The oceanway, promenade or a smart transport route?

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Title: The Oceanway, Promenade or a Smart Transport Route?

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Abstract:

This paper arises out of a doctoral case study that sought to understand how people value, use and relate to urban beach precincts so that the development of seaside places may functionally reflect the role they play in people’s lives. The case study examined the complex relationships between the urban design attributes and spatial arrangement of beach precincts and public access to activity, amenity and facility in a case study of three different Gold Coast beach precincts.

The Oceanway project aims to establish a shared use ‘smart transport’ route along the Gold Coast ocean frontage from the Spit to Coolangatta. The Oceanway is an iteration of a Council foreshore public access plan dating from the 1980s. It has also become a project of cycling advocacy groups on the Gold Coast and within the Gold Coast City Council bureaucracy. The Oceanway proponents cite the benefits of the project as sustainable coastal tourism with improved active transport outcomes in line with active healthy living objectives.

The case study suggests the proposition that the shared path policy in the foreshore park sections of the Oceanway creates a loss of amenity in the highly valued social, recreational and restorational spaces of the beachfront transitional corridor. Cycling is a probable cause of deterrence to the use of the foreshore parks by a constituency of disadvantage who may only have walking as a viable option to enjoy a degree of physical exercise and mental restoration. Cyclists can achieve their desired transport route and exercise needs elsewhere in the city and should be prioritised with the provision of an alternative purpose-built, shared route in the gateway transitional corridor.

Keywords: Beach precincts, cycling, conflict over public space, foreshore parks, gender and age, walking.
Introduction

This paper arises out of a doctoral case study that sought to understand how people value, use and relate to urban beach precincts so that the development of seaside places may functionally reflect the role they play in people’s lives. The case study examined the complex relationships between the urban design attributes and spatial arrangement of beach precincts and public access to activity, amenity and facility in a case study of three different Gold Coast beach precincts. The case study design used in this study utilises multiple sources of evidence to build a matrix of data (Yin 2009). The overarching research question for the study was:

*How well do the urban design attributes, characteristics and values of selected Gold Coast beach precincts meet the expectations, preferences and values of the different user and interest groups?*

The case study took the overarching research question and used it to define lines of enquiry into the urban design, spatial and physical relationships of the public realm of different beach precincts. It also related the attributes and characteristics of place to the expectations, preferences and values of the different users and groups for the purposive use of place (Canter 1983), as illustrated in the research framework below (Figure 1)

![Figure 1: Case study research framework based on the purposive use of place (Author, 2012, adapted from Canter 1983)](image)

The case study adapted a method of inquiry described by Tuan (1974) for connecting people and place by:
- distinguishing different types of spatial arrangement and orientation of beach precinct environments to describe their character using typological (Cartlidge 2011a) and urban design tools of analysis developed by the author;
- examining the informal public narratives to analyse the discourse for meaning by textual analysis of the narratives surrounding public access to the beach and activity as attributes and characteristics of place (Altheide and Schneider 2013);
- observing how people behave in the public spaces of the beach precinct in relation to the identified characteristics of the different types of beach precincts (Gray 2009);
- enquiring into the preferences of individuals for the preferred urban design characteristics and pattern of activities of beach precincts (Oh, Draper and Dixon 2009, Raybould and Lazarow 2009); and,
- seeking the opinion of the public and professionals about their preferred governance and urban design solutions for beach precincts (Cartlidge and Armitage 2014).

The research findings

The case study revealed complex patterns and relationships between the urban design of elements of the typology of beach precincts and their use by residents, tourists and visitors. As suggested by Bentley et al. 1985 - people can only use the beach precinct for the social, recreational and restorative benefits they desire if they are allowed to do so by the design of the public realm and supportive public and private infrastructure. Each of the strands of enquiry suggested that the nature of the spatial and physical relationships of the different beach precincts affected the values of those precincts for different groups of users.

This paper draws together strands of evidence from the case study that indicate that the use of the beachfront transitional corridor as a smart transport route is not the highest and best use of the most important space in any beach precinct for egalitarian access and amenity. The following sections present the evidence for this assertion and propose that the beachfront transitional corridor, in beach precincts with a foreshore park, should be designed and planned as a promenade.

This paper will set out a typology of form, use and transition and identify the different types of user groups and constituencies of advantage and disadvantage created by the contemporary design of the corridors, locations and edges of Gold Coast beach precincts. The next part will explain the nature of the foreshore park beach precincts and their importance for social, restorative and passive recreation purposes for residents, visitors and tourists. The paper will go on to examine the nature of conflict produced by using the foreshore park precincts as a smart transport shared path and explains why the Oceanway along the beachfront deters use by the constituency of disadvantage. Finally the paper questions the policy of creating a conflict between cyclists and other users of the beach precinct that is emotional and intractable and creates a loss of amenity for the majority of users of a unique place, for the purpose of creating a somewhat limited smart transport route.
Typology of Form, Use and Transition of Beach Precincts

The typological and urban design analyses of beach precincts conducted in the case study identified that the spatial characteristics for public access to amenity and activity are concentrated along the pathways through the transitional corridors, locations and edges of public, private and commercial built and natural forms (Figure 2). Different types of activity are related to the arrangement and provision of facilities in the transitional spaces of the beach precinct.

The most important of these transitional spaces is the beachfront transitional corridor. It is in this corridor that the conflict over the social, recreational and restorational benefits peak (Cartlidge 2011b). All the purposes of visitation are met in this corridor and then are supported or restricted in the other beach precinct transitional corridors, locations and edges. The corridors, locations and edges of beach precincts are defined by the typology as:

- **Transitional Locations** found at social nodes, beach access points and gateways where facilities provide access to specific activities and amenities;
- **Beachfront Transitional Corridor** found along the transverse path between the access form and the beach in places with public foreshore spaces;
- **Gateway Transitional Corridor** found along the transect path between the built and access form, and
- **Transitional Edges** - the interface between public and private/commercial property and the different forms of the typology.

