How to talk about opening our streets for people who walk, ride bikes, and take public transport

The Workshop

November 2022

theworkshop.org.nz

Contents

This guide gives new ways to talk about opening our streets so more people can walk, ride bikes, and take public transport

Many New Zealanders share a vision of living in towns and cities where all people can move around in healthy, enjoyable ways. This vision means having streets that meet the needs of all people, including children, older people, and disabled people, and that help protect people and the planet.

But the changes needed to bring this vision to life are big and rely on people's support. The more people who understand and support these changes, the easier it is for political decision makers and other decision makers to make them happen and for successive leaders to keep changes in place.

To help people understand and support change, you can talk effectively about opening the streets in a way that works with the information environment people are in and the fast-thinking way our brains deal with information.

This guide gives you tested ways to talk about the changes needed to get all people and goods moving in better ways around our towns and cities. You can use this advice to show people an alternative possibility of how their world could look, to tell stories that change the narrative, and to insert those stories in the public debate.

The theory and research underlying this guide focuses on the power of helpful narratives to influence how people think and talk about the world and what influence this has on concrete political and social change. This work takes time and needs many people using helpful narratives repeatedly and consistently.

You can find recommendations, tested narratives, and supporting theory in this guide

The information in this guide is split into three parts.

1   **Part 1 —** how to use tested messages to talk about opening our streets and improving how we move people and goods.

2   **Part 2** — putting it into action using tested messages and a new story structure that works to connect with people and deepen understanding.

3   **Part 3** — a summary of the theory and science of effective Narratives for Change.

How to use this guide

This guide gives you advice and recommendations based on extensive research and testing of mode shift narratives and mindsets. You can read about the research and findings for this guide at www.theworkshop.org.nz/publications

Narrative strategies are used to shift mindsets in order to build support for changes that will make the biggest difference to achieving mode shift. This way of communicating works alongside your everyday ways of communicating about things that don't require a mindset shift — business as usual.

You can use this guide in different ways. You can:

- take the full stories we tested and use them verbatim
- take the component parts of the stories and build your own stories
- use the advice in the guide to develop a new narrative strategy and approach for your organisation.

A note about the terms 'walking' and 'cycling'

In this guide, 'walking' includes people who use wheelchairs, and 'cycling' includes people who use different types of mobility scooters and other types of non-car wheeled transport, such as scooters, skateboards, and longboards.

Thank you

This guide is based on research by The Workshop on behalf of Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency. The research was undertaken by Dr Sharon Bell, Ellen Ozarka, and Dr Jess Berentson-Shaw of The Workshop. The words were written by Jayne Dalmer and Julie Fairfield. Dr Rebecca Grey completed the early literature review.

We would like to offer our deepest gratitude to our contributors. This work would not have happened without the support, expertise and research of many knowledge holders and experts including:

- Dr Huhana Hickey, Tamatha Paul, Mary Fisher and Erin Gough for their advice and expertise on understanding mode shift, and framing it from the perspective of disabled people
- Dr Caroline Shaw, Dr Rhys Jones, Dr Bridget Burdett, Emma McInnes, Patrick Morgan, Gerri Pomeroy, Lourdes Vano, Simon Wilson and Lisa Rossiter for their insights and knowledge on walking, cycling and public transport issues
- Dr Eleanor Glenn and Mark Chenery and Common Cause Australia for their early advice, and their generosity in sharing the results of their own research on framing walking and cycling
- Kathryn King, Peter McGlashan and Dr Kirsty Wild from the Urban Mobility Team of Waka Kotahi
- All of the focus group members and survey respondents.

Ngā mihi nui ki a koutou.

Most people can support change if they understand it better

Our streets need to be opened for all people so our cities and towns can work better for everyone, but policy and physical changes that people don't understand are difficult to put in place and hard to hold on to. To help people better understand and support mode shift changes, we need to communicate strategically and use tested narratives and explanations that influence people's shared mindsets.

The changes needed to make the biggest difference to people's lives will change over time and for different cities and circumstances.

Today, they might include these changes:

Innovative traffic control measures	Road management laws	Installing tracks for light rail
Changing street markings and layouts	Creating corridors for key public transport routes	Creating and protecting cycleways and connected cycle networks
A joined-up approach to housing and transport	New ticketing systems and fares for public transport	Community decision making about street changes
Support schemes to buy e-bikes	Congestion charging	
Low-traffic neighbourhoods	Traffic circulation plans	
Reallocating road space	Parking reform	

The way we talk and write about mode shift can help people understand

A barrier to people fully understanding and supporting change is the existing way of thinking and talking about mode shift that many people have — our shared mindsets.

The way advocates, researchers, practitioners, or politicians talk about transport mode shift significantly impacts understanding. Even when supportive people are advocating for change, they can inadvertently use unhelpful narratives that work against people's understanding and support.

Narratives and mindsets are connected

Shared mindsets are taken-for-granted patterns in how we think about the world. We get shared mindsets from living within our culture, the media, our families, and other communities. Shared mindsets influence how we think, what we do, how we talk about things, what we see is needed, and what we think is possible. Mindsets and narratives influence each other in ways that can hold current systems in place or help people see the need for changing them.
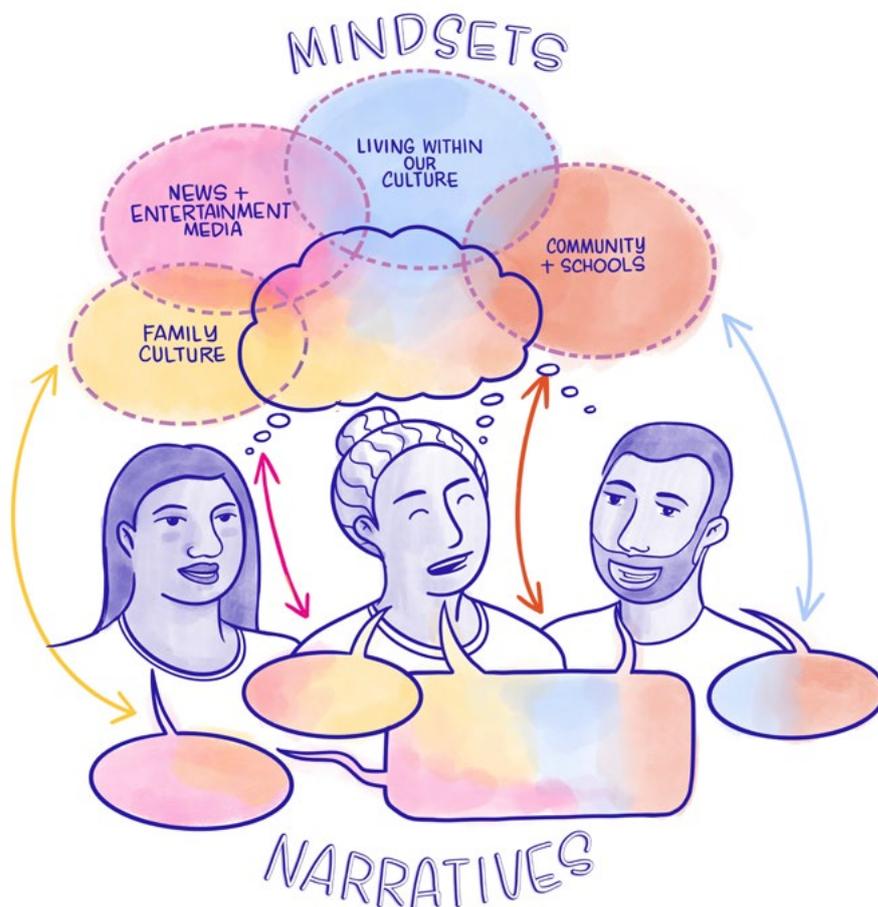
Instinctive or habitual ways of communicating are not designed to shift mindsets

When we are looking to build understanding and engage mindsets helpful to our changes, research indicates we need to shift away from habitual ways of communicating. These habits include leading with facts, specific policy solutions, directly addressing the unhelpful stories, or attempting to motivate people to act by talking about the cost or risk. Helping people understand the need for change takes more than giving facts, persuasive stories, or emotional images. The busy information environment we all live in, along with our 'fast-thinking' system — the mental shortcuts we all use when processing information — means people need different types of communication if we are to shift people towards more helpful mindsets.

Narratives for change strategies are designed to shift mindsets, taking into account our information environment and the ways our brains work. Research shows that using the narrative strategies in this guide can help deepen understanding about complex issues and build people's support for changes that will make the biggest difference.

We might be skilled communicators, but the communication strategies we are skilled in may not have been designed to deepen people's understanding, shift the mindsets, and build support for changes that make the biggest difference. That is not about us as communicators — it is about the goals of different types of communication.

Here are some communication approaches to shift away from when communicating about big changes.

- Shift away from focusing on the narratives of noisy opponents — focus on your narrative and your stories.

- Shift away from simply talking to those that are already supportive of your changes — use strategies that engage people open to understanding and supporting your changes.

- Shift away from leading with facts and problems — lead with a vision and follow up with an explanation that uses your facts to deepen understanding.

- Shift away from using money, fear, or other self-interest values to try to motivate people to act — connect with people's intrinsic 'all-of-us' values, which are most people's most motivating human values.

Tested communication can be used to create stories that reflect new narratives and shift mindsets

Narratives are patterns of meaning and common understanding in our talk and communication. Narratives are like a golden thread in our stories that reflect shared ways of thinking and reasoning (shared mindsets). We can create stories using tested communications that can reflect new patterns of meaning (narratives) and shift people's thinking and shared mindsets.

How does a narrative relate to the stories you tell?

Stories are told, and narratives are understood. Stories are all the different ways we can talk and communicate about our issues day to day — for example, a news item, a press release, or a campaign with a series of people talking about different aspects of mode shift.

Narratives are reflected in your different stories and communications. Stories can be unique to the needs of different groups, have a different focus on different aspects of the issue, and even have a different call to action. Stories reflect the style and tone of the person or organisation that they're coming from, so they don't all have to sound or feel the same. But stories should all reflect core tested narratives that redirect people's thinking away from the unhelpful shared mindsets and towards more helpful mindsets.

When talking about mode shift changes, we need to understand:

- the information and narratives that people are already exposed to
- how people currently think and reason about big issues — their shared mindsets
- how people process new information that may go against their current understanding of an issue
- the narratives that will be effective in helping people understand and support change.

Four effective stories in a nutshell

The following four stories combine effective messaging elements to help reflect some core helpful narratives about opening our streets so more people can walk, ride bikes, and take public transport. To find more about helpful and unhelpful narratives, read page 19.

After these stories, we explain the big shifts you can make to your communication and why they will make a big difference to the impact of your work to shift mindsets. We also explain the different elements of these stories, why they work, and how to use them to create your own stories.

➜ These four tested stories follow a vision with values + explanation + solution + action structure

In our testing, these stories were effective at deepening understanding or increasing support for solutions among people who are open to persuasion on these issues.

Read more about our testing and findings in this document.

People who are open to understanding and persuasion are different from people who are strongly opposed to change. Find out why we can prioritise communicating with people who are open to persuasion on page 32.

