

The Sutherland to Cronulla Active Transport Link: The case for a safer, direct path

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Foreword

This document explores alternative visions for the Sutherland to Cronulla Active Transport Link (SCATL) laid out in the current and previous Review(s) of Environmental Factors (REF). How these visions meet the needs of pedestrians and cyclists shall be considered with regard to community feedback, Transport for NSW (TfNSW) planning and responses to this feedback and the TfNSW policies and frameworks guiding active transport infrastructure.

Bicycle NSW has been the peak bicycle advocacy group 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'* from 8 to 80 years of age, and we support improvements to facilities for pedestrians and cyclists. We advocate for new cycling routes that 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 thank you for the opportunity to comment on SCATL. In the preparation of this document, Bicycle NSW would like to acknowledge the many years of research and advocacy undertaken by Sutherland Shire Council, Sutherland Shire Community Centre, local bicycle user groups and community members who have provided Transport for NSW feedback in order to make SCATL best meet the needs of Sutherland Shire.

Project need

The Sutherland to Cronulla Active Transport Link has been more than 20 years in the planning.

The strategic objective of SCATL is to address the current heavy reliance on motor vehicle transport for short trips in the Shire by improving opportunities for cycling and walking. (REF 2018, P14)

The Future Transport Strategy (2056) aims to ensure walking or cycling is the most convenient option for short trips around urban centres and local areas, supported by a safe road environment and suitable pathways. This was supported by The Australian Vision for Active Transport (2010), an amalgam of The Australian Local Government Association, cycling advocacy, public health and transport industry groups in order to foster preventative health and physical activity, sustainable and liveable spaces, carbon reduction, social inclusion, traffic congestion and road safety (REF 2018, P14). In response a study was conducted by the Australian Bicycle Council 2013 of 723 households in the Sutherland Shire. It found that 'all age groups have lower participation rates of cycling for recreation and transport than other Sydney metropolitan areas.' (REF 2018, p15)

Sutherland Shire Council's 2012 Environment and Sustainability Strategy aimed to increase active transport and reduce car dependence (REF 2018, P15). The need for SCATL was established.

SCATL Stage 1

Of the three options considered for SCATL stage 1: a) Do nothing b) continue mostly within the rail corridor and c) Combination of path within and outside of the corridor (REF 2015, p.20), option c was chosen by TfNSW. The SCATL Stage 1, beginning at Sutherland Station on McCubbens Lane, and ending at Kirrawee Station on Oak Road, was completed in 2021.

SCATL stage 1 comprises 2.5 km of a mixture of shared and separated pedestrian paths and cycleways with various pavement profiles and four crossing treatments for the six crossings in accordance with Austroads 2009 Guide to Road Design Part 6A: Pedestrian and Cyclist Paths and the NSW Bicycle Guidelines (RTA 2005)(REF 2018, p75-77).

These active transport linkages have been well received with an expectation that the safety, comfort, directness and amenity would continue with the design of SCATL Stage 2.