![Figure 2: Typology of Form, Use and Transition (Cartlidge 2014)](image)

We now move on to describe how the different groups were defined in the case study.
Identifying the different groups of use, activity and governance of beach precincts

The different groups who use, design and plan the beach precinct are difficult to categorise. The case study used ‘activity’, ‘age’ and ‘gender’ in the field observations and identity groups in the textual analyses of expressed opinions of public and professional opinions (Cartlidge and Armitage 2014). The case study indicated that those who make decisions in the urban design, planning and governance of beach precincts have conflicting priorities and values with some of the different users of the foreshore parks. In particular the way appropriate uses and activities have been prioritised in the beachfront transitional corridor where the Oceanway is located.

It was not practical in the case study to describe or define all the different identity groups in society who have influenced the urban design and planning of beach precincts. It was possible, however, to identify broad groups for the purpose of critical analysis by distinguishing some of the roles that institutional, organisational and special interest user groups may have had in the contest for the control of the public spaces of the beach precincts. These user groups include what Castells (2009) characterised as ‘legitimate’, ‘resistance’ and ‘project’ identities. In the analysis adopted for the case study, the ways different interest groups contest the design of spaces to meet their definitions of appropriate uses of place have been recast as ‘dominant’, ‘project’, ‘resistance’ and ‘passive’ (Althusser 1984). These groups play different roles in the cultural conflict for the creation of place artefacts in the built environment (Figure 3).

‘Dominant groups’ have particular attributes. They are empowered by their level of engagement in the political fields of conflict by their ability to control agendas and make decisions. They have either personal wealth or control of government or corporate expenditure. They often possess global political and economic connections and exercise personal, institutional, legal and

Figure 3: The Role of Identity in the Political Creation of Place (Author, 2012)
historically legitimised powers (Castells 2012). The dominant group members initiate the vast majority of change to the built environment and have the greatest degree of influence in the political field of conflict over the consultation, design, build or governance of artefacts in that built environment (McGlynn 1993).

The individual needs and preferences of the dominant group are always prioritised and articulated in the political field of conflict in the consultation, design and build stages of the creation of place artefacts. Their identity is reinforced by the cultural creation of place artefacts and they receive positive endorsement of their expectations, preferences and values by their control of the process (Castells 2009). On the Gold Coast these dominant groups are represented by the media, tourism, development and construction industries and the powerful individuals with global connections who live in the city. The institutionally dominant identities in the beach precincts include the councillors, bureaucrats, state officials and politicians who make governance decisions.

The ‘Project Group’ usually coalesces as a single or special interest group and can originate from either the dominant or resistance groups. They share the characteristics of their parent group in relation to the control of wealth, corporate powers or positions of authority in different levels and departments of government. They are as connected and empowered as their parent group. The degree of influence they exercise over the cultural creation of artefacts will tend to reflect the influence of the parent group. In different contexts, for example, beachfront residents, cyclists and environmentalists may take dominant, project or resistance roles.

Dominant project groups, by virtue of their function or position within institutions or corporations, exercise undue influence over the agenda and processes of consultation, design, build or governance for their desired cultural creation of place artefacts. On the Gold Coast these project groups include the beachfront property owners, political and economic alliances for the creation of projects such as the cruise ship terminal proponents, and activity groups, such as the cyclist lobby behind the creation of the Oceanway concept.

‘Resistance groups’ usually react to developments created by the dominant and project groups and will be alienated by those developments if they fail to meet their individual expectations, preferences and values of place design. The creation of places with particular physical or spatial attributes can also exclude or prevent them from easily accessing places to meet their needs and desires. The resistance groups do not initiate change to the natural and built environments as often as the dominant groups. However, through their engagement in the field of political conflict, they may succeed in becoming the dominant group or alter the paradigms and processes of development (Castells 2010). The resistance identities in the design of beach precincts can be found amongst the environmental and alternative communities of interest such as the ‘Save our Spit’ group.

The ‘Passive Group’ is characterised by its being disconnected from the cultural creation of place artefacts. They may lack wealth, organisation, motivation, inclination, education, experience and understanding of the political processes. However, all the other groups will at some time claim to speak for the passive group as they are by far the largest group of the analysis. They are largely under-represented in the political process and have little in the way of connections except their social groups or communities of interests. All the other groups seek to influence this group purely for their electoral endorsement and the legitimacy this brings to the political agendas.
The case study research made it possible to describe different identity groups who may be simultaneously members of the different identity groups and privileged or discriminated against by the existing urban design and planning of beach precincts on the Gold Coast. These identity groups are the constituencies of advantage and disadvantage.

**Constituencies of Advantage and Disadvantage**

The case study found the urban design and planning of the beach precincts largely favours the activity interests of active adult males, creating constituencies of advantage and disadvantage. They are constituencies rather than communities, as people can move in and out of them and only share disadvantaged access to the public spaces of the beach precinct as a common characteristic of membership of the constituency. The constituencies can be summarised as:

- **Constituency of Advantage**: all the beach precincts of the study appear discriminate positively in favour of active adult males, local residents, cyclists, the wealthy, property owners, tourism operators, real estate interests, surf lifesaving clubs and their members, the physically fit and mobile. This constituency of advantage is likely to be overrepresented in the urban design, planning, management and governance of beach precincts (Mees and Groenhart 2012).

- **Constituency of Disadvantage**: the constituency of disadvantage was identified in the case study as a broad grouping that includes children; carers; seniors; socially, economically, perceptually and mobility-impaired people; women; and, in particular, older women; and, in the context of the Gold Coast, all those people who live in inland and hinterland suburbs.

