



Acknowledgments

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Smithton Community Members

We would like to thank the Smithton 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: Smithton Report. University of Tasmania, Feb 2021.



Executive Summary

This project aimed to identify features of Smithton 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, identify local priorities and discuss approaches to sharing the findings more broadly.

Key findings

Smithton is a small town situated on the Duck River estuary, close to the coast and surrounded by fertile agricultural land. The town is of sufficient size to have extensive community facilities including schools, businesses and services. It has a range of assets that support 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 that our Citizen Scientists were less aware of whether these elements existed in their town (e.g., access to school grounds) and the audit tools indicated a lack of programs, aside from organised sport, to support recreation in the town for older adults, people with disabilities or adolescents (scoring 26%).

The foreshore walking track is a key asset that supports recreational walking and links the southern areas of the town to the central and northern parts of the town. The community sporting facilities are extensive, centrally located and very well maintained. Most of the key facilities, such as banks, post office, supermarkets and shops are situated in the centre of town along the Emmett Street, Smith Street, Nelson Street and King Street block. These facilities are in walking distance of the majority of the town's residents. The existence of the Smithton Recreation Trail Plan from 2007 was identified during the workshop and reference has been made to the recommendations from this plan in the following report.

Priorities

The overall priority identified in this project was to **“Extend what we currently have. Make things link up.”** Two specific priorities were identified that reflect these considerations.

1. Improving the condition of the informal track from the southern end of Emmett Street and connect this to the informal track that exists between the western end of Upper Grant Street and Nelson Street. Currently there exists a gravel track at the southern end of Emmett Street and a track that runs between Nelson Street and Upper Grant Street with a bridge that crosses a creek. However, the condition of the gravel tracks and lack of lighting or other supporting infrastructure means this track is not accessible to all who live in the area. Improvements to this track were identified as having the potential to improve walkability and connectivity for residents in the Upper Grant Street units and the aged care facility with services in the centre of Smithton. Upgrades would also improve access to the community recreation precinct on Nelson Street.

2. Further extension of the East Duck River Foreshore Trail in a northerly direction and connecting the trail to the Massey Street lookout. This trail is considered a key community asset and ongoing development and extension of this trail was identified as a key priority. It was noted that while the trail was well known to locals and there was clear signage indicating the length of the trail and time to walk between key destinations there was not signage from the centre of town to direct visitors to the town to this facility.

These two priority areas were identified in the 2007 Smithton Recreation Trail Plan with improvements and extensions to the existing foreshore track identified at this time as a key priority. Some relevant development has been undertaken but there remains a desire to further extend the trail and connect it to the Massey Street lookout. The development of the existing Emmett Street/Upper Grant Street tracks was not a key recommendation in 2007. However, these upgrades were recognised for this project as having the potential to improve the connectivity for people living in this area with key services and facilities in the town centre.

Other considerations

Features that support walking such as more seating, rubbish bins, water fountains, provision of dog poo bags and improved lighting in some areas featured prominently during the audits and discussions.

Creating a track that looped from Carnac Court, through the hospital grounds to Upper Grant Street would also involve upgrading existing walking tracks and was discussed as another area that could improve connectivity. This short connection would in effect connect with and extend the Upper Grant Street/Emmett Street track outlined above, providing a pedestrian route from south Smithton, through the hospital grounds to the existing Emmett Street track into the town centre. It was felt the upgrade to the Emmett Street/Upper Grant/Nelson Street tracks was a higher priority because of the higher density housing and its proximity to key services and facilities.





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.

