

Muswellbrook Shire Council  
PO Box 122  
Muswellbrook NSW 2333

25<sup>th</sup> November 2021

Dear Muswellbrook Council,

**RE: Muswellbrook Active Travel Plan**

Thank you for the opportunity to be involved in the development of the Muswellbrook Active Travel 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 NSW better for all bicycle riders'*, 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. Bike riding 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 Muswellbrook Shire for developing a new strategy to support active transport in Muswellbrook, Denman and the rural villages. A long-term plan for cycling with a clear set of actions will be a game changer because it puts the Muswellbrook area 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 Muswellbrook Shire 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 provided<sup>i</sup>.

Increased active travel leads to less congestion, noise and car parking pressures in towns and villages. Pedestrian and bike riding 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.

Bicycle 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 road<sup>ii</sup>.

In a region where 7% of households have no access to a car and many struggle to afford one, transport poverty is a serious issue. 23% of households have a weekly income below \$650, more than the NSW

average of 19%<sup>iii</sup>, and inequality is likely to widen further with rising housing costs and changing employment patterns. 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 owning multiple cars.

Bike riding 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<sup>iv</sup>. The Upper Hunter already attracts touring cyclists but a focus on this market would bring substantial benefits as the mining economy fluctuates over the coming years.

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

Hunter Regional Plan 2036<sup>v</sup> was prepared by the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment and sets out four goals and 27 directions to help achieve a vision for the Hunter to be the leading regional economy in Australia. Muswellbrook is identified as a 'strategic centre' and Denman is a 'local centre'. The population of the LGA is expected to grow from 17,150 in 2016 to 20,300 in 2036, an increase of 18%. The expansion of walking and cycling infrastructure plays a key role in Direction 9: Grow tourism in the region, Direction 17: Create healthy built environments through good design and Direction 18: Enhance access to recreational facilities and connect open spaces

Muswellbrook Local Strategic Planning Statement 2020-2040 is still being prepared. It recognises that Muswellbrook is a '*community in transition*' and has a strategic vision for '*a more sustainable community, environment and economy through diversification*'. Active transport infrastructure could help develop safe, connected and liveable communities, increase resilience to climate change, reduce carbon emissions and foster new industries such as sustainable tourism.

Muswellbrook Community Strategic Plan 2017-2027<sup>vi</sup> has a new focus on economic diversification and resilience, transition to a low carbon future, education and skills, reflecting the increasing uncertainty about the future of the thermal coal industry. Twenty five goals are divided into 6 key streams in which Council delivers services to the community. Under 'Community Infrastructure', integrated pedestrian and cycling networks would support Goal 19 for well-planned, safe and reliable infrastructure, and Goal 21 for the safe movement of residents around the Shire. It is important to note that encouraging active travel is very important in achieving goals across all 6 themes – for example, Goal 1: Support Job Growth; Goal 2: Diversify the economy; Goal 5: Improve the liveability and amenity of the Shire's communities; Goal 7: Build social inclusion and Goal 14: Reduce the community's impact on the environment.

Muswellbrook Town Centre Strategy 2016<sup>vii</sup> establishes a land use strategy to ensure key urban design principles are incorporated into future development opportunities within Muswellbrook Town Centre. Ten key strategic directions include several objectives which rely on better active and public transport infrastructure – for example, 6. Enhanced Waterfront Connections (providing new pedestrians and cycle links to the Hunter River, Muscle Creek and smaller gullies), 7. Enhanced accessibility and safety (improving walkability and encouraging access by bike through infrastructure upgrades and new signage), and 8. Improved Environmental Sustainability and Amenity (delivering a new integrated transport hub).

Walk and Cycle Plan for Muswellbrook and Denman 2009<sup>viii</sup> highlights several opportunities for active travel infrastructure in the townships. Many streets are wide with limited traffic and could accommodate on-street separated cycle paths. In many locations quite simple upgrades could connect existing shared paths to improve the network. However, there are many constraints including:

- major barriers to movement, such as the New England Highway, the rail line and the Hunter River. Limited crossing points are in the form of bridges and underpasses which are too narrow to allow safe passage by pedestrians and cyclists.
- steep topography in the residential areas
- privately owned land preventing the completion of paths
- safety issues occur where paths are located in secluded park reserves
- cul-de-sacs in new developments which prevent direct trips
- a lack of shade making trips on foot and cycle unpleasant during hotter months.

