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Via email: kweallans@byron.nsw.gov.au
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Dear Kirk,

Re: Mullumbimby-Brunswick Heads cycleway route options

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment and feedback on proposed options for the Mullumbimby to Brunswick cycleway.

We applaud this timely and exciting project that will make Byron Shire an even more attractive, resilient and sustainable place in which to live, work, and play. We support the project's aim of providing 'a safe and accessible alternative transport route for the local community, linking urban areas to schools, workplaces and businesses.'ⁱ We believe that this project will address an aspect of transport disadvantage in regional NSW, namely, lack of access to active transport. 'Cycling is a healthier, cheaper, more enjoyable and environmentally-friendly alternative to private vehicle use (with) the potential to address transport equity issues arising from the high costs of car ownership...'ⁱⁱ It also has the innate power to dramatically improve population and environmental health, reduce traffic congestion and enhance economic activity. The positive social impact derived from bicycle infrastructure is estimated to return 1:5ⁱⁱⁱ for every dollar spent. We also note the importance given to supporting cycling programs within Byron Shire to provide a strong foundation for increasing both the number and the diversity of users.

Bicycle NSW prefers Option 1.

The guiding philosophy and principles in the Byron Shire 10 Year Bike Plan reassure us that the concept design will meet desired outcomes of safety, convenience, comfort and directness. This will be achieved by:

- Providing a convenient, safe and connected network that offers route choice, links residential areas, key attractors and public transport facilities.
- Considers the needs of all users and follows cyclists' desire lines.
- Addresses hazards by reducing the need to cross roads and providing suitable crossings where the cycle network and road network intersect.
- Promoting cycling as a viable transport and progressing strategic regional cycleways.

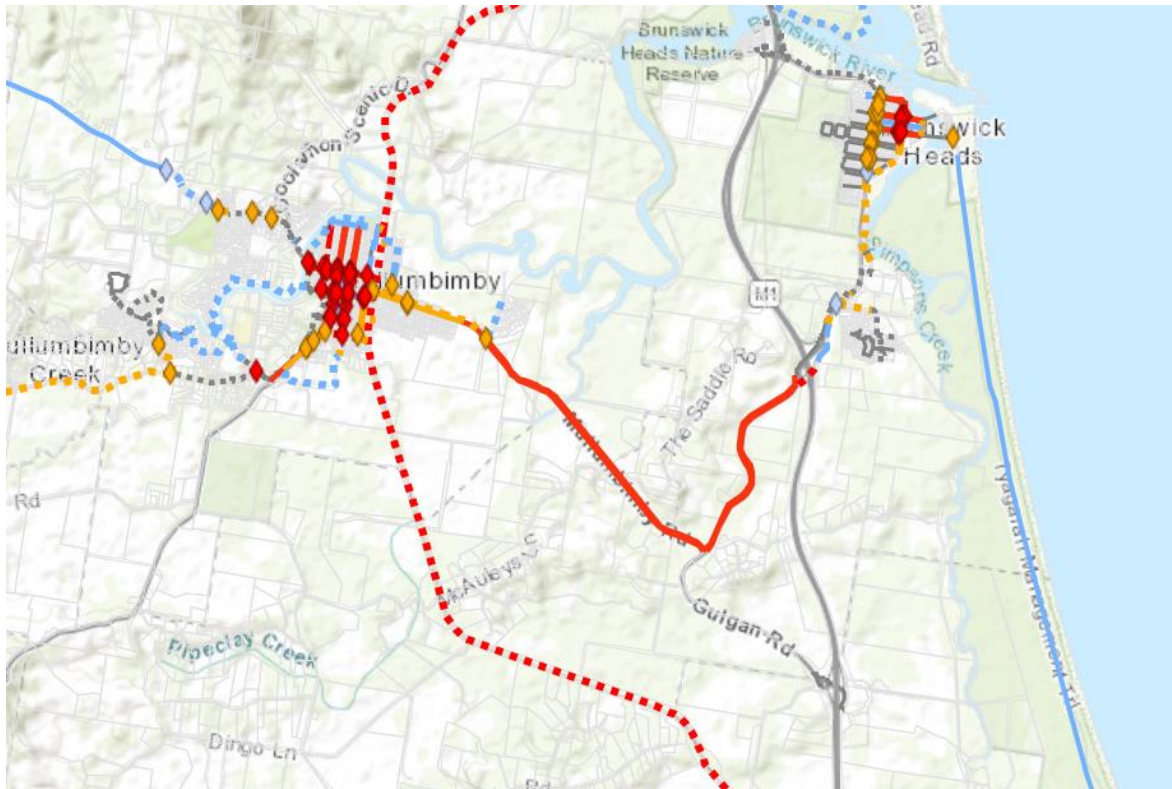


Figure 1: View of existing and proposed bicycle infrastructure, high priority in red, (Source: [Byron Shire Bike Plan, 2019](#))

