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7<sup>th</sup> December 2022

Dear Waverley Council,

**Re: Birrell Street renewal**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the plans to upgrade Birrell Street in Waverley with new landscaping, wider footpaths, safer crossings and new bicycle infrastructure.

Bicycle NSW has been the peak bicycle advocacy group in NSW for forty-seven years, and has more than 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 recognise that Waverley Council is making progress to deliver high-quality active transport infrastructure after decades of inaction. The completed cycleway through Bondi Junction is a fantastic facility in a key strategic location and Curlewis Street will be under construction soon. Ridership will undoubtedly grow as more connections to the surrounding residential areas are created.

Birrell Street is an important regional route from the Centennial Park to Bronte. **Bicycle NSW fully supports upgrades that will improve conditions for people walking and riding. However, we ask Waverley Council to take further steps to deliver a truly future-proof protected facility along this corridor that will enable residents of all ages and abilities to cycle safely.**

Option Two offers **no** protection for bike riders to and will do nothing to encourage more people to cycle, or help Waverley meet its ambitious mode share targets to increase the proportion of trips undertaken on foot, bike or public transport to 63% by 2031<sup>i</sup>. Option Two should not be pursued. It is unclear why this unsafe 'solution' was exhibited at all and reflects a worrying lack of urgency for Council to act on the recent resolution to reach net zero by 2035<sup>ii</sup> and its raft of excellent strategic plans that have been agreed with the community.

**Option One is preferred over Option Two** and provides safe conditions for riding uphill.

However, we have several concerns about the proposals:

- Bike riders heading downhill are expected to mix with fast traffic, with no protection from opening car doors.
- A critical section of Birrell Street between Henrietta Street and Tamarama Street, providing access towards Bondi, Tamarama and Bronte beaches, is omitted.

- The promise to retain *every parking space* is against Transport for NSW policies and Waverley strategies that aim to rebalance movement and place on local streets and prioritise road space for active transport.
- The plans do not include a safe crossing at point on Birrell Street between Bourke and Brisbane Streets for the existing bicycle route between Bondi Junction and Randwick.

This submission makes several recommendations to inform the further planning of Birrell Street. We thank BIKEast for excellent advocacy in the Waverley area and align with its submission.

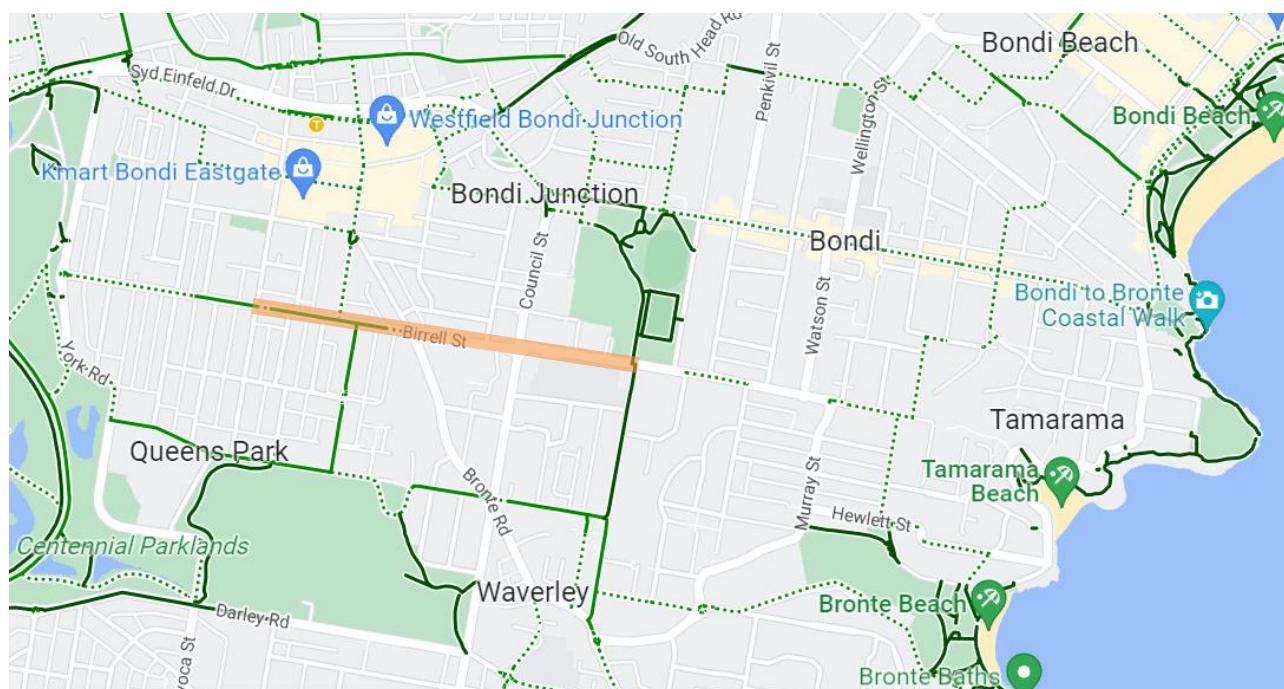


Figure 1: the stretch of Birrell Street included in the current plans is highlighted in orange (Source: Google Maps)

## Opportunities

Bicycle NSW is delighted that Birrell Street is being prioritised for active transport by Waverley Council, despite its exclusion from the 2013 Bike Plan.

