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Merrylands Town Centre Public Domain Plan Feedback

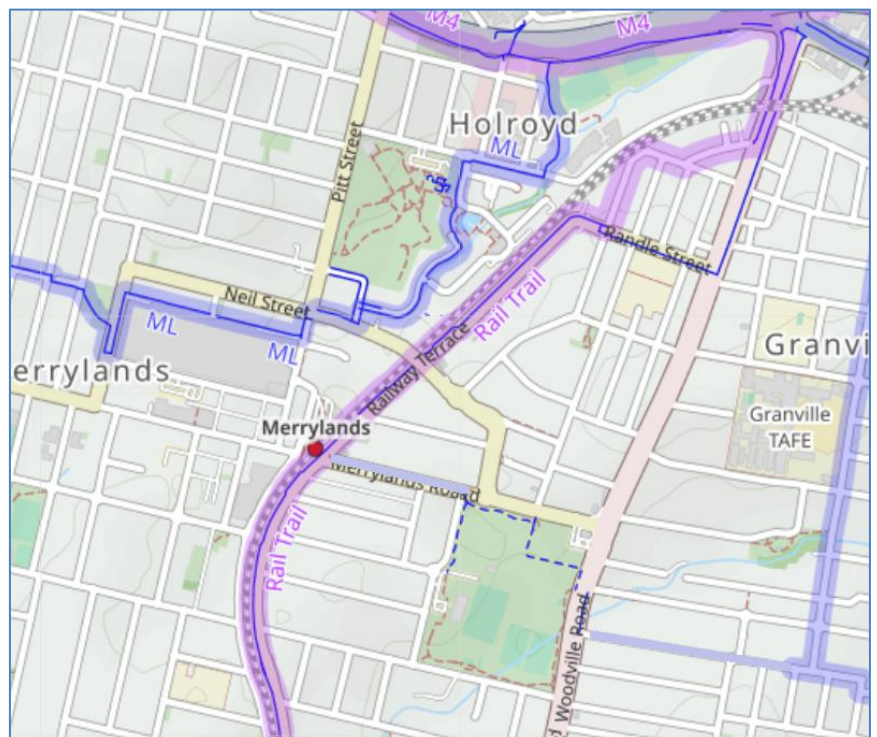
Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Merrylands Town Centre Public Domain Plan (The Plan).

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.

This feedback starts off by looking at the broader picture for active transport around Merrylands, before narrowing the focus back to the immediate Town Centre precinct.

➤ Merrylands area Active Transport Overview:

As can be seen on the map, the existing paths around Merrylands consist of the Parramatta to Glenfield Rail-Trail shared path along the eastern side of the railway line, the A'Becketts Ck path up to the rear entrance of Holroyd Gardens and the M4 path, a not particularly direct link from Merrylands Park that hugs the northern border of the town precinct on the western side of the line, and a combined on/off-road route on the eastern side of the line using Merrylands Rd (East) roadway, a path through Granville Park, a crossing of Woodville Rd at Louis St, then a path down Woodville Rd to Meadows St where riders use on-road facilities into Granville and further east. The Merrylands to Granville corridor is one of the key strategic corridors identified in the Central River City overview document^[2].

