



# City of Port Phillip - Healthy Tracks to School

Summary Report

June, 2024

Institute for  
*Sensible Transport*





Council respectfully acknowledges the Traditional Owners of this land, the people of the Kulin Nations. We pay our respect to their Elders, past and present. We acknowledge and uphold their continuing relationship to this land.

The Institute for Sensible Transport acknowledges the people of the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung language group of the eastern Kulin Nation on whose unceded lands we work.

We respectfully acknowledge their Ancestors and Elders, past and present.

We also acknowledge the Traditional Custodians and their Ancestors of the lands and waters across Australia where we conduct our business.

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# 1. The project



The City of Port Phillip has developed their *Healthy Tracks* program to boost the number of people able to walk and cycle to school. The *Healthy Tracks* program involves working closely with a chosen school to determine and overcome the barriers to active travel. St Mary's Primary School, located in St Kilda East has been the focus of the 2024 *Healthy Tracks* program.

This report provides a summary of the key findings from our work and outlines recommended changes to enable more people from the St Mary's community to walk and ride to school. This includes four safe routes that were discussed with the school community at an on-site workshop and during an online survey.

## 1.1 Project objectives

The main objective of the *Healthy Tracks* program is to increase the level of active travel to and from St Mary's Primary School by identifying and overcoming the key barriers to walking, bike riding and scooting. This program required collaboration with the City of Port Phillip and the St Mary's community, to create a plan to encourage active travel to/from school.

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## 1.2 What is active transport?

Active transport is a broad term that includes walking and bike riding. It relates to physical activity undertaken as a means of transport. This includes travel by foot, bicycle and other non-motorised vehicles.

## 1.3 The benefits of active transport

The benefits of walking or riding regularly to school are well established. Being active on the way to and from school can contribute to a student's daily physical activity and increases social and community connectedness. The health benefits are not limited to just a student's physical health, it also supports overall wellbeing and the creation of lifelong healthy habits.

Aside from the health benefits, active transport contributes to great places, cleaner local environments and economic benefits. Some of the additional benefits of active travel include but are not limited to:

- Enhances the environment by reducing emissions and traffic congestion
- Activates the area around schools, helping to increase passive surveillance and feelings of community safety
- Independently negotiating the walk or ride to school can increase a student's sense of independence and develops their responsibility, decision making and risk management skills.



## 2. What we heard from the school community





A series of community engagement activities were held to provide an opportunity for St Mary's students, parents and teachers to contribute to the *Healthy Tracks* project. The engagement also provided a chance for the school community to share their aspirations for safer, more sustainable transport choices to and from school. This section outlines what we heard from the school community, which formed the basis of our recommendations.

## 2.1 What we did

On-site workshop sessions were held at St Mary's Primary School on *National Ride2School Day* to provide an opportunity for the school community to share their concerns as well as aspirations for safer, more sustainable transport choices to and from school. Approximately 100 St Mary's students and staff members attended the two, 45-minute workshops. There were several events held prior to the workshops including a smoothie bike, a helmet parade and a free coffee was provided to parents who participated. The workshops included multiple collaborative exercises including hands-up surveys, interactive sticker activities (shown in Figure 1) and facilitated group discussions.

Additionally, an online survey was developed to provide an opportunity for the school community to tell us about their travel patterns to and from school, as well as what would make it easier or harder to walk or ride a bike to school.

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A total of 122 responses to the online survey were received.

