

Tweed Shire Council
PO Box 816
Murwillumbah NSW 2484

29th September 2021

Dear Tweed Shire Council,

RE: Tweed Pedestrian and Bike Plan

Thank you for the opportunity to be involved in the development of the Tweed Pedestrian and Bike Plan. Bicycle NSW has been the peak bicycle advocacy group now in NSW for over forty-five years, and has over 30 affiliated local Bicycle User Groups.

Our mission is to make cycling better for everyone in NSW, and we support improvements to facilities for pedestrians and cyclists. We advocate for new cycling routes that incorporate dedicated paths within both green corridors and the road environment, to provide connections to jobs, schools and services for daily transport and recreation trips. Cycling provides a healthy, congestion-reducing, low-carbon form of travel that is quiet, efficient and attractive for all ages with the correct infrastructure design.

Opportunities:

We congratulate Tweed Shire for developing a new strategy to support active transport over the next 10 years. A long-term plan for cycling with a clear set of actions will be a game changer because it puts the Tweed Shire in the best possible position for attracting infrastructure investment from the State Government and becoming a prime cycling region in the future.

A commitment to new active transport infrastructure will deliver innumerable benefits to the Tweed Valley and its residents. Improved walking and cycling paths will ensure better access to beaches, reserves and recreation facilities, helping to establish healthy lifestyles. High-quality shared paths through town and village centres will support access by pedestrians and cyclists of all ages and abilities, reducing dependency on private cars. Studies have shown that 70% of people in NSW either ride a bike now or would start to ride if safe infrastructure was providedⁱ.

Increased active travel leads to less congestion, noise and car parking pressures in towns and villages. Pedestrian and cycling infrastructure developed through the lens of the Movement and Place Framework will create more space for trees and landscaping, slow traffic and allow a more compact urban form.

Cycling infrastructure has a low cost per km, offering better value than road projects and supporting Council's financial sustainability. Over 100km of bike path can be delivered for the cost of 1km of new roadⁱⁱ.

In a region where 6% of households have no access to a car and many struggle to afford one, transport poverty is a serious issue. Household weekly incomes average \$1064 which is significantly lower than the NSW average of \$1486ⁱⁱⁱ and equality is likely to widen further with rising housing costs. If education facilities, workplaces and community facilities can be accessed safely on foot or by bike, families can be released from the financial burden of car ownership.

Cycling facilities are proven to attract tourists and support the visitor economy. New businesses will be needed to support eco-, active and adventure tourism while existing businesses benefit from increased passing trade and foot traffic^{iv}. The imminent construction of the Tweed section of the Northern Rivers Rail Trail is very exciting and will kick-start a new chapter for Tweed's tourism sector.

The Tweed Bike and Pedestrian Plan should be developed with regard to other relevant strategies for Tweed Shire LGA to ensure it maximises opportunities to improve the active transport network. These plans include:

North Coast Regional Plan 2036^v was prepared by the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment and sets out four goals and 25 directions to help achieve a vision for the North Coast to be the best part of Australia to work, live and play. Tweed Heads is identified as one of 3 new regional cities (along with Port Macquarie and Coffs Harbour) and Murwillumbah is an 'important centre'. The strengthening of connections north to the Gold Coast is emphasised. The expansion of walking and cycling infrastructure plays a key role in Direction 8 to promote the growth of tourism and Direction 15 to develop healthy, safe and well-connected communities.

Tweed Local Strategic Planning Statement 2020^{vi} outlines how Tweed will carefully manage substantial population growth over the next 20 years while retaining '*the area's high scenic quality, biological and ecological values, iconic natural landscapes, sense of community and relaxed lifestyle*'. There were 91,400 residents in 2016 and this is expected to grow to 125,800 by 2036, an increase of 38%; the number of dwellings will rise by 33% from 42,800 to 57,100 in the same timeframe. 18 planning priorities grouped under 4 themes provide a framework to guide land use planning. Active transport infrastructure is critical for PP2 to increase resilience to climate change, PP4 to reduce carbon emissions, PP9 to foster sustainable tourism and PP11 to develop safe, connected and liveable communities.

