



Acknowledgments

The project is funded by the Tasmanian Government (Public Health Services, Department of Health) through a translational research funding agreement with the University of Tasmania (Menzies Institute for Medical Research). It is supported by the Local Government Association of Tasmania and University of Tasmania.

The work undertaken for this project was approved by the Tasmanian Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee on 29 January 2020 (reference number: H0018594).

Project investigators

- Associate Professor Verity Cleland, Menzies Institute for Medical Research, University of Tasmania
- Dr Kim Jose, Menzies Institute for Medical Research, University of Tasmania
- Oliver Stanesby, Menzies Institute for Medical Research, University of Tasmania
- Dion Lester, Local Government Association of Tasmania
- Dr Lynden Leppard, Local Government Association of Tasmania
- Kate Garvey, Public Health Services, Tasmanian Department of Health

Ouse Community

We would like to thank the community member in Ouse who collected data and information for the audits and provided feedback on the report. While the information was collected by one person the data collected using the audit tools contains useful information that could be used by the Ouse community to inform conversations in the community about how walkable the town is.

What is citizen science?

Citizen science involves members of the public (citizen scientists) being actively involved in the research process. This might include designing tools, collecting and analysing data, interpreting findings and prioritising actions. Citizen science has been commonly used to help researchers and scientists monitor animal and plant populations and capture change over time. For example, the annual Aussie Backyard Bird Count calls on Australians from all over the country to count their local birds. This is something researchers could not do without the help of citizen scientists. This approach has not been used as often in health research but there is growing interest in involving the community in health-related research.

Why did we use citizen science?

There are a number of reasons why citizen science is used in health-related research projects. These include:

1. Gaining new perspectives on problems and solutions
2. Monitoring policy and program implementation
3. Obtaining difficult to access data
4. Mobilising support for action to improve health
5. Gathering locally-relevant data to inform policy and practice

In this project our ‘citizen scientists’ have helped us recruit other community members to help with data collection, helped identify which parts of the town to audit for their walkability, collected data on walkability, attended workshops where they helped researchers understand important things about their town as well provided additional sense-making of the data. Our citizen scientists provided feedback on the report and can use the report to bring about change in their community. This project would not have been possible without the citizen scientists involved in the project.



Suggested citation

Jose K. Stanesby O, Cleland V.

Understanding and Promoting Active Living in Rural Tasmania: Ouse Report. University of Tasmania, Feb 2021.



Executive Summary

This project aimed to identify features of Ouse that make it easier or harder for residents to be active and walk around their town ('walkability'). Using a Citizen Science approach, where local leaders and community members are directly involved in data collection, the project involved auditing the physical environment and local policies and programs using established tools and taking photos of important town features that impact on walkability and active living.

The original plan was to include 3 – 4 community members in the data collection process and then come together with other members of the community to discuss the findings. Unfortunately, we were unable to recruit additional community members to collect data, possibly due to the timing of this work in and around the COVID-19 pandemic and other factors so this report is based on the audit of the town conducted by the one community member. The audit tools reveal some important information about elements of the Ouse environment that do and do not support walking in the town. As there was no workshop in which the audit findings were discussed, or priorities for action identified, we have not made recommendations but present a summary of the key findings from the audit tools. We hope the information contained here will be used to promote conversations in Ouse about factors that do or do not support walking and assist in identifying priorities for action.





Introduction

We know that walkable neighbourhoods provide health, environmental, social and financial benefits. A neighbourhood's walkability is the degree to which it has safe, designated areas for people to walk or bike to work, school, dining, shopping and entertainment. Walkable communities are easier to get around, they support everyday connections and foster a greater sense of community.

Most of the studies looking at walkability focus on cities and large towns and we don't know very much about how our environment helps us or stops us from being active in rural and regional areas. In this project we are working with Tasmanian communities to find out what supports and hinders regular physical activity. We hope to find out the biggest barriers to being active and will work with community members to try to come up with ways to overcome these.

