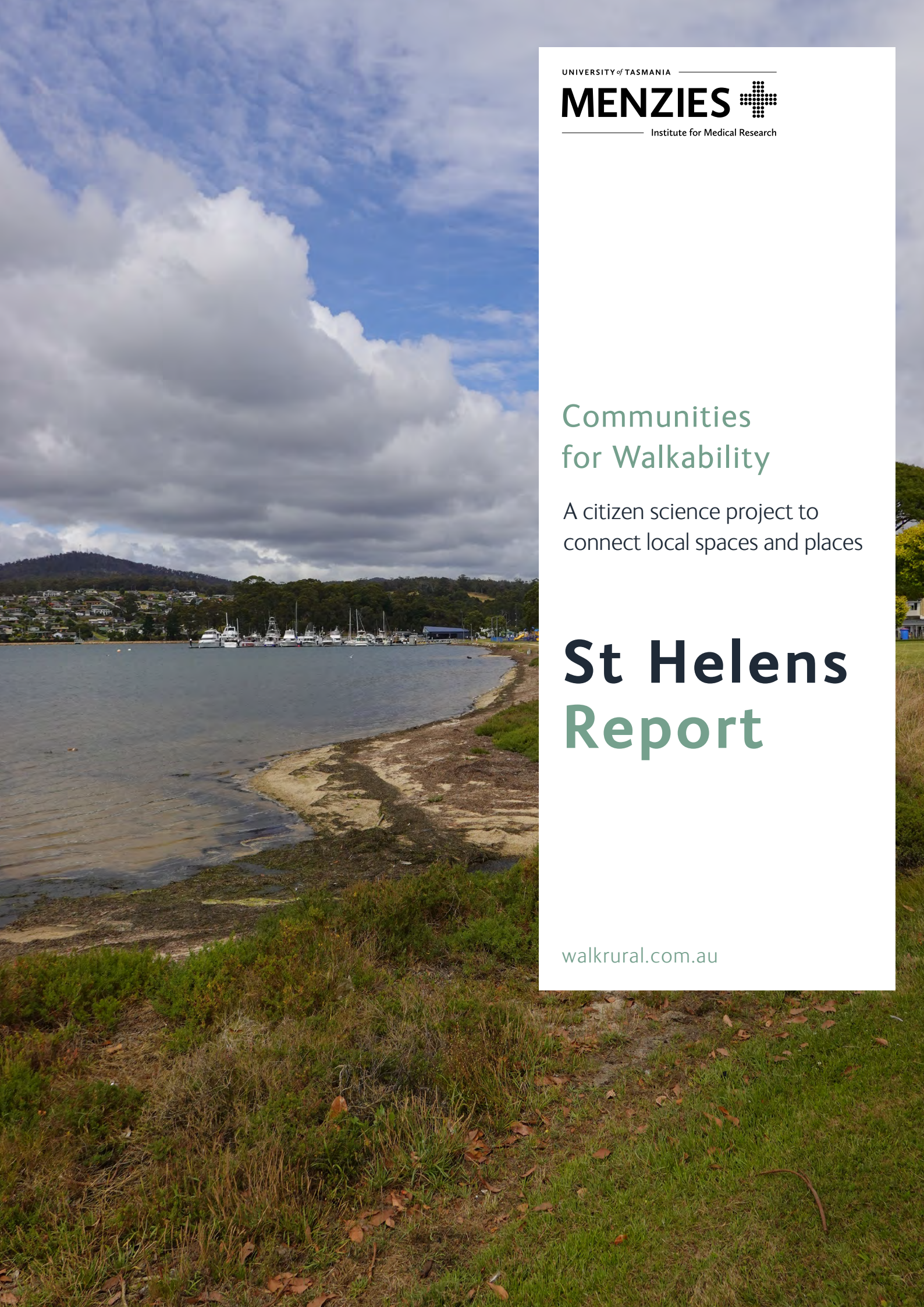


UNIVERSITY of TASMANIA
MENZIES
Institute for Medical Research

Communities for Walkability

A citizen science project to connect local spaces and places

St Helens Report

walkrural.com.au

Acknowledgment of Country

The University of Tasmania pays its respects to elders past and present and to the many Aboriginal people that did not make elder status and to the Tasmanian Aboriginal community that continues to care for Country.

We acknowledge the profound effect of climate change on this Country and seek to work alongside Tasmanian Aboriginal communities, with their deep wisdom and knowledge, to address climate change and its impacts.

The Palawa people belong to one of the world's oldest living cultures, continually resident on this Country for over 65,000 years. They have survived and adapted to significant climate changes over this time, such as sea-level rise and extreme rainfall variability, and as such embody thousands of generations of intimate place-based knowledge.

We acknowledge with deep respect that this knowledge represents a range of cultural practices, wisdom, traditions, and ways of knowing the world that provide accurate and useful climate change information, observations, and solutions.

The University of Tasmania likewise recognises a history of truth that acknowledges the impacts of invasion and colonisation upon Aboriginal people, resulting in forcible removal from their lands.

Our island is deeply unique, with cities and towns surrounded by spectacular landscapes of bushland, waterways, mountain ranges, and beaches.

The University of Tasmania stands for a future that profoundly respects and acknowledges Aboriginal perspectives, culture, language, and history, and a continued effort to fight for Aboriginal justice and rights paving the way for a strong future.

Acknowledgments

The project is funded by the Medical Research Future Fund (Grant ID 1200144; 2020-2024). The project is a collaboration between researchers from the Menzies Institute for Medical Research, University of Tasmania, and partners organisations:

- Public Health Services, Tasmanian Government Department of Health
- Local Government Association Tasmania
- Institute for Physical Activity and Nutrition, Deakin University
- Centre for Urban Research, RMIT
- Menzies Centre for Health Policy, University of Sydney

Suggested citation
McGrath, G., Jose, K., & Cleland, V. *Communities for Walkability: St Helens Report*. University of Tasmania, 2023.

The work undertaken for this project was approved by the University of Tasmania's Research Integrity and Ethics Committee on 29 March 2021 (project ID: 23174).