As set out in our [2021 submission](#) to inform the development of the new Waverley Bicycle Strategy and Action Plan, Birrell Street is a well-used and significant corridor that connect several schools. The corridor was part of the Principal Bicycle Network developed in 2018/2019 and it is an important element of a key Green Grid<sup>iii</sup> opportunity to link Hyde Park with Bronte. We look forward to the exhibition of the draft Bicycle Strategy in 2023.

There has never been a better time to build infrastructure for bike riding and active transport. The Minister for Active Transport, Rob Stokes MP, set out in a recent speech<sup>iv</sup> that walking and cycling projects to 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.

As Lord Mayor Clover Moore explains in **Sustainable Sydney 2030—2050 Continuing the Vision<sup>v</sup>**, the reconfiguration of streets to provide more space for walking and cycling does not only achieve transport objectives. Projects such as Birrell Street are significant urban design proposals with a vision to deliver quieter, calmer, leafier streets that benefit every resident and visitor.

In 2016, Waverley had 72,100 residents. The population is forecast to grow by around 8,000 people to 80,100 by 2031, an increase of 11%<sup>vi</sup>. Although Waverley has a relatively low modal share for private car trips and modest car ownership compared to the rest of Sydney (Figure 2), it is essential to maintain downward pressure on these figures to create space for active and public transport infrastructure and prevent worsening congestion as the population increases.

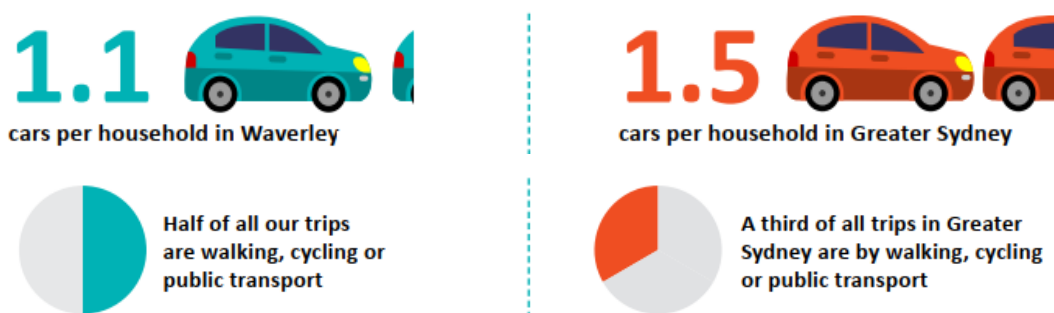


Figure 2: Extracts from the People, Movement and Places integrated transport strategy 2017. (Source: Waverley Council)

Cycling in Waverley was initially planned through the 1982 Inner Sydney Bike Plan with council bike strategies published in 1989, 1999 and 2013<sup>vii</sup>. Despite this plethora of different plans over the last 3 decades, the cycling network in Waverley remains very fragmented in 2022.

On a positive note, Waverley has the highest levels of bike riding in Australia accounting for nearly 5% of all trips, double the Sydney average<sup>viii</sup>. The dense urban form means that the average trip distance is short, at just 2.2 km per trip, and easy to cover on a bike. 3.1% of journeys to work in the Waverley LGA are by bicycle, with some suburbs having a higher mode share for work trips - for example Tamarama 5.9%, Bronte 4.8% and Bondi 3.7%. There is so much scope to further increase bicycle use and capitalise on the growing popularity of dockless share bikes, e-bikes and cargo bikes.

Waverley's People, Movement and Places (PMP) 2017<sup>ix</sup>, the adopted integrated transport plan, establishes a clear transport hierarchy that puts people first by prioritising pedestrians and cyclists, followed by public transport and shared mobility with private vehicles to be considered last. The plan encourages active and public transport, and supports better streets and public spaces. The PMP has already influenced Waverley's development controls with a zero minimum car parking rate, and a reduced maximum car parking rate.

Waverley's transport hierarchy now aligns with NSW Government policy. In February 2021, Transport for NSW published the Road User Space Allocation Policy<sup>x</sup> and established a road user hierarchy that considers pedestrians first and private cars last. Although the policy does not apply to Council-owned roads, they have unleashed a new era of people-first thinking after decades of designing our streets primarily around the movement and storage of private cars.

PMP outlines 12 Signature Projects where Council can focus funding, advocacy and delivery to create the 30-minute city for residents, workers and visitors. When Waverley Council asked the community to nominate the highest priority transport projects, separated safe cycleways was selected by a large margin – nearly twice as much as any other initiative<sup>xi</sup>. As a result, a key Signature Project is the provision of cycling infrastructure.

