

Summary Findings

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Introduction

The following is a summary analysis and report of the engagement activities and resulting lessons from the Moreland City Council Northumberland & Kent Road (Pascoe Vale) bike lane trials. The trials were installed in June 2021 and have generated a great deal of discussion and lobbying across the community ranging from fiercely opposed to fiercely supportive of the trials.

This summary report was written in September 2021 is specifically designed to provide concise findings and analysis of the engagement outcomes, for the purposes of reporting back to Council.

Consultation context

RedRoad Consulting was engaged in the first week in July to lead a community engagement program designed to:

- provide information and context to community on the strategic principles and goals, data/evidence and traffic engineering rationale for the bike lane trials.
- seek feedback on the immediate benefits and impacts on community, particularly in respect to things Council might be able to respond to quickly.

Plans were made to run four large pop up events in July and August 2021 as well as some smaller, focussed community walks between the pop ups.

Unfortunately, the outbreak of COVID-19 in Victoria, resulting in lockdown 5.0 and 6.0 meant that this type of engagement was not possible. The team worked to 'pivot' the pop up engagement into six smaller walks (capped at eight participants per walk, in accordance with state regulations at that juncture). Three of those walks were held before the State was locked down again, necessitating that the remaining three sessions be held online.

The dates, times and formats for the events were:

1. Saturday 31 July, 11am-12pm
2. Wednesday 4 August, 10am-11am
3. Thursday 5 August, 4pm-5pm
4. Saturday 7 August, 10:30am to 11:30am (virtual)
5. Saturday 7 August, 12:30pm to 1:30pm (virtual)
6. Saturday 7 August, 2:30pm to 3:30pm (virtual)

The community engagement was also cut short by the Council meeting on 11 August, which brought forward decision making on the trials.

What we heard

The two-trial bike lanes drew comments across a range of design, safety, strategic, aesthetic and utility themes as well as in relation to how community were consulted in respect to their installation. The following are the key themes and messages we heard from the community between June and August 2021.

Key design-related feedback

A wide range of positive and negative feedback was received about the design of the two bike lanes. As these aspects of community feedback tend to intersect with other issues of concern (the design of the lanes was seen to impact utility and road safety, for example), the key messages have been summarised in the following matrix.

	Positive feedback	Negative feedback
concrete barrier (Kent Rd)	it provides a separated cycle lane and is safer for cyclists it is hard for drivers to mistake it for a traffic lane	it is too wide and unnecessarily narrows the road space the gravel in the centre of the concrete areas is being spread onto the bike lane (by accident and on purpose)

	Positive feedback	Negative feedback
	the width of the barriers prevents dooring on the passenger side of parked cars	
plastic barrier (Northumberland Rd)	<p>it provides a separated cycling lane and is safer for cyclists</p> <p>it is visible to road users and is clearly a barrier</p>	<p>it is mistaken for a traffic lane by some drivers</p> <p>the plastic bollards are ugly and some were concerned about effects on property values</p> <p>the plastic bollards are already damaged (reflective surfaces are wearing, bollards are knocked and scuffed)</p> <p>it is made of plastic (environmentally poor)</p>
intersections: Northumberland & Rhodes; Kent & Cornwall; Kent & Cumberland	<p>there is no worsening of conditions for pedestrians or cyclists as a direct result of the lanes (e.g. there were always conflicts for cars/cyclists at these locations)</p> <p>there is an opportunity to improve both cycling and pedestrian safety through the installation of crossings at key locations</p>	<p>pedestrians crossing Northumberland along Rhodes Parade have to dodge bollards</p> <p>directions are confusing for cyclists turning left into Rhodes Parade from the Northumberland lanes (which are on the right-hand side of the road)</p> <p>both cyclists and pedestrians are at risk from cars while crossing Cornwall Street between the Reserve and Kent Rd. Pedestrian infrastructure is absent completely on the north side of the intersection</p>
intersections: driveways and other	line of sight to cyclists is improved in terms of cars exiting side streets and driveways	the lanes coupled with on-street parking create a challenge for people navigating out of their driveways and turning from side streets
general road safety	<p>safety issues are not a result of the lanes but of poor driver behaviour (and therefore require a different solution than removing the lanes)</p> <p>the lanes improve safety for cyclists</p> <p>opportunities exist to make other road safety changes, like reducing speed limits (50km/hr is too high)</p> <p>narrowing of the road does slow traffic</p>	<p>the lanes create conditions where drivers are a risk to others on the road (pedestrians and other drivers)</p> <p>a number of crashes are attributed to the lanes by local people and this perception of safety is a concern</p> <p>road safety risks may simply be displaced elsewhere as people avoid these roads</p>