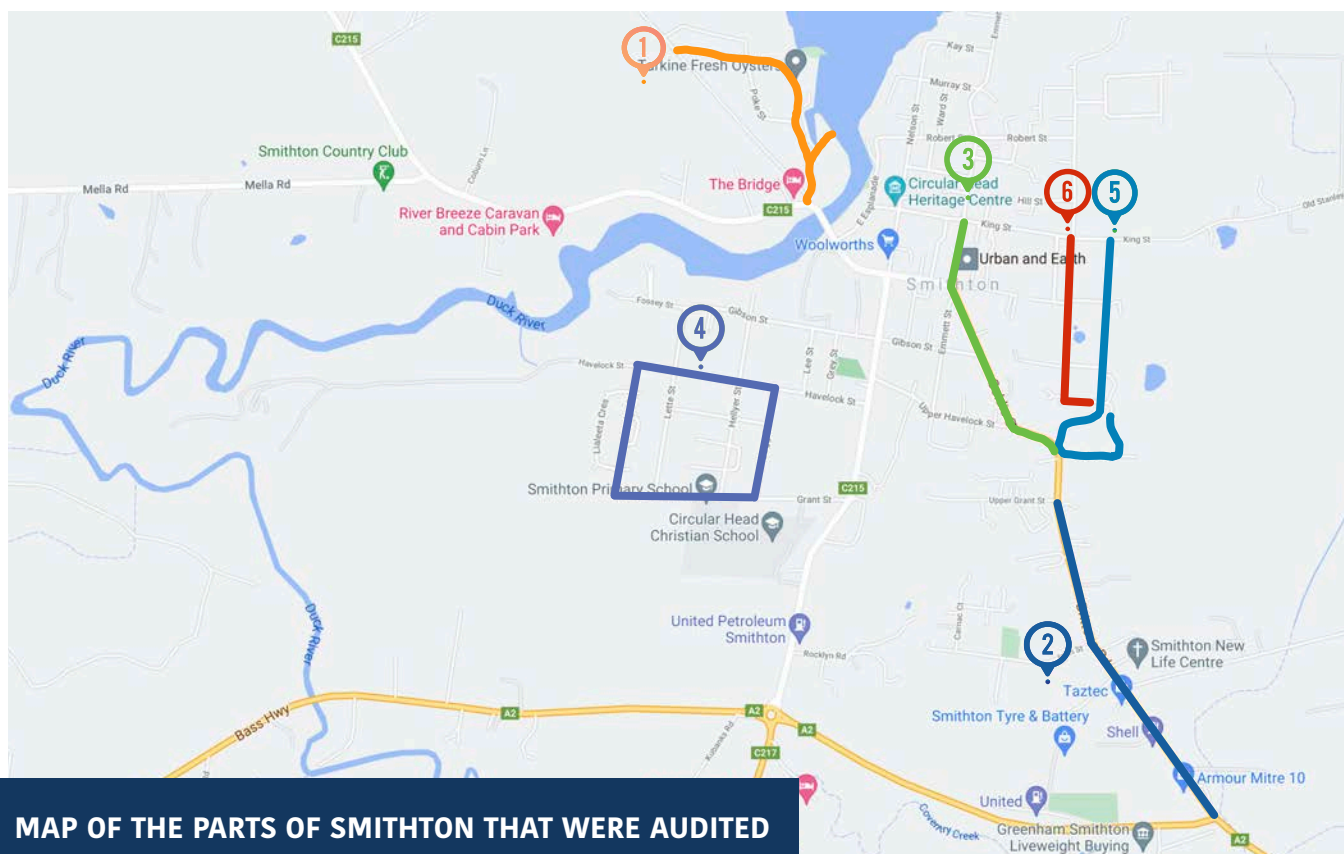
What we did

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 for Medical Research, University of Tasmania and partners from the 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 Smithton seven people were involved in conducting the audits. The audits were conducted between July 15 and August 20 in 2020 and one workshop was held at Smithton on 3rd November 2020 with a total of four 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 local action to support walking in the area.





Overview of Smithton

Smithton is a town of approximately 3,300 people situated on the Duck River in north-western Tasmania. Key industries in the area include forestry and timber production, agriculture, dairy and prime beef production, commercial fishing and aquaculture, manufacturing, tourism and vegetable processing. The town covers an area of 9.07 square kilometres and has a density of 361 residents per km² (compared to Hobart which covers an area of 1,695.5 square kilometres and has a density of 130 people per km²).

The town has extensive sporting and recreational facilities, the majority of which are centrally located. Smithton has one public primary school, one Catholic primary school (St Peter Chanel Catholic School), one public high school (Years 7 – 12) and one Christian School (Kindergarten – Year 12). There is a District Hospital with 12 acute beds and accident and emergency service, medical centre, two pharmacies, aged care facility, Service Tasmania Centre, library and online access centre, community centre, post office, banks, accommodation, multiple churches, hardware store and petrol stations. The Circular Head Council and the Circular Head Aboriginal Corporation have their offices in Smithton.

The population of Smithton has been relatively stable over the past decade or so at approx. 3,500 people, although as industries in the area have expanded or contracted over the years there has been some movement of people in and out of the town. This stability contributed to the sense of community expressed by our participants.

I like living in Smithton because I think I know a lot of people and I know the lay of the land and that sort of thing. And I think I know a lot of people. Not as many as I used to know. There seems to be a lot more different faces.

Our community members discussed the sense of community here and reported that they felt safe and would be happy to walk around the town in the dark. Discussions revealed that community members appreciated the

relaxed pace of [life] – like the lifestyle is relaxed, access to key services and lovely shops and that kind of thing. But also beautiful coastlines and stuff around Circular Head. So not just Smithton. There's a lot of beautiful outdoors spaces.

This sense of community, relaxed lifestyle and access to the outdoors were important to our study participants.