Project Investigators:

- Associate Professor Verity Cleland, Menzies Institute for Medical Research, University of Tasmania
- Professor Anna Timperio, Deakin University
- Dr Kim Jose, Menzies Institute for Medical Research, University of Tasmania
- Associate Professor Melanie Davern, RMIT University
- Dion Lester, Local Government Association of Tasmania
- Dr Lynden Leppard, Local Government Association of Tasmania
- Kate Garvey, Public Health Services, Tasmanian Department of Health
- Dr Yvonne Laird, The University of Sydney
- Dr Samantha Rowbotham, The University of Sydney

St Helens Community Members:

We would like to thank the St Helens 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.


EROUS
Roads
beach
ws
NATURE
Speed

Contents

Executive Summary

The Communities for Walkability project aimed to identify features of the St Helens area that make it easier or harder for community members to be active and walk around their town ('walkability'). St Helens is located on the North-East coast of Tasmania and has a range of community facilities including: a primary school, high school, police station, library, community centre, hospital, sporting ovals and other services (supermarket, museum, post office and neighbourhood house).

Data was primarily collected using a Citizen Science approach, where local leaders (Community Champions) and community members (Citizen Scientists) were directly involved in data collection (conducting audits or engaging in workshops). This report brings together the findings from each of these project dimensions to provide a summary of the key issues impacting walkability in the area.

Key Findings

When assessed spatially, St Helens' walkability was rated low suggesting that walkability is limited throughout the area. However, the spatial map findings were not necessarily reflective of the findings from the town audits (including the town wide and program and policy assessments as well as the segment audits) or community workshop. The Town Wide Assessment audit shows that St Helens has a range of assets that support walking and active recreation in the area. Other facilities, such as the supermarket, medical clinic and primary school, are in walking distance for most St Helens residents (this was more difficult for community members who live south of the Georges Bay bridge). The program and policy audit suggests there is a range of council programs and policies addressing walking and active recreation. However, community members were less aware of policies requiring bikeways or pedestrian walkways in new public infrastructure projects.

St Helens has key assets recognised by community members as supporting walkability. The town is located on Georges Bay and is surrounded by beaches and natural reserves (including Binalong Bay located 10km away). The key facilities are in the town centre around Cecilia Street. This includes schools, supermarkets, hospital, aged care facility as well as recreational facilities such as oval, bowling club and the recently built Georges Bay foreshore multi-user track. Most of the key facilities are in walking distance for residents located north of the Georges Bay bridge. Access is limited for those located further to the north or south of the main town area. Community members felt the mountain bike park was great for tourism with engagement targeted towards young people and visitors to the area.

Priorities

Throughout the project, three priorities were identified as impacting negatively on walkability in St Helens. These priorities include:

1

Pedestrian safety

The lack of safe pedestrian crossings to facilitate access along Cecilia Street in the main town area was considered a priority. Issues regarding pedestrian safety are highlighted when traffic to the area increases at peak times and in tourist season. The lack of pedestrian crossings in the main street was of particular concern for younger community members and those who require mobility aids (such as prams, wheelchairs or other mobility equipment).

2

Connectivity

Discussion in the workshop highlighted that connectivity was limited across Cecilia Street creating a physical divide. Pedestrians found it difficult to move throughout the area, particularly when moving west to east (towards the beach/ foreshore). In addition, there were some areas throughout St Helens where footpaths did not link up resulting in pedestrians needing to use an alternative route, potentially compromising safety.

3

General pedestrian infrastructure

The workshop discussion suggests there is a lack of pedestrian infrastructure (including crossings) to support walkability throughout the town. Additional infrastructure would support community members to walk more and would also help to reduce barriers caused by traffic and lack of connectivity.

Other concerns raised by community members included:

- Lack of signage along walking paths.
- The speed limit through the town centre was considered unsafe for pedestrians to safely cross.

Potential Solutions

While the three key priorities identified above would require a significant investment in infrastructure to address, there were other options that might also support greater walkability. During the community workshop, a range of solutions to address the above listed priorities were identified to support greater walkability in St Helens, including:

Developing safe pedestrian crossings to facilitate movement across Cecilia Street to improve safety for pedestrians. This included providing safe and accessible pedestrian crossings at key locations and more signage.

Improving walking connectivity throughout the area, including improving better linkages between footpaths and trails and increasing signage (including town maps and distance markers).

Extension of the shared walking/biking pathway to Binalong Bay to support increased connectivity throughout the area.

Reducing the speed limit through St Helens and adding signage to raise motorists' awareness of pedestrians.

In addition, there was strong support for increasing signage throughout the area including maps of walking paths/trails and adding walking distance markers.

DANGEROUS

Roads

CARS

be

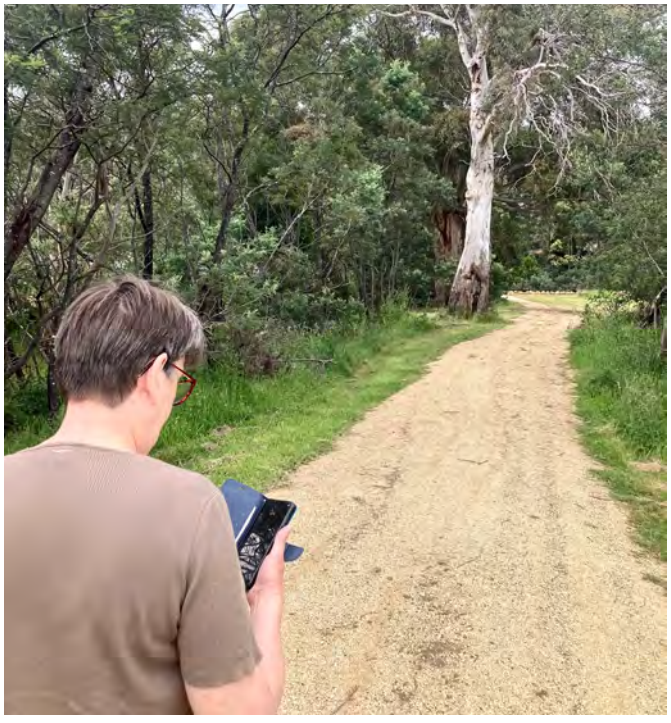
trees

NATUR

What is the Communities for Walkability Project ?

Communities for Walkability is a citizen science project to identify environmental characteristics that influence walkability and physical activity in rural Tasmania. This is important because the environments where people live, learn, work, play and age influence health and physical activity. The project involved three key phases:

1. A spatial assessment of walkability
2. Audits of the town's walkability using a townwide assessment tool, policy and program assessment tool and street segment walkability audits
3. A community workshop.



