



4 February 2024

Mount Alexander Shire Council

Castlemaine VIC 3450

By email to: [info@mountalexander.vic.gov.au](mailto:info@mountalexander.vic.gov.au)

### **SUBMISSION TO MASC 2024/25 BUDGET**

Mount Alexander Cycling (MAC) appreciates this opportunity to make a submission to the 2024/25 Council budget process.

MAC notes that Council has endorsed the 2023-2033 Active Transport Strategy (ATS), and although the ATS did not contain a list of priority infrastructure projects, it is understood that Council may have several high priority active transport projects that it wishes to advance in the short term.

To progress its vision for active transport and to deliver its priority projects, detailed planning and design work must be carried out before any grant funding is obtained to build them. Hence Council must commit funding in the 2024/25 financial year for the planning and design of priority projects.

MAC would also like to see funding allocated to additional strategic work including the engagement of suitably qualified consultants to:

- a) Deliver initiatives in the ATS Initial Action Plan including an audit of existing tracks, trails and paths (see Mount Alexander Shire Council 2023b),
- b) develop the ATS into a Community Mobility Plan with mode-share targets and implementation timeframes, and
- c) facilitate additional community consultation including workshops with stakeholder groups, to help develop the strategy into a plan.

Active transport infrastructure is a sound investment by governments because it pays strong social, economic and environmental dividends.

As noted in the ATS, investing in the Shire's active transport assets will promote sustainable mobility, enhance the health and wellbeing of the community, and make roads safer for vulnerable users including children, the elderly and people with a disability (Mount Alexander Shire Council 2023a).

In addition to these significant benefits, McKinsey & Co. (2020) estimate that every dollar invested by governments in active transport infrastructure yields more than two dollars of socioeconomic and decarbonisation benefits for the community.

It should be noted that Council funding for active transport infrastructure in the years following publication of the 2010-2020 Walking and Cycling Strategy peaked at \$1.04 million in FY 2015-16 but reduced

significantly during the years leading up to publication of the 2023-33 Active Transport Strategy (see attached).

MAC is concerned that Council could lose both state government and local community support for active transport investment if it does not have any 'runs on the board' soon i.e., deliver one or more significant active transport projects in the next year or two.

Although the 2023/24 Council budget forecast more than \$1 million per annum investment in footpaths and cycleways for the 2024/25, 2025/26 and 2026/27 financial years, without robust long-term planning and a pipeline of 'shovel ready' projects, Council may not be able to deliver on this promise.

In light of a potential lag between project planning and delivery, and the difficulties of sustaining a long-term program of infrastructure investment, it is important to note the Climate Council of Australia (2023) argues that if Australian governments are to achieve their emissions reduction targets they must invest heavily in active transport infrastructure.

Their analysis suggests that governments must rebalance transport infrastructure investment "from now" by redirecting 50% of future transport funding to public transport projects and 20% to active transport projects (Climate Council of Australia 2023, p. 48).

"Under all emissions reduction scenarios the Climate Council modelled," the authors of the *Shifting Gear: The path to cleaner transport* contend, "a major and dramatic shift in the way most people get around is required" (Climate Council of Australia 2023, p. iii).

Therefore, as well as applying for State government grants, Council should consider committing its own funds to deliver a significant active transport project, given the considerable social, economic and environmental dividends that such investments can return to the community.

Council could also consider applying to the Essential Services Commission to increase the 2024/25 rate cap to pay for active transport infrastructure projects. Given the low cost of active transport infrastructure relative to public transport and roads, and the proven benefits of active transport investment, such an application could meet the Commission's criteria for resource efficiency and value for money. Applications to increase the rate cap close 31 March each year (Essential Services Commission 2023).

MAC stands with Council in its efforts to deliver active transport projects, but Council must lead by committing significant funds in this budget for:

- Delivering initiatives in the ATS Initial Action Plan,
- Developing a Community Mobility Plan (including Community Consultation),
- Project planning and design, and
- Project implementation.

It is MAC's assessment that any amount less than \$1.2 million in the 2024/25 Council Budget, for these activities, is likely to be inadequate.

Yours sincerely

Peter Strang

Secretary

Mount Alexander Cycling Inc.

C/- The Hub, 233 Barker St Castlemaine VIC 3450

## References

Climate Council. 2023. Shifting Gear: The path to cleaner transport. Potts Point, NSW: Climate Council of Australia Ltd.

Essential Services Commission. 2023. Guidance for councils applying for a higher rate cap. Melbourne: State of Victoria. <https://www.esc.vic.gov.au/local-government/higher-rate-cap-applications/guidance-councils-applying-higher-cap> accessed 3 February 2024.

McKinsey & Co. 2020. How a post-pandemic stimulus can both create jobs and help the climate. In McKinsey Sustainability. San Francisco: McKinsey & Company. <https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/sustainability/our-insights/how-a-post-pandemic-stimulus-can-both-create-jobs-and-help-the-climate> accessed 3 February 2024.

Mount Alexander Shire Council. 2023a. Active Transport Strategy 2023-2033: Working towards a safe, sustainable, accessible and connected network to encourage our community to become more active, more often. Castlemaine, Vic.: Mount Alexander Shire Council.

Mount Alexander Shire Council. 2023b. Active Transport Strategy 2023-2033: Initial Action Plan. Castlemaine, Vic.: Mount Alexander Shire Council.