

Sydney Gateway - where to from here?

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Foreword

The construction at Sydney Gateway is proceeding fast. Transport for NSW and contractor John Holland Seymour Whyte Joint Venture (JHSWJV) have developed a well-conceived proposal for an Active Transport Link (ATL) that is being delivered as part of the conditions of consent.

The ATL links Tempe Reserve and the International Terminal with the Domestic Terminal. It will provide a very high-quality shared user path (SUP) at the nexus of major existing or proposed routes between the Inner West, the Cook River, Wolli Creek, the Eastern Suburbs and Sydney's CBD.

However, not enough attention has been paid to how the ATL connects to routes going south, east, west and north. The bigger picture of how the Gateway project can contribute to the regional cycling network has been neglected and the contractors are doggedly sticking to their contracts. There is a serious risk that opportunities will be missed to deliver optimum outcomes for a healthier, less car-dependent future as Sydney's population grows. Second-rate or inappropriate active transport infrastructure will take decades to unpick and correct.

Since 2019, a series of new policies and strategies have been released by NSW Government that aim to achieve a much better balance of movement and place with vastly improved facilities for active transport. Most recently, Transport for NSW has published the Eastern Harbour City Strategic Cycleways Corridors. Key routes pass in and around Sydney Airport. **New priorities have been established and it is time to review the project outcomes.**

This document sets out the background to Bicycle NSW's advocacy at Sydney Gateway and the contemporary strategic and policy context.

Bicycle NSW then asks that Transport for NSW and the Gateway team reassess the active transport opportunities provided by the project and undertake urgent feasibility studies to determine the best ways to connect the ATL to neighbouring suburbs, with a focus on the routes north to Mascot town centre and west to Sydenham Station.

Some elements of the future network, such as a safe crossing of the Cooks River to the south, the extension of the SUP along the Alexander Canal and the routes east towards Eastgardens and Randwick, can be designed, funded and delivered at a later date. However, other linkages intersect closely with the new motorway and it is **critical** that solutions are found before the construction progresses any further.

This is the best opportunity in recent years for local and state governments, Sydney Airport, active transport planners and advocates to work together to deliver a truly transformational network for cycling, but there is no time to waste.

Background

Extensive campaigning by Bicycle NSW, Bicycle User Groups (BUGs), active transport planners at Inner West, Bayside and City of Sydney Councils and the community was required over several years to ensure that the Gateway project incorporated the SUP along the northern side of the Alexandra Canal, the new rest areas, the dedicated walking and cycling bridge over the canal and the safe link to the Domestic Terminal.

The final conditions of consent included:

- a requirement under the Commonwealth Conditions of Ministerial Approval (CoMA) to ensure that, by the time construction is substantially complete, an active transport link has been constructed to connect International Terminal T1 and Domestic Terminals T2/T3 (Clause 1)
- an obligation under State Conditions of Approval (CoA) for the Sydney Gateway Project SSI – 9737 to deliver a north-south green link corridor linking Cooks River, Tempe Wetlands, Tempe, St Peters and Sydney Park and include site-specific public art and interpretation incorporating Aboriginal designs, patterns and motifs (Clauses E76, E77).

The resulting ATL (Figure 1) is a huge win for active transport in the area. It will contribute to the Principal Bicycle Network and dramatically enhance pedestrian and cycling connectivity to Sydney Airport, allowing local travellers and 40,000 staff who live in neighbouring suburbs¹ to reach the airport in a healthy, sustainable way. This will reduce pressure on roads, parking and public transport infrastructure and leave capacity on the networks for those needing to travel from further afield.

