes from the social connection of meeting neighbours in the street, and more surveillance of the public domain that can help cut crime and vandalism - and then there is the potential to help the battle against climate change.

<http://www.citylab.com/design/2014/12/growing-evidence-shows-walkability-is-good-for-you-and-for-cities/383612/>

Unfortunately the Federal Government has cut back public transport funding and created uncertainty for renewable energy targets, but local government agencies are starting to fill this space – although national and state policies are needed to really have an impact.

At the start of this year, the UN Secretary General's Special Envoy for Cities and Climate Change together with the C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group, looked at a range of ways that our urban environments could help mitigate the impacts of climate change. With the need to build a new city for 1 million people every 5 days from now to 2050 for the world to meet a projected population increase of 3 billion, energy consumption and carbon production must be drastically reduced.

Elevation of energy efficiencies in new buildings, refits for existing ones and higher performance standards for building lighting and appliances were all seen as key elements for this challenge along with planning more compact urban communities that could minimise private travel needs and improve public transport use.

<http://theconversation.com/cities-could-be-the-secret-to-fighting-climate-change-34915>

Many local Councils in Sydney are also focused on active alternative transport measures such as walking and cycling, and these must be essential parts of our future urban environment. Along with strategies for better public transport, A Plan for Growing Sydney just released by the State Government has many positive leads encouraging both walking and cycling, but puts the heat on local Councils to work with a proposed Greater Sydney Commission in implementation of the finer grain urban design needed for all these initiatives.

<http://www.strategy.planning.nsw.gov.au/sydney/>

This Plan is intended to improve access to the things that urban communities value such as parks, shorter commutes, jobs and affordable housing, with scope to improve street networks through

better infrastructure for walking and cycling for both recreation and transport. This can also help revitalise communities and support healthier lifestyles.

'The Commission will monitor the progress to make sure the right homes, jobs, infrastructure and services are being delivered when and where they are needed. This will be done in close consultation with communities and everyone will get a chance to have a say.' A Plan for Growing Sydney

Lane Cove is really an exemplar for many of these initiatives already. Along with TVO, our local Council, Lane Cove ALIVE and In The Cove, and community groups such as the Bushland Conservation Society and Bike North are able to show the way for cooperative and proactive strategies to help influence better outcomes in other parts of Sydney. However the challenges to getting the right community engagement will remain, and it is important for us all to continue monitoring, discussing and getting involved where we can to really help make a difference to our urban futures.

After hopefully a jolly, safe and sustainable festive season, I encourage you to try to fit in time for some of the attached articles to prepare for better times in 2015 and beyond.

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