

Engineering Services – Traffic Section
Penrith City Council
PO Box 60
Penrith NSW 2751

28th October 2022

Dear Penrith City Council,

Re: Penrith Accessible Trails Hierarchy Study (PATHS) Implementation Plan 2022-2032

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the plans to deliver shared user paths and other bicycle infrastructure across Penrith City.

Bicycle NSW has been the peak bicycle advocacy group now 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'*, 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.

The Penrith Accessible Trails Hierarchy Study (PATHS) Implementation Plan 2022-2032 outlines an excellent vision for the development of important active transport connections in Penrith.

Bicycle NSW wishes to congratulate Penrith City Council for delivering 30km of high-quality shared user paths since the PATHS 2012 plan. A highlight is the fantastic 2018 'Yandhai' active transport bridge which provides a vehicle-free crossing of the Nepean River for pedestrians and bike riders, connecting with the Great River Walk and the 6.4km Bridge to Bridge loop.

The new Implementation Plan will support further progress in the Penrith area. We are impressed by the following features of the plan:

- A systematic analysis has been undertaken to score a 'long list' of possible projects on merit. 20 priority projects have been clearly identified and mapped. It will be easy for all stakeholders to understand what is planned where.
- The priority projects will be embedded into Council delivery and operational plans to ensure they can be included in budgets and work schedules over the next 10 years.
- 10 **regional** priority routes align with Green Grid and Principal Bicycle Network routes. They will create strategic active transport corridors along state-classified roads. It is clearly understood that these projects must be delivered in collaboration with NSW Government, with Council advocating for new active transport infrastructure whenever Transport for NSW proposes major roadway upgrades.
- The 10 **local** priority routes focus on connecting key daily destinations such as public transport hubs, future metro stations, schools, hospitals, business parks and shops. These routes emphasise the potential of cycling for transport as well as recreation. They will play an important role in reducing car dependency.

- The plan takes a holistic approach of making the most of existing infrastructure to expand the network, creating the maximum impact with the minimum outlay.
- Council demonstrates deep knowledge of best practice in cycleway design and delivery, wayfinding and end-of-trip facilities, and the need to align with TfNSW Cycleway Design Toolbox.
- There is a clear intent to increase separation of people on bikes from vehicles and pedestrians in high-activity or high-speed corridors. The plan recognises that the current mix of shared paths, on-road shoulder lanes, and mixed traffic routes is inadequate for future needs.
- Council will collect data and continually evaluate if delivered infrastructure is having the desired impact on the uptake of active transport and the reduction in traffic growth.

This submission reinforces why it is essential to provide better active transport infrastructure in Penrith and sets out **a series of recommendations** to inform the final PATHS Implementation Plan 2022-2032.

Our recommendations are intended to complement the detailed [suggestions](#) from Bicycle User Group CAMWEST that draw on local knowledge and expertise. Bicycle NSW aligns with CAMWEST's advocacy regarding path upgrades, bridges and short connections that would join up existing shared path infrastructure to create a much more useful network for residents of all ages and abilities.

In some cases, minor changes would to quickly expand the network. For example, CAMWEST highlights many examples of footpaths that could be shared paths but mapping is uncomplete, signage is unclear, and bike-friendly details like ramped kerbs are missing. We support CAMWEST's calls to complete missing links at Jordan Springs, Ron Mulock Oval, Boronia Park, Cranebrook Road, Jamison Road, Werrington Road, the South Creek corridor and along Forrester Road from Ropes Crossing to St Marys Station.

Opportunities:

In 2021, Penrith LGA recorded a population of 216,000. This figure is expected to increase by 35% to 270,000 by 2041ⁱ. Congestion is a major and growing problem and the transport network is already under pressure. To maintain lifestyle amenity as population grows, Council will need to balance transport options and ensure that the good access is provided to important destinations for all road users. It is imperative not to continue with a business-as-usual approach to transport where over 80% of trips are made by private car (compared to an average of 69% across Greater Sydney).

The area has a low mode share for active and public transport. Only 5% of all trips in Penrith are made by public transport. Walking-only trips account for 8% of journeys and bike riding account for 1%ⁱⁱ. However, there is latent demand for active travel. Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, Council received many requests from residents for better bike facilities.

