

Getting to School by Walking & Cycling

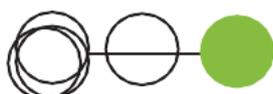
Echuca East Primary School
Summary of Findings

Prepared by: GTA Consultants (VIC) Pty Ltd for Campaspe Shire Council

on 23/09/19

Reference: V149840

Issue #: A-Dr (First Draft)



GTAconsultants

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Prepared with the support of a TAC Local Government Grant 2018/19.

Quotes throughout may have been edited for clarity, interpretation and spelling.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

1.1.1. Campaspe Active Transport Strategy

In June 2019, Council adopted the Campaspe Active Transport Strategy, which supports and encourages people to travel more actively in the local area, including by walking, wheeling and cycling. The strategy is the culmination of research, local observations and discussions with Council and the community.

The strategy aims to improve health and wellbeing and build stronger, more vibrant local communities through three key pillars:

- Encouraging more active travel to schools
- Creating towns which are attractive and comfortable places to walk
- Connecting housing with where people want to travel

More details on the Active Transport Strategy can be found on Council's website.

1.1.2. TAC Local Government Grant - Analysis

This project helps bring the Active Transport Strategy to life by identifying opportunities to encourage active travel (in all forms) around two schools – Echuca East Primary School in Echuca and St. Augustine's College in Kyabram.

GTA were engaged to undertake investigations and analysis about how students and staff travel to and from the two schools and provide evidence which supports future investment in making active travel safer, more comfortable and more enjoyable for the students, teachers and parents accessing them.

The intention is that initiatives can be piloted and/or introduced at the subject schools, with lessons applied at other schools across the area as opportunities arise.

The project was made possible through funding provided by the Transport Accident Commission (TAC) Local Government Grants program.

1.2. Approach

1.2.1. Opportunities Identification

Students, teachers and parents know their school best. Our approach focussed on extracting the issues and opportunities with the people that attend the schools every day. At Echuca East Primary School, we:

- Ran a 'journey mapping' exercise with all students in grades 3-6 to understand how they travel to school, what they enjoy (or don't enjoy) about their trip and ideas for how they could be safer and more enjoyable.
- Worked with smaller groups of year-level leaders and Student Representatives on infrastructure or facilities around the school which would improve safety or functionality of travel to/from school, including on routes to common destinations (such as Echuca United Football and Netball Club or other after-school activities).
- Discussed issues with staff, a crossing supervisor and parents at the after-school pick-up.
- Undertook a tour of the school and surrounding areas.

GETTING TO SCHOOL - ECHUCA EAST PRIMARY SCHOOL

- Observed the after-school pick-up activity.

Figure 1.1: Echuca East Primary School Engagement Activities



As part of the review, we also:

- Reviewed reported crash statistics in the vicinity of the school and on common routes.
- Reviewed 'like spots' and 'dislike spots' identified by the community as part of the Active Transport Strategy ('CrowdSpot').
- Reviewed provision of footpaths (as provided by Council), and discussed known issues raised with Council.

1.2.2. Initiatives Development

In order to translate the opportunities to improve active travel (in all forms) around the two schools, they were passed through the below constructs:

Safe System Approach (as adopted in the Victorian Road Safety Strategy – Towards Zero)

The safe system approach is based around the four interactive pillars outlined below and shown in Figure 1.2. At its core, the safe system approach aims to create a transport environment where it is not possible for users to be seriously or fatally injured, including when users make mistakes.

The Safe System approach is nationally adopted and is beginning to be integrated into all planning and design activities.

Safe and Active Routes to School Toolkit, City of Darwin

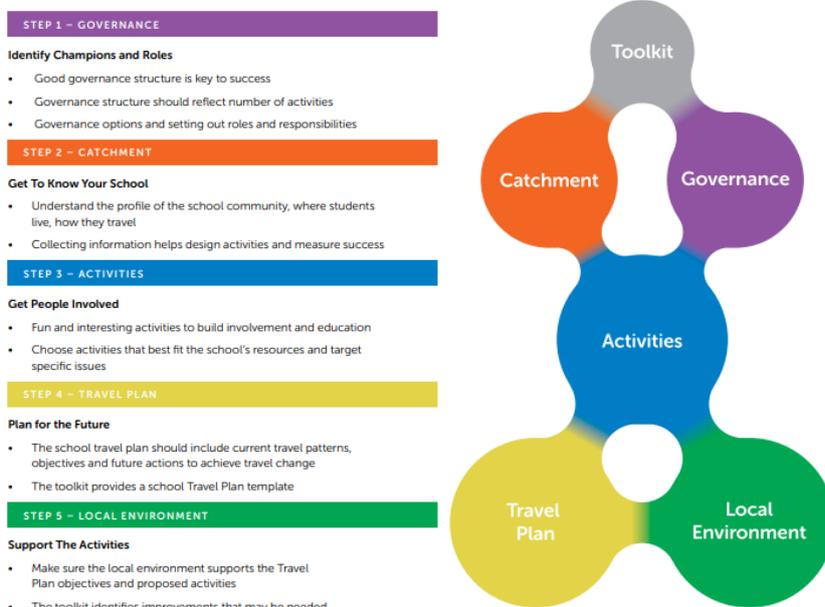
With support from the Heart Foundation NT, the City of Darwin developed a toolkit to enable local schools within the Council area to achieve increased levels of active travel¹. The toolkit provides guidance to all local schools on the activities, governance structures and identifying improvements to the local area that could be implemented to support their efforts to increase levels of walking and cycling to school. Background facts and figures, survey forms and travel plan templates are included as part of the toolkit.

