UNIVERSITY of TASMANIA

MENZIES Institute for Medical Research

DOVER

Understanding and PROmoting Active living in Rural Tasmania: UPROAR

Acknowledgments

The project is funded by the Tasmanian Government (Public Health Services, Department of Health) through a translational research funding agreement with the University of Tasmania (Menzies Institute for Medical Research). It is supported by the Local Government Association of Tasmania and University of Tasmania.

The work undertaken for this project was approved by the Tasmanian Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee on 29 January 2020 (reference number: H0018594).

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Dover Community Members

We would like to thank the Dover community members involved in collecting data and information for the audits and those who attended the workshops to discuss the findings and provided feedback on the report. Your input has been invaluable and critical to the development of this report.

What is citizen science?

Citizen science involves members of the public (citizen scientists) being actively involved in the research process. This might include designing tools, collecting and analysing data, interpreting findings and prioritising actions. Citizen science has been commonly used to help researchers and scientists monitor animal and plant populations and capture change over time. For example, the annual Aussie Backyard Bird Count calls on Australians from all over the country to count their local birds. This is something researchers could not do without the help of citizen scientists. This approach has not been used as often in health research but there is growing interest in involving the community in health-related research.

Why did we use citizen science?

There are a number of reasons why citizen science is used in health-related research projects. These include:

1. Gaining new perspectives on problems and solutions
2. Monitoring policy and program implementation
3. Obtaining difficult to access data
4. Mobilising support for action to improve health
5. Gathering locally-relevant data to inform policy and practice

In this project our 'citizen scientists' have helped us recruit other community members to help with data collection, helped identify which parts of the town to audit for their walkability, collected data on walkability, attended workshops where they helped researchers understand important things about their town as well provided additional sense-making of the data. Our citizen scientists provided feedback on the report and can use the report to bring about change in their community. This project would not have been possible without the citizen scientists involved in the project.

Suggested citation

Jose K. Stanesby O, Cleland V. Understanding and Promoting Active Living in Rural Tasmania: Dover Report. University of Tasmania, Feb 2021.

Executive Summary

This project aimed to identify features of Dover that make it easier or harder for residents to be active and walk around their town ('walkability'). Using a Citizen Science approach, where local leaders and community members are directly involved in data collection, the project involved auditing the physical environment and local policies and programs using established tools and taking photos of important town features that impact on walkability and active living. Group discussions were then held with local community leaders and residents to discuss the audit findings and identify local priorities and discuss approaches to sharing the findings more broadly.

Key Findings

Dover is a small town of great natural beauty situated on the sea and surrounded by mountains of the south-west area of Tasmania. It has a range of assets supporting walking and active recreation in the area, scoring 74% for town recreational facilities on the town wide assessment tool. The program and policy assessment tool showed the town lacked physical activity programs for younger and older adults in the area (scoring 21.5%). The foreshore region and the walking track are key assets that support many activities, but facilities such as the sailing club, bowls club and sports oval are important too. Most of the town's facilities, such as the post office, IGA supermarket, newsagent, public toilets and pharmacy are situated along the main highway that passes through town. These facilities are within walking distance of each other.

Two priorities were identified as having a negative impact on physical and social connectivity and walkability

- The lack of connection from the town centre to areas south of the Dover township (beyond Harvey Town Road where the foreshore track currently ends) was identified as creating a physical and social division in the town. Bates Creek and the Huon Highway were identified as barriers to walking and cycling from the newer developments to the south and the town centre.
- The intersection at the entrance to Dover where the Huon Highway meets Station Road and the road to the Southgate Shopping Centre. Poor signage, lack of clear pedestrian access, the presence of the bottle shop on the western edge of the intersection and the entranceway to the Southgate shopping centre all contributed to this intersection being difficult to navigate for pedestrians and vehicular traffic.

While the two key priorities identified would require a significant investment in infrastructure to address, there were low-cost options that might also support greater walkability, such as reducing the speed limit through the town centre and pedestrian crossings or islands to support pedestrian access to key aspects of town. There was strong support for investment in the physical infrastructure to connect the town as this was considered important for building social cohesion in the Dover community.

Other considerations raised included:

- The intersection of Station Road, Bayview Road and the Esplanade. While not a high traffic area the lack of signage and clear road markings made it difficult for vehicles to negotiate. Pedestrians walking the foreshore track needed to navigate their way across this intersection.
- The speed limit through the town centre and the heavy vehicle traffic created additional challenges
- Lack of safe pedestrian crossings to facilitate access to Southgate Shopping Centre

Introduction

We know that walkable neighbourhoods provide health, environmental, social and financial benefits. A neighbourhood's walkability is the degree to which it has safe, designated areas for people to walk or bike to work, school, dining, shopping and entertainment. Walkable communities are easier to get around, they support everyday connections and foster a greater sense of community.

Most of the studies looking at walkability focus on cities and large towns and we don't know very much about how our environment helps us or stops us from being active in rural and regional areas. In this project we are working with Tasmanian communities to find out what supports and hinders regular physical activity. We hope to find out the biggest barriers to being active and will work with community members to try to come up with ways to overcome these.