Being active is good for our health – it can stop us from getting diseases like heart disease, diabetes, breast and colon cancers, and osteoporosis. It is also great for managing our weight, blood pressure and cholesterol, and for keeping us mentally healthy and well. Research has shown that people living in rural parts of Australia are less active than those who live in urban areas. And rates of preventable health conditions such as heart disease, type 2 diabetes and high blood pressure tend to be higher in rural Australia than in urban Australia.

In cities, where we live, work, study and play we know the physical environment can affect how active we are. The way things like our neighbourhoods, streets, buildings, services, facilities, and public spaces are designed can either help us or stop us from being active. More 'walkable' neighbourhoods tend to have safe and high-quality footpaths, road crossings, good lighting, streets that connect to each other, and plenty of places to play and rest. But we don't know what 'walkability' looks like in rural areas. Small towns and some rural council areas may have access to fewer resources to develop the infrastructure to support walkability and active lifestyles. This project was designed to help us find out more about walkability in rural areas and what might be needed to support this.

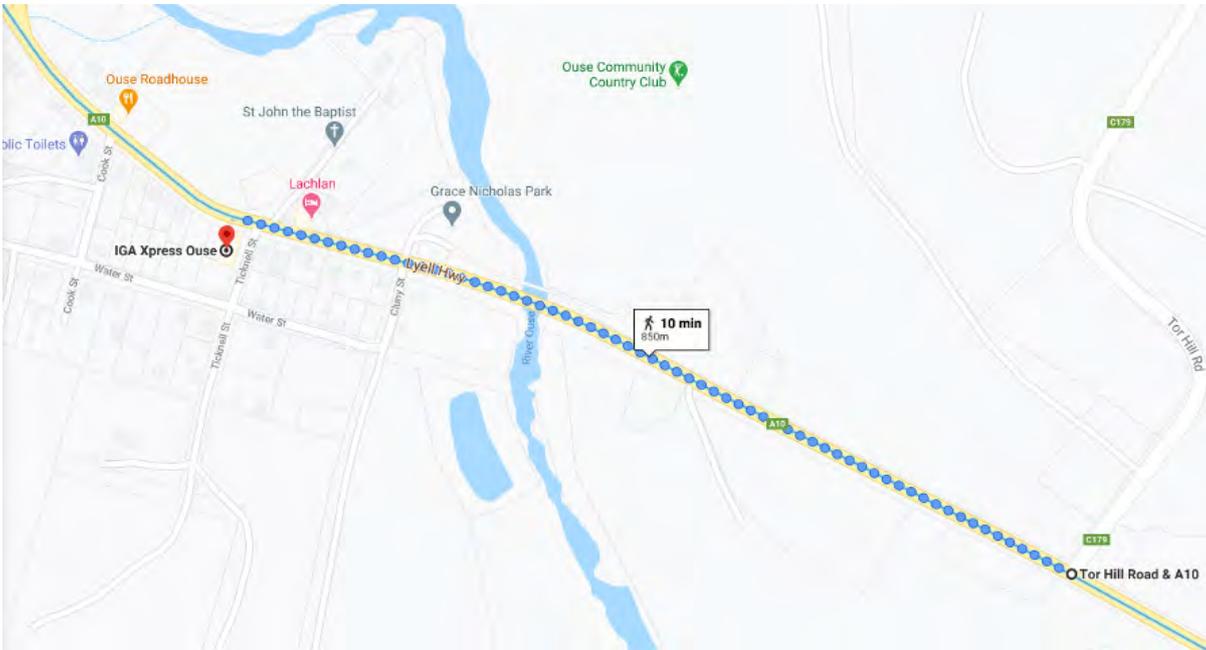
What we did

This project used a Citizen Science approach to identify features of the town that make it easier or harder for residents to be active. Researchers from the Menzies Institute of Medical Research, University of Tasmania and partners from the Public Health Services and the Local Government Association Tasmania have worked with local community members to support data collection in the town. This has involved working with a community member to identify which parts of the town to audit and then asking local community members to audit the physical environment and local policies and programs using established tools. In Ouse we had trouble finding other community members to help with data collection for several reasons, including the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic so all the audits were completed by the one community member and we did not hold a community workshop but spoke to the community member over the phone.