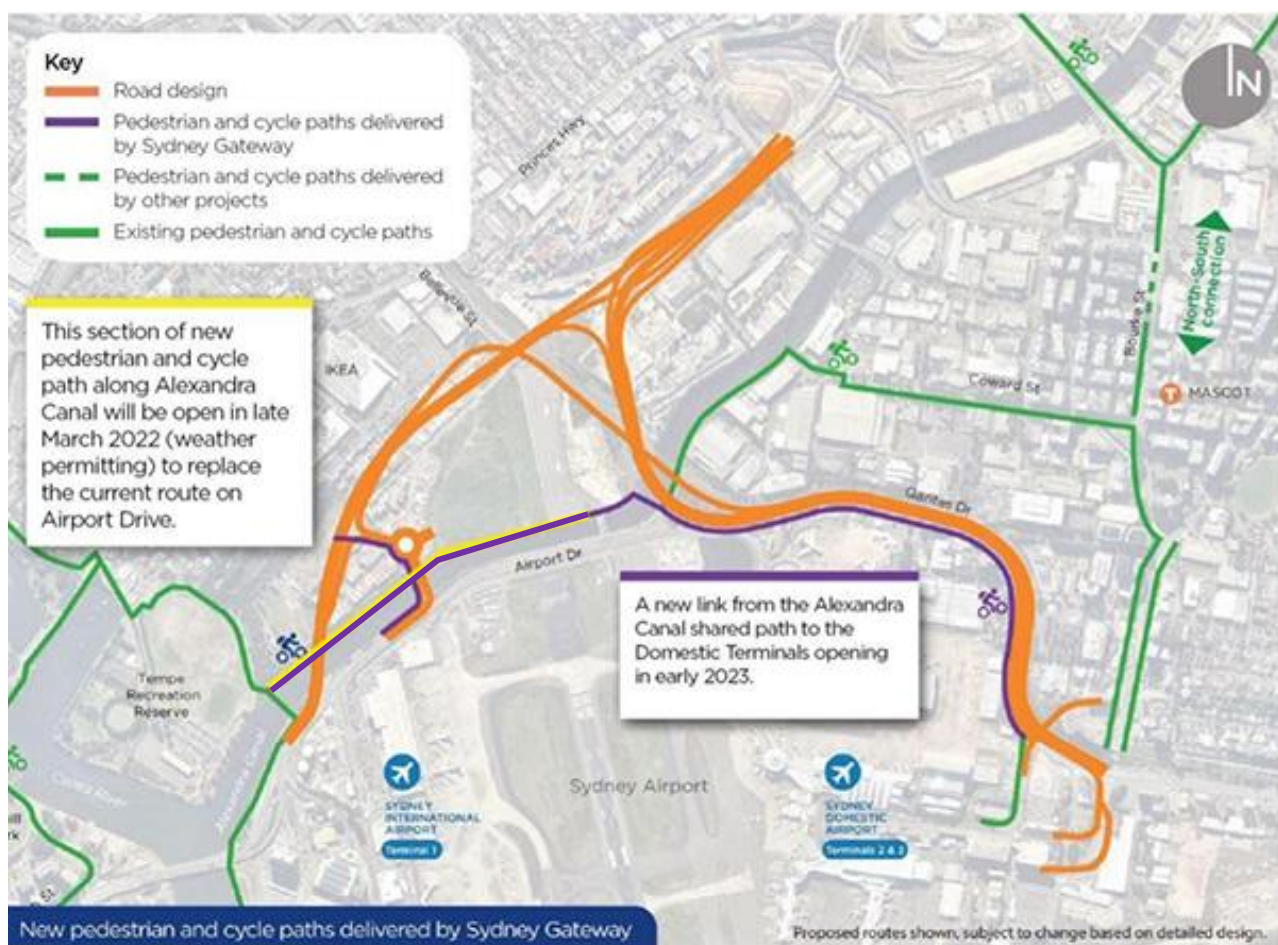


Figure 1: The route of the new ATL at Sydney Airport (Source: Transport for NSW)

Despite overall support for the proposals, Bicycle NSW would like to raise **several issues of concern**:

- Transport for NSW has drawn a line 1.5km from the project footprint to determine where its influence should end. For a project of the scale and impact of the Sydney Gateway, this is not sufficient to ensure good outcomes for integrating the new motorway into the delicate fabric of Inner Sydney. The active transport network review must extend to neighbouring Strategic Centres/ Local Centres as defined by the Eastern City District Planⁱⁱ.
- The current plans do not allow for seamless connections to the wider cycling network. The ATL will not form a key part of the regional network without links to existing and planned cycle infrastructure. As can be seen in Figure 2, there are major missing links, particularly heading north-west towards Sydenham, north to Mascot town centre, north-east towards Sydney Park and south-east towards Randwick and its significant health and education precinct.

