

Hunter Regional Plan team
Department of Planning, Industry and Environment
PO Box 1226
Newcastle NSW 2300

3rd March 2022

Dear Sir or Madam,

RE: draft Hunter Regional Plan 2041

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the draft Hunter Regional Plan 2041.

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 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:

The first Hunter Regional Plan 2036 was published in 2016 and established a 20-year strategic vision for land use and growth in the region.

The new Regional Plan updates the vision with a greater focus on climate change and its impacts on water security and biodiversity. **Achieving net zero emissions** and **respecting traditional owners** are established as core guiding principles for all planning decisions, an important step for future resilience.

The eight new objectives and associated strategies respond to the wake-up call of the IPCC report of 2021, the accelerating move away from coal as a power source and the new work and travel patterns that have emerged during the Covid-19 pandemic. **Bicycle NSW is delighted that several objectives stress the importance of increasing active travel as a means of achieving climate, health and liveability goals.**

For example,

- *Objective 4: Plan for 'nimble neighbourhoods' and diverse housing* recognises that more medium density housing will promote the use of public and active transport, as well as meeting the needs of a diversifying and ageing population.
- *Objective 5: Increase green infrastructure and quality public spaces and improve the natural environment* aims to improve walking and cycling connections to public space, develop trails that showcase the region's natural features and rural landscapes and develop the street network as green corridors, shaded by increased tree canopy.

- *Objective 6: Reach net zero and increase resilience and sustainable infrastructure* sets out how compact urban areas that support walking, cycling and micro-mobility, and reduce car dependency, are key to reducing emissions.
- *Objective 7: Plan for businesses and services at the heart of healthy, prosperous and innovative communities* discusses the importance of being able to easily reach shops and services by bicycle in any strategy to support flourishing town centres, a night-time economy and sustainable tourism.

Bicycle NSW is most excited by Objective 3: Create a 15-minute region a made up of mixed, multi-modal, inclusive and vibrant communities.

The concept of more compact, mixed-use neighbourhoods has spread across the world, with the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions demonstrating the importance of vibrant, connected local centres where every day needs are close to home and can be met with a short walk or bike ride (or a car trip in rural areas).

Objective 3 provides strategic direction for land-use decisions that place new housing and infrastructure close to jobs and services to encourage active and public transport. This a major shift in policy for regional NSW where development has prioritised travel by private car for the last 70 years. A clever and thoughtful approach to the urban-to-rural transect ensures that 15-minute thinking can apply to the range of different contexts found in the Hunter: urban, brownfield infill, established suburbs, new greenfield suburbs, towns, villages or rural.

Bicycle NSW applauds the inclusion of the ‘15-minute region’ in the draft Hunter Regional Plan and looks forward to seeing the model developed for the Hunter spread quickly across NSW.

The commitment to new active transport infrastructure will deliver innumerable benefits to the residents of the Hunter. Improved walking and cycling paths will contribute to connected and liveable communities, increase resilience to climate change, reduce carbon emissions and ignite new industries such as sustainable tourism. Creating safe and attractive routes to workplaces, schools, reserves and recreation facilities will foster healthy lifestyles and ensure equitable access to economic opportunities for people of all ages, incomes and abilities.

There has never been a better time to build for active transport, as evidenced in two very significant new Transport for NSW policies that require State projects to prioritize road space for walking and cycling:

- [Road User Space Allocation Policy CP21000ⁱ](#) establishes a road user hierarchy that considers pedestrians first and private cars last.
- [Providing for Walking and Cycling in Transport Projects Policy CP21001ⁱⁱ](#) requires every transport project funded by Transport for NSW to include provision for walking and cycling, which must delivered from the outset of the project. The policy applies to anyone planning, designing, delivering, building or managing a transport project or asset for, or on behalf of, Transport for NSW.

Bicycle infrastructure has a low cost per km, offering better value than road projects and supporting Councils’ financial sustainability. Over 100km of bike paths can be delivered for the cost of 1km of new roadⁱⁱⁱ. Studies have shown that 70% of people in NSW either ride a bike now or would start to ride if safe infrastructure was provided^{iv}.

The urban design strategies developed for regional NSW by Government Architect NSW^v, acknowledge that private cars are likely to remain a dominant form of transport in regional areas. However, enabling active transport in town and village centres through good urban design and integrated land use planning will reduce

congestion, noise and car parking pressures. 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.

High-quality shared paths through towns and villages will reduce dependency on private cars. In a region where 5% of households have no access to a car and many struggle to afford one, transport poverty is a serious issue. 22% of households have a weekly income below \$650, more than the NSW average of 19%^{vi}, 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.

Of course, 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^{vii}. The Hunter Valley wine country already attracts touring cyclists but a focus on this market would bring substantial benefits as the mining economy fluctuates over the coming years.

Recommendations:

Bicycle NSW would like to be involved with the delivery of active transport infrastructure in the Hunter. We can offer expert advice at each stage, from the planning of walking and cycling networks to the detailed design of paths and intersections. Many of the relevant technical standards, policies and guidelines are drawn together on our [website](#).

It is important for planners and engineers to consider the following when developing infrastructure for active travel. Please note that these recommendations are all reflected in the new Regional Cycling Plan that Bicycle NSW is developing with Transport for NSW.

- **Provide cycling infrastructure that is segregated from vehicles**

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^{viii}, such cycle paths will allow 70% of local residents to consider journeys by bike.

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 and separated cycle paths within the road environment should be considered.

