

# Vested interests: unhealthy transport policy discourse and the road lobby in Aotearoa New Zealand

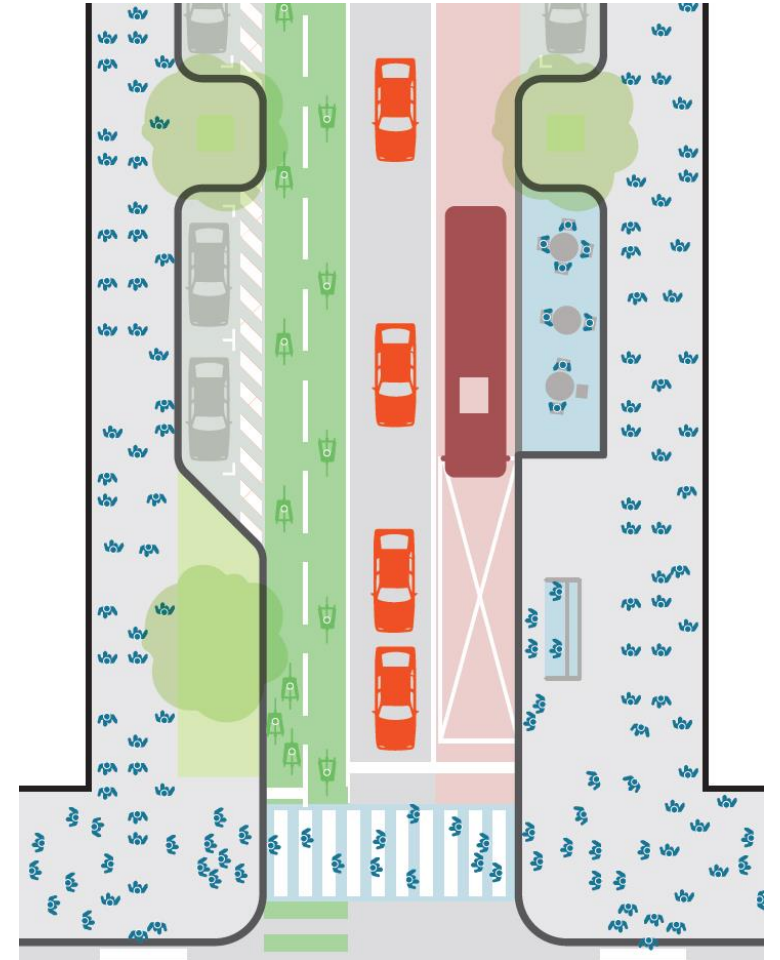
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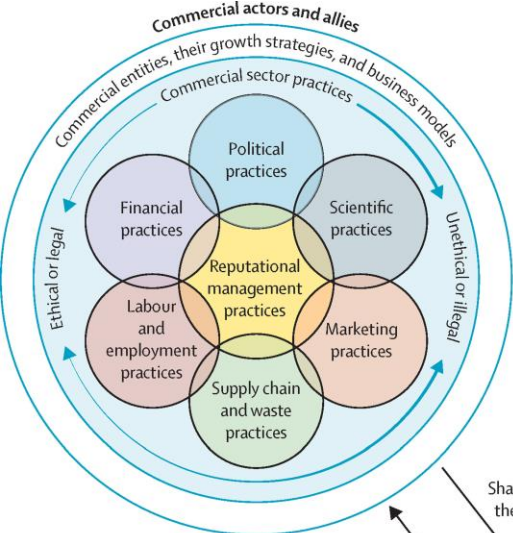
# Trying to explain policy inertia

- Transport policy currently prioritises private vehicles
- Cars as a harmful commodity
- Resistance to change suits powerful interests
- Commercial determinants of health (CDoH) framework