Figure 1.2: Safe System Approach



The key steps are outlined in Figure 1.3.

Figure 1.3: Safe Active Routes to School Toolkit Steps



¹ https://www.darwin.nt.gov.au/sites/default/files/publications/attachments/safe_active_routes_to_school_toolkit_0.pdf

2. WHAT WE HEARD

2.1. Insights

Conversations with the students and review of the journey mapping exercise revealed a few key insights regarding how students travel to school. Of those that we spoke to:

- Broadly, about half of students travel to school by car, with about 20% walking and 20% travelling by bus. Other students travel by bike or scooter.²
- Many students travel a relatively short distance to school (i.e. local trips) – on average less than 15 minutes. As expected, students walking, cycling or travelling by scooter generally have shorter trips (i.e. less than 10 minutes) while students travelling by bus generally have longer trips (i.e. 30-60 minutes).
- Many students travel a short distance to school by car – on average less than 10 minutes. There is opportunity to encourage these students to shift to more active behaviour.
- Travel choice often depended on weather, where the student is travelling from and if they are running late.
- The school pick-up period was relatively short – after about 7-10 minutes, the majority of vehicles and people had dissipated from the school area.
- There are existing programs at school which could be leveraged to encourage walking and cycling, including “Breakfast Club” (where students are able to access breakfast at school) and Dojo Points (an incentive system where students are awarded with various prizes).

2.2. Key Concerns

Aside from imaginative ways to make travel to school more enjoyable, the students suggested a number of ideas which would make active travel to school safer or more comfortable. These are summarised below.

1. Missing footpaths in the vicinity of the school and on key after-school routes

Missing footpaths was one of the most commonly raised issues, echoing concerns raised by staff and parents. Concerns were particularly strong with respect to the east of the school (a large portion of the school catchment) and the south of the school (connecting to Echuca United Football and Netball Club). We were told the absence of footpaths raises a number of challenges, including:

- Inability to use a scooter or other wheeled transport – during observations, a student was observed using a scooter on the wrong side of the road for a short distance between Barry Street and Stawell Street (120 metres) to access the footpaths beyond to the east.
- Bindi-eyes from the grass getting stuck in shoes or bike tyres, causing punctures.
- Informal paths and nature strips becoming muddy after rain, making for an uncomfortable walk or ride.

² Travel times and modes are self-reported by the students. They represent one of several ways in which the student may travel to school. ‘Bus’ may also be in combination with other modes (i.e. walk to bus stop). Very small sample size.

Some specific locations identified include:

- Eyre Street, where footpaths are missing in sections on both sides. Observations and informal tracks indicate this is a high-demand route. In the after school period, many students were observed to travel east along Eyre Street.
- Sutton Street, where footpaths are missing on the east side and Leichardt Street, where footpaths are missing on the north side. Informal tracks indicate these are in-demand routes.
- East of Bowen Street, where there are missing connections to footpaths in newer developments.
- Along Murray Valley Highway, where there are limited or missing facilities but high-speed, high-volume traffic movements with popular destinations beyond to the south, including Echuca United FNC and Hungry Jacks.

Students also requested more bike paths around the school – given most of the students are young enough to cycle on footpaths, providing additional foot infrastructure would also cater for cycling to school.

Some of the ideas to resolve the issues included:

- *“Make a footpath between the school and the football club”*
- *“Finish the footpaths”*
- *“Path on Murray [Valley] Highway”*
- *“Bike path beside highway” / “Bike track to United [Football & Netball Club]” / “Push bike track”*
- *“A scooter path on the way to school”*
- *“More footpaths on both sides of the road” / “Footpath to Hungry Jacks”*
- *“Safer roads to walk home”*

Figure 2.1: Missing Footpath – Eyre Street (facing east)



Figure 2.2: Students (including on bikes) using missing footpath section – Eyre Street (Google)



2. Missing crossings in the vicinity of the school and on key after-school routes

Missing crossings were another commonly-raised issue and can be as critical as footpaths themselves, as they provide connections between footpaths across areas where key conflicts exist (such as roads).