	Positive feedback	Negative feedback
	the lanes offer a critical link in the wider cycle network and allow people to make longer and safety journeys on separated infrastructure	the lanes ‘respond to a non-existent problem’ as cyclists weren’t experiencing issues before the trial
the wider transport network	<p>it is an underfunded aspect of the transport network which is now being allocated a fairer share of resources</p> <p>these lanes provide critical links to the cycling network and help people to cycle to “where they want to go” (e.g. shops/services, Upfield bike path, Pascoe Vale train station, etc.)</p>	it seems ‘piecemeal’ and not a comprehensive addition to a strategic cycling network
on-street parking	<p>on-street parking is now separated from the bike lanes and dooring isn’t a risk for cyclists</p> <p>on-street parking has been retained for residents, visitors, people using local services and open space, etc.</p> <p>there is possibly scope to address the concerns by removing some parking (e.g. on one side of Kent Rd)</p>	<p>the lanes coupled with parking significantly narrows the road for people driving through</p> <p>parking is elevated (space-wise) over other road uses and is mainly for non-residents, providing little local benefit</p> <p>on-street parking created a challenge of people navigating out of their driveways</p>
lane position and width	<p>the lanes in both Northumberland and Kent Rds were a comfortable width for cycling</p> <p>the Kent Rd dual carriageway is ‘gold standard’</p>	<p>the gutter edge of the dual carriageway in the Northumberland Rd lanes was uneven, making less confident riders nervous</p> <p>the dual carriageway in Kent Rd was seen as ‘overkill’ and an over-provisioning for such a minor road</p> <p>the lanes would be better as a shared path at pedestrian grade</p>
rubbish collection	cyclists are used to bins being in lanes one day a week	<p>for some households, the bike lane is the only place to put their bins (e.g. for some houses at the north end of Northumberland Rd)</p> <p>the raised barrier kerb in Kent Rd makes it difficult for elderly/disabled people to put their rubbish out</p>
the school traffic	the lanes offer an alternative for children and staff travelling by car	parents picking up students at the school are frustrated by the lanes (and some are blaming the school)

	Positive feedback	Negative feedback
	<p>the school drop off/pick up, though an acknowledged problem, is not a result of the lanes</p> <p>there are opportunities to work with the school to increase cycling rates (which are very low as compared to other schools in the area)</p>	<p>the lanes add to congestion around the school at drop off and pick up times, affecting amenity for residents</p>

Some potential responses (generated through discussions with community members and with Council officers) are summarised in the following ‘Ideas for Change’ sub-section of this short report. It is proposed that they be the basis for further discussion with stakeholders via the process recommendations suggested in the ‘A Way Forward’ section.

Ideas for change

Aside from removing the lanes altogether (a common request from parts of the community) there were many modification ideas or recommendations made to Council for further investigation. They include:

Kent Rd lanes:

- remove the on-street parking on the south side of the road
- reroute the lanes down the (western, if possible) edge/s of Cole Reserve
- replace the two single direction bike lanes with a single dual carriageway lane (like in Northumberland Rd)
- reduce the speed limit to 40km/hr
- install an east-west cyclist and pedestrian crossing across Cornwall Rd, linking Kent Rd and the KW Joyce Reserve shared path
- install a north-south pedestrian crossing across Kent Rd near Cole Reserve

Northumberland Rd lanes:

- redesign the intersection at Northumberland and Rhodes Parade to better link cyclists and pedestrians to the shared path on the north side of Rhodes Parade
- install an east-west pedestrian crossing at the top of Northumberland Rd
- realign the join between the bike lane and the shared path that heads south through KW Joyce Reserve
- widen the gaps between bollards to allow cars to turn into and from side streets and driveways more easily
- put the bike lanes at footpath level rather than road level
- reroute the lanes through HM Dowd Reserve and Crowley Court (or Snell Grove)
- lessen the “ugly” visual impact of the current treatment

Key process-related feedback

The feedback was also very focused on the processes employed for designing and installing the lanes. There is less polarisation and disagreement in this set of feedback – most agree that there is scope to improve the manner in which Council works with community on these types of projects – and the key points raised about community engagement in this project include:

Transparency about the rationale for the lanes

Several people felt that the Council “hadn’t done their research” on the (current) demand for cycling infrastructure while others felt that the strategic goals of developing active travel networks and infrastructure in Moreland (and across Melbourne) were not well articulated or defended in the process.

The strategic context was important for opponents and proponents of the bike lanes alike and many who were advocating their removal were also expressing sentiments like the following:



Everyone should be demanding a better plan for cyclists, not piecemeal action.

Community walk participant

Lack of engagement in the design process

A number of people commented on the fact that the Council, in undertaking the design process without any involvement of the community, had missed an important opportunity to deliver better outcomes based on locals’ lived experience (as cyclists, pedestrians, residents and drivers). This had created a poorer product in many people’s view.

Concerns about frayed community relations

There were people on both ‘sides’ of the disagreement about these lanes who expressed fear about how those on the other ‘side’ were treating them in online and real world interactions. This was seen as a direct result of the mechanisms for community engagement used for feedback on the lanes: the social media and ‘message board’ type environments specifically. The agonism of the process was and is having negative effects on the social fabric of the area.

These concerns were not simply a Council matter as much of this agonism is occurring in community forums, the media, etc. Council, however, may have an important role in

mitigating the harms occurring and in finding/promoting different modes of engagement moving forward.