Networks were proposed for Muswellbrook (Figure 1) and Denman, with key attractors such as schools and workplaces mapped and connected. An implementation plan aimed to deliver the most useful sections first. Most of the network was due to be completed within 10 years – that is by 2019. It is apparent from a current Google Maps extract (Figure 2) that few of the paths have been delivered.

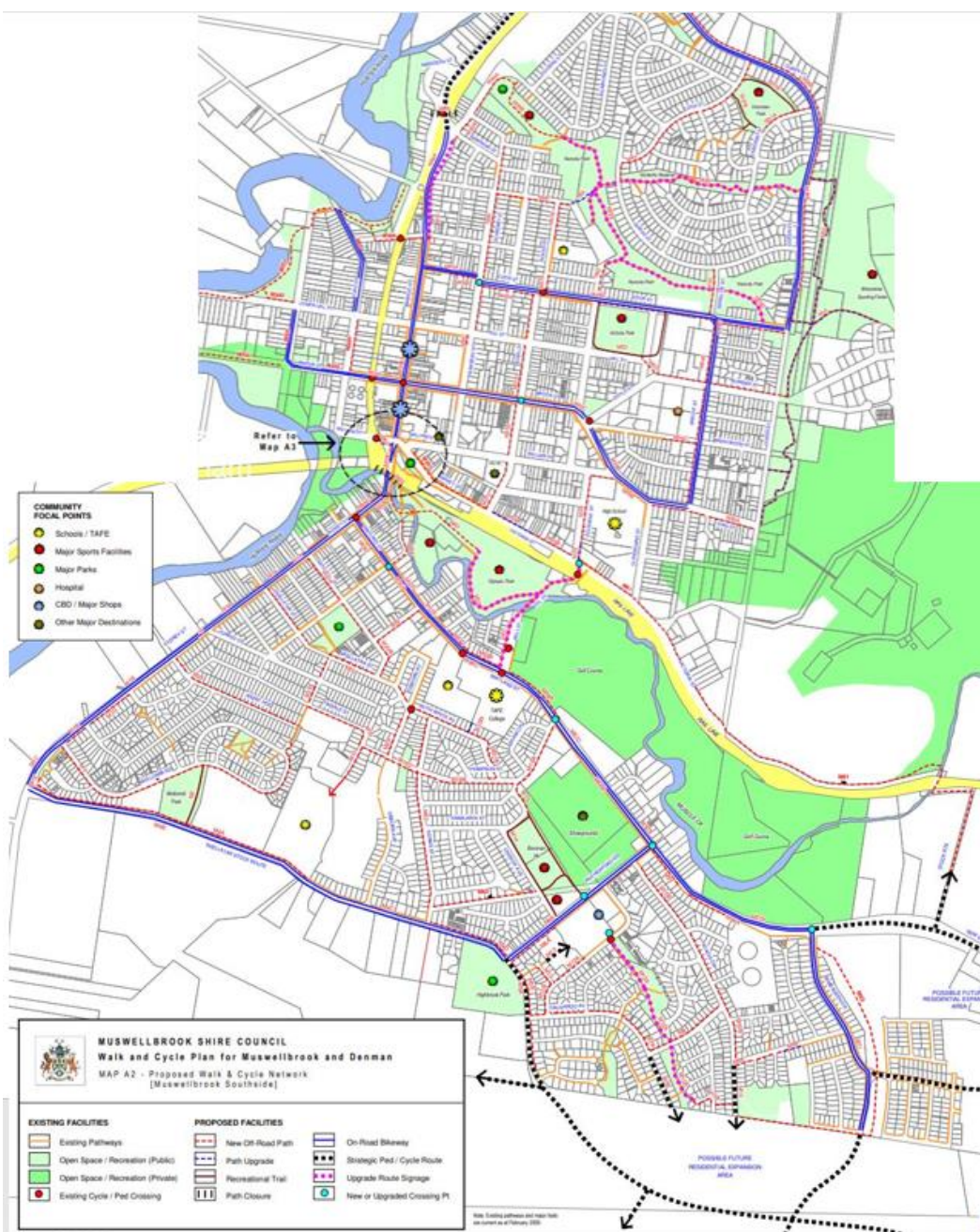


Figure 1:  
The proposed walk and cycle network from the 2009 plan (Source: Muswellbrook Shire Council)



