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Toongabbie Town Centre Draft Public Domain Plan Feedback

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Toongabbie Town Centre Draft Public Domain Plan (*The Plan*).^[1]

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 a large part of Western Sydney, including Cumberland LGA.

➤ Executive Summary

The draft Toongabbie Town Centre Public Domain Plan misses a real opportunity to realise the full potential of Active Transport in the town centre and surrounding areas. There appears to be very little effort in promoting a shift away from motor vehicle use and towards active transport – and therefore a more people-focused town centre. With its growing population density and a shopping precinct centred around the relatively low road traffic thoroughfare of Aurelia St, Toongabbie is in an enviable position amongst local town centres to incorporate Active Transport elements relatively painlessly into the precinct and provide residents with viable transport alternatives to only car use. From both health and liveability perspectives we believe it is incumbent upon Council to provide residents with a range of viable alternatives.

A concerted mode-shift towards Active Transport would almost certainly reduce the local traffic component of the congestion currently experienced with the road crossing of the railway line between Cornelia Rd and Wentworth Ave during peak periods.

Diagrams in *The Plan* contain a number of non-committal statements and some of the text annotations lack clarity and/or detail.

We wish to emphasise that connectivity with the existing and future planned shared paths and separated cycleways that surround the precinct is a vital component in a more people-focused and liveable town centre.

While we did manage to find a few positives in *The Plan*, overall we found it was disappointing when viewed from an Active Transport perspective.

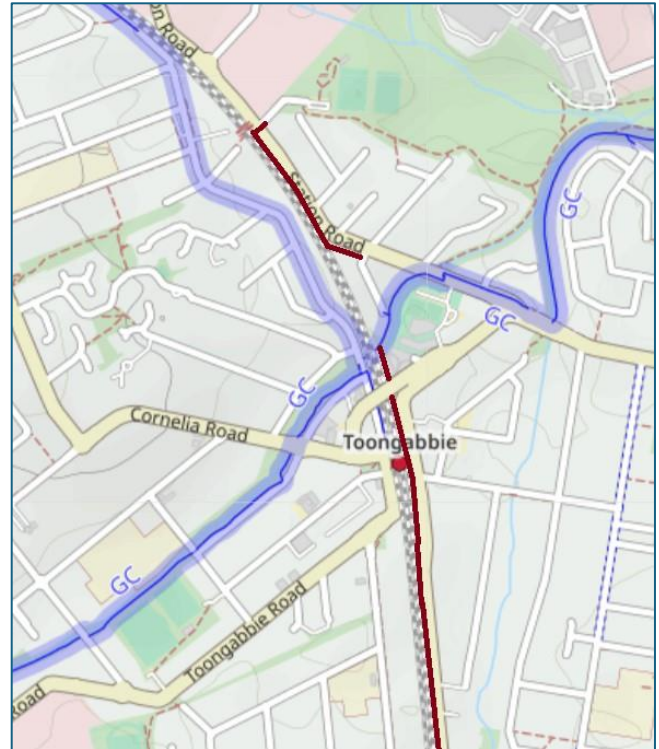
➤ Broader Context:

Toongabbie is divided by the railway line, Girraween Ck and to a lesser extent, Pendle Ck. It's spread over three LGAs – Blacktown, Parramatta and Cumberland, although the main town centre is in Cumberland.

This map shows the current shared paths (thin blue line both in and outside of shaded lines) and on-road sections (shaded lines only), and the planned Toongabbie to Parramatta route^[2] (brown line), which in this area is just inside Parramatta LGA.



Marked-up OSM map showing LGA boundaries



Marked-up OSM Cycle map showing current and future cycleways to and from the town centre.

While the railway line and station provide essential connectivity to the broader Sydney area, they also act as a significant physical barrier for people movement from one side of the railway line to the other, as observed by the congestion experienced on the single local road bridge crossing between Cornelia Rd and Wentworth Ave. If enough residents feel safe to use bikes and other forms of active transport to traverse the local area, there is real potential to decrease the number of local residents needing to cross the road bridge thereby reducing congestion during peak periods.