Bicycle NSW recommends referring to the new Cycleway Design Toolbox^{ix} and the 2017 Austroads Cycling Aspects of Austroads Guides (AP-G88-17) to ensure that the paths are constructed to current best practice.

- **Reduce speed limits to 30km/h in residential roads and town centres**

30 km/h speed limits reduce the need for separate bicycle infrastructure on local streets. 30 km/h has been shown as an optimal speed limit to allow people driving and cycling to share the road safely^x 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^{xi}.

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^{xii}.

- **Future proof the active transport network**

The status quo of walking and cycling activity in regional NSW is likely to change rapidly. The density of walkers will increase when new housing and employment 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.

- **Develop facilities for cycle tourism**

Cycle tourism has enormous potential to attract visitors to regional areas and provide business opportunities for local residents. Rail trails are gaining momentum in NSW. 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^{xiii}. The Northern Rivers Rail Trail will be a catalyst for the Tweed Valley becoming an important hub for cycling. 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. The Richmond Vale Rail Trail from Newcastle to the Kurri Kurri in the Lower Hunter is finally progressing and we hope this will inspire other Hunter LGAs to develop trails.

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^{xiv}, attracting thousands of cyclists to the area for a 5- or 6-day adventure. It is important for neighbouring LGAs to collaborate 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^{xv}. Dungog is seeing the benefits of attracting mountain biking with the development of the trails on Dungog Common.

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.

- **Work with train and bus operators to allow carriage of cycles**

Although bikes can be wheeled onto the CityRail services to between Newcastle, Scone and Dungog, 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 supports 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.

- **Improve safety on rural roads linking smaller towns and villages**

Bicycle NSW has consulted with local cycling advocates and a common 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.

- **Increase tree canopy cover over the walking and cycling network**

Climate change is causing an increase in hot weather in regional NSW. Much of inland NSW 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^{xvi}. 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 following the research being undertaken into heat resilient street trees at Western Sydney University through the [Which Plant Where?](#) Project.

- **Ensure that new cycle infrastructure is inclusive**

All types of bikes should be accommodated by the cycling infrastructure, including cargo bikes and tricycles. Again, the width of the paths is critical and it is important to consider turning radii, dropped kerbs, ramps and the design of modal filters to ensure that non-standard bikes not excluded from the network. Cargo bikes will increasingly be used for deliveries and have huge potential to play a key role in a sustainable transport system. Non-standard bikes such as hand-cycles, recumbents and wheelchair bikes offer disabled people independent mobility but are a rare sight on urban streets due to barriers caused by poor urban design. Any measures enabling cycling by disabled people will support a growth in cycling by novice cyclists, children and older people, and improve conditions for those using mobility scooters^{xvii}.

- **Prioritise pedestrians and cyclists at all intersections**

Traffic light phasing and sensors must favour active modes to encourage more people to walk and cycle. In line with the Road User Space Allocation Policy and other State and local strategies, small delays to vehicle traffic should never prevent the delivery of safer, more efficient and more attractive active transport infrastructure. Raised crossings at unsignalised intersections will slow cars and improve safety. Bicycle paths must continue across the raised crossings so people riding bikes are not required to dismount.

- **Maintain a focus on the important details of the cycle network**

The detailed design of cycle routes, adequate end of trip facilities, clear wayfinding and grass roots education are critical to 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.

Cycle paths should feature amenities such as water fountains, shading, seating, lighting, bike maintenance stations and toilet blocks.

Secure bike parking and other end of trip facilities, including charging points for e-bikes, should be provided at journey end locations to further support riders and encourage participation.

Wayfinding must support visitors by clearly articulating and communicating the most efficient and safest route. Signage style for wayfinding should be consistent throughout each 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 DPIE to take advantage of the process of updating the Hunter Regional Plan to lock in game-changing advances in active transport. 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 Transport for NSW, DPIE, Local Government Authorities and local Bicycle User Groups of the Hunter region to progress the delivery of active transport infrastructure in the near future.

Yours faithfully,



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www.transport.nsw.gov.au/system/files/media/documents/2021/road-user-space-allocation-policy.pdf

ⁱⁱ NSW Government, Providing for Walking and Cycling in Transport Projects Policy CP21001,

<https://s23705.pcdn.co/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/providing-for-walking-and-cycling-in-transport-projects-policy.pdf>

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

^{iv} 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>

^v Government Architect NSW. 2020. Urban Design for Regional NSW. <https://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/-/media/Files/DPE/Guidelines/urban-design-guide-for-regional-nsw-2020-06-03.pdf>

^{vi} Australian Bureau of Statistics. Quickstats for Hunter Valley SA4 2016.

https://quickstats.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2016/quickstat/106?opendocument

^{vii} 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 for business \(theconversation.com\)](https://www.theconversation.com/do-the-sums-bicycle-friendly-changes-are-good-for-business)

^{viii} Roger Geller. (2009). Four types of cyclists. Portland Bureau of Transportation.

<https://www.portlandoregon.gov/transportation/article/264746>

^{ix} 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>

^x 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>

^{xi} 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>

^{xii} 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/>

^{xiii} 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>

^{xiv} Central West Cycle Trail. <https://centralwestcycletrail.com.au/>

^{xv} 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>

^{xvi} 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>

^{xvii} Wheel for Wellbeing. 2020. A Guide to inclusive cycling. https://wheelsforwellbeing.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/FC_WfW-Inclusive-Guide_FINAL_V03.pdf