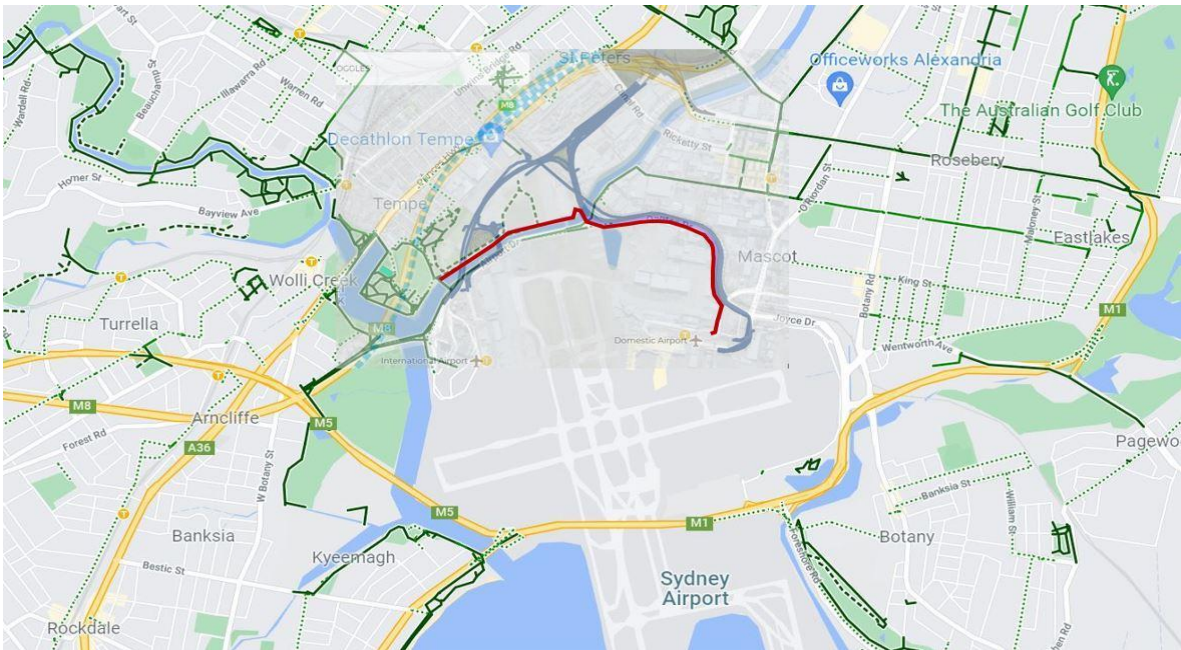


Figure 2: A map showing of the Sydney Gateway project and the ATL (in red) in relation to the existing cycle network (Source: Google Maps / JHSWJV / Conybeare Morrison International)

- There is no detail in the PDLP to show how the ATL connects with the Domestic Terminal and its future end-of-trip facilities. The maps in Figure 3 highlight where significant gaps exist in the plans. To continue progressing the construction of the roads without keeping the ATL front and centre may lead to a compromised outcome for access to the terminal by both local residents, workers and travellers.



Figure 3: Undefined sections of the ATL in the vicinity of the Domestic Terminals (Source: JHSWJV / Conybeare Morrison International)

- There is still no clarity on how safe and attractive access for people walking and cycling from Mascot town centre to Domestic Terminal can be provided. The terminal building could become an important services and retail centre for the local community. This would reduce the pressure on Mascot as the residential density continues to intensify, and provide economic benefit to Sydney Airport and its tenants.

Strategic context

Walking and cycling activity in the Sydney Airport area is likely to evolve rapidly. The density of walkers will increase with the delivery of promised housing and retail. An upswing in travel by bikes has occurred recently due to COVID-19, individual reactions to climate change, a surge in local delivery services and the growing popularity of e-bikes. In addition, State policies promoting active transport to address climate change and urban liveability will significantly increase travel share for walking and cycling. It is important to future-proof the cycle network by allowing for increased demand at the outset.

Since 2019, there has been a **seismic shift in Transport for NSW policy direction**, framed by innovative thinking around ‘place’ after 70 years of car-centric planning that focused on movement to the detriment of community, urban amenity, walkability, public health and air quality. The Movement and Place Framework takes a cross-governmental integrated approach to infrastructure projects and land use design. It is bolstered by two policies published by Transport for NSW in early 2021 that require State projects to prioritise road space for active transport:

- Road User Space Allocation Policy CP21000ⁱⁱⁱ establishes a road user hierarchy that considers pedestrians first and private cars last. Multiple environmental and health benefits will flow from increased walking, cycling and public transport use. The streets will be more equitable for Sydney-siders of all ages, incomes and abilities.
- Providing for Walking and Cycling in Transport Projects Policy CP21001^{iv} 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.