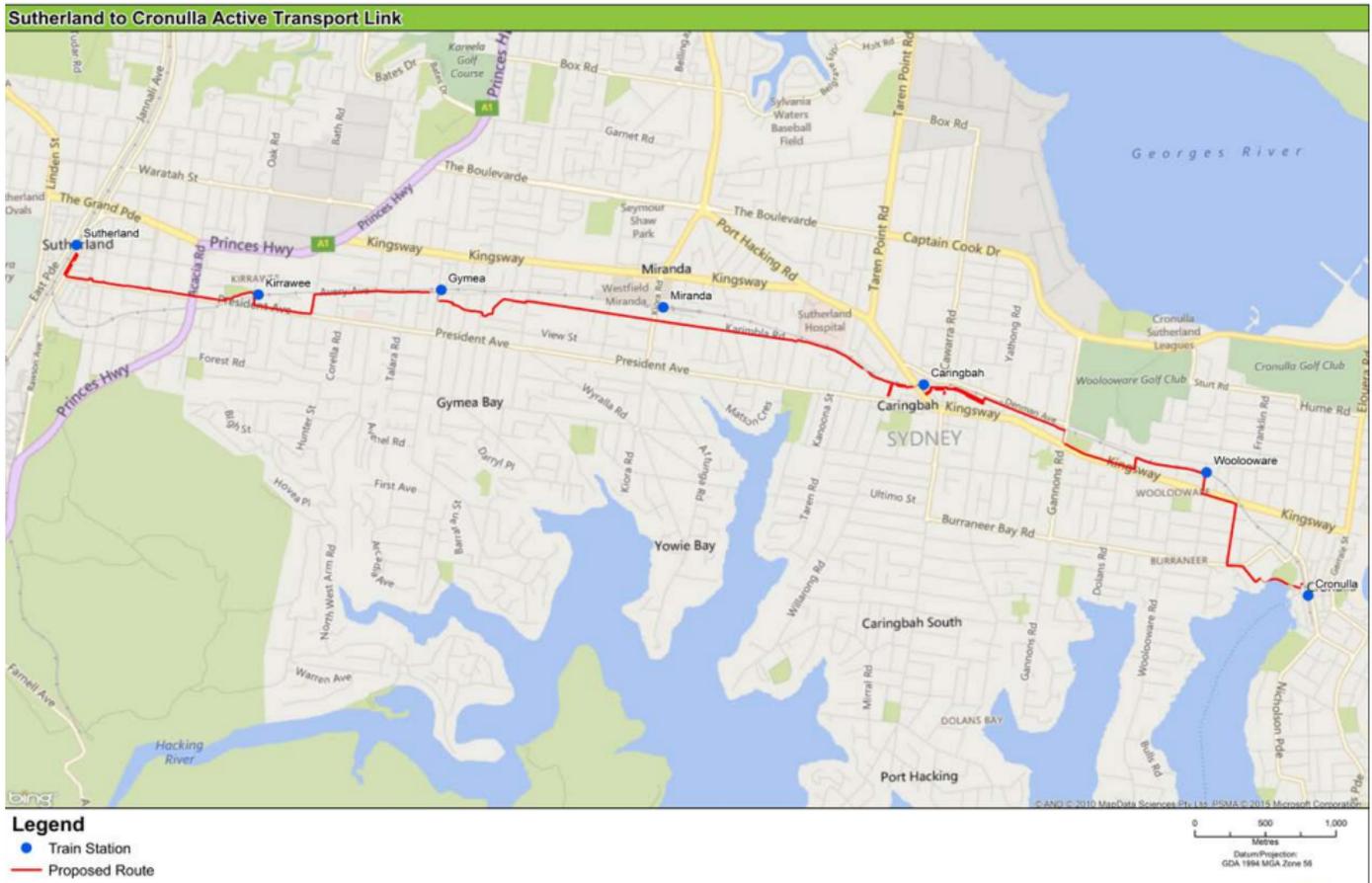


(SCATL Stage1 Determination Report 2018)

SCATL Stage 2

The original proposed route for Stage 2 SCATL was within the railway corridor (REF 2015/16, p 10). This is the design preferred by Sutherland Shire and stakeholders because it:

- Allows for a 3.5 metre wide path to be constructed off-road within the rail corridor where possible or within the existing road verge, with visual separation between bicycle and pedestrian movements
- Minimises steep gradients and deviation from the 'desire line'
- Avoids the need to construct complex bridges and road crossings that would create a greater impact to the area during construction
- Enables Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) features to be incorporated such as side road access along the rail corridor route
- Minimises the need to change on-street parking
- Avoids impacts to state heritage items
- Provides access for rail maintenance and emergency services, during periods of inclement weather
- Does not cross areas of known flood zones (REF 2015/16, p 9)(Sutherland Shire Council 2022)



(The SCATL Stage 2 traverses the rail corridor from Sutherland to Cronulla)(REF 2015/16, p10)

The rail corridor option is regarded as the ‘optimum outcome and providing the best hope of genuine transport mode shift to active transport from cars’. (Sutherland Shire Council 2022). In addition, 3000 signatures of support for an in corridor active transport plan were obtained by the Sutherland Shire Environmental Centre.