Being active is good for our health – it can stop us from getting diseases like heart disease, diabetes, breast and colon cancers, and osteoporosis. It is also great for managing our weight, blood pressure and cholesterol, and for keeping us mentally healthy and well. Research has shown that people living in rural parts of Australia are less active than those who live in urban areas. And rates of preventable health conditions such as heart disease, type 2 diabetes and high blood pressure tend to be higher in rural Australia than in urban Australia.

In cities, where we live, work, study and play we know the physical environment can affect how active we are. The way things like our neighbourhoods, streets, buildings, services, facilities, and public spaces are designed can either help us or stop us from being active. More 'walkable' neighbourhoods tend to have safe and high-quality footpaths, road crossings, good lighting, streets that connect to each other, and plenty of places to play and rest. But we don't know what 'walkability' looks like in rural areas. Small towns and some rural council areas may have access to fewer resources to develop the infrastructure to support walkability and active lifestyles. This project was designed to help us find out more about walkability in rural areas and what might be needed to support this.

What we did

This project used a Citizen Science approach to identify features of the town that make it easier or harder for residents to be active. Researchers from the Menzies Institute of Medical Research, University of Tasmania and partners from the Tasmanian Government Department of Health, Public Health Services, and the Local Government Association Tasmania have worked with local community members to support data collection in the town. This has involved working with a 'community champion' to identify which parts of the town to audit and then asking local community members to audit the physical environment and local policies and programs using established tools. During the audit community members also took photos of key town features. This information was collated before a workshop was held with community members to discuss the findings and identify priority areas for action and potential solutions. This group discussion was facilitated by researchers and attended by those who conducted the audits as well as other invited community members.

In Dover six people were involved in conducting the audits. The audits were conducted between July 15 and August 20 in 2020 and two workshops were held at Dover on Monday 14th September with a total of seven community members present to discuss the findings. Community champions provided an overview of the facilities and activities in the town that supported walking and active living while specific segment audits looked at areas of the town in more detail. The sections of the town that were audited are outlined below.

This report is a summary of the information collected as part of the audit and during discussions at the workshops. The report includes quotes from people who attended the workshops or from comments they made while doing the audits. Photos have been included to identify aspects of the environment being referred to.

It is hoped the findings included here will support further discussions in the town as well as support local action to support walking in the area.

MAP OF THE PARTS OF DOVER THAT WERE AUDITED

Overview of Dover

Dover is a town of approximately 850 people situated in Huon Valley Council (HCV) in southern Tasmania. It is a small town of great natural beauty situated on the sea and surrounded by mountains. Key facilities such as the supermarket, service station and community online centre are situated along the main highway. The town covers 4.04 square kilometres and has a density of 120.5 residents per km^2 (compared to Hobart which covers an area of 1,695.5 square kilometres and has a density of 130 people per km^2). The town has one District school with children from pre-kinder to year 12. There is a pharmacy, medical clinic, aged care facility, online access centre, community workshop, R.S.L., bowls club, golf club, post office, bank, accommodation, community church, hardware store, petrol station, bottle shop, skate park and sports oval. The main industries for the town are fishing, forestry and tourism.

In recent years Dover has seen the population grow as people from other parts of Australia have moved into the area. While this was considered a positive outcome with more families moving to the area there was recognition that the changing demographics of the town had impacted social cohesion.

> *since then the demographic has changed considerably to being from older families been here for generations. … the first wave of new people coming in and now the demographic's changed even more with younger families and lots more people from interstate moving here and so much so that the community identity that was once very cohesive is now not as easily recognisable because there are a lot of people in the town now that you don't know.*

Dover and the surrounding towns have a number of active community groups including the Dover South Action Group, Far South Future Group and groups associated with the RSL, sailing club, bowls club, golf club and other local recreational activities in the area. As Dover is a small community this means that individuals may be involved in a number of groups and this can reduce capacity to support local projects.

> *We're all purely volunteers who work and have families juggle multiple roles within our community groups and that so you can have great ideas like with regard to walking tracks. Everybody knows what we want and everybody knows what the best outcome would be but it's actually project-managing something from start to finish that's a bit of a barrier.*

Dover is considered to have a radial street design – this means roads spread out from a centre point. While Dover is situated on the sea it was noted that Dover '*has its back turned to the sea*'. The town centre did not easily connect to one of its greatest natural assets.

> *It's always struck me as being somewhat a disadvantage to the town in embracing where they are because of this physical locality of its shops and businesses having their backs to that and why it was so important that sailing club was there because it bridged from the traditional through to the aspirational in that you have an activity that was the sole employ of people around these parts to get around.*

Findings from the Audits and Workshop

Overview of Facilities

In general, Dover was considered to have a range of recreational facilities that were well maintained by the council and used by the local community. This was reflected in the town-wide assessment score of 74% that captures the availability of amenities and physical features such as schools, walking trails, parks/ playgrounds, recreational facilities and water activities. In Dover this includes walking tracks and trails, public parks, playgrounds, a skate park, playing fields such as the Jim Casey Oval and Bowls Club as well the swimming beach and river for water sports. The town has an active sailing club that plays a central role in the community, but a series of recent arson attacks had burned the sailing club rooms among other facilities. This was noted as being a significant loss to the community as it had acted as a community hub. Currently, the town does not have a community hall or meeting place. There is no community transport or taxi service.

