

Lake Macquarie City Council
PO Box 1096
Hunter Region Mail Centre
NSW 2310

11th April 2022

Dear Lake Macquarie City Council,

Re: Charlestown to Whitebridge cycle route

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the different options for connecting Charlestown to Whitebridge to create a multi-use path for walking and cycling.

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 *'create a better environment 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.

We applaud Lake Macquarie City Council's efforts to roll-out new active travel infrastructure. Our Members are thrilled with the new Speers Point to Glendale path and there is much excitement about pushing forward with the Charlestown to Whitebridge route after many years of planning and local advocacy. The project will create a safe and accessible walking and cycling route between Charlestown and Whitebridge, providing connections to key destinations such as schools and shops and intersecting with the Fernleigh Track at Whitebridge. Bicycle NSW would like to highlight the significance of the Charlestown to Whitebridge route for the development of an integrated **regional bicycle network**. Not only will the cycle route support local journeys to work, school, shops and public transport, but its strategic location between Charlestown Square shopping mall and the Fernleigh Track will facilitate longer trips across the Lake Macquarie area for commuting and recreation.

Bicycle NSW strongly recommends proceeding with Option One which closely follows the route championed by CycleSafe Network.

Opportunities:

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 and reduce carbon emissions. 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.

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 roadⁱ. Studies have shown that 70% of people in NSW either ride a bike now or would start to ride if safe infrastructure was providedⁱⁱ.

The urban design strategies developed for regional NSW by Government Architect NSWⁱⁱⁱ, 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. 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 also 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}.

There has never been a better time to build infrastructure for bike riding and active transport. As the new Minister for Infrastructure, Cities and Active Transport, Rob Stokes MP, set out in a recent speech^v, active travel projects that stitch the suburbs together and enable people of all ages and abilities to get around without a car can be more sustainable than megaprojects. He stressed that the NSW Government will focus on completing missing links in the active transport network. Such smaller projects have big benefits, and not only for reducing pollution and congestion. Active mobility improves public health, activates high streets, helps build social connections and addresses inequality.

In early 2021, Transport for NSW published two policies that require State projects to prioritise road space for active transport:

- Road User Space Allocation Policy CP21000^{vi} establishes a road user hierarchy that considers pedestrians first and private cars last (figure 1)
- Providing for Walking and Cycling in Transport Projects Policy CP21001^{vii} requires every transport project funded by Transport for NSW to include provision for walking and cycling, which must be 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.

Order of Road User Space Considerations



Figure 1:
Diagram expressing Transport
for NSW's road user priority.
(Source: Transport for NSW)

We have reviewed the plans for connecting Charlestown and Whitebridge alongside other relevant plans that relate to the Lake Macquarie area. The proposed route for Option One aligns well with the high-level ambitions outlined in:

Transport for NSW Future Transport 2056 Plan^{viii}, which commits to creating around 6,000 kilometres of cycling routes across Greater Sydney, Newcastle, Gosford and Wollongong, with a mix of cycleway types appropriate to the location, including protected bicycle paths, shared paths, and bicycle boulevards. The plan aims to increase the walking and cycling mode share in Regional NSW from 6% in 2016 to 13% in 2026. Future Transport 2061 is currently being prepared following stakeholder consultation and will put an even greater emphasis on sustainable mobility.

Draft Hunter Regional Plan 2041^{ix} contains an exciting, forward-thinking objective to create a '15-minute region' a made up of mixed, multi-modal, inclusive, connected and vibrant communities where every day needs are close to home and can be met with a short walk or bike ride. The draft plan offers strategic direction for land-use decisions that place new housing and infrastructure close to jobs and services to encourage active and public transport. Active transport infrastructure is an essential element of 15-minute neighbourhoods.

Lake Macquarie Local Strategic Planning Statement - Shaping the Future^x recognises that the population could grow by 50% to over 300,000 by 2036 if fast rail is delivered as part of the emerging Sandstone Megaregion of 6 connected cities. To ensure liveability, expanding and improving walking and cycling infrastructure is the top priority for transport planning. Active transport will help deliver all 7 Planning Priorities and is the focus of Planning Priority 4: A city of close connections where people, goods and services move efficiently. A major regional cycleway to link Charlestown to Whitebridge and the Fernleigh Track is a key commitment (figure 2).