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 are 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.

Bicycle NSW is committed to this objective, but in order to achieve it we emphasize that most people will not switch to walking or cycling, or allow their children to do so, if they feel unsafe^{vi}. Infrastructure that fails to meet the needs of children and elders will not lead to the mode shift essential to prevent Sydney becoming choked with cars under the current plans for population growth.

A raft of recent NSW Government strategies supports the development of a network of safe cycleways, separated from vehicles:

Future Transport 2056 Plan (2018)^{vii} outlines an overarching vision for transport in NSW guided by community desire for better places. Future Transport 2056 commits to providing a regional cycle network in Greater Sydney, known as the Principal Bicycle Network (PBN). A coordinated delivery of protected bike lanes across the metropolitan area will ensure that routes across council boundaries align and create the most direct path of travel. Future Transport 2061 is currently being prepared following stakeholder consultation and will put an even greater emphasis on sustainable mobility.

Greater Sydney Commission's Eastern City District Plan (2018)^{viii} set outs how integrated land use and transport planning can help achieve the 30-minute city through increasing development density near public transit corridors in Planning Priority E10. The need for better accessibility, connectivity and amenity for pedestrian and cyclists is also emphasised in Planning Priorities E4, E17, E18 and E19. An important objective is a “city in its landscape” which has 2 relevant indicators – to create increased urban tree canopy and expand the Sydney Green Grid.

Sydney Green Grid^{ix}, developed by the NSW Government Architect in 2017 and reflected in the district and region plans, proposes an interconnecting network of open spaces that support walking and cycling. The Principal Bicycle Network will integrate the Sydney Green Grid to create important links between activity centres and support active recreation. The project opportunities for the Airport area are shown in the extract from the Green Grid in Figure 4. The ATL will contribute to projects 38, 21 and 9 as well as the long-term vision of achieving the **Sydney Airport Orbital**^x which includes a link from Kyeemagh beach to Botany's Foreshore Beach as part of Mill Stream and Botany Open Space Corridor.

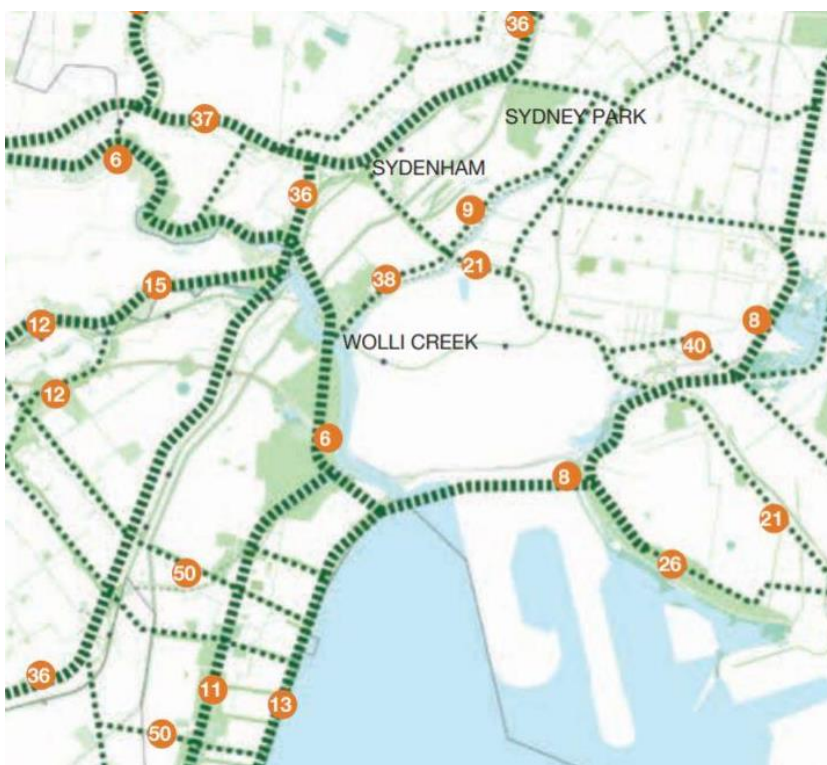


Figure 4:
Extract from the Green Grid showing project opportunities in the Sydney Airport area
(Source: Tyrrell Studio / NSW Government Architect)