Cycleway route options^{iv}

Option 1 - the north option

- Starts in Mullumbimby at corner of Prince Street and Argyle Street, heads north off-road and uses the rail corridor north over the Brunswick River to Synotts Lane and then east towards Smokey Valley Way, connecting to Brunswick Valley Way (at a spot between Orana Road and Rajah Road, Ocean Shores).
- Connects to North Brunswick via an existing shared path on Brunswick Valley Way which extends to Tweed St.

Option 2 - the south option

- Starts in Mullumbimby at corner of Prince Street and Argyle Street, heads out of town on-road via Mullumbimby Road (past the industrial estate and across Kings Creek) then takes a turn inland towards Hambly Road, through sugar cane fields directly to Henderson Lane, Saddle Road.
- Connects to the south of Brunswick Heads via Gulgan Road to Tweed Street

We believe that Option1 will be the safer, more convenient and comfortable of the two concepts designated for the Mullumbimby to Brunswick Heads cycleway concept design. This is because it is entirely off road and makes use of the existing, decommissioned rail corridor. It passes the large population centre at Ocean Shores, offering really useful connectivity to a greater number of people. It was also identified as the route most likely to service a greater proportion of disadvantaged communities. On that basis, Option 1 rates highly both as a sustainable transport and social equity community asset.



Figure 2: Cycleway route options (Source: [Byron Shire Council, Have your say](#))

Discussion

Of the six original concept options, the rail corridor option is one of the shortest and most direct with a 32-minute estimated travel time.^v With a gradient under 5% for nearly all of its length, it would be one of the most comfortable. Importantly, because it connects to Brunswick Heads via the rail corridor, a combination of road reserves, private property, and existing paths, it is separated from road traffic and therefore the safest route. For these reasons, and the attractiveness of low-stress travel, separate from cars, we anticipate that the North Option is more likely to encourage mode shift from private car use.

The Option 1 scored highly with respect to the criteria weightings (5 = highest score, 1 = lowest) for user experience (5); cyclist safety (4); and connectivity (5). Option 1 scored averagely for approvals risk (3); ecological impacts (2); delivery timeframe (3) and construction costs (3).^{vi} It needs to be noted that when the report was published, the rail corridor between Argyle Street and Synotts Lane needed to be closed by an Act of Parliament and use rights conveyed to Byron Shire Council. The approval process has since been streamlined due to the passing of the Transport Administration Amendment (Rail Trails) Bill 2022 on 12th August 2022. This amendment removes the need for each rail trail proposal to have a separate Act of Parliament and enables the Minister for Regional Transport to allow derelict tracks to be converted into a rail trail for ‘recreation, tourism or related purposes’.

As development of the Northern Rivers Rail Trail gains pace, use of rail trail within Option 1 will enhance connectivity and provide a substantial economic boost to regional communities^{vii}. This opportunity is particularly important for NSW regions undergoing recovery from natural disasters.

The Northern Rivers region is no stranger to floods of increasing severity and frequency. Any improvements to cycling infrastructure and encouragement of rider uptake will improve the region’s adaptive capacity and resilience to future events. This is due to the fact that flooding isolates areas by destroying sections of roads and cutting off supply lines for fuel and other consumables. Whilst cars become immobilised, bikes can easily navigate potholes and other obstacles.

Whilst the cycleway will enhance the region's attractiveness to visitors, its other advantage is providing cycling for transport to the local workforce. Many Northern Rivers residents experience transport disadvantage and the economic pressure associated with car dependence. As Byron Shire council is well aware, cycling profoundly benefits the physical, mental health, connectivity and economic sustainability of communities. We believe the rail trail option to be the best placed to service the most users.

Recommendations for active transport projects in Byron Shire:

There has never been a better time for building active transport infrastructure. As the Minister for Infrastructure, Cities and Active Transport, Rob Stokes MP, has asserted, walking and cycling 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^{viii}. Active mobility improves public health, activates high streets, helps build social connections and addresses inequality. Such ambitions are bolstered by the Road User Space Allocation Policy CP21000, published by Transport for NSW in early 2021. This policy establishes a road user hierarchy that considers pedestrians first and private cars last, and provides local and State governments with **a powerful lever** to prioritise road space for active transport.