On March 30 2021, there was a public announcement by TfNSW of substantive changes to SCATL Stage 2.



The revised SCATL Stage 2 design is completely outside of the rail corridor (crossing many driveways and intersections) (REF 2018). This deviation falls well short of providing the safety, comfort, directness and enjoyable experience envisaged in the original plan for SCATL2.

Bicycle NSW shares the concerns raised by SSC, SSEC, and local Bicycle User Groups (BUGs) about the revised SCATL2:

- As indicated on the map (SSEC 2022) SCATL Stage 2 is indirect and does not follow the line of desire for commuting bicycle users.
- Hundreds of driveways and many intersections will need to be crossed along this new route, making it unsafe. (SSEC 2022)
- The Sutherland- Cronulla Active Transport Link doesn't actually reach Cronulla. (SSEC 2022)- A disincentive for bicycle riders and pedestrians who are not allocated space in this busy and important hub.
- The Kingsway diversion will be unpleasant for walking or cycling with hills and traffic signals making it slow and inefficient. (SSEC 2022)
- The removal of more trees will be required for the road option than the rail corridor (SSC 2022, p.8). This is an important matter for amenity, comfort and safety especially with summer temperatures expected to increase due to global warming.
- Future-proofing: State approval of high density housing development in the Shire necessitates a high-quality, safe and efficient active transport route along the rail corridor. Smaller, less expensive connectivity to suburbs and services can be added after this crucial "Spine" is established. (SSEC 2022)

Concerns about the revised SCATL2 fall under the following precincts:

Kirrawee:

The new route on Flora Street has a high volume of people and cars accessing shops and apartments. It is neither safe nor efficient. Pedestrians already have existing footpaths that don't need replacement.

Gymea:

- The Kingsway route along Gymea will be substandard, inefficient and dangerous for cyclists compared to use of the rail corridor. It is a very busy route with many driveway crossings, some for high density apartment blocks.
- The treatment (illustrated below) is unsafe given vehicles needing to enter and leave the Kingsway will do so at speed. It is also highly likely that owners of driveways will strongly object to being made to give way to bike riders. Dual direction poses the additional risk to riders that car drivers will not look for them in the direction that is contraflow to the driving alignment.
- There are many traffic signals along the route, which will slow down and endanger cyclists.
- There is already a footpath so the proposed new route does nothing to enhance walking along a busy road and in fact may require the removal of trees to create a shared path which will make it even less pleasant.



(Proposed treatment of the Kingsway) SCATL Consultation Report, 2021, p9)

Miranda:

- This is not a good route compared to the rail corridor for the same reasons as stated for Gymea.

- An issue with SCATL in the rail corridor in Miranda as not being able to provide sufficient exit points could be easily solved by reserving this section for ‘cyclists only’ as a faster rate of travel. This means less exits are required. Pedestrians in this section could use the existing footpath on Karimbla Rd.
- The steep incline between Jackson Avenue and Port Hacking makes it a less desirable route for both walkers and cyclists.

Caringbah:

- The section along the Kingsway has the same problems as mentioned previously – most people don’t want to cycle along a busy road with driveways and traffic signals. There is no tangible improvement for walkers over existing footpaths and it is dangerous and inefficient for cyclists.
- If the section along Denman is on the Southern side, that would at least eliminate the problem with driveways.

Woolooware:

- Stage 2 of SCATL was supposed to provide a safe, direct route to Cronulla mall. This new proposal ends at Gannons road with indirect access to Cronulla mall.

Cronulla:

- As with Woolooware- The commercial area of Cronulla has the highest need for a high-quality, efficient active transport corridor and is no longer part of the proposal.

Other options for SCATL Stage 2

Of the six possibilities for SCATL Stage 2, the out-of-corridor option was the least preferred by local stakeholders for reasons already mentioned. In summary, the options included:

Option name	Type	Features
1a Kirrawee to Cronulla	In corridor	Links Kirrawee to Cronulla town centre- 8.3 kilometres. Includes 4 bridges and one underpass. Avoids Kingsway
1b Kirrawee to Caringbah	In corridor	Same alignment as 1a, terminating at Gannons Road. Includes three bridges and one road underpass.