Tweed Community Strategic Plan 2017-2027^{vii} is focussed around four key streams in which Council delivers services to the community. The third, 'people, places and moving around' contains targets to reduce the number of vehicle and pedestrian accidents and increase the supply of alternative transport options under Goal 3.3.

Neighbouring Byron adopted a Bike Plan in 2019^{viii} which sets out a future network of separated cycleways and shared paths, prioritises construction work in an extensive action plan and considers a range of non-infrastructure initiatives around education and encouragement. The methodology and format of the plan may be very relevant to Tweed.

Recommendations:

Bicycle NSW requests that Tweed Shire considers the following recommendations when developing the Pedestrian and Bike Plan:

1. Provide cycling infrastructure that is segregated from vehicles

Bicycle NSW supports cycling infrastructure that is completely separated from vehicles and caters for riders of all ages and abilities. Mixed traffic cycle routes are only appropriate where speed limits or traffic volumes are very low. Shared paths are not suitable for areas with high pedestrian and cycling activity and will not lead to an acceptable level of amenity and safety for either walkers or riders as conflict occurs between different users.

According to the best practice 'cycling segmentation' model, developed in Portland USA to identify the type and needs of existing and potential bike riders^x, such cycle paths will allow 70% of local residents to consider journeys by bike (Figure 1). The area has some steep inclines but the increasing use of e-bikes and other micromobility devices will ensure that active transport options are accessible to all residents.

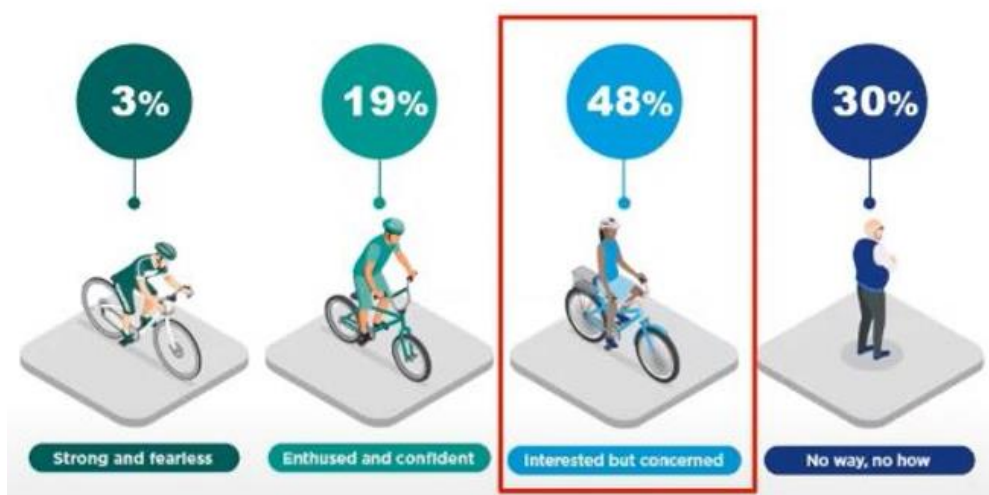


Figure 1:
Four general categories of comfort levels for cycling as transportation.
Source: North Sydney Council

The Bicycle NSW *Build it for Everyone* policy pillar^x sets a standard that cycling infrastructure should be fit for eight year old children or elders to ride on. Door zone bike lanes, bike stencils on the road and dangerous intersections will continue to deter the 48%^{xi} of people who are 'interested but concerned', from making the switch to cycling.

There has never been a better time to build for bike riding and active transport, as evidenced in the new Transport for NSW policies that require State projects to prioritize road space for active transport (Figure 2):

- Providing for Walking and Cycling in Transport Projects Policy CP21001^{xii}
- Road User Space Allocation Policy CP21000^{xiii}

The policies establish a road user hierarchy that considers pedestrians first and private cars last, as shown in Figure 2.

