



What a mess! It's time to get streetwise, Swanston-wise

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Pedestrians and cyclists risk life and limb, and it must be rectified.

IT'S TIME for Swanston Street to be properly planned to make it safe for people on bikes, and create more space for people on foot. This fine street is the central axis that in many ways defines Melbourne as a city. It has heritage buildings, it connects St Paul's Cathedral, the Town Hall, the State Library and two universities.

It houses two main transport hubs, it is a main retail and entertainment street, it leads to the arts precinct, Federation Square and the river, and it looks on to the Shrine of Remembrance. Yet, at present the street is a disgraceful mess. Last week it also proved to be a danger to life.

Crashes such as the one in which a cyclist died are not accidents. They are symptoms of planning failure. Swanston Street has become a loading zone for service vans, a parking place for tour buses, a rat-run for taxis, a hell ride for cyclists and a congested nightmare for pedestrians.

All of this contradicts the fine aims announced by the Melbourne City Council in the Future Melbourne planning exercise: "Melbourne will be a cycling city. The municipality's entire road network will be safe and attractive for cyclists of all ages. Bikes will become the mode of choice for private transport trips in the municipality, including for work, school, business and recreation. The whole road and path network will be made safe, easy and enjoyable for cycling." Now it's time to translate these goals into action. Ironically, Swanston Street is already designated a pedestrian and cycling priority zone. Yet it is anything but that.

Cyclists squeeze between unloading vans, taxis, huge tour buses and trams. I cycle to work every day along Swanston Street and I know the dangers.

So here's my plan for implementing the city's goals.

1. At the Flinders Street intersection, begin by creating a diagonal pedestrian crossing with lights and road markings. In the longer term, tunnel Flinders Street under Swanston Street to allow level pedestrian flows across to Princes Bridge and the arts precinct.

2. Trams along Swanston Street should have priority at all road intersections. Pedestrians and trams mix safely in major European cities (pictured is Montpellier in France), and

they do so in the Bourke Street Mall, where the pedestrian priority is much clearer.

3. Tour buses and taxis must be banned from Swanston Street. The street should have a level surface without kerbs (sometimes called an urban carpet), so that any vehicles in the street know that this is a pedestrian priority zone. Service vehicles, except for emergency vehicles, should only be allowed at night and early morning.

4. Where streets are heavily used by both pedestrians and cyclists, there has to be some separation. Swanston Street is a main arterial for bikes and walkers. Clearly designated green-paved bike lanes must be provided on both sides all the way along the street, connecting with the excellent Copenhagen lanes in the north of the street and similar bike lanes along St Kilda Road.

5. Close off all the cross streets between Flinders and Lonsdale streets. There is no need to allow cross traffic

through central Melbourne. VicRoads' plan for Melbourne is to keep the through traffic running fast. But let's just consider a different attitude to congestion. In *The Limits to Travel*, transport analyst David Metz says: "Many bottlenecks perform a metering function by reducing the flow at one point to a level that can be sustained in downstream sections of roadway." Congestion at the perimeter of cities is necessary to keep the city itself liveable.

6. Reconfigure the crazy intersection with La Trobe Street to provide clear priority zones for pedestrians and cyclists so that the City Baths building marks a pleasant gateway to the city.

For this to succeed, there must be agreement between council and the transport department. Let's see the Lord Mayor and the ministers exercise some imagination, and for once care for Melbourne's citizens as they are elected to do. If they fail, we voters must hold them accountable.

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