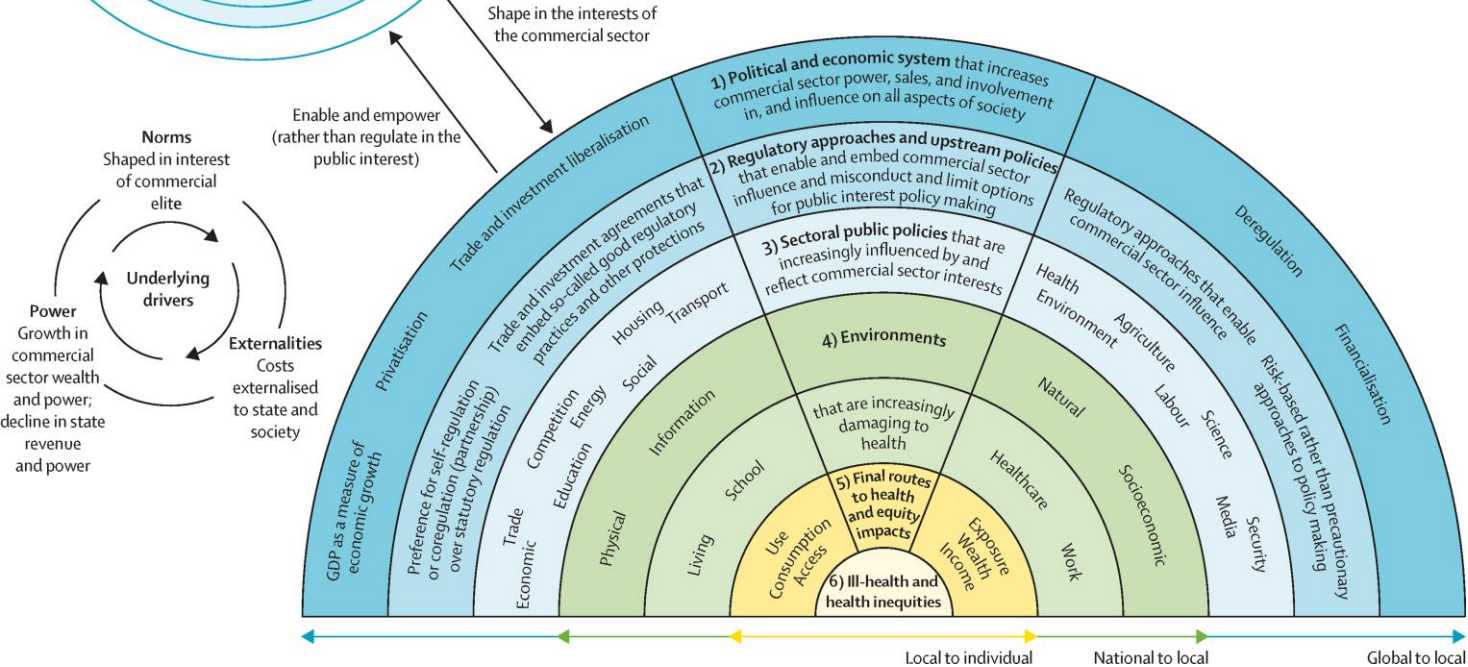
Global Designing Cities Initiative,  
Multimodal Streets Serve More People

# Commercial determinants of health (CDoH)



“...the systems, practices, and pathways through which commercial actors drive health and equity...”

Businesses, companies or corporations involved in buying/selling goods or services for profit



Gilmore et al, 2023. Defining and conceptualising the commercial determinants of health. The Lancet

# Research questions

1. Who are the major interest groups representing the road sector in Aotearoa NZ and what do they do?
2. Which types of transport and climate change policies do they support or oppose?
3. What are the framings and arguments used to support their policy position?



# Framing analysis as a way to research political activity

Framing is how we present information and ideas

Framing strategies are a type of corporate political activity

Reasoning devices	Prompt questions (to identify and code data)
Policy positions	What are the views on current policy? What solutions are proposed or emphasized? What solutions are opposed?
Problem cause	What is identified as the cause of the problem? Who or what is to blame for the problem? Is the cause systemic or individual?
Problem responsibility	Who should take responsibility for solving the problem? What are the roles of business, government and individuals?
Underlying values	What values or principles are dominant in the discourse? What is the "why" behind particular policy positions? To what extent is health, equity and environment valued?
Voices used	On whose behalf are arguments being advanced? Whose voices are invoked? Whose voices are not represented?



# Results

## 1. Who are the major interest groups representing the road sector in Aotearoa NZ and what do they do?

5 out of 7 identified as  
“road lobby” groups

- AA
- Motor Industry Association
- Motor Trade Association
- Iā Ara Aotearoa  
Transporting NZ
- Business NZ Energy Council
- Bus & Coach Association
- Energy Resources Aotearoa

Large, often complex  
organisations, well-resourced

- Financial resource
- Staff
- Networks

Openly undertake a range of  
activities intended to  
influence policy

- Submissions, written & oral
- Cultivating relationships
- Producing information
- Media and PR

## 2. Which types of transport and climate change policies do they support or oppose?

### Support

- Policies that promote private vehicles & investment in their supporting infrastructure
- Research into new fuels and technologies
- Individual behaviour change approaches
- Government/industry partnerships

### Oppose

- Reallocation of transport funding from roads to low-carbon transport modes
- Tighter vehicle emissions standards
- Government intervention (e.g. regulation, spending)
  - **except** investment into roading infrastructure or industry development

# Policy positions

“Road lobby” organisations tend to resist policies with evidence of public health benefit