In the recently released Parramatta to Westmead Pedestrian and Cyclist Corridor Plan, the City of Parramatta have laid out a vision for a regional cycling route providing much needed connectivity on the eastern side of Toongabbie station alongside Wentworth Ave. The planned corridor intersects with the existing Girraween Ck railway underpass shared path on the northern edge of the town centre precinct, which will provide connectivity to the western side of the railway line and Toongabbie Town Centre. The challenge for Cumberland LGA is to set in place plans that will add to this network and over time draw people into the town centre by travel modes other than by car.

➤ General Comments on *The Plan*

We are disappointed at the lack of detail and clarity in *The Plan*. As highlighted below, some of the diagrams do not appear to indicate whether features are existing or proposed, and text in some of the map markups is vague.

The excerpt on the right from the Cumberland Walking and Cycling Strategy^[3] implies that cycling initiatives should be part of Public Domain Plans. We can see very little evidence in this instance.

The Plan contains these generic statements related to cycling and Active Transport:

- [Design Principles:] ‘Promote healthy living with good walking and cycling permeability throughout the local centre.’ [Page 8]
- ‘Use smart technologies and evidence-based decision making to prioritise footpath and cycling improvements.’ [Page 8]
- [Active and Public Transport:] ‘Currently, all cycling is on-road within the Centre. Opportunities may be considered for supporting cycling infrastructure, including dedicated bike lanes (where feasible), signage and bike parking stations.’ [Page 12]

Walking and Cycling Initiatives Currently Underway

Council is currently progressing a number of initiatives and projects to support walking and cycling in Cumberland, including:

- Upgrades to town centres, including better paths, bicycle lanes and supporting infrastructure.
- Public Domain Plans which provide guidance on infrastructure and design in local centres and key corridors.

From page 18 of the Cumberland Walking and Cycle Strategy.^[3]

Where is the detail? ‘*May*’ and ‘*where feasible*’ are non-committal terms and it is unclear as to whether there is any real intention to implement improved cyclability within the town centre. This seems to be at odds with the stated aims of the Walking and Cycling Strategy.

There are a number of other examples of non-committal language throughout *The Plan*:

- ‘Subject to Traffic Committee Approval’
- ‘With potential for amenity improvements’
- ‘Subject to TfNSW approval’
- ‘Explore further activation opportunities’
- ‘Investigate opportunities’.

Bike parking, shared paths and separated cycleways need to be identified early on, so they can be incorporated into the overall precinct plan, and not ‘tacked on’ later – if there is enough physical space and money left to do so.

For example, what if the design of the suggested ‘New outdoor dining areas’ on Aurelia St precludes installation of a separated cycleway or shared path in the future? All the foreseeable options need to be laid out from the outset so that a comprehensive plan can be drawn up taking into consideration all competing interests.

On the positive side, CAMWEST are very supportive of a couple of elements of *The Plan*:

- New Outdoor Dining areas on Aurelia St (providing they are done in such a way as to not limit potential Active Transport options along the corridor).
- Additional tree canopy around the precinct. We believe this can go a long way toward making the precinct more attractive for those spending time there as well as for those passing through – but the other components of active transport infrastructure and low traffic congestion are just as important to attract them there in the first place.