While the facilities were well maintained it was noted that there were not many programs offered in the area as reflected in the of 21.5% on the programs and policies assessment tools. Structured activities such as bowls or the sailing club offered some activities but there were few general recreational activities in the area. Exercise or walking groups have not been sustained long-term as support and fees impact on participation. There is no afterhours sports or other activities for young people.

FORESHORE PATHWAY ON BAY VIEW ROAD

Overview of Physical Features

Supporting walking and being active (facilitators)

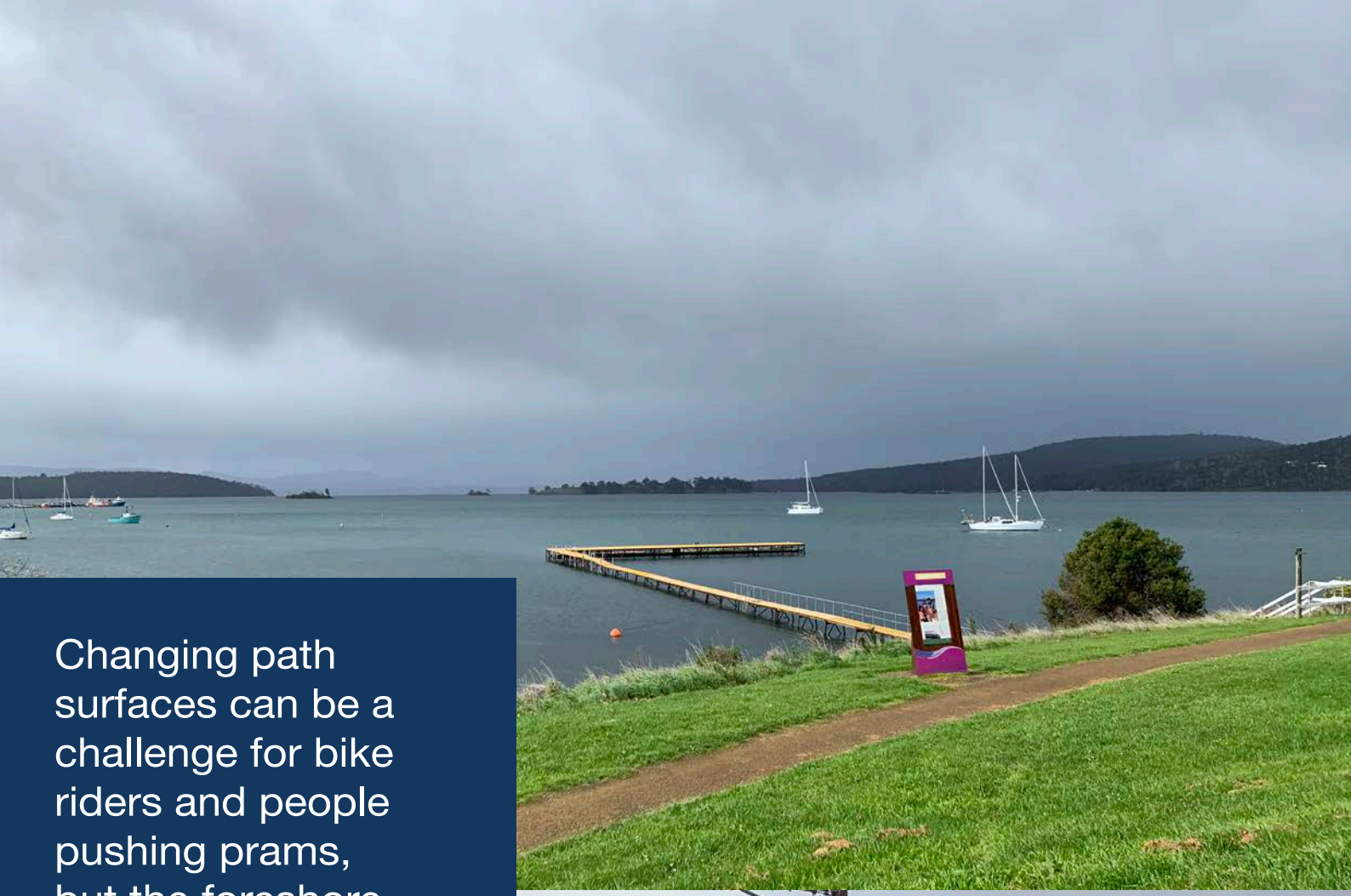
The walkway that extended along the foreshore was identified as critical infrastructure that was well used by a cross-section of the community.

