What happens when a real-world planner uses a digital world to build the cities of tomorrow?

This presentation follows the journey of an in-real-life (IRL) urban planner using Cities: Skylines 2 as a professional ‘digital sandbox.’ We will explore how complex urban theories are brought to life, tested, and refined in a virtual environment. Our case study is the city of Marsden Point, built from the ground up to demonstrate a philosophy of integrated, human-centered design.

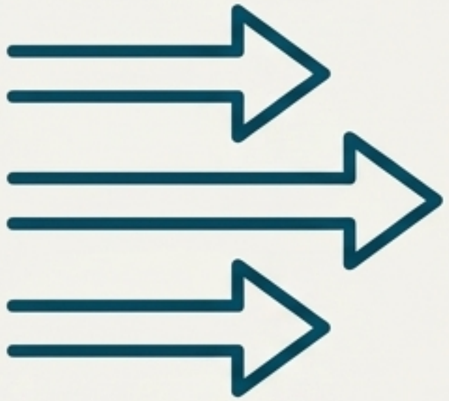
The Central Conflict: Efficient Movement vs. Livable Communities

Modern cities face a fundamental tension. We need efficient networks for logistics, commuting, and commerce—the movement of people and goods. **Simultaneously, we need safe, cohesive, and vibrant communities** where people can live, interact, and thrive.

Trying to make a single piece of **infrastructure serve both purposes** often results in it failing at both. A road designed for high-speed traffic is inherently hostile to social interaction, while a street designed for community is hopeless for efficient, long-distance travel.

A Planner's First Principle: Roads are Not Streets

The solution begins with a clear definition of purpose. We must stop conflating two distinct types of infrastructure. This simple distinction is the "operating system" upon which a successful city is built.



ROADS = MOVEMENT

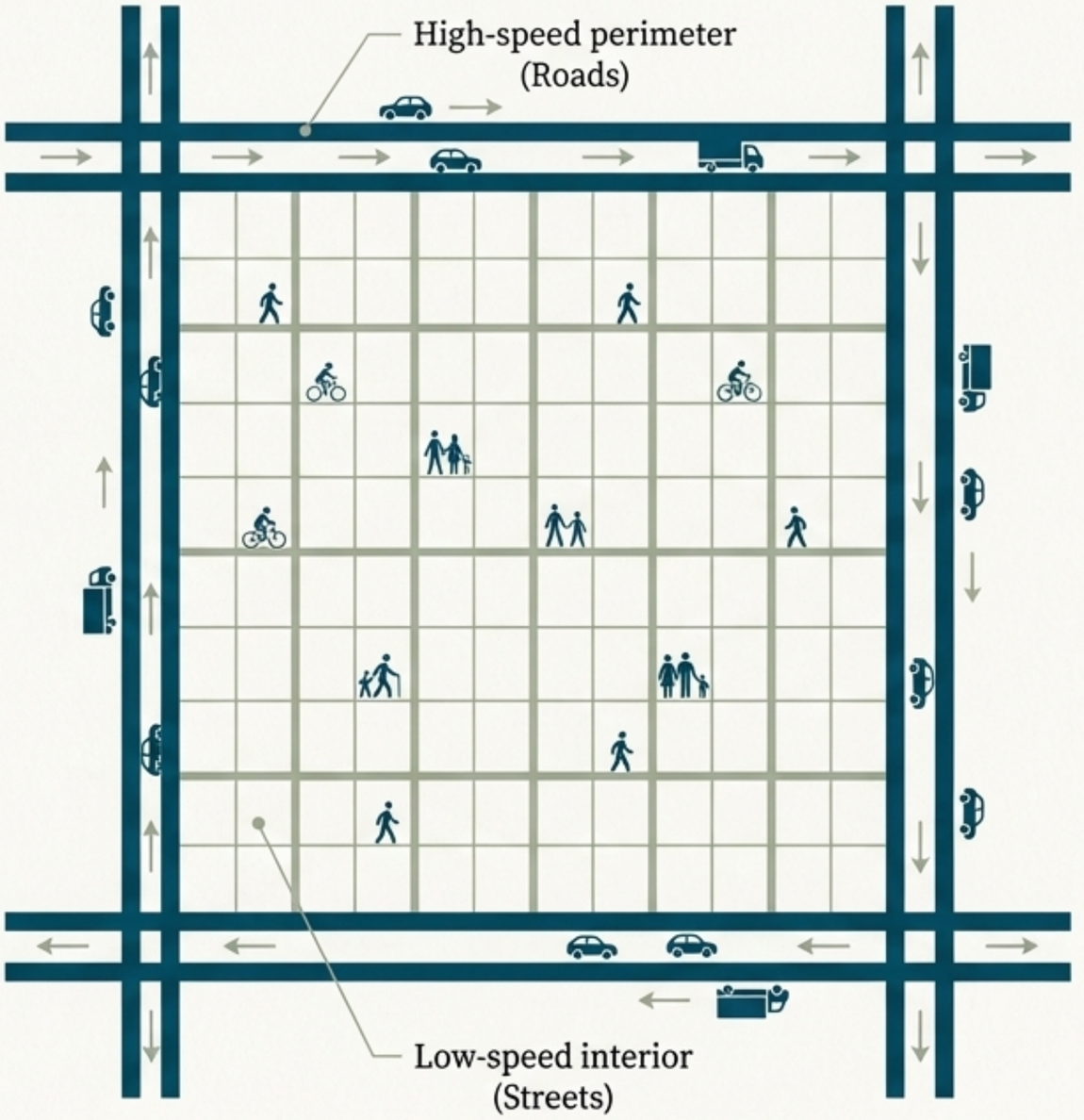
Their function is to move people and goods efficiently and safely across the city. Think arterials, highways. Speed and flow are priorities.