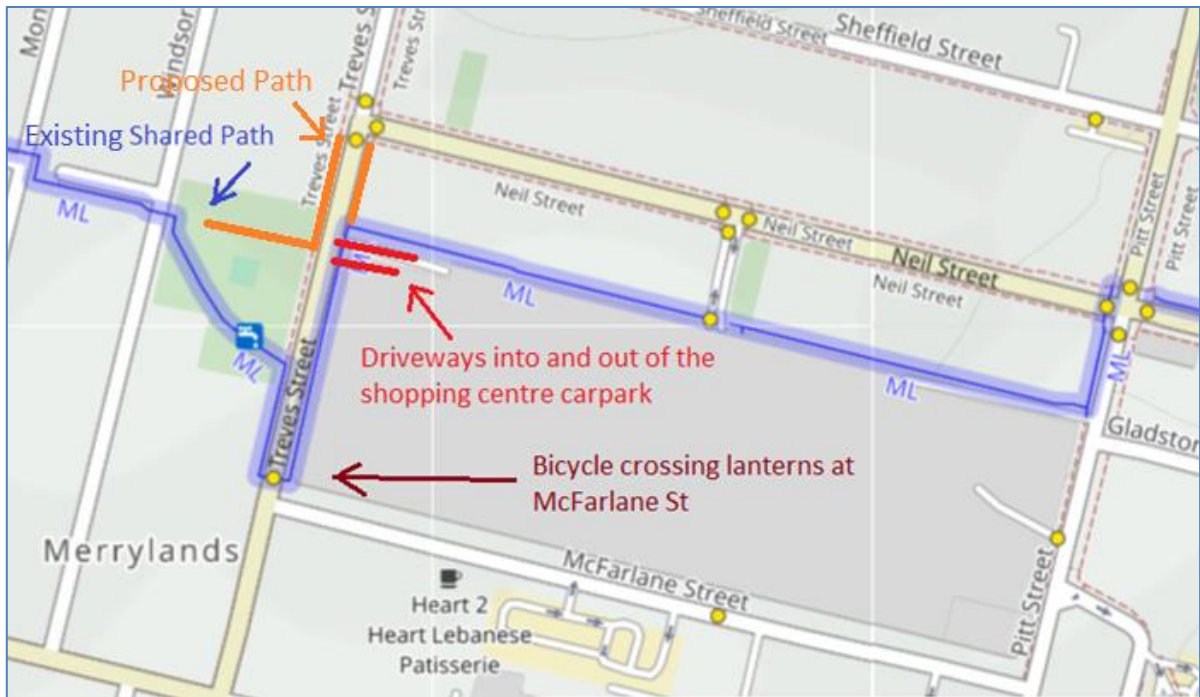


Marked up map from Open Street Map (Cycle Map Layer^[1]) showing Active Transport links around Merrylands.

With this latter route we believe there are both safety improvements that can be made with the current route but also possible alternative routes between Railway Terrace and Granville Park that would avoid Merrylands Rd and be more appealing to less confident on-road riders. These are largely outside the main precincts of The Plan and won't be pursued further here, but we're happy to provide further input on request.

There are no real identified routes into Merrylands from the south-west.

Bordering on the Town Centre Precinct area, we believe access to the route from Merrylands Park through Merrylands Memorial Park could be improved. This route likely forms part of the Merrylands to Greystanes key strategic corridor^[2]. The current route has riders traversing both sides of Treves St to the bicycle crossing lanterns at McFarlane St and takes riders across one of the busy parking entrances/exits for Stockland Shopping Centre. We would've thought a safer and more direct option would've been to create a straighter route through Memorial Park and ideally create a new crossing of Treves St or maybe more practically take the shared path to Neil St to cross. This route appears to cross only 1 significant driveway, while avoiding the shopping centre carpark entrance and exit.



Marked-up map from Open Street Map (Cycle Map Layer^[1]) showing the current shared path either side of Treves St and proposed path.

The current options for crossing the railway line at Merrylands are to use the Neil St bridge roadway or footpath just north of the town centre precinct, or dismount and use the ramps under the station or the lifts and overbridge at the station. Each of these present barriers of one form or another to active transport use. (Each time a user is required to dismount is seen as another 'excuse' not to use active transport – and often to use the car instead). We're not sure that there are any easy answers here. Retrofitting the Neil St bridge would be very welcome - but expensive. There may be opportunities to convert the footpath on the southern side of the bridge to shared path use – even though it doesn't meet the recommended minimum width. We'd strongly encourage council to consider options regarding this crossing. We imagine that the Neil St bridge would be a State rather than Council asset.