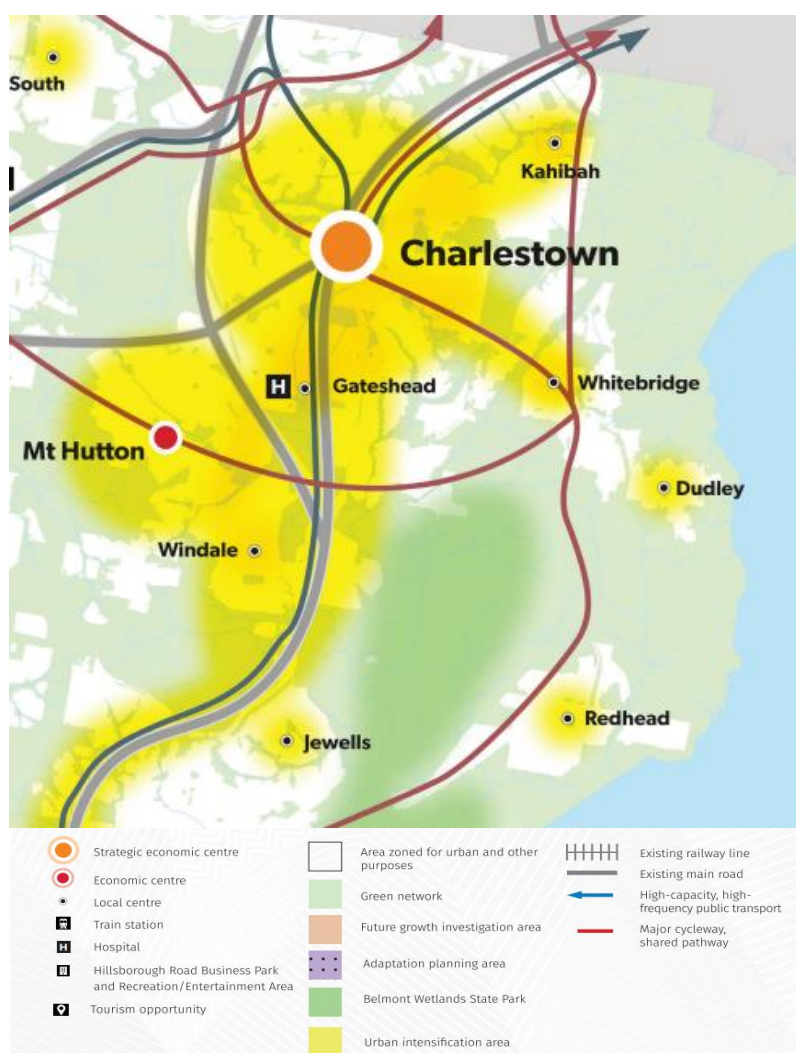


Figure 2: Extract from the structure plan for the North East Growth Area (Source: LMCC LSPS)

CycleSafe Network 2016^{xi} was developed by a volunteer group of local residents and cycling advocates. It sets out an ambitious plan for delivering 140km of new safe cycling infrastructure in Newcastle and Lake Macquarie in 3 phases over 7-10 years, connecting with 90km of existing paths to deliver an integrated active transport network. Around 30% has been completed. The network aligned with Newcastle's bike plans and Lake Macquarie City Council's Cycling Strategy 2021 (now superseded) but consolidated some routes and added others. The CycleSafe Network was concentrated in the north of the LGA where the population density will ensure the best return on investments in active transport.

The CycleSafe Network was designed with 4 principles at the fore:

- Connectivity - connected to the existing active transport network and leading to where people want to go
- Family Safe - safe for 8 year olds and 80 year olds to use.
- Easy way finding - clear and consistent routes
- Amenity - world class treatments and a beautiful experience to use

A route from Charlestown to Dudley following green corridors was in Phase 2 and was due to be delivered by 2019. It was named the Charlestown to Coast or C2C (figure 3). The C2C route was not considered when Lake Macquarie City Council formulated its Cycling Strategy 2021 in 2012.