Smithton is considered to have a grid street design – this means the streets run at right angles to each other to form a grid. Many of the key facilities are in the central grid of the town and the recreational facilities are also centrally located. The Bass Highway bypasses the town directing heavy traffic away from the town centre.

Findings from the Audits and Workshop

Overview of facilities

The town has extensive sporting and recreational facilities that include the centrally located Circular Head Community and Recreation complex that incorporates sporting fields for Australian rules football, cricket, tennis, netball and an astroturf hockey field and adjacent skate park. The new Smithton Wellbeing and Indoor Recreation and Leisure Centre is located nearby and includes a six-lane 25-metre indoor swimming pool and fitness facility. This centre adjoins an existing indoor sports building used for basketball, badminton and squash. Other town facilities include a bowling club, golf course and pony club. General recreational facilities include walking trails, public parks and playgrounds, river for water access and a swimming beach (although this is >15 km away). Most facilities were reported to be in good or excellent condition with good access although not all facilities had good signage. There is no community bus service although long distance transport options are available.

While there were many opportunities for participating in organised sport or structured physical activity for all ages, it was noted that there were few opportunities for community-based physical activity programs such as those traditionally offered through community-based organisations such as the PCYC.

CIRCULAR HEALTH COMMUNITY AND RECREATION CENTRE



Overview of Physical Features

Supporting walking and being active (facilitators)

The East Duck River Foreshore Trail was identified as important physical infrastructure that supported recreation of a large cross-section of the community. It connected the southern areas of Smithton (Fossey Street, Wedge Street) and northern areas of Smithton (Kay Street, Murray Street) to the town centre and facilitated access to the high school on the western side of the river from different areas of the town. The northern section of the walkway that followed the river estuary from the boat ramp to Flowery Flats Road included fitness equipment, a playground area with picnic tables, water fountain and seating as well as information boards about birdlife and other natural features of the river.

P1 I've never gone for a walk on that [foreshore trail] and not passed –

P2 Yeah. Somebody is always on it.

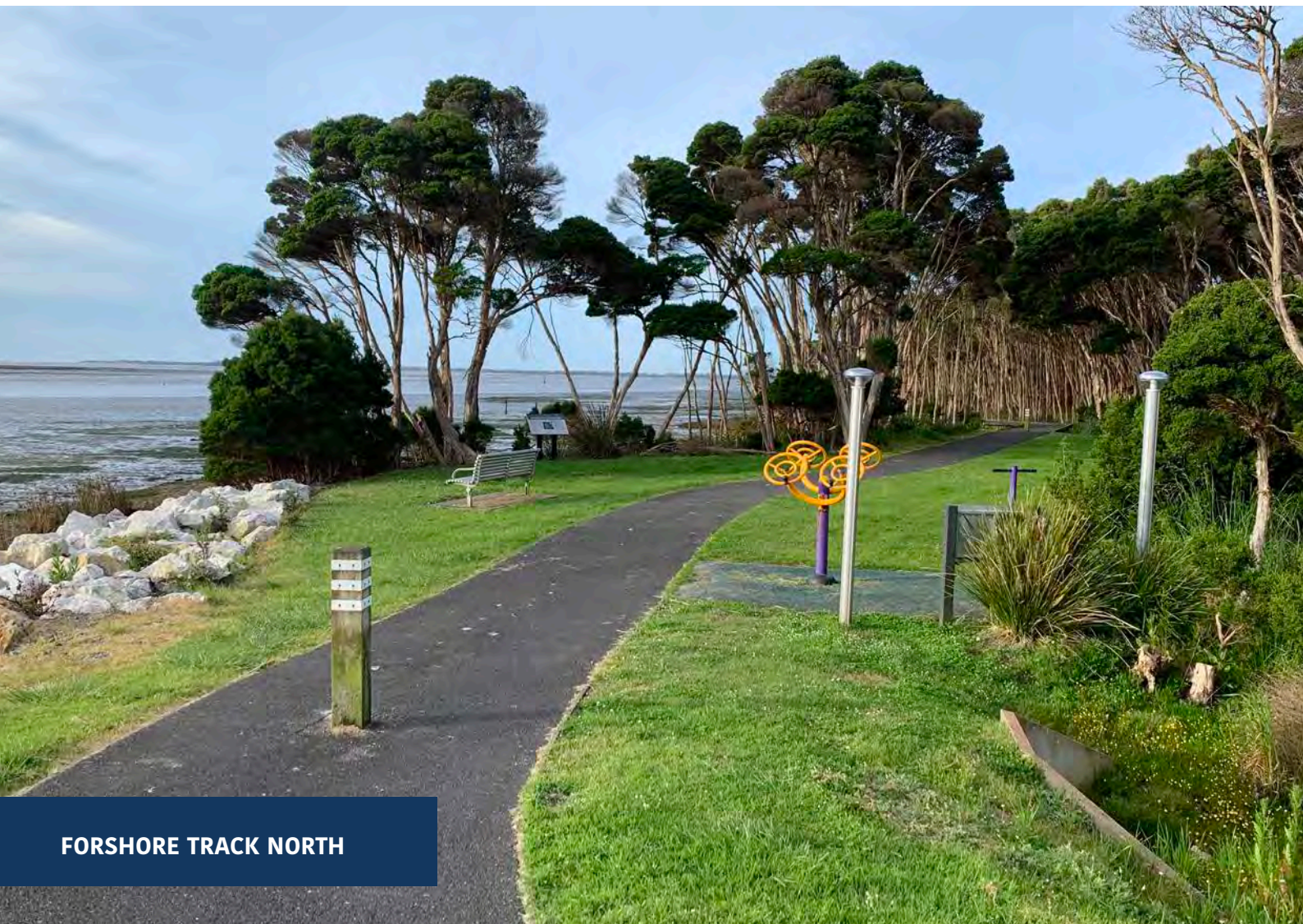
P1. You know, there's always somebody on it. And there's exercise equipment right along here.