Figure 2:  
The bike network in 2021  
(Source: Google Maps)

## Recommendations:

Bicycle NSW requests that Muswellbrook Shire considers the following recommendations when developing the new Active Travel Plan:

### 1. Provide cycling infrastructure that is segregated from vehicles on main roads

Bicycle NSW supports bicycle infrastructure that is completely separated from vehicles on main roads to cater for riders of all ages and abilities. Mixed traffic cycle routes are only appropriate where speed limits or traffic volumes are very low.

According to the best practice 'cycling segmentation' model, developed in Portland USA to identify the type and needs of existing and potential bike riders<sup>ix</sup>, such cycle paths will allow 70% of local residents to consider journeys by bike (Figure 3). 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.

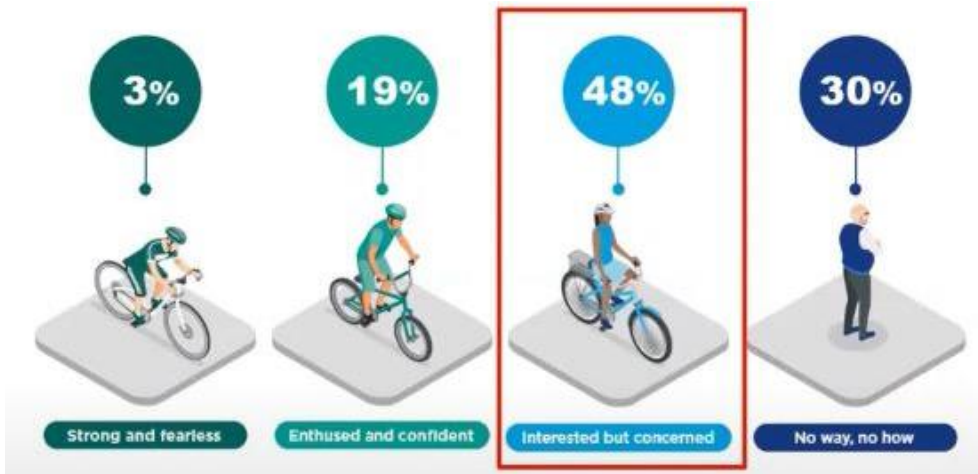


Figure 3: Four general categories of comfort levels for cycling as transportation. (Source: North Sydney Council)

The Bicycle NSW *Build it for Everyone* policy pillar<sup>x</sup> sets a standard that bicycle 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%<sup>xi</sup> of people who are ‘interested but concerned’, from making the switch to bike riding.

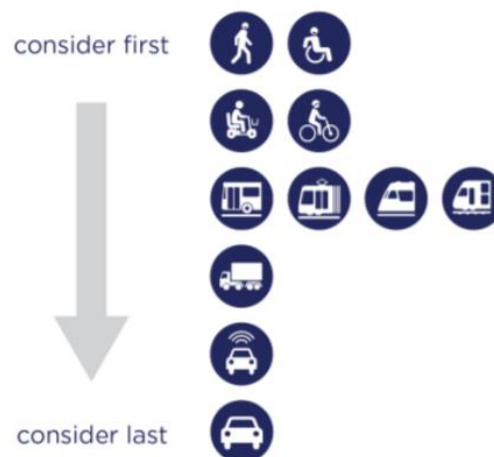
There has never been a better time to build for bike riding and active transport, as evidenced in the new Transport for NSW policies that require State projects to prioritize road space for active transport:

- Providing for Walking and Cycling in Transport Projects Policy CP21001<sup>xii</sup>
- Road User Space Allocation Policy CP21000<sup>xiii</sup>

The policies establish a road user hierarchy that considers pedestrians first and private cars last, as shown in Figure 4:

### Order of Road User Space Considerations

Figure 4: Diagram expressing Transport for NSW’s road user priority. (Source: Transport for NSW)



Where there are few pedestrians, shared paths through parks or on footpaths are a suitable solution. In areas with high levels of pedestrian and cycling activity, standard shared paths will not lead to an acceptable level of amenity and safety for either walkers or riders as conflict occurs between different users. Shared paths with a minimum width of 3.5m must be provided and where this is not possible on the footpath, separated cycle paths within the road environment should be considered.

