

Research shows demand for safer cycle routes

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Couple Jean Beetham and Ed Randal both completed their Master's in Environmental Studies last year, each with a focus on cycling in Wellington, and will graduate in December. Although they approached the topic from different angles, the message to the Wellington City Council from many members of the public was clear—'if you build it we will come'.

Jean studied the feasibility of an arterial cycle way between Wellington's

southern suburbs and city centre. In particular, she focused on a potential Tory Street route and the impact that removing some on-street car parks may have on businesses in the area.

A survey of around 600 people found that a large number would consider biking to get from place to place if they felt safer on the roads. A significant majority of respondents also said they would be willing to consider the removal of some on-street car parking to provide for safe cycle routes—even those who weren't interested in [cycling](#). This was mostly because of their concern for cyclists' safety or because, as drivers, they found sharing the road with cyclists stressful. An additional survey of shoppers on Tory Street showed that only six percent were using the on-street parking on Tory Street.

"There are about 4000 car parks within one block of Tory Street, and about 100 car parks on Tory Street itself—so taking out parks on one side, for example, would remove a relatively small percentage of available parks. As a result, the economic impact on surrounding businesses would likely be minimal," says Jean.

"The private market is able to supply car parking and it does, but it can't supply cycle ways because they're not something that can be charged for. If we used some of our public road space to implement cycle ways strategically in selected streets it would very likely reduce cycling-related deaths and accidents, and encourage cycling."

Jean is now working with Opus International Consultants Ltd, and one of her projects is to help design a similar survey to that of her thesis for the whole city, in order to help the Wellington City Council find out what infrastructure the public wants and the barriers to cycling.

Ed is currently working for the New Zealand Centre for Sustainable Cities. His Master's research focused on how to get more Wellingtonians

cycling. Although, like Jean, he found that many people are deterred from cycling in the city because of safety concerns, as well as the hills and inclement weather, statistics show cyclist numbers in Wellington have been increasing since the 1980s.

"Even though Wellington has the highest rate of serious harm or death for cyclists in the country, it is also one of the only main urban centres in New Zealand where commuter cyclist numbers are still going up," he says.

Above all, says Ed, people cycle because it is enjoyable and good for their health.

"Aspects such as being good for the environment or saving money were seen as a bonus rather than a motivator. Also, it seems that a lot of people travel to work by car because it's a habit they don't think about unless they move house or job."

His research concluded that promoting recreational cycling on Wellington's various tracks around the city to non-cyclists, in particular under-represented groups such as women, young people and those on lower incomes, would help them feel more confident on a bicycle. This could potentially act as a gateway to commuter cycling. It would need to be part of an initiative to improve road safety for cyclists and a strategy to promote the fun side of cycling, he says.

Wellington City Council plans this year to significantly increase its cycling budget, from \$1.3 million to \$4.3 million, and invest in a cycle way from Island Bay to the city.

Provided by Victoria University

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