P3 And it is nice, because it's along the river and it's got some signage and things about –

P2 Birds and –

P3 - about the birds and –

P2 And there's a little playground as well. So it's a popular park isn't it?



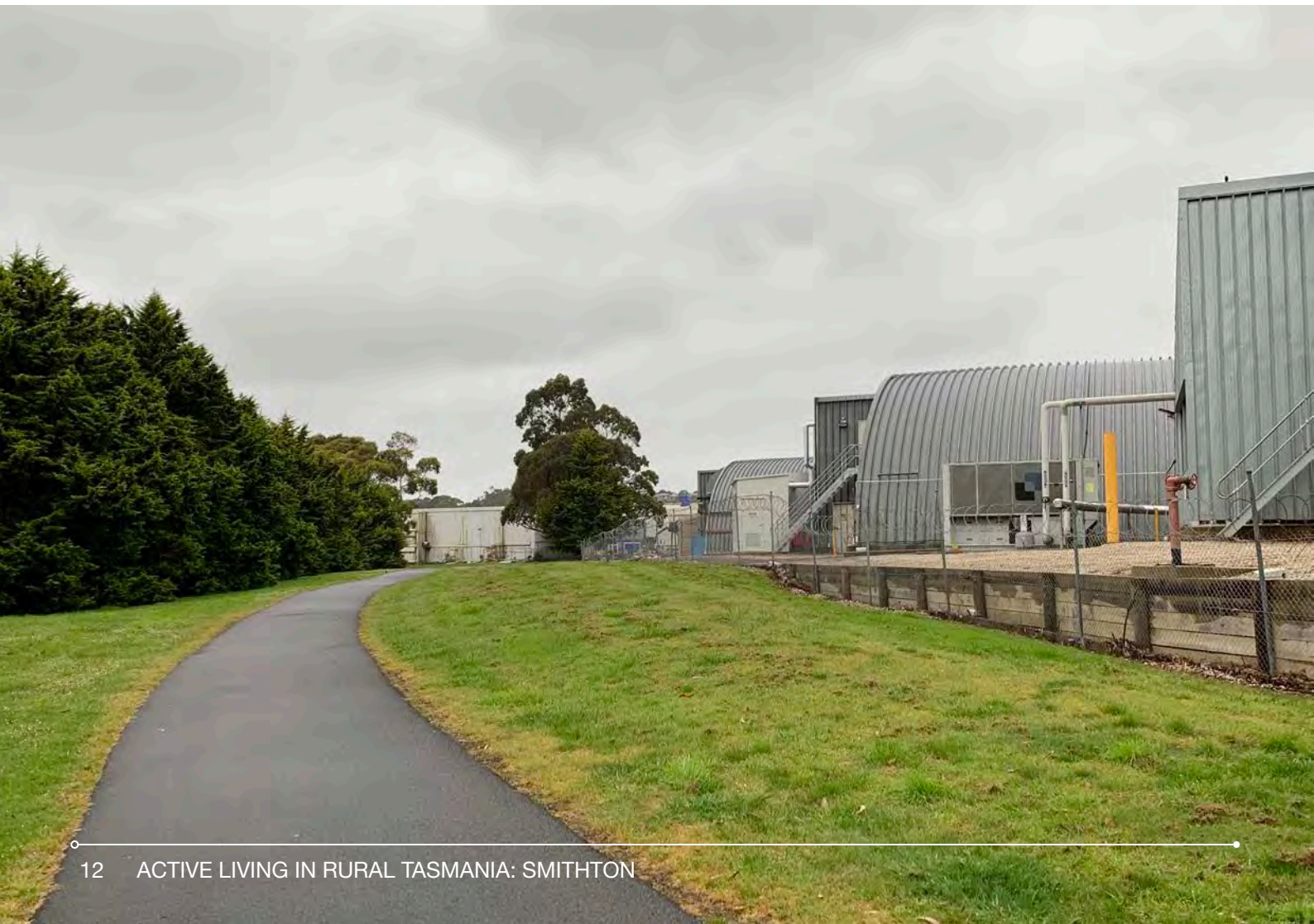
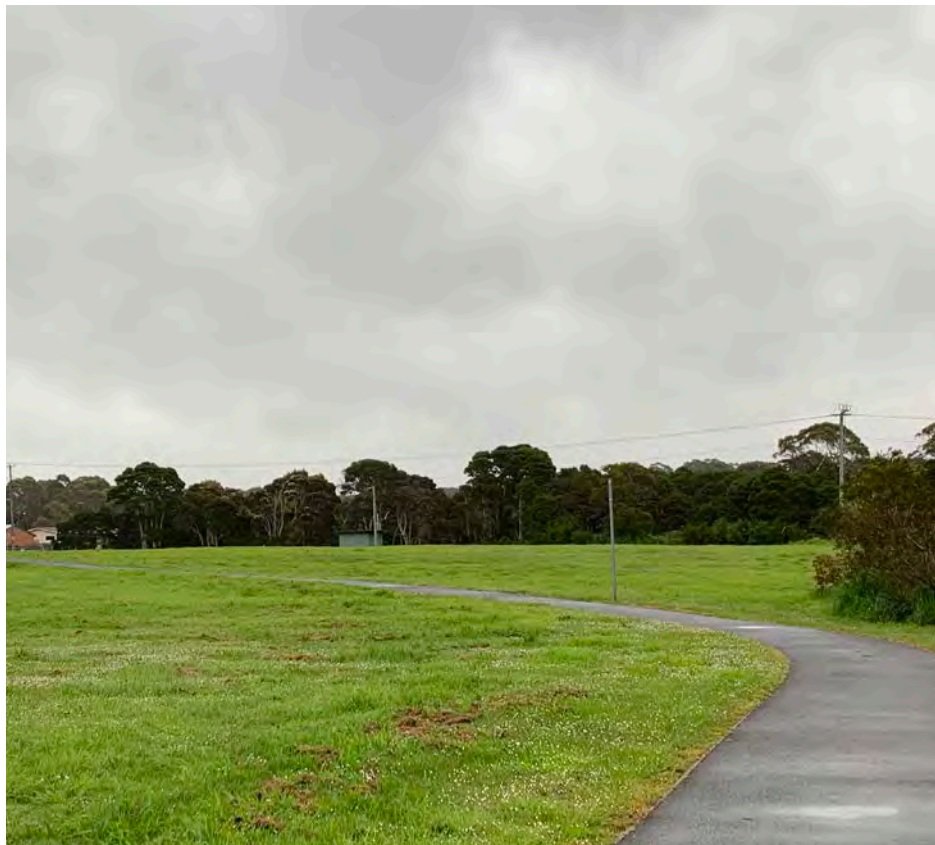
FORSHORE TRACK NORTH



