Measuring gender, age, and ability diversity on Auckland paths

New Zealand’s Government Policy Statement on Land Transport lists ‘inclusive access’ as an important investment objective. Without ways to measure diversity in transport, Road Controlling Authorities cannot know whether they are delivering inclusive access. We developed a practical way for councils to measure diversity of use on walking and cycling paths, to help all practitioners understand how design decisions contribute towards inclusive access. We counted people using ten cycleways, footpaths, and shared paths in Auckland over 39 hours in total. We counted all pedestrians and cyclists, including categories for ebikes, electric and manual scooters, and mobility aids including wheelchairs, mobility scooters, prams, and other aids such as a walking stick or a guide dog. We estimated the gender (male or female) of everyone we counted. We also estimated age as under 18 years, 18-64 years, or over 64 years.

Results showed marked diversity of use on the Auckland paths that we studied. Across all sites, 75% of e-scooter riders, 70% of cyclists, and 52% of pedestrians were male. Most people were estimated as working aged, with 79% of cyclists and 90% of pedestrians estimated to be aged 18-64 years. Just 0.2% of pedestrians counted were using a mobility aid. It is estimated that approximately 3% of Auckland people use a mobility aid.

These count data show that diversity, and by implication inclusive access, can be counted. The data raise a lot of questions about diversity on paths. More data collection can help Road Controlling Authorities to deliver more inclusive infrastructure, because they can use the data to understand how path quality affects peoples’ choices. The data could also be collated nationally, to give the government confidence that investment in inclusive access is fruitful.