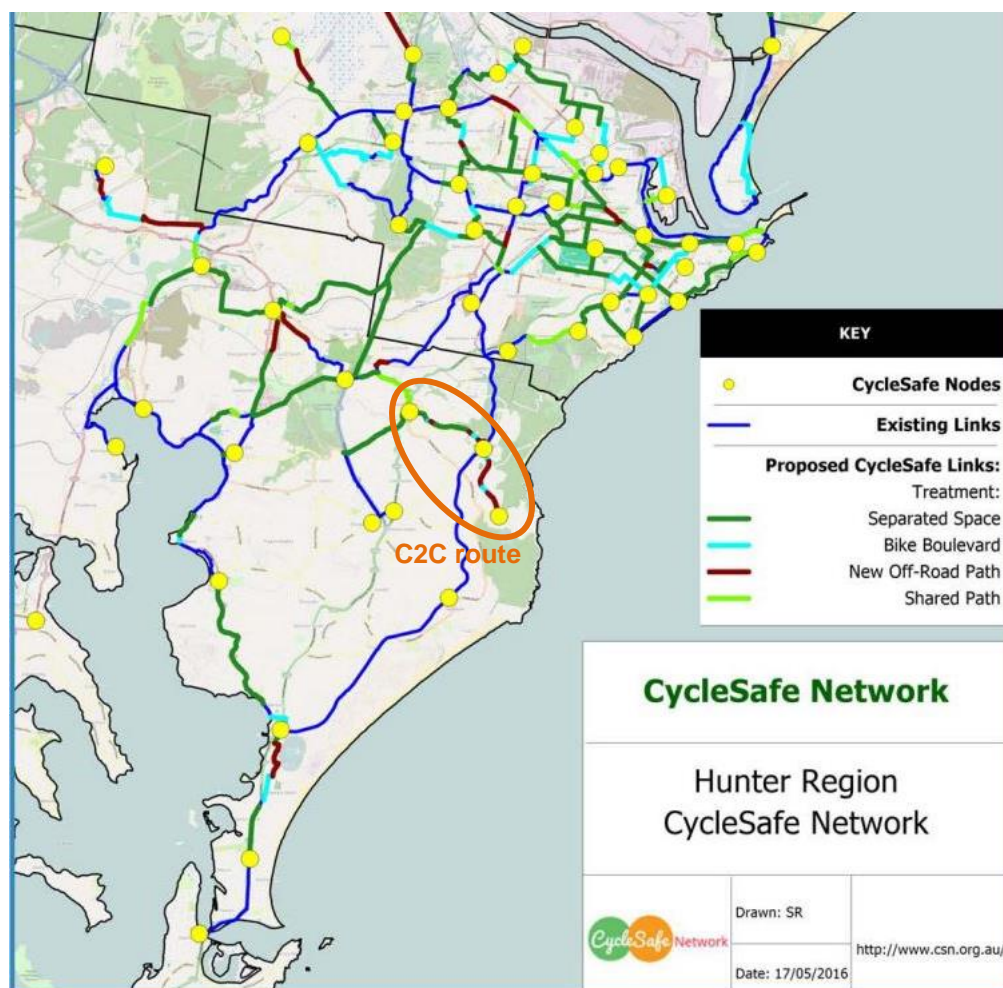


Figure 3: Extract from the Cycle Safe Network showing routes proposed for the Lake Macquarie area
(Source: CycleSafe Network)

Lake Macquarie Walking, Cycling and Better Streets Strategy 2031^{xii} updates the Cycling Strategy 2021. The Council aims to exceed the NSW Government's target for 17% of all trips in the Greater Newcastle metropolitan area to be made by walking or cycling by the year 2056. The development of a Principal Bicycle Network is a focus area. The PBN builds on the regional cycling routes suggested in the Greater

Newcastle Future Transport Plan 2056 and the community-led CycleSafe Network to propose 254km of cycle paths for Lake Macquarie that connects key daily destinations. By 2021, 85km of new paths had been established. The route between Charlestown and Whitebridge is identified as part of the Richmond Vale to Fernleigh Track Regional Route. By passing 5 schools, the Option One route for connecting Charlestown and Whitebridge will help achieve another focus area - to provide safe active travel to school.