Specific crossing concerns included:

- Across Murray Valley Highway / Ogilvie Avenue, which is a high-speed, high-volume arterial road with complex turning movements at points (such as the intersection with Bowen Street & McKenzie Road). There are several popular after-school destinations on the south side (such as Echuca United FNC, Hungry Jacks

and residential areas), which would benefit from improved access and a greater provision of footpaths. GTA understands that signals are proposed at the intersection of Murray Valley Highway and Sturt Street under a state government project.

- South of the school, through the surrounding residential areas to connecting to Echuca United Football and Netball Club.
- East of the school, where a large portion of the school catchment resides.
- Crossing of Bowen Street and Sutton Street (and absence of connecting facilities such as footpaths) to help connect to residential areas or the broader township. These streets carry vehicles which may seek through-links between Pakenham Street and Ogilvie Avenue and in some cases, the wide cross-sections and relative lack of constraints are conducive to higher vehicle speeds.

Concerns were also raised about the streets in the immediate vicinity of the school, which, in some cases, also feature wide cross-sections (i.e. all legs at the Eyre Street / Barry Street and Eyre Street / Sutton Street intersections). There are mid-block school crossings, but some students were observed to continue to cross the road at the intersections as they provide a more direct route, or to access parents picking them up nearby.

Crossing these streets can be difficult or uncomfortable at times - while on-site students were observed to run across Sutton Street between a break in traffic in order to access the west side. A median island and/or kerb buildout would reduce the crossing distance and allow a staged crossing between traffic travelling in different directions.

Some of the ideas to resolve the issues raised by students included:

- *“More footpaths and crossing and less parking on streets”*
- *“Lights across highway to soccer”*
- *“Walking stops and looking stops [median islands]”*
- *“Walking/crossing lights”*
- *“A crossing across highway to United FNC”*

Figure 2.3: Students wait to cross Sutton Street at Eyre Street (Google)



Figure 2.4: Absence of Connecting Facilities – Bowen Street (Google)



3. Limited driver caution around school environment

As noted above, anecdotal responses indicated that drivers were noted travelling at speeds which may have been above the posted speed limit at some locations around the school.

Some factors which may contribute to this include:

- Wide, straight street cross-sections (i.e. Sutton Street, Eyre Street) with only limited speed calming measures or friction, conducive to travel at higher speeds.
- Though streets around the school have default 50km/h or full-time 40km/h posted limits, there is limited clear distinction of the area as a 'school zone'. Though regular travellers will be aware of the presence of the school, a visual cue or reminder may prompt some drivers to exercise additional caution.

Figure 2.5: Wide Street Cross-Section – Eyre Street



Figure 2.6: People wait to cross the wide cross-section of Eyre Street at Sutton Street (Google)



4. Parked cars can make visibility difficult

With primary school children being of a height that makes it difficult to see over a parked car, some students advised that this was an issue when crossing the road at some locations, both at mid-block and at intersections.

Some of the ideas to resolve the issues included:

- *"Less car parks on streets"*
- *"More footpaths and crossings and less parking on streets"*
- *"No parking signs"*

5. Landscaping / Garden Blocking Footpaths

As in other parts of Echuca, there are some areas where plantations or landscaping covers the entire nature strip between the property line and carriageway, with no clear footpath width. In these cases, all non-vehicle users (pedestrians, people with prams, mobility scooters, children on bikes and on scooters etc.) are required to use the road to circumnavigate. Generally, instances occur on local residential streets.

Some specific locations advised include:

- Snowden Street
- Stawell Street

While several students commented that plants and trees can make the walk more pleasant or comfortable, there should ideally be a suitable clear footpath width along all road reserves.

Figure 2.7: Student walks on road with no footpath alternative – Snowden Street (Google)



Figure 2.8: Landscaping across nature strip – Stawell Street (Google)



6. Connection over railway line at Eyre Street

The railway line is a known and ongoing barrier to east-west movement in Echuca and continues to form a major barrier to active transport movements to / from the residential areas near the school. The resultant road-based detour can be significant, with current crossing opportunities at Murray Valley Highway (700 metres to the south of Eyre Street) and Pakenham Street (700 metres to the north of Eyre Street).

The concept of a pedestrian crossing at Eyre Street has been long-contemplated, given the existing crossing of the Campaspe River at Eyre Street and position midway between the two existing railway crossings, creating an east-west pedestrian link which traverses the length of the town centre. However, it is understood that VicTrack does not support an at-grade pedestrian crossing at this location, and the cost of a grade separated facility is significant.

Figure 2.9: East-west connections (existing – blue, Eyre Street missing link – pink)



7. Other Suggestions

There were a range of other suggestions put forward to help encourage active travel to and from the school. Those of note and considered to be of most benefit is outlined below:

- More attractive routes to school, through the following:
 - *“On the way to school make the scenery better”*

- *“Better consequences for litterers”*
- *“Less messy nature strips” / “Cut grass”*
- *“More plants/trees”*
- *“I would like more trees in Echuca”*
- *“Add a garden”*
- Walking with a friend or buddy
- Supporting facilities at the school, including:
 - *“New bike shed with a roof” / “Scooter and bike shed”*
 - *“Add security” / “New security and cameras” / “High tech fences”*
 - *“Free phone caller so we can call our mums to come pick us up”*
 - *“More bubble taps”*

2.3. Other Analysis

2.3.1. CrowdSpot

Community feedback received during the development of the Campaspe Active Transport Strategy for locations proximate to the Echuca East Primary School is listed in Table 2.1 and shown in Figure 2.10.