The Council’s shared path policy in foreshore parks (Gold Coast City Council 2014a)(and particularly the Oceanway project along the beachfront transitional corridor) creates conditions for conflict. These conditions deter members of the constituency of disadvantage from accessing the social, recreational and restorative benefits of a unique transitional space between the built and natural environments.

The following sections will describe the nature of that conflict.

**The Nature of Conflict over the Oceanway Route through Foreshore Parks**

The decisions made by the dominant and project groups over the appropriate design of beach precincts will stem from their identities and reflect their political paradigms. They are often motivated by their visions of a better world and the designs and plans they produce are intended to solve contemporary urban crises to order society by transforming the physical environment (Fishman 1982). The cyclist project group believes that cycling can change society’s’ behaviours and make a contribution to improve people’s health and the environment (Bicycle Network 2013).

The cyclist project group has successfully influenced the dominant groups to adopt many of their policies, and appropriated the foreshore public access plan dating from the 1980s to promote the Oceanway as an important part of the council’s active transport policy (City of the Gold Coast 2012). The stated aim of the Oceanway project is to establish a shared use ‘smart transport’ route along the Gold Coast ocean frontage from the Spit to Coolangatta (Gold Coast City Council
It has also become a project of cycling advocacy groups on the Gold Coast and within the Gold Coast City Council bureaucracy (Save Our Spit 2013).

Morrell (2009) asserts that one of the roles of the academic community is to scrutinise the claims those in power make for the expenditure of revenue for the ‘public good’. There is a lack of research in the academic literature either directly into the validity made for the claims of the Oceanway project or the contributory evidence provided by the active transport movement for the shared path policy. This may be due to the tendency of problem-led research being determined by those in a position of power, the questions asked and the funding provided (Morrell 2008) or the manipulation of scientific investigation for political purposes (Save Our Spit 2013).

We now turn to the evidence from the case study showing that the adoption of the Oceanway project and the shared path policy in the foreshore park beach precincts of the Gold Coast act against the interests of members of the constituency of disadvantage.

Foreshore Park Precincts are Critical for Inland Gold Coast Suburb Residents

The spatial problems of the Gold Coast City can all be related to distance, time, population densities, the existing vehicle route networks and the location of available beachfront foreshore parks. The city is spread over a large area but its highest residential density is found along the coastal spine with a high degree of car dependency and sprawl in the inland suburbs (Gold Coast Primary Care Partnership Council 2009). Figure 4 gives some idea of the relative distances that residents of the city have to travel to get to the beaches, the routes they can take to visit foreshore park beachfronts and the locations of the case study areas.

In terms of driving distances, it can be up to an hour to travel from the north to the south of the city. From the inland suburbs such as Nerang it is about twenty minutes’ driving time to the coast. The arterial road system also restricts the options from the inland suburbs to the coast. Residents north of Nerang are channelled by the arterial routes to the publically accessible ocean beachfronts that are found at the Spit, Main Beach and Surfers Paradise. Residents around Nerang are channelled to Broadbeach. Residents south of Nerang are channelled to Burleigh Heads. South of Burleigh Heads the city narrows and residents usually live close enough to be convenient to beachfronts. Coolangatta/Tweed Heads straddles the New South Wales border with a small hinterland and effectively is a single destination of choice for visitors (Figure 4).

This channeling of route choices affects all residents of the suburbs west of Bermuda Street. Residents east of Bermuda Street will use the adjacent beach suburbs if they have a publically accessible beach or travel along the Gold Coast Highway until they come to their nearest public beachfront (Figure 4). Generally, only the residents east of the Gold Coast Highway have largely unrestricted access to their nearest beach. The linear and layered structure of the city has created physical disconnection for inland residents, with the suburbs west of Bermuda Street and the Pacific Motorway being progressively less connected to the beachfront.

Poor public transport connections from the inland suburbs means that people who do not have or cannot drive a car are even less connected to the beachfronts. If they are reliant on public transport they can spend up to half a day travelling to and from the beach and even more if they miss a connection. The author found sample journeys from Coomera, Nerang and Mudgeeraba by public
transport to the nearest beachfront take at least one hour 38 minutes with up to two transfers and a long walk from the bus stop (Translink 2013).

The intent of the Oceanway project for a 36 km cycling route along the foreshore is an understandable response for cyclists who can cover the distances involved in a reasonable time frame but a less convincing solution for pedestrians. Around half the beachfronts of the Gold Coast are adjacent to private property (Wake et al. 2008) and, as can be seen from Figure 4, the location of private beachfront development regularly interrupts the beachfront transitional corridor with long sections of private property in the beachfront transitional corridor which limits public access (Cartlidge 2011b).

Figure 4: The Gold Coast Showing Case Study Locations and Major Vehicle Routes (Author, 2012)
The routing of the Oceanway through foreshore parks privileges residents of beach suburbs for the purpose of cycling to work and recreational or exercise purposes. However, those people who have to travel from inland suburbs are more likely to travel to their nearest foreshore park beach precinct by car to visit a destination for social and restorational purposes, uniquely associated with the transitional corridors of the beach precinct. This is because routes to the beach from inland are channelled by the arterial road system to the foreshore park beach precincts.

The infrequent, expensive and inconvenient public transport service from the inland suburbs has created an imperative for parking spaces near the foreshore parks for many members of the constituency of disadvantage. This is particularly true for carers with small children and people with perception or mobility impairment as except for Burleigh Heads the public transport stops can be over three hundred metres from the beach. Beachfronts in residential suburbs are also distant from public transport routes and have few public facilities that will support egalitarian visitation. On the Gold Coast there are only three significant foreshore park beach precincts with public infrastructure supportive of extended stays and these are: Coolangatta, Broadbeach and Burleigh.

The land use of the Oceanway as a transport route through these foreshore park beach precincts conflicts with important social and restorational values of this limited public space for a growing and ageing population (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2010b). The more cyclists who use this transport route, the more likely the constituency of disadvantage will be deterred from accessing this important public space because of the inherent conflict that accompanies shared path use between cyclists and other users as explained later in this paper.