1c Gymea variation	In corridor	Same alignment as Option 1a connecting Kirrawee to Cronulla with a 700 metre deviation at Gymea. Includes four bridges and one underpass.
2a North Kingsway	Road network	Links Kirrawee Station to Cronulla Town Centre using the existing road network north of the rail corridor. 9.1 kilometres. Variety of types (shared path, separated cycleway and shared zone) No bridges or underpasses.
2b In corridor to Sylvania Rd	Hybrid	Uses residual space within the rail corridor and the local street network parallel to the corridor from Kirrawee Station to Sylvania Road between Gymea Station and Miranda Station. Then exits the rail corridor, travels north to Kingsway and follows the same alignment as Option 2a. Includes one underpass at Gymea Station, but no bridges.
2c In corridor to Miranda	Hybrid	From President Avenue, Kirrawee, this option uses low traffic streets on the southern side of the rail line, past Gymea to Wandella Road. From Wandella Road, this option enters the rail corridor and uses space on the south of the track between Miranda and Caringbah Station. Exits on Kingsway and travels along the south side of Denman Avenue and local streets to Cronulla Town Centre. Includes two bridges at Miranda.

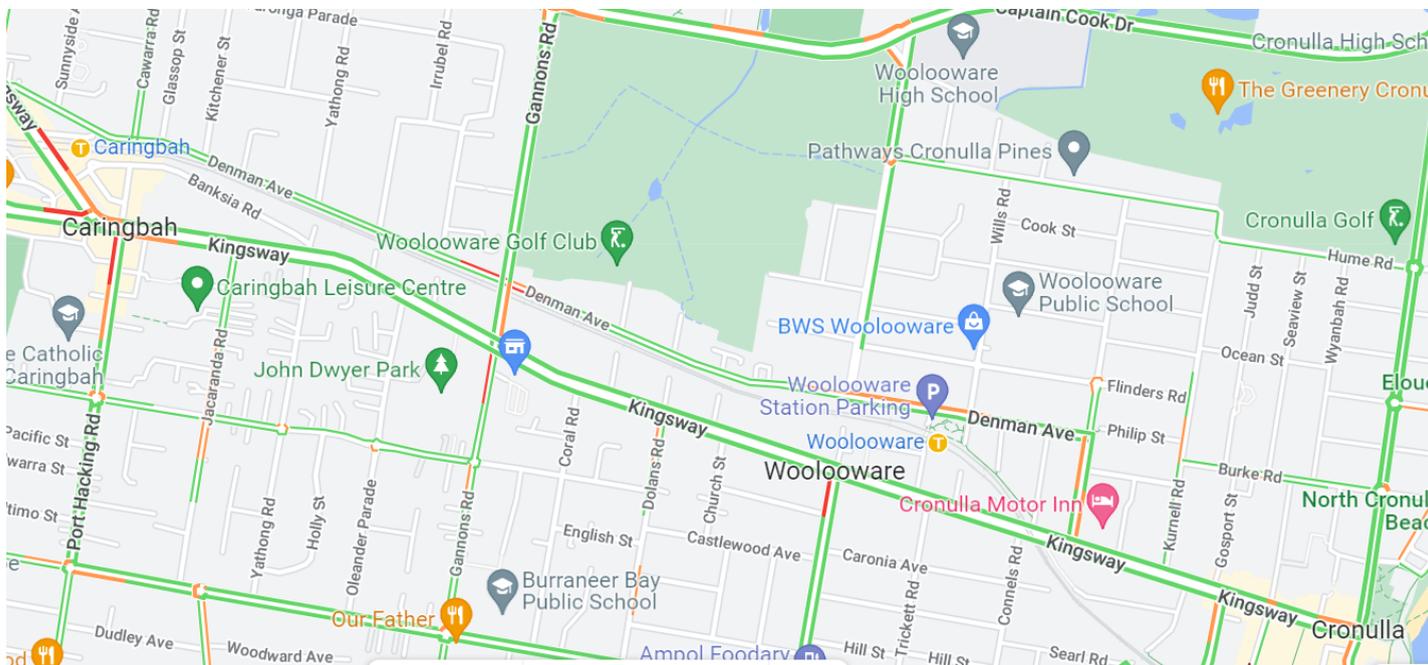
Table of SCATL Stage 2 options (REF 2021, p2-11)