> *The foreshore area is the jewel in the town's crown. A long expanse of public open space, comprising flat grassed areas interspersed with native plantings, a playground, fitness park and public toilet block, free BBQs and multiple access points to Dover Beach. There are also a number of parking spaces adjacent to Kent Beach Rd. This area is well utilised as a family recreation facility - the path often used by dog-walkers, children riding bikes, families and older residents going for walks etc. It is really the only flat, grassed area that HVC owns (aside from Jim Casey Oval 3km out of town) so most public events (such as Dover Seafest, the TASSAL 10 Fun Run, Sailing regatta) are held here.*

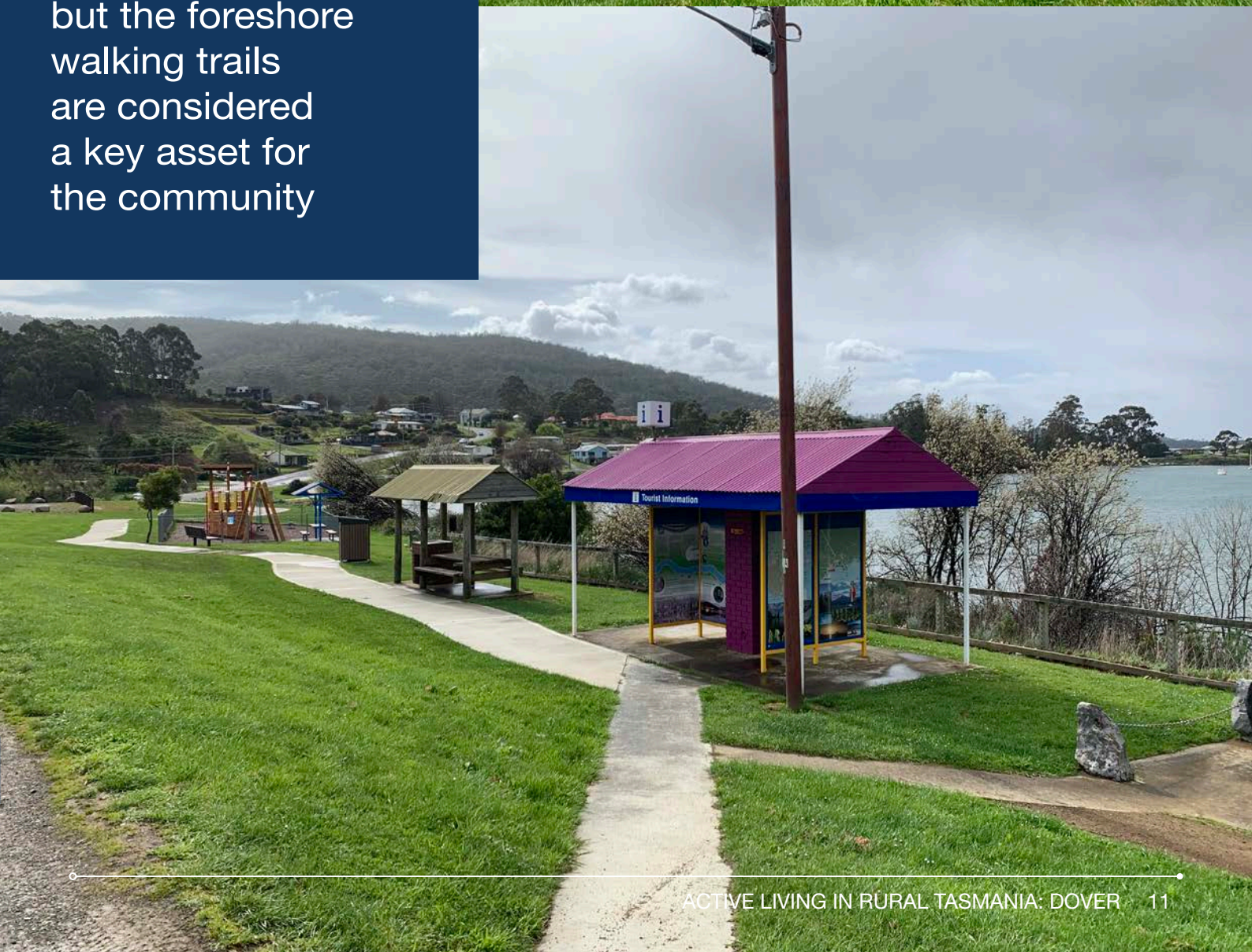
The walking trails along the foreshore have been progressively developed and extended as funding became available. It was noted that the changing surface from natural gravel to concrete did create some challenges for bike riders and people pushing prams but on the whole, it was considered a key asset for the community.

Footpaths and areas in the town centre were well maintained and supported connectivity for those who lived in this part of town with the main amenities and facilities.

FORESHORE PATHWAY ADJACENT TO THE HUON HIGHWAY NEAR THE NEW PLAYGROUND



Changing path surfaces can be a challenge for bike riders and people pushing prams, but the foreshore walking trails are considered a key asset for the community



Aspects that made it difficult to be active (barriers)

The newer housing areas on the southern edge of town (Cemetery Road and McNaughten Road), where there was the greatest density of young families, were considered to have poor connections to the town centre. The foreshore pathway stopped at the Old Kiln on the southern edge of town and for the many families and people who lived beyond this there was no safe way to connect to the town centre on foot or by bike as the highway and Bates Creek acted as significant barriers.

> *Residents living past either end of these points (which includes a large number of older residents and families) don't have safe access into town (except via vehicle) - largely due to the proximity to the highway and narrow shoulders on the side of the road*

The highway and the resulting traffic, which included trucks, made this unsafe for pedestrians or cyclists.

