

Pedestrian safety: why we need an inquiry

- Successive New Zealand governments and government agencies have failed to address, or even to recognise, the magnitude and implications of the number, age distribution and circumstances of pedestrian deaths on New Zealand roads.
- Surveys show that walking is New Zealanders' favourite recreational activity. It suits people of all ages and abilities. People who have long since given up playing sport and going to the gym get their exercise by walking.
- But you can't walk far if it's not safe to cross the road.
- Between 2006 and 2015, almost four times as many pedestrians (348) as cyclists (90) were killed on New Zealand roads. Pedestrian deaths among people over 65 (104) outnumbered total cyclist deaths (90) over that period.
- Most pedestrian deaths occur on the road, but the invasion of footpaths by often poorly controlled and rapidly moving wheeled vehicles (mobility scooters, bicycles, skateboards and so on) is a growing risk to vulnerable pedestrians.
- Between 2006 and 2015, 30% of pedestrian deaths (n=104), and 23% of cyclist deaths (n=21) came from 14% of the population, i.e. they were aged 65 and over.
- Another group of vulnerable road users, children aged 0 to 14, represent 20% of New Zealand's population. They fare better in the road crash statistics – probably because their parents know it's unsafe for children to cross the road, so they drive them to school. Between 2006 and 2015, 10% of pedestrian deaths (n=35) and 9% of cyclist deaths (n=9) were among children aged 0 to 14.
- Despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary in its own data, the Ministry of Transport claims: *Walking is one of the safest modes of travel available (Pedestrian Crash Facts 2015).*
- New Zealand's *Safer Journeys Strategy* seems designed to recognise and address the high pedestrian road toll: *The Safe System approach recognises that people make mistakes and are vulnerable in a crash. It reduces the price paid for a mistake so crashes don't result in death or serious injuries.*
- But instead of taking a Safe System approach to pedestrian deaths, the Ministry's Crash Facts 2015 play the blame game. The section headed *Who was at fault* lists risks like texting, listening to music, playing games and lying on the road – none of which are indulged in by old people who just want to cross the road without getting run over.
- Under the heading *Cycling and pedestrian safety, The Safer Journeys Action Plan 2016-2020* notes: *The NZ Transport Agency and its partners will continue to deliver the Cycle Safety Action Plan ... Actions include: co-investing more than \$350 million in urban cycling infrastructure.* But there is no mention of any Pedestrian Safety Action Plan, and no mention of any investment in urban pedestrian infrastructure.
- The words "pedestrian" and "footpath" are absent from Budget 2016 Vote Transport, and from the Government Policy Statement on Land Transport 2015/16 - 2024/25.
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