Priority project opportunities:

- 6. The Cooks River Open Space Corridor
- 8. Mill Stream and Botany Open Space Corridor
- 9. Alexandra Canal
- 21. Freight Rail Lines Chullora to Port Botany
- 26. Joseph Banks Reserve and Foreshore Drive
- 38. Airport to Bourke Street Active Travel Link
- 40. East-West Coastal Green Links: Mascot to Maroubra

Sydney Airport Master Plan 2039^{xi} was published in 2019 to set a robust planning framework for the fast-changing Airport precinct. The delivery of active transport infrastructure will contribute to the 10 of the 11 objectives established to drive the future visions (Figure 5)



Figure 5:
Extract from the Sydney Airport Master Plan 2039 showing the 11 objectives for all future planning.
(Source: Sydney Airport Corporation)

The latest, and most exciting, document to be published by Transport for NSW, under the direction of Minister Stokes, is the Eastern Harbour City Strategic Cycleway Corridors^{xii}. 30 strategic corridors have been identified for eastern Sydney, making up approximately 250 km of cycle network (Figure 6). The corridors will connect key centres and major points of interest. Exact routes will be subject to detailed design and collaboration with councils and the community. The corridors will form the backbone of the Principal Bicycle Network.

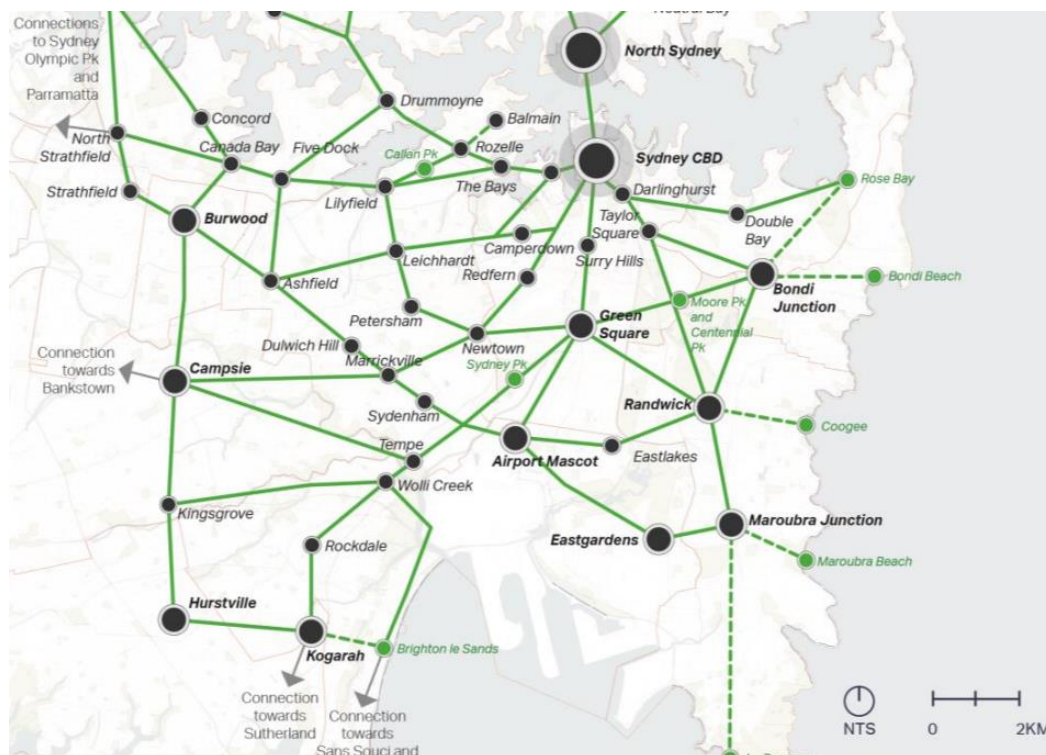


Figure 6: Extract from the new Strategic Cycleway Corridor network showing the airport as a strategic centre at the junction of several corridors
(Source: TfNSW)

The Eastern Harbour City was the first of the 6 cities of the newly-defined sandstone megaregion to receive a cycleway corridors plan in April 2022: the other cities will follow by the middle of 2023.

