RAC response to the Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage's proposed Perth and Peel Urban Greening Strategy

June 2024

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Western Australian Planning Commission

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We thank the Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage (DPLH) for the opportunity to provide input to assist with the development of a Perth and Peel urban greening strategy (the Strategy). The Strategy represents an important step towards recognising and prioritising the role that Perth's unique ecological landscape plays in creating an active, healthy, and resilient city.

Below is RAC's response to the focus questions outlined in your letter dated May 6, 2024.

Questions 1 & 2: Main area of interest and key message for the Urban Greening Strategy:

RAC is a purpose-led member organisation. Since our foundation in 1905, RAC has existed to be a driving force for a Better WA. We act as a voice for more than 1.3 million members in more than 60 per cent of Western Australian households and work collaboratively with government, industry, our members, and all Western Australians to champion change that will deliver safer, sustainable, and connected communities – this is our 2030 Vision. Towards more sustainable and connected communities where harmful vehicle emissions have been reduced and Western Australians have greater access to a variety of safe, comfortable, and convenient travel options, it is vital we implement initiatives which support the uptake of walking, riding, and cycling. However, there are several barriers to the uptake of active travel and according to RAC members[1], a lack of shade and shelter and the weather are key barriers to walking and cycling more.

Empirical evidence shows that well-implemented greening initiatives significantly boost the duration and frequency of walking, riding, and cycling[2]. RAC has been actively involved in the greening of Perth and Western Australia through initiatives including community volunteering, our [Connecting Communities Fund](#) and [Reconnect WA](#). Through these programs we have provided staff and family tree planting opportunities, as well as supported communities and local governments in their greening efforts. Over 25,000 seedlings have been planted as part of RAC community tree planting specifically to address urban greening along active transport routes.

RAC advocates for the Strategy to facilitate the greening of active travel routes as well as community nodes and places across the state to support their use. This will both encourage mode shift from private vehicles and enhance community connection. These routes are typically located on and/or adjacent to government owned land which provides a great opportunity to increase levels of shade and greenery.

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[1] Based on four years of data from RAC's Member Priorities Tracker Survey. RAC's membership is broadly representative of the WA population.
[2] [The effect of street-level greenery on walking behavior: Evidence from Hong Kong - ScienceDirect](#)

Question 3: Key opportunities for improving urban greening in Perth and Peel:

RAC requests that key active travel routes be prioritised for greening and tree canopy as follows:

a) **Along Perth's Principal Shared Path (PSP) network** to support longer trips to be made by walking, riding, and cycling. These routes are commonly located on State owned land such as road and railway reservations.

The PSP network records the highest volume of cyclists than any other part of the path network and due to its design (generally 4 metres in width with adequate lighting and grade separation at intersections as well as low pedestrian interaction[3]), provides one of the safest locations for active travel. However, the focus to date appears to have been on the delivery of hard infrastructure with less consideration to the lived human experience of travelling along these paths.

Shade from trees can offset the urban heat island effect in these locations by reducing surface temperatures by up to 19°C and ambient air temperatures by between 5-7°C[4]. Never was this issue more pressing than the summer of 2023/24 when Perth broke its record for the most days over 40°C in February creating three consecutive heatwaves[5].

Improving the comfort and amenity of the PSP and high-quality shared path network is critical to support and encourage longer trips to be made by active travel modes, to attract a broad range of user groups to walk, ride and cycle, and to reduce reliance on private vehicle use[6].

b) **Along secondary and local routes, as identified in the Long-Term Cycle Network (LTCN)** between residential areas and local destinations such as centres and schools, to encourage short local trips to be made by active travel modes. These routes are commonly located on local government and privately owned land.

The Department of Transport estimates that over 2.8 million trips under five kilometres are made every day by private vehicles in Perth and accounts for approximately 60 per cent of all vehicular trips[7]. Increasing the uptake of active travel modes for these types of trips provides a key opportunity to address ongoing problems of congestion, air quality, and socially disconnected communities[8].

A fundamental component to encourage higher uptake of active travel is to make these routes attractive, comfortable, and enjoyable for everyone. Empirical research also shows that street greenery supports social interactions and fosters a sense of community, offering residents additional reasons to choose walking, riding, and cycling[9].

How our streets and public spaces are managed can impact our health and wellbeing, as well as the economic vibrancy of local centres. In addition to urban greening along the active routes mentioned above, **RAC also requests that DPLH consider opportunities for improving urban greening in community nodes and spaces** to attract residents and visitors, encouraging them to spend time and connect. How connected we feel to each other and our local communities also has a powerful impact on our quality of life and overall wellbeing. A survey of RAC members in 2020 found those who felt connected to their community rated their wellbeing 24 per cent higher than those who did not.