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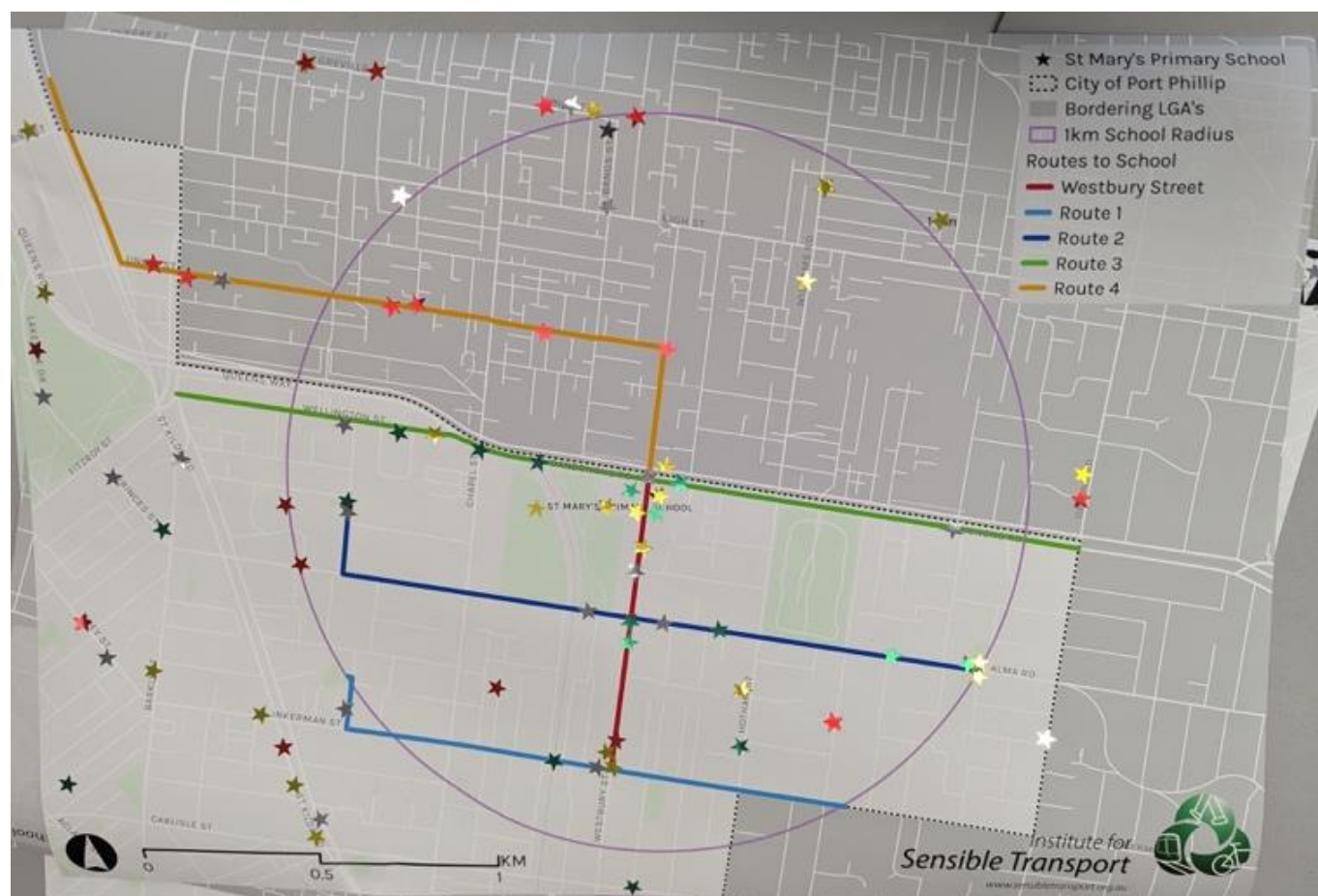


Figure 1 Example from the workshop activities

## 2.2 What we heard

Both the workshops and online surveys gave the St Mary's community a chance to express the key barriers that may prevent students from walking or riding a bike to school. Figure 2 below shows the general barriers to active transport that have been corroborated with the school community during our workshop activities. These issues include:

- There are not enough safe bike lanes and both parents and students don't like riding a bike with cars
- The distance from home to school is too far to walk or ride a bike
- Students often need to carry too many items to school, making it inconvenient to walk or ride a bike
- Many parents and students told us they had general safety concerns from antisocial behaviour in the area, especially around Chapel Street and Dandenong Road
- Students in particular told us that they often do not know the way to school and require better and more frequent wayfinding signage.