The nature of the restorative and social benefits of foreshore park precincts and the way shared path use compromises and conflicts with those benefits will now be discussed in the following sections.

The Importance of Beachfront Foreshore Parks as a Restorative Environment

The case study research conducted by the author suggests that the urban design and planning of the transitional corridors, locations, forms and edges of beach precincts is adversely affected by the design and location of the Oceanway in the foreshore parks. This is caused by the affective and purposive conflicts produced when walkers engage with vehicles moving through the foreshore park. In this restorative walking environment walkers need to pay attention to their safely and comply with the traffic rules introduced by the Council which is not conducive in a relaxed environment.

The public health aspect, considered central to the relationship between people and beach precincts, is the positive effect the natural environment has in allowing people to recover from stress bought on by urban living (Kaplan 1995). Kaplan distinguishes between stress that is caused by anxiety, frustration, and other physical and mental conditions and stress that arises from directed attentional fatigue. In a natural environment people are, through evolutionary processes, able to switch off directed attention and rely on involuntary attention and, in doing so, relax and restore themselves.

The connection between involuntary attention and the process of restorative effectiveness, for which natural environments are particularly suited, is elaborated by Kaplan as having four
requirements. Kaplan details the requirements of a restorative environment as: ‘being away, fascination, extent and compatibility’. These are elaborated as:

**Being Away:** the seaside is a preferred idyllic destination along with mountains, lakes, streams, forests, and meadows for ‘being away’. For Gold Coasters, ‘being away’ can be a reality whilst staying put, if the access to the natural environment suits the other requirements of a restorative environment. ‘Being away’ also implies that many of the things that are taken for granted in the design of streets in other urban contexts may not be as supportive of maintaining a sense of ‘being away’ in the beach precinct such as the traffic environment of shared paths.

**Fascination:** the fascinations of the natural environment is found in its objects and processes, horizons, beaches, trees, headlands, bays, waves, sunrises and sunsets, changing views and vistas. Promenading is a very natural way to engage with these fascinations of a beach precinct. There should also be fascinating approaches from the built environment and opportunity to experience the natural environment through involuntary attention without the need for directed attention.

**Extent:** Kaplan (1995) explains that, in the wilderness, ‘extent’ is a natural property of the environment but it can be reproduced in smaller more managed environments. Pathways can be designed so that even small areas seem larger. To achieve this Kaplan identified enclosure of vistas and the miniaturisation found in Japanese gardens to create a sense of coping as well as connectedness. As well as including cultural or historic artefacts to allow connection to past eras and environments and in turn to a larger world.

**Compatibility:** Kaplan (1995) assigns a special resonance between people and the natural environment as people need less effort to function in a natural setting than in their more usual urban setting, especially if they can be in an inattentive state. There is a convergence of the evolutionary development of the senses of perception with patterns of preferred activity and compatibility with the natural environment. Even short stays in a restorative environment have an extended peaceful effect and accessible natural environments can provide most people with a compatible context for purposive visits.

We now turn to examine the social and recreational use of beach precincts to meet needs that are complementary to their restorational values.

**The observed social and recreational use of foreshore parks**

The field observations conducted during the case study recorded the age and gender of the people found in selected beachfront and gateway transitional locations. These observations recorded whether they were there in a social group or on their own, what they were doing and where they were doing it. When the age and gender observations were analysed and compared to the age distribution pattern of the Australian population (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2010a) a male prevalence in all age groups was found, although only marginally so in older adults (Figure 5).

Due to the observations being conducted during term time and during the day, the absence of children was expected. The adult male dominance of the beach precinct indicates that beach precincts are an adult male domain. This may be a reflection of adult males use the beach precinct, the influence they have over the design of public and private spaces and the provision of supportive infrastructure and facilities in beach precincts through their dominance in the design,
planning, building, and governance professions, particularly in the senior and decision-making roles (Mathewson, Stead and Burns 2012, Todes, Malaza and Williamson 2009).

The observations suggest that older women may not be confident individual users of the precincts despite the potential mental, physical, social and health benefits of the beach precinct for this particular age group (Maller et al. 2008). There is also evidence that older people perceive the sort of straight path shared with cyclists and skateboarders found in the Gold Coast beach precincts as being a deterrence to walking (Burton, Mitchell and Stride 2011). The movement data collected by the author’s survey revealed that couples are the single largest social visitation category in the beach precincts followed by individuals and groups (Figure 6).

**Figure 5: Observed Distribution of the Age and Gender in the Beach Precincts (Author 2012)**

**Figure 6: Incidences of Individuals, Couples or Groups in the Beach Precincts (Author 2012)**
The age and gender of the couples observed visiting beach precincts reveal a similar pattern of adult and male dominance that is disproportionate to their presence in the general Australian population. The single largest social group observed was the adult male and female couple, followed by the older male and female couple (Figure 7).

The older adult couple grouping implies that older women prefer to visit beach precincts in the company of older male partners. However, older females are also found in groups consisting of an older female with adult female and adult male, suggesting other family relationships may also be important in motivating older females to visit beaches. The most commonly observed social groups are all same generation combinations which could be either family or friendship groups.

![Figure 7: The Age and Gender of Couple Groups in the Beach Precincts (Author 2012)](image)

When the social groupings are combined with the analysis of the incidence of the movement modes recorded in each of the beach precincts, the most common purposive use of beach precincts can be seen to be social walking or promenading especially as couples or in groups (Table 1). This type of use is probably not typical of other urban areas. However, no studies could be found with which to compare. Nevertheless it does indicate that the use of the transitional corridors of foreshore parks is more important for its social and promenading purposes, rather than transport route function.