Further impetus to reduce car use and encourage active travel comes from research published by the Western Sydney Diabetes alliance showing that more than half of Western Sydney's population is overweight and at risk of developing type 2 diabetes. The incidence rises by 1% annuallyⁱⁱⁱ. Western Sydney is described as a *diabetogenic* environment where the local economy and built environment make it difficult for the residents to engage in a healthy lifestyle. There is an urgent need to change the environment in which people live, work, travel and play to address the social determinants of poor health. Active transport infrastructure in Penrith will help reverse inactivity and improve public health.

Another critical benefit of more active travel infrastructure is the mitigation of the **urban heat island** effect. Western Sydney is particularly susceptible to extreme heat events which affect residents' ability to work, study, sleep and exercise^{iv}. By focusing development on parks, open spaces and tree-lined shared paths rather than roads and car parks, Penrith will contribute to creating a cooler city and healthy environment for all citizens.

Bicycle infrastructure has a low cost per km, offering better value than road projects and supporting Council's financial sustainability. Over 100km of bike path can be delivered for the cost of 1km of new road^v. Bike riding facilities are proven to attract tourists and support the visitor economy. Penrith sits in a beautiful spot, straddling the Nepean River at the foot of the Blue Mountains and should take advantage of tourism opportunities. New businesses will be needed to support eco-, active and adventure tourism while existing businesses benefit from increased passing trade and foot traffic^{vi}.

However, as the map in Figure 1 exposes, the existing infrastructure for safe bike riding is disjointed. Many existing shared paths do not have tree coverage or space for trees, therefore contributing to urban heat and making these routes uninviting for walking and recreational purposes.

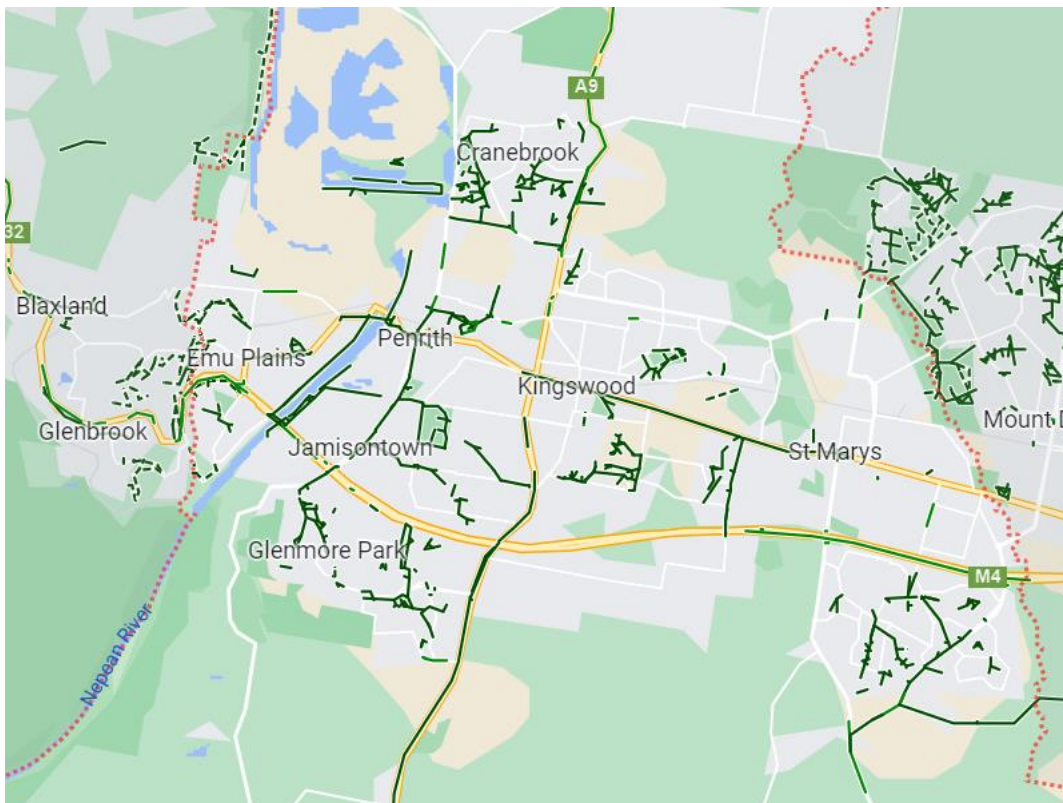


Figure 1:
The existing cycling network in Penrith.
(Source: Google Maps)

There has never been a better time to build infrastructure for bike riding and active transport. As the Minister for Infrastructure, Cities and Active Transport, Rob Stokes MP, set out in a recent speech^{vii}, 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 active transport networks. Such 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.