Muswellbrook 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. This will benefit 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 (Figure 5). 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 cycle paths and new treatments.



Figure 5: Pop-up infrastructure in Sydney (Source: Bicycle NSW / Randwick Today)

## 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<sup>xiv</sup> 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<sup>xv</sup>.

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<sup>xvi</sup>.

## 3. Future proof the active transport network

The status quo of walking and cycling activity in the Muswellbrook Shire 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-19, 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 above, pedestrians and bike riders should be separated where possible.

Bicycle NSW recommends referring to the new Cycleway Design Toolbox<sup>xvii</sup> and the 2017 Austroads Cycling Aspects of Austroads Guides (AP-G88-17) to ensure that the paths are constructed to current best practice.

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

Muswellbrook 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. 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<sup>xviii</sup>. 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<sup>xix</sup>, 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. Waymarked bicycle trails link the vineyards of the Lower Hunter and the Barossa Valley. The attractive wine country around Muswellbrook should have a network of back road routes to draw tourists from far and near.

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<sup>xx</sup>.

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.

#### **6. Work with train and bus operators to allow carriage of cycles**

Although bikes can be wheeled onto the CityRail services to Muswellbrook, they must be boxed and weigh under 20kg to be accepted onto the faster regional trains. Only a limited number of bikes (usually 5) can be carried on each train. Many bicycles, such as e-bikes and tandems, do not fit within the size and weight limits. This is a serious impediment to bike-related tourism, particularly as e-bikes grow in popularity, opening up cycle touring to a much broader demographic.

In view of the economic, health and environmental benefits of encouraging cycling, Bicycle NSW urges Muswellbrook Shire Council to join the campaign for new trains currently being procured by the NSW

Government to have more space allocated to bicycles, with roll on/roll off storage replacing the requirement to box bikes. Please see <https://bicyclensw.org.au/bikes-on-nsw-trainlink-campaign/> for more information.

We also suggest initiating discussions with bus operators to develop a strategy to allow 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 trails and everyday destinations without using a car.

## **7. Improve safety on rural roads linking smaller towns and villages**

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.

## **8. Increase tree canopy cover over the walking and cycling network**

Climate change is causing an increase in hot weather in Country NSW. Much of the Hunter Valley experiences 10-20 days each year where the maximum temperature is greater than 35°C. Maximum summer temperatures are predicted to increase by 2.3°C by 2070 when 40 annual hot days over 35°C are likely<sup>xxi</sup>. It is essential to create a tree canopy over footpaths and shared paths to ensure that they are comfortable to use in the warmer months, allowing opportunities for exercise and mitigating the health impacts of inactivity, such as diabetes and heart disease. The correct trees for the climate, soil and topography must be selected, and an adequate maintenance programme instigated. We recommend that Muswellbrook Shire Council follows the research being undertaken into heat resilient street trees at Western Sydney University through the [Which Plant Where?](#) Project.

## **9. 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 Muswellbrook 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.

Finally, education, information and events to promote walking and bike riding as a form of transport are an important part of any plan to increase participation in active travel.

## Conclusion:

Bicycle NSW encourages Muswellbrook Shire Council to plan for game-changing upgrades to the active transport network in the LGA. Safe infrastructure to support walking and bike riding 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 Muswellbrook Shire Council to progress the delivery of active transport infrastructure in the near future.

Yours faithfully,

***Sarah Bickford***

Bike Planner  
Bicycle NSW

<sup>i</sup> Byron Shire Bike Plan. 2019. <https://www.byron.nsw.gov.au/files/assets/public/hptrim/traffic-and-transport-planning-medium-and-long-term-development-transport-strategies-2013-2020/byron-shire-10-year-bike-plan-2019-final-adopted-plan-only-without-appendix-24.2017.50.1.pdf>

<sup>ii</sup> PIA. 2013, Sept 3. <https://www.planning.org.au/documents/item/5578>

<sup>iii</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics. Quickstats for Muswellbrook LGA 2016.

