

# Moonee Valley's Movers and Shakers



Photo: Courtesy City of Moonee Valley WSB

**The City of Moonee Valley is fair dinkum about getting people out of their cars. It wants people to make more trips, more often, either on foot or on a bike. And it is putting its money where its mouth is and committing resources to many significant active transport initiatives.**

Active transport generally refers to walking and cycling for travel to and/or from a destination rather than for recreation. It can also include the incidental activity that comes with using public transport, such as walking to a train station or tram stop.

In 2004, the city adopted a *Cycling and Walking Strategy* which aims to get as many people as possible of all ages more active in the community. The strategy recognises that improvements to the physical environment are helpful in achieving this, but an increase in people's desire to walk or cycle is crucial for its success.

Simon Bennett, Moonee Valley's Sustainable Transport Officer,

thinks we need a major jolt to get us out of our cars and into a new way of thinking.

'A crisis is needed to turn around this car culture. It's not until it hits the hip pocket that people will make a change. We are seeing this now with oil prices. We need to get away from the thought that walking and cycling is only recreational. You can do it for a purpose – as a way of getting to work', he says.

A number of programs and partnerships are currently underway within Moonee Valley to try and change people's mindset and their attachment to their cars.

The TravelSmart Communities project, run in partnership with the Department of Infrastructure, approached nearly 22,000 households in Moonee Valley and encouraged them to think about smarter uses of transport, such as walking, cycling or working out how they could use the public transport services in their area. Of these households, nearly 10,000 requested extra information including: public transport timetables and ticketing advice; cycling and walking maps and guides; and advice on smarter, more efficient car use, such as car pooling. >>>

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Simon says it will be interesting to see if the project will have any real effect on the way people travel to school and work.

‘At the time these households were contacted there was the first major petrol price increase and public transport was highly validated. It’s easy to say you are going to make changes when you are getting attention and participating in surveys, but the real test will be to see if the changes occur and whether they are sustainable’, Simon says.

A TravelSmart Education project ran parallel to the Communities project. The Department of Infrastructure identified a precinct near Essendon Railway Station that was heavily congested with traffic and had schools that were well serviced in the area. Information was provided to the parents and the children via the schools to get them thinking about changing their way of travelling to school and work.

The cities of Moonee Valley and Melbourne are also working together to develop School Travel Plans with local schools: Kensington Primary School (which is in the Moonee Valley area) and Holy Rosary (which is in the City of Melbourne).

The project is a mix of traffic counts and observations, student roll calls asking them how they travelled to school, parent surveys, and in-class activity which will involve mapping where the children live and how they get to school, with a combined parents information night.

‘We want people to start to consider walking as a first option then cycling, then public transport use. We are focusing on the positive aspects of active travel – the social aspects, the interaction between children, and the personal development children get from walking with others’, Simon adds.

The Walking School Bus program has always been seen as a key component of the Council’s Cycling and Walking Strategy and its success has strengthened Moonee Valley’s commitment to sustainable transport in general.

‘The Walking School Bus program for us is a good entry point into the school. It is an obvious link to the School Travel Planning project as it recommends the continuation and growth of Walking School Bus projects. It is a good first point of contact to get other things up and running in the school. It is a smaller way of getting to think about bigger things, if you like’, Simon says.

There are six schools running Walking School Buses, with 74 volunteers and 211 children registered to walk. Another two schools will come on board later in the year.

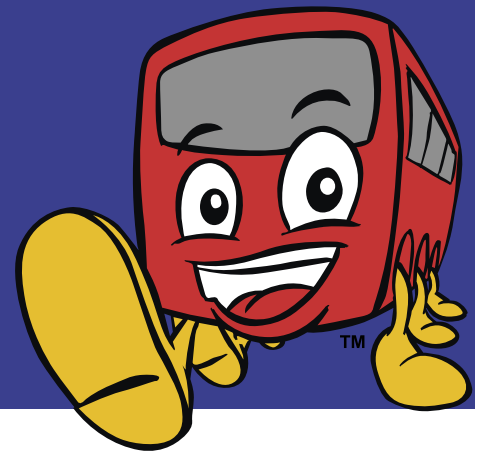
The buses are very visible examples of the impact active transport initiatives can have on a community when people are willing to give new ideas a go.