➜ Use the whole story or choose individual elements to create your own

You can use the entire story in your communications — the more people who repeat these effective elements, the more they're likely to work. You can also take elements such as the vision or a useful metaphor or explanation within each story to create your own stories.

These effective stories help redirect people's thinking

The goal of these stories is to direct people who are open to persuasion away from the unhelpful narratives and thinking that they're frequently exposed to and redirect them to more helpful thinking — thinking that aligns with what we know works to help more people walk, ride bikes, and take public transport.

These stories will also help you avoid engaging with the unhelpful narratives of those people who are opposed to change and reduce the risk you repeat these unhelpful narratives.

Your messengers and the tone of your stories are unique to you

You can use the tone we use or a tone more appropriate to your story and the people who you're talking with.

Your messengers should reflect a diverse range of people across our community — people who are open to persuasion are also a diverse bunch and not who you always expect.

A story about opening streets for our children

Child-led stories are effective in communications about neighbourhood or community changes, school-based travel, and communication about the places and changes that will lead to our children being more free.

Our cities can be places children move around freely and independently — on separate bike paths, spacious footpaths, and on buses or trains — so parents can be free from worry. Our streets can be friendly, shared spaces where children play and we connect with each other. **1**

To give kids this independence that most of us want them to have, people in government **2** and local councils can use tools that work **3** to open our streets. These tools will allow kids to get around safely on their own, by walking, getting a bus, or biking.

The tools people in our councils can use to open our streets **4** include putting in protected bike paths, calming speeds on our streets, opening up parts of the city for walkers only, and creating more space on our streets for public transport.

It's how we make our cities places where children can move about freely and independently. **5**

1 *This story starts with a statement about children's independence and freedom because this matters to many people who are open to persuasion. Read about these 'all-of-us' values on page 37.*

It includes a concrete vision describing how people's everyday lives will be different. See more about vision on page 28.

2 *Naming people in government as the agents of change. Naming the people in a system with power is important for systems narratives. See helpful narratives on page 26.*

3 *A 'tools' explanatory metaphor. See better explanations on page 46.*

4 *'Opening our streets' is another effective metaphor. See better explanations on page 46.*

5 *This story finishes by reminding people of why this change matters to them and links the action to the values.*

A story about streets, cities, and a transport system that makes space and meets the needs of all people

This story might be best suited for citywide projects, projects or contexts where things are being 'joined up', and contexts where space is being rebalanced between users — for example, parking changes or cycle paths.

Living in cities is all about making space for everyone. The streets in our cities and neighbourhoods need to work for all of us and the different ways different people need to get around. **1**

Right now, many people, including children and disabled people, find it harder to take part in school or work, or to go and have fun in our cities, because our streets are just too difficult to get around. **2**

When people in government make cities and streets easy to get around for everyone, including children and disabled people, **3** we all have the opportunity to be part of the things that are important to us.

By creating space on our streets **4** for people who use wheelchairs, bikes, scooters, or who walk, and by creating more space for easy-to-use public transport, we can make our cities great places to live for all of us.

1 *The story starts by reminding us that many of us want to meet the needs of all people in our community – a shared value. See 'all-of-us' values on page 37.*

2 *This story moves, like all the stories, from values and a vision to an explanation of why changes are needed, who they are not working for, and why.*

3 *Here, the story names the people we want the reader to have in mind because the transport system is not working for them.*

4 *Here is an explanatory metaphor 'creating space'. See better explanations on page 46.*

A story about a protecting the places and people we love — the environment

(3)

Try this story when doing big-picture thinking about city plans, spatial projects, long-term plans linked to urban density, or play type projects or telling the joined-up story of a series of small projects or plans.

In the future, our cities can be calm places, full of trees and birdlife. We can build good homes closer to the places we work, learn, and play. With more playgrounds and shared spaces for us all to enjoy, and streets that are open to people walking and riding bikes, we can live in ways more connected to each other and our environment. **1**

Making these cities our future means acting to protect people and places from harm. **2** It means solving the transport issues in our cities and reducing carbon and other pollutants from cars and trucks that contribute to our health and environmental problems. **3**

Making calm, connected cities means using the right tools for the job of transport. **4** When cars and trucks no longer work for our health or the planet's health, we can use tools like biking, walking, and taking buses or trams.

To make it easy for people to use these better transport tools, people in government **5** can make more space in our streets for buses and trams, put in more protected bike lanes, and reallocate streets for green and play spaces. People in government can also encourage housing closer to the centre of the city.

When people in government help us change the way we move around the city, we can all live in ways more connected to each other and our environment. **6**

1 *This story starts with a vision of how people's lives can be better. Visions help people think about what is possible. See visions on page 28.*

2 *This story reminds people that protecting people and the environment matters to them – 'all-of-us' values. See values on page 37.*

3 *This story contains a short explanation of how transport is connected to carbon and the environment. See why explanations are better than descriptions on page 46.*

4 *Here is an explanatory metaphor that does the heavy lifting of explaining the solution without using too many words. See better explanations on page 46.*

5 *Here, the story names the people who can make the changes to help explain who can make the changes that make the biggest difference.*

6 *This story ends by reminding people why these changes matter to them – reconnecting them to their values. See values on page 37.*

A story about sensible decision making and people in government working for the public good

(4)

This story is good to use when local or central government actors are naming themselves as agents or when people are looking at long-term plans. They can also be good for weaving mode shift changes with climate change communication.

We need our cities to work for all of us over the long term. With more people living in our cities, we need people in government to take practical steps to make it easier for people to walk, ride a bike, or get a bus. **(1)**

Just like we need different gears for cycling up and down hills, **(2)** our cities need different transport solutions for our different challenges.

Until now, our cities have been geared towards one form of transport — cars. With lots more people in our cities now, our streets don't work well for anyone — even people who drive. People in government can take practical steps to solve our communities' transport problems by making it easier for people to walk, ride a bike, or get a bus. **(3)**

Using a range of solutions for the transport problems we face is the practical and responsible thing for people in government to do, to make sure our cities work well for all of us over the long term. **(4)**

(1) *This story starts by reminding people that being wise and responsible are important things in life, and we need people in government to also be that. These are the values we can use instead of talking about saving money or cost-effectiveness. See values on page 37.*

(2) *Here is an explanatory metaphor to help explain the problem and solution to people in a way that is quick to understand. See better explanations on page 46.*

(3) *Here is a short tested explanatory chain, with a metaphor, to help people understand how the problem started and what the impacts are. See better explanations on page 46.*

(4) *The story finishes by reminding the reader about why this matter to them, who needs to do the work, and for whom.*

Part ①

How to talk about changes for opening our streets and moving people and goods in better ways

'Good messaging is about making popular what needs to be said and done.'[1]

This part of the guide recommends five communication shifts to support how you communicate about mode shift changes.

The recommendations are about helping people understand that:

- streets are for people as well as cars
- opening the streets and giving people options for travel benefits us all and the planet.

[1]Anat Shenker-Osorio https://wordstowinby-pod.com/

Five shifts to help people understand and support change

This section gives five communication shifts you can make to help people understand and support the evidence for the changes needed to open the streets and improve how people and goods move around.
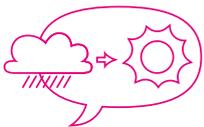
1. Shift to your narratives

Narratives can help shift mindsets by helping people better understand a problem or opportunity. Helpful narratives remind people of the values that motivate us all and give people hope that a better future is possible.

2. Shift who you focus on

Focus on meeting the information and communication needs of people who are open to persuasion and helping your base of supporters use your narratives to persuade more people.

3. Shift to 'all-of-us' values

Connecting your communication to what matters most to people (their intrinsic 'all-of-us' values) is a powerful way to get people to pause and think, listen to your explanation, and get motivated to act.
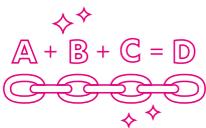
4. Shift to explaining over describing

People need clear explanations to help them understand the origins, consequences, and solutions of problems. Just describing problems doesn't work to deepen understanding or overcome powerful unhelpful narratives.

5. Shift to effective messengers who will use effective messages

A good messenger will do the heavy lifting of an effective story and helpful narrative because people use trust and credibility in the messenger to assess whether information is believable.

1. Shift to your narratives

Shifting to your own narratives can help people see things in a different way and is the most important part of helping people understand and support change.

Better narratives can help people understand the causes and solutions of different problems and opportunities, and they can help shift mindsets. Helpful narratives also remind people of the values that motivate us all and give people hope that a better future is possible.

Understand unhelpful narratives to avoid reinforcing them

To be confident that you're using helpful narratives to shift mindsets, it's good to understand all the narratives that can dominate conversations. 'Helpful' means the narratives help people understand and support the changes that will make the biggest difference. 'Unhelpful' narratives can get in the way of people's deeper understanding, lead people to feel fatalistic about a better future, and focus people's attention on small individual changes rather than changes that will make the biggest difference.

Unhelpful narratives:

- are often simple
- carry incorrect information
- can dominate the conversation.

Unhelpful narratives can be created and used by people and organisations with more power in society to maintain or build their power. These people often have greater access to information-creating sources. Unhelpful narratives are frequently used by those people opposed to change.

Because unhelpful narratives are all around us, they're also inadvertently used by people who are advocating for change. People with no deep feelings on an issue can also repeat unhelpful narratives, so it sounds like they are more opposed than they actually are. As advocates for change, we need to be able to identify unhelpful narratives and avoid them so that we don't reinforce them through myth busting or repetition. We need to use more helpful narratives.

Unhelpful mindset

Transport individualism

Problems and solutions in the way we move people and goods are down to an individual's choices and decisions.

Dominant, unhelpful narratives that reflect this mindset

- Narratives that emphasise lifestyle choices, behaviour change, or consumer-driven solutions — for example, narratives about individuals choosing to ride a bike, walk, or buy an electric vehicle.

- Narratives that emphasise individual 'carbon footprint' and choices people can make to reduce it.

- Consumerism narratives imply that if people want change, they can 'vote with their wallets'.

- Consumerism narratives are similar to transport individualism, and they emphasise consumer choices.

Why are these narratives unhelpful?

- People concentrate on individual behaviours and can't see and support the transport system that shapes how people and goods move.

- These narratives make invisible the upstream changes that will make the biggest difference.

- These narratives imply that systemic solutions aren't effective because, 'if that guy was able to choose to ride a bike, it must be possible for more people to do so'.

- Consumerism narratives imply that all transport problems can be solved with economic solutions, like the laws of supply and demand.

- Consumerism narratives imply that all people have all choices. These narratives conceal power and resource differences and the structures and systems that have taken away some people's choices.

Them versus us

Changing our transport system means less for me and more for others.

Dominant, unhelpful narratives that reflect this mindset

- Narratives that emphasise different transport groups — for example, 'cyclists need protection, car drivers are the problem', 'only Lycra-clad middle-aged men ride bikes'

- Narratives that imply competition for limited resources between different groups — for example, 'bikes lanes are a luxury when our pipes need fixing'.

