

Cycling Research

TOO MUCH OF A GOOD THING

As was reported in CAN's meeting with Pete Hodgson, one thing the new Transport Minister wanted to know was *what is an optimal amount of funding for walking and cycling?* Meanwhile, the latest Budget hasn't changed Transfund's Walking/Cycling (W/C) funding from the previous two years. It's one thing to say it should be more than at present, but how much exactly?

There are a couple of potential ways to try to assess the required funding:

1. Review all available W/C strategies around the country, tot up the estimated costs to complete the planned facilities and divide by a desired timeframe to complete them (10/15/20 years?). The main problem with this approach is that many strategies contain no estimated expenditure for completing their networks (which says something about the commitment to make them happen...). Also many councils still don't have a strategy in place yet.
2. Review the Long Term Council Community Plans (LTCCPs) for all councils to identify how much councils are proposing to spend on W/C over the next ten years (invariably these Plans are provided on the relevant council websites). One problem is that this doesn't necessarily equate to an "optimal" amount of expenditure; it's just what each council feels they can afford (in some cases, appearing rather small).

In general I've decided to adopt the latter approach, with some additional guidance from strategies where available (mainly I've also focused on cycling only). In many cases, scouring through LTCCPs was straightforward because there was a one-liner somewhere that said "new cycleways" (say) and the respective expenditure throughout the decade. For others it was a little harder; sometimes they only had 3 years of details listed, or cycling was wrapped up under "general roading improvements". So in some cases I've had to make a (conservative) estimate of how much they might spend on cycle facilities, based on their size, presence of a strategy, etc. A note to councils: to simplify this exercise in the future (and make it easier for local advocates to comment on your LTCCP), I suggest that you explicitly state somewhere how much you're proposing to spend on W/C projects!

After much digging through screeds of council-speak, I have come up with a total estimated cycling expenditure in the next 10 years of about **\$91 million** (if anyone would like to see my calculation spreadsheet, please contact me). Taking off the local council contributions through rates (typically about half) and a bit of funding from Infrastructure Auckland, we're left with what Transfund would have to shell out; about **\$5.8 million a year** for cycling projects alone.

A few caveats on these figures:

- I *haven't* included walking projects, partly because it's more difficult to know how much Transfund would subsidise. It perhaps says something about the perceived worth of providing for pedestrians, that walking facilities are subsidised even less by Transfund... (of course, many "cycling" projects like pathways will also benefit pedestrians too). As an example, Christchurch City Council are planning to spend about \$43.7m on "new pedestrian assets" in the next 10 years. How much would be subsidised? If it was (say) \$10m then that's another \$500,000/year required from Transfund. Needless to say, once you add in funding for walking projects and promotion right around the country, you get considerably more than the \$5.8m/year stated above.
- The funding figures given are generally only based on *cycleway construction*, not on cycling promotional projects or cycle strategy developments/reviews. Both of these of course are also fundable by Transfund from the W/C fund, but are not always explicitly identified in LTCCPs.
- The figure is very sensitive to how much Transit NZ want to spend, given that they get full funding from Transfund. Their draft 2004/05 State Highway programme indicated ~\$12m of walk/cycle projects in the next three years, so I have conservatively assumed that they *could* average \$3m/year over the next decade (certainly they have no shortage of projects...).
- Likewise, the amount of funding available from Infrastructure Auckland will affect the funding demand from councils in the Auckland region. I have tentatively suggested \$5m from them. I know however that they have \$70m left to spend on walking, cycling, and demand management, so the amount could be higher. Conversely however it could also mean that the Auckland region can actually get a lot *more* funded than currently proposed, once the various councils cotton on to this (\$20m harbour bridge cycleway anyone?)

- The figures assume that the indicated funding is allocated evenly across the next ten years. In practice, the indicative expenditure is often weighted heavily towards the latter part of this timeframe. For example, Kapiti Coast DC is planning to spend only \$50,000 pa for the next eight years, and then miraculously find \$633,000 pa for the subsequent twelve years (the more cynical among you may suspect that, by then, such councils will find some reason why they suddenly can't actually afford that much...).
- The funding estimate doesn't allow for those councils that haven't developed W/C strategies yet and hence could add to the demand for W/C funding in the future. Upper Hutt & Porirua, for example, have no known strategies or indicative funding identified (at least, that I could find); there are plenty of others around the country. This obviously isn't a problem for determining the *current* amount to allocate to W/C, but could increase it in the future.
- If your definition of "optimal" is to get as much of the various cycleway networks implemented as soon as possible, then the proposed funding in many cases won't cut it. For example, Rotorua's planned cycle network would easily cost millions of dollars to implement; yet currently the council is only allocating about \$70,000 over the next 10 years. So, if the Government wanted to push harder on promoting W/C and provide more incentives for councils to put up W/C projects, then there are plenty of worthwhile projects out there (consider that the \$91m I have estimated over ten years is still less than many of the major roading projects currently in the pipeline).

While this is an interesting exercise in numbers, the bigger picture must also be remembered. For example, a lot of W/C facilities will also be provided as part of other general roading projects (certainly, things shouldn't get worse for cyclists and pedestrians!), and will be subsidised from Transfund's general roading funds. Similarly, W/C projects can also be funded from Transfund's "minor safety" funding. Given that reported cyclist/pedestrian crashes make up approximately **18%** of the crash costs to the country (and we know that W/C crashes are significantly under-reported), it would not be unreasonable to see a similar proportion of safety funds spent in this area.

References

- To find local councils that have cycling information, including strategies, go to:
<http://www.can.org.nz/technical/tech-rcas.htm>
- Transit NZ's draft 2004/05 State Highway programme is at
http://www.transit.govt.nz/news/LandTransportProg/sh_plan.html
- To find links to local council LTCCPs, go to:
<http://www.localgovt.co.nz/AboutCouncils/CouncilsInformation/Consultation.htm>

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