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[3] Principal Shared Path Expansion Program (transport.wa.gov.au)
[4] 231005-CPP_Consultation-Report.pdf (bradpettitt.com)
[5] The ARC Centre of Excellence for Climate Extremes | Never two without three: how three successive heatwaves impacted Western Australia in February 2024 - The ARC Centre of Excellence for Climate Extremes
[6] Perth and Peel @ 3.5million 2018 (www.wa.gov.au)
[7] Perth active transport improvements | Infrastructure Australia,
[8] Perth and Peel @ 3.5million 2018 (www.wa.gov.au)
[9] The impact of street greenery on active travel: a narrative systematic review - PMC (nih.gov)

Question 4: Examples for linking and integrating green spaces within urban areas:

Evidence of where PSP routes have already been greened include the PSP adjacent to Stubbs Terrace (see Figure 1), [Bassendean Green Trail](#), where 'the route has produced significant improvements to amenity and experiences on the PSP and people reported it makes them more likely to use active modes of travel' and the [Cottesloe Greening Plan at Cottesloe Station](#) which won a Planning Institute of Australia [2021 Award for Planning Excellence](#).

Figure 1 Greening of the PSP route (source: Google Street view)

Through RAC's Reconnect WA initiative we have enhanced community nodes with greening that has transformed underutilised community spaces including sumps, road reserves, and small pocket parks into vibrant, safe, and active spaces where communities connect and interact. For example, RAC partnered with South Perth to upgrade the Goodwin Avenue drainage sump. As part of enhancing the local area over 5000 native plants (including nutrient stripping vegetation in the sump areas) and advanced native trees, were planted. In addition, seating, picnic, and nature play areas were created, and a nature walk, new footpaths, drinking water supply and street lighting were installed.

Evaluation reports from City of South Perth staff indicate that the area has been transformed into a more attractive high-quality space for passive and active recreation activities. The existing and newly installed advanced trees around the site provide good shade to people sitting, walking, jogging, and riding as well as contribute to overall urban heat reduction. Newly planted shrubs will soon provide a good buffer between the shared paths and the traffic noise from the street. This area has become a more popular location for families with young children, cyclists, joggers, and dog walkers.

Question 5: Key actions to improve urban greening and tree canopy:

In line with the focus of this submission, RAC submits greening along active travel corridors is a key action that should be included within the Strategy. In addition, the inclusion of a minimum target for tree canopy would be useful to create momentum, clearly communicate the desired vision and allow progress to be tracked and communicated. The inclusion of a target could bring Western Australia in line with better practice, as seen in New South Wales which has a net tree canopy target of 40 per cent[10] and Victoria which has a minimum 30 per cent canopy cover target for the public realm in new communities.[11] Internationally, Austin (US) has a canopy target of 40 per cent and Pittsburgh (US) has a canopy target of 50 per cent[12]. The Healthy Streets framework,

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[10] [Urban tree canopy targets and development controls report (nsw.gov.au)](#)
[11] [Greener and cooler environments - VPA](#)
[12] [The Sustainable Urban Forest (itreetools.org)](#)

an evidence-based approach to creating fairer, sustainable, and attractive urban spaces that has been adapted to be a locally relevant guide for the design and management of streets, uses a minimum target of 50 per cent shade for Australian streets. The Healthy Streets framework argues that to ensure our streets are inclusive of everyone and comfortable to walk and cycle in no matter the weather we must pay close attention to shade and shelter[13].

It is pleasing to see the Strategy intends to improve the consistency of digital data in urban forest and tree canopy measurement and this will be critical to track success. In particular, providing up-to-date information and data analysis on land clearing, loss of trees in relation to infill and road building, as well as improvements to greening and canopy cover in Perth and Peel is important. Whilst the DPLH Urban tree canopy dashboard does provide one source and has tracked trends over time, it is not intended as a comparison tool between suburbs or local governments, as each area is subject to different conditions and land use purposes[14]. The Urban tree canopy dashboard is also designed to track macro trends at two-year intervals and thus it is unclear how it could be used to measure more detailed changes such as an individual development's impact on the urban canopy.

Another key action to achieve the desired outcomes in WA is to ensure greening requirements are included in broader policy frameworks at both state and local levels. A gaps analysis should be undertaken as part of development of the strategy to determine the design guidance and planning policies that could better incorporate urban greening needs into the existing planning framework.

Question 7: Other comments

In addition to the points made above, RAC recommends that the scope of the Urban Greening Strategy be expanded to include all regions across Western Australia. Urban greening challenges and opportunities related to liveability and sustainability are present across the state, and the Strategy is critical to assist all local governments to access funding and coordinate resources.

We trust RAC's submission, which is based on improving tree canopy and creating more green community spaces and along active travel routes is useful in progressing the development of the Strategy. In support of our submission please refer to RAC's Public Policy and state and federal budget submissions, which outlines RAC's priorities and stance on matters relating to supporting travel by active modes.

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[13] Australia — Healthy Streets
[14] Better urban forest planning - Perth and Peel (www.wa.gov.au)