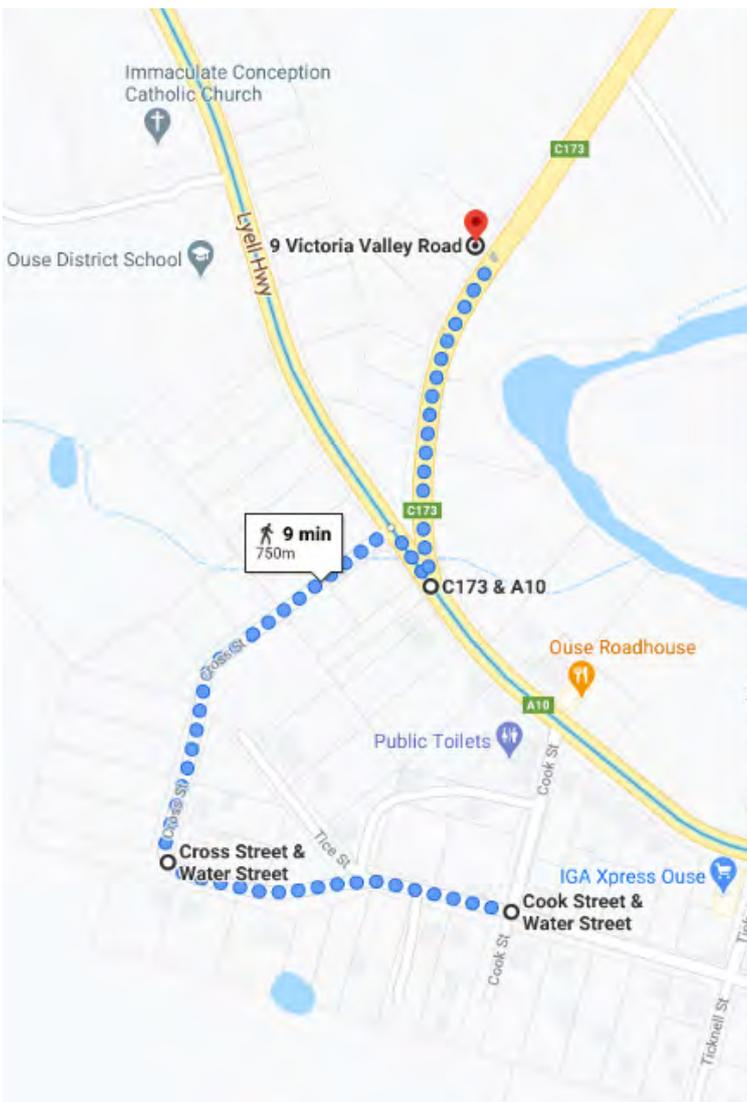
The community member provided an overview of the facilities and activities in the town that supported walking and active living while specific segment audits looked at areas of the town in more detail. The sections of the town that were audited are outlined on page 8.

This report is a summary of the information collected as part of the audit and during the interview with the community member. Photos have been included to identify aspects of the environment being referred to. It is hoped the findings included here will support further discussions in Ouse about elements of the town that do or do not support walking.

Audit segments



Segment 1: Ouse Community Country Club (Corner of Tor Hill Road and Lyell Highway) to IGA Xpress Ouse (along Lyell Highway).



Segment 2: Corner of Cook Street and Water Street to 9 Victoria Valley Road (along Cook Street, Water Street, Cross Street and Victorian Valley Road).





Overview of findings for Ouse

Summary of Findings

Ouse is a small rural town of approximately 300 people situated on the Ouse River in the central highlands of Tasmania. The Central Highlands local government area is primarily a rural based district with a population of approximately 2,200 residents living in numerous small towns or on rural properties. The area also includes some of Tasmania's premier trout fishing lakes.