Phase 1 — Spatial Walkability Assessments

To inform the selection of the 10 towns involved in the Communities for Walkability project, phase 1 involved conducting a spatial analysis of walkability for transport in 92 small rural towns across Tasmania with populations less than 6,000 people. This work was completed by project team members at RMIT University in Melbourne who are world-leaders in spatial assessments of walkability. They have developed the Australian Urban Observatory (auo.org.au), which includes liveability and walkability assessments across the 21 largest cities in Australia, including Hobart and Launceston in Tasmania. Spatial walkability assessments use Geographic Information Systems to understand the walkability of an area based on three key components: daily destinations (something to walk to), street connectivity (a way to get there) and dwelling density (people to service the destinations and shops). These three factors were summed to produce a final walkability score for towns resulting in an overall walkability rating of high (top third of walkability scores), medium (middle third of walkability scores) or low walkability (bottom third of walkability scores).

It is also important to note that factors like footpaths, roundabouts or signalled pedestrian lights are not included in these spatial walkability assessments. Previous research suggests that these urban design factors have a big influence on the willingness of residents to walk for transport which has a direct effect on physical activity levels and overall health. However, most of this previous research has been conducted in big cities and less is known about how valuable spatial walkability assessments are for understanding walkability in smaller rural towns. Thus, while spatial map scores are suggestive of walkability, this study aims to better understand how applicable they are within a rural context.

Phase 2 — Town Audits

Building on the spatial walkability assessments, the second phase involved a Citizen Science approach in 10 towns across Tasmania. Citizen science is valuable within health-related research projects for many reasons, including:

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 each town, local leaders ('Community Champions') contributed to the project by identifying which parts ('segments') of the town to audit, recruiting 'Citizen Scientists' and completing town audits (including the town wide assessment and policy and programs assessment). Next, the Citizen Scientists completed street segment audits of the physical environment using the online walkability audit tool with the purpose of providing greater understanding of specific features within the town.

As part of the segment audits, community members took photos of town features that supported or hindered walkability. These images have been used throughout this report. It is important to note that the findings are general in nature as not all sections of the town have been audited. Instead, the findings highlight the broader features supporting and hindering walkability throughout the town.

Phase 3 — Community Workshops

Once each town had completed the audits and taken photos, a summary of the audit data was shared with community members at a community workshop. The workshop discussion enabled a greater understanding about the features impacting on walkability in the towns, identified priority areas for action and potential solutions. In each town, researchers facilitated a community workshop which was attended by Community Champion/s, Citizen Scientists and other interested community members.

Images.

▲ Documents to aid discussion at the workshop

◀ Citizen Scientist completing an audit segment using the online audit tool

Introduction

Being active is good for our health – it can prevent 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. It is also known that 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.

It is well known that walkable neighbourhoods provide health, environmental, social and economic 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, medical services, recreation and entertainment. Walkable communities are easier to get around, they support everyday connections and foster a greater sense of community through increased informal and spontaneous social interactions. In cities, research shows that the physical environment where people live, work, study and play can affect physical activity levels.

However, there is minimal research showing 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 find out more about walkability in rural areas and what might be needed to support this.

Most of the research studies looking at walkability focus on cities and large towns and not much is known about how our environment helps or stops communities from being active in rural and regional areas.

The report includes quotes from people who attended the workshop or from comments they made using the online audit tool. Photos have been included to provide local examples of features that hindered or supported walkability. It is hoped the findings included here will support further discussions in the town as well as support local action to encourage walking in the St Helens area.

Image.

▸ *(opposite page)* Cecilia Street is the main shopping strip in St Helens


C850
Binalong Bay
(Bay of Fires)
(The Gardens)
SECOND RIGHT

Overview of St Helens

St Helens is a coastal town located on the North-East coast of Tasmania. The town is known for its beautiful coastline, world class mountain bike trails and other outdoor pursuits such as beach activities and recreational fishing. The town is a popular tourist area and an entryway to the Bay of Fires (Larapuna) and Binalong Bay (10km away). St Helens has seen a large growth in population since 2016 from 1449 to the current population of 2206 people[1]. As a well-known tourist location, the population of St Helens grows significantly over the summer months with visitors to the town as well as the surrounding small localities and national parks. The ABS reports that 22.9% of private dwellings were unoccupied in St Helens in 2021 (in comparison to the national average of 10.1%) which suggests there is a large number of holiday residences in the area[2]. The St Helens township has a population density of 1.9 residents per square kilometre (compared to Hobart which covers an area of 6.6 square kilometres and has a density of 1356 people per square kilometre).

St Helens sits on the edge of Georges Bay with many of the main facilities located along Cecilia Street in the town centre. At each end, Cecilia Street turns into the Tasman Highway (just after Quail Street to the north and at the bridge along Georges Bay Esplanade to the south) which is the primary routes to both Hobart and Launceston. The main facilities in the town include a primary school, high school, police station, library, community centre, hospital, sporting ovals and other services (supermarket, museum, post office and neighbourhood house). The town also contains retail shops, accommodation, cafes and restaurants. The smaller residential locality of Steiglitz adjoins the town. The natural bushland in the area, including the St Helens Conservation Area, Ferntree Falls and Bells Marsh Forest reserve, are important spaces for walking and other recreation.

There have been some recent developments in the area including the Georges Bay multi-user foreshore trail (funded with a national government grant of $2,100,100) and ongoing improvements to the St Helens Mountain Bike trails (known as Flagstaff Gully).

[1] Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021

[2] Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 2021, St Helens 2021 Census Data, www.abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/UCL615026

All the new infrastructure for the new foreshore. So that's really solid. Bike stores, everything. And obviously a lot busier in terms of that whole area.

Images.

- ▸ St Helens Wharf (with the Georges Bay Foreshore Trail in the background)
- ▾ St Helens is a coastal fishing community with both industrial and recreational fishing

Findings From the Project

Spatial walkability assessment findings

The spatial analysis completed in the first phase of the project examined the local neighbourhood attributes of street connectivity, dwelling density and an index of access to services of daily living. These three attributes were used to indicate overall walkability and then given a rank to represent its position in relation to the other 91 small towns in Tasmania. Each attribute, as well as the overall walkability score, is classified as low, medium or high walkability.