What I love about the boardwalk as well is it's a nice view and it's different and there's boats or birds or whatever. So that's just that little bit nicer than just walking around town.



The southern part of the trail - from Davis Street to Fossey Street - passed by the McCains Foods factory. This area had less amenities with no fitness equipment, information boards or tables and more open green space but there was some seating available along the river. This trail was well used by all members of the community.



The West Esplanade reserve on the western side of Duck River was also identified as a local destination. This reserve had BBQ facilities, tables, open green space and a fenced children's play area. This park was also accessible from the eastern side of the town with a walking path over the bridge that connected to the East Duck River foreshore pathway. Several other playgrounds and parks existed throughout Smithton including ANZAC park on King Street and playgrounds on Hellyer Street, Wedge Street and Lialeeta Crescent.

Footpaths and areas in the town centre were well maintained and supported connectivity with the main amenities and facilities in the town.



Aspects that made it difficult to be active (barriers)

Smithton was identified as a town that prioritised the needs of car users over pedestrians or cyclists; cars are far more important. The strong 'car culture' was identified as impacting on the capacity to promote walkability in the town, with car users having a stronger voice with respect to infrastructure and support.

P1. Yeah, I know that they get – people that drive cars get very antsy about if they lose a carpark

P2. That's what I was going to say. It wouldn't make any difference if the pedestrian was between the person who wanted to park at a shop – they wouldn't slow down and watch out.

P3. Because we used to have a crossing in the main street, but we don't have one anymore.