STREETS = PLACE

Their function is to serve as an extension of our homes, businesses, and social spaces. They are destinations in themselves. Human interaction and safety are priorities.

The City's Blueprint: Structuring the Urban Island

The 'Urban Island' (or Superblock) is a design pattern that organizes the city around our first principle. High-speed, high-capacity roads and transit lines form the perimeter, handling the city-wide movement of people and goods. The interior of the island is a network of low-speed streets (e.g., 30 km/h zones), where community life, local business, and social interaction can flourish, protected from through-traffic. This creates connected, cohesive communities without sacrificing the sacrificing the efficiency of the wider transport network.

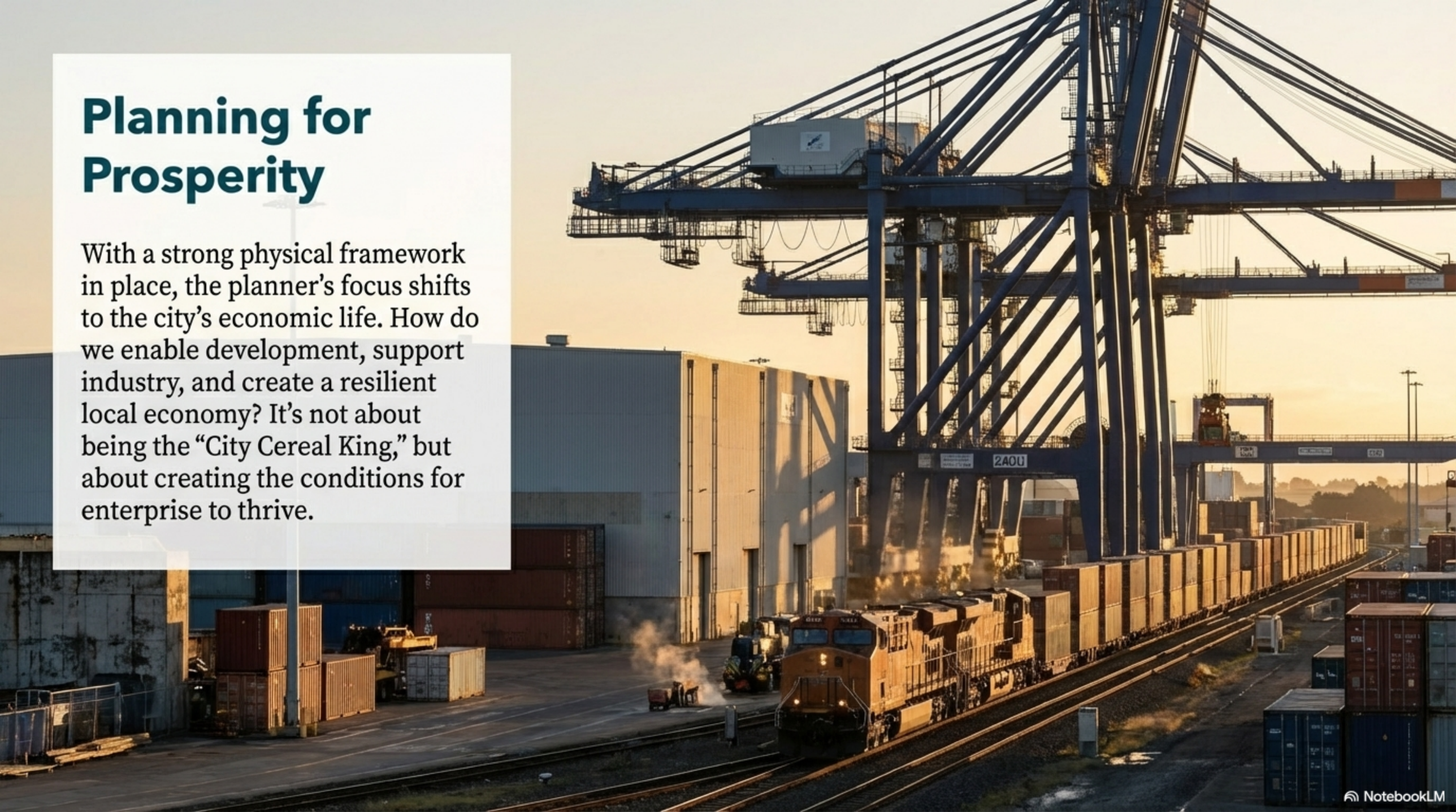