The spatial analysis resulted in the creation of a Spatial Map (Figure 1) that helps to show the walkability in St Helens. Overall, the spatial walkability assessment ranked St Helens as low walkability compared with the 91 other towns analysed in phase 1. The map shows walkability across St Helens. The maps indicate that St Helens is least walkable (pink to dark pink) throughout the town. The town centre north of the bridge is more walkable, however, this is still recorded as low walkability (light pink).

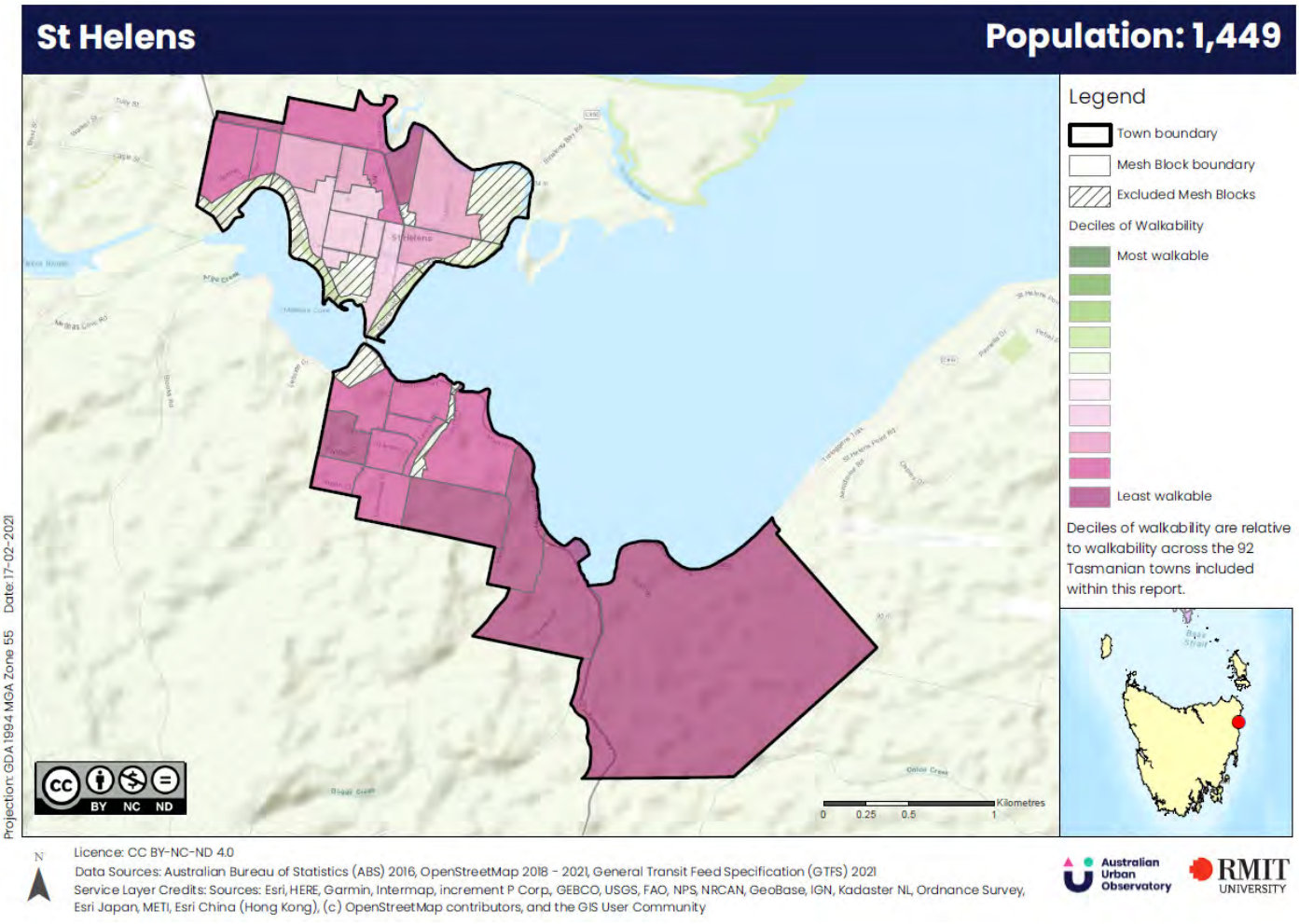


Figure 1. Spatial Map for St Helens
(Spatial map data sources: ABS 2016, OpenStreetMap 2018-2021 and General Transit Feed Specification 2021)

Audit and workshop findings

In St Helens, one Community Champion completed the town wide facilities and program/policies audits that examined the features in the area that supported walking and physical activity. The Community Champion then selected the segments of the town to be audited by the Citizen Scientists. The seven segment audits were completed between March and May 2022 (see Figure 2 for audit map). Five Citizen Scientists completed the segment audits that captured detailed information on walkability in these areas. While they walked a segment, Citizen Scientists used the audit tool to respond to questions about the segment including the presence of features such as paved footpaths, unpaved footpaths, crossing, signage, roads and other safety features. Citizen Scientists also took photos of key features that impacted on walkability in the segment.

Initial findings from the audits were presented to the community at the community workshop. The community workshop was held in St Helens on 8 June 2022 with five community members present to discuss the findings. Following the workshop, this report was produced for the St Helens community. Community Champions and Citizen Scientists provided feedback on this report and can use the report to bring about change in their community.

Image.

▲ Small jetty in Georges Bay

Town wide and policy/ Program audit findings

The range of community facilities in St Helens was reflected in the town wide audit. The assessment captured the range of amenities and physical features such as schools, walking tracks and trails, parks/playgrounds, swimming pool, sporting facilities (golf club, football oval, netball courts, mountain bike trails) and other community facilities (neighbourhood centre, men's shed). In the audit, all facilities and features in St Helens were rated as good/ excellent condition, and facilities were regularly maintained by the council.

The town policy/program assessment examined the availability of health and physical activity related programs and/or policies in the area, including those run at the local school. The Program and Policy assessment did not capture the full range of programs or policies in the area. This was not necessarily reflective of a lack of programs or policies but may highlight a lack of knowledge and awareness about these within the community. The response to the policy audit was:

> If there are policies and/or programs, they have not promoted them to local Allied health for disease prevention programs.

