

## Promote island as cycle destination, says expert

Make sure children can cycle and walk safely to school and put cycle ways in place to attract tourists, is Paul Steely White's advice to Waiheke after biking from the Matiatia ferry to Palm Beach last Friday.

An alternative transport authority based in New York, Mr Steely White was in the country to offer some insight and inspiration to people committed to making our cities more cycle and pedestrian-friendly.

Invited to New Zealand by Cycle Action Auckland's chairperson Barbara Cuthbert, he was keen to take up an offer of lunch at her Palm Beach home in between city

speaking engagements.

"I really like your slogan, 'slow down, you're here,'" he laughs.

Mr Steely White is the executive director of Transportation Alternatives, New York City's leading transportation advocacy which boasts a citywide network of 100,000 active supporters and 30 fulltime staff.

inviting and vibrant, whether people feel like lingering and talking and at what noise level it is no longer possible to talk."

He says cities like Copenhagen and Amsterdam long ago realised the wisdom of investing in cycling to 'move people around'.

But aren't they both flat?

"Yes that is the old excuse but it shouldn't stop people from doing things differently. The more you widen a sidewalk or create a bike lane, the safer it becomes for everyone and the more liveable and sociable your city becomes. "You're sending a signal that people are here and

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New York alternative transport authority Paul Steely White, on Waiheke last week with Cycle Action Auckland's Barbara Cuthbert.

The group has successfully campaigned to add around 600 kms of bikeways to the city's streets and parks over the past five years and to ban cars from some of the most congested areas like Times Square and much of Central Park.

He says the group have been fortunate in having the support of the current mayor Michael Bloomberg and also have a big fan in the shape of his most likely successor, Bill de Blasio.

"We have really changed the conversation about public transport in the last few years with a lot of inspiration from people like Jan Gehl."

A Danish architect and urban design consultant based in Copenhagen, Gehl's career has focused on improving the quality of urban life by re-orienting city design towards the pedestrian and cyclist.

"Gehl basically observed how people used the built environment and judged the quality of the experience in terms of things like whether the streets feel safe,

creating driver awareness. A street is not just a highway but a flexible, precious space to be shared."

He says New York transport authorities have had to change their criteria for measuring how well or badly the city is running.

"Their only question used to be 'how fast is the (motorised) traffic moving?' They weren't thinking about other considerations."

Only around 20 percent of New Yorkers own private cars, with the rest choosing other types of transport.

"The more highways you create, the more traffic will fill them up. It's called 'induced demand'. It's like trying to solve an obesity problem by loosening your belt."

He says it just takes a bit of courage and a different mindset by those in city planning roles.

"If you put the plan in place, the people will follow." • *Julianne Evans*