Order of Road User Space Considerations



Figure 2:
Diagram expressing Transport for NSW's road user priority.
(Source: Transport for NSW)

Tweed Shire Council must initiate brave discussions with Transport for NSW and the community about reallocating road space from private cars to reflect the priorities set out in the Road User Space Allocation Policy and Council's own policies. Any increase in inconvenience to car drivers created by reducing road space for driving and parking private vehicles will incentivise the mode-shift that Transport for NSW and Council seek, benefitting local residents with quieter streets, and less pollution, noise and through-traffic.

Many cities, including Sydney and Brisbane, have installed pop-up cycleways to expand the network quickly. These lanes have demonstrated the importance of physical separation to the usability of bike infrastructure while showcasing less expensive ways to provide it. Permanent changes to curbs, parking and landscaping can then be made when funds allow.

Bicycle NSW has drawn together the relevant standards, policies and resources on our [website](#) and we are happy to support Council's efforts to test and implement cycleways and new treatments.

2. Reduce speed limits to 30km/h on local streets

30 km/h limit streets reduce the need for separate bicycle infrastructure on local residential roads. 30 km/h has been shown as an optimal speed limit to allow people driving and cycling to share the road safely^{xiv} and is becoming a standard speed limit in many parts of the world. All single lane roads in Spain have been under a 30km/h limit since May 2021 and 30% of UK residents live in 20mph areas^{xv}.

Lower speed limits are an important building block for Vision Zero, an approach to road safety that was launched in Sweden in 1994 with the simple premise that no loss of life is acceptable. The Vision Zero approach has been highly successful and has spread to many other countries. The key policies include prioritizing low urban speed limits, pedestrian zones, physical separation between bicycle and car traffic, data-based traffic enforcement and behaviour-change education^{xvi}.

3. Future proof the active transport network

The status quo of walking and cycling activity in the Tweed Valley is likely to change rapidly. The density of walkers will increase when new housing and retail is delivered as proposed. An upswing in travel by bikes has occurred recently due to Covid, individual reactions to climate change, a surge in online delivery services and the growing popularity of e-bikes. In addition, State policies to address climate change and urban liveability will add to pressures on councils to secure a much bigger travel share for walking and cycling. It is

important to future proof the cycle network by allowing for increased demand at the outset. Paths should be wide enough for overtaking and must accommodate a range of mobility options such as cargo bikes and disability scooters. As discussed, pedestrian and cyclists should be separated where possible. Shared paths on sidewalks will be not be adequate to meet future needs in areas with high volumes of activity.

Bicycle NSW recommends referring to the new Cycleway Design Toolbox^{xvii} to ensure that the paths are constructed to current best practice.

4. Include clear numerical targets and timeframes for increasing active travel

Tweed Shire should set ambitious numerical targets to expand the cycling network, reducing reliance on private vehicles and curtailing increases in congestion and pollution as the population grows.

5. Develop facilities for cycle tourism

Cycle tourism has enormous potential to attract visitors to regional areas and provide business opportunities for local residents. The Northern Rivers Rail Trail will be a catalyst for the Tweed Valley becoming an important hub for cycling tourism and its delivery must be a priority. The Tumbarumba to Rosewood trail has brought a constant flow of visitors to small villages in the area since it opened in 2020, supporting 9 new businesses^{xviii}. Tourism on neighbouring Brisbane Valley Rail Trail (BVRT) is going from strength to strength. The BVRT is a great example of what can be achieved through community and government support.

Dedicated infrastructure is not always required for tourist routes. Establishing a series of waymarked routes on scenic back roads and publishing maps and resources to promote cycle touring will draw cyclists from far and wide and support a vibrant rural economy. The Central West Trail near Dubbo provides a 400km waymarked loop that has revitalised several country towns since April 2020^{xix}, attracting thousands of cyclists to the area for a 5- or 6-day adventure. It is important to work closely with neighbouring LGAs to facilitate longer touring routes.