Coordinator Lisa Bagnati says Strathmore North Primary School’s project has had so much support that they have to run two buses simultaneously on the same route to accommodate all the children wanting to walk. One school, St Mary’s, has three routes walking every day. Signs, similar to SunSmart signs, have been produced to identify the schools that are ‘Walking School Bus Schools’.

‘A parent rang me after seeing the sign and wanted to know what it was all about. Another parent is about to start a Walking School Bus program at her school after seeing children walking from another school and speaking to those parents about the program’, Lisa says.

‘I had a training session for 18 parents this morning. I can definitely see that the parents are embracing the program. I get calls and emails from parents every day wanting to know what it is and how they can get involved. I really believe that in nine out of every 10 of these enquiries, they will either become a volunteer or they will allow their child to start walking on the bus.’

In keeping with the remarkable community spirit that has grown through the Walking School Bus programs statewide, Fiona Burnes, the City of Melbourne/YMCA’s Walking School Bus



Coordinator, was a parent volunteer coordinator at Kensington Primary School, and was invaluable in recruiting volunteers for that school and sharing resources she had already developed through her Walking School Bus.

Lisa says they are fortunate to have a number of other partnerships within the community that actively promote the Walking School Bus as part of their normal activities.

'We have a relationship with Neighbourhood Watch. The president is also involved with RoadSafe. When he goes around to schools and various community events he always mentions the buses in his presentations.'

The Moonee Valley Walking School Bus program also has a great relationship with the Essendon Football Club, which sends footballers to the school for launches and various events. All Walking School Bus children get automatic membership in the PUMA mosquito fleet, which provides them with a backpack full of goodies, invitations to footy club events, and a birthday card from the club each year. An event is currently being planned at Windy Hill for the children who walk on the bus.

Parents have commented that older children who may not want to walk on the 'official bus' are walking around or behind the buses.

'We are finding that the kids who started walking on the buses when they were young are now in Grades 5 or 6 and are walking independently with their friends to school. Being on the bus has definitely given them the road safety skills and confidence to go to that next stage where they are walking independently', Lisa says.

Lisa is about to instigate Walk to School Wednesdays to target children who don't walk on the bus. All students from all schools will be encouraged to walk together each Wednesday.

'This idea has definitely come about because of the success of the Walking School Buses', Lisa adds.

The City of Moonee Valley is committed to getting people out of their cars and onto its streets and paths. Only time will tell how effective active transport initiatives will be, but Simon Bennett is passionate about doing his bit and getting the message out.

'The public transport system wouldn't be able to cope if all of a sudden people stopped using their cars. I think the awareness of walking and cycling as a credible means of transport is getting more credence and people are starting to see it as an area that needs more development. We need major changes in transport funding. You've got to get a balance. In the past it's all been about road building and expansion; there needs to be more money put into supporting the increased use of public transport and infrastructure for increasing walking and cycling for everyone in the community.'

**For more information on the City of Moonee Valley's Sustainable Transport Initiatives, contact Simon Bennett, Sustainable Transport Officer, on (03) 9243 8738 or visit [www.mooneevalley.vic.gov.au/Services/Traffic\\_and\\_Transport/Sustainable\\_Transport/](http://www.mooneevalley.vic.gov.au/Services/Traffic_and_Transport/Sustainable_Transport/)**



Photo: Mark Farrelly

### What made the difference?

- *Council's proactive and public commitment to sustainable and active transport*
- *The integration of a range of active transport activities across the community*
- *The development of partnerships between local governments, community agencies and sporting clubs, each with a similar commitment to having more active communities*
- *Using the trust developed through the Walking School Bus program between the Council and the schools to develop other active and sustainable transport initiatives*