Street segment audits: Overview of facilities

Seven segments of St Helens were audited by the five Citizen Scientists (Figure 2 and Figure 3) which included two Citizen Scientists who completed two segments each. In St Helens the segment audits revealed the following findings:

Facilities rated Good/Excellent	Facilities rated Fair/Poor	Facilities not present
Hiking/walking trails	None reported	Swimming pool
Biking Trails		Private gym
Public Parks		
Public Toilets (Quay side and War Memorial)		
Swimming Beaches		
Lake		
River		
Skate Park		
Town Recreational Centre		
Playground		
Playing Fields		
Indoor or outdoor courts		
Other: Bowling Club, tennis club, church hall, neighbourhood house, croquet club		

Table 1. Facilities in St Helens as captured in the Town Wide Audit

- All segments had paved footpaths available. Two segments had footpaths on both sides of the street, two segments had footpaths on one side of the street and three segments had intermittent footpaths.
- In four segments, the paved footpath was rated as good/excellent quality.
- One segment was reported to have a pedestrian crossing, and this was rated as poor/fair quality.
- Three segments were reported to have good/excellent buffers and shoulders available alongside the footpath.
- Traffic volume was reported as high in four segments, medium in one segment and low in two segments.
- Six segments were reported to have high connectivity – footpaths or trails linking the segment to other locations in the town. Segment 1 was reported to have low connectivity.
- While six Citizen Scientists reported that their segment was walkable, only two agreed that the segment was accessible for an older person or someone with mobility needs (segments 3 and 4). Similarly, only two segments were reported to be walkable for a child (aged 10) to walk on their own (segments 2 and 3).

In general, the Citizen Scientists felt there was a good range of different sporting and recreational facilities that were well-maintained by the council and used by the local community.