The 2a North Kingsway option was chosen over others presumably, and understandably, due to cost and technical issues. The preferred 1a in-corridor option included four bridges and one underpass whilst the North Kingsway did not (REF 2021, p2-11). There was however, no basic '1d' reduced cost alternative that excluded the bridges and underpasses. Furthermore, options 1a, 1b, 1c do not appear to consider an exclusive cycleway only (no shared path) link in the corridor with at grade road crossings. A cycleway only option in corridor could have been explored further due to the existence of a parallel footpath network out of the corridor. This could be resolved with wayfinding signage. Instead, the 3.5m wide shared path in corridor has, according to the information in REF 2 triggered the need for embankment / retaining walls etc.) As well as accessibility/permeability/safety concerns for pedestrians in some in corridor sections such as at Miranda. But a 2.5m cycleway only option would most likely, based on the limited general in corridor information provided by TfNSW, be able to resolve these concerns.

In its response to the announcement that SCATL2 will utilise the road network rather than the rail corridor, SSC reiterated its support of the latter and offered to ‘collaborate with TfNSW to review the specification of works. Council has extensive experience in shared path projects and could apply this to ensure elements of the project are not over specified. Cost elements such as fencing, retaining structures and privacy screens are worthy of examination.’(SSC 2021)

Cost-effective and low-impact alternatives

Denman Avenue hugs the railway corridor from Caringbah almost all the way to Cronulla town centre. This is one example of an obvious and easy opportunity to run the cycleway just inside the railway corridor but nowhere near the railway line or service routes. All that would be required is a minor adjustment of the fence line. Please see below:



Google Map showing Denman Avenue running parallel to the railway from Caringbah to Cronulla and avoiding the Kingsway.



Photo showing the direct, cost-effective solution of adjusting the fenceline back 1.5M to allow for a cycleway adjacent to the footpath on Avery Avenue Kirrawee.

The SSC suggestion of moving the fence line back 1.5 M along available corridor paths is an easy fix with no visible or physical impact upon railway infrastructure. What it does mean is that the cycleway is flat, direct and shaded by mature trees, it is separated from the dangerous Kingsway and there are no driveways to negotiate. The footpath is there already, separated from the cycleway and shaded by the mature trees. This part of SCATL 2 (at least) is way cheaper to construct. It is direct, comfortable, safe and convenient and a lot more attractive than the revised SCATL 2 plan for the area which will result in the removal of at least 80 trees on Denman Avenue alone. This is one of several areas along SCATL 2 where it is absolutely in the interests of TfNSW to work with SSC on its implementation of SCATL 2. To achieve the best results some flexibility and consultation regarding a hybrid plan is recommended.

Movement and Place

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 CP21000¹ 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 CP21001² 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.

The Future Transport 2056 Plan (2018)³ 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.

The Strategic cycleway Corridors (2022)⁴- Commencing in the harbour City, this active transport program, *‘...provides the foundation for establishing safe and convenient cross-city cycleway connections that better connect centres, precincts, and places, and enables councils to progressively expand local bike networks.’* (TfNSW 2022)

Recommendations

¹ 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

² 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>

³ 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

⁴ TfNSW, Strategic Cycleway Corridor (2022),
<https://www.transport.nsw.gov.au/operations/walking-and-bike-riding/strategic-cycleway-corridors-for-eastern-harbour-city>

The establishment of a project the scope and scale of SCATL is an enormous achievement for parts of Sydney in desperate need of active transport infrastructure. Although it is not traversing along the preferred path of the rail corridor, we understand street treatments will be of high quality in line with community expectation. The timeframe for the project's completion by 2025 (though stopping short of Cronulla) is also very positive. SCATL is progressing and this is great news for active transport in The Shire, however BNSW recommends that all options be considered. There are obvious hybrid solutions that closely skirt the railway corridor that do not require tree removal or a duplication of footpaths. These hybrid solutions are substantially cheaper to implement. In order to achieve the best results for SCATL 2 it is recommended that TfNSW closely consult with SSC.