Concerns:

Although Option One closely aligns with the aspirations of the CycleSafe Network, there are some gaps and changes that Bicycle NSW would like to see addressed.

The current plans do not indicate the treatment proposed for each section. There is a concern that the cycle route will evolve into sections of disparate shared paths broken by inconvenient intersections and may lack clarity. As a major regional route, it is essential that the Charlestown to Whitebridge route is continuous and legible.

Important elements of the C2C concept have been omitted. There is no safe link to Charlestown Square and the shared path through the leisure centre grounds has been moved to Milson Street. Most significantly, there are no plans to construct a new bridge over the reservoir to reach the Fernleigh Track and allow a direct connection to Dudley via the disused rail corridor.

Recommendations:

- **Ensure bike riders are fully separated from vehicles on most streets**

According to the best practice 'cycling segmentation' model, developed in Portland USA to identify the type and needs of existing and potential bike riders^{xiii}, separated cycle paths will allow 70% of local residents to consider journeys by bike (figure 4). 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.

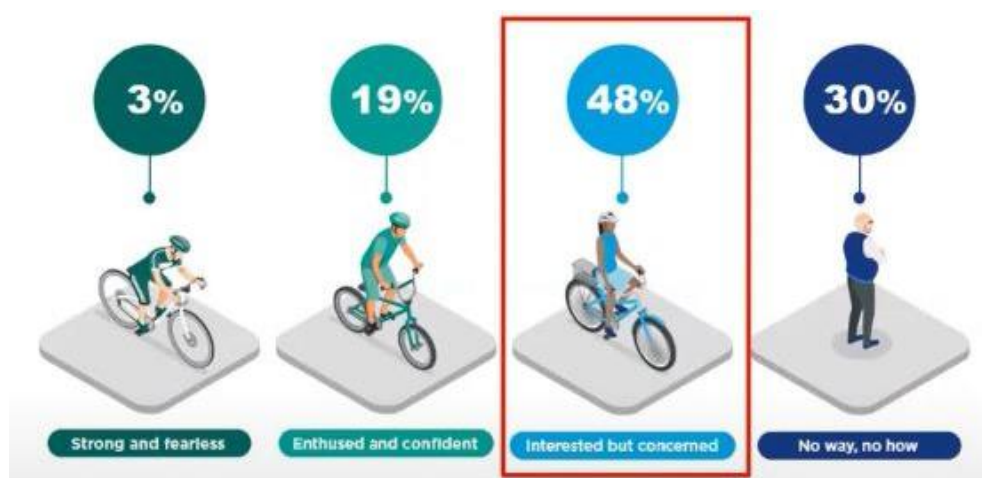


Figure 4:
Four general categories of comfort
levels for cycling as transportation.
(Source: North Sydney Council)

The Bicycle NSW *Build it for Everyone* policy pillar^{xiv} 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%^{xv} of people who are 'interested but concerned', from making the switch to bike riding.

On cul-de-sacs with low traffic volumes, such as Flora Close and Kopa Street, a shared space 'bicycle boulevard' treatment may be appropriate with traffic calming interventions to ensure very slow vehicle speeds.

- **Future proof the active transport network**

The status quo of walking and cycling activity in the Lake Macquarie area 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 responses, the expansion of the active travel network, 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 modal 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. **A minimum width of 3m** should be achieved at all times with extra width considered where volumes of people walking and cycling may be high^{xvi} (see Figure 5). It is important that faster cyclists can overtake and that pedestrian comfort is never compromised. In busy areas, or on steeper sections, paths should be wide enough to provide separate space for pedestrians.

