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Via email: Franco.Guerrisi@canadabay.nsw.gov.au

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Dear Franco,

Re: Heath Street Cycleway, Five Dock

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on Canada Bay Council's plans to remove the recently-constructed Heath Street Cycleway.

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 bicycle infrastructure 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 Heath Street Cycleway is an excellent piece of infrastructure and a credit to Canada Bay Council's sustainability and active transport strategies. There is no tangible reason to dismantle the cycleway. Bicycle NSW strongly opposes its removal.

The beginning of a significant regional route

The Heath Street Cycleway is a well-designed regional route that provides safety, convenience and comfort to pedestrians and bike riders. It calms traffic along Heath St and improves amenity for all road users and residents. Delivered in partnership with Transport for NSW, the Heath Street Cycleway progresses a key strategic cycleway corridor from the Eastern Harbour City to the Central River City.

The Heath Street Cycleway is the first of 6 segments of the Concord to Bay Run East-West Regional Cycleway (Figure 1). It was enabled by \$7 million from the NSW Government 'to improve open space and active transport links along the Parramatta Road corridor'. This is a Parramatta Road Urban Amenity Improvement Program (PRUAIP) collaboration between State agencies and local governments.

Stage 1 Heath St was built to improve regional bike connectivity between North Strathfield and Henley Marine Drive (The Bay Run). After a comprehensive feedback process, the route was selected to expand the local bike network and provide a safe cycling environment for people of all ages and abilities. Connection to key land uses including schools, parks, residences and businesses was a critical consideration in this process.

Heath St stage 1 is a key section of the East-West route with the potential of encouraging mode shift to active transport for multiple users. Canada Bay Council (CBC) notes that Heath St and its surrounds are packed with cars on 3 weekday afternoons and weekend mornings for sports fixtures at Timbrell Park. With a connected separated cycle route, park users, particularly children, would be able to safely ride there.



Figure 1: An overview of the Concord to Bay Cycleway connecting bicycle riders from Strathfield to the Inner West (Source: Canada Bay Council)

The decision to remove the separated cycleway and instead paint bike symbols on the road will discourage the mode shift that CBC seeks in all its policies. Opposition to change in the road environment, especially new cycleways, is common. This however, would be an unfortunate capitulation to a very small group not representative of all affected residents and sets up a concerning precedent for CBC's funded active transport partnerships with Transport for NSW.

Bicycle NSW and Canada Bay BUG note that the cycleway is successful because it works to keep bicycle riders safer, and thus encourages cycling. We also note that good bicycle infrastructure attracts opposition.

1. A consultant's "Review of as-built Heath St (regional cycleway works) 23/12/22" was commissioned by CBC to respond to increasingly hostile sentiment against the Heath Street Cycleway. This review advised CBC to remove the cycleway without substantiating its claims against it. It was then deleted from the CBC interactive Collaborate Canada Bay site whilst detailed plans to remove the separated cycleway remained.
2. Some residents have claimed that changed road conditions between Henley Marine Drive and First Avenue have made conditions less safe due to reduced visibility of parked cars and residents utilising driveways. Whilst conditions have changed, there is no undue difficulty compared to other narrower streets. Indeed, all claims about street width interfering with visibility/ safety/ drivability are moot given that most streets in suburbs east of Canada Bay are considerably narrower.
3. Regarding the width of Heath St between kerbs at different cross sections between Henley Marine Drive and First Ave, Canada Bay BUG disputes the consultant's claim of 8.6m. There is no evidence as to where this measurement was taken and the report is unavailable. Bay BUG members measured from east kerb to west cycle lane buffer to be 9.05m. In comparison, a number of neighbouring two-way streets are 8.6m wide.

- Concrete separators are essential in preventing vehicle intrusion and a standard item in the Transport for NSW Cycleway Design Toolboxⁱ. The separators on Heath St provide no obstruction to pedestrians due the gaps between them and driveways.

All of the resident concerns regarding traffic navigability would be allayed by lowering speeds to 30 km/h.

Narrower, filtered streets support reduced speeds as noted in the NSW Movement and Place Street Design guidelinesⁱⁱ for the treatment of a **yield street**:

‘A very quiet residential street for living activities and movement at low speeds and volumes, with a carriageway that requires people driving vehicles to yield to one another to pass... Carriageway width is approximately 7.6-8m, with parallel car parking on both kerbside lanes.’



Figure 2: Middlemiss Street Mascot is characteristic of the yield street type as a quiet and calm local street (Image: Bicycle NSW)



Figure 3: By comparison, Heath St is wider and with reduced speeds will be even less of a safety risk (Bicycle NSW)

Reduced speed limits and the creation of a quiet or *yield street* will create an environment that encourages CBC's active travel, climate and sustainability strategies to be realised.

The Bicycle NSW *Build it for Everyone* policy pillarⁱⁱⁱ sets a standard that bicycle infrastructure should be fit for eight-year-old children or elders to ride on. According to the best practice 'cycling segmentation' model, developed in Portland USA to identify the type and needs of existing and potential bike ride riders^{iv}, such cycle paths will allow 70% of citizens to consider journeys by bike.

The issue is not safety. Overall safety is improved by separated infrastructure and speed reduction. Sadly, anti-cycleway sentiment latches on to perceptions of safety to reverse sound active transport decisions. Rather than attempt to refute unsubstantiated claims from a report that has been removed from the CBC website, Bicycle NSW urges CBC to consider all of its options.