> *This area on the road, from there all the way through to Dover Fish is a challenge, really, really dangerous.*

> *There's no way for these people here to get down to there to get on the walking track unless they take their car because to walk around that area there is very unsafe.*

The physical disconnection created by the highway and creek was also identified as impacting on social connectivity and cohesion for the town.

> *That was what I was going to bring up today was the fact that the town is separated into two groups. When you get to Dover Fish the track stops at the end of Harveytown Road and so from there over to here where huge amounts of population is there's no way of getting along the road to walk, to ride a bike, to have a skateboard, anything. It's very dangerous to go around that corner there.*

> *Well it would get this side of the town engaged with the other side of the town, it would allow the young people who seem to live out this way, it would give them the safe option of community engagement as well this side of town. For that side of the town this place with all of its health outcomes available here, which aren't available if you can't get here because it is so unsafe to do so.*

Areas north of the town were also identified as having poor pedestrian access due to lack of safe walking tracks, no road shoulders and no defined trails.

> *From the school heading north out of town and essentially there is no formed pathway but a lot of people do just drive but then there are people who walk along there occasionally and also mums with kids. So it's a very difficult journey, actually, to walk out of town up to those houses. They're drains, there's runoff that you then have to set put onto the road to avoid, you've got trees that are very close to the road and you have to once again step out onto the road to avoid.*

HIGHWAY DISCONNECTING SOUTHERN PARTS OF THE TOWN TO THE TOWN CENTRE

Intersections

Two intersections were identified as problematic in the town; a) the main intersection at the entrance to the town, and b) the intersection between Station road, Bay View Road and the Esplanade near the wharf.

Town Entrance

Poor signage was identified as contributing to the challenges at the intersection to the entrance to the town. While the highway continues around the bend there is the option to continue straight ahead on Station Road to the wharf and beach or turn left on the road to the Southgate Shopping Centre (the only shopping centre in the town). It was felt that lack of signage here contributed to confusion for people entering the town.

The Huon Highway/Station Road corner is confusing for users coming into the town heading south as the highway appears to go straight (Station Road) instead of around the corner. Traffic heading north on the highway have to cross the road on the blind corner to access Southgate Shopping Centre.

But there's no real signage to tell you which way to go apart from there's a sign on the corner that says Southport and you know that that's that way you're supposed to go.

The Huon Highway intersects Station Road and the entrance to Southgate Shopping Centre. There is a large section of road to cross to get from one side to the other with a very small median strip in the centre.

In addition, it was unclear who had right of way at the intersection.

Because you actually don't know who really should be giving way, especially coming from Station Road, I reckon.

> *It's really like Rafferty's Rules, you make it up as you go. What's the pathway to survivability? Will I go into the traffic this way or that way?*

LACK OF PEDESTRIAN ACCESS AT MAIN INTERSECTION WITH NEW FOOTPATH TO SOUTHGATE IN LEFT OF PHOTO, BOTTLE SHOP ON THE RIGHT

The infrastructure designed to support pedestrians to access Southgate Shopping centre did not align with more intuitive access routes and was considered to be poorly conceived.

Adding to the challenges at the intersection was the position of the local bottle shop and cars parking and entering and exiting this shop from the highway.

> *If you go to the shops you've got to go all the way up to that one to cross over, and then walk all the way around; you can't just go - the way that it … way those little rampy things are designed is … it's not direct access.*

Wharf Area

The second intersection identified as challenging was between Station street, Bay View Road and the Esplanade near the wharf. This intersection did not have the same traffic density as that at the town entrance but a lack of signage at this intersection was also identified as making it difficult for drivers to know who had right of way.

> *Nobody actually knows who's got right of way because there's no signs. Of course if you're local and you've always driven up and down that road and you're an expert you always think you've got right of way.*

This intersection also impacts directly on pedestrians walking along the foreshore walking tracks with pedestrians needing to cross from the walking track on the Dover Beach side of the intersection to the point where it recommenced on Bay View road. The changing surfaces along the foreshore path was also identified as contributing further to challenges in the area.

> *Ill defined intersection for pedestrians at Station/Bay View/Esplanade Roads. No obvious pathway.*

> *The stopping and starting thing that you just mentioned, that's part of the problem; different surfaces along the way. That kind of reduces the connectivity a bit. It's okay if you're just walking, but as soon as you've got a wheelchair or prams and scooters and all that sort of stuff, you start to think about those sorts of things.*

The wharf area became busy in summer as people parked their boat trailers adding to the confusions at this intersection.

> *So it's a very confusing intersection, basically, a busy one like in the height of summer when you've got your boats there's a lot of activity on the wharf and then people walk –*

Future impacts on intersections

Both of these intersections were considered to be manageable at present when the traffic in the area was not too busy, that if traffic volume increased these intersections would become more difficult to navigate for motorists and pedestrians.

> *I think the only saving grace from all of it is that we're not a busy town. Generally, it's safe, because you can see, you just have to be patient; you can see what's coming where … You use the eyeball method. But if we were to become a busier centre it would be really fraught with it.*

> *Again, because it's not too busy, it's okay, but if it was busier - there's cars coming from the wharf.*

The Dover area has recently been identified by the HVC as a potential site for the development of mountain bike tracks and there is planning for an art installation by MONA at Lune River in response to the bushfire in the region in 2019. These two developments were identified as having the potential to exacerbate issues at these intersections.