Why are these narratives unhelpful?

- This puts people in silos, and people find it harder to think about 'better together' solutions that work for everyone. It makes people feel that a gain for 'them' is equivalent to a loss for 'us'.

- Roads are not a rope in a game of tug of war for different groups to win or lose — rather than a thing that provides benefits for the whole community.

- People find it harder to see the collective 'all-of-us' and solutions that work for everyone.

- The 'them versus us' frame can sometimes be used unintentionally, but it is unhelpful because it stops people thinking about people on bikes being members of the local community — they are 'them over there' not 'me here'.

Unhelpful mindset

Transport fatalism

Transport equals roads and cars and can't be changed.

Dominant, unhelpful narratives that reflect this mindset

- Narratives about people needing to drive cars. Transport problems are just a normal part of life. Mode shift solutions might work in other countries, but not in Aotearoa — for example, 'we're not Amsterdam', 'Wellington is too windy and hilly for bikes'.

- Narratives that emphasise cars, car culture, roads, transport jargon, carparks, and problems with drivers. The solution is more road space for cars — for example, 'cars are essential', 'everybody will always need a car'.

Why are these narratives unhelpful?

- These narratives focus people on cars and roads as solutions rather than changes that open the streets and make it easier to move people and goods.

- People's normalcy bias (a mental shortcut that favours the status quo) tells them that cars are the only viable way of getting around. If you talk about making things worse for people who drive cars, people can't see how mode shift would work and think it means they wouldn't be able to get around at all.

- Instead, talk about opening the streets for people who walk, ride bikes, disabled people who need cars, and take public transport, and for moving goods and people around in better ways.

Transport financialism

Transport is mainly an issue of time and money.

Dominant, unhelpful narratives that reflect this mindset

- Narratives that emphasise transport shifts as an issue of cost and loss of efficiency, and congestion is a productivity and loss of money issue — for example, 'it's too expensive to make radical changes' or 'we don't have five years to wait and billions of dollars to build light rail'.

Why are these narratives unhelpful?

- These narratives direct people away from transport as a critical infrastructure for public good that shapes social and environmental health.

- These narratives make solutions that have higher upfront costs, but long-term wellbeing benefits, be 'too expensive' or a 'nice-to-have luxury.

Transport is dangerous

Dominant, unhelpful narratives that reflect this mindset

- Narratives that focus solely on the very unsafe nature of current modes, roads, transport, and travel, especially for children — for example, 'I'd rather my child be safe from dangerous drivers'.

Why are these narratives unhelpful?

- These narratives direct people's thinking to how to protect themselves from, or make changes to, dangerous elements within the existing transport system — for example, to drivers, roads, or cars — while keeping the system itself the same.

- These narratives direct people to think non-car options are too dangerous so they would drive their children in bigger cars. These narratives make it harder to see solutions other than more and bigger roads and cars. People are less likely to think of other transport options.

Government inaction, fatalism, and status quo

Dominant, unhelpful narratives that reflect this mindset

- Narratives about the government not doing anything or not being able to do anything.

- Narratives that suggest people in government tend to be unable to act or make changes that make a big difference — for example, 'it's too political, so nothing will ever happen' or 'this council is dysfunctional'.

Why are these narratives unhelpful?

- People feel they can't do anything to effect change because people in government won't listen or will be prevented from acting in other ways.

Read this article about Wellington cycleways in the New Zealand Herald for an example of reporting that feeds into a them versus us mindset.

Read this article on the 1News website to see another example of a them versus us narrative and a luxury good frame to talk about cycleways.

Replace unhelpful narratives with helpful narratives

Helpful narratives can redirect people's understanding so they see the changes needed to make the biggest difference to all our lives. Helpful narratives can give people better explanations for problems, show solutions, and influence shared mindsets and support.

Weave the following narratives like a golden thread through your stories to help deepen people's understanding of improving the way we move people and goods around our streets. Use these helpful narratives repeatedly and consistently.

After this list of helpful narratives, you can find specific visions, values, frames, and explanations that you can use to reflect and build these narratives in your stories.
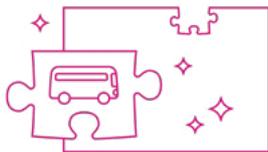
These changes will make the biggest difference for the public good — a systems narrative

A systems narrative helps to redirect people's thinking away from transport individualism, and a focus on small-scale change within the current system. A systems narrative helps people see the constraints current transport policies and practices put on us and how these constraints can be lifted.

A narrative about changes that will make the biggest difference to including more people needs to use frames and explanations that talk about the people who can create more options. This narrative needs to show the invisible 'system' that shapes our lives (for worse) and focus on the wider public good that a new transport system can create — the physical, social, and environmental benefits. It also needs to name agents within the system who can bring change about.

Opening streets protects the people and planet we care for

A narrative that directs people to think about the more holistic goals of the transport system and away from the 'transport as a productivity tool' mindset. This narrative helps people understand the harm that the current ways we move ourselves and our goods does to people and the environment.

Streets are for all people

A narrative about 'streets for all people' directs people's thinking away from car fatalism and transport individualism and towards thinking about streets as public spaces for all people. A 'streets for all people' narrative also directs people's thinking towards moving people and goods in ways that meet the needs of all people to move about and be included.

We're creating better lives and cities together — a common destination

A 'creating better lives and cities together' narrative redirects people from a 'them versus us' mindset. This 'better together' narrative brings to the surface thinking that says, 'Opening streets for people on bikes, walking, and non-car forms of mobility benefits most people across different communities. This thinking includes everyone who needs to move around in different ways, not just small groups of people who are 'not like me'. Aspects of building connections and community are embedded in this narrative.
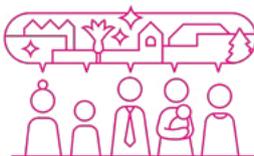
Communities and governments have the strengths and capability to act

This narrative about the strengths of communities and governments to act can direct people's thinking away from fatalism and status quo thinking, especially about governments. It reframes deficit-led stories to strength-led stories about our capability to change the way we move ourselves and goods about.

Name the future to make the future — stories that reflect your narrative need a vision

Having a vision for a better world and the changes you're talking about are an important part of shifting to your narratives. A hopeful vision motivates people to consider the information you're trying to communicate about the need for change and the possibility it offers. Repeat your hopeful messages, especially if you're talking about a vision people can't yet see in the world.

A vision invites people in

A vision needs to:

- be concrete
- be specific
- describe people's day-to-day lives.

A good way to think about a vision is to think of a finished cake instead of the ingredients to make it. A cycleway, an integrated transport network, or a new urban planning strategy are ingredients — how we get the better world we want. These ingredients might be compelling to you as experts but are less compelling for people who aren't yet engaged in your topic. You first need to describe the better world and show it through words, images, and video.

Leading with a vision can also help you avoid starting with a problem, which won't engage people who are open to persuasion. Starting with a vision invites people in.

Two visions tested well with people who were open to persuasion

In the research, both visions below made persuadable people feel optimistic, interested to learn more, and supportive of changes to make the vision a reality.

A child-led vision was persuasive when talking about mode shift

This is the vision that we tested:

Our cities can be places children move around freely and independently on separate bike paths, spacious footpaths, and buses or trains so parents can be free from worry. Our streets can be friendly, shared spaces where children play and we connect with each other.

Example of a child-led-independence vision in the media

Let's take a typical street in our neighbourhood, and re-imagine it as a place where local kids can walk, cycle and scooter together, or even play games; where friendlier and more connected neighbours can sit on a bench under a tree for a chat and encounter passers-by.

From a Stuff article by Gemma Dioni, *Reimagining Wellington: Growing up and old in the city.*

Read this article, *Help us to reimagine Upper Hutt*, on page 4 of the Upper Hutt Leader for a story about helping people imagine a better future.

An environment-led vision was persuasive when talking about green urban design

This is the vision that we tested:

Our cities can be calm places, full of trees and birdlife. We can build warm, dry homes closer to the places we work and learn and play. With more playgrounds and shared spaces open for us all to enjoy, we can live in ways more connected to each other and our environment.

2. Shift who you focus on

Shift the focus of your communications to the people whose mindsets and opinions are open to persuasion. When you're planning your communications or responding on the spot, think about three main groups of people.

- People who don't have a fixed view, or who have mixed or competing views on mode shift — your people open to persuasion and understanding.

- People who are already persuaded — your base of supporters, who already mostly cycle, walk, and use public transport and can share your messages.

- People who are opposed to changes and unlikely to be persuaded.

Important note about formal consultation

We recommend prioritising your time and communication resources on the people who are most likely to shift their mindsets to support mode shift changes.

A shift in focus away from the narratives and arguments of those most opposed to change has a number of benefits, which includes:

- meeting the information needs of a larger group of people - a group more likely to understand the issues

- creating and structuring information in ways that work for those already supportive of changes and those open to understanding

- avoiding reinforcing unhelpful narratives.

> Central and local government organisations have an additional duty and mandate to consult with all people impacted by strategic and structural changes that arise as part of their governmental responsibilities. Shifting the focus of your general (not consultation) communications to people open to understanding and persuasion increases the opportunities to hear from people who are most excluded and those otherwise not engaged. This could increase the number of people and range of perspectives you hear from in formal consultation processes.

Focus on finding effective ways to communicate with people open to persuasion

Focus on meeting the information and communication needs of people who are open to persuasion. Most people are in this group, which includes people who like the idea of walking and riding, parents with kids who want to stop driving their kids to school but are still fearful, and people who care about their and the planet's health.

Perhaps surprisingly, this group also includes people who can and do express opinions that are anti-mode shift, but this means they might be currently influenced by other, dominant narratives, but are still persuadable.

Effective strategic communication should focus on people who are open to persuasion and also motivate your base to support you in this work. Your communication should also help people who are harmed the most by current systems.

Persuadable people are everywhere

People who are open to persuasion are in every demographic. You won't be able to use demographics to identify people who are persuadable because people who are persuadable are across many political, gender, ethnicity, age, and income groups. However, you can still focus on particular groups of people using messages that work with people who are persuadable — for example, women with children.

Use the messages in this guide widely and you will reach persuadable people. Demographics may be helpful for choosing the style, tone, or channel for your communication but not for the message itself.

Persuadable people are more likely to have moderate and centrist political beliefs

Attitudinal research showed that the biggest difference between groups of supporters, opponents, or persuadable people was their political beliefs. Supporters of mode shift hold left-leaning political views, while opponents hold right-leaning political views. Persuadable people were not aligned with a particular ideology or political party.

Navigate around people who are firmly opposed to change and their unhelpful narratives

Your proactive communications should focus on people who are open to persuasion and your own narratives, but sometimes you also have to deal with noisy opponents and their unhelpful narratives.

Repeating unhelpful and frequent narratives gives them further weight. If you draw on them to negate them, it still brings the unhelpful narrative to the attention of people open to persuasion on the issue and can entrench mindsets that make change seem impossible or unnecessary. Negating unhelpful narratives also gives free airtime to those opposed to change and their narratives.

TELL YOUR STORY.