Supporting features

Lack of signage, seating, rubbish bins, water fountains, lighting in key areas and supply of dog 'poo bags' for dog walkers were identified as barriers to walkability.

No. I think in the middle of the main street there's a rubbish bin and there's not another one until you get right back around to the other side of the street. And if you're doing this loop down here, it's probably about 3kms before you can get rid of it. And if you know that, you get very tempted to just leave the dog poo.

Also we have lots of people walking dogs so extra rubbish bins along our tracks would be amazing!!!

The lack of signage that directed visitors to the East Duck River Foreshore track or playground areas was also noted as impacting on walkability. There was also a lack of signage on key linking walkways and tracks such as the existing track that connected Upper Grant Street to Nelson Street and the southern end of Emmett Street. It was noted that roads on the western side of Duck River along the esplanade and connecting streets were poorly signed.

A lack of lighting in key areas was also identified as a barrier. Solar lighting was used on the East Duck River foreshore track, but the existing lighting in some areas was identified as inadequate. Some of the less-formed track such as the existing track connecting Upper Grant Street, Nelson Street and southern end of Emmett Street had no lighting.

We have lots of people walking dogs so extra rubbish bins along our tracks would be amazing!!!



Footpaths

Footpaths in the town centre were considered adequate but the more peripheral areas of town (for example, the western side of Duck river and roads connecting to the Esplanade and surrounding streets) had no footpaths.

And then the road that runs off this way, that's sort of a link road. That didn't have any footpaths, didn't have any gutters or anything like that. But it could also be linked up to the Esplanade here to make it a bigger – you could make it like quite a big loop to walk as well. If you had the footpaths and that to go with it.

In Massey Street and Sampson Avenue some of the footpaths had been upgraded but it was noted that this had not been done along the entire length of the street. Some key connecting roads such as Maurice Street at the southern end of Sampson Avenue that went downhill and connected houses in the area to the St Peter Chanel Catholic Primary School were identified as being in poor condition or poorly maintained.

And none between Sampson Avenue and down the – like there's footpaths along the street, but then you get

around the hill and there's this. Which... It gets really slippery down around the hill. ... And it's quite cracked and ... in wintertime this is really slippery because it's always covered in ... grass clippings and it's never ever cleared off.

On the main access road - Brittons Road - there are footpaths on both sides until the Dream Builders Church when the footpath continues along one side of the road until you reach the service station. While the footpath is well maintained, there is no pedestrian crossing or islands along this access road (or the other main access road into Smithton: Nelson Street) that supports pedestrians to cross the main access roads that have heavier volumes of traffic.

It gets really slippery down around the hill. ... And it's quite cracked and ... in wintertime this is really slippery because it's always covered in ... grass clippings and it's never ever cleared off.





Traffic and safety

While the main highway bypassed Smithton, traffic speed was identified as a safety concern for pedestrians in the central town block. The main access roads to the centre of Smithton had 60 km/hr speed limits and the town block that supported most key services (bounded by Emmett, Smith, Nelson and King Streets) had a 50 km/hr speed limit but, given the high pedestrian use in this area, 50km/hr was identified as too fast for pedestrians in the area.

P1. But how could it be 50 in the main street? Like that's too fast, really.

P2. That's way too fast.

P1: In like the main little –

P3. That and probably around Woolworths.

P4. Especially where there could be kids and stuff.

P3. Yeah, that's what I was thinking.

P2. A lot of traffic. Foot traffic.

Priorities

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

Priority 1. Improving Connectivity

The key priority identified was improving or extending existing tracks and trails and improving connectivity or 'linking' existing infrastructure.

P1. Extend what we currently have. Make things link up.

P2. Exactly. ... And it doesn't all have to be concrete. It doesn't have to be sealed. It can be good, compacted gravel and things like that.

A number of possible tracks and trails were discussed but the identified priorities included; a) extending the Eastern Duck River Foreshore Trail and connecting it to the Massey Street lookout and, b) improving the condition of the existing informal track from Upper Grant Street to Nelson Street and linking it with the informal track from southern Emmett Street. These two priority trails were considered important because they would improve recreational walking opportunities (eastern foreshore track extension) and improve connectivity and access to services for the residents of the retirement units in Upper Grant Street and surrounding homes, respectively.

Upper Grant. Here we go. Senior cits. ... There's just vacant blocks here. So coming back in, so does that link up with Emmett Street? Yes, it does. So here. So there's already a path that comes through here.

These priority areas built on existing informal infrastructure that could be made much more accessible through improvements to the surface of the current tracks, the addition of seating and lighting and improved signage.

Priority 2. Improving features that support walking

The addition of rubbish bins, seating, signage and lighting as well as reducing the speed limit in the town centre were all identified as having the potential to support walkability in the town. While the East Duck River Foreshore track was identified as having most of these key features it was considered there was still room for improvement.