Marsden Point's Foundation: Urban Islands in Practice

In Marsden Point, the Urban Island concept forms the city's DNA. This high-level view shows the clear hierarchy. Arterial roads and highways connect different districts, the port, and industrial areas. Within these perimeters, residential and commercial areas are built on a fine-grained network of streets, creating distinct neighborhoods that are both accessible to the wider city and livable within.

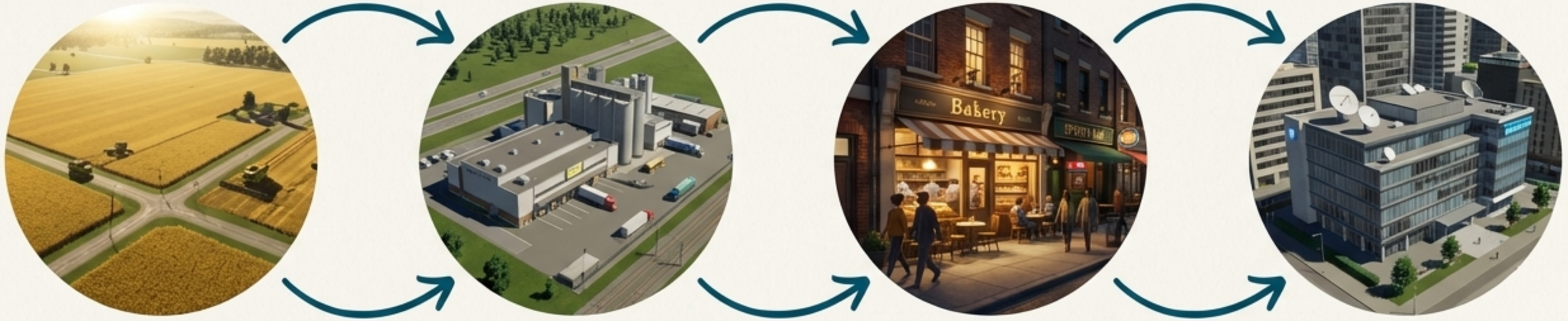
Planning for Prosperity

With a strong physical framework in place, the planner's focus shifts to the city's economic life. How do we enable development, support industry, and create a resilient local economy? It's not about being the "City Cereal King," but about creating the conditions for enterprise to thrive.