We do envisage, beyond 2025, that as the population of Sutherland Shire increases and approved high density dwellings are filled, active transport planning will adapt to meet that need. This will likely entail a revisiting of rail corridor options, reallocation of road space to active transport or a combination of both, therefore Bicycle NSW requests that TfNSW and Council prevent further developments which will impede such a corridor in the future. Ultimately with increased users the SCATL 1 and SCATL 2 will provide direct links to residents and business, while the rail corridors hybrid will be a direct link for those active transport users travelling longer distances.

In the meantime, BNSW recommends:

- Continued monitoring of road safety data of *Road users by local government area of crash*⁵ within the six major precinct zones of SCATL.
- Increased monitoring of cyclist data to determine rider uptake of SCATL2 compared with SCATL1.
- Annual survey of local active transport usage with the question, 'Is SCATL meeting your transport needs?'
- Undertake Policy, regulatory, governance and better-use reforms as per the *complimentary recommendations* for SCATL 2 (SCATL Stage 2 REF 2021, p.2-10). These were presented as 'alternatives' but, given the increased exposure of vulnerable road users to a dense traffic environment ought, as per the Road user Space allocation Policy and Providing for walking and Cycling, be run concurrent to SCATL2.
 - i. Reducing the speed limit on the Kingsway to provide additional safety for cyclists
 - ii. Providing subsidies to encourage take up of bicycles and other active transport equipment
 - iii. Pay or provide a rebate every time people ride a bike to work
 - iv. Regulate for commercial buildings to install end of trip facilities

⁵ TfNSW 2022, *Road users by local government area of crash*, Centre for Road Safety, TfNSW

- v. Regulate to remove untimed/free parking spaces around commercial areas including on street parking spaces to encourage active transport
- vi. Regulate for new green field developments to incorporate and build active transport links
- vii. Reforms which encourage resident and workers to reconsider their travel choices by remodeling, retiming or reducing travel. These are all worthwhile complementary suggestions by TfNSW that will need to be in place to support the aims of SCATL2 .(SCATL Stage 2 REF 2021)

Conclusion

As Sydney adapts to the future health and active transport needs of a rapidly growing population, and the imperative to reach Net Zero, we welcome the prospect of active transport infrastructure in the Sutherland Shire. Whilst SCATL1 is considered a great success, there are concerns about SCATL2 which has deviated from the original rail corridor and is now gazetted to share the road network. The revised SCATL 2 is considerably less safe because it places vulnerable road users in proximity to cars at numerous crossings and on many driveways. The route is much less direct than the corridor option, with steeper gradients, less convenient due to the many crossings, and less pleasant. There are cheaper, simpler, safer and more direct solutions that combine road and railway corridors. We recommend that TfNSW collaborate with SSC on these and other options apace with population growth and active transport needs. In the meantime, BNSW supports increased monitoring of SCATL 2 for safety and usage. We also support governance measures alongside SCATL to encourage active transport uptake and improve the safety and livability of visitors and residents to the Shire..

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4. Sutherland Shire Environment Centre (2022), The SCATL Backpeddle – request a better Sutherland to Cronulla active transport link < <https://www.ssec.org.au/scatl-submission-guide/>>
5. SCATL Consultation Report (2021), Sutherland to Cronulla Active Transport Link, TfNSW, p9

<https://www.transport.nsw.gov.au/system/files/media/documents/2021/SCATL%20Information%20Booklet%20V15%20WCAG.pdf>

6. Review of Environmental Factors (2021), Sutherland to Cronulla Active Transport Link, Main Report and Appendix, TfNSW

https://www.transport.nsw.gov.au/system/files/media/documents/2021/SCATL_REF_MainBody_AppA_web.pdf