Western-side ramp to underpass at Merrylands Station where riders are instructed to dismount and walk. The ramp has offset bollards at the bottom which may be tricky to negotiate for some potential users.

➤ Town Centre Precinct:

One of the stated 'Liveability' design principles for the Town Centre Precinct is to 'Promote healthy living by enhancing pedestrian and cycle connectivity and increased active transport amenity' (page 9), while there is a further comment for the McFarlane St Precinct that 'Active transport will be encouraged through shared cycleways and attractive street design' (page 16).

While there are some welcome additions to the shared path network within the McFarlane St precinct, there doesn't appear to be much evidence of a local cohesive Active Transport plan informing the overall design for the Town Centre and beyond. This is disappointing.

We're focusing our comments on the Neil and McFarlane St precincts rather than the full Town Centre area defined in The Plan's Figure 2.



Figure 2: Merrylands Town Centre Precinct Boundary

The Town Centre boundaries appear to extend well beyond the three precincts, and, according to Google, even go beyond the suburb boundaries of Merrylands.

Here are some 'challenges' that we see with both the current infrastructure and the proposals outlined in The Plan:

- There are some existing bike parking spaces allocated within Stockland Shopping Centre, but no apparent shared paths or cycle friendly roads to the applicable access entrances. There don't appear to be any additional bicycle parking facilities proposed for the Town Centre precinct.
- There was one mention of wayfinding signage, but that appeared to be related more to pedestrians than bike riders. We see clear signage and pathway markings as integral to encouraging Active Transport uptake and educating path users.

The following three items refer to marked-up image of Figure 10 from The Plan to the right:

- Are we correct in assuming that the proposed cycle link crossing of Neil St at McCleod Rd (circled in orange) will be signalised? We believe the crossing could potentially be quite dangerous if not.
- There is no 'Cycle Link' shown on the northern side of Neil St between McCleod Rd and Pitt St. The recently completed path along this section is not currently marked as a shared path, although it appears wide enough to be considered one. Note that a proposed cycle path is shown on the southern side of Neil St.
- The signalised intersection of Pitt and Neil Streets (circled in blue) currently only have bicycle lanterns for the two crossings starting from the south-west corner of this intersection. The other two crossings (which join the path in the above point) currently have pedestrian-only lanterns.