Two critical links

The EIS for Sydney Gateway and the conditions of consent were developed before the Movement and Place Framework became a foundation of urban planning in NSW, supported by the Road User Space Allocation and the Providing for Walking and Cycling in Transport Projects policies. Although the ATL will be a great piece of infrastructure, we share the concern of many stakeholders that opportunities to provide optimal connections to the existing and future regional cycling network have not been incorporated into the design of the motorway and **time is running out to resolve engineering issues**.

We appreciate that the project team is still exploring how (Figure 7) to ensure that the ATL forms a central role in the regional network. Bicycle NSW supports this work and participates in continual stakeholder engagement to develop designs and shape the forthcoming Active Transport Network Strategy.



Some of these connections can be delivered when funding and construction capacity allow in the future. A new bridge across the Cooks River to the south, the extension of the SUP north along the Alexander Canal and the routes east towards Eastgardens and Randwick are not directly connected with the Sydney Gateway site.

However, we have identified **two critical linkages** that closely interface the motorway footprint. These were considered too difficult to achieve in the face of project expediency and have been overlooked as construction races ahead:

1. Domestic terminals to Mascot town centre

The current proposal for accessing Mascot from the Domestic terminals involves following the ATL to the Alexandra Canal, heading north to Coward Street and then turning along Coward Street towards the town centre and its high-density residential developments. This is a very convoluted 4km route to travel a short distance of less than 1.5km (Figure 8).



Figure 8: Extract from the Sydney Gateway plan highlighting the Domestic to Mascot connection (Source: Transport for NSW / Bicycle NSW)

- Future safe cycling route to between Mascot town centre and the Domestic terminals
- Preferred future walking and cycling route
- Area where future connectivity remains unresolved

There is an existing shared path along Bourke Road and O’Riordan Street but this is cluttered with poles, bus stops and signs, and broken by dangerous intersections. It is constrained and will become crowded as population grows. It is possible to cross Qantas Drive at grade level, but such a mission is not convenient or comfortable due to small refuge islands, fast slip lanes and multiple traffic signals. This junction will become more difficult to cross if current plans to widen and ‘upgrade’ Qantas Drive to maximise traffic flows are delivered.

Figure 9 shows a technical drawing of this junction from Sydney Gateway PDLP. The ATL is the grey line south of the motorway which terminates at Seventh Avenue opposite Robey St. It appears that this is where Sydney Airport plans to take cyclists into Domestic. The project boundary is shown as a red dotted line, illuminating the minimal requirements for the integration of the new road into the surrounding urban fabric. It is clear that the pedestrian and cycle links are unresolved.