Your communication is effective if people open to persuasion respond positively

Don't measure the effectiveness of your communications by how people who are already opposed respond. Narratives and stories that are unpopular with people who are fixed in their opposing views can be some of the most powerful.

Think about whether people are true opponents or critics of aspects of what you're trying to do. People may criticise certain decisions or the rate of change but still support — or can be persuaded to support — your vision for opening the streets for everyone. Encourage critics to use helpful narratives within their stories, so you may have different stories but you're still moving in the same direction.

Include disabled people in your vision making and follow through

Disabled people and their allies are equally likely to be supporters, opponents, or open to persuasion. Disabled people can be sceptical about the benefits of mode shift because similar initiatives in the past that talked about inclusivity have excluded their needs in practice.

Consulting with disabled people about how to best meet their needs and the kind of streets that would work for them (their vision) and ensuring legitimate follow-through is critical for creating trusted and meaningful communications about mode shift.

In our research, explicitly mentioning the needs of disabled people made non-disabled people prioritise equitable outcomes more highly. Meeting all people's needs is a powerful value that creates support for opening the streets and creating better ways to move people and goods.

3. Shift to 'all-of-us' values

Values are 'the why' of our actions and lives. Connecting your communication to what matters to people is a powerful way to get people to pause and think, listen to your explanation, and get motivated to act.

We all have many values, but we prioritise them differently. The way we communicate can bring values to the surface for people that help them care and connect with what we're saying.

These 'all-of-us' values should sit at the heart of compelling narratives

In our testing, values that led people to agree with mode shift solutions were:

→ equity and inclusion — talk about 'meeting people's different needs' and building cities that enable all people to get around, including disabled people, children, older people, people without transport, people who live far away, and people on low incomes

→ pragmatism and problem solving — talk about responsible management and working for the public good for the long term

→ protection of health and the places we love and that sustain us

→ freedom and independence for children — consider saying 'freeing' rather than 'freedom' for adults, or talk specifically about the 'freedom of riding an e-bike'.

What this sounds like:

'The streets in our cities and neighbourhoods need to work for all of us and the different ways different people need to get around.'

Equity and inclusion

'When people in government make streets easy to get around, including for children and disabled people, we all have the opportunity to be part of the things that are important to us.'

Equity and inclusion, and freedom and independence for children

'Whether we're riding a bike, walking, using a wheelchair, using a scooter, taking a bus, or driving a car, we want cities and streets that work for all of us and especially for our children. Together, we can create better neighbourhoods and cities.'

Equity and inclusion, and freedom and independence for children

'Most of us want our kids to have the independence we had. We can give them that freedom by building cities and streets that allow kids to get around on their own, walking, by bus, or by bike.'

Freedom and independence for children

What this sounds like:

'City leaders can take responsible and practical steps to care for our environment and future generations by opening our streets to more people walking and biking.'

Pragmatism, problem solving, and protecting the places we love

'It's important that we protect people and places from harm by solving the transport issues in our cities that are causing problems like climate change. Taking care of our environment means reducing the carbon we're putting into the air. People in government can do this by opening streets to people walking and riding bikes. If we change how people move around the city, we can reduce the carbon we put in the air and help limit climate change'.

Protecting health and the places that we love and sustain us

'With more people in our cities, we need people in government to take practical steps to make sure our cities work for us all over the long term, by making sure our streets are open to people walking and using a bike or wheelchair.'

Pragmatism and problem solving

Shifting to your narrative makes your argument more convincing to the people most open to persuasion

Using your own narrative is more effective at shifting people open to persuasion than negating an opposition narrative. The graph below is one example of what we found in our testing. The frame that used the new, helpful narrative of 'streets are for all people' was more persuasive for this group than a frame that attempted to disprove the opposition's narrative by arguing that 'active and public transport is good for business'.

We also found that people open to persuasion were more convinced by a frame that said 'more roads and cars are good for business' than a negating frame that favoured mode shift. This means that countering an anti-mode shift argument with the same transport financialism narrative would be ineffective.

In other words, using your own narratives is a more effective approach than negating unhelpful narratives.
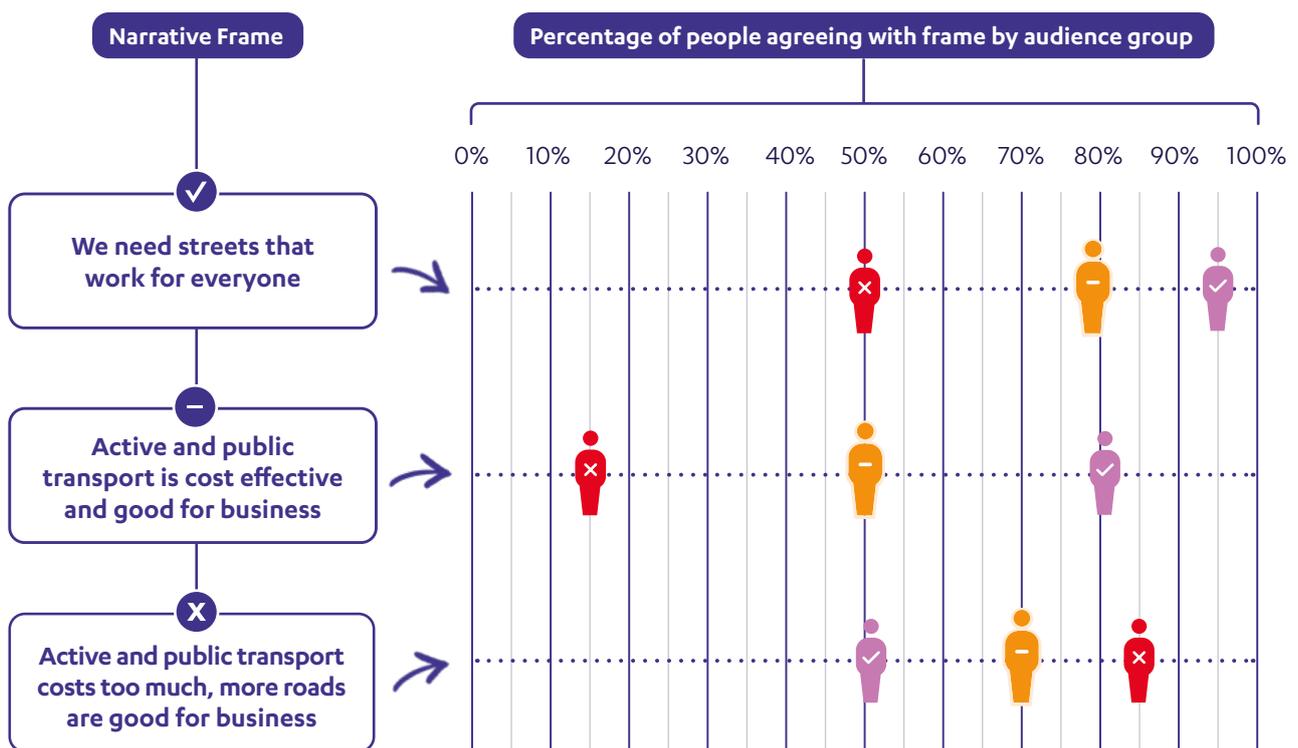
Most people care about each other and what's best for all of us

Unhelpful and dominant narratives constantly tell us that what matters most in life is money, status, appearance, and being safe from scary 'others' or a terrible future. Most of us are not driven by these extrinsic or self-interest values but by more collective, caring, creative 'all-of-us' values (also known as intrinsic and self-direction values), but we don't see those values reflected in the dominant narratives around us.

Our narratives about mode shift need to draw on these 'all-of-us' values because:

- they're most people's most deeply held motivations
- research shows they drive decisions and behaviours that benefit collective wellbeing.

The Common Cause Handbook[2] includes extensive information on the role of shared values in communication and building understanding of change that will make a big difference to collective wellbeing.

EVOKE the INTRINSIC VALUES we know MOST PEOPLE HOLD, and let them know OTHERS FEEL the SAME.

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[2] The Common Cause Handbook: A Guide to Values and Frames
https://commoncausefoundation.org/_resources/the-common-cause-handbook/

Triggering emotions is different to connecting with values

You might think that getting people to feel any emotion is good, but some emotions work better than others — for example, fear doesn't motivate people. Values are a more robust and predictable way of reminding people why they care about an issue and the changes that might be needed.

Examples

This excerpt from article *The e-bike revolution* that's transforming New Zealand's small communities is a good example of independence values in action.

> *'Trish Dunn is retired and hadn't been out on two wheels since she was 18. She didn't dream of biking until the e-bike revolution.*
>
> *'Oh [it] liberated us... really has. I've done four rides this week. I'm now up to about 80 kilometres this week, which I would never have done if I didn't have an e-bike,' Dunn said.*

Read the article on the Newshub website

This excerpt from an article by Anna Fifield, *Mode Shift: Our streets must be safe for everyone*, is a great example of using 'all-of-us' values. In particular, she invokes equity values, as she talks about sharing the street, as well as freedom and self-determination values.

> *'This is what this series is about: Exploring ways for all of us to share our streets. I'm never going to ride a horse to work, you might never bike to the supermarket or take the train to Waikanae. But wouldn't it be great if everyone who wanted to shift modes could?'*

Read the article on the Stuff website

This quote is from Healthy Families East Cape and their project *Reimagining our Streets in Tairāwhiti*. It's a good example of using an equity value. The image used invokes the value of children's freedom and helps people envision what our streets can look like.

> *"The best test of any street is whether there are people reflecting the full diversity of society. Streets should be inviting for everybody to spend time, play and make journeys on foot, cycle or by public transport."*

In this Stuff news article, bus driver Ethan Hakopa shows the value of connection.

> *'For me, it's just fun. You meet your neighbours. You see your friends. It builds a little community around the bus.'*

Read the story about Ethan Hakopa driving a bus on the Stuff website

Including disabled people in your vision and story helps non-disabled people think about equity

In testing, equity and inclusivity were powerful values. Talking about equity and meeting the needs of disabled people led non-disabled people in focus groups to think more about ways the transport system could be improved to make things better for disabled people.

Example

This article from Josephine Franks, *Not Built For Me: Freedom, frustration in navigating public transport with a disability*, talks about how public transport creates freedom for Abigail, a person with Down's syndrome.

> *'Public transport gives Abigail Knight the freedom to do what she loves most… Abigail Knight, 26, has Down syndrome. While Auckland's buses and trains let her navigate the city largely independently, fragmented routes, changes to services and hard-to-read timetables create challenges.'*

Read the article, Not Built for Me, on the Stuff website

Avoid safety or fear values

Using safety or harm reduction to motivate people can instead create fear and cause people to think about safer cars on safer roads and that cars are the safest option.

Avoid other extrinsic values like wealth or expertise

Values like wealth or authority are known as extrinsic values — values that have external reward. These extrinsic values are individualistic and don't help people think about the greater good or changes that will make the biggest difference to all of our lives.
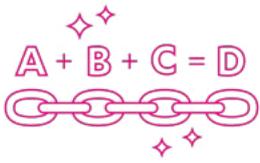
4. Shift to explaining instead of describing

Shifting to better explanations includes leading with a vision and values instead of facts or problems, using helpful metaphors, and naming people with the power to make the changes that will make the biggest difference.