Table 2.1: Community feedback for locations near Echuca East Primary School (via CrowdSpot)

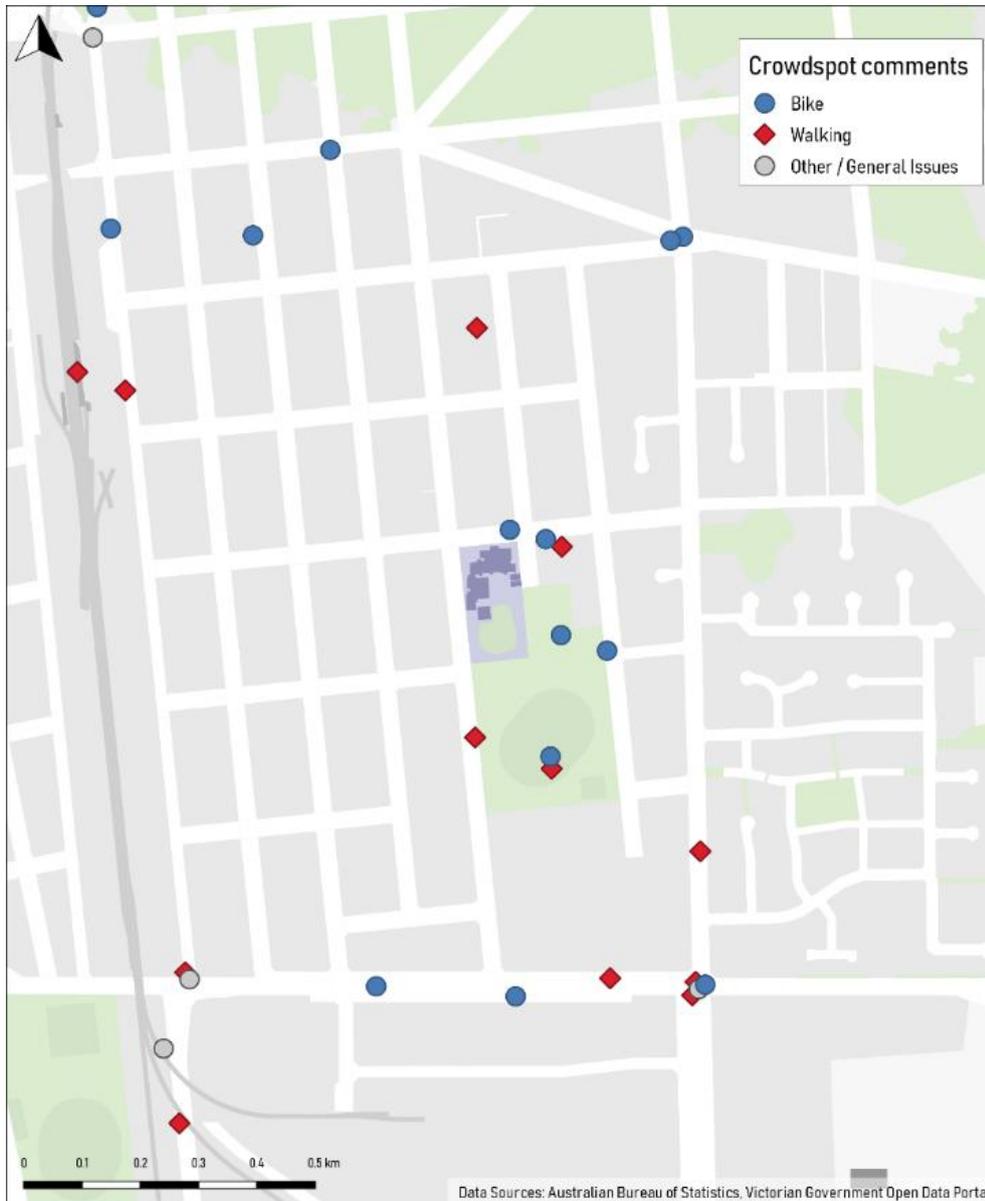
Location	Feedback
General comments around Echuca East	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● No footpaths on certain sides of the street. ● Bindis cause punctures on children’s bikes when travelling to and from school.
Ogilvie Ave / Bowen St / Kyabram Rd Intersection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Multiple people have flagged this intersection as busy and dangerous for all users (walkers, cyclists and cars), including those travelling along Bowen Street and Echuca-Kyabram Road. People are discouraged from riding or walking because of this.
Ogilvie Avenue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● There are no footpaths for walking or cycling so pedestrians are required to walk on the road shoulder. Bicycle lanes are covered with stones, causing cyclists to move into traffic lanes to avoid them.
Echuca East Recreation Reserve	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● There are bindis throughout the reserve causing punctures on children’s bikes who are travelling to and from school. ● To create a walking/bike track to at least the East Boat Ramp, possibly even further to the caravan parks would be great. Many people use this stretch and it can be very dangerous on the road edge. ● The footpath ends at the Echuca East Kindergarten and doesn't connect to the path through the Echuca East Recreation Reserve connecting to the Echuca East School. Children are unable to ride their bicycles safely between the two without getting a puncture.
Eyre Street, just north of the school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● There are bindis all around and in the crack of the footpath here and around the Echuca East school which need to be removed to prevent punctures in the bicycle tyres for those children riding to school. ● There is no footpath on the south side of Eyre Street, despite there being a safe crossing point to the school here at Barry Street. There is no safe place for children to walk/bicycle or scoot to school along this stretch of road. ● No footpath but regularly used due to close proximity to school & kindergarten. Ruts and uneven ground make it difficult to navigate with bikes, scooters, prams