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

Figure 5: Suggested shared user path widths (Source: Austroads Guide to Road Design Part 6A: Paths for Walking and Cycling AGRD06A-17)

	Suggested path width (m)		
	Local access path	Regional path ⁽³⁾	Recreational path
Desirable minimum width	2.5	3.0	3.5
Minimum width – typical maximum	2.0 ⁽¹⁾ – 3.0 ⁽²⁾	2.5 ⁽¹⁾ – 4.0 ⁽²⁾	3.0 ⁽¹⁾ – 4.0 ⁽²⁾

1. A lesser width should only be adopted where cyclist volumes and operational speeds will remain low.

2. A greater width may be required where the numbers of cyclists and pedestrians are very high or there is a high probability of conflict between users (e.g. people walking dogs, in-line skaters etc.).

3. May be part of a principal bicycle network in some jurisdictions.

- **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 radius, 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^{xviii}.

- **Consider on-road separated bicycle paths for some sections of the route**

Where the Charlestown to Whitebridge cycle route uses road corridors, there is a choice of treatments. Although not specified on the plans, Bicycle NSW assumes that the Council will generally deliver shared paths in the form of widened footpaths. However, there are locations where on-road separated bicycle paths may be more appropriate.

There are several reasons why **a shared path** is not appropriate for important and well-used sections of a cycling network. These include conflict between people walking and cycling, which will get worse as population and active travel increase; the loss of verges, vegetation and, in some instances, mature trees; the uncomfortable pinch points caused by bus stops, power poles and retained trees; and constant interruptions when crossing side streets where vehicles effectively have priority. Importantly, no attempt is made to change the dial on car use when bicycles are squeezed into pedestrian spaces. By leaving the road between the kerbs as the unchallenged domain of private cars, with wide vehicle lanes and ample parking, car travel is encouraged, unsafe speeds are common and the modal shift needed to meet climate, health and liveability imperatives may not occur.

Segregated bi-directional paths have many benefits over shared paths:

- People riding bikes are separated from pedestrians and vehicles, reducing conflict.
- Street trees and green verges are not impacted.
- The narrower vehicle lanes will slow traffic, reducing noise and improving safety for all road users.
- No additional asphalt is required, reducing issues with urban heat and stormwater.
- Sufficient space is created to enable a significant modal shift to active transport.
- New landscaping and important pedestrian safety features such as kerb extensions can be incorporated into the buffers and the parking lanes.
- The cycle paths can be prioritised over driveways and minor road intersections.
- Motorists exiting driveways have a better sightline to approaching cyclists, improving safety.

Lake Macquarie City 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.

In our recent meeting, the Minister for Active Transport, Rob Stokes MP, stated his preference for properly separated walking and cycling infrastructure^{xix}. He expressed his strong belief that **the road-related environment is a public asset** that must be shared equitably between all road users. 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.

- **Consider a trial using temporary materials**

Bicycle NSW suggests that Lake Macquarie City Council uses pop-up methods to trial separated cycle paths. Moveable lane barriers can be installed quickly to create stretches of protected path (Figure 6) and demonstrate how unfamiliar cycle infrastructure fits into the street. Ridership can be observed over several months using electronic counters to monitor use, and issues with parking and buses can be resolved before permanent infrastructure is constructed. Many councils, including Randwick, Parramatta and City of Sydney, demonstrated the demand for safe cycling using the pop-up bicycle paths established as a COVID-19 response. Permanent changes to kerbs, parking and landscaping can then be made when funds allow.



Figure 6: Pop-up infrastructure in Sydney (Source: Bicycle NSW / Randwick Today)

- **Undertake a parking survey for the corridor**

Removal of street parking will be necessary in places to create safe raised crossings, wide shared paths and separated bicycle paths. Council must be strong when faced with resident opposition. Most houses in the area have off-street parking. On-street parking is fundamentally the storage of private property in the public domain. It makes driving easier and generates car trips. When on-street parking is prioritised over safe cycling, active transport for the whole community suffers.

A parking survey will determine precise usage patterns for on-street parking and reveal how necessary the spaces are for residents. Parking requirements should be studied at different times of the day and night, and during the holidays, school term and weekends. Local sides streets must be included in the survey. Parramatta Council's study of parking on Ferndale Close in Constitution Hill, part of the re-aligned T-Way cycleway <https://participate.cityofparramatta.nsw.gov.au/t-way-cycleway>, found that 40% of spaces are used on average, all houses have ample off-street parking and side streets have excess capacity. With accurate data to reflect on, the community accepted the loss of parking on one side of the street to allow the installation of a best-practice bicycle path which benefits the wider community.