Definitely the boat ramp, a pedestrian sign probably wouldn't be a bad idea, where you've got to cross there to go onto the walking track.



Possible solutions

Improve connectivity

Improving connectivity was identified as a key aspect of the Smithton Recreation Trail Plan in 2007 and remained a key priority in this existing project. While the 2007 plan focused on recreation trails, the current project was interested in walking to key destinations and services as well as for recreation. The two priority areas identified in this report address both recreational walking and daily living activities. While much of the discussion focused on improvements in supporting features when prompted to consider connectivity and accessibility, improving the existing informal trails on the southern end of Emmett Street and Upper Grant Street and Nelson Street was identified as having significant potential to enhance access to services and support walking for people living in these and surrounding areas. Informal tracks already exist and a bridge over the creek between Upper Grant Street and Nelson Street appeared to be in good condition. Upgrading the surface of these informal tracks, and providing seating, lighting and signage would increase track accessibility and support walkability in this area. While this area had been identified in the 2007 Recreation Trail Plan it was not prioritised as highly, possibly because this current study focused not just on recreational trails but walking to access services and facilities.

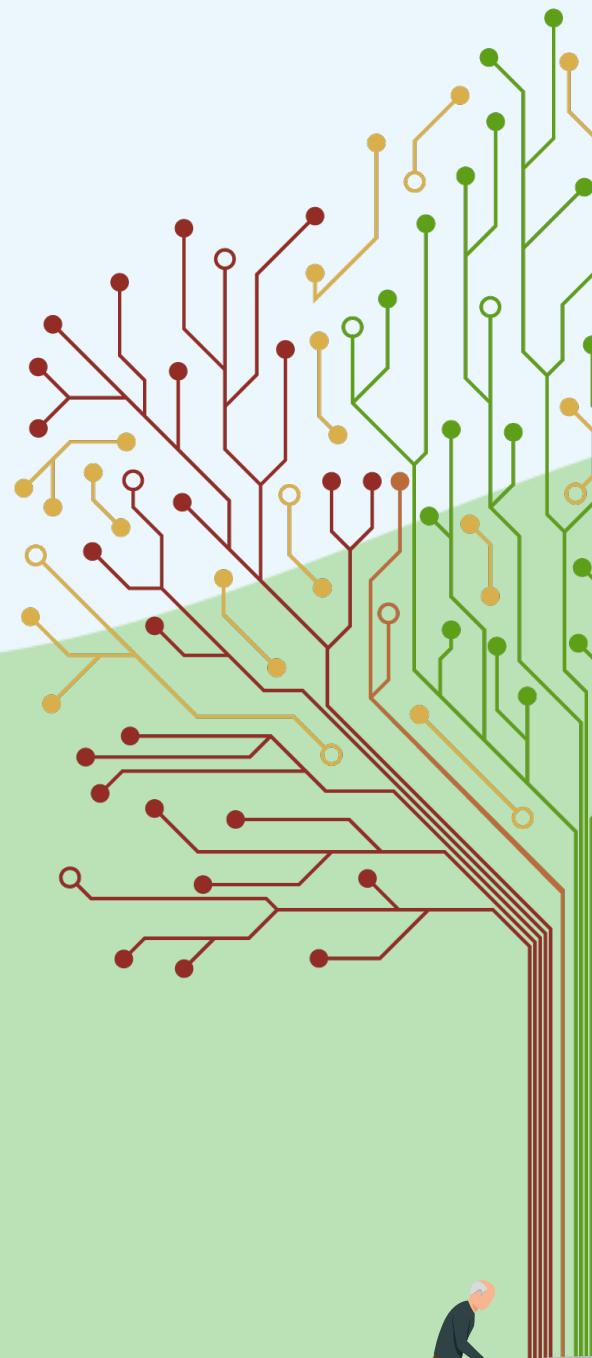
The extension of the foreshore track and connection to Massey Street Lookout was acknowledged as more challenging because some of the land required to implement this is privately owned. However, as this was identified as a priority in 2007 and remains a priority in 2021 it appears further investigation of this possibility would be warranted.