Location	Feedback
	etc. Gets quite muddy in winter too. A footpath from the school at Barry Street to Bowen Street.
The Pakenham Street / Goulburn Road intersection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are bindis present along the footpath here, and other footpaths and nature strips in Echuca East causing bike punctures for children riding to and from school. • There is no safe place to cross this intersection with children riding their bicycles to school. It is almost a 5-way intersection as you have to watch for traffic from Darling Street, Bowen Street and Goulburn Road.
Pakenham & Sturt Street Roundabout	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cross over issues for families with young children on bicycles. • Crossing over at this point is the most direct route to get from the East to the main street of Echuca and ultimately Echuca Primary School. Crossing this very busy roundabout with morning traffic with children on bicycles is hazardous. • It is a very busy intersection, and the main path into the shopping district of Echuca from the East, but is very dangerous for kids/families walking or riding bikes. • We ride and walk to school through this dangerous crossing. I am nervous each time we cross.
Train Station Overpass	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is no path on the East or west side of the overpass linking it to the East or to town. On the west side is an unmarked gravel car park. On the east side is the newly sealed train station carpark, but no dedicated footpath.
Sturt Street near train Station	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficult for crossing - especially for kids who want to walk to school.
Mitchell Street	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uneven Gravel shoulders to sealed toad are difficult/dangerous for young cyclists to navigate, especially when the sealed section barely allows two cars to pass. Sealing the edges to the gutter would allow enough room for safe cycling, or a bicycle path.
Hovell Street	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unsealed edges of roads are making it difficult for children to ride in a safe road position, especially when cars are passing them.

Community feedback is broadly consistent with issues raised by school students and teachers, including:

- Absence of footpaths in many locations, particularly around the school
- Difficulty in crossing roads, particularly intersections along Goulburn Road and Sturt Street
- Sense of discomfort and risk on Ogilvie Avenue
- Bindi-eyes causing punctures and stone presenting hazards on paths and unsealed road shoulders

Figure 2.10: Community feedback for locations near Echuca East Primary School (via CrowdSpot)



2.3.2. Crash Statistics

A review of the reported casualty accident history in the vicinity of the Echuca East Primary School has been sourced from the VicRoads CrashStats accident database. This database shows all recorded accidents causing injury and categorises these accidents as follows:

- Fatal injury: at least one person was killed in the accident or died within 30 days as a result of the accident.
- Serious injury: at least one person was sent to hospital as a result of the accident.
- Other injury: at least one person required medical treatment as a result of the accident.

The following charts show where (Figure 2.11) and types (Figure 2.12) of crashes, number of crashes involving vulnerable road users (Figure 2.13) and the age of people involved in the crashes (Figure 2.14) over the past 5 years.