- **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.

- **Reduce speed limits to 30km/h on all local streets**

Residential streets form a critical part of any active travel network, connecting homes to safe cycle routes. 30 km/h speed limit reduce the need for 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^{xx} 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^{xxi}.

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^{xxii}.

- **Continue to investigate a bridge over the reservoir**

Bicycle NSW supports Council's decision to construct the route along Lonus Avenue and recognises that land ownership, cost and engineering issues could delay the delivery of the Charlestown to Whitebridge route. In addition, the connection to the Whitebridge shops will be useful for many residents and help ensure a '15-minute neighbourhood'.

However, we strongly urge Council to push on with developing designs for the direct link to Dudley via a short bridge over the narrow point of the reservoir and the disused railway. This would complete the Charlestown to the Sea (C2C) route that has been the subject of very long-term advocacy from local residents. The NSW Government has promised significant new investment in active transport and grants may become available sooner than expected^{xxiii}. A 'shovel-ready' project is always more likely to win funding.

- **Ensure there is a safe link to Charlestown Square**

The current plan shows the cycle route terminating at the Pacific Highway, missing the opportunity to connect to the commercial heart of the area at Charlestown Square. The project needs to include an upgrade to the Pacific Highway intersection at Frederick Street and a shared path to the entrance of Charlestown Square shopping centre.

- **Take the path through the swimming pool grounds**

We do not agree that this route would have security issues. Several other local paths, such as the Speers Point to Glendale route, which opened recently to much fanfare, have sections that are not overlooked and safety has not been a concern. It may be necessary to wait until the pool undergoes the upgrade promised to the community in 2015 and use the Milson Street option in the meantime.

- **Deliver elements of Option Two to provide more connections to the PBN**

There are sections of the Option Two route which have considerable merit and would help maximise access to the principal regional route created by Option One. For example, the route along Dickinson Street from Frederick to James, which connects to the existing road reserve to Tiral Street would be an excellent investment. Tiral Street can receive cost-effective treatments to create a 'bicycle boulevard' and students from Charlestown East Public School would be able to cycle safely to school. Again, funding for active transport infrastructure is increasing so please develop designs for additional cycle routes so they are shovel-ready when grant applications open.

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

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.

Integration of the route 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.

Parking and other end of trip facilities should be provided at journey end locations to further support riders and encourage participation. Future iterations of the Lake Macquarie DCP must ensure that sufficient cycling parking is provided in future developments, including facilities for charging e-bikes.

The cycle route must aim to be delightful, lined with trees to provide shade, and peppered with benches, water fountains, artworks and memories of indigenous and colonial heritage.

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. Figure 7 shows a great example from the UK!



Figure 7: Fabulous graphics by advocacy group Walk Ride Bath that celebrate the diversity of people cycling (Source: Wheel for Wellbeing)

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:

The Charlestown to Whitebridge cycle route represents a vital element of the emerging regional bicycle network in the Lower Hunter, connecting residential areas with employment hubs, education facilities, waterways, public transport and town centres. Cycle paths offer the greatest mode-shift potential when riders are able to connect their whole journey safely. The City of Parramatta and City of Sydney have demonstrated that building safe, well-connected cycleways works to induce more people to travel actively^{xxiv}. Sustainable, equitable active transport options for residents and visitors of all ages and abilities will decongest roads, public transport and parking, reduce noise and pollution, improve public health and benefit local businesses, as people who ride bikes can easily stop at local shops en-route.^{xxv}

Bicycle NSW looks forward to working with Lake Macquarie City Council to progress the detailed design of the Charlestown to Whitebridge cycle route. Please reach out with any questions or help needed. If requested, we would be delighted to assist with advocating for new bicycle infrastructure through our connections with politicians, Transport for NSW and neighbouring metropolitan councils.

Yours faithfully,

Sarah Bickford

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