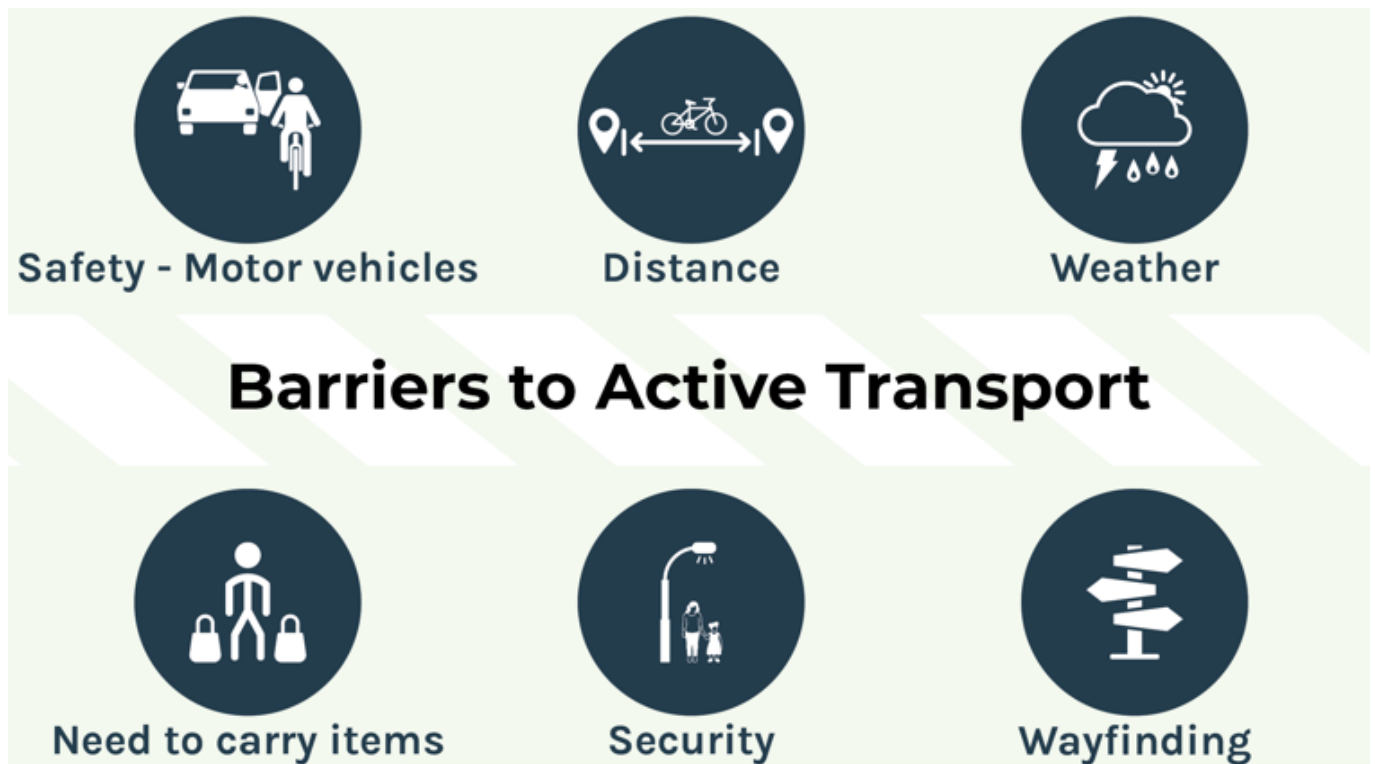


Figure 2 General barriers to active transport

Alongside the general barriers to active transport shown in Figure 2, both students and parents provided us with some additional concerns detailed in the online surveys. These included:

- Many students and parents told us that there is generally a lack of safe points to cross the road
- Many parents and guardians need to drive to work, which prevents them from walking or riding a bike to school with their child
- Both parents and students told us that many children are too young to walk or ride to school alone, this included students telling us their younger siblings are too young to walk or ride with them
- Both parents and students told us that the pedestrian crossing lights at many intersections are not long enough for students to cross safely
- Many students and parents told us they had issues with uneven footpaths making it difficult to ride a bike or walk on.



