

Before the last local body election mayoral candidate Celia Wade-Brown pledged to make Wellington a better place for cyclists. Three years on, cyclist numbers have doubled, but is the city safer for them? **Sasha Borissenko** investigates.

A better deal for cyclists?

Riders still risking their lives

Two years ago, Barbara Crump was biking down Taranaki St when a car pulled out in front of her and she hit it.

She suffered permanent tendon damage to her arm, but some of the worst scars were mental.

"There was a lot of blood," she said. "I was grateful when I realised I was on the ground. I really thought I was going to die."

Ms Crump is one of a growing number of cyclists hurt by Wellington's lack of cycle lanes.

It is estimated the number of cyclists travelling into the Wellington city centre during morning peak time has doubled to 1600 cyclists since 2006.

And yet, according to the national Cycling Advocates Network, Wellington is the most dangerous place to ride in New Zealand, with an average of 7.7 crashes per million hours of cycling.

A report from Wellington Regional Council shows last year's target of 110 "casualties" was not met, with 125 incidents reported.

Of the 125, 91 cyclists suffered minor injuries, 33 were serious and one fatal.

Why is it so bad here? And what is being done?

Despite famously riding into the city on her bicycle at the news she was elected as mayor, Celia Wade-Brown has been criticised for failing to come to the party.

Her opposing mayoral candidate, John Morrison, said the mayor had failed to fulfil her promises.

"We've virtually done nothing for cyclists. There's just talk talk about cycle lanes, but there is actually nothing to show for it," he said.

Another councillor, Paul Eagle, was positive about the future, but agreed the council had not done enough for active modes of transport.

That view was not shared by transport portfolio leader Andy Foster, who said he understands people's concerns, but that they were misguided.

"We've been achieving great things, slowly, but surely," Mr Foster said. Where council once voted 9-6 in favour of the "cycling basics" budget in 2009, the current council had voted 15-0 in favour of increasing cycling funding this year.



Cycling mayor: Celia Wade-Brown has practised what she has preached.

Photo: FAIRFAX

The cycling budget has gone from a "paltry" \$70,000 in 2007 to \$1.8 million per year as of July 1 (including a 53 per cent contribution from NZ Transport Agency).

Key projects included a 5km Tawa cycleway/walkway project, started last year and due to finish by the end of this year.

Mr Foster blamed the perception that the council had failed to fulfil its promise to improve cycling on the Tawa project.

"Most people probably will not see the Tawa project because the majority of Wellingtonians do not live in or cycle through the area."

He said other "fragmented" projects could contribute to the sense of inaction.

During the last term, the council had created a morning peak clearway on Thorndon Quay, 30 advanced stop boxes a year at traffic lights, cycle-friendly grates, cycle racks, speed limit reductions in Oriental Pde and Miramar, simple green paint on the Hutt Road shared path, and cycle routes through Botanic Garden and on the Birdwood St footpath into Karori.

There was also a proposal for a cycleway to run directly from



Happy man: Cycling advocate Patrick Morgan is delighted with the progress that has been made.

Island Bay into the city, he said.

A public meeting run by Cycle Aware Wellington in August discussed the possibility of segregated "Copenhagen-style" lanes and a consultation process is to start early next year.

Also planned, Mr Foster said, was the Great Harbour way, a 70km link from Wellington to Lower Hutt.

Mr Foster also pointed to plans for 19 other routes into the city, which would address the view

that Wellington has a "fragmented cycling network".

Ms Wade-Brown said many councillors said they liked cycling, but when it came to making changes, they could not bring themselves to vote accordingly.

"I've been passionate about cycling for a long time, but until recently we had neither the political nor the organisational will," she said.

Mr Foster and Ms Wade-Brown have got support from long-time cycling advocate and council critic Patrick Morgan.

Now project manager for the Cycling Action Network, he said he felt upbeat, especially about the planned Island Bay route.

"We have finally got the political will, the public support and the money," Mr Morgan said.

"It's a win-win. Things are looking really positive."

Mr Morgan applauded Ms Wade-Brown in her bid to increase the cycling budget, despite being under a lot of pressure to save money.

However, the real test would be after the upcoming election, and whether the public was willing to elect councillors who would ensure those plans eventuated, he

said.

Mr Foster and Mayor Wade-Brown said even when agreement was made, it was very difficult to secure government funding.

NZ Transport Agency planning and investment regional manager Lyndon Hammond said the agency assessed cycling projects on a case by case basis.

"We particularly recognise the ability of cycling to ease pressure on busy roads, and of good cycle facilities to improve safety in high-risk road environments," he said.

Mr Hammond said investing in cycling was just one part of investing in an integrated network that catered for a wide range of travel choices. "This across the board [approach] will ensure Wellington has a constantly improving, well-balanced transport network that works effectively and safely for everyone, however they choose to travel."

Despite her accident, Barbara Crump said the benefits of cycling were a "no brainer". She said she hoped cycling advocates, councillors and the Government could continue the momentum promised, and prevent accidents like hers happening to others.

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If the goods you buy are for personal (not business) use, you are also covered by the Consumer

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Guarantees Act (unless you bought the goods in an auction).

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