Policy type	AA	MIA	MTA	IAATNZ	BEC	ERA	B&C
<b>Pro-road transport</b>							
<b>More road investment</b>	+	+		+			+
<b>Fuel switching</b> e.g. to biofuels or hydrogen	+	+	+	Mixed	Mixed Doubt		+
<b>EV incentives</b> e.g. public investment in charging network	+	+	+		+		-
<b>Individual behaviour change interventions</b> e.g. education about vehicle emissions	+	+	+	-	+		+
<b>Emissions Trading Scheme alone</b> including international offsets				+	+	+	
<b>Neutral measures</b>							
<b>Flexible working from home policy</b>	+				+		+
<b>Shared and community mobility</b>	Mixed	+					
<b>Coordinated systems or network planning</b>			+		+		+
<b>Research investment</b> e.g. into travel habits or new technologies	+	+	+		+		
<b>Pro-public health measures</b>							
<b>Travel demand management</b> e.g. VKT or congestion charging	Mixed Delay	-	-	-	Mixed		+
<b>Road space reallocation</b> e.g. from private to public or active transport	Mixed Delay Doubt	Delay		- Doubt			+
<b>Improving low-carbon transport modes</b> e.g. public or active transport	Mixed Doubt	Mixed	+	-			+
<b>Reallocation of transport revenue from roads to low-carbon modes</b> e.g. rail, active travel	- Doubt			-			-
<b>Tighter vehicle regulations</b> e.g. low and zero emissions standards	Delay	Delay	Delay	-	Delay		
<b>Planning for compact urban form</b>	Mixed				Delay		+

Key

+ Policy supported  
- Policy opposed

Policy of known benefit to public health



The Government is responsible for climate action

but

The Government should not intervene with regulation, subsidies or investment in mode shift



Businesses are responsible for climate action

but

Climate action by businesses should only be voluntary, and they are already doing a lot



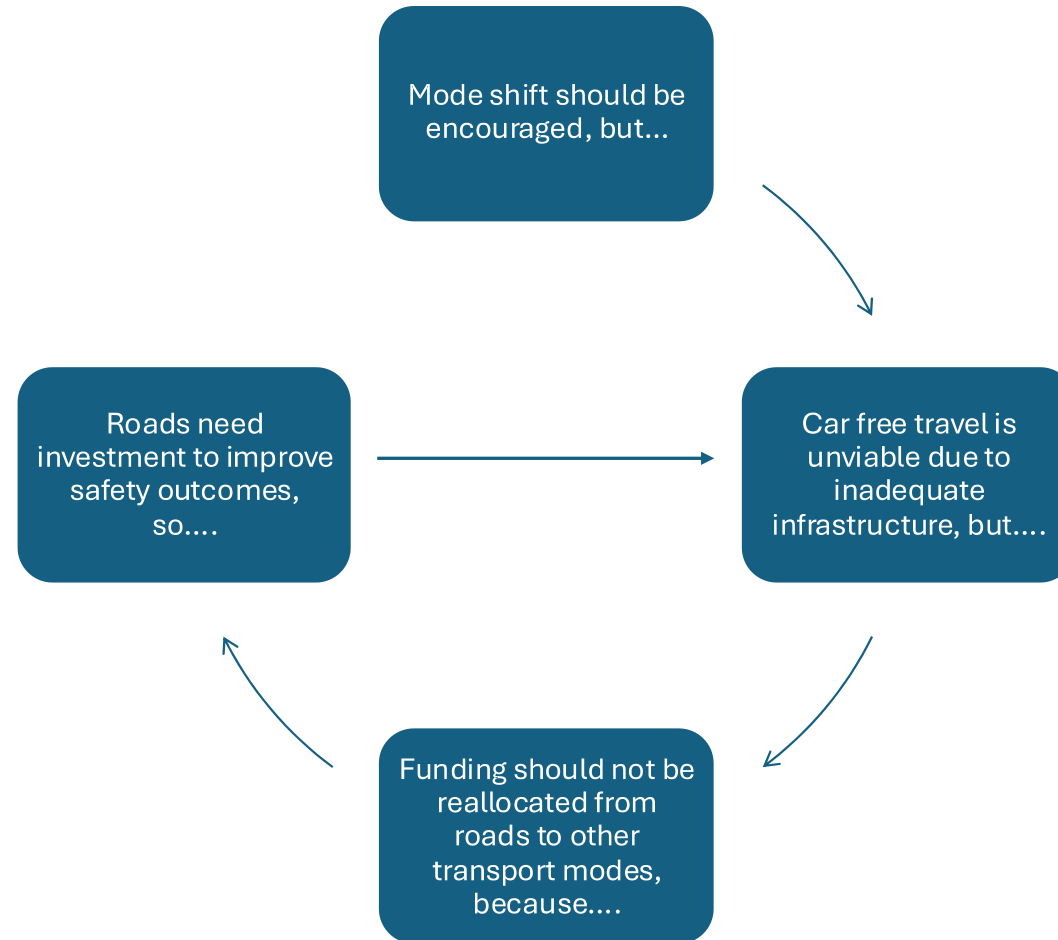
Individuals are responsible for climate action

but

The transport system does not provide adequate alternatives to cars and this should not be changed BECAUSE people have no alternatives



