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Bicycle NSW feedback - Charlestown to Whitebridge shared pathway/cycleway

1 message

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To: assets@lakemac.nsw.gov.au, Peter Lee <peter@peddlee.com>, council@lakemac.nsw.gov.au, don.o@bigpond.net.au, Peter McLean <peter.mclean@bicyclensw.org.au>

Dear Mr Earls,

It is very encouraging to see Lake Macquarie Council making progress with the first stage of the Charlestown to Coast (C2C) active transport link.

Background to our advocacy:

Bicycle NSW wrote a submission during the last round of consultation in April 2022. <https://bicyclensw.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/2204011-Charlestown-to-Whitebridge-submission-Bicycle-NSW.pdf>

Bicycle NSW strongly supported the project. Although no route option was perfect, we recommended proceeding with Option One which closely follows the route championed by CycleSafe Network. It followed Frederick Street from the Pacific Highway, turned down Milson Street and on to Kaleen Street, before following a track through bushland to Flora Close, then along Lonus Avenue and down an existing path on Kopa Street to the Fernleigh Track. By passing 5 schools, the 2022 Option One route for connecting Charlestown and Whitebridge will help achieve another focus area - to provide safe active travel to school.

However, we raised some concerns about the 2022 Option One:

- The plans did not indicate the treatment proposed for each section. We were worried that the cycle route would evolve into sections of disparate shared paths broken by inconvenient intersections and may lack clarity. As a major regional route, it is essential that the Charlestown to Whitebridge route is continuous and legible.
- There was no safe link to Charlestown Square and the shared path through the leisure centre grounds was abandoned.
- Most significantly, there were no plans to construct a new bridge over the reservoir to reach the Fernleigh Track and allow a direct connection to Dudley via the disused rail corridor.

We clearly set out the reasons why Bicycle NSW does not generally support shared paths in the road-related environment. On-road separated bicycle paths on busy roads combined with 'Quietway' treatments on low-traffic streets are more appropriate.

The current consultation:

Unfortunately, the project has stalled as residents of Lonus Avenue have roundly objected to the route being located on their street. Lake Macquarie Council has been forced to consult once again on three options for the Whitebridge section of the C2C route, to link from the corner of Waran Road and Guna Street to the Fernleigh Track. Two of these still use Lonus Avenue.

We align with affiliated Bicycle User Group Newcastle Cycleways Movement (NCM) in objecting to Option Three: Waran Road.

Waran Road is a busy rat run street. It will need to be crossed twice. It provides a convoluted route to Whitebridge High school from the Fernleigh Track
It requires removal of mature tree canopy along Whitebridge High School.

There are two options for the Lonus Avenue route. *Again, we align with NCM in having no strong preference for Option One: Lonus (on nature strip) or Option Two: Lonus Avenue (on road)*

As discussed in our April 2022 submission, Bicycle NSW advocates for councils to move forward from default shared paths and deliver future-proof infrastructure that separates people walking and cycling. If necessary, road space can be reallocated from private vehicles. 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 councils seek. This will benefit local residents with quieter streets, and less pollution, noise and through-traffic.

A separated path would be ideal for Lonus Avenue with Quietway treatments used to enable safe on-road riding north of Kurraka Street. However, it is an imperfect world and a shared path would also be an acceptable solution for Lonus Avenue. A shared path has the benefit of creating walking space on the east side where there is currently no footpath. A shared path will be easier for the community to accept in an area very much wedded to cars and resistant to major changes to the road-related environment or loss of parking.