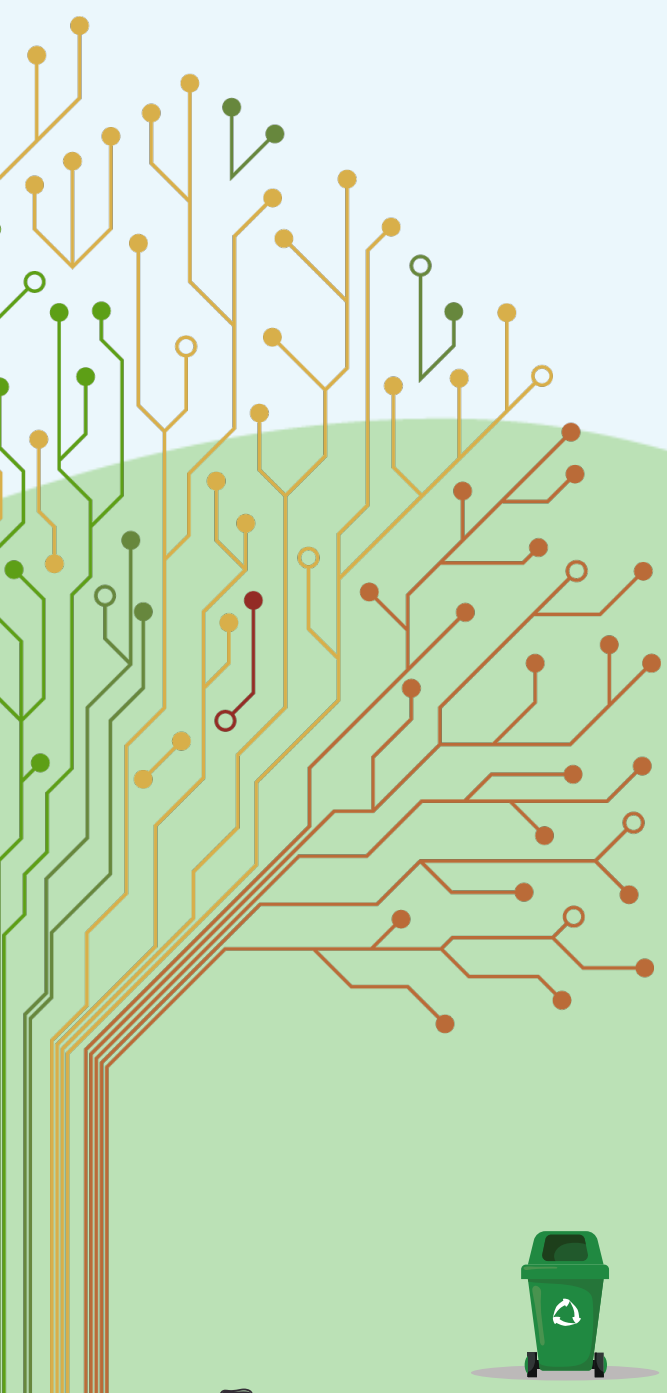
Other interventions requiring less infrastructure and investment were also identified and discussed by our community members.

Signage

Introducing more 'watch out for pedestrian signs' in areas of high pedestrian use was identified as another element that could support walkability. More signs that indicated the distant to destinations were discussed although consideration of time was identified as more important than the distance.

People are probably more interested in not probably the distance but how long it's going to take them.





Street furniture

Street furniture such as seating, water fountains, rubbish bins and provision of dog poo bags. While some tracks and areas had adequate provision of these features there remained a perception that these could be increased in key areas to support walking. More rubbish bins and the provision of dog poo bags were identified as easy to implement and supported by community members.







Conclusion

Smithton is a regional centre with a range of core businesses and services that support those who live in the region. It has an extensive range of well-maintained community sporting and recreational facilities – the majority of which are centrally located. The East Duck River foreshore track and the West Esplanade Park areas are key assets that support recreational walking and other activities in the area.

Many elements identified in the 2007 Smithton Recreation Trails Plan remain relevant today and some have been acted upon in the intervening years – for example, upgrading, extending and maintaining existing footpaths and upgrading and maintaining existing trails. Some of the trails identified in 2007 for extension were identified during this study as potential areas for upgrading. Notably, further extension of the East Duck River foreshore track and connecting this to the Massey Street lookout remained a priority. However, new priorities were identified in this current study which focused not just on recreational trails but walking to access services and facilities. Walking to access key services brings a different focus on elements that support accessibility as well as connectivity – as was highlighted in discussion about upgrading the existing informal tracks at Upper Grant Street and Emmett Street.

A range of non- or low-level infrastructure measures such as improved signage, more seating and rubbish bins and other measures were identified as having potential to improve walkability and pedestrian safety around the town.

One of the key challenges noted during discussions was a local culture that supported and promoted car use. The existing culture that cars are far more important was identified as a barrier that influenced decisions and support for features that promote walkability. This is not surprising for a regional centre where alternative means of transport are less available and access to social, recreational and employment opportunities rely on access to cars. Building a culture that supports and promotes walkability will take time and perseverance by a range of community members and organisations. Ideally, promoting walkability and enabling pedestrian access need not be seen as an area of conflict with car users – rather, in a rural town that services a large region these two aspects need to be considered complementary.