People need explanations to help them understand the origins, consequences, and solutions of problems. Just describing problems, statistics, or policy solutions doesn't work to deepen understanding or overcome powerful unhelpful narratives and the explanations that they contain.

You can deepen people's understanding if you:

- open stories with a vision and shared values to invite people into the issue
- follow up quickly with effective explanations that link causes, consequences, and solutions.

A clear explanation fills gaps in people's understanding. Without the right explanation, these gaps can be filled with false or shallow information, or the gaps can cause your whole explanation to fall over.

Good explanations can be short and work with fast-thinking brains. You don't need to access people's slow thinking every time you want them to understand more deeply.

Facts can leave gaps

Facts and evidence need to be linked together for people in a way that moves people from cause and effect through to solutions and by replacing readily available unhelpful explanations. Explanatory chains can be used with good effect to achieve deeper understanding.

Use 'gears', 'tools', 'opening our streets', and 'calming speeds' as short explanatory metaphors

A metaphor takes something we understand on a practical everyday level and connects it to something more abstract or complex. Our testing showed that 'gears', 'tools', 'opening streets', and 'calming streets' were effective metaphors when talking about mode shift changes with people open to persuasion.

Gears — a tested explanation using a gears metaphor was persuasive

A 'gears' metaphor can help explain that cities have been geared for one form of transport, and we can use different gears for different solutions to transport problems.

What this sounds like:

Just like we need different gears for cycling up and down hills, our cities need different transport solutions for different challenges. Until now, our cities have been geared towards one form of transport — cars. We can solve our communities' transport problems by using different solutions, making it easier for people to walk, ride a bike, or get a bus.

SEPARATED WHEELING AND CYCLING NETWORKS

ON-DEMAND BUS SERVICES

WIDER, CALMER STREETS

PRIORITY SPACES FOR DISABLED PEOPLE + SPECIALIST VEHICLES
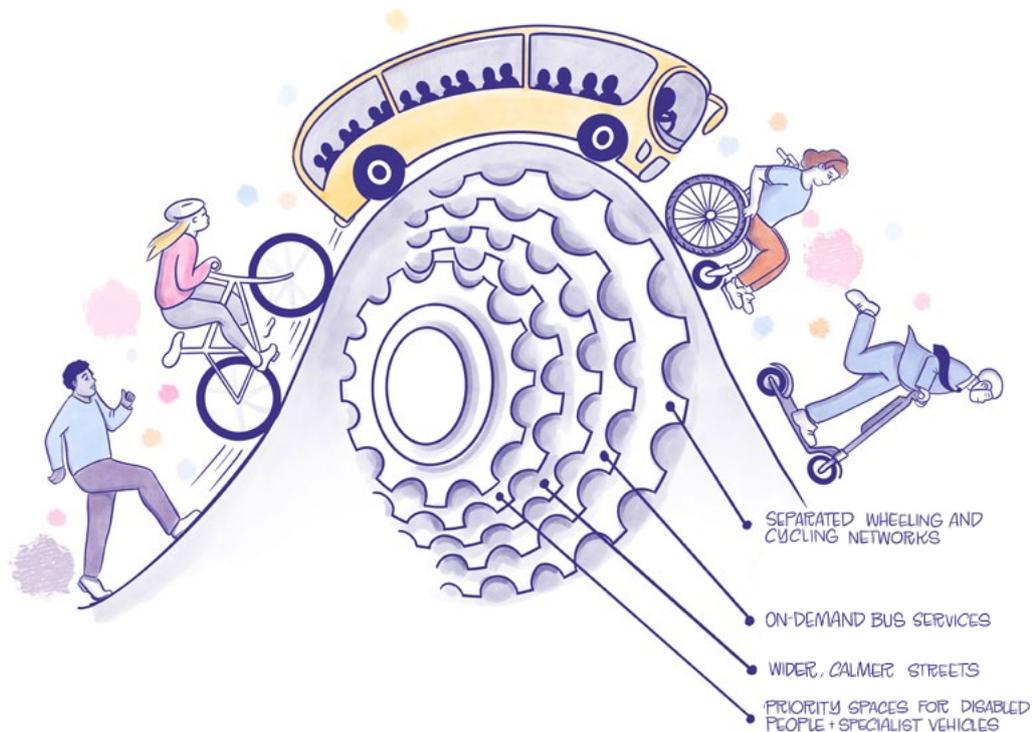
Tools — a tested explanation using a tools metaphor was persuasive

A 'tools' metaphor can help explain the different ways people in power can open our streets.

What this sounds like:

> *... people in government and local councils can use tools that work to open our streets. These tools will allow kids to get around safely on their own, by walking, getting a bus, or biking.*
>
> *The tools people in our councils can use to open our streets include putting in protected bike paths, calming speeds on our streets, opening up parts of the city for walkers only, and creating more space on our streets for public transport.*

Example of 'tools' metaphor in a news article

In the article Mode Shift: Give people transport choices and get right tools for the job, Thomas Nash uses a tools metaphor. Note that we recommend using the word 'options' rather than 'choices' because options help move people away from an individualistic or consumer mindset.

Read the article *Mode Shift: Give people transport choices and get the right tools for the job* on the Stuff website

Opening streets — a tested metaphor about opening streets was persuasive

An 'opening streets' metaphor can help explain the changes that will make the biggest difference to how we move people and goods around our towns and cities.
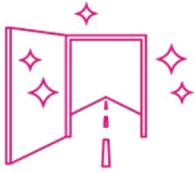
What this sounds like:

... people in government and local councils can use tools that work to open our streets.

The tools people in our councils can use to open our streets in...

Example of 'opening up' metaphor in a news article

In the article *Mode Shift: Transport equity needs to keep up with cycleway construction*, equity advocate Lily Chalmers shares an equity-led message on mode shift in Lower Hutt. She uses a metaphor of biking 'infrastructure' and initiatives and talks about 'opening up' opportunities for people in her community to travel and become active members of society.

Read the article *Mode Shift: Transport equity needs to keep up with cycleway construction* on the Stuff website

Calming streets — a tested metaphor about calming streets was persuasive

A 'calming streets' metaphor can help explain all the different ways to modify speed and street layouts.

What this sounds like:

- *Making calm, connected cities means using the right tools for the job of transport.*

- *The tools people in our councils can use to open our streets include ... calming speeds on our streets ...*

A good explanation says who has the means to make the change — name the agents

A good explanation should name the agents or people who can act and who have the means and influence to make the changes that will make the biggest difference — for example, you can say 'people in government' or 'local council leaders need to vote for this plan'. Naming these agents will also help you with a systems narrative.

Explanatory frames work — use clear, short explanations to link cause, consequences, and solutions for people

Start with the initial cause of a problem, link that cause to the impacts, and follow up quickly with solutions, while using only a few facts in the right place. This approach is more powerful than using many facts that just describe a problem or a solution.

A tested short explanation about cities not working well for people was persuasive

"The people who designed our cities designed them to work best for cars. With lots more people in our cities, our streets now don't work well for anyone — even people who drive. That's why we need people in government to create options for people to ride bikes, walk, and take public transport, so that there are many different, easy ways for people to get around."

Read more about the tested explanatory chains in our research findings document *Research Report — Combined Methods and Results*

How to deal with unhelpful narratives and false information

If you have to address misinformation and false narratives, you can use a 'truth sandwich' technique.

1. Engage people first with some shared values and give them the true information.

2. Name x information as untrue and the motivations behind it.

3. Rename the true information and the values.

An example

"Many people in Auckland want streets that are open to people moving about on foot, on bikes, and using wheelchairs, welcoming to kids, and full of fun spaces that encourage people in. We can design our cities to enable these things, which include wider footpaths, more play spaces, and bike paths. You will hear untrue information that these changes harm businesses. These businesses may be scared of change/heard false information/are being used by x. The truth is that opening our streets in this way brings more business, new people, and more diversity of people into local shops. These are the types of cities most of us want to live in."

5. Shift to effective messengers who will use effective narratives

A good messenger will do the heavy lifting of an effective story and helpful narrative because trust and credibility in the messenger is a mental shortcut people use to assess whether information is believable.

We tend to trust people who are more like us, who we think share our values, who we have had positive experiences with, who share our background or experience, who are more attractive, and who we believe are qualified to comment.

And because many different types of people are open to persuasion on opening our streets, we need a wide range of messengers.

Pair the right messenger with the right message

Choose messengers who bring with them trust and credibility for your persuadable audience and who are in a position to move your audience to your helpful message.

People trust messengers and narratives that they can connect with or see shared experiences or values in. It's important to pair the right messenger with the right message.

We tested two different messengers both talking about the positive benefits that opening their streets had made to their day-to-day lives: a mother of children talking about the many trips she made as part of her parenting and work life, and a young man talking about his work trip. Both messengers performed well with people who are open to persuasion.

Use non-political messengers

Use apolitical messengers or messengers from across the political spectrum because as a group, people who are persuadable support a range of political parties and are not uniformly aligned to one particular ideology.

Unexpected messengers are powerful

Powerful messengers are unexpected people using appropriate and tested messages. For example, instead of business leaders talking about economics, they talk about the collective benefits of mode shift like employee wellbeing and a better world for everyone, or children talk about independence, or older Pākehā males who don't ride bikes talk about everyone getting what they need and pragmatism. People are more likely to be persuaded by hearing from surprising people or people like themselves talking about how opening the streets has led to better experiences for moving about.

Identify members of a stereotypical opposition group to see whether they might be a useful surprising messenger for you, but make sure they will use helpful frames. It's better to have no messenger than one who is unpredictable.

Example

In the Cycling Weekly article *London businesses join forces to back cycle superhighways*, business owners talk about supporting cycleways to show care for their staff. These business owners are unexpected messengers and a powerful choice.

Read the article about business backing cycleways on the Cycling Weekly website

Try using people who don't ride bikes as messengers

People who don't ride bikes or aren't known environmentalists are powerful messengers because they don't fit the stereotype people might have of a 'typical cyclist' or 'greenie'. Children who cycle are an exception to this advice because people see them differently. You can also use people who drive cars as messengers. These people could be especially powerful if they're talking about the shift they were able to make from a car to an non-car type of transport.

Children and younger people make great messengers for older people

Letting children and young people tell their own stories about how great it is that they can ride their bikes to school, gives extra support to messages about children's self-direction and independence. Child and young people messengers about climate change aspects of mode shift are likely to be especially appealing to persuadable people who are more likely to be parents or grandparents. Parents are also more likely to be persuaded by other parents.

Politicians and 'experts' are not always effective messengers with people open to persuasion

People with technical expertise or authority may not be the most effective messengers for people open to persuasion. This is because we tend to trust people who are more like us, who we think share our values, who we have had positive experiences with, and who share our background or experience. Messengers also need to have 'relevant' expertise to the audience group. That can mean lived experience is much more relevant for many people. In focus groups, persuadable audiences did not respond as well to a message referring to experts with authority in the subject matter.