Figure 2.11: Location of All Crashes – Last Five Years

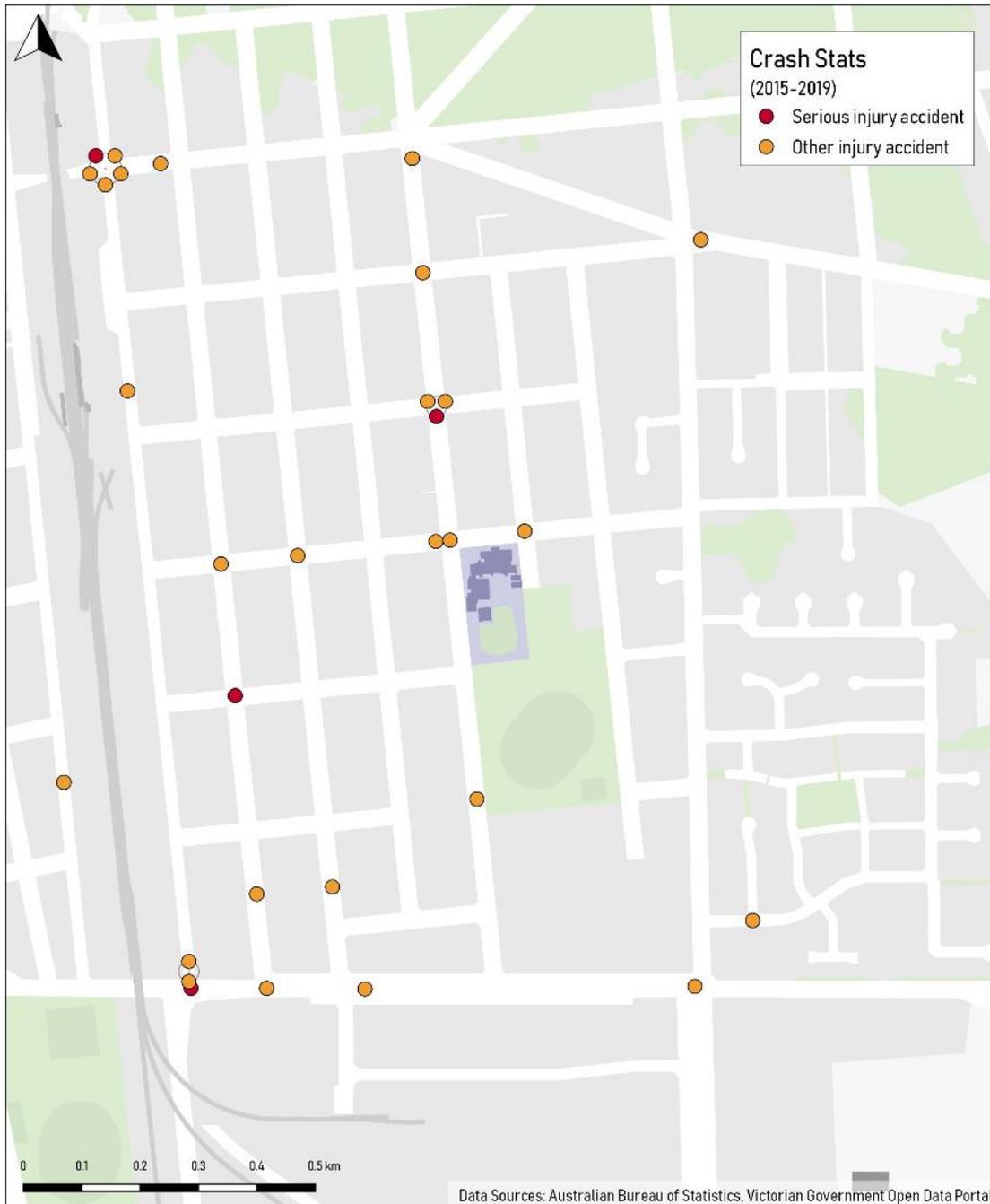


Figure 2.11 indicates that a total of 30 crashes were recorded over the last 5 years in the proximate area to the Echuca East Primary School, including 4 serious and 26 other injury crashes. Of these, the highest-crash areas occurred along Sturt Street, Sutton Street, Murray Valley Highway and Eyre Street, at the following locations:

- Sturt Street and Darling Street with 5 crashes, including 1 serious and 4 other injury types.
- Sutton Street and McKinlay Street with 3 crashes, including 1 serious and 3 other injury types
- Sutton Street and Eyre Street with 2 crashes, both being other injury type crashes
- Sturt Street and Murray Valley Highway with 3 crashes, including 1 serious and 3 other injury types

