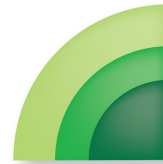


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# Some new ways of walking

By **Brendan Gullifer**

**I**T'S a sign of the times, and one of dozens that will be placed around Ballarat.

The first part of a strategy that will transform a car-focused community into one of Australia's most walkable cities will be rolled out next month.

And a variety of new street signs — consisting of area maps, information panels and direction signs — will be phase one. Expect to see them popping up in all sorts of places.

Additionally, footpaths will be upgraded. Traffic lights will be tweaked to give pedestrians quicker crossings.

And Ballarat will continue to promote walking and associated events to both residents and visitors.

Council infrastructure director Jeff Haydon says the project is a key part of Blueprint Ballarat, the council-steered community plan for the city.

It will help put us on the map as a great city to walk, and down the track will possibly be extended to include the lake and gardens precinct, including the new Wendouree Station.

Ballarat was probably once quite a good city for a stroll. A small shopping area, easily-crossed streets and the absence of cars would have offset the obstacles of lousy street lighting, few proper

footpaths, frequent puddles and horse manure.

But then we joined a 20th century trend that happened worldwide. Planning fell into the hands of transport engineers. The focus fell on the car.

Ballarat central business district now has a "generous" supply of places to park, according to a consultant's report. Vehicles have priority over pedestrians at most intersections and roundabouts. Footpaths are still missing in some places. The city feels "bigger" than it actually is.

And street signage is poor. Finding landmarks can be difficult for visitors who are often on foot.

But all that is about to change.

While working for the Department of Infrastructure, John Grant advised the Victorian Government on the Melbourne 2030 strategy. Now as a consultant, he's leading a charge in Australia and overseas to counter rising costs, unreliable public transport, greenhouse emissions and obesity by getting cities to focus on creating better walking environments.

As co-author of a 2007 report to Ballarat City Council, he says it's all about making big differences without spending big money.

"A lot of councils and state governments think they're too

big to deal with this type of small detail," he explains.

"But Ballarat Council is forward looking enough to recognise this is something they can do, that it will please a lot of people and is an intelligent and economic response to problems such as poor health and obesity and emissions."

In the report, Dr Grant says most of the essentials are already here, including our unique historical environment and a large number of attractions within reasonable distance of each other.

But there are pockets of the city with huge potential that visitors would never find, he says.

"At the back of the gallery, there's a beautiful vista over the town that is not marked on any maps."

Dr Grant names Zurich and Copenhagen as great walking cities. London is investing 500 million pounds between now and the Olympics to make that city a walker's paradise.

But the Victorian Government doesn't get it, putting billions into more freeways and a paltry \$15 million into local walking projects, he says.

Meanwhile, the implementation of the signage part of Ballarat's transformation is \$50,000, which looks like a walk in the park in comparison.



**LEFT:** Project manager Charlie Cahill, left, and City of Ballarat director of infrastructure Jeff Haydon with one of the new signs to be installed around the city.