Political messengers are likely to shut out people who aren't affiliated with that party and are likely to activate an in-group or an 'us versus them' feeling. People in politics may be seen as more credible messengers when they are reflecting what they have heard from the people they have been elected to represent, not their own beliefs or expertise.

Trusted messengers provide social proof

People like to see stories and evidence of changes that have worked in other cities and neighbourhoods in Aotearoa in particular — we're persuaded by what we think others think and do. As well as helpful narratives and explanations, people who are persuadable need genuine consultation, participation, and social proof of changes to our streets and ways of moving about that have made a big difference to people's lives.

In focus groups, when someone spoke positively about mode shift changes their council had made, it shifted the fatalism in other participants. Find everyday messengers from communities where mode shift changes have been made and people are already seeing the benefits of it. Show people that it does work in New Zealand.

Example

The Stuff article, *Newtown locals on their new cycleway: 'It's amazing*, I love it is a good example of speaking positively about changes that have already happened.

Read the article on the Stuff website

Repetition gives credibility and persuades people

People are more likely to accept beliefs and positions that they see frequently in order to fit in. Repetition from trusted others gives credibility to the information you are trying to get across.

But this cuts both ways — repeating unhelpful information gives it credibility.

Using narratives to shift mindsets takes consistent repetition of helpful messages by different messengers over time.

Shift narratives together

Shifting mindsets and narratives is networked work. Lasting change that makes the biggest difference to people's lives takes time, collective effort, and understanding from people working across a field of practice. Sharing this guide and other knowledge will help everyone move in the same direction.

When a field of practice agrees on the needed mindset and narrative shift work and the words, stories, and images that will achieve it, big things are possible.

Part ②

Putting it into action

This part of the guide:

- asks you to think about the ecosystem of people working for the same changes
- summarises tested phrases to embrace or replace
- suggests a new story structure that works to connect with people and deepen understanding.

Making change means working alongside allies, advocates, activists, and government

Making the mode shift changes needed to benefit people and the planet means working alongside other practitioners, advocates, allies, and activists. This can feel hard because these groups will sometimes criticise — it's their job to push for things that you might not be able to do. Activists' work is essential for transformation, and it's important to build relationships and networks with everyone working for a similar vision. You might not agree on all issues, but you probably share the same goal.

Activists who might not agree with how quickly you're doing things or some details of your approach can still be powerful messengers. Together, you can be more effective if you're using the same narrative strategies. You need activists and civil society groups using the same narratives too within their own stories — it's an ecosystem of change.

When talking about the role of government, it's important to talk about its work for the long-term public good and remind people of the things people in government can do. This can help people understand what change is possible and who can make it happen.

Putting it into action — a shortcut sheet of words and phrases to embrace or replace

Use this shortcut table to quickly see the words and phrases to embrace when talking about changes to get more people walking, riding bikes, and using public transport.

Print this table out as a separate sheet if that's helpful.

Embrace saying ✓

- **Opening the streets**
- **Making space for everyone**
- **Streets for everyone**
- **Creating a city where people get what they need, including disabled people and tradies who still need to use cars**

Replace saying ✗

- Restrictions on car driving or parking such as closing streets to cars (prompts a loss mindset)

Embrace saying ✓

- **Calming streets**

Replace saying ✗

- Lowering speed limits

Embrace saying ✓

- **Giving people options**

Replace saying ✗

- Giving people choices or people choosing to do something (this prompts an individualistic or consumerist mindset)

Embrace saying ✓

- **Connecting people and places**

- **Protecting the people and places we love**

- **For the public good**
- **Making all our lives better**
- **Riding and walking sparks joy**

- **Taking practical steps and finding the best way to do things**
- **Seeing what works in the short term and the long term**
- **Being adaptable or flexible**

- **Naming the people with the power to make the biggest changes**

Replace saying ✗

- War — 'cyclists battling for space'
- Sports — 'competing' for funding

- Safety from harm (this prompts fear and 'we need safer cars and roads' thinking)

- People making individual choices for themselves

- It must be perfect or not at all
- It's 'a trial' (this prompts temporary or short-term thinking)

- Not naming people with the power to make changes or using a non-specific 'we'

Putting it into action — a new story structure to reflect your narratives

Once you've shifted to helpful narratives, you can put together different stories to consistently reflect that understanding you want people to have. Using a consistent story structure will help people understand the vision you're working towards, the barriers in the way, what should be done, and by whom.

Stories are all the ways we communicate about our issues day to day — for example, a news article or a campaign with people talking about different aspects of mode shift. Stories may be unique to the needs of different groups, have a different focus on different aspects of the issue, reflect the unique style and tone of the messenger, or have a different call to action, but they should all reflect a similar narrative and follow a structure that works to deepen understanding.

Use this formula to structure your stories and communications

A practical formula can help you construct stories to reflect your helpful narrative. Aim to spend a third of each communication on each part of the story.

→ Vision and values first.

→ Explanation and barriers to this vision — this is the origin story: who put the problem there, how did this happen, what are the impacts and flow-on effects.

→ Solution and action — what is needed now to overcome barriers, including what people need to do and who can do it. For example, people in power need to make certain decisions or people in the population need to lobby people in power to make those decisions.

Lead with a vision and values

+ Explain the barriers

= Give solutions and actions

→ 1. Start with a hopeful vision and values

A clear vision at the start of your stories gives people hope that change is possible and invites them to consider the evidence for the changes needed. Starting with a vision that includes our shared 'all-of-us' values makes it easier to give detailed action to achieve that vision.

→ 2. Visions need a clear pathway

Visions need a pathway to get there. Follow your hopeful vision with a clear, logical explanation of how to get there and name the people or agents who can make it happen — naming and explaining barriers and how to overcome them shows people you are realistic about real problems.

→ 3. Solutions and actions will depend on your vision, explanation of barriers, and the change you're trying to make

Make sure your solution and actions match the change you're trying to make and the barriers you've explained. If you're creating advice on how to move people to take action, you need to tell people what you want them to do.

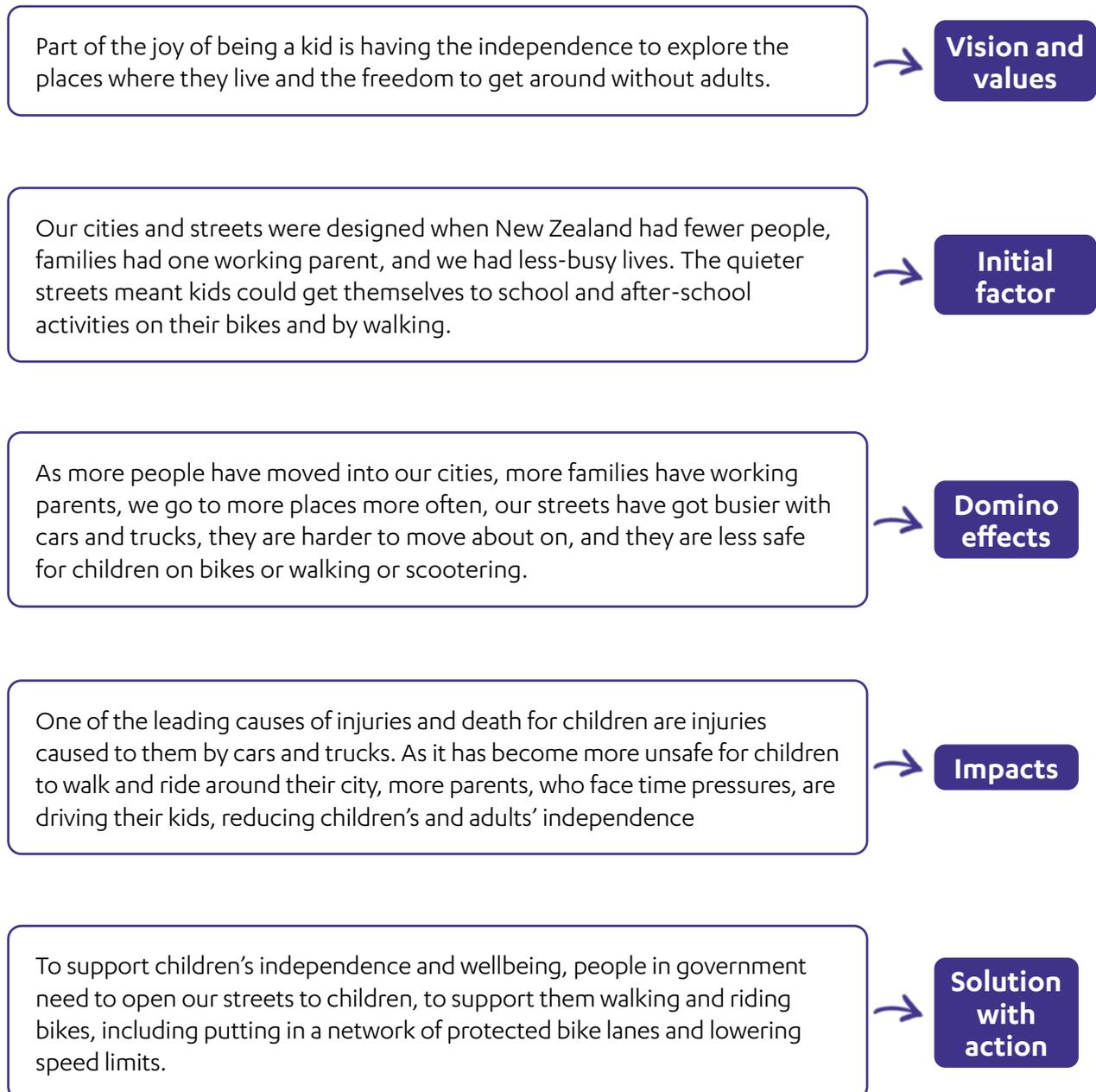- 'Support projects by getting involved in their planning and consultation.'
- 'Support local projects by using the new infrastructure and show that it works.'
- 'Be visible and vocal in your support for national and local change to build political will.'
- 'Hold local or central government to account for their intentions for mode shift.'
- 'Share this helpful narrative so it becomes obvious that opposition is the minority.'

A communication example with vision and values, an explanation of barriers, and solutions

Here's an example of a story about opening the streets.

It shows a vision with values and an explanation of an initial factor, domino effects, and solution. You can use an example like this to build your own explanations. This one wasn't tested in the research, but the principles it's based on are reliable.

Part of the joy of being a kid is having the independence to explore the places where they live and the freedom to get around without adults.	**Vision and values**

Our cities and streets were designed when New Zealand had fewer people, families had one working parent, and we had less-busy lives. The quieter streets meant kids could get themselves to school and after-school activities on their bikes and by walking.	**Initial factor**

As more people have moved into our cities, more families have working parents, we go to more places more often, our streets have got busier with cars and trucks, they are harder to move about on, and they are less safe for children on bikes or walking or scootering.	**Domino effects**

One of the leading causes of injuries and death for children are injuries caused to them by cars and trucks. As it has become more unsafe for children to walk and ride around their city, more parents, who face time pressures, are driving their kids, reducing children's and adults' independence	**Impacts**

To support children's independence and wellbeing, people in government need to open our streets to children, to support them walking and riding bikes, including putting in a network of protected bike lanes and lowering speed limits.	**Solution with action**

The four stories at the start of this guide also follow this structure and have all been tested.