[https://quickstats.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census\\_services/getproduct/census/2016/quickstat/LGA15650?opendocument](https://quickstats.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2016/quickstat/LGA15650?opendocument)

<sup>iv</sup> Jerome N Rachele. Do the sums: bicycle-friendly changes are good for business, The Conversation [Online as at 24/2/2021] [Do the sums: bicycle-friendly changes are good business \(theconversation.com\)](https://www.theconversation.com/do-the-sums-bicycle-friendly-changes-are-good-business)

<sup>v</sup> DPIE. 2016. Hunter Regional Plan 2036. <https://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/-/media/Files/DPE/Plans-and-policies/Plans-for-your-area/Regional-plans/Hunter-Regional-Plan-2036.pdf>

<sup>vi</sup> Muswellbrook Community Strategic Plan 2017-2027. <https://www.muswellbrook.nsw.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/IPR-2017-2027-Community-Strategic-Plan.pdf>

<sup>vii</sup> Muswellbrook Town Centre Strategy. 2016. <https://www.muswellbrook.nsw.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Muswellbrook-Town-Centre-Strategy.pdf>

<sup>viii</sup> Walk and Cycle Plan for Muswellbrook and Denman 2009. <https://www.muswellbrook.nsw.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/2009-Walk-and-Cycle-Plan-for-Muswellbrook-and-Denman.pdf>

<sup>xvi</sup> Roger Geller. (2009). Four types of cyclists. Portland Bureau of Transportation. <https://www.portlandoregon.gov/transportation/article/264746>

<sup>x</sup> Bicycle NSW (2018) Our Policy, [online as at 24/2/2021] <https://bicyclensw.org.au/our-policy/>

<sup>xi</sup> 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>

<sup>xii</sup> NSW Government, Providing for Walking and Cycling in Transport Projects Policy CP21001, [Online as at 19/2/2021] [www.transport.nsw.gov.au/system/files/media/documents/2021/providing-for-walking-and-cycling-in-transport-projects-policy.pdf](http://www.transport.nsw.gov.au/system/files/media/documents/2021/providing-for-walking-and-cycling-in-transport-projects-policy.pdf)

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- <sup>xiii</sup> NSW Government, Road User Space Allocation Policy CP21000, [Online as at 19/2/2021]  
[www.transport.nsw.gov.au/system/files/media/documents/2021/road-user-space-allocation-policy.pdf](http://www.transport.nsw.gov.au/system/files/media/documents/2021/road-user-space-allocation-policy.pdf)
- <sup>xiv</sup> City of Yarra - 30km/h speed limit: pre-trial final report, 2017. <https://thanksfor30.com.au/sites/default/files/2018-08/City-of-Yarra-Pre-Trial-Report-Aug-2017-FINAL%5B1%5D.pdf>
- <sup>xv</sup> O'Sullivan, F. (2020, November). Why Europe is slowing down. Bloomberg CityLab.  
<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-11-18/speed-limits-are-dropping-in-europe-and-the-u-k>
- <sup>xvi</sup> Vision Zero Network. (2015, April 13). European Cities Lead the Way Toward Vision Zero.  
<https://visionzeronetwork.org/european-cities-lead-the-way-toward-vision-zero/>
- <sup>xvii</sup> Cycleway Design Toolbox: designing for cycling and micromobility. Transport for NSW.  
<https://www.transport.nsw.gov.au/system/files/media/documents/2021/Cycleway-Design-Toolbox-Web.pdf>
- <sup>xviii</sup> Railtrails Australia. 2021, April 18. Local economy thrives since the opening of the Tumbarumba to Rosewood Rail Trail. <https://www.railtrails.org.au/2021/897-local-economy-thrives-since-the-opening-of-the-tumbarumba-to-rosewood-rail-trail>
- <sup>xix</sup> Central West Cycle Trail. <https://centralwestcycletrail.com.au/>
- <sup>xx</sup> AMB Magazine. 2021, July 29. Riding to the edge. <https://www.ambmag.com.au/feature/riding-to-the-edge---understanding-logging-around-blue-derby-trails-568005/page3>
- <sup>xxi</sup> Upper Hunter Shire Council LSPS 2020. <https://upperhunter.nsw.gov.au/f.ashx/documents/plans-and-reports/Local-Strategic-Planning-Statement-2020-Adopted-by-Council-25-May-2020.PDF>