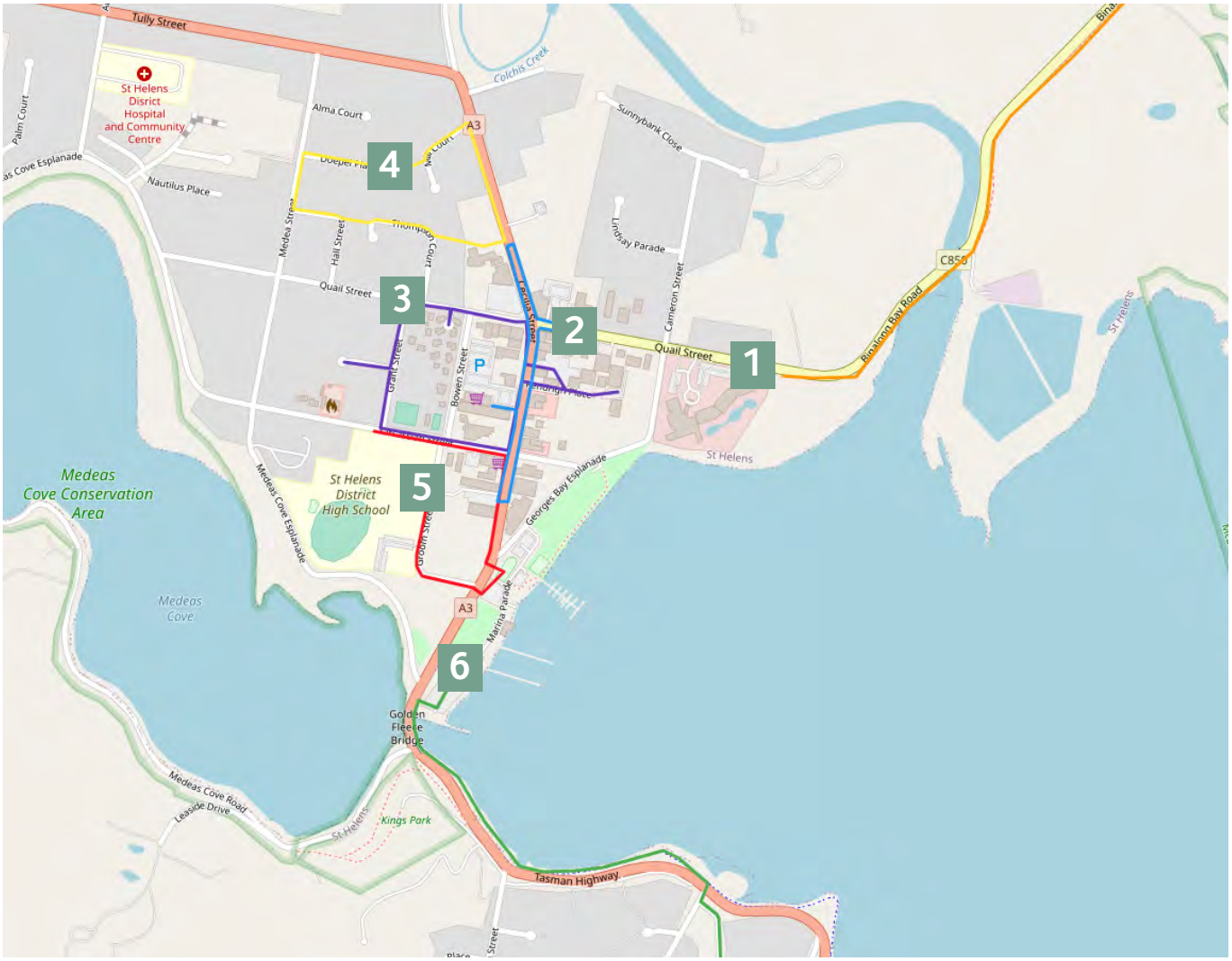


Figure 2. Six of the seven street segment audits completed in St Helens

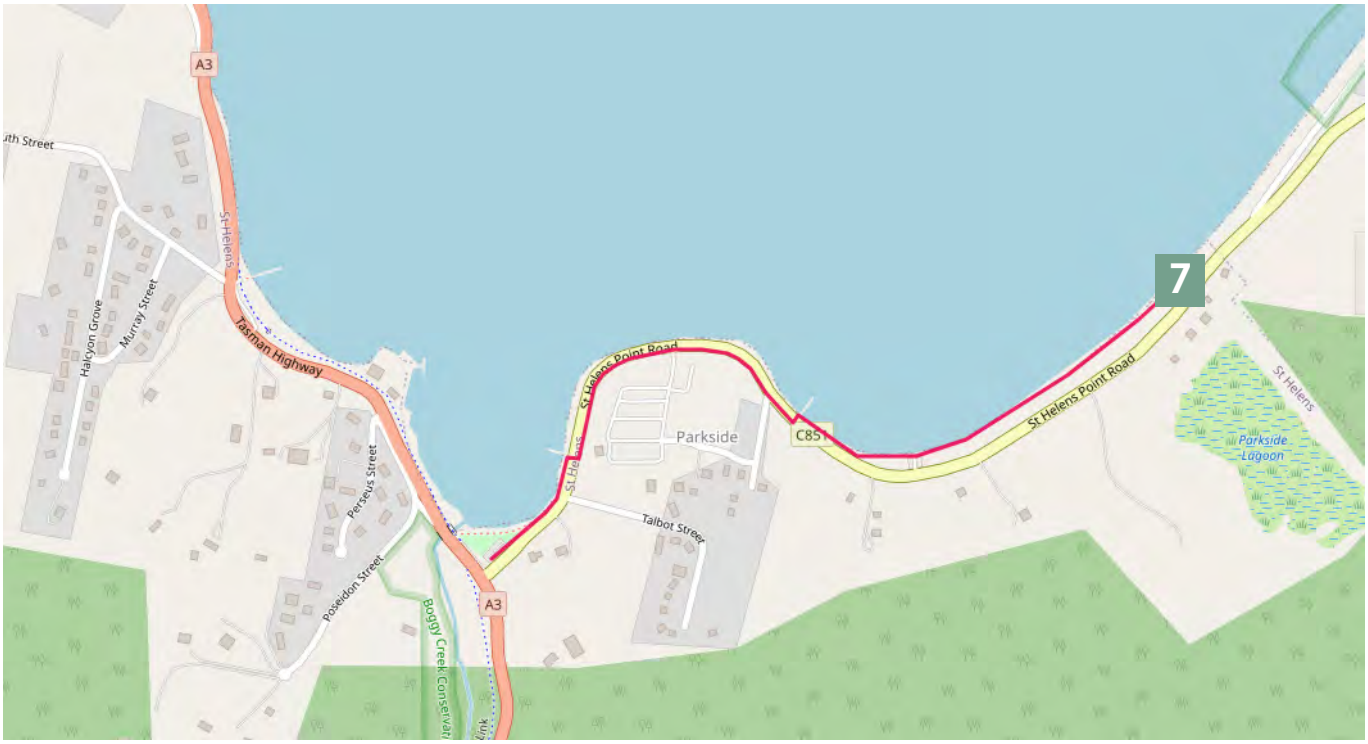


Figure 3. The seventh street segment audit, south of the main town area of St Helens

Features that support walking and being active (facilitators)

The natural environment around St Helens is a key factor in supporting community members to engage in walking and other physical activities. The nature reserves, beaches and bushland provide important and aesthetic spaces for many people in the area.

> There are outdoor things to do. Bike riding, hiking, beaches.

The topography of St Helens is flat with the audit reporting good quality footpaths overall. Community members felt that there are a range of walking options throughout St Helens including footpaths around the town, walking trails along the coastline and tracks through the natural reserves. Community members felt that

Image.

◂ The Flagstaff Gully and Blue Derby mountain bike trails are in close proximity to St Helens Credit: Tourism Tasmania, All Rights Reserved

the primary use footpaths were well maintained and were well connected to the main amenities and facilities in St Helens.

Community members felt there were many future developments that will be supportive of walking and physical activity in the area such as additional shared footpaths, walking trails and mountain biking infrastructure. During the workshop, community members discussed the Recreational Trails Strategy which is currently published as a draft for consultation by the Break O'Day Council.

The growth of tourism in the area, and particularly the area as a mountain biking destination, has led to development of infrastructure around St Helens. This includes an 8km cycling path access from the town centre to the St Helens Mountain Bike Park on the southern edge of town, as well as signage, toilet blocks, shelter and a bike wash station.

> I mean, if you're into mountain biking, well, you're in the best place in the world to be honest.

Investment in the St Helens Mountain Bike Park has included over $1,500,000 in funding from the Australian Government and $1,000,000 from the Tasmanian Government. Overall, the community members involved in the walkability project have supported the development of the mountain bike park and associated infrastructure. Importantly, further development (including the Recreational Trails Strategy) should seek to continue engagement with diverse community members to ensure both tourist and local needs are met.

Images.

▲ The Georges Bay shared walking and cycling trail links the main town area with Lions Park to the south

▶ Seating and bike racks along Cecilia Street

Features that make it difficult to walk and be active (barriers)

Connectivity

The citizen scientists reported most segments to be well-connected to other trails or locations in the town. However, the segment map and the community workshop discussion suggested this was not an entirely accurate reflection of street connectivity. During the community workshop, discussion revealed that there were areas throughout St Helens where connectivity was limited which resulted in physical and social disconnection in the town. This was an issue along the main street where there are limited safe crossing areas (see following discussion) and there were places where footpaths would abruptly end. This required community members to backtrack or take a longer route which could be a challenge for some population groups. For example, a Citizen Scientist who uses a wheelchair had difficulty on Portland Court:

> You go around the corner and then [the path] just stops...There's nothing to say it's going to stop... we would chat and walk along. He was wheeling. And all of a sudden [the path] stopped, and we both looked at each other and went, "Well, I guess that's it then."

Community members also felt the town had minimal pedestrian connections between other locations in the area, such as the coastal township of Binalong Bay around 10.5km away.

> Because there's a lot of cyclists that use the [Binalong Bay] road and it's so dangerous.

> I drive that road and I hate coming up against cyclists.

In addition, while the Georges Bay Foreshore Trail creates some great linkages throughout St Helens, there are areas where accessing the trail is difficult. For example, south of the Georges Bay bridge community members said that crossing the Tasman Highway could be difficult.

> We did a different route back from the caravan park to the town...You can't just cross [the highway].

Images.

▲ Bollards and pedestrian refuge along Cecilia Street

▼ Path between St Helens and Binalong Bay

▶ *(opposite page)* St Helens skate park and play ground is located on the foreshore but difficult for pedestrians to easily access

Pedestrian crossings

Cecilia Street bisects the main town area in St Helens. On the west side of the highway are the schools, aged care facility, neighbourhood house and council offices, and on the east is Georges Bay, beach areas and walk/bike paths. Along the main road are many businesses and services including two supermarkets, pharmacy, visitor centre, hardware store, post office, restaurants and cafes. Community members felt that a lack of safe pedestrian crossings created barriers to walkability due to the difficulty of crossing the main road. This was exacerbated in peak tourist periods (such as school holidays and long weekends).