The Ouse town layout is described as a grid pattern (streets run at right angles to each other forming a grid). Ouse is bisected by the Lyell Highway and most of the town's key facilities - primary school, community health centre, online access centre, Ash cottage, town hall, roadhouse, service station and hotel are all situated along the highway.

The audit tools found that Ouse had a few key assets (Primary school, IGA supermarket, community health centre, playground, public toilets) that supported walking and active recreation, but did not have other features such as walking or cycling tracks or public or private recreational facilities, scoring 26% on the town-wide assessment tool. The program and policy assessment showed the town lacked programs to support physical activity in Ouse (scoring 21%) although the Health Action Team Central Highlands offered some programs.

As there was no community workshop held in Ouse no priorities for action were identified. The points listed below identify some of the findings that could be used to generate further discussion by the community and help identify priorities for action.

Town features

- Ouse has one primary school situated on the western edge of the town with a small number of students (<20). There is a footpath that is separated from the highway that leads from the school to the town centre – although the footpath is in variable condition. There is no school bus to transport children to or from the primary school. The school's outdoor recreational facilities are open after school hours. The school is involved in the annual Walk to School Day event.
- The Community Health Centre is on the eastern edge of town with a new footpath in good condition connecting this to the main street. However, in general the footpaths in Ouse were noted to be in variable condition;

We have one small park, the path to the Health Centre is in good condition ... The footpath leading away from park is ok near the park but the further away you get the worse they are, they are uneven and damaged.

- There was concern that the condition of the footbridge over the river was in need of some repair with some safety concerns for young children;

the footbridge over the river it's uneven and bumpy and has some missing bolts holding safety wire on the sides so you'd have to be vigilant with small children.

- The town is bisected by the Lyell Highway with no infrastructure to support pedestrians to cross the highway. The speed limit drops from 100 – 60 km/hour upon entering the town zone. This, as well as the agricultural vehicles that pass through the town, raised some safety concerns;

having a highway running through the middle of our town is quiet dangerous. Our town is quite small so you could ride around the block but it wouldn't take long or we have a few longer roads away from the highway but we have a lot of traffic from farmers etc.

- There are a few recreational facilities in the town – a public park, recreational centre, playground and playing field – that were noted to be in good condition although signage and footpaths leading to the facilities were not always present.
- It was noted that the condition of footpaths and other factors were impacting on walkability for members of the community who were less mobile.

there was a little bit of an issue with walkability or accessibility, as some people have wheelchairs or scooters and bits and pieces like that.

- Photos revealed no footpaths and narrow road shoulders in some areas of the town.
- HATCH – the Health Action Team Central Highlands offers a range of programs and activities at different sites including community walks and exercise classes.
- Some community assets and recreational facilities are shared between Ouse and neighbouring towns. For example, Hamilton – a 15-minute drive from Ouse - has tennis courts and a Men's shed but no community health centre or primary school.