Although Burleigh Heads has a smaller public foreshore park than Broadbeach, it had the largest number of people visiting the precinct; it was also the precinct with the greatest diversity of users with pram and dog walkers as significant groups. It is thought that Burleigh’s more direct visual, physical and symbolic connections in the beachfront transitional corridor to the restorative natural environment are responsible for this. This situation is also reflected in the narrative of Burleigh as a popular local and family destination (Experience OZ 2013, tripadvisor 2013).
Table 1: The Incidence of Different Movement Modes in the Beach Precincts (Author 2012)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Movement Mode</th>
<th>Burleigh Heads</th>
<th>Mermaid Beach</th>
<th>Broadbeach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Walking</td>
<td>1066 (291)</td>
<td>139 (38)</td>
<td>758 (182)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cycling</td>
<td>129 (35)</td>
<td>38 (11)</td>
<td>112 (27)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jogging</td>
<td>24 (7)</td>
<td>4 (&gt;1)</td>
<td>35 (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pushing a Pram</td>
<td>166 (45)</td>
<td>3 (&lt;1)</td>
<td>50 (12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walking a Dog</td>
<td>43 (12)</td>
<td>4 (&gt;1)</td>
<td>17 (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skateboarding</td>
<td>22 (6)</td>
<td>1 (&lt;1)</td>
<td>5 (&gt;1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assisted Mobility</td>
<td>6 (2)</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>14 (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals (Hourly rate in brackets)</td>
<td>1456 (397)</td>
<td>164 (47)</td>
<td>991 (238)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reasons given for visiting beach precincts

An inquiry into the purpose of visit using a questionnaire (n=70), conducted at the same time as the urban design analysis and field observations of the case study, found that visitors to beach precincts preferred the social and recreational activities of enjoying views, relaxation and restoration activity in a natural environment (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Respondents’ Reported Purposes for Beach Precinct Visitation (Author 2012)

The case study questionnaire was formed by, and related to, other research into beach visitation and use by Powell and Muldoon (2005), Raybould and Lazarow (2009) and Oh, et al (2009). Respondents were given the opportunity to select as many purposes of use for a beach precinct as
they wanted. The similarity of the responses between the questionnaire conducted by the author and the other sources suggest a general degree of validity for the questionnaire findings.

Enjoying the views, fresh air, relaxing, walking on the beach and in the park, and being in nature were identified by questionnaire respondents, and from the other author surveys as the primary reasons for visiting beach precincts. Although some people go for specific fitness related activities such as swimming and jogging the frequency of passive recreational activities associated with the restorative nature of the beach precinct is significant. Cycling only received a single response as a preferred beach visit activity in the questionnaire and is not mentioned at all by Raybould and Lazarow (2009).

It appears to be noteworthy that all the studies consulted appear to support the notion of the beach precinct as an accessible, relatively quiet, uncrowded, safe, inviting and comfortable place with a preference for the attributes of the natural environment. This has particular implications for beach precinct planning in the Gold Coast as many foreshore park beach precincts are probably at their limits of capacity during many weekends and beyond them during peak holiday periods (Wake et al 2008).

It may be as pleasant to cycle along the foreshore as it would be to drive along, but in doing so, the values and purpose of visit for many other users are undermined. Cyclists could achieve their desired exercise needs elsewhere in the city and be prioritised for their transport needs with a route in the gateway transitional corridor. The foreshore park beach precincts would appear to fulfil most people’s purposive intent by being largely for low intensity or passive recreation.

We now turn to examine the case for shared paths as an active transport option that led to the promotion of the beachfront transitional corridor as a ‘smart transport’ route rather than a social, recreational and restorative promenading leisure space.

**Active Transport and Shared Paths**

The Oceanway supporters cite the benefits of the smart transport project as a form of sustainable coastal tourism with improved active transport outcomes in line with Active Healthy Living objectives (Gold Coast City Council 2014b). The case for shared paths in foreshore parks promoted by the Gold Coast City Council relies on a specific interpretation of a large body of research on the effects of the built environment of cities on the health of people and communities in the developed world, known as the healthy cities movement.

The healthy cities movement is a global (World Health Organisation Regional Office for Europe 2003) to national (Department of Health and Ageing 2010) to state (Queensland Health 2010) to local (Gold Coast Physical Activity Alliance 2010) governance response to the health crises associated with epidemics of asthma, diabetes, obesity, cardiovascular disease, lung cancer mortality and mental health issues in developed countries (Srinivasan, O’Fallon and Dearry 2003). The active transport policy narrative is firmly embedded in the professional (Planning Institute of Australia 2009b), institutional (National Heart Foundation of Australia 2011) and activity (Australian Bicycle Council 2013) policies and programs. It relies on research linking health outcomes to the nature of the built environment to promote active transport as a solution to those endemic health problems.
The policy narrative of active transport is founded on the proposition from the US Surgeon General (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 1996) that 30 minutes of moderate exercise each day, including brisk walking, could be as important to limit disease risks as not smoking and a healthy diet. This finding encouraged the concept of incidental exercise as an effective public health response if physical activity could be incorporated into the habits of daily life, such as walking to catch a bus. Incidental exercise has also created the premise of active transport in which cycling and public transport have become a key component of healthy living policy responses (Wiggins 2010).

The underlying rationale of cycling being an unalloyed good for everyone is used to promote the Oceanway and shared paths (Bicycle Network 2013). However, groups in the constituency of disadvantage are unlikely to benefit from the allocation of all the available public space to cycling. The need for regular walking to maintain mobility has been identified as a key issue in maintaining health for older citizens (Pahor et al. 2014).

There is evidence that the benefits of walking for people from the age of 45 and above for women (Feskanich, Willett and Colditz 2002) and men (Feskanich, Flint and Willett 2014) for bone density is significant in retaining a degree of mobility for older people. However, older cyclists will experience higher rates of osteoporosis which will limit their future mobility (Nichols and Rauh 2011).