Such ambitions are bolstered by the Road User Space Allocation Policy CP21000^{viii}, published by Transport for NSW in early 2021. This policy establishes a road user hierarchy that considers pedestrians first and

private cars last (Figure 2), and provides local and State governments with a **powerful lever** to prioritise road space for active transport.



NSW Government has committed to provide a regional cycle network in Greater Sydney, as outlined in the Future Transport 2056 Plan^{ix}.

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^x. 30 strategic corridors have been identified for eastern Sydney, making up approximately 250 km of cycle network. 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.

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 Western Parkland City network should be published by the middle of 2023 and will undoubtedly include the regional priority routes identified in the PATHS Implementation Plan 2022-2032.

The Implementation Plan also aligns with other important NSW State Government and Council strategies that promote and support active transport. These include the new Future Transport Plan, the Western City District Plan, Sydney Green Grid and Penrith Green Grid Strategy.

Recommendations:

- **Future-proof the active transport network**

The status quo of walking and cycling activity in Penrith 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^{xi} (see Figure 3). 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^{xii} and the 2017 Austroads Cycling Aspects of Austroads Guides (AP-G88-17) to ensure that the paths are constructed to current best practice.

Figure 3: 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 to 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.

- **Provide segregated infrastructure rather than shared paths in high-activity locations**

The separation of bike riders from pedestrians on major active transport corridors must be a key policy position of Penrith Council, improving safety and creating space to accommodate future demand. Shared paths are not suitable for areas with high pedestrian and cycling activity and will not lead to an acceptable level of amenity and safety for either walkers or riders, with conflict occurring between different users.



Figure 4: Separate paths for walking and cycling reduce conflict and minimise the visual and environmental impact of widened shared paths (Source: <http://www.pedbikeimages.org/> - Dan Burden)

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

The Bicycle NSW *Build it for Everyone* policy pillar^{xiii} sets a standard that bicycle infrastructure should be fit for eight-year-old children or elders to ride on. Penrith should aspire to this standard and must not include 'door zone' bike lanes, bike stencils on the road or dangerous intersections that deter the 48%^{xiv} of people who are 'interested but concerned' from making the switch to bike riding.

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^{xv}.

- **Provide separated bicycle paths for on-road sections of cycleways**

Where cycle infrastructure is provided in road corridors, there is a choice of treatments. Shared paths in the form of widened footpaths have been the preferred option for most councils.

However, there are several reasons why **a shared path** is not appropriate for important and well-used sections of the 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 bicycle 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.

Penrith 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^{xvi}. 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.

An alternative to separated bicycle paths, only suitable for quiet residential streets with low traffic volumes, is a shared space 'bicycle boulevard' or 'quietway' treatment where traffic calming interventions ensure very slow vehicle speeds. Most bike riders will feel safe using the vehicle lanes if traffic speeds and volumes are low.

The Western Australian Department of Transport has rolled out several 'bicycle boulevards' using residential streets as part of its Safe Active Streets programme^{xvii}. In addition to a 30 km/h speed limit, a range of physical interventions support slower speeds and reduce traffic volumes and rat running.

Many councils, including Randwick, Parramatta and City of Sydney, have installed pop-up cycleways to expand the network quickly. These lanes have demonstrated the importance of physical separation to the usability of bike infrastructure, while showcasing less expensive ways to provide it (Figure 5). Permanent changes to kerbs, parking and landscaping can then be made when funds allow.



Figure 5: Pop-up infrastructure in Sydney (Source: Bicycle NSW / Randwick Today)

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

Residential streets form a critical part of any active travel network, connecting homes to the regional routes and Green Grid corridors. 30 km/h speed limits reduce the need for separate 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^{xviii} 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^{xix}.

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^{xx}.