### 3. Key changes to active travel around St Mary's Primary School





The *Healthy Tracks* project provided council with recommendations on infrastructure that could improve the safety and attractiveness of walking or riding a bike to school. This may mean that changes will be considered to help make active travel easier for students to get to and from school. This section outlines what these recommendations will look for the St Mary's community and how they will improve active travel options to school.

### 3.1 Where are the recommended changes?

Figure 3 below details the four recommended safe routes to St Mary's Primary School. The routes to school were determined with the objective of increasing the number of students and parents choosing to travel to school using active modes. The routes to school were shaped through detailed analysis of the student catchment areas, existing active travel behaviour and aligning with the existing and future safe infrastructure. Additionally, an assessment of the routes for tree canopy coverage was undertaken and has been attached in Appendix 4.1. The recommendations from this report aim to improve the overall active travel experience along these designated routes, to provide students and parents with an easy to follow, safe route to school.

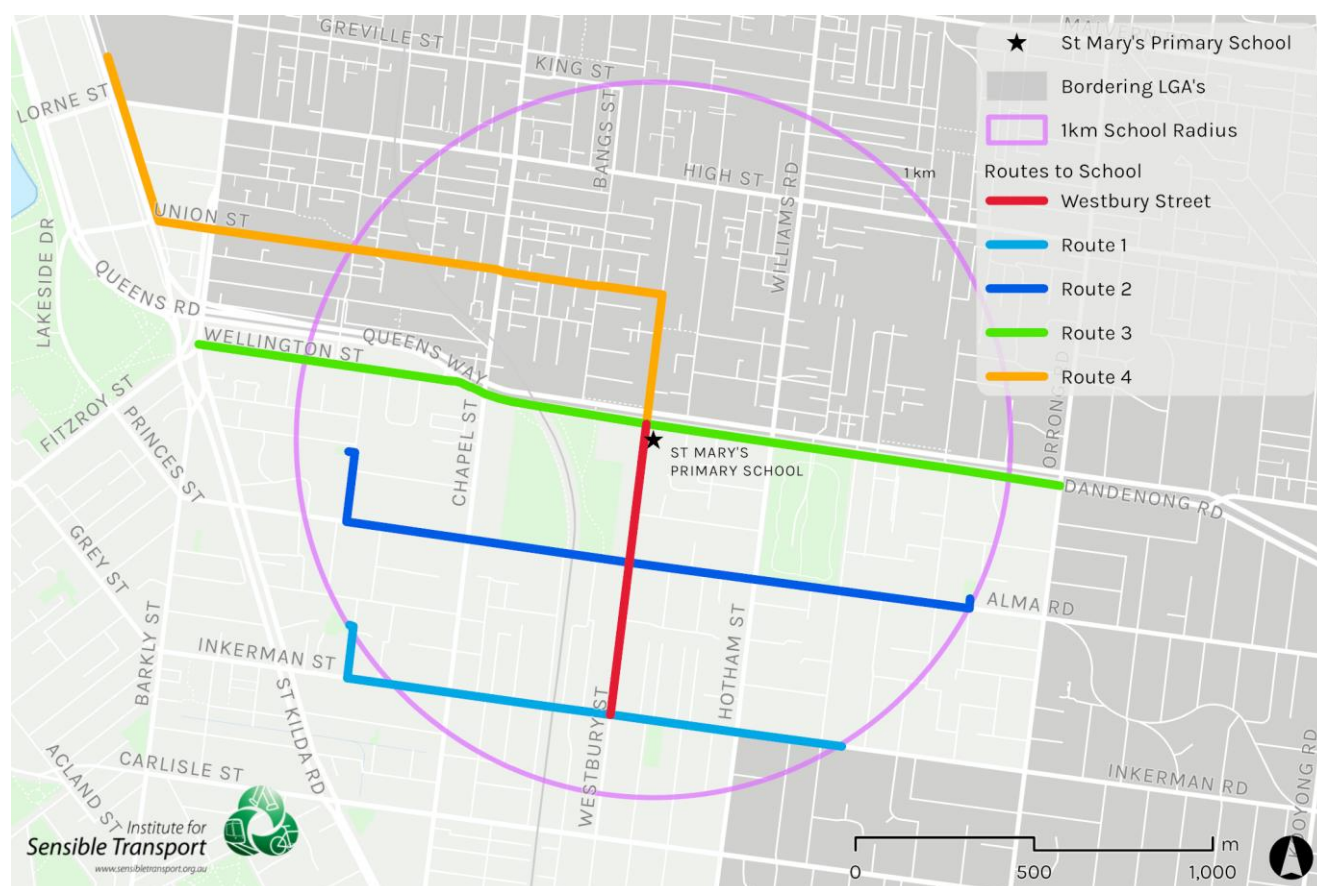


Figure 3 Routes to School

### 3.2 What are the big ideas?

The *Healthy Tracks* program has a set of recommendations designed to improve the overall active travel experience for both students and parents traveling to/from St Mary's Primary. Figure 4 below provides a brief explanation of the main infrastructure recommendations included as part of the *Healthy Tracks* report and provides a visual representation of the infrastructure type. Council will consider the installation of several of these measures on the four designated safe routes to improve the safety and overall experience for students and parents walking or riding a bike to school.



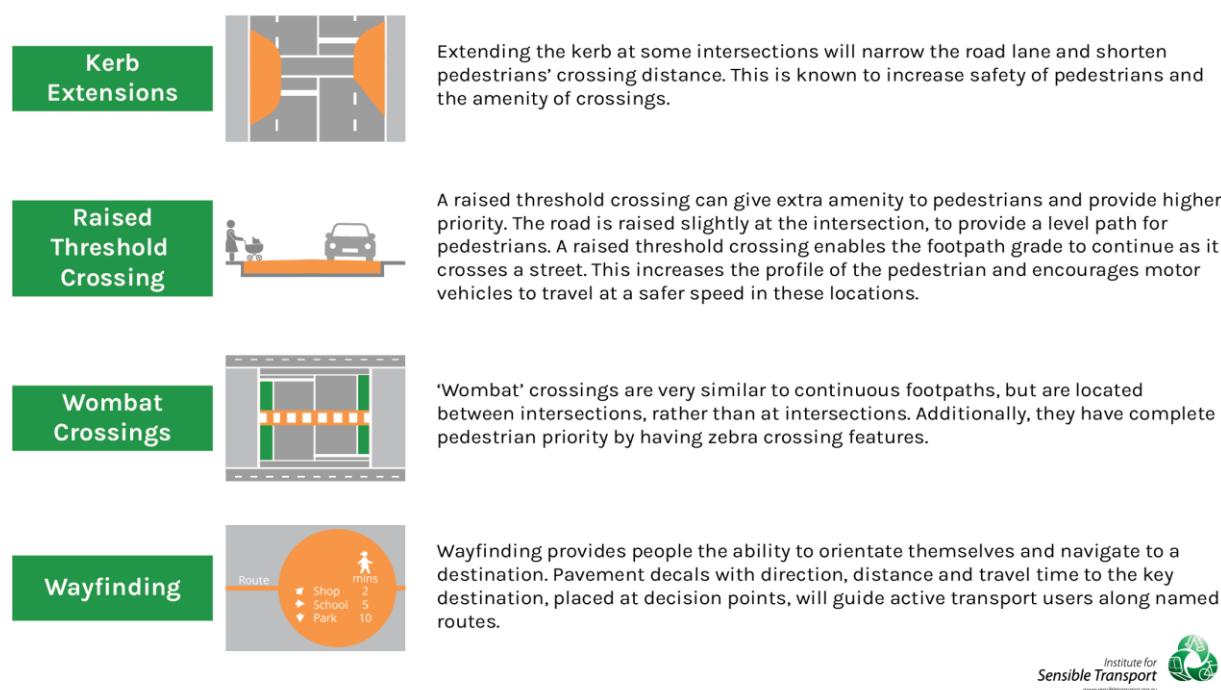


Figure 4 Recommended infrastructure types

Council will investigate the implementation of a variety of measures to enhance the overall experience for students and parents walking or riding a bike to school.

