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Frenchs Forest Active Transport Network

1 message

Sarah Bickford <sarah.bickford@bicyclensw.org.au> 21 October 2024 at 01:14
To: council@northernbeaches.nsw.gov.au, Alex Yuen <alexander.yuen@northernbeaches.nsw.gov.au>, Felicity Shonk <felicity.shonk@northernbeaches.nsw.gov.au>, Phillip Devon <Phillip.Devon@northernbeaches.nsw.gov.au>

Dear Northern Beaches Council,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the plan for new shared paths in Beacon Hill, Frenchs Forest, and Davidson.

Bicycle NSW strongly supports the proposal to deliver 7.7km of new and upgraded paths, connecting schools and other daily destinations to help people of all ages and abilities undertake short trips by bike in the neighbourhood.

Projects like this are essential to achieve the targets set out in the Northern Beaches Transport Strategy Move 2038 - to double the active travel trips for households, commuters and school students and reduce trips by cars by 30% by 2038. Population will grow sharply in the Frenchs Forest area, there is no way the road network, or the environment, can sustain everyone travelling in cars. A business as usual approach to transport planning is not viable. Massively expanded active transport infrastructure is essential.

We would like to make a few comments:

- The plans are unclear and incomplete with too little detail for the community to understand the proposal. Many street names are missing or too small to read. More images and detail would help to clarify what is meant by a shared path, a continuous footpath and a shared user crossing. The inset photographs are tiny! There is a text version of the project broken down into sections but this is not easy to digest - as always, an image tells a thousand words. There is no detail about kerb extensions, landscaping, trees to be removed and replaced, or bike parking locations.
- It would be better to include existing shared paths, particularly on the northern side of Warringah Road between the hospital and Rabbett St, the eastern side of Forest Way south of Naree Road, and on the southern side or Warringah Road east of Hilmer Street. It is confusing to leave these off. The maps are also missing some existing crossings.
- Bicycle NSW asks that Better Streets Northern Beaches and Bicycle NSW are consulted on detailed plans once designs have been progressed. We are keen to help Council get the best possible outcome, including maximising opportunities for landscaping and kerb extensions.
- Bicycle NSW does not generally support shared paths in the road-related environment. However, it is an imperfect world and for this project, in a neighbourhood where volumes of pedestrians and bike riders are predicted to remain relatively low, a shared path is a reasonable compromise to deliver safer spaces to walk and ride without controversial changes to the streets. A shared path also creates walking space on streets where there is currently no footpath.
- However, it would be brilliant if a separated bike path could be considered for Blackbutts Rd. This would connect Forest Way to key community hubs such as Lionel Watts Oval, Glenrose shops, Glen Street library and theatre, Mimosa PS and Davidson High. The houses here all have off-street parking and the on-street parking is not used much. A separated bi-directional cycleway would roll out a 'green carpet' for new and less confident riders and demonstrate that Northern Beaches Council means business with prioritising cycling. A separated cycleway would have the added benefit of narrowing the vehicle lanes and slowing traffic.
- It is beyond time to get on and impose an area-wide speed limit of 40km/h, with 30km/h on side streets. It is exciting to see this proposed for large areas of North Balgowlah and Narrabeen. Bicycle NSW hopes Frenchs Forest is next. The streets will feel so much calmer and more bike-friendly if the traffic is slower. In addition, fewer expensive traffic calming interventions are required when the speed limit is set to 40km/h.
- It is fantastic that pedestrians and bike riders will be prioritised with continuous footpaths across side streets and raised shared user crossings. These should be raised to kerb level to ensure they are fully accessible. Extend kerbs as far as possible to reduce the crossing distance. Use the kerb extensions and any no stopping areas for new trees and landscaping.
- The project overview states that the shared paths will be 3m wide 'where possible', but locations where the paths will be narrower are not indicated on the plans. If verges have to be concreted over to achieve 3m paths, consider planting trees in the road space between parked cars. This will provide shade, break down the visual dominance of lines of parked cars and reduce vehicle speed. Remember that tree canopy, and the amenity and safety of people walking and cycling, are more important than a handful of parking spaces - particularly in an area where all houses have off-street parking.
- Council should apply the Road User Space Allocation Policy where needed to achieve 3m path widths consistently. Note that the Road User Space Allocation Policy, first published by Transport for NSW in early 2021, has recently been updated with a much stronger mandate to find a better balance between movement and place. The policy provides local governments with a powerful lever to prioritise road space for active transport. The TfNSW Road User Space Allocation Procedure contains guidance on the application of the policy.

- It is important that Council recognises that ‘strong and fearless’ bike riders will prefer to ride on the road. They ride at higher speeds than appropriate on a shared path, prefer to avoid navigating intersections and driveways, and feel comfortable in traffic. **Bike stencils** should be placed on the road, in the centre of each vehicle lane, to make it clear to all road users that they need to share the road safety and patiently with bike riders. We also recommend forward stop lines at intersections, head start green lights, and regular maintenance to ensure smooth surfaces.

- The short gap in the existing shared path on the east side of Forest Way should be filled to allow legal bike riding from the south to the mid-block crossing in front of Forestway shopping centre.

From the school and the hospital it is quick, level and convenient to use the shared path on the northern side of Warringah Road to reach the shopping centre and the Forest Way bus stops. However, the path stops abruptly just after the start of Forest Way:

And starts again after the pedestrian crossing.

The orange line shows the missing link.

- Existing crossings should be upgraded to shared user crossings where they form part of the shared path network. It is not clear if this is proposed, for example, at the crossings near the Pringle Avenue and Glen St intersection.

- There is a small section of path at the western end of Lionel Watts park, which could be extended to create a very useful link to the Glen St theatre car park and then onto Glenrose shops.
- Council should explore every opportunity to use modal filters and low speed limits to create more Quietways across the neighbourhood. Carefully located modal filters would cut down on rat running and allow 'every street to be a cycle street' with minimal physical intervention. Please refer to our article Making Local Street Safe for Bikes has global case studies, links and resources. Grace Avenue and Prince Charles Rd are examples of roads that would become valuable elements of the active transport network if traffic speeds and volumes were very low.
- Although outside the project footprint, Bicycle NSW supports community advocacy to upgrade the footpath on Forest Way north to Hews Pde to a shared path as soon as possible. The footpath is narrow and damaged, but it is used by many bike riders accessing Wakehurst PS and the backstreet route to Wyatt Reserve and John Colet.

Finally, we would like to reiterate our position on shared paths, as set out in our previous submission on projects in the Northern Beaches.

There are several reasons why shared paths are not appropriate for important sections of a 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. 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 bicycle paths have many benefits over shared paths:

× People riding bikes are separated from pedestrians and vehicles, reducing conflict - a growing issue as e-bikes explode in popularity.
× 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.
× Motorists exiting driveways have a better sightline to approaching cyclists, improving safety.
× Dedicated bicycle paths will out 'a green carpet' to encourage more people of all ages and abilities to take to two wheels - it is a virtuous cycle!

We urge the Council to strive to deliver separated cycling infrastructure on future projects.

Please do not hesitate to contact Bicycle NSW if we can assist further at this stage.

Many kind regards,

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