> The lack of pedestrian signage and clearly defined pedestrians crossing is a potential disaster given the town is a well visited tourist destination.

> A lot of our people do walk...but they're afraid of crossing. They can't do the crossings. So, it doesn't make it walkable.

Currently there is one crossing in front of the high school to allow students to cross Circassian Street outside the school. Further south, a cycling and pedestrian refuge was recently installed at the Lions Park (at the intersection of the Tasman Highway and St Helens Point Road) as part of the St Helens to Flagstaff Gully mountain bike trail link. As this is designed to allow mountain bikers to safely cross the highway to the mountain bike trails, it is sufficiently wide enough to support pedestrians. However, the crossing does not support pedestrian access to key facilities in the town centre as it is 3 km south of the town centre and key facilities.

> It's the only decent crossing in St Helens we found out, from the [Walkability] project.

Images.

▲ Pedestrian crossing outside St Helens District High School

▼ Parking outside St Helens District High School

Along Cecilia Street, there are no safe crossing locations for pedestrians. The intersection of Cecilia Street and Quail Street in the town centre as well as the Circassian Street and Georges Bay Esplanade intersections were considered a concern for drivers and pedestrians.

> I know as a driver when you're at [the Quail Street] intersection, oh my gosh, you've got to look so many ways, like if you've got the chance to go, you whizz around that corner and then say, "Whew. There might be a pedestrian there."

Further south, pedestrians can follow the new shared footpath along the bay. However, community members noted that there are limited paths that cross the Cecilia Street to the residential area on the western side of the highway.

> A side path takes you from the dedicated walkway to the highway for crossing to the residential area/ caravan park. However, there is no marked crossing or signage on the highway for motorists.

Lack of safe crossings was a particular concern for children and young people (including the Skate and Scoot class at the local school) who tend to congregate at the skate park on the foreshore after school. Students need to navigate very difficult roads:

> [There is] no pedestrian crossing to move across the main street/highway to get to the skatepark.

Image.

▼ The Circassian Street/Cecilia Street intersection is difficult for pedestrians to cross

> Because the skate park is brilliant and there's a lot of kids use it, all ages. Like from four-year-old, get the littlies on their scooters... but they just can't get there.

The most direct route to the skate park from the school is down Circassian Street which intersects with Cecilia Street, however routes along Steel Street, Groom Street and Georges Bay Esplanade are also used. The junction at Circassian Street and Cecilia Street has traffic from the IGA supermarket as well as the petrol station and is slightly offset which creates some confusion for motorists regarding the need to indicate or not. This was also confusing for pedestrians attempting to cross.

Instead, students will generally use the route via Steel Street which is also difficult to navigate and has limited footpaths. Outside the council chambers on Cecilia Street there is no footpath, so community members will cut across the carpark in front of the industrial area.

> So, they basically come from school, and they come on the other side of that street where the footpath is. Around past council here. And then they just cross straight over.

> It's not ideal, because you've got the intersection coming off Bayside [Hotel] as well as the Tasman Highway as well as that pull in bay along the front there.

In addition, parked cars alongside the school created some safety issues.

> Immediately the two boys walked behind the parked cars there, because it's not really clear that there's actually a parkway in front of the [school].

A lack of safe crossings, particularly in the town centre, was discussed as a key barrier for walkability in St Helens and this aligns with the findings from the spatial walkability assessment (Figure 1). As seen in the spatial map, the main town strip is light pink and the outer areas are dark pink both of which indicate lower walkability.

Images.

- *(opposite page)* Intersection of Cecilia Street and Circassian Street
- There are limited places for pedestrians to cross towards the skate park and foreshore

Traffic

Safety was a consideration in many segments, particularly along Cecilia Street which was reported to create a significant physical divide throughout the town. The segment audits found that traffic was medium to high in five of the seven segments, however, it was noted that the audits were conducted during the non-holiday period when traffic and pedestrian volume is reduced.

The highway is a key road for tourists into the area as well as for commercial traffic from local industries (including fishing trucks). As a result, there can be significant amounts of traffic going through the main town area at certain times of the year. Community members felt this causes significant safety issues for pedestrians.

> During holiday periods, traffic and pedestrian volume increases significantly.

Community members have also noticed the number of tourists to the area has increased, bringing bigger vehicles and caravans through the town centre. The speed of this traffic in combination with the lack of safe pedestrian crossings was highlighted as a key concern.

The primary concern from community members are the dangers caused by speed and traffic along Cecilia Street and the Tasman Highway, particularly at the start and end of day when students are walking to or from school.

Accessibility

Although the quality of walking paths and trails was generally reported to be well maintained in the segment audits, it was acknowledged during the community workshop that this was a significant barrier for many individuals within the community. The segment audits showed that there are locations throughout the town that are not deemed accessible for all (including segments 1, 2, 5, 6 and 7).

> The walkability of the review corridor [segment audit] can be undertaken by able bodied individuals easily, however, a wheelchair user and/or visually impaired individual may find the review corridor troublesome due to the unevenness of some pathways/ pavers, steep pram crossings and no tactile fitted to pram crossings.

Image.

◂ Pedestrian visibility is often obscured by parked cars, making crossing difficult

There were some locations where visibility was impeded by obstructions:

> Visibility of oncoming traffic within the 50km signed speed signs was impeded by parked vehicles.

> “ A wheelchair user has to move into the drains to see past a parked vehicle.

These obstructions mean that individuals must move further onto the roadway to see any oncoming traffic which creates safety concerns regarding traffic. In addition, the condition of some paths was reported as poor and it was recognised this meant they were unsuitable for community members with reduced mobility. Community members said that some paths had uneven pavers and tripping hazards (such as tree roots or uneven gravel).

Image.

▲ Footpaths with rough surfaces are found along Cecilia Street near the mountain bike shop and Bayside Hotel

▼ Uneven pavers along Cecilia Street

Priorities

During the workshops participants were asked which of the identified features they considered a priority for action. The key priorities in St Helens were to improve connectivity throughout the area (particularly focusing on the need for safe pedestrian crossings in the main town area) and improving general pedestrian infrastructure.