INTERSECTION OF STATION ROAD, BAY VIEW ROAD AND ESPLANADE

Traffic and safety

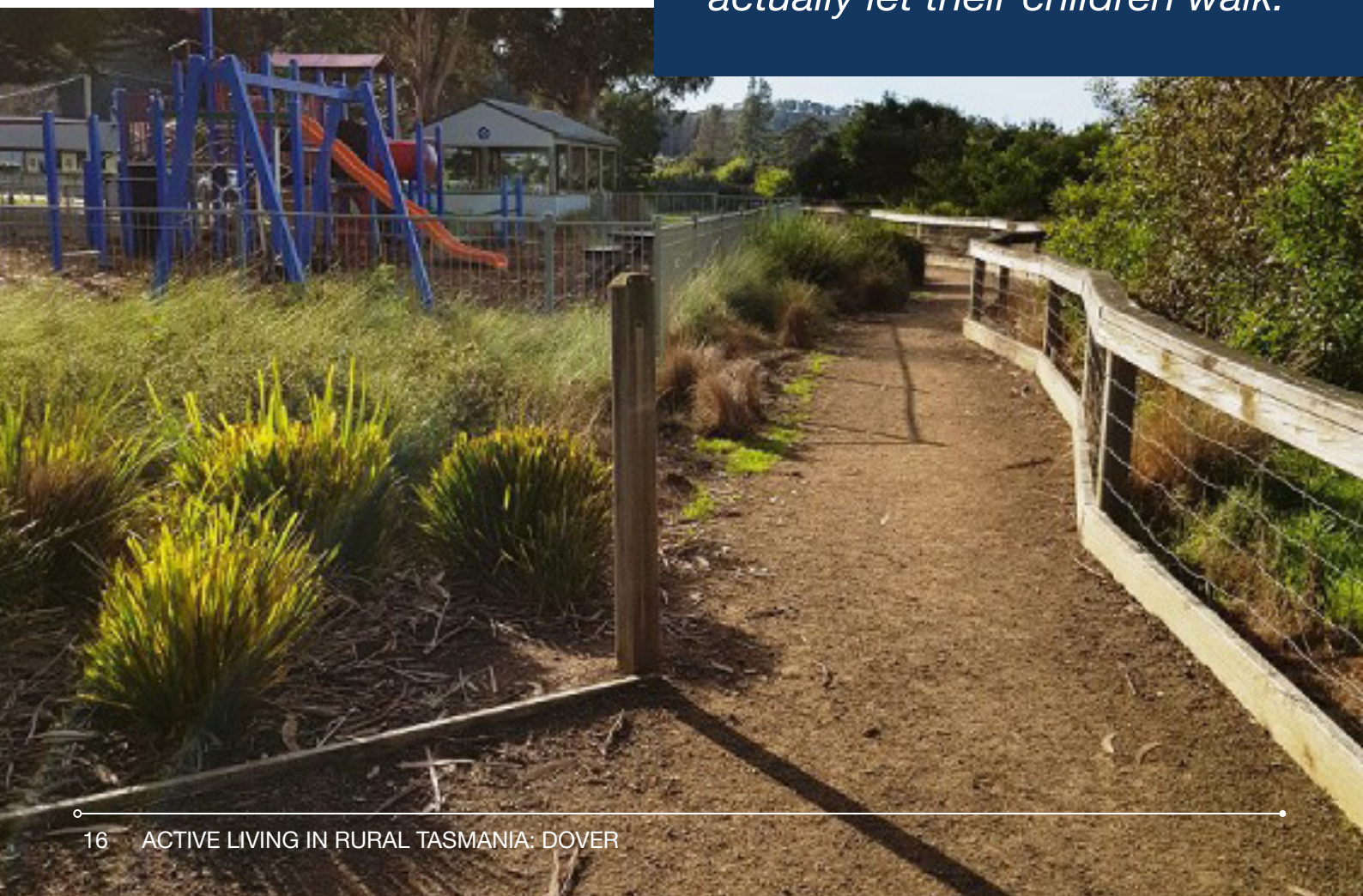
While it was acknowledged that Dover does not have high density traffic relative to major towns or cities the main highway to the southern part of Tasmania passes through the town. There was discussion about the number of trucks that use the highway, traveling through the town as a result of the fish farms '*across the bay*' and forestry activity in the area. As well as the tracks there was '*a huge drive in, drive out population every day*' to support these and other industries such as tourism.

This did raise concerns about safety, a particular concern for those with younger children and in relation to the speeds the traffic travelled through the town or when negotiating the main intersection.

Yeah, it wouldn't hurt. It wouldn't hurt for the traffic to slow down. It's a very sharp corner and if you've got the heavy trucks coming from the south coming north the corner around where the bottle shop are, they do swing wide to get around –

And that's the thing: my son's starting to want to go for bike rides. And these are exactly the things that are giving me nightmares. But you're so close to the road. The highway just runs through and there's really not much space in some places, to be off the road. And there's trucks going through and speeding cars.