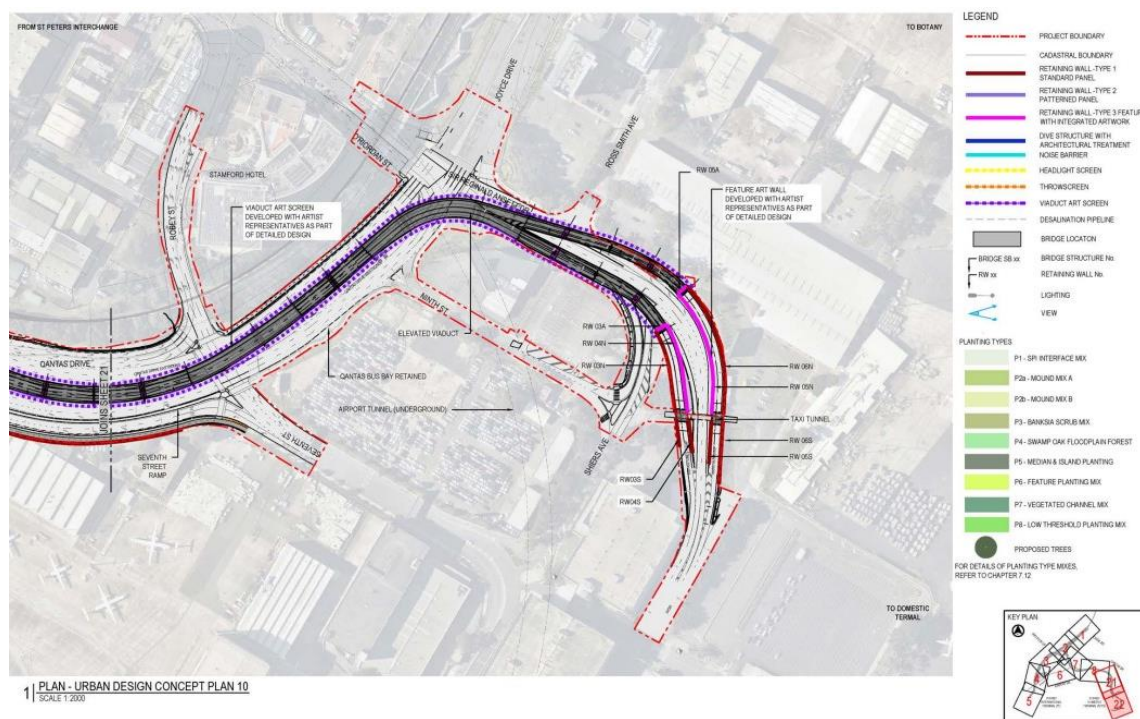


Figure 9: Extract from the Sydney Gateway PDLP showing the area around the junctions of O’Riordan Street and Robey Street (Source: Transport for NSW / Conybeare Morrison)

If no changes are made to the design, the outcomes for active transport will be far from optimal and not appropriate for a strategic cycleway corridor. **Transport for NSW must commission a full feasibility study to assess all possible ways to provide safe and comfortable access for pedestrians and bike riders from the Domestic terminals to either Robey Street or O’Riordan Street.**

Several ideas have put forward by the community, consultants and councils. Bayside Council continues to advocate for a grade-separated bridge. Transport for NSW has investigated options for an overpass of this 11-lane road but the design process has stalled. Of course, there may be new possibilities generated by project and policy changes that no-one has thought of yet. Perhaps it will make more sense to claim some road space at grade level and provide a signalised crossing with large refuges and traffic light phasing that prioritises walkers and bike riders. Does Qantas Drive need additional lanes and slip lanes when the new elevated motorway is providing so much extra capacity? In line with the Providing for Walking and Cycling in Transport Projects and Road User Space Allocation policies, we urge the project team to urgently review the junction with Robey and O’Riordan Streets. A separated cycleway can then be provided to connect with Mascot town centre.

2. The ATL to Sydenham Station

A direct route west to Sydenham Station has long been identified as an important element of the regional cycling network. It has now been recognised as a strategic cycleway corridor (see Figure 6). There are complex issues around ownership and access to land along this corridor which have led to the project team placing the cycleway in a ‘too hard basket’. However, **it is essential that the construction of the motorway allows for a future connection to be made from the northern end of the canal-side ATL near the rest area.** Figure 10 shows the complicated junction of road and rail line at this location.