Things to consider when talking about walkability

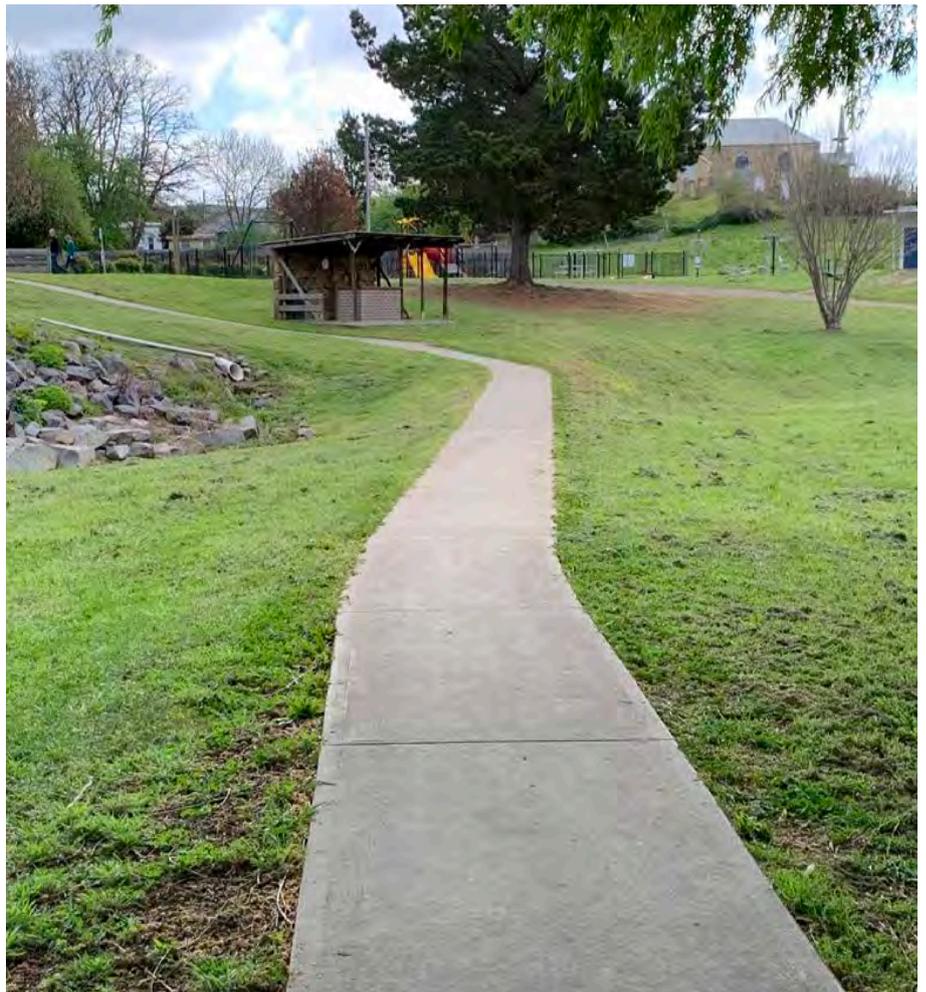
The desire to build on the current recreational facilities in Ouse by creating a dedicated walking track was one of the reasons for getting involved in this project.

One of the projects that we'd actually discussed with a grant that we were running, is that there isn't a great deal of walkability in Ouse, and we were trying - we put a proposal in for a walking track.

Towns are considered more walkable when there are destinations within the town to walk to, paths and tracks connect and link together, the distances between destinations and town assets are not too far and pedestrians feel safe. Considering the needs of young children, the elderly and those who are less mobile when planning and upgrading features will also benefit other members of the community.



When thinking about identifying priorities for action it can often seem like there is a need to invest in major infrastructure. Walkability can also be helped by adding less resource intensive initiatives such as seating, better signage, shade, pedestrian islands, improved lighting, reducing speed limits and even water fountains or rubbish bins.



The conditions of footpaths and the connections between these are also important. These simple interventions could be considered by the town in future conversations about walkability.





Conclusion

Ouse is a small town situated on a river and surrounded by productive agriculture land and businesses. It has a few assets that support walking and recreation in the area, such as a primary school, shop, community health centre and community centre, although lacks programs to support walking and physical activity more broadly. Footpaths in the town are variable in quality with some being noted as in very poor condition and impacting on accessibility and walkability. The highway and associated agricultural traffic was also noted as having a major impact on walkability.

Ouse shares some community assets and recreational facilities with neighbouring towns. This report does not seek to promote duplication of key assets across the region, but some considerations of how accessible facilities are to those in the community with limited access to private vehicle transport may be valuable.

It is hoped that the information contained in this report helps promote discussion in the Ouse community about walkability and the features that support or hinder this. There appears the potential to make some small changes or upgrades to existing features that could increase walkability as well as plan larger scale projects to support walkability.