The following are general suggestions, most of which appear to be covered in the Byron Shire 10 Year Bike Plan:

- A logical, legible, accessible and permeable pedestrian and cycling network must be delivered alongside investments in end-of-trip facilities, wayfinding and education. A multi-pronged approach is needed to encourage the uptake of cycling and reduce dependence on private vehicles.
- Reduce speed limits to 30km/h on all local and residential streets
- We support any measures for bicycle parking and end-of-trip facilities included in at both ends of the cycleway. Facilities must include public charging for e-bikes and bicycle servicing hubs.
- A bicycle hire programme using docked or undocked share bikes will enable more people to take advantage of the multi-modal mobility offered by the future town centre and support the tourism economy. It is essential to ensure that popular daily destinations are easy to reach by bicycle for all residents of all ages and abilities.
- 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.
- Wayfinding supports visitors by clearly communicating the most efficient and safest route. Signage style for wayfinding should be consistent throughout the LGA and reflect the diversity of the community.
- Finally, education, information and events to promote walking and bike riding as a form of transport are an important part of any plan to increase participation in active travel. An example is the safe paths to school program which encourages active travel from childhood to improve health and mental wellbeing outcomes for future generations.

30km/h on local streets:

Residential streets form a critical part of any active travel network. 30 km/h speed limits reduce the need for separate bicycle infrastructure on local residential roads. 30 km/h^{ix} has been shown as an optimal speed limit to allow people driving and cycling to share the road safely 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^x limit since May 2021 and 30% of UK residents live in 20mph areas. The Western Australian Department of Transport has rolled out several 'bicycle boulevards'^{xi} using residential streets as part of its Safe Active Streets programme.

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, and physical separation between bicycle and car traffic, data-based traffic enforcement and behaviour-change education.

We thank Byron Shire Council for the opportunity to comment on the Mullumbimby to Brunswick Heads cycleway design concept. We believe that it addresses many social, environmental and economic sustainability issues through a well-considered place-based innovation that complements the unique topography of the Byron Hinterland. This is an exciting and progressive active transport plan and a great example to other LGAs. We look forward to its progress and continued consultation with Byron Shire Council as this project develops.

Kind regards,

Francis O'Neill



Head of Advocacy
Bicycle NSW

Bicycle NSW has been the peak bicycle advocacy group in NSW for forty-seven years, and has over 30 affiliated local Bicycle User Groups. Our mission is to 'create a better environment 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, low-congestion, low-carbon, economical form of travel great for all ages.

ⁱ Byron Shire Council 2022, Mullumbimby to Brunswick, Have Your say, <https://www.byron.nsw.gov.au/Your-Say-Byron-Shire/Mullumbimby-to-Brunswick-Heads-cycleway-route-options>

ⁱⁱ Byron Shire Council 2022, Byron Shire 10 Year Bike Plan, <https://www.byron.nsw.gov.au/Services/Footpaths-and-cycleways/Pedestrian-footpath-and-cycleway-plans/Byron-Shire-Bike-Plan/Byron-Shire-Bike-Plan#:~:text=Some%20of%20the%20main%20improvements,design%20to%20support%20safe%20cycling.>

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- ⁱⁱⁱ Queensland Government 2019, Cycling investment in Queensland, <https://www.tmr.qld.gov.au/Travel-and-transport/Cycling/Cycling-investment-in-Queensland>
- ^{iv} Byron Shire Council 2022, Mullumbimby to Brunswick, Have Your say, <https://www.byron.nsw.gov.au/Your-Say-Byron-Shire/Mullumbimby-to-Brunswick-Heads-cycleway-route-options>
- ^v Byron Shire Council 2022, Byron Shire 10 year bike plan, <https://www.byron.nsw.gov.au/Services/Footpaths-and-cycleways/Pedestrian-footpath-and-cycleway-plans/Byron-Shire-Bike-Plan/Byron-Shire-Bike-Plan#:~:text=Some%20of%20the%20main%20improvements,design%20to%20support%20safe%20cycling.>
- ^{vi} Byron Shire Council 2022, Mullum to Brunz cycleway route options report, <https://www.byron.nsw.gov.au/Your-Say-Byron-Shire/Mullumbimby-to-Brunswick-Heads-cycleway-route-options>
- ^{vii} Rail Trails Australia 2003, Economic benefits of rail trails, <https://www.railtrails.org.au/news/economic-benefits-of-rail-trails/>
- ^{viii} 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/>
- ^{ix} 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>
- ^x 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>
- ^{xi} Western Australia Department of Transport. Safe Active Streets Programme. <https://www.transport.wa.gov.au/activetransport/safe-active-streets-program.asp>