➤ Vibrant Streets:

The term 'Vibrant Streets' appears to have a few slightly different definitions. There is no real definition or description in *The Plan*. The only definition we could find relating to a Cumberland plan was from the Granville Town Centre Public Domain Plan ^[4] which contained the following text: *'The vibrant street enhances the public realm with activated frontage and an integrated movement network that reinforces pedestrian priority and human scale.'*

Another discussion we located online around vibrant developments and streets ^[5] was an interesting read. One paragraph summed it up for us:

'First, if you want to create a vibrant, transit-oriented development, you need to ask exactly what people will see when entering and exiting transit. Then, you need to make sure it is full of places to sit, talk, eat, and shop. Those first 100 metres—and especially the first 25 metres—are your principal opportunity. Screw this up and the streets will wither.' ^[5]

Toongabbie, like most other Sydney suburbs, is car dominant. For pedestrians, two sets of lights at the Portico Pde and The Portico/Cornelia Rd signalised intersection need to be crossed to transit between the railway station and the park or main shopping precinct, with somewhat lengthy waits needed to cross at least one of those crossings. Pedestrian movements fit around those of motor vehicles.

As demonstrated by the red line on the diagram to the right, this is not attractive for pedestrians who want to cross from Aurelia St to the station lifts. It is not quite as bad for those wishing to walk up the ramp (green line), but still far from ideal. Those walking to or from the western end of Aurelia St can cut through the park (blue line).

One of the challenges is to effectively visually and practically 'link' the main transit areas with the retail businesses and park. We feel that the present linkages between these key areas could be greatly improved.

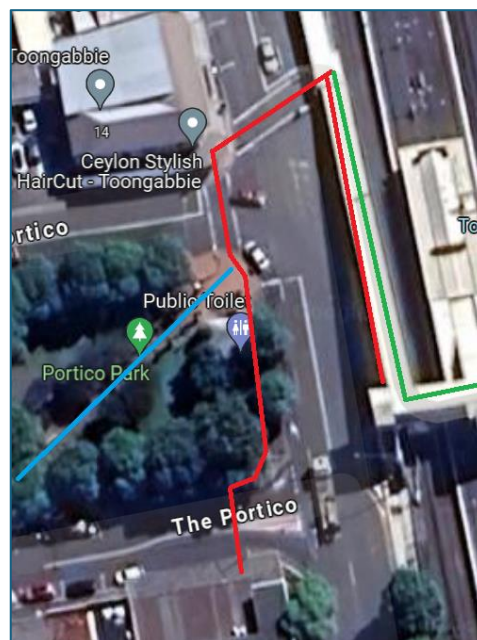
Text in Red Box: If we are interpreting this correctly, a positive step is the potential for a single signalised crossing of Portico Pde at The Portico/Cornelia Rd (subject to TfNSW approval). This would go some way to improving pedestrian connectivity between the station and Portico Park, Portico Plaza Shopping Centre, and Aurelia St shops.

Text in Purple Box: Is this indicating that there will be another crossing of Portico Pde south of Aurelia St? Is this to be an official crossing? We would like to see a wombat crossing or similar at this location.

Crossings should be prioritised to provide pedestrians (and cyclists) with the safest and most direct routes to their destinations.



Part of *The Plan's* Figure 8. The yellow streets are defined as 'Vibrant Streets'.



