

Western Harbour Tunnel and Warringah Freeway Upgrade team
Transport for NSW
Locked Bag 928
North Sydney NSW 2059

Via email: whtbl@transport.nsw.gov.au

20th December 2022

Dear project team,

Re: Draft North Sydney Tree Replacement Strategy

Bicycle NSW is grateful to the Warringah Freeway project team for the opportunity to provide feedback on its tree replacement strategy. This is a brief submission, as tree selection is neither in our remit or area of expertise. Tree preservation however, is vital to urban liveability and sustainability.

The North Sydney Tree Replacement Strategy will not come close to replacing the heavy losses for many decades and it neglects to include or reference the Greening our City Premier's Priority and NSW Government target to see an urban Tree Canopy of 40% achieved by 2036.

North Sydney Council currently has an urban tree canopy of approximately 34% which is well below the NSW target of 40% by 2036, all neighboring Councils have urban tree canopies of 40% or more. The strategy follows the destruction of over 750 trees between North Sydney and Naremburn, to pave the way for the Warringah Freeway upgrade and the proposed Beaches Link. In the reported example of Cammeray Park, hundreds of trees were removed overnight with zero community consultation. Local government and community members were understandably upset and saw this as a cynical exercise. For many residents who have seen what was beautiful about their place destroyed without any recourse, the strategy will be regarded as an attempt to regain trust, after the fact.



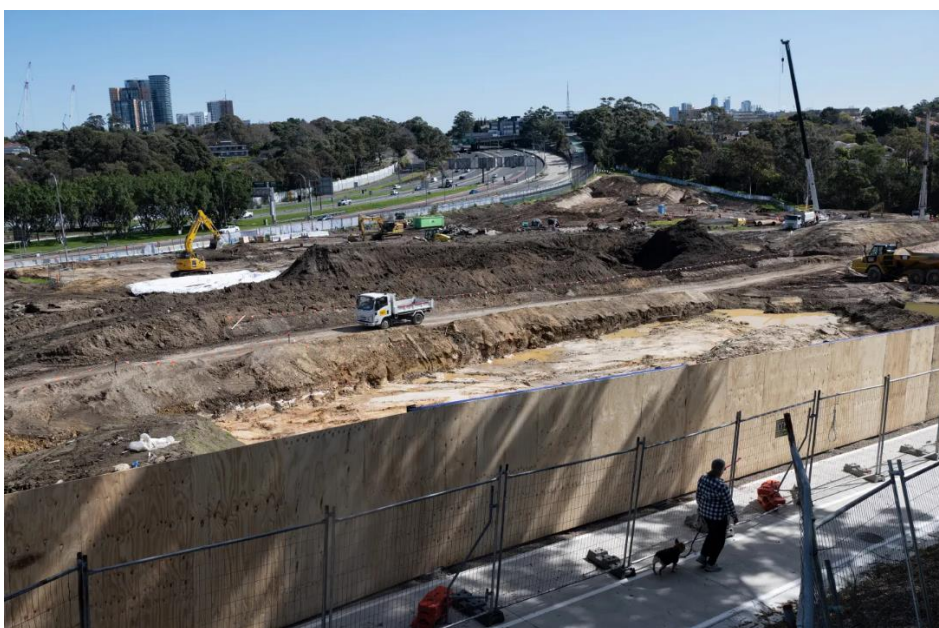
The Cammeray Park tree loss represents a fraction of the overall impact. Hundreds of trees are currently being removed from the High Street area (Source: TfNSW)

The documents avoid specifying the total number of mature trees lost but community groups calculate that it will amount to 3,000. Yet more trees will be impacted by the Western Harbour Tunnel project.

As a stakeholder representing the interests of active transport in the Warringah Freeway corridor, our concerns about widened motorways and induced demand for cars at the expense of walkable green spaces is on record. We consequently question the stated 'need' for large scale tree removal.



Photo courtesy of SMH showing mature trees removed from Cammeray Golf Club.ⁱ



Overall visual impact, SMH.ⁱⁱ

Leaving aside the contested issue of 'need', Bicycle NSW doubts that a strategy of consultation, so late in the piece, will restore community trust. Regardless of the damage already done to the community and the environment, there remains the issue of tree replacement.