Part ③

The theory and science of effective Narratives for Change

This section gives some of the theory and science this guide is based on

This section covers:

- more about Narratives for Change

- fast thinking and our information environment

- a strategic approach to communicating

Narratives for Change can help people understand and support big changes

Narratives for Change are about using narratives to help persuadable people understand and support changes that will make the biggest difference to people's lives — also called systems change. It's a deliberate communications strategy designed to work with the overloaded information environment people are in and with the mental shortcuts people use to understand and navigate the world.
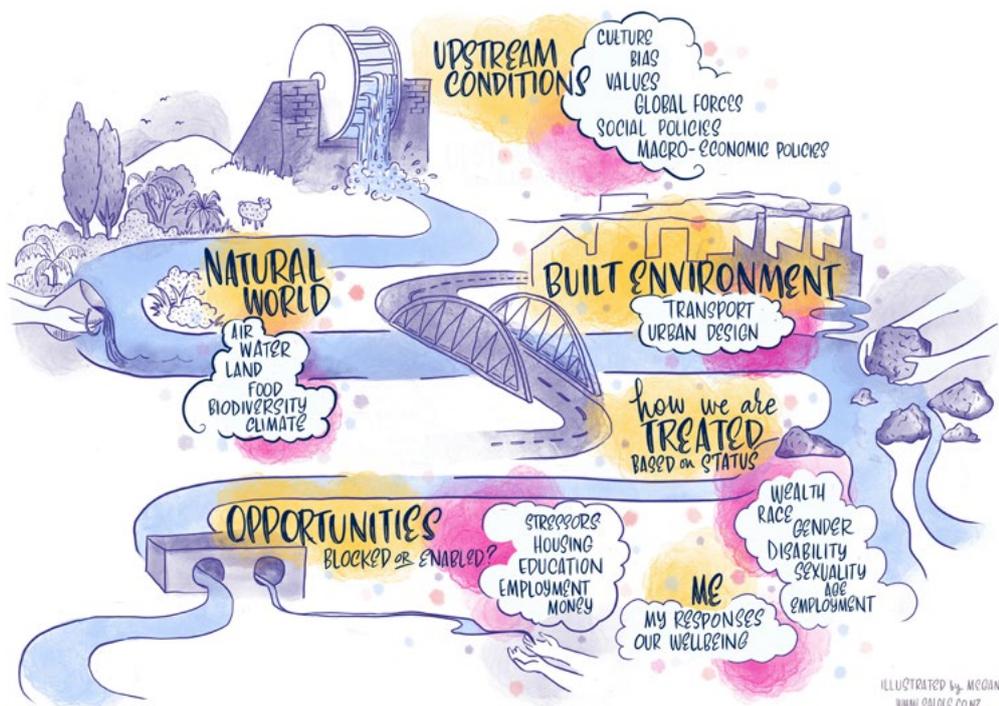
Changes that will make the biggest difference to people's lives are hard to see

Narrative work is an emerging field, has connections to activism, and is focused on kinder, more equitable narratives. This work is one part of what it takes to make changes that make the biggest difference to people's lives.

An upstream–downstream metaphor of a river can help explain these changes. Downstream, are the visible problems we see and want to overcome. If we go upstream, we can see the social, environmental, and cultural conditions that shape these downstream problems.

Systems are often complex and made up of interconnected webs of cause and effect, but they are also controlled by people and can be changed. How we talk about things can give people hope and agency to act.

Upstream–downstream metaphor to illustrate systems change

Mindsets and narratives matter when we want changes that will make the biggest difference

Narratives for Change can help shift people's mindsets and deepen understanding about complex social and environmental issues — the sorts of issues where we want to make changes that will make the biggest difference to people's lives.

Narratives for Change are about helping people see what those changes are and building people's support for change. Narratives influence mindsets, and mindsets influence support for change. Shared mindsets and narratives also reflect and reinforce each other.

Narratives are patterns of meaning in our talk that tie together different stories and reflect people's mindsets

In our information landscape we're exposed to different types of narratives:

- Dominant, shallow, and unhelpful narratives — our job is to find them and avoid them.

- Quieter, more nuanced, and helpful narratives — our job is to find or create them, and amplify them.

Helpful narratives are those that deepen people's understanding and build people's support for changes that make the biggest difference to people's lives. Narratives are a tool to shift mindsets, deepen understanding, and get support for change.
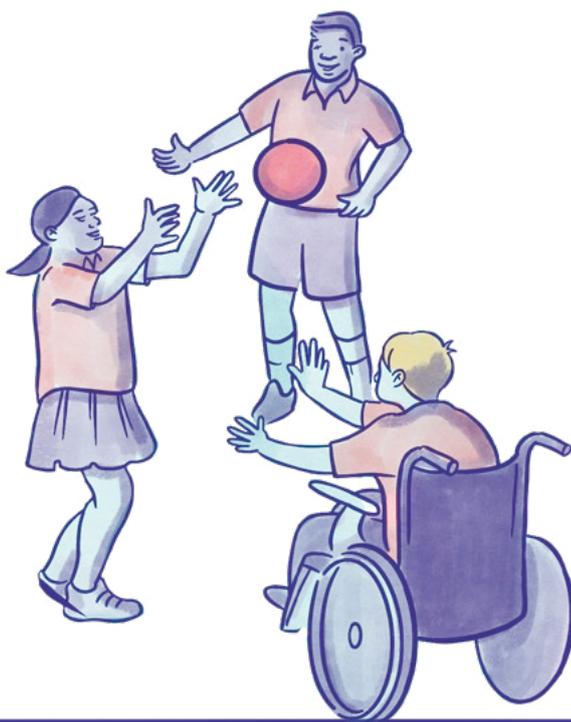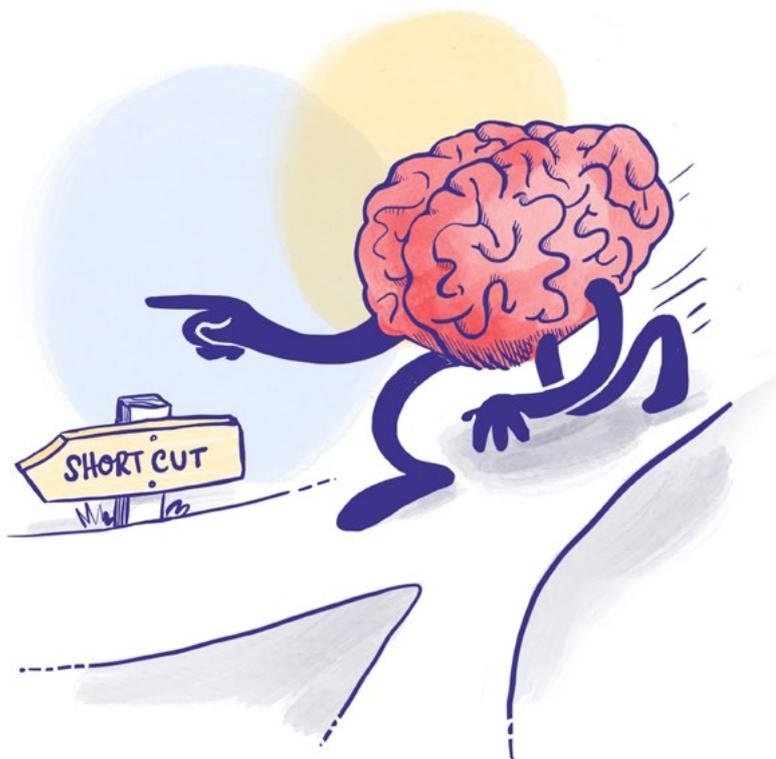
Fast thinking and our information environment can be a barrier to understanding

When we do Narratives for Change work, we need to work with people's fast thinking. Human thought is fast and automatic, and that speed serves us well most of the time but can get in the way when we're trying to think about complex issues.

Psychologist Daniel Kahneman[3] has shown that our fast-thinking brains use shortcuts to cope with the vast amount of information in the world. These shortcuts protect our existing beliefs, which leads to confirmation bias.

Fast thinking:

- is mostly subconscious — because it's so fast

- means we use shortcuts to decide what information to pay attention to and take in — we never receive evidence in a neutral way, and we use trust and perceived expertise to help us decide

- means we use emotion to judge the accuracy of information in the context of what we already know

- means we shy away from abstract ideas

- makes it harder to have productive public conversations about complex public and environmental issues.

[3] Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (2017).

Our information environment reinforces fast thinking

Our environment is filled with a huge amount of information that we are exposed to all the time. The effort to read, reassess, and re-evaluate this information is immense for one person. Our environment is also filled with shallow or unhelpful narratives that influence our thinking.

Fast thinking reinforces a feedback loop where shared narratives in the world help shape our mindsets about the world, and these mindsets help create the narratives.

Effective ways to shift mindsets need to work with our fast-thinking brains and our information environment

To make a difference, we need to work with the information environment we are living in and with the fast-thinking way our brains deal with this information.

Instinctive and habitual ways of communicating are not effective in shifting mindsets

Helping people see and support the need for change takes more than giving them more facts, persuasive stories, or emotional imagery. These instinctive or habitual ways of communicating can backfire.

As experts and advocates for an issue, we often communicate in these default ways by:

- correcting incorrect beliefs and stories by busting myths and negating
- leading with problems such as the costs to society or risks to people
- using facts without context
- using technical language
- relying on individual emotive stories.

These default ways of communicating are not effective because people work harder to protect their existing beliefs. These ways of communicating can also inadvertently reinforce existing unhelpful narratives instead of building new narratives that help deepen people's thinking.

A strategic approach to communicating works with fast thinking and our information environment

A strategic approach to communicating works with fast thinking and our information environment

Narratives for Change work means taking a strategic approach to communicating. It's helpful to think about these shifts in approach.

→ Shift to mindset work

→ Shift to your narratives

→ Shift who you focus on

→ Shift to 'all-of-us' values

→ Shift to effective messengers

→ Shift to an effective story structure

→ Shift a narrative together

Changes that make the biggest difference rely on mindset shift

Social scientists have shown that our mindsets shape what we see as normal, or a problem, in how the world works or how our society is structured. Mindsets shape our willingness to support transformations to systems, policies, and practices. Narratives for Change are about helping shift mindsets so people see what those changes are and support them. This work takes time and needs communicators to use new narratives repeatedly and consistently.

Shifting people's mindsets is one of six interconnected conditions that can hold a problem in place or create the necessary change to solve it.

