



27th February 2009

Retail Policy Review
Department of Planning and Community Development
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Dear Submission Administrator,

Re: Heart Foundation submission to Retail Policy Review

The Heart Foundation is pleased to contribute to the Department of Planning and Community Development's Retail Policy Review. Planning for the retail sector has great potential to shape our future urban form to create healthier and more sustainable communities.

The review discussion paper outlines significant issues facing planning now and into the future. It suggests that the pressures of climate change, increasing petrol prices, a tightening financial sector and infrastructure costs means that the work of planners is more challenging, and perhaps also more important than ever before. We also regard the costs associated with the increasingly sedentary lifestyles of Victorians as a key issue that the planning sector has the capacity to address through design of the public realm.

There is an urgent need to increase the physical activity levels of Victorians in order to address rising levels of chronic disease. The planning and development sector can make a significant contribution to this task by creating built environments that support people to walk and cycle, rather than rely on the car for short journeys in their local area.

One way this can be achieved is by providing retail within local communities via strip shopping, and linking these services to nearby housing via quality pedestrian and cycling infrastructure. By providing residents with a safe and convenient way to travel to local shops on foot or by bike, the many short journeys currently taken by car can be shifted to active transport, resulting in multiple benefits for the community.

Of course the ongoing viability of local shopping requires a local population large enough to support it. Given the projected rate of population growth in Melbourne, we have the imperative for increased housing density which will provide the suitable conditions for more local retail options. We strongly suggest an increased emphasis on accommodating local shopping facilities in local strip shopping wherever possible.

Where major retail development is required, we support its location within activity centres and suggest design principles based on the development of town centres rather than under cover shopping centres (or malls). This is due to the significant problems created by the typical design and location of shopping malls.

Shopping malls generally cater for car-based access by providing large car parks which surround the centre, discouraging access via any other transport mode. Given these perimeter car parks, the relationship of the centre with the surrounding environment is poor, and as a result shopping malls often act as a barrier within and between communities. They also convert public realm into private space and this restricts the diversity of use that the space could enjoy if it wasn't privately managed and owned.

Retail development based on town centres on the other hand, provides opportunities for stores and facilities to address streets with active frontages; direct and convenient access for pedestrians, cyclists and public transport users; mixed use development; and integration with the surrounding environment. These design features result in more people, more business, increased activity and social exchange, better public transport performance and greater opportunity for physical activity and social connection within retail precincts.

Shopping is a necessity, and it also provides an important chance for human interaction. Local strip shopping and the integration of major retail into town/activity centres provides an environment where all people, not just those with access to cars, can connect with their community and boost local economies.

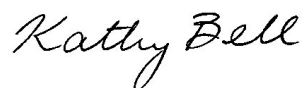
It is clear that the management of current challenges posed by retail growth will impact on the future of Victoria in terms of economic and environmental outcomes, as well as health and wellbeing outcomes. The Heart Foundation encourages the consideration of health and social impacts as part of any overarching changes to retail policy.

Planners undoubtedly play a significant role in providing opportunities for the community to lead active and healthy lives. This is the basis of the Heart Foundation's *Healthy by Design* resource. The resource supports planners to consider the health impacts of their work and outlines a number of key design considerations which contribute to the development of urban environments that support communities to lead active and healthy lives.

Healthy retail environments include legible street networks that provide direct, safe and convenient pedestrian and cycle access to local destinations including shops and services. A research review undertaken in 2008 by the Safe Speed Reference Group (of which the Heart Foundation is a member) indicated that low vehicle speeds are very important to providing access for pedestrians and cyclists and suggested that 30km/h is the most appropriate speed limit for roads around high trip generators such as retail. Creating urban environments that support social interaction and a sense of community spirit is also a key consideration for planners.

Ensuring that state legislation and policy supports planners in creating healthy urban environments is a key role for the Department of Planning and Community Development. It is encouraging to see that the current review is indicating a stronger focus on health and social outcomes associated with retail development and we hope that this is reflected in the action arising from the review process.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kathy Bell". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kathy Bell
CEO – Heart Foundation (Victoria Division)