



www.camwest.org.au

advocacy@camwest.org.au

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Low Carbon Emission Blacktown City Draft Plan Feedback

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Low Carbon Emission Blacktown City Draft Plan (*The Plan*).

These comments have been prepared on behalf of CAMWEST, a Bicycle NSW affiliated Bicycle User Group with a focus on advocating for and encouraging cycling in the Penrith, Blacktown, Parramatta, and Cumberland council areas of Western Sydney.

We understand that a more detailed Council Active Transport strategy is in the pipeline. We look forward to providing more targeted feedback after having had the opportunity to review that document.

We applaud the broad direction of *The Plan* in setting pathways for reducing the city's carbon emissions. While there are a number of initiatives covering a broad range of carbon sources presented, we're narrowing most of our focus to transport.

As cited^[1], Transport currently makes up 21% of emissions by source and is the second highest contributor after electricity (62%). We acknowledge that Active Transport (AT) is one small component of the transport sector, so on the surface it's a relatively small part of the potential carbon emission reduction mix. We believe there's more to the story though.

The two main mentions of AT in *The Plan* are outlined below:

1. *'We are supporting the development of an Active Transport Network in line with Blacktown City's Integrated Transport Management Plan and NSW Government's Active Transport Strategy.'*^[2]
2. *'We have used evidence-based projections for this modelled scenario for Blacktown City which include:...a 5% mode shift from car use to public and active transportation by 2030 and a further 5% by 2040.'*^[3]

With no citation for the 'evidence-based projections' quoted in point 2 above we couldn't delve deeper into the methodology or assumptions behind the projection. We find the figures quoted in this point interesting and for us they pose several questions: Are they based on current infrastructure, and the proposed increases driven mainly by community education? Or are they based at least partly on future infrastructure builds? What is the breakdown in these numbers between public transport and AT growth? Without further supporting data these projections seem incredibly vague and open to interpretation.

From the very limited discussion of AT in *The Plan*, we couldn't readily ascertain whether E-Bikes and Micro-mobility were seriously considered under the wider AT banner, as there was no mention of them specifically. There were mentions of Electric Vehicles, but these appear to solely refer to cars.

Just a note that our definition of AT includes walking and the many forms of cycling – whether that be a standard human-powered or electrically-assisted bicycle; the equivalent recumbent or upright tricycle; tandem or even the occasional tandem; any of the above with a trailer, child-trailer or tag-along attached; balance bike; scooter; and any of a number of two or three wheeled cycles designed to carry cargo.

Currently around 50% of car journeys are under 5km in length^[4]. When given favourable terrain, climate, and infrastructure, 5km is quite a cyclable distance using a standard bike for a reasonable proportion of the population. This distance can be doubled or even tripled if using an e-bike - and terrain and climate become less of a concern - while increasing accessibility for a greater percentage of the community.

We would like to see the current uptake of E-bikes and Micro-mobility built upon in a structured and considered manner, which could help facilitate a mode-shift from private cars towards AT. As well as helping Council reduce overall carbon emissions, this mode-shift would have the potential to:

- help reduce the number of cars on the road leading to reduced congestion for those still needing to drive.
- improve fitness for a community increasingly struggling with obesity by using the various forms of AT – whether they be electrically assisted or not. One study showed that the health benefits for those using pedal-assisted e-bikes can be similar to those using standard non-powered bicycles.^[5]

However, none of this can realistically occur until the cycling infrastructure is improved.

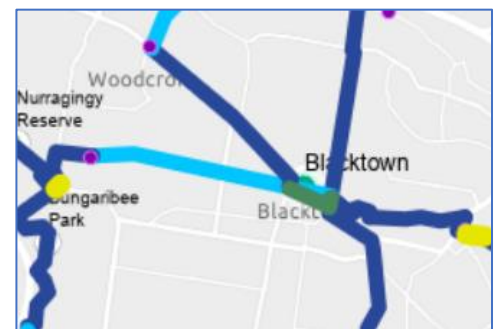
➤ Current Infrastructure

We note that council is not the only body providing funding and delivering infrastructure, with some of the infrastructure listed below likely provided by developers. Council however should maintain strategic oversight into what is provided.

One of our frustrations is the lack of connectivity between existing routes throughout the Blacktown LGA – particularly around town centres.

Getting across Blacktown from Richmond Rd to Main St safely and legally (without dismounting from the bike and walking sections) for all but the most confident riders is pretty much impossible. Having said that, we do acknowledge that this has been identified in the Central River City strategy^[6] as a missing link and look forward to a satisfactory and safe outcome for all riders.

Depending on the solution adopted, this may or may not help riders get into the Blacktown CBD. (We like the idea of building a cantilever on the western side of the Richmond Rd railway bridge and a dedicated cycle lane on the northern side of Main St – but there may be practical barriers to implementing this suggestion).



Snippet of Central River City Priority Connections, With Green connection across Blacktown listed as an 'Immediate Opportunity for Investigation'.

There are missing links or barriers in getting safely and legally from *existing* shared paths to shopping precincts such as Mt Druitt, Glenwood Village and The Ponds to mention a few. There are also missing links to educational facilities. A lot of residents within the LGA are still not within easy reach of existing paths or cycleways.