Figure 2.12: Common Crash Types – All Crashes – Last Five Years

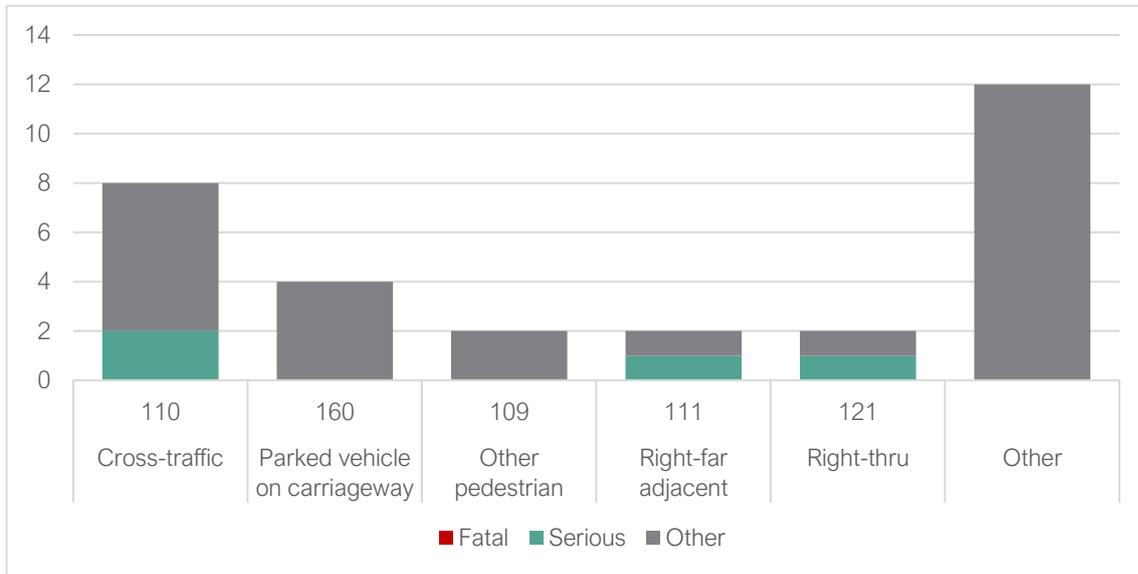


Figure 2.12 indicates that the most common crash types were between cross-traffic at intersections (8 crashes) and vehicles hitting parked cars (4 crashes).

Figure 2.13: Vulnerable Road User Crashes – Last Five Years

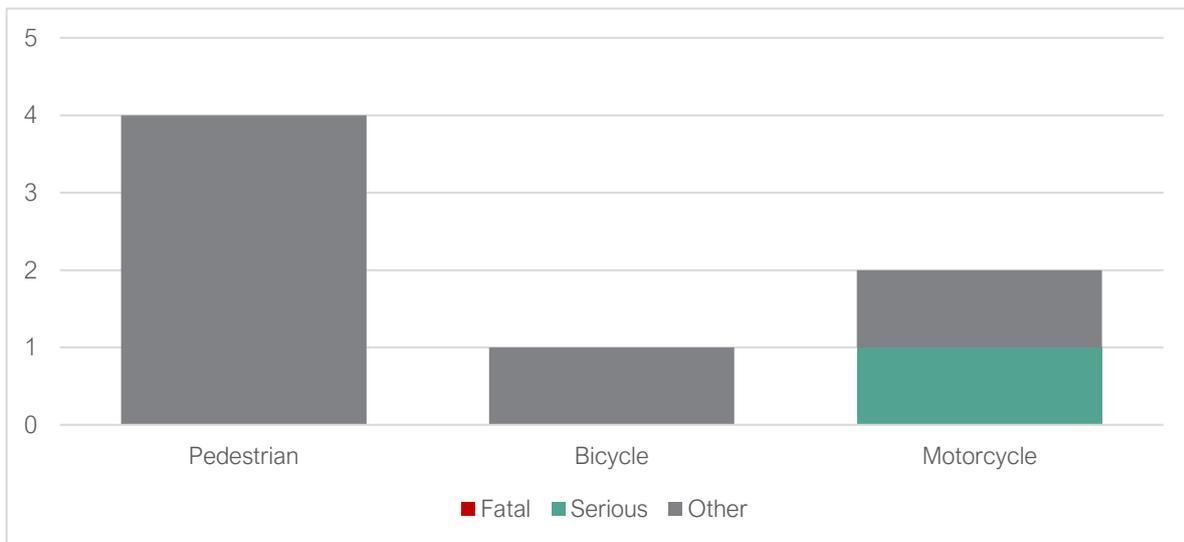


Figure 2.13 indicates that the majority of vulnerable road user crashes involved pedestrians with 4 crashes, then motorcycles with 2 crashes and only one involving a cyclist. Of these 7 vulnerable road user crashes, only one motorcycle crash resulted in a serious injury; the others were all other injury crash types.