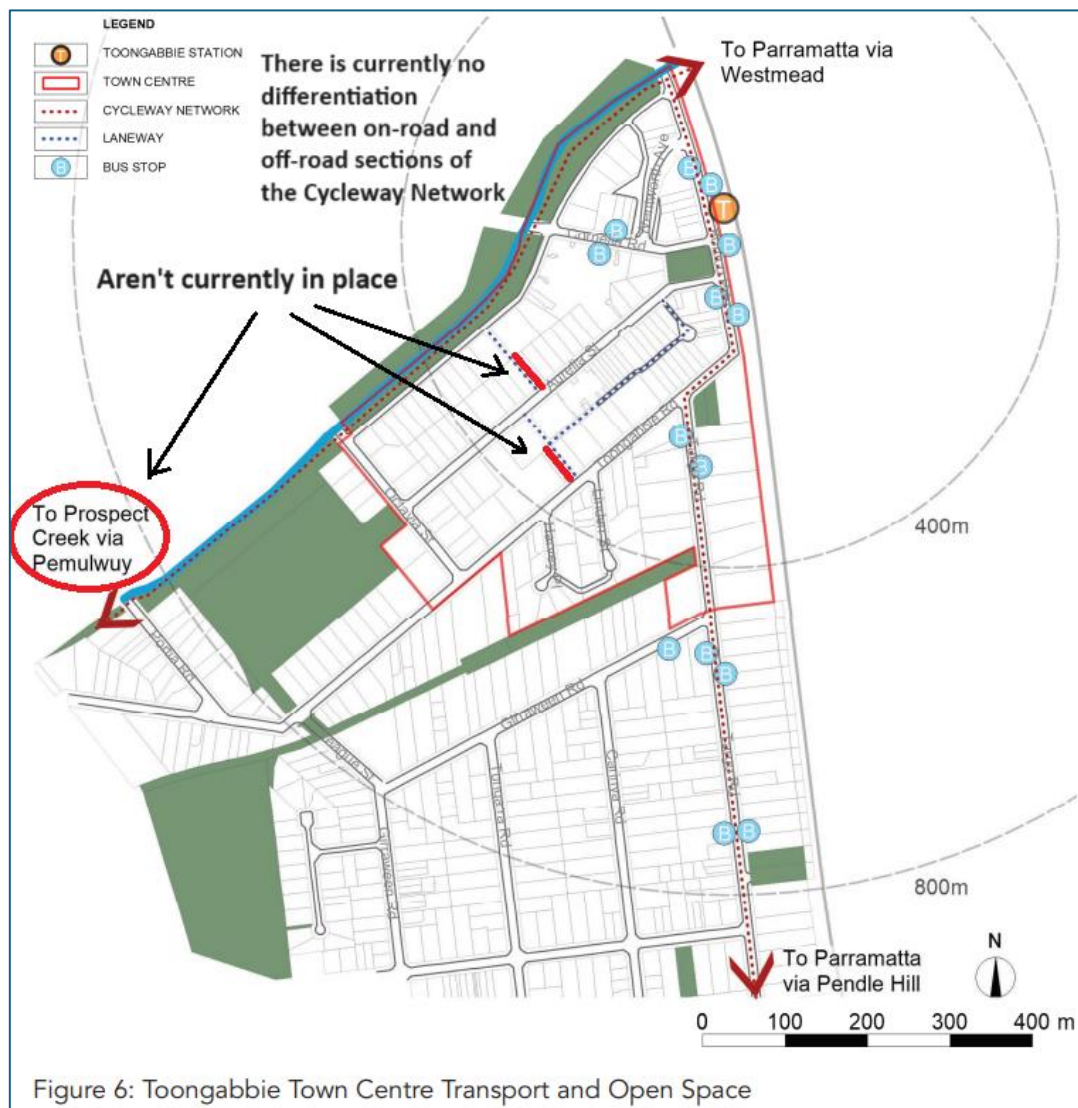
Marked-up Google Satellite view image



Mark-up of part of *The Plan's* Figure 11.

➤ Comments on *The Plan's* 'Figure 6':

This is the only diagram in *The Plan* to show some active transport components.



Marked-up version of The Plan's Figure 6

There are some disparities between the above map and what is currently 'on the ground'. If the map is meant to be a future plan, we could not see any markings to indicate that this is the case.

- The two laneways between Junia Avenue and Aurelia Street, and Aurelia Street and Toongabbie Rd do not currently extend through as indicated. They require land acquisition and demolition of buildings facing Aurelia St and Toongabbie Rd. We can see that having laneways extending through would assist the movement of pedestrians and cyclists into and out of the town centre.



The dead-end laneway coming off Junia Ave. On Figure 6 it is shown extending through to Aurelia St.

- The cycleway to 'Prospect Ck via Pemulwuy' has a missing 1.5km link. The on-road alternative to this missing link is not a suitable route for many cyclists. This route is Corridor 11 in the adopted Cumberland Walking and Cycling Strategy.

There is also no delineation on this diagram between on-road and off-road cycleways.