- **Be strong about removing on-street parking**

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. 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.

Studies show that parking spaces in commercial areas are less significant for customers than many businesses expect, with owners overestimating the proportion of customers arriving by car by a factor of 3^{xxi}. Visitors themselves overwhelmingly prefer widened footpaths, even if it means sacrificing some parking spaces. Cyclists and pedestrians are better customers, spending over twice as much time in the area and 40% more money per month than people driving. A report from London showed that improvements to the public realm to enable safer walking and cycling lead to a 30% increase in trade^{xxii}.

A parking survey can be useful to determine precise usage patterns for on-street parking. With accurate data to reflect on, the community may find it easier to accept the loss of parking 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 Council strategies, small delays to vehicle traffic should never prevent the delivery of safer, more efficient and more attractive active transport infrastructure. Pedestrian and bicycle level of service should be optimised with the following features:

- Instant green on demand for pedestrians and bicycles at mid-block crossings, with induction loop detectors for bicycles/wheelchairs/mobility scooters and fully accessible push buttons.
- Longer crossing times so that pedestrians of all ages and abilities have time to cross safely and without stress.
- Automatic green for pedestrians/bicycles at all signalised intersections so there is no need to press a 'beg button'
- Raised crossings at unsignalised intersections will slow cars and improve safety.
- Bicycle paths must continue across both raised and signalised crossings so people riding bikes are not required to dismount.

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

Climate change is causing an increase in hot weather in Western Sydney. 44 days over 35C were recorded in Penrith in 2019^{xxiii}. 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. Bicycle NSW supports the efforts of WSROC to increase city resilience to a hotter climate and endorses WSROC's Urban Heat Planning Toolkit.^{xxiv} We also recommend that Penrith City Council follows the research being undertaken into heat resilient street trees at Western Sydney University through the Which Plant Where? Project.

Conclusion:

The PATHS Implementation Plan 2022-2032 will kickstart a great number of exciting projects to benefit the local community. Community and stakeholder endorsement at this stage will allow Council to develop critical elements of the active transport network in detail. It is essential that Council has 'shovel-ready' projects in the pipeline for when funding becomes available. This is an increasingly important pre-requisite for NSW Government support.

Safe infrastructure to support walking and cycling will benefit everyone in the community, reducing congestion, noise and pollution while improving public health and providing more equitable access to employment, businesses, services and public transport. 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^{xv}.

Bicycle NSW looks forward to working with Penrith City Council to progress the detailed design of walking and cycling infrastructure. Please reach out to Bicycle NSW with any questions or help needed. If requested, we would be delighted to assist with advocating for cycling infrastructure in the LGA through our connections with politicians, Transport for NSW and neighbouring metropolitan councils.

We also ask Council to engage with CAMWEST, who would like to be more active in Penrith. BUG members have the skills and capacity to contribute to developing cycling in the area. They could be part of an active transport advisory committee, assist with auditing the current routes, provide feedback on proposals and promote community participation in bike-related events.

Yours faithfully,



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ⁱ Penrith City Council. 2022. Penrith Accessible Trails Hierarchy Study (PATHS) Implementation Plan for 2022-2032. https://hdp-au-prod-app-penr-yoursay-files.s3.ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/6716/6431/2846/PATHS_Penrith_Accessible_Trails_Hierarchy_Study_Implementation_Plan_2022-2032.pdf

ⁱⁱ Penrith City Council. 2022. Penrith Accessible Trails Hierarchy Study (PATHS) Implementation Plan for 2022-2032. https://hdp-au-prod-app-penr-yoursay-files.s3.ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/6716/6431/2846/PATHS_Penrith_Accessible_Trails_Hierarchy_Study_Implementation_Plan_2022-2032.pdf

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^{iv} Climate Council. 2021, Jan 28. Untouchable playgrounds: urban heat and the future of Western Sydney. <https://www.climatecouncil.org.au/urban-heat-island-effect-western-sydney/>

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

^{vi} Rachele, J. 2016, May 12. Do the sums: bicycle-friendly changes are good for business, The Conversation [Online as at 24/2/2021] <https://theconversation.com/do-the-sums-bicycle-friendly-changes-are-good-business-58213>

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^{viii} NSW Government, Road User Space Allocation Policy CP21000,

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