The 2:1 replacement of older established trees is based on the false premise that all trees are equal.

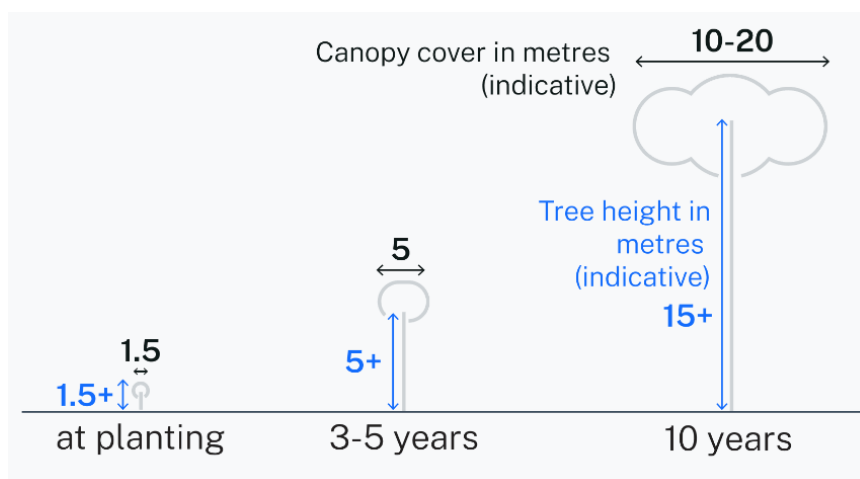


Image from North Sydney Tree Replacement Strategyⁱⁱⁱ indicating canopy growth over time.^{iv}

Trees are vital to the reabsorption of CO₂ and significantly cool the lived environment. The removal, especially of old trees, contributes to the urban heat island effect and a hardening of the built environment. Whilst it is catastrophic to the communities of fauna - the possums, gliders and migratory birds who depend on the hollows of older trees for habitat, tree loss is deeply felt by humans physically and psychologically. Humans develop a familiar relationship and sense of place living and moving around trees. There are many studies on the softening effect of trees on the urban landscape, both physically and psychosocially. There is a strong relationship between a healthy amount of green space and improved psychological wellbeing^{vi} and reduced anti-social behaviour^{vii}.

With a higher frequency and intensity of 40+ degree days under climate change, loss of canopy exacerbates the health and safety impacts created by the urban heat island effect. The mitigation of and adaptation to these impacts is prioritised in the NSW Future Transport Strategy 2061^{viii} and Active Transport Strategy^{ix}. Bicycle NSW would like to see these valuable frameworks applied in the North Sydney Tree Replacement Strategy.

Bicycle NSW recommends that TfNSW considers the essential nature of trees in creating a sense of place and apply this in good faith. If it is serious about tree replacement, then it needs to understand that a ratio of 2:1 is ineffective and inappropriate. Many more trees will be required at a much higher ratio due to the requisite years in regrowth - 2:1 is manifestly inadequate. A fifty-year-old habitat tree is worth decades of younger progeny. Regardless, a larger ratio will never replace the innumerable fauna and unique communities already lost.

Yours sincerely,

Frances O'Neill

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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.

ⁱ Sydney Morning Herald, <https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/like-a-bomb-site-hundreds-of-trees-removed-for-north-shore-freeway-upgrade-20220824-p5bccw.html>

ⁱⁱ Ditto.

ⁱⁱⁱ North Sydney Tree Replacement Strategy, <https://caportal.com.au/rms/wfu/trees>

^{iv} Ditto.

^v National Library of Medicine,

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7775428/#:~:text=The%20study%20suggests%20that%20unintentional,for%20individuals%20in%20deprived%20groups.>

^{vi} World Economic Forum, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2021/04/city-trees-reduce-stress-and-anxiety/>

^{vii} Science Daily, <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2020/02/200227144253.htm>

^{viii} TfNSW, <https://www.future.transport.nsw.gov.au/documents/future-transport-strategy>

^{ix} TfNSW, https://www.future.transport.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-12/Active_transport_strategy_0.pdf