The state of Queensland (Queensland Government 2012) and Gold Coast City Council (Gold Coast City Council 2014a) permit cyclists and other wheeled, personal vehicles to travel along all footpaths in the beach precincts along with people walking, jogging and pushing prams. The shared pathways have been permitted and encouraged by the GCCC although they have the option to pass by-laws that restrict cycling in particular places. Such controls are found in the coastal City of Cairns in North Queensland where cyclists are required to dismount in public spaces where cycling conflicts with high pedestrian traffic and social usage associated with activity and amenity, in a city which relies heavily on overseas tourism (Figure 9) (Tourism Queensland 2013).

Figure 9: The Cairns Foreshore Promenade (Author 2012)
In promoting the Oceanway as the best use of the traverse pathway in the transitional corridor, the cyclist project group and active living advocates uncritically conflate walking and cycling (Planning Institute of Australia 2009a) on routes along general urban roads, and have extended the shared path prescription into the unique social, recreational and restorative foreshore parks. This is done without consideration of the appropriate use of a restorative transitional corridor that can be used by all to relax and escape the everyday pressures of urban living (Kaplan 1995).  

**The Beachfront Transitional Corridor as a Promenade Space for Walking**

The notion of the use of the beachfront transitional corridor as a smart transport route is actually an unusual concept. The history of the beachfront transitional corridor as a promenading space has dominated the design of this corridor since the inception of the modern seaside resort. Indeed, promenading for enjoyment is so ingrained in the design of seaside resorts that the pier evolved from the functional breakwater and transport jetty to a promenading pier from around 1814 and led to new forms of architecture such as the Victorian era pleasure piers (Gray 2006).

It is instructive to understand the meaning of a promenade in much of the English-speaking world. Its traditional relationship to the beachfront transitional corridor is encoded in the cultural meanings ascribed to the term that many visitors and tourists will bring with them to beach precincts. A promenade is place for strolling, where people walk at leisure for exercise, display or pleasure. ‘Promenades are located in resort towns and in parks and are public avenues landscaped in a pleasing manner or commanding a view’ (Encyclopaedia Britannica 2013).

Walking is not just a transport option: it is human activity that is linked to our senses and should not be assumed to be merely a ‘movement mode’ (Nicholson 2008). Walking also plays a role in the fields of philosophy, spirituality, sexuality, literature, history, science, politics, the design of cities and many other fields (Gros 2014). Indeed, it is so embedded as an activity in our natures that its contribution to our culture is often taken for granted (Solnit 2000).

It is not possible for people to take a leisurely walk or stroll, amble and saunter or take pleasure in walking and viewing the beach and ocean if they are constantly on the alert for vehicles, often travelling much faster than walking speed. Prominent signs to keep left, to not block the path and cyclists ringing bells, turn the beachfront transitional corridor into ‘A Smart Travel Initiative’ traffic environment, under notice of penalty for infringement, much more familiar to a road traffic user than a person promenading along the beachfront. The design of the Oceanway path would also seem to have more in common with a road than a footpath (Figure 10).

The degree and quality of stimulus is important for considering shared path use as it affects the quality of the walking experience. People prefer pleasurable and attractive environments with a minimum of conflict. They like having room to walk, unhindered by others getting in the way and intruding into their personal space. These negative social-environmental factors apply particularly to women, the young and old (Gehl 2010).

Walking is a form of human behaviour related to purpose and these purposes are often coexistent and simultaneous. We can scan ahead, switch off, listen, talk, drink, answer phones, sing, observe the weather, meditate, ponder, daydream and much more whilst walking, especially along a promenade which connects us to the natural environment (Berman, Jonides and Kaplan 2008).
People engaged in driving wheeled vehicles cannot do any of these things without risking accidents and breaking traffic rules and regulations (Queensland Transport 2014).

![Image](image.jpg)

*Figure 10: The Oceanway in Broadbeach (Author 2012).*

It would appear that cyclists prefer paths which are designed to be unobstructed or constricted by the use of seating and other street furniture and do not have tactile surfaces suitable for people with vision impairment (Australian Bicycle Council 2013). This is contrary to a walker’s preference for use of framed views, end vistas and meandering courses (Lynch 1981).

Mixing vulnerable people engaged in primarily social, recreational and restorational activities with a mode of transport that is unregistered and has no compulsory third party insurance would appear to be a very poor policy choice. There is also little deterrence for cyclists to travel at excessive speed, as there is currently no offence for speeding by cyclists on shared paths in Queensland. The differential speeds of people walking in a foreshore park and cyclists, who can be travelling legally at speeds of up 50 km per hour (Ker et al. 2006), raises liability concerns for local councils which have yet to be tested in court (Creed 2008).

We now move on to examine the consequences of the conflict created by allocating the foreshore park paths to the contradictory purposes of promenading and active transport.

**Shared paths unavoidably increase risk of injury for other users**

Making all paths shared is an understandable policy for urban areas, given the accident, injury and death rates amongst cyclists on the roads (Jensen 1998). However, it is also recognised that allowing cyclists to use shared paths will probably result in shifting the burden of risk towards walkers and, particularly, older walkers (Chong et al. 2009). As well as this burden there is also no consensus amongst researchers as to whether shared paths in general urban settings have an acceptable risk of conflict and injury amongst the different groups of users (Grzebieta, McIntosh and Chong 2011).

It is also of interest that the most at-risk groups identified in the literature are young children, women and older people who are less likely to be cyclists (Chong et al. 2009). Older people, in particular, may have impaired sensory facility and/or a degree of immobility that will make them
particularly sensitive to the near miss encounter with cyclists, especially due to the fright factor of being approached suddenly from behind or being startled by a bell. Older people are also more responsive to the possibility of crime or an accident than other groups and need to be assured of their safety (Jensen 1998).