Mistrust

All of the above has created (or added to) a “sense of mistrust” between community members, between community members and Council and in regard to the professional advice and recommendations that have prompted the project. The mistrust extends to the decisions about funding already applied to the project and which changes will necessitate.

There are broader mistrust issues at play here too, given there is a growing disquiet with democratic processes and procedures across Australia and other liberal democracies. Some are a legacy of poor consultation processes broadly and some are a feature of modern political populism which tends to emphasise polarised positions and agonistic processes. Nonetheless, there is scope for Moreland City Council to find ways forward that are better designed to build trust and cooperation.

A Way Forward

There are some cautionary tales about the next steps for this project and also about the processes for future projects of this type.

For this project

These findings suggest that a way forward needs attention to process first: a more robust and deliberative process would be the best vehicle for deciding on improved design outcomes for the lane trials.

While COVID is still a concern, this will necessarily be an online process and might look as follows:

Format:

- online ‘Design In’, citizen jury or charrette type workshop over two sessions (about 3-4 hours in total)
- supported by trained and external facilitators (in large part so that Council officers can actively participate in the discussions rather than moderate or observe)

Participants

- a balanced/representative and invited list of people who bring different professional and lived experience knowledges to the task:
 - local residents
 - local active travel users (cyclists and pedestrians)

- Pascoe Vale Girls' College school students/staff
- local business owners (e.g. from the medical centre in Kent Road)
- Council officers (with engineering, design, strategic planning, environmental and other backgrounds)
- State government officers and decision makers, as relevant
- recommend a maximum group of 60 invited people (with one facilitator per 8-10 participants).
- recommend that this process NOT be an open town hall style process as that format contributes little to problem solving or co-design goals.

Tasks

- the agenda for the session should stress problem-solving, deliberative and prioritising tasks, for example:
 - establishing shared principles for changes to the trials (e.g. that they won't displace problems or disadvantage vulnerable citizens, etc.)
 - reviewing and providing structured SWOT-type feedback on ideas for changing the trial
 - hearing professional and lived experience perspectives on the design/safety elements of the lanes (as a citizen jury might), including potential costs
 - prioritising ideas for change as a group
- tasks may include some type of communication/engagement with the wider community in-between and following the sessions to provide pipeline of updates and feedback from the progress of the workshop

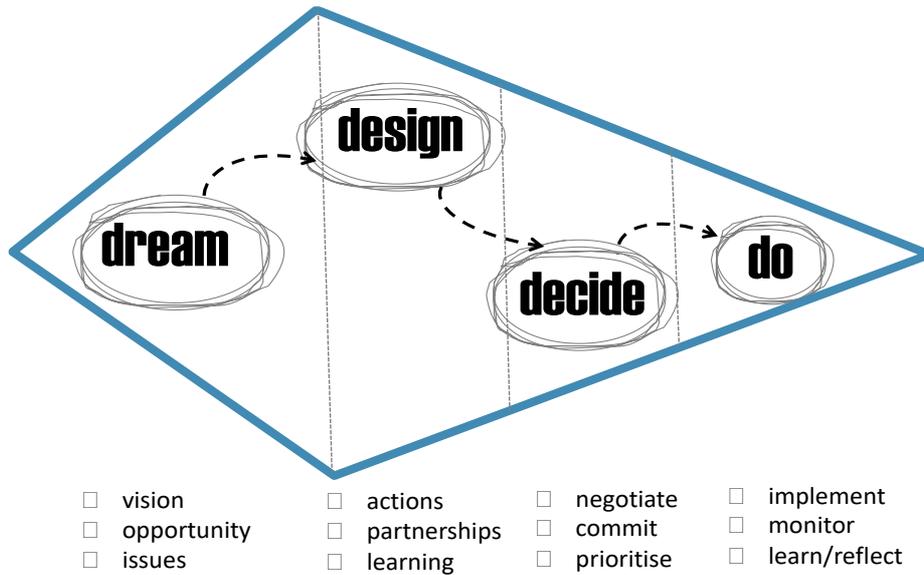
Anticipated Outcomes

- improved advice to Councillors for decision making regarding the trials
- improved trust between community members and between Council and community
- improved evidence-based consultation practice
- a model for future engagement practice on projects of this type

For future projects of this type

It needs to be acknowledged that traffic calming and active travel measures in transport planning are sparking backlash and outrage across many jurisdictions, not just Pascoe Vale or Moreland. This type of change is contested, and Councils across Australia are grappling with how to create change to road environments that have historically focused on drivers' needs and safety.

Rather than a "decide and defend" approach to projects, we recommend a community planning approach that includes key stakeholder deliberation in the following elements of planning:



The workshop described above is only one aspect of that type of approach, albeit an important one as a careful agenda can touch on multiple goals (like discussing opportunity and prioritising ideas for action). We'd recommend that future processes start with that type of engagement rather than try to include it later, after community members have protested a change in their area.

Finally, we also recommend that future projects of this type seek to align the processes of civic engagement (led by Council officers and engagement specialists) and political engagement (led by elected representatives). A great number of people (elected, professional and community) wind up exhausted and frustrated by processes when multiple avenues of advocacy and feedback are all open simultaneously and poorly coordinated.