Wayfinding signage also requires addressing.

While shared paths may work in areas with lower pedestrian activity, riders really need dedicated cycleways in and immediately around town centres and areas where pedestrian activity is high.

In point 1 above we note that while some of the proposed cycling infrastructure listed in the 2013 Blacktown City ITMP^[7] and Bike Plan 2016^[8] has been delivered, there are still significant links outstanding.

Physical Barriers:

There are numerous 'physical' barriers to cycling. The first four photos on the next page show a selection of offset barriers around the LGA. From a cycling perspective, the 'best' can be negotiated on a standard bike by a confident rider without putting their feet down. The 'worst' require the rider to dismount from the bike and drag it under the fence or barrier. These barriers become harder (if not impossible) to navigate with larger/heavier bikes or trikes and/or reduced mobility of the rider.



Squeezing through this gap between the fence and gate on Church St, Rooty Hill when accessing the M7 shared path on a standard bike with pannier bags is impossible – let alone a cargo or similar larger bike. I need to dismount and drag my bike under the fence. This arrangement will no doubt be changed with the development of Eastern Ck Quarter Stage 3 ^[9].



Offset barrier on the Mt Druitt - Lethbridge Park shared path (opposite the corner of Lang Cres and Franklin St Blackett), which is very tight. (Photo Google Streetview).



One of six sets of offset barriers on the path up the centre of Parkway Drive, Marsden Park.



One of two sets of barriers between Bells Ck shared path and Amsterdam St, Oakhurst.

Dismount and Walk:



One of a several bus stops on the shared path along South Street in Schofields, where riders are asked to dismount and walk the length of the bus stop – even when there aren't any people or buses around.

Poorly positioned objects:



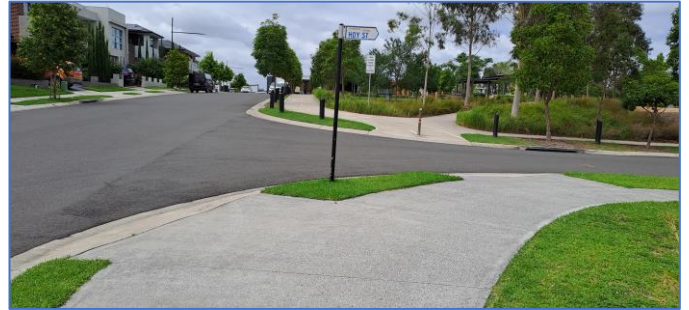
Recently constructed shared path on Railway Terrace (corner of Manchester Drive), opposite Schofields Station, with a pole in the centre of the pathway.

Poorly Defined Shared paths and poor kerb ramps:

A lot of what CAMWEST believe to be shared paths are either not defined as such or are poorly defined. The path alongside the western side of Hambledon Road between Quakers Hill Parkway and Stanhope Parkway is a wide path and defined on the Bike Plan as an existing shared path, but with no markings apart from some at the Quakers Hill Parkway end. The signalised crossing at Bali Drive has pedestrian only signals. This is only one of many such examples.



It may be hard to see with this photo, but at the corner of Calder St and Rosetta Street Schofields there are 'roll gutters' with no proper crossing. The other intersections along the Calder Street shared path have proper crossings.



Shared Path alongside Calder Street Schofields. There are no path markings on the northern side of the Hoy Street intersection, but good markings on the southern side alongside Altrove Hilltop Park.

There are a number of pathways across the LGA which don't have proper kerb ramps to the existing roadways, and missing sections of pathway across nature strips.

Dangerous Crossings:

There are a number of less-than-ideal road crossings for active transport users.

One that we normally try to avoid (particularly on group rides) is the dual-lane roundabout at the intersection of Hambledon Road and Stanhope Parkway / Burdekin Rd. The crossing used to be reasonable, but now with the additional traffic in the area it can be quite treacherous to cross.

In our opinion dual-lane roundabouts in 60 kmph or faster areas and active transport do not mix.



Looking north up Hambledon Rd into the roundabout. This crossing can be quite treacherous, with cars coming both from Hambledon Rd north of the roundabout and turning left into Hambledon Road from the Stanhope Parkway. (Image from Google Streetview)

Signalised Intersection phasing:

One non-physical barrier is the long wait-times experienced at intersections when riding on a shared path alongside a main arterial road. Riders normally need to press the 'beg' button and wait at each signalised intersection – and sometimes several times per intersection if slip lanes or wide divided roads need to be crossed. We were recently pleasantly surprised when riding on the shared path alongside Richmond Rd between Marsden Park and Oakhurst. When crossing the main carriageways of the intersecting roads, the pedestrian/bicycle lanterns

were in phase with those on the Richmond Rd roadway – meaning that we normally had green lights and didn't need to press the button and wait for the next phase to cross. At intersection with a signalised slip-lane we still encountered red lights, but this is understandable. We haven't had the opportunity to check other similar arterials such as Sunnyholt Rd and Windsor/Old Windsor Roads to determine whether their crossing buttons still need to be pressed.

