Community Experiences of Te Ara Mua – Future Streets: Walking and cycling for transport in Māngere, Auckland

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AIM
To understand how Māngere community members experienced Te Ara Mua – Future Streets, and what this means for making walking and cycling for transport accessible and desirable in low socioeconomic, ethnically diverse neighbourhoods.

CONTEXT
Te Ara Mua – Future Streets was an infrastructure project implemented between 2015 and 2017 in Māngere Central in South Auckland. It aimed to make walking and cycling safer and easier while reflecting cultural identity.

The physical changes included a community walking and cycling trail loop, painted walkways and crossings through the town centre car park, raised zebra crossings, bike lanes – physically separated along some streets (e.g. Mascot Ave) and partially separated along others (e.g. Friesian Drive), a variety of traffic calming features, a community walking/cycling trail loop, painted walkways and crossings through the town centre, unless opening

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL NORMS framed walking and cycling for transport as unusual. Walking for transport was described as a symbol of poverty. Cycling was felt to be for kids and youth, while the bike lanes were seen as catering to more ‘serious’ and culturally unfamiliar cycling. However, a local cycling advocate was challenging these ideas.

“...you rarely see people walking to the town centre, unless [...] you’re broke” (M/GM)

CONCLUSIONS
For active transport to contribute to better climate, road safety, and health outcomes, walking and cycling programmes should

FINDINGS
Six key themes were identified in participant narratives. These are presented below.

• Respond and understand to socio-economic and cultural factors in disadvantaged communities.
• Consider how active transport infrastructure may be tailored to better meet community needs while still being safe and effective, for instance, by providing safe bike parking.
• Combine infrastructure improvements with programmes to normalise and make walking and cycling for transport easier for local families, for example, by increasing access to different types of bikes and accessories and addressing personal safety concerns.

PERSONAL SAFETY was a major ongoing concern. Changes made to local parks and alleys were appreciated but were not perceived to have reduced the risk of attack, harassment, or theft when using them.

“I walk through here today, it’s about 10 minutes. It looks friendly but basically when you look closer […] Drinking still happens everywhere” (F/GF)

TRAFFIC SAFETY discussions often focused on reduced driver comfort and safety. However, walking was felt to be much safer and easier than previously, particularly for older people and those using mobility devices. The on-road bike lanes were felt to have improved cycling ease and safety somewhat, but were viewed by non-cyclists as designed for confident cyclists, and by confident cyclists as too restrictive and slow.

“I do like the walking and cycling trail, and the core concept of like, you know, well if you want to go out, we’re gonna have something laid out for the average resident who is ill or older people, Q = Interviewer

CONNECTIVITY provided by the community trail for walking, running, and beginner cyclist was viewed positively. However, long DISTANCES to common work, shopping, and leisure destinations, together with a lack of bike lane connectivity beyond Māngere Central limited the perceived viability of active transport.

“I do like the walking and cycling trail, and the idea that there’s something laid out for the community to walk around, I think that’s quite an exciting idea, and the core concept of like, you know, well if you want to go out, we’re gonna make these streets connective” (M/I)

Tensions were apparent between a sense of appreciation for government investment in Māngere and perceptions of the project as ‘experimentation’ that did not reflect LOCAL PRIORITIES.

“Some of the playgrounds are really awesome, so it’s just nice that there has been some investment into recreational stuff that looks quite good” (F/I)

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT, particularly around the bike lanes, was also described as insufficient.

“Some, there are folks out and they’re going for a leisurely bike on the footpath” (M/GM)

“I think the frustration occurred when they started doing too many bike lanes […] was going ‘what the hell no one’s gonna use this’” (F/GF)

CONCLUSION
Active transport infrastructure does not automatically lead to increased active transport in low-income communities.

Cars were viewed as a necessity for work and family life, while SOcioeconomic FACTORS such as low disposable incomes, lack of time, and large family sizes were felt to pose a significant barrier to walking and cycling among residents.

“They’re not gonna pay for a bike, and do that only for it to get stolen” (M/I)

“I can’t comment on safety but I think they really wanted the other side of the road, the view from the road, the view of the road, the view of the road” (F/GF)

ACTIVATING BEHAVIOURS for the average resident who is ill or older people, Q = Interviewer

“…..the islands, the concrete bollards” (M/I)

“I do like the walking and cycling trail, and the core concept of like, you know, well if you want to go out, we’re gonna have something laid out for the average resident who is ill or older people, Q = Interviewer

METHOD
Transcripts from two types of data were thematically analysed:

• Key informant interviews with 8 community stakeholders
• 3 focus groups with local residents

Interviews and focus groups were conducted between June and October 2018 (approximately one year after the infrastructure was completed).

Participant gender and data source are noted in brackets at the end of each quote: Gender: F = female; M = male; Source: I = key informant interview; GF = focus group female; GM = focus group male; GD = focus group disabilities and older people, Q = Interviewer

For more information on Te Ara Mua – Future Streets and further research, visit www.futurestreets.org.nz