### 3.3 What else could change?

Alongside the major infrastructure changes that are detailed in the previous section, several quick and cost-effective opportunities were identified that would enhance active travel to school, whilst also delivering additional benefits to the local community. Some of these additional 'quick win' recommendations of the *Healthy Tracks* project are outlined in Table 1 below. Finally, an assessment of the routes for tree canopy coverage is attached as an

Table 1 Additional 'quick win' recommendations

| Recommendation                       | Description                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Bike parking                         | Bike parking is an essential element of the infrastructure required to enable students to ride a bike to school. Currently, there is no bike parking offered to parents dropping off/picking up their children. It is therefore recommended that six bike parking hoops be installed as close as possible to the entrance of St Mary's Primary School.                                                                     |
| Footpath maintenance                 | One of the major themes arising from the community engagement activities was the general poor maintenance of footpaths in the area. To mitigate these risks and improve the overall pedestrian experience, we recommend the implementation of a footpath maintenance strategy that will target footpaths that are non-DDA compliant or show signs of deterioration that could potentially compromise safety in the future. |
| Increased pedestrian crossing timing | A number of traffic light-controlled pedestrian crossings were observed to not provide sufficient time for young children/families to cross, which can cause unnecessary stress for students crossing the road. It is recommended that Council engage with the Department of Transport and Planning to discuss an increase in the pedestrian crossing sequence at identified key intersections.                            |



## 4. Appendix





## 4.1 Creating Greener Healthy Tracks

An important part of the *Healthy Tracks to School* project is to provide improvements to the streetscape environment which local students use to travel to and from school. The City of Port Phillip assesses *Healthy Tracks to School* walking routes for the level of canopy cover, to identify where new trees can be planted to increase the cover for students in the future.

Having trees in streets where kids walk to school is important for several reasons:

- **Shade and comfort:** Trees provide shade and cooling, which helps in reducing the temperature and mitigating the urban heat island effect on hot days. This makes walking to school more comfortable for children, especially over summer when heat related illnesses can occur.
- **Air quality:** Trees play a crucial role in absorbing pollutants such as carbon dioxide, and particulate matter from the air. Cleaner air means healthier children, reducing the risk of health issues such as respiratory problems.
- **Traffic calming:** Trees can act as a natural barrier between pedestrians and vehicles, which can help to slow down traffic. This creates a safer environment for children walking to and from school, reducing the risk of accidents.
- **Psychological benefits:** Trees and green spaces have been shown to have a positive impact on mental health and well-being. For children, being surrounded by nature on their way to school can improve their mood and reduce stress.
- **Sense of place and local identity:** Trees contribute to the overall beauty and attractiveness of a neighbourhood. They can foster a sense of community pride and encourage people to spend more time outdoors. The type of trees planted influence the look and feel of our streets.
- **Reconnecting children with nature:** Trees provide an opportunity for children to learn about and connect with nature, ecology, and the environment firsthand, and support further street greening and biodiversity. Schools can integrate tree-related education and activities into their curriculum, fostering a greater appreciation for the natural world.

In summary, trees on streets where kids walk to school promote physical health, mental well-being, safety, and environmental awareness. They create a more pleasant and conducive environment for children to travel through as they learn and grow.

From our most recent analysis of canopy cover captured in 2022 (see Table 2), Routes 1 (14.76%) and 2 (20.92%) both show lower canopy cover than the city-wide average for streets of 25% cover, and Route 1 below the overall canopy cover of 17.17%. Routes 1 and 2 will be assessed for planting opportunities to improve canopy cover for the future as council focuses on an overall increase to canopy cover by 2040. Opportunities for improved canopy cover for routes 3 and 4 will be investigated, however will be a lesser priority compared to areas of low canopy.

Table 2 Route tree canopy coverage

| St Mary's Primary School<br>Healthy Tracks to School | Canopy Cover<br>% of street area |
|------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Route 1                                              | 14.76                            |
| Route 2                                              | 20.92                            |
| Route 3                                              | 40.04                            |
| Route 4                                              | 46.02                            |



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