This assurance is unlikely in a shared recreational environment with cyclists where any accident with a cyclist is more likely to result in serious injury to the elderly walker. Older walkers demonstrate their awareness of the risk of severe injury in collisions with cyclists, by being more likely to move off the path to avoid cyclists (rather than the cyclist) than any other group (Johnson and Bruton 2009). There is also a likelihood of the accumulation of negative experiences of cyclist-walker accidents amongst older people personally or by acquaintance (Garrard 2013).

Walkers are much more likely than cyclists to suffer death or serious injury in collisions between them, and women walkers are more likely to be injured than men (Jensen 1998). This risk rises with speeds beyond 20 km per hour, which is easily achieved by cyclists (Jensen 1998). A German study found that the cyclist is usually the cause of the accident, whereas the walker suffers more severe injuries. The study also found that the cyclists involved in the accidents were usually younger and the walking victims were older and frail with a lower tolerance for trauma (Graw and Konig 2002).

This leads us to consider whether the conflict between cyclists and other users can, or should, be moderated by the setting of rules and seeking behaviour modification in the limited number of foreshore parks in the Gold Coast. Cyclists claim that lack of awareness, disregard for rules, a lack of courtesy and consideration, wheelchair users and other people with disabilities slower response times, a lack of control of children and pets, people walking in pairs and groups, failing to keep left and unpredictable movements are stressful behavioural issues for cyclists (Queensland Transport 2014).

All these so called ‘behavioural issues’ may be a problem on a transport route but - considering the primary purpose of beach precinct visit is for social, passive recreation and restorative use - it would appear to be conflicted reasoning at best to impose traffic rules on others. It is also notable that the groups singled out for attention by cyclists as problematic for them are all members of the constituency of disadvantage.

We will conclude this paper with an examination of the nature of the conflict between cyclists and other path users.

**The narratives of conflict between cyclists and other users**

The informal literature, examined by the author and discussed in this section, indicated a very high level of emotional conflict has been generated between cyclists, drivers and walkers. Online newspaper articles concerning conflict between cyclists, drivers and walkers draw a remarkably high comment rate from the public, indicating that the current spatial arrangements and regulations are very unsatisfactory from a public policy perspective. Articles from Brisbane and the Gold Coast were examined to identify the themes of conflict over the shared use of paths using textual content analysis (Bazeley 2008).
A 2010 Brisbane online article illustrated the issues of walker-cyclist and cyclist-driver conflict in urban areas and received 294 comments (O’Loan 2010). The article referred to a woman who was struck by a cyclist and suffered a head injury that left her in a coma for a week. She reportedly said that: ‘For my part now, I avoid (shared paths) and exercise elsewhere’. The reporter also claimed that half of all riders went faster than the signed speed limit of 20 km/h and one in three cyclists were travelling past walkers at 30 km/h or more. It was also reported that in the opinion of the director of the Queensland Injury Surveillance Unit cyclist-walker collisions were a common and significant risk of serious injury for walkers. The article gave an estimate of 20 people being hospitalised every year in Queensland, and commented that most accidents between cyclists and walkers go unreported (O’Loan 2010).

The article describes a conflict based on fear and an inability of the police to act or control the behavioural issues. The official attitude towards the conflict, as expressed by then Brisbane Mayor Campbell Newman, is that cyclists and walkers need to respect each other and had to get used to sharing space (O’Loan 2010). Judging from the comments posted to the article, the respect the Mayor calls for is largely missing from the narrative, as both walkers and cyclists generally take up confrontational and territorial positions to each other.

On the Gold Coast, the nature of the conflict on the streets and roads and the Oceanway is similar to the Brisbane experience of shared paths, with the added complication that much of it is occurring in the social, recreational and restorative pathways of the foreshore parks. When the author approached the Gold Coast City Council for comment they acknowledged there was conflict between cyclists and other users in the foreshore parks but were unable to provide details as they do not keep a record of incidents.

There is some sense that much of the narrative in the local media surrounding the Oceanway is driven by local cyclists who ensure their viewpoints are represented. ‘Shane’ a frequent poster to the Oceanway articles makes a claim to exclude pedestrians when posting: ‘I'd rather walk on the sand. It would be a good idea to build a better bike lane, but not one for pedestrians - cycling is getting more popular, and the Oceanway will not be suitable’ (Elder and Stojceska 2011).

The textual analysis indicated that the confrontational nature of many of the comments is similar in character in both the Brisbane urban and the Gold Coast Oceanway contexts. In commenting on the extension of the Oceanway southwards in Surfers Paradise; ‘Peter of Tugun’ comments: ‘Barry - walk down the pathway at Kirra, it is like dodging bullets. People trying to use it as a bicycle raceway, skateboarders, roller bladers versus joggers and walkers. I avoid it as there is almost a fight every minute. Imagine one where the Police can't get to it to patrol it would be a criminal’s dream’ (Fineran 2012).

Explicit and implicit threats by cyclists towards other users are found in the Gold Coast Oceanway narrative with fifteen instances of threats by cyclists towards other road and path users. In response to an article regarding cyclist abuse of a young boy jogging in a group along the Hedges Avenue on-road section of the Oceanway; ‘Bikez’ posts: ‘With joggers using headphones, double prams, other cyclists without helmets, police cars neglecting to address those flaunting the laws the list goes on! As a cyclist using Hedges Ave and having myself come under physical attack from the above users I guess some riders have had enough’ (Willoughby 2011).
The comments posted to the articles also articulate aspects of the conflict that relate to disadvantage, disability and behaviour modification. ‘Essendee of CQ’ posted: ‘I'm blind and choose to walk on the road rather than on the footpath. At least I can hear motor vehicles approach’. A post by ‘Judith of Gold Coast’ relates an accident to her friend who was struck by a cyclist from behind, causing injuries to her knees and arms that led to her abandoning the shared path for exercise and caused her mobility to be restricted for some time (O’Loan 2010).