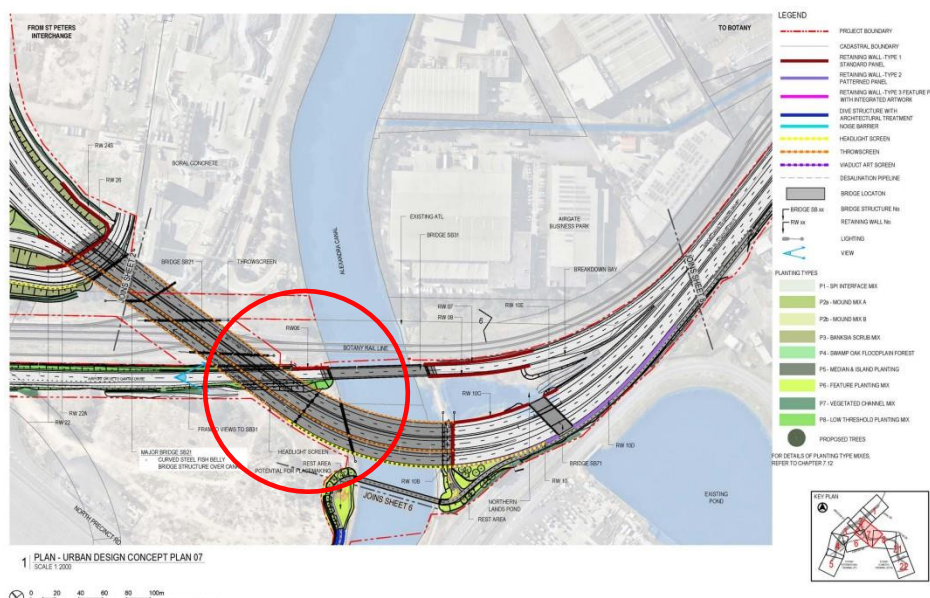



Figure 10: Extract from the Sydney Gateway PDLP (Source: Transport for NSW / Conybeare Morrison)

 Area where future connection to a cycleway towards Sydenham Station needs to be made

It may be necessary to create underpasses, bridges or structural elements that can carry an elevated cycleway. Again, all possible options must be assessed. If nothing is done now, the completed motorway structure will lock out the provision of a Sydenham connection for decades to come.

Next steps

As the discussion of the contemporary policy context underscores, NOW is the best moment in decades to really push the NSW Government to deliver active transport infrastructure that will enable its ambitious objectives for health, resilience, liveability and social equity to be achieved.

The Sydney Gateway project offers a once in a generation opportunity for significant investment in mode shift and behaviour change and its influence must be far-reaching. There is a huge appetite for public and active mobility and if the correct infrastructure is provided, many people will happily drive less, benefiting the entire community with less pollution and congestion.

It is time to revisit the active transport commitments at Sydney Gateway and align the proposed cycleways to the latest policies and strategies **before construction of the motorway proceeds past a point of no return**. Resolving these critical links will not be easy but Transport for NSW has a mandate to find a solution if it has real intent to deliver the strategic cycleway corridors.

On behalf of current and future bicycle riders from across Greater Sydney, **Bicycle NSW requests urgent feasibility studies to determine the optimum solutions for resolving the critical junctions discussed and connecting the ATL to Mascot town centre and Sydenham Station**. It is essential to ensure that Sydney Gateway creates the finest possible outcomes for active transport in this part of Sydney.

ⁱ Sydney Airport Annual Report [Online]

https://assets.ctfassets.net/v228i5y5k0x4/6nKbfG2HrgWPKFg7cvmr7B/b590dcb9ac7f438cc1537fa7da34ae18/Sydney_Airport_Annual_Report_April.pdf

ⁱⁱ Greater Sydney Commission, Eastern City District Plan, 2018. <https://www.greater.sydney/eastern-city-district-plan>

ⁱⁱⁱ 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

^{iv} 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>

^v Stokes, Rob. 2022, Feb 10. Footpaths and cycleways are an act of democracy – ask Steph. Fifth Estate.

<https://thefifthestate.com.au/urbanism/planning/footpaths-and-cycleways-are-an-act-of-democracy-ask-steph/>

^{vi} Currently 70% of people when surveyed feel too unsafe to ride their bike more often NSW Government, Sydney's Cycling Future (2013) [Online at 17/9/2019] <https://www.transport.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/media/documents/2017/sydneys-cycling-future-web.pdf>

^{vii} NSW Government, Future Transport 2056 [Online 1/4/2020] <https://future.transport.nsw.gov.au/plans/future-transport-strategy/future-transport-greater-sydney>, Points 3-5

^{viii} Greater Sydney Commission, Eastern City District Plan, 2018. <https://www.greater.sydney/eastern-city-district-plan>

^{ix} Sydney Green Grid, Central District. Tyrrell Studio, 2017.

<https://www.governmentarchitect.nsw.gov.au/resources/ga/media/files/ga/plans/sydney-green-grid-plan-4-central-district-2017.pdf>

^x Sydney Airport Orbital. <https://theorbital.org/>

^{xi} Sydney Airport Corporation, Sydney Airport Masterplan 2039, 2019, April. <https://www.sydneyairport.com.au/corporate/planning-and-projects/master-plan/master-plan-2039-downloads>

^{xii} Transport for NSW. 2022, April. Eastern Harbour City Strategic Cycleway Corridors.

<https://www.transport.nsw.gov.au/system/files/media/documents/2022/strategic-cycleway-corridor-eastern-harbour-city-program-update.pdf>