Case Study: Engineering a Cereal Supply Chain

When “Captains of Industry” approached Marsden Point's planners to capitalize on the region's grain output, a master plan was drafted. The goal was to enable a complete, end-to-end supply chain within the city. This involved zoning land, ensuring infrastructure connections, and planning for each stage of production and consumption.



1. Primary Production

Grain farms are zoned and connected to the transport network.

2. Industrial Processing

A Cereal Plant and Livestock Processor are established on the city's outskirts.

3. Consumer Outlets

A local Bakery and a Sports Bar are created to sell the final products.

4. Corporate & Marketing Support

A headquarters (‘Bottlecap Office’) and even a Television Studio are established to market the ‘wonderful cereals on prime time kids TV.’

Supporting Growth: The Birth of Whangarei Flats

Industrial growth is not the end of the story. The workers for these new industries need places to live, with access to amenities and transport. The second stage of the master plan was the delivery of Whangarei Flats, a semi-sufficient satellite town designed to support the new rural industries—much like Pukekohe supports the Franklin District in real-world Auckland. The town provides all necessary amenities and is connected back to the main city via road, bus, and metro rail.

The Human-Scale Connection

The city has a strong structure. Its economy is functioning. But how does it feel? How do citizens connect with each other and their environment?

The final layer of planning focuses on the fine-grain details that transform a functional city into a beloved one. This is about activating the ‘Streets’ as social spaces.

The Missing Glue: Cycling as a Powerful Transport Mode

Cycling (and other forms of micromobility like e-scooters) is the critical element that ties the city's systems together at a human scale. It's not just about reducing traffic; it is a versatile tool that addresses three distinct needs within the urban ecosystem, making the entire network more efficient and resilient.

The Three Critical Roles of a Cycling Network

1. Tackling Local Congestion

Most trips in the real world are under 6km, and this is where most congestion originates. Bikes and e-scooters are a hyper-efficient way to handle these short, local journeys.

2. Solving the First/Last Mile Gap

Cycling perfectly bridges the gap between a person's home and a rapid transit spine (like a metro or train station), and from the station to their final destination.

3. Enabling the Full Commute

For many, cycling can make up 100% of their journey to work, especially with a safe and connected network.

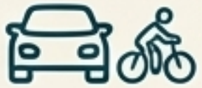
A Planner's Toolkit for Building a Cycle Network

Planning a successful network isn't just about painting lines on roads. It's a "big Planning Word Salad" that requires answering a series of essential questions to inform the design:

PURPOSE?

-  **Commuters** (to/from work)
-  **Casual** use (shopping, leisure)
-  **Tourism** (scenic trails)

INFRASTRUCTURE?

-  Mix with traffic on the **carriageway**
-  On-street painted **cycle lanes**
-  Fully **separated bike paths** for maximum safety

TRIP TYPES?

-  **Single-seat trip** (the entire journey is by bike)
-  **Multi-modal trip** (connecting to transit)

The Journey's End: The Critical Role of End-of-Trip Facilities

A cycling network is useless if there's nowhere to park at the destination. End-of-trip facilities are non-negotiable. In *Cities: Skylines 2*, just as in real life, sims won't bike if there is no bike parking. Planners must provide a range of options, from simple racks to large-scale, secure facilities, integrated with public transit and key destinations.

- **Public Options:** Simple Bike Racks, Bicycle Shelters, Parking Areas, large Bicycle Halls, and secure Underground Parking.
- **Integrated Options:** Bus stops with bike stands and metro stations with built-in parking are crucial for enabling multi-modal travel.

Bicycle Shelter


Bicycle Hall

Underground Parking


Integrated Bus Stop

The Result: An Integrated, Human-Centered City

Great cities are not accidents. They are the result of integrated, evidence-based planning that balances large-scale systems with the human need for connection and community. By starting with a strong structural foundation (Urban Islands), enabling a vibrant economy (Supply Chains), and weaving it all together with a human-scale transport network (**Cycling**), we create a city that is both productive and a joy to live in.