**Delivering more safe infrastructure to support cycling must be a priority for Waverley Council.**

## Recommendations for Birrell Street

- **Install a separated cycleway that can be used in both directions**

Birrell Street has adequate width to incorporate a bi-directional cycleway. There are limited bus movements and stretches without street parking. A pair of one-way bicycle path could also be considered. It is entirely possible to reallocate additional space in Birrell Street to active transport.

Waverley Council must continue brave discussions with the community about the need to reflect the priorities set out in the Road User Space Allocation Policy<sup>xii</sup> and Council's own strategic plans. It is time for Council to prioritise the safety and mobility of vulnerable road users and stop preserving public space for storing private motor vehicles.

There are two less satisfactory options that could be considered:

- **Create a shared user path on the downhill side Birrell Street to accommodate less confident cyclists**

As set out in earlier [submissions](#) to Waverley, Bicycle NSW does not generally support shared paths in the road-related environment, particularly for key sections of the regional cycling network. Shared paths cause conflict between people walking and cycling, and footpath widening often necessitates the loss of vegetation and mature trees.

However, shared paths may provide a useful alternative to cycling downhill in mixed traffic, and allow bike riders to access quieter streets to complete their journeys. We ask Waverley Council to refer to BIKEast's submission, which suggests the sections of Birrell Street where a shared path could be considered.

- **Develop Birrell Street as a 'quietway'**

With traffic filtering to reduce traffic volumes, 30 km/h speed limits and range of interventions to slow vehicles, Birrell Street could be safe for bike riders without physical separation. A concerted and integrated effort by Council and community to reduce car use for local journeys will be essential - but this mode shift is urgently needed to meet strategic goals. Quietways improve safety and amenity for all road users and residents without the expense of constructing dedicated infrastructure.

- **Remove the slip lanes at the junctions of Birrell Street with Carrington Road and Bronte Road**

Removing the slip road will improve pedestrian safety and amenity and allow much needed landscaping to be added to the streetscape. Slip roads are dangerous as they permit vehicles to turn without slowing down. When the fast movement of vehicles is facilitated, people are less likely to walk or cycle or allow their children to travel independently.

- **Extend the cycleway for the full length of Birrell Street**

We understand that budget is limited, but detailed design work should embrace for a cycleway stretching from Centennial Park to Tamarama Street to ensure an integrated solution when funds become available to deliver the full park-to-beach connection

- **Construct continuous footpaths at side street intersections**

The artist's impression shows excellent high-quality treatments that raise road and the cycleway to footpath level at the junction with a side street to create a continuous footpath. The raised intersection slows turning cars, gives clear priority to pedestrians and improves accessibility, particularly for those in wheelchairs or pushing prams. However, it is not clear where this treatment will be applied. Bicycle NSW would like to see continuous footpaths at every unsignalised intersection with a minor road.

- **Add new pedestrian crossings to Birrell Street**

Two options for improving existing crossing near the junctions with Isabella Street and Stanley Street. Bicycle NSW definitely prefers Option One, with attractive landscaped kerb extensions to narrow the road. We suggest including a raised 'wombat' crossing to further slow vehicles.

We ask Council to include further raised pedestrian crossings along Birrell Street, with locations determined during the detailed design stage in consultation with road users and residents.

Of particular importance is a safe crossing on Birrell Street between Bourke and Brisbane Streets for cyclists using the existing bicycle route between Bondi Junction and Randwick. BIKEast has suggested the optimal location for the relocated crossing on the desire line for users of this key north-south route.

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

Removal of street parking may 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.

It is getting easier and easier to access a car for trips that are too awkward by public or active transport. Car sharing and ride hailing are slowly chipping away at the one-person, one-car mentality that Australians are accustomed to after 60 years of car-centric planning. In 2021, 28.5% of Bondi Junction households had no car and this figure can be expected to increase<sup>xiii</sup>. In 2019, membership of local car share schemes grew by 20%, showing a huge appetite for new models of vehicle use.

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.

- **Ensure that the Birrell Street bicycle path is inclusive**

All types of bikes should be accommodated by the cycling infrastructure, including cargo bikes and tricycles. 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<sup>xiv</sup>.

- **Maximise pedestrian- and cyclist-priority at 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 the raised and signalised crossings so people riding bikes are not required to dismount.

- **Refer to the new Cycleway Design Toolbox<sup>xv</sup> to ensure that the new cycleway is constructed to current best practice.**

## Conclusion:

Cycling has the potential to solve so many of the area's problems with regard to congestion, health, equity, pollution and noise and it is very frustrating that the movement and parking of private cars is still prioritised over active transport.

Minister for Active Transport, Rob Stokes MP, is clear that his preference is for properly separated walking and cycling infrastructure<sup>xvi</sup>. 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.

Bicycle NSW looks forward to working with Waverley Council to progress the delivery of its integrated cycle network. 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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Bicycle NSW



Peter McLean

Chief Executive Officer  
Bicycle NSW

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