Figure 2.14: Age of People Involved in Crashes – All Crashes – Last Five Years

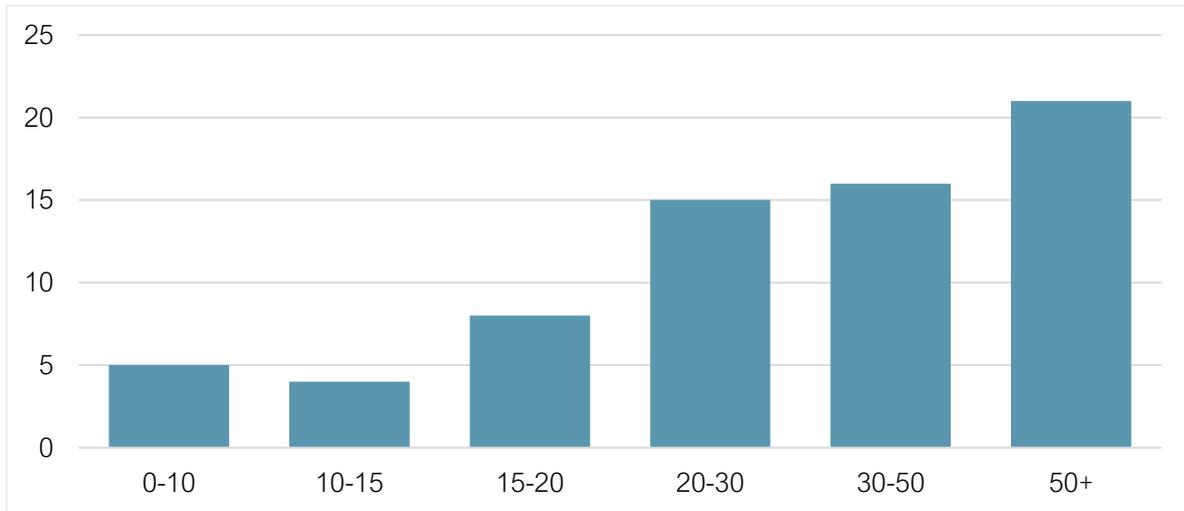


Figure 2.14 indicates the majority of the crashes involved people 50+ years of age and broadly decreases with each age group. From the above data it is also noted that three crashes resulted in other injuries to school-aged pedestrians at the following locations:

- Eyre Street and Barry Street
- Eyre Street and Sutton Street
- Sturt Street and Ogilvie Avenue

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1. Overview

Echuca East Primary School is located within a predominantly residential area, generally with default speed limits of 50km/h or a posted speed limit of 40km/h. The residential area is somewhat severed from its surrounds by the high-speed, high-volume Murray Valley Highway to the south and rail corridor to the west. Bowen Street, Pakenham Street and other main north-south roads can also impose challenges in accessing parts of the neighbourhood. In these areas, traffic volumes travelling in both directions and wide streets which require crossing in a single movement can make traversing difficult or unsafe. These challenges are compounded by busier road network volumes coinciding with school times.

Footpath provision is generally inconsistent – while some areas have a footpath on one side, others have footpaths on both sides, and some streets are absent of any facilities. As outlined earlier, this can force people walking and cycling to use roads or road shoulders,

As such, a focussed set of recommendations over the short, medium and long-term are set out below that aim to support students, teachers and parents accessing Echuca East Primary School through walking, wheeling and cycling. The aim is for recommendations to be consistent with the Active Transport Strategy and be realistic and achievable by Council, with support from others.

3.2. Descriptions

3.2.1. Short-Term

In the short-term (i.e. within the year and generally deliverable through Council's operational allowance/not require a specific Council budget allocation):

- Creation of a 'school zone' around the school through relevant signage and linemarking, including a gateway / threshold treatment 200m to 400m on each approaching road to the school, as per Table 4 of the VicRoads Speed Zoning Guidelines. Though regular drivers will be aware of the school's presence, a visual cue and prominent display as a school zone may encourage some drivers to exercise additional caution.
- Observe car parking and extend No Standing signs near intersections where parking is observed to be a problem or reduce crossing visibility on key routes (including Eyre Street, Sutton Street and Barry Street and near intersections with busier roads). Ensuring clear sight lines was raised by several students as a hazard and is relatively straightforward to control.

3.2.2. Medium-Term

Over the medium-term (i.e. next year or two, requiring some alternate funding) the initiatives that can be implemented and are recommended include the following:

- Complete footpaths on both sides of Eyre Street between Sturt Street and Bowen Street. In particular, the link between Barry Street and Stawell Street should be prioritised, given it is immediately adjacent to the school and abuts a key pick-up/drop-off area.
- Install median refuge islands on all legs of the intersection of the intersection of Sutton Street and Eyre Street. Though there are mid-block crossings, some students will still choose to use the more direct routes at intersections, and this will reduce the width of the road and allow crossing to be broken into stages.

- Progressively complete footpaths between Eyre Street and existing residential footpaths to the west of Bowen Street.
- Progressively complete footpaths along Sutton Street to create a continuous north-south link near the school, feeding adjacent residential streets.
- Progressively complete footpaths linking the school to Echuca United FNC via the new signals at the intersection with Sturt Street/Murray Valley Highway. Ultimately, this will involve providing footpaths on Sturt Street and Murray Valley Highway, which have been raised as areas of concern.

3.2.3. Long-Term

The following initiatives will improve the safety and accessibility by foot, wheel or bicycle:

- Continue to identify opportunities to link across the railway line at Eyre Street.
- Continue to complete the footpath network in the surrounding residential areas.
- Rationalise road space along local active travel access routes (i.e. Eyre Street, Sutton Street).
- Continue to improve crossing facilities (built-outs, refuge islands, zebras, flashing lights, etc.) and walking comfort (i.e. by planting trees or landscaping) along the key active travel access routes to the school.
- Continue to deliver Local Area Traffic Management measures to achieve a self-enforcing speed environment within the 40km/h speed zone area.

3.3. Summary

Recommendations are shown diagrammatically in Figure 3.1.

Figure 3.1: Short, Medium and Long-Term Recommendations