Priority 1: Improving pedestrian safety

Discussion suggested that a lack of safe crossings along Cecilia Street was creating a physical division in the area. There are currently no crossings along the main street creating safety issues for pedestrians, particularly when the traffic is busier during tourist season. Creating safe pedestrian crossings will help to improve connectivity and ensure community members can safely cross town to access the foreshore. Community members also felt that extending the shared footpath to Binalong Bay would improve connectivity within the area and enable residents to easily travel into St Helens. Ensuring connectivity between key areas and facilities within the town was also important.

Priority 2: Improving connectivity

Discussion suggested that a lack of connection across Cecilia Street was creating a physical division in the area. In addition, there are many locations where a footpath will end, or paths do not link up resulting in pedestrian needing to walk on a road or road verge or cross to an alternative footpath. Improving connectivity in walking paths and trails will support better connections throughout St Helens.

Priority 3: Improving general pedestrian infrastructure

Improving and erecting general infrastructure to support walking around St Helens was highlighted as a key priority. While some areas had some infrastructure (such as along the new foreshore shared pathway or at the mountain biking trails), adding more of this around St Helens was considered important.

Image.

▸ *(opposite page)* The Georges Bay Foreshore trail

Possible Solutions

Workshop participants were asked to consider possible ways to address these barriers. The following presents the solutions discussed by community members to address the key challenges to walkability in St Helens.

Pedestrian safety

Discussion focused on creating safe spaces for pedestrians, particularly along the highway in the main town area. Currently, there are limited safe spaces for pedestrians to cross and community members felt that the existing pedestrian islands were inadequate to support those with limited mobility, prams or who require the use of a mobility device. This impacts on connectivity and creates significant physical disconnections. Suggestions to address these issues included the introduction of better signage to aid pedestrians (both as a safety measure and signage with maps and directions for pedestrians), repairs to existing footpaths, and inclusion of tactile ground surface indicators at crossings within the CBD to assist community members with vision impairment or blindness.

Discussion also suggested making improvements to the designated pedestrian crossings (such as alongside Quail Street and outside the school). Currently, some crossings had limited visibility due to parked cars or the curve of the road.

> Better visibility in required at pram crossing where the line of sight for oncoming vehicles is impeded by parked vehicle in assigned parking spaces.

> The pram crossings [have] impeded visibility and require modification to the gradient. Currently to view past parked vehicles, a person in a wheelchair/elderly with walking frames are required to move onto the roadway, position the wheelchair/ frame in the spoon drains to see oncoming traffic.

Traffic and limited vision exacerbate dangers for community members, particularly those with limited mobility. Community members felt that reducing the speed along the main road could help to increase the safety of pedestrians. The speed is currently 50km/hr but community members felt that:

> Ideally, it should be a 40kmph area.

Community members felt having more signage, including painting speed limits on the road, could ensure motorists are aware of the speed.

Walking paths

Community members said that some new walking paths could ensure there is a connected network of paths across the area. Until recently, there was limited connection between the main town area and other important spaces for walking and physical activity such as Lions Park or the mountain bike park. There have been positive responses from the community about the recent extension of the walking trail (including bridge development beside the Tasman Highway at the south of Cecilia Street)

Image.

▸ *(opposite page)* The southern end of the Georges Bay Foreshore trail

completed by the council. Other locations are more isolated and do not have clearly marked and connected paths. For example, paths were not always well-connected within the town (such as Doepel Place to Mill Court and Hall Street to Thompson Court), compromising accessibility and connectivity.

In addition, community members felt that paths around the school were not clearly defined.

> We walked on the school side...so we started at outside the school gates. And immediately the two boys walked behind the parked cars there, because it's not really clear that there's actually a parkway in front of the – so I just thought, all these kids are coming out and walking behind

Community members felt that an additional path between St Helens and Binalong Bay would provide a safe way for pedestrians (particularly cyclists) to travel. It was felt this would increase safety and create stronger connections throughout the community.

Signage

Adding signage and road markings was discussed during the community workshop as a safety measure to ensure vehicles are aware of pedestrians, as well as for directing locals to tracks and paths. Building on from the discussion around safety and pedestrian crossings, community members wanted increased signage along the main street to ensure motorists are aware of pedestrians.

> The town area is very walkable but lacks clear signage for (ramp point) public crossing.

> Need a crossing for children to safely cross and for motorists to be aware that children cross there.

In addition, it was felt many people in the community are unaware of the tracks and trails in the area.

> People don't realise they can cycle into town.

To address this, a town map and signage throughout the community was considered a useful way to improve this. Community members felt that maps with walking or cycling paths, mountain bike trails, key routes and distances would be useful for people to plan walking routes around the community. The foreshore was suggested as a good place for this (such as on the 'mushroom' information booth).

> [The 'mushroom' is] a good spot for some big maps, because we've talked about using that...to put the mountain bike maps up on. We could use half of it for that, and then the other half is maps of Georges Bay and around there.

At the same time, direction markers with distances and estimated times could be placed along these key routes. Whilst community members said there are some previous distance and direction markers on the footpaths, discussion at the workshop revealed these are old and in need of updating.

> A lot of our crossings had steps on it to the school to tell the kids how many – or metres, how far, when they're at the crossing, how far they were from school.

> It used to be old 10,000 steps markers. And it runs from just outside the neighbourhood house, it goes around the block. But I don't know how long ago that was there, because it's really worn now and you can find the beginning, but you can't find the end.

Image.

◂ *(opposite page)* Walking path connecting Thompson Street to the Visitor Center Carpark on Cecilia Street

Conclusion

St Helens is the major regional centre on the East Coast of Tasmania with a range of natural and community facilities that support walking and physical activity in the area including beaches, parks, a recreation stadium, a skate park, a mountain bike park, and walking trails. The town has a good range of community sporting and recreational facilities with recent development including the extension of the walking path to the Lions Park/mountain bike trailhead. The audits completed by the Community Champions and Citizen Scientists highlight the valuable assets in St Helens as well as areas that could be improved.

The audit process and workshop identified features in St Helens considered a priority to increase walkability and physical activity participation in the area. Community members felt that the key priorities were:

- Improve connectivity focusing on the development of safe pedestrian crossings along the main town area on Cecilia Street.
- Improve general pedestrian infrastructure including improving walking paths and adding signage throughout the area.

A range of possible solutions would help to address these priorities including pedestrian crossings as well as infrastructure measures including signage and improvements to walking paths.

Image.

▶ *(opposite page)* Boats at the St Helens wharf


S121
Silver Trevally


walkrural.com.au
beach
NATURE