Some of the attitudes of cyclists towards people with children or dogs are illuminating, such as that of ‘Morgan of Brisbane’ who posts: ‘and the worst offenders of all... women with prams who dawdle 3-wide on the paths and expect the world to change to suit what they are doing. If there is a risk of your kid and pram ending up in the river, you would think that a ‘mother’ would take steps to prevent this happening’ (O’Loan 2010). This and other similar posts tend to indicate that women in particular are being pressured by cyclists in shared path environments.

The assumption by cyclists that the use of shared paths requires behavioural modification amongst non-cyclists is repeated by ‘ChrisG’: ‘Only recently did I witness a cyclist come off his bike when he had to swerve off the path (Kedron Brook) to avoid colliding with a lady walking her two small children and dog on a leash right in the middle of the lane! Luckily no-one was hurt, but the lady with the kids had an iPod on - and didn't hear the bike coming’ (Brisbane Times 2008).

Irrational attitudes appear to be common amongst some cyclists as is illustrated in a post by ‘Norm of the Bike Saddle’ who commented ‘I rang my bell to warn a pedestrian on a shared path and they leapt to their RIGHT, instead of the obvious place (their left). Luckily I had slowed down and a collision was avoided. Didn’t stop them giving me an earful of abuse, however. Governments can legislate all they like, but at the end of the day, you can't outlaw idiots. Only Darwinism will solve that issue’. Norm’s post not only illustrates a degree of self-entitlement but also the rationalisation of the victim being responsible for their injury common amongst cyclists. Walkers are seen as the cause of collisions by a significant number of cyclists, judging by many who comment in the articles analysed. This attitude also illustrates the flawed position that active healthy living advocates of cycling are in when calling for respectful shared use of footpaths.

There are very many posted comments that tend to confirm the observations of this research that the form, nature and characteristics of the cyclist-walker conflict over shared paths is both persistent and unamenable to codification and control measures. A post that tends to indicate the intractability and irrationality of the conflict is from ‘bike rider of Forest Lake’ who posts: ‘I ride my bike for exercise, there is no way I would ride on the road, I drive and hate cyclists on the road because they are a danger to themselves and people driving the cars. On a shared pathway you are supposed to keep left, where I ride people walk all over the path, they hear you coming and don’t bother moving. I can ding my bell and they stare at me like a dipshit thinking WTF is that thing. It is their own fault if they get hit, serves them right for being greedy path hogs :)’ (O’Loan 2010).

**Discussion and Conclusions**

The case study research conducted by the author tends to indicate that conflating walking and cycling as ‘active transport’ is an inappropriate public policy concept created from the active living literature. The research suggests that the shared path policy in the foreshore park sections of the Oceanway creates a loss of amenity in the highly valued social, recreational and restorative beach precincts. Cycling and other personal recreational vehicles are a probable cause of
deterrence to the use of the this space for the vulnerable walking groups, such as carers with young children, the mobility and perceptually impaired, children and seniors who may only have walking as a viable option to enjoy a degree of physical exercise and mental restoration.

With an ageing population and an increased need for activities such as walking to meet physical activity guidelines (Department of Health and Ageing 2010), this senior age group deserves priority consideration in the design, planning and management of beach precincts. The quote ‘Design for the young and you exclude the old; design for the old and you include the young’ by the eminent Professor of Geriatric Medicine, Bernard Isaacs, would appear to be a useful design principle for beach precincts (cited in Giles-Corti et al 2008).

Bicycles are vehicles that can follow the rules of the road and those rules are designed to permit high speed traffic to flow safely in directionally oriented and defined routes. Walkers, however, are not vehicles. They move at relatively slow speeds and possess extreme manoeuvrability to shift instantly in any desired direction with no need for defined routes. Walkers have no need for specific rules governing their direction of travel or speed. Their visual and auditory communication is suited to their sensory system and they can usually avoid conflict with other walkers if they chose to do so.

Missing from the analysis of the transport mode conflict research is what types of behaviour can reasonably be expected of people visiting the beach precinct in the recreational areas of the beachfront, foreshore parklands and adjacent streets. Beach precincts have a particular purposive use that is associated with relaxing, viewing, communing with nature and place, as well as watching and participating in mostly passive recreational activities. When the purpose of the majority of visitors and users of the beach precinct is to escape the pressures of the city to restore their physical and mental health, avoiding cyclists, modifying activity behaviours and raising attentive awareness is thought to be counterintuitive to the purpose of a beach precinct visit.

Imposing codes and rules intended for traffic control on walkers is unnecessary and unreasonable in recreational and social spaces. Imposing codes and rules on cyclists for shared paths is never going to work because they prefer to move in a straight or gently curving line. Cyclists cannot avoid a degree of conflict with people who are engaged in social and recreational activities. Cyclists cannot ride in a way that allows for, or controls, the unpredictable behaviour of people in an environment that they consider social, recreational or restorative. The consequences for imposing controls and codes on walkers and exposing them to severe injury or even death in social and recreational spaces is unacceptable and posited to cause the most vulnerable amongst them to modify behaviour and cease accessing or visiting the beach precincts when they are forced to share the space.

The research suggests that pathways in the foreshore parks, and especially those along the beachfront transitional corridor, are best suited to promenading. Their use as a ‘Smart Transport’ route is a poor and conflicted public policy choice, which favours the constituency of advantage whilst actively discriminating against the constituency of disadvantage. Councils should instead pursue research into the design of transitional corridors in beach precincts as promenading spaces; spaces where people of all ages and genders can safely walk, stroll, amble, wander, roam and saunter and enjoy the views in an inviting and comfortable, traffic-free restorative environment away from the stresses of city life. Further research into the issues raised in this paper is necessary so that the foreshore park beachfronts are designed to meet the needs of all.
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