# Mode shift, yes but... road safety is road upgrades



# Recommendations for policy & practice

Transport should be considered a CDoH

- Existing public health frameworks should be applied e.g. marketing restrictions, building advocacy coalitions

Counter-arguments should be refined and amplified using values-based framing

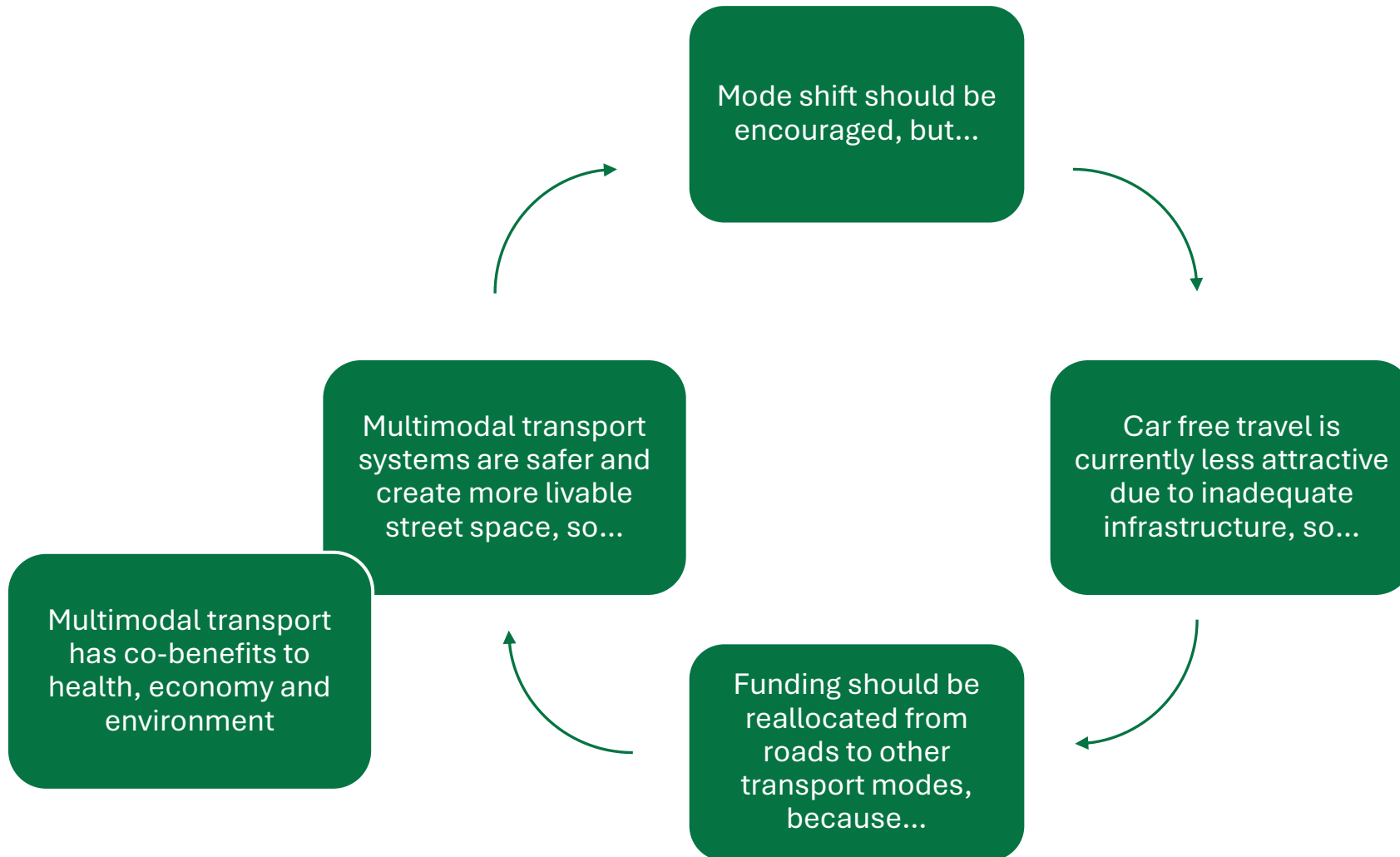
- see The Workshop resources

Raise awareness of transport policymakers about commercial vested interests

- Ensure sufficient weight is given to health, environmental, equity and intergenerational outcomes in decision-making processes

Research how political influence occurs in transport policymaking, link with other research into lobbying

- Challenge legitimacy, advocate for lobbying regulation



“Unfilter the truth” Maddox et al, 2024

# Framing is a type of political power



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