Shifting the conditions that can hold a problem in place[4]

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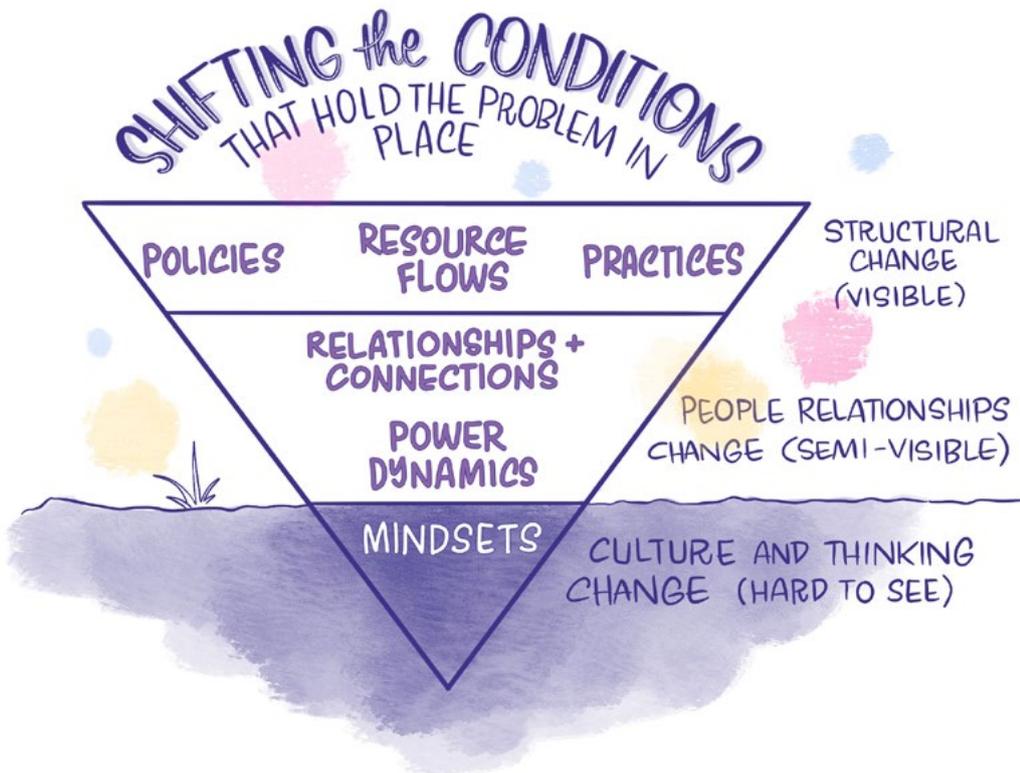
[4] Adapted from John Kania et al. *The Water of Systems Change*.

Appendix (A)

Have a narrative strategy

Have a narrative strategy

When you shift to narrative work, you need a narrative strategy to match.
At a basic level, think about these things. Add your own answers in below.

What changes are you trying to build support for?	For example, are you building support for: • cycleway projects • transport strategy • infrastructure changes • specific policy changes	....

Who can make the change?	For example, the people who can make change are: • people in local councils • people in government agencies.	....
Whose support do they need to have to make that change? **Who can influence the people who can make the change?**	For example, the people whose support is needed, and can influence the people that make the change are: • people that vote • community members • people who engage in consultations.	....

Whose support do you need to have to make the change? **Who are the people open to persuasion?**	For example, people open to persuasion are: • people not yet participating in community engagement • people who don't yet understand why change is needed • people who have yet to decide their position on the issue • people who want change but aren't sure the best changes to make.	....
Who are your supporters that can share stories to broaden your base?	For example, your supporters are: • people who advocate for your solution • people who already 'do' behaviours eg use cycleways • people who want the same vision as you and support your solutions.	....

What do you want people to understand about the changes? **What do you need to explain to people so that they support the changes you're working towards?**	For example, you want people to understand that: • putting in a separated cycleway means rebalancing the space on the road so it can be used by everyone • you're making practical decisions for the long-term public good.	....

| What do you need people to do to show that support? | For example, you want people to: | .... |
| What action do we want them to take in support of the changes you're working towards? | • participate in engagement and consultation activities
• share publicly that they support the work being done. | .... |

| Who are your collaborators? | For example, your collaborators are:
• community leaders
• advocates for mode shift. | .... |
| How will you let them know the helpful narratives to use and unhelpful narratives to avoid? | For example, you'll let them know which narratives to use by:
• meeting with them
• sharing resources
• providing content they can use in their communications. | .... |

Who are the groups and people that share your overall aims, and could be influential on this issue but are not your collaborators and may criticise you?	For example, your critics might be: • people that believe in the vision but don't trust you • people that believe in the vision but don't agree with your pace, process or way of achieving the solution.	....
How can you support them to use helpful narratives? **What benefits would they see in this?** **Who are the credible messengers to persuade them about narratives for change?**	For example, you could support them by: • meeting with them to discuss what you have in common and what your differences might be • sharing resources • resourcing people who they do trust to share these narrative resources with them.	....

Who are your messengers? **Who will stick to your helpful narratives and appeal to a wide selection of people open to persuasion?**	For example, messengers for your base and people open to persuasion might be: • community leaders • children • business owners.	....
Who are the credible messengers to persuade your critics about narratives for change?	For example, credible messengers for your critics might be: • collaborators who are trusted by the critics • your base who have things in common with your critics.	....

What are your channels? How will you reach your base and people open to persuasion?	For example, you will reach your audiences through: • your own social media channels • media coverage • word of mouth • events.	....

How will you measure impact? What will success and impact look like and how will you measure if it has been achieved? Avoid measuring impact by 'engagement' on social media, or the volume and response of opponents.	For example, your impact measurement might include: • when persuadable people understand the issue better • when those most harmed by the current system respond • when people take the action you asked them to.	....

Use a communication checklist

Check your communication: ✓

Check your communication does not: ✗

Talks mainly to your persuadable audience in ways your supporters feel comfortable with and will want to share. ✓

Talk just to your base of supporters.

Negate or myth-bust opponents stories. ✗

Tells your own narrative— be clear on what that is.

Helpful narratives include:

- These changes will make the biggest difference for the public good — a systems narrative.
- We're creating better lives and cities together — a common destination narrative.
- Streets are for all people – a meeting everyone's needs narrative.
- Opening streets protects the people and planet we care for – a holistic narrative.
- Communities and governments have the strengths and capability to act – a strengths-based narrative. ✓

Use the unhelpful narratives of people firmly opposed to your vision

Use unhelpful narratives that trigger thinking about:

- transport Individualism
- them versus us
- transport fatalism
- transport financialism
- transport is dangerous
- government inaction, fatalism, and the status quo. ✗

Has stories with a vision and values + explanation of barriers + solution and action structure that help you start with the better world you want. ✓

Lead with problems or a series of facts describing the problem.

Lead with the specific policy solutions (the ingredients instead of the cake). ✗

Taps into 'all-of-us' intrinsic values like:

- streets for all people (equality and inclusion)
- doing what works for our long term needs (pragmatism and responsible management)
- protecting the people and places we love (care for our environment)
- freedom and independence for children.

See for tested values statements.

Tap into extrinsic (external) values like:

- safety
- fear
- wealth
- expertise.

Uses a clear explanation about the barriers to your vision.

- What is the initial factor?
- Who put it there?
- What are the flow-on effects?
- What needs to be done to remove it?
- Who needs to remove it?

Use a lot of facts to describe a problem or solution rather than using facts as part of an explanation.

Uses helpful explanatory metaphors like:

- gears
- tools
- opening streets
- calming streets

Use metaphors or jargon that are found in opposition narratives.

Uses concrete and specific language.

Use abstract or vague language.
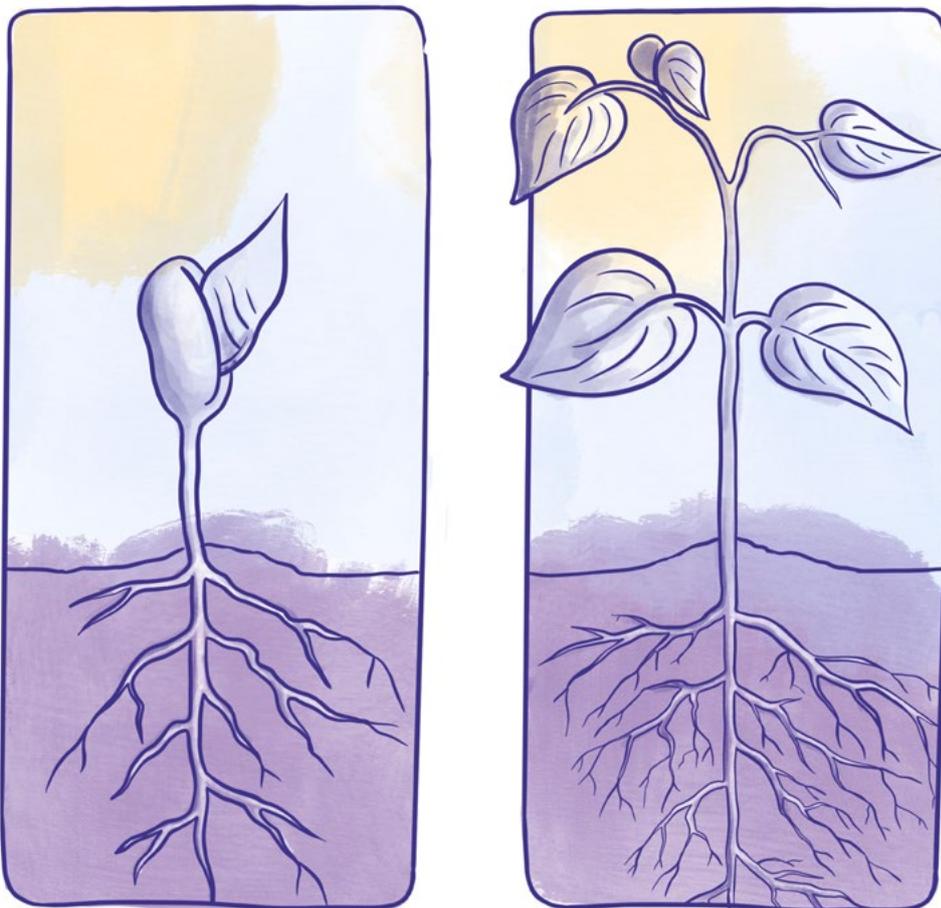
Finishes by reminding people of your why.

Think about your potential barriers to using the advice in this guide

When you put into practice the advice in this guide, you might come up against resistance in your organisation or from advocates. Doing things differently takes time and repetition.

Remember to follow the advice in this guide when you're talking to others in your organisation about a new approach — state the vision you're all working towards, lead with 'all-of-us' values, and give clear explanations about barriers, solutions, and actions. Remember not to lead with problems and isolated facts.

Remind people that the advice is based on evidence and messages tested with real people.
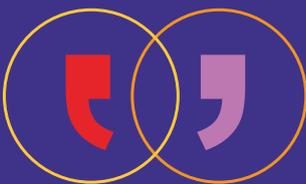
Adapt the general principles if your topic is not an exact fit to the examples in the guide. Remember, this advice is about helping people understand and support changes that will make the biggest difference to people's lives — it's not about how to talk about business as usual.

The
Workshop