> *Even though we were quite close there's no way I would have been letting him walk on his own because the highway is meant to be 60 but people are always flying along. There are quite a few families who do live north but I don't think many of them would actually let their children walk.*



Priorities

During the workshops participants were asked which of the identified features they considered a priority for action.

Priority 1. Improving Connectivity

While the intersections were acknowledged as problematic it was the area south of Dover and the disconnection between the areas around McNaughten and Cemetery road from the town centre that was identified as the priority by the majority of participants because it cuts the town in two. People living in this area of town have no walking access to the town's facilities. It was felt that there was the land and potential to extend the walkway to this area of town. This would also connect the town centre to the Jim Casey Oval which is also situated south of the town.

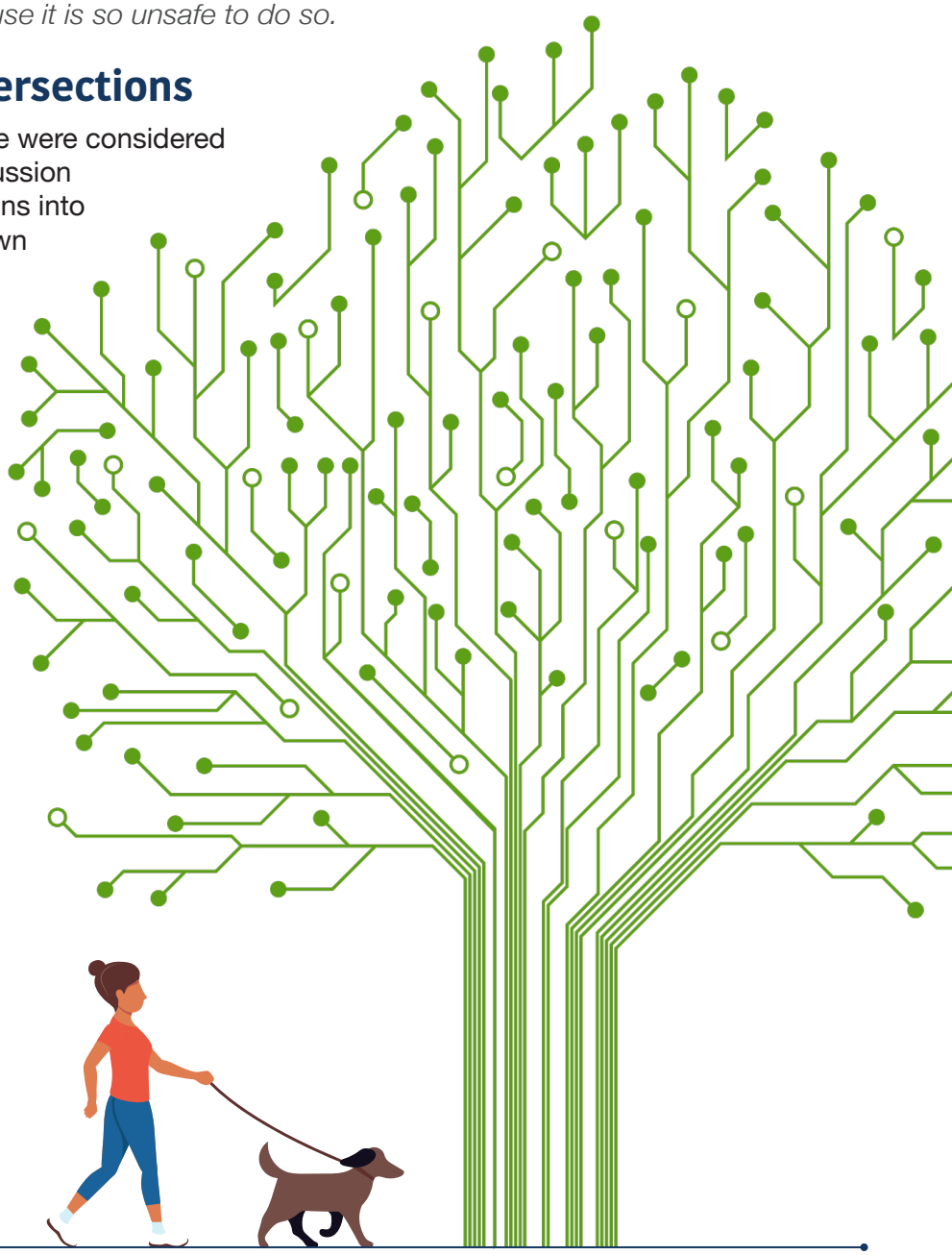
> *Well it would get this side of the town engaged with the other side of the town, it would allow the young people who seem to live out this way, it would give them the safe option of community engagement as well this side of town. For that side of the town this place with all of its health outcomes available here, which aren't available if you can't get here because it is so unsafe to do so.*

Priority 2. Improving Intersections

The two intersections discussed above were considered priority areas although there was discussion about how there had been investigations into turning the main intersection at the town entrance into a roundabout and this had been considered too difficult due to private landownership in the immediate vicinity

> *It's on the council plans. It's already passed to be a roundabout but it's been like that since I've been here ...there's all council drawings about the roundabout, how it's going to fit and everything else*

The intersection between the Esplanade, Station Road and Bay View Road was also considered a priority as it impacted on walking along the foreshore.