Each of these barriers is a deterrent to cycling. People have differing thresholds and tolerances towards different barriers – some can cope with more than others. Some people will give up if they encounter a 'major' barrier, while others may be willing to cope with several. We'd encourage Council to remove as many as possible that are within their purview, and to petition other government bodies and entities to remove the remainder.

➤ Moving Forward:

Like in many parts of Sydney, Blacktown LGA is extremely car dominated. A lot of Active Transport infrastructure seems to be 'added-on' after the fact – as long as other physical restraints and funding permit. Fortunately, this mindset appears to be slowly changing. AT needs to not only be an integral part of new designs, but it needs to be the *primary* consideration, as per the Road User Space Hierarchy.

In line with the recommendations of Better Streets^[10], we'd encourage council to help fund programs to get kids active, build or upgrade at least 20 pedestrian crossings per year, and look at lowering speed limits in residential and urban centres to 30 kmph (particularly in areas where shared paths or separated cycling infrastructure is not feasible).

We believe that active transport uptake needs to start with safe and inviting infrastructure to shopping centres, transport nodes, educational facilities and other trip generators.

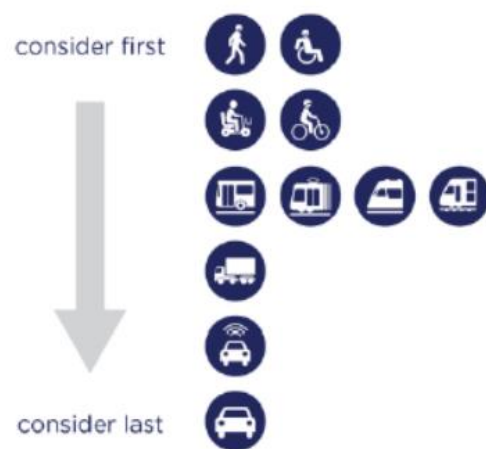
Infrastructure includes appropriate and secure bicycle parking in relevant locations which riders will be willing to use. Bicycle Parking with built-in E-bike charging stations is now commercially available and may be worth considering.

Once the infrastructure is in place, education and familiarisation activities can begin in earnest.

We'd encourage Blacktown Council to follow the lead of other government bodies to incentivise e-bike and micro-mobility uptake in a targeted fashion (means-tested, and/or additional incentives for those purchasing cargo e-bikes etc).^{[12], [13]} This may well be beyond Council to fund, and State or Federal grant money may need to be sought.

We believe higher percentages of active transport uptake could be achieved (with all the related community benefits) than the seemingly ill-defined targets in *The Plan* with the right infrastructure, incentives, and education in place.

Order of Road User Space Considerations



Transport for NSW version of hierarchy^[11]

➤ Development:

Ideally, we'd like to see additional localised shopping strips or mixed businesses spread through the suburbs so that more of the community have viable options to purchase small essentials within easy walking or cycling distance from their homes. We're not sure whether council has (or wants to have) any influence with developers in this direction. Of course, any stores would need to be economically viable, which is the reason many that existed in the past closed. Maybe the higher density housing in some of the newer areas may make them viable?

➤ Closing Comments:

We're happy to clarify or elaborate on any of the points or suggestions outlined in the feedback.

We are happy to look at working with Council in active transport advisory and promotional capacities. We initially began our advocacy work in the Blacktown LGA in the late 1980s. In the 1990s and early 2000s CAMWEST members met regularly with Blacktown Council staff to review and inform the development of cycling routes in the LGA. We would very much like to reestablish these links, either through a formal Active Transport Committee process or alternatively through less structured and more informal channels. We believe that we have a lot of 'on-the-ground' experience that could help shape the Active Transport future of Blacktown.

This feedback was prepared by Rob Kemp on behalf of CAMWEST Bicycle User Group Inc.

References and Comments:

- 1 Figure 2 on Page 8 of *The Plan*
- 2 Page 10 of *The Plan*, under 'Areas of Control' (Section 2.1) and the 'Low Carbon Transport' sub-heading.
- 3 Page 16 of *The Plan*
- 4 <https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/vhtransch3.pdf>, page 2.
- 5 <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S259019821930017X>
- 6 <https://www.transport.nsw.gov.au/system/files/media/documents/2023/Strategic-cycleway-corridors-Central-River-City-overview.pdf>
- 7 https://www.blacktown.nsw.gov.au/files/assets/public/buidling-and-planning/engineering-design-library/blacktowncouncil_integratedtransportplan.pdf
- 8 <https://www.blacktown.nsw.gov.au/files/assets/public/recreation/blacktown-bike-plan.pdf>
- 9 <https://camwest.org.au/advocacy.html#EasternCreekQuarterOutletCentrePlan>
- 10 <https://www.betterstreets.org.au/recommendations.html>
- 11 Page 4 of <https://www.transport.nsw.gov.au/system/files/media/documents/2022/road-user-space-allocation-procedure.pdf>
- 12 https://www.weride.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/WeRide_e-Bike_Subsidy_Report_FINAL-lores.pdf
- 13 <https://bicyclenetwork.com.au/newsroom/2023/11/17/tasmania-helps-more-riders-on-to-e-bikes/>