Mountain biking is also very popular. The Blue Derby trails in north-eastern Tasmania provide an excellent example of bike tourism bringing economic benefits for local communities. \$3.1 million was invested in mountain bike trails in 2015. Now, more than 30,000 tourists visit the trails each year, injecting more than \$30 million back into the Tasmanian economy^{xx}.

Share bike rental hubs should be provided in tourist centres to ensure access to the trails for all visitors. Facilities for e-bike charging, bike maintenance and bike storage need to be created in key locations.

We also suggest initiating discussions with bus operators to develop a strategy for allowing bikes to be carried on buses. This will allow one-way trips, open up the cycle network to a wider range of users and provide access to the trails without using a car.

6. Improve safety on roads linking smaller towns

Bicycle NSW has consulted with local cycling advocates and a key request is that the main roads connecting smaller villages are made safer for cyclists. In the short term, wide shoulders, signage, speed restrictions and intersection improvements are essential. In the longer term, separate cycle paths should be developed along key routes. The following roads are a priority:

- Kyogle Road between Murwillumbah to Uki, where a new mountain bike park is proposed.
- Tweed Valley Way between Murwillumbah and Chinderah, creating safe access to the cycling infrastructure on the Gold Coast, the light rail and the airport.
- Wooyung Road between the end of the rail trail at Crabbes Creek and the coast trail at Wooyung.

These routes all connect to the Northern Rivers Rail Trail and help complete a network for both recreation and transport.

7. Maintain a focus on the important details of the cycle network

While creating a regional network is essential, it is the detailed design of cycle routes, end of trip facilities, wayfinding and education that will encourage the uptake of cycling and reduce dependence on private vehicles.

It is essential to ensure that popular daily destinations such as town centres and schools are easy to reach by bicycle for all residents of all ages and abilities. In particular, safe connections with all education facilities along the routes must be incorporated. Cycling infrastructure needs to be safe and continuous to increase the mode share of cycling and reduce congestion associated with school journeys. Without proper separation from vehicles and safe intersections, parents will still feel driving their children to school and activities is the only way to keep them safe from being hit by cars.

Integration of the routes with bus stops is essential to ensure easy access by bike and foot. All public transport journeys start and finish with a walk or cycle. Providing high-quality, safe conditions for active travel to bus routes will break down the first/last mile barrier which can inhibit take-up of public transport.

Accessibility for everyone must be considered. Paths are to be smooth, free of obstructions and wide enough to accommodate disability scooters, double prams and cargo bikes.

Parking and other end of trip facilities should be provided at journey end locations to further support riders and encourage participation. The Tweed DCP should be reviewed to ensure sufficient cycling parking is provided in future developments, including facilities for charging e-bikes.

Wayfinding supports visitors by clearly articulating and communicating the most efficient and safest route. Signage style for wayfinding should be consistent throughout the LGA and reflect the diversity of the community.

Education, information and events to promote walking and cycling as a form of transport are an important part of any plan to increase participation in active travel. The Byron Shire Bike Plan contains an inspiring set of non-infrastructure actions in Section 5.

Conclusion:

Bicycle NSW encourages Tweed Shire Council to plan for game-changing upgrades to the active transport network in the LGA. Safe infrastructure to support walking and cycling will benefit everyone in the community, reducing congestion and pollution while improving public health, providing more equitable access to employment, services and public transport and attracting tourism.

We look forward to working with Tweed Shire Council to progress the delivery of active transport infrastructure in the near future.

Yours faithfully,

Sarah Bickford

Bike Planner
Bicycle NSW

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- ^{vi} Tweed Local Strategic Planning Statement 2020. <https://www.tweed.nsw.gov.au/files/assets/public/documents/development-and-business/land-use-and-planning-controls/local-strategic-planning-statement-2020.pdf>
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- ^{xi} 70% of people when surveyed said they would ride more if they felt safe NSW Government, Sydney's Cycling Future (2013) [Online as at 24/2/2021] <https://www.transport.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/media/documents/2017/sydneys-cycling-future-web.pdf>
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