Recommendations

CBC has more options at its disposal than is currently suggested in the announcement to remove the separated cycleway. There are statutory obligations involving project partners which must be considered along with attendant risks should CBC decide that retaining the facility in the face of a small but very vocal opposition is too difficult.

Time is your friend

CBC built the Heath Street Cycleway in good faith. The East West Regional Cycleway is part of a much wider NSW Active Transport and Future Transport Strategies and was made possible through a local and state government partnership involving \$7 million of NSW Government funding. Permission must be sought from the funding body to replace excellent infrastructure with road paint. Any such decision requires time - time that can be dedicated to exploring options including improved public consultation.

Additional consultation

There is opportunity for CBC to work with TfNSW to develop a wider public engagement strategy with regard to its active transport plans. The more closely the public can be brought on board to the planning process, utilising co-design principles, the more likely the plan is to succeed. Ideally this is done in the pre-planning stages and Bicycle NSW acknowledges that a level of consultation would have taken place. The fact remains however, that a more comprehensive process of public engagement involving, schools, residents, parents, sporting groups and utilising social media platforms and events will need to occur. CBC may not have factored the level of opposition to the cycleway and will need to discuss the matter with Transport for NSW to implement an adequately funded public engagement partnership.

There are so many positive messages about cycleways that can be communicated. Here is a handful:

Investment in bicycle infrastructure returns a minimum of \$5 for every dollar spent^v. According to a UK Government study^{vi}, other economic benefits of cycling include:

The local economy:

- Cyclists visit local shops more regularly, spending more than users of most other modes of transport
- Per square metre, cycle parking delivers 5 times higher retail spend than the same area of car parking
- Public realm improvements, including those that cater for cycling, have been shown to result in increased trade at local businesses; up to 49% in New York City

Personal benefits:

- Neighbourhoods with cycle-friendly characteristics – low traffic volumes, walkable, close to off-road cycle paths – are more desirable or have higher property values
- Residential property values rise 1% if motor vehicle traffic is reduced by 50%
- Children who walk or cycle to school tend to be more attentive and achieve better results
- Cycle friendly environments promote more physical activity in later years

Employment benefits:

- Facilitation of cycling to work leads to lower staff turnover
- Cycling facilities can overcome difficulties in accessing employment opportunities
- Cycling reduces absenteeism, boosting productivity: regular cyclists take one less sick day per year

Public infrastructure benefits:

- Cycling schemes can achieve more for less, with benefit-to-cost ratios in the in the range of 5:1 to 19:1 – some as high as 35.5:1

Transport and logistics benefits:

- Cycle freight offers a competitive advantage in city locations and is cheaper than motorised freight for small payloads over short distances. Cost savings range between 39% and 64% compared to a van-based service.
- An absence of dedicated cycling infrastructure will slow down buses and HGVs as mode share increases.
- Cycling has a lower capital cost than other forms of infrastructure
- Cycling can increase the reach of public transport

Cycle tourism:

- Cycle tourists on average spend more: around 9% per head per trip
- Cycle tourism is influenced by utility mode share: i.e. where cycling is attractive and thus more people cycle, there is a greater propensity for cycle-tourism

Understand the risks of removing good active transport infrastructure

The decision to remove separated bicycle infrastructure from a regional corridor will result in less confident people deciding not to ride.

It is a well-documented fact illustrated by the Portland Model that incomplete infrastructure excludes 'interested but concerned riders', 48% of the general population. Removing a key section of the network would degrade the value of the East-West Cycleway corridor as a regional active transport route for all ages and abilities. It also reverses progress towards CBC's strategic sustainability and active travel goals.

The other significant risk is to the operational integrity of CBC and an emboldening of opposition to its future active transport plans. Despite attempts to frame this as receptivity to community feedback, it will be viewed as capitulation to a small vocal interest group, not all of whom are residents.

Conclusion

Bicycle NSW understands and appreciates that CBC has come under strong opposition from a noisy minority who defend the status quo. However, CBC does have options, allies and the advantage of time.

We are happy to help.

If you have any questions regarding our position, please don't hesitate to get in contact.

Yours faithfully,



Francis O'Neill

Head of Advocacy
Bicycle NSW



Figure 4: The high-quality uphill protected cycleway on Heath Street, Five Dock (Bicycle NSW)

ⁱ Cycleway Design Toolbox: designing for cycling and micromobility. Transport for NSW.

<https://www.transport.nsw.gov.au/system/files/media/documents/2021/Cycleway-Design-Toolbox-Web.pdf>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.movementandplace.nsw.gov.au/design-principles/design-road-and-streets-guide/designing-local-streets/yield-street>

ⁱⁱⁱ Bicycle NSW (2018) Our Policy, [online as at 24/2/2021] <https://bicyclensw.org.au/our-policy/>

^{iv} Roger Geller. (2009). Four types of cyclists. Portland Bureau of Transportation.

<https://www.portlandoregon.gov/transportation/article/264746>

^v <https://www.tmr.qld.gov.au/Travel-and-transport/Cycling/Cycling-investment-in-Queensland>

^{vi} Rajé, F. and Saffrey, A. The Value of Cycling.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/509587/value-of-cycling.pdf