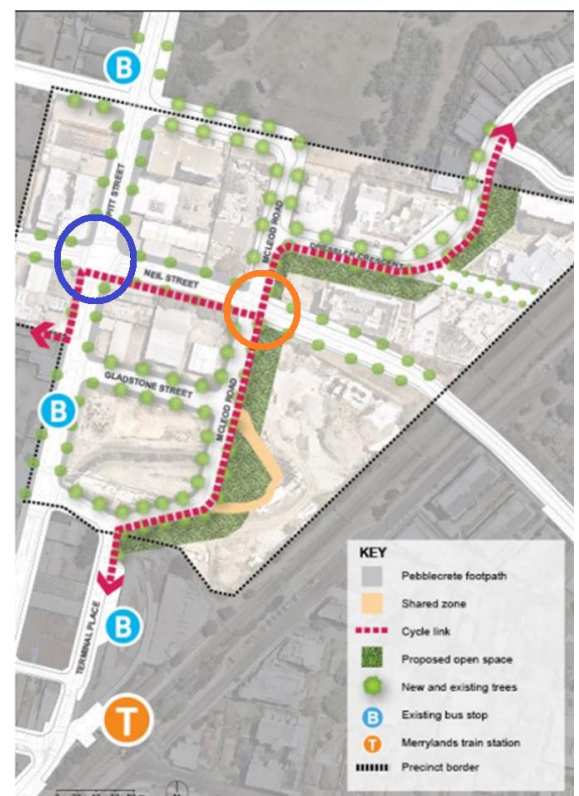


Figure 10: Neil Street Plan

- The Future Cycling Link along Terminal Place shown in The Plan's Figure 8 is alongside an existing Taxi Rank and Bus Stop. There is currently scope for conflict between different path users. Are there are plans to re-design this area?
- It's not clear to us from The Plan how bike riders should move through the McFarlane St precinct East-West. While the path through Memorial Park may be a suitable town-centre bypass particularly for users from the west or north-west segments of Merrylands, it doesn't readily serve those from the south-west or those wanting to directly access the main shopping precinct. We'd ideally like to see some separated on-road cycling lanes. However, if on-road along McFarlane Rd and/or Merrylands Rd is not feasible, we believe that the speed limits should be further reduced to 30kmph around the precinct and the coverage area extended beyond the current 40kmph zones.

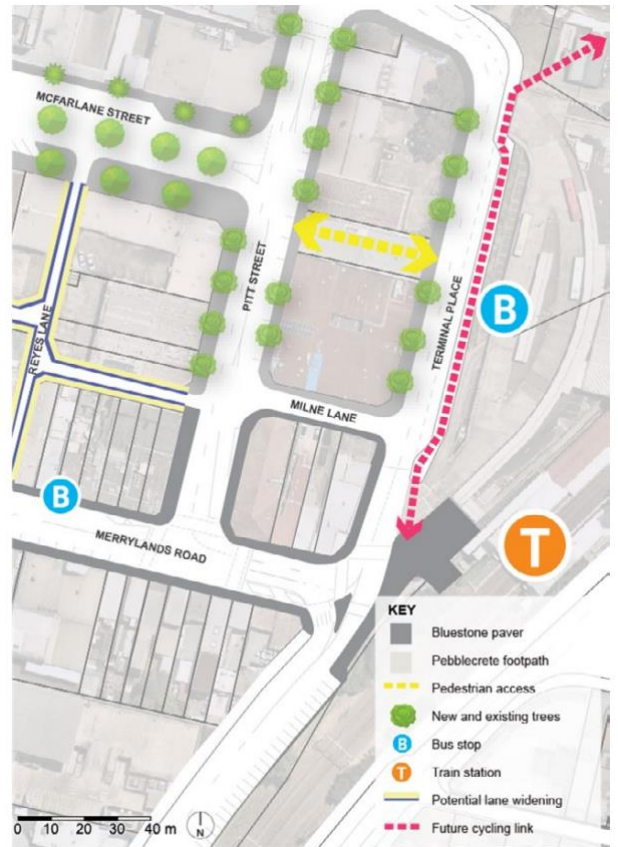


Figure 8: McFarlane Street Precinct (Merrylands Station)

➤ Closing Comments:

From the document presented, we are struggling to see a comprehensive strategy for developing active transport in the area. With Merrylands being a proposed strategic centre and the increase in population density around the area, residents and visitors need to be given viable transport alternatives instead of always defaulting to motor vehicle usage. Travel mode shift will take time but needs to start with appropriate infrastructure on the ground.

We're aware of council's higher-level strategies as presented in the Walking and Cycling Strategy document (which we provided feedback on) but feel that more granular detail is required for specific regions such as Merrylands. At present it almost appears to be more a case of 'Seeing how Active Transport can fit in after other requirements are met'.

CAMWEST would like to see a more localised active transport strategy articulated which can then inform other plans such as this. We find it challenging to comment on quite specific localised plans when we aren't aware of Council's broader (or mid-level) Active Transport plans for the area – if they exist.

We are happy to clarify or elaborate on any of the above points and are willing to assist in any way we can with the development of Active Transport in the area.

Rob Kemp

CAMWEST Advocacy Lead (with input from CAMWEST member Mark Robson).

References and Comments:

- [1] On the [Open Street Map Cycle Map layer](#), thin blue solid and dashed lines represent off-road routes (shared paths), while wider semitransparent lines depict local/regional routes both on and off road.
- [2] See map on page 5 of <https://www.transport.nsw.gov.au/system/files/media/documents/2023/Strategic-cycleway-corridors-Central-River-City-overview.pdf>.