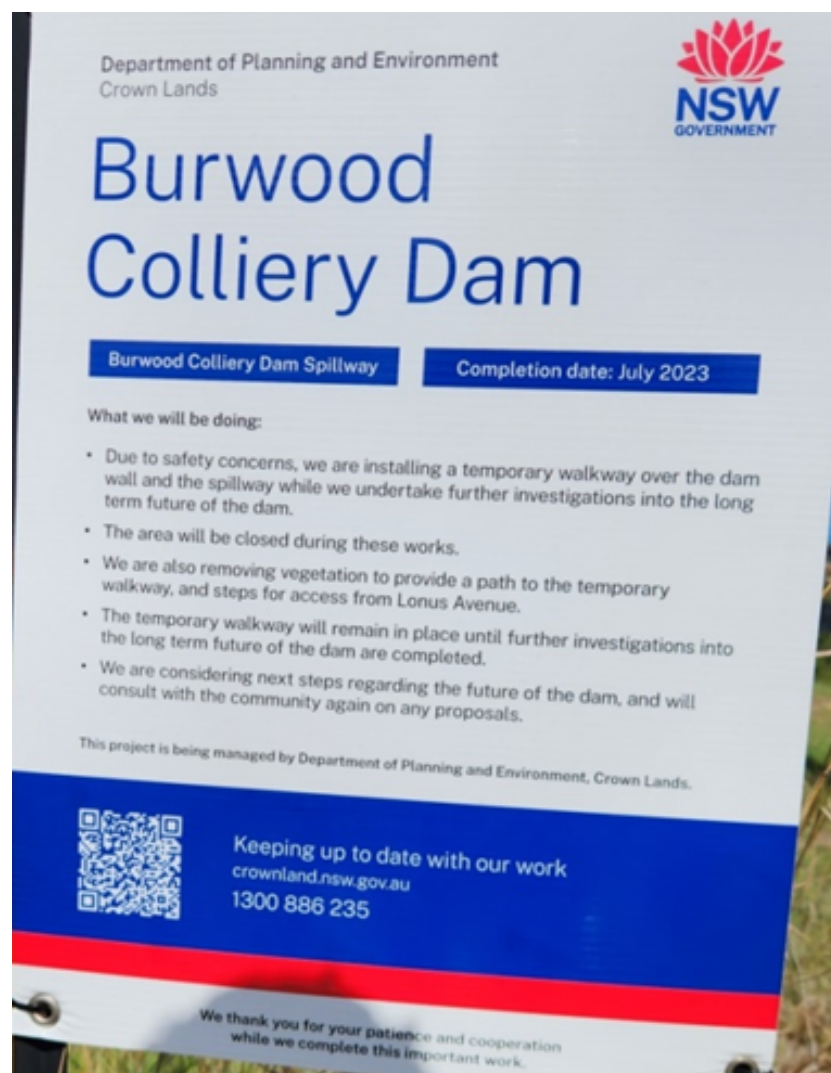
Note that we are not convinced that the proposals will deliver a safe connection to the Whitebridge shops, despite this being stated as a positive outcome for all options. The concept plans do not show the path south of Kopa Street, or any indication of how people on bike will navigate the roundabout at the junction with Dudley Road.

Exciting progress on the long-awaited track across Burwood Dam:

In our April 2022 submission we urged Council to push on with developing designs for the direct link to Dudley from the northern end of Lonus Avenue. This would involve an accessible switchback ramp down the hillside, a short bridge over the narrow point of the reservoir, crossing the Fernleigh Track and following the disused railway corridor. Such a path would complete the Charlestown to the Sea (C2C) route that has been the subject of very long-term advocacy from local residents. The NSW Government has promised significant new investment in active transport and grants may become available sooner than expected. A 'shovel-ready' project is always more likely to win funding.

However, a new opportunity has arisen to progress this project! The NSW Department of Planning and Environment, Crown Lands, has put up signs in the area to indicate that the NSW Government is looking into the future of the dam adjacent to the Fernleigh Track. An established history of public crossing of the dam required a temporary structure to make this crossing safer, and further investigation of options for the dam are underway. A stepped pathway up to Lonus will also be constructed to improve a well-used walking route to the high school.

The DPE is likely to recognize an obligation to beautify the Burwood Dam site. The community will advocate for a permanent and fully-accessible path from the dam up to Lonus Avenue. And as this is mostly Crown land, this cost is not likely to be a burden on Lake Macquarie Council.



Bicycle NSW supports NCM's suggestion for an alternative way forward:

- Build the less contested Charlestown to Flora Close section of the C2C track. The current deadlock should not hold up the western section of the project. Although cycle facilities along Lonus Avenue are important to create an all ages and abilities route, many riders will feel comfortable sharing this relatively quiet road out of school drop-off times.
- Wait for the completion of DPE's "further investigations" and community engagement on ways to beautify the area around Burwood Colliery Dam
- Council and councillors advocate for an accessible shared user path connecting Lonus Avenue with the Fernleigh Track to be a priority outcome of upgrades to the dam.

As NCM explains, a partially completed Charlestown to Whitebridge section of the C2C would be accepted by the bike community if there is a possibility of something magnificent happening in the near future - a direct link to the Fernleigh Track, the focus of local advocacy since 1997!

Bicycle NSW is happy to discuss these recommendations further with Council. We will work with local politicians to keep pressure on DPE to develop really good plans for the long-term future of the dam.

Many thanks and kind regards,



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