Possible solutions

Improve connectivity

Discussion focused on major infrastructure works to improve the connectivity between the town centre and areas on the southern part of town and the main intersection. There was an understanding that increasing connectivity to the town centre would be possible:

> *Like I think we found a pathway many years ago that you could actually go via mostly road reserves and right of ways that would make that possible.*

However, solutions to the challenges associated with the entrance to the town were understood to be more problematic and to have had feasibility studies in the past that had highlighted potential problems.

> *No. And I'm not sure it's fixable, either, from the perspective - from my understanding, they were going to do a roundabout there. They did like a feasibility study and basically the bottle shop was in the way and would have to be removed if that was going to go ahead. So I think that's why the whole thing got canned and was sort of never looked at again.*

However, when prompted to consider other potential interventions such as speed limits, signage, traffic calming and pedestrian access there was recognition that these measures could address some of the issues raised during audits and the workshop for these and other 'problematic' areas in the town.

Signage

Signage aimed at increasing awareness of pedestrian crossings was considered to be ineffective. Currently, no such signs existed and the only warning to traffic was to watch for swans crossing near the Old Kiln area.

However, improved signage at the main entrance to the town that provided information about how to access attractions such as the beach was considered of value.

> *But there's no real signage to tell you which way to go apart from there's a sign on the corner that says Southport and you know that that's that way you're supposed to go*

> *these are the main street and so all of the area down by the caravan park and all of the park area and the beach and the wharf, nobody knows it's there because there's no signage and you can't see them from the main road.*

There was discussion about improving signage at the intersection between Station Road, the Esplanade and Bay View Road as this would be useful to clarify who had right of way.

> *Nobody actually knows who's got right of way because there's no signs. … I've looked at it and I've just gone actually how would you know? In some parts of the world they have what they call a four-way stop where everybody has to stop and give way but nobody's got right of way. So everybody stops and goes "who wants to go first?".*

It did appear that the addition of signage at the two problematic intersections discussed during workshops would clarify who had right of way with respect to vehicular traffic. Such measures might also improve pedestrian access as there would be less uncertainty about the movement of cars in these areas.

Lighting

When raised lighting was not considered an issue for walkability in the town. In fact, low level lighting was acknowledged as important for ensuring natural attractions such as the aurora were not impacted.

> *One of the beautiful things about here is if we have an aurora*

Speed limits

Except for the school zone speed limits (40km/hour during the designated times of the day) on the northern parts of the town the speed limit through Dover was 60km. There was support for reducing this to 50km as a means of improving safety for pedestrians and local traffic in the town.

> *Yeah, it wouldn't hurt. It wouldn't hurt for the traffic to slow down. It's a very sharp corner and if you've got the heavy trucks coming from the south coming north the corner around where the bottle shop are, they do swing wide to get around*

> *Personally, I think it could be even slower, coming through there. Where would you start it? If you're going back along the highway and you're coming up and sort of hit Bay View Road to the left there, probably from there upwards, down through the town to the school, that could all be a 50 zone, I reckon, and really slow the traffic down through there.*

Traffic calming measures

There was discussion of other potential traffic calming measures in other areas of the town. This included a pedestrian crossing near the school, speed bumps along Kent Beach Road near the caravan park and the use of a 'rumble strip' in some areas:

> *We've always wanted speed bumps put in near the caravan park because there's little kids that'll cross to go to the playground from the caravan park but –*
>
> *Painting lines is obviously a much cheaper option, you think people might slow down if they see them but what if the painted lines had something a little extra in them like that stuff that makes your tyres vibrate –*
>
> *The ideal thing would be if they closed that road - the Esplanade [near the wharf area] - off. … it's not actually a gazetted road anyway, as I understand it, and it would give us a lovely lot of green space there.*

It is noted that the suggestion to close the section of the Esplanade referred to above was subject to a previous referendum by the HVC and the motion was defeated.

Conclusion

Dover is a small town of great natural beauty situated on the sea and surrounded by mountains of the south-west area of Tasmania. It has a range of assets that support walking and recreation in the area although lacks programs for young people and older adults. The foreshore region and the walking tracking are key assets that support such activities.

While efforts to extend and enhance pedestrian and cycle connectivity have been made, the lack of connection between the areas to the south of the town centre is considered not only to impact on access to services but to also negatively impact social cohesion.

The two intersections discussed were identified as real challenges, but locals are aware of these challenges and have adapted their driving and pedestrian behaviour accordingly. Improved signage, line markings and other measures were identified as potential mechanisms to improve car and pedestrian movement at these intersections.

A range of non- or low-level infrastructure measures such as changing the speed limit through town and pedestrian crossings were identified as having potential to improve walkability and pedestrian safety around the town. It was recognised that if the proposed developments in the area proceed, namely the mountain bike tracks and trails and the art installation at Lune River, traffic through the town will increase and such measures will become more important.

> *So if that [Mona art installation and bike trails] all goes ahead we will see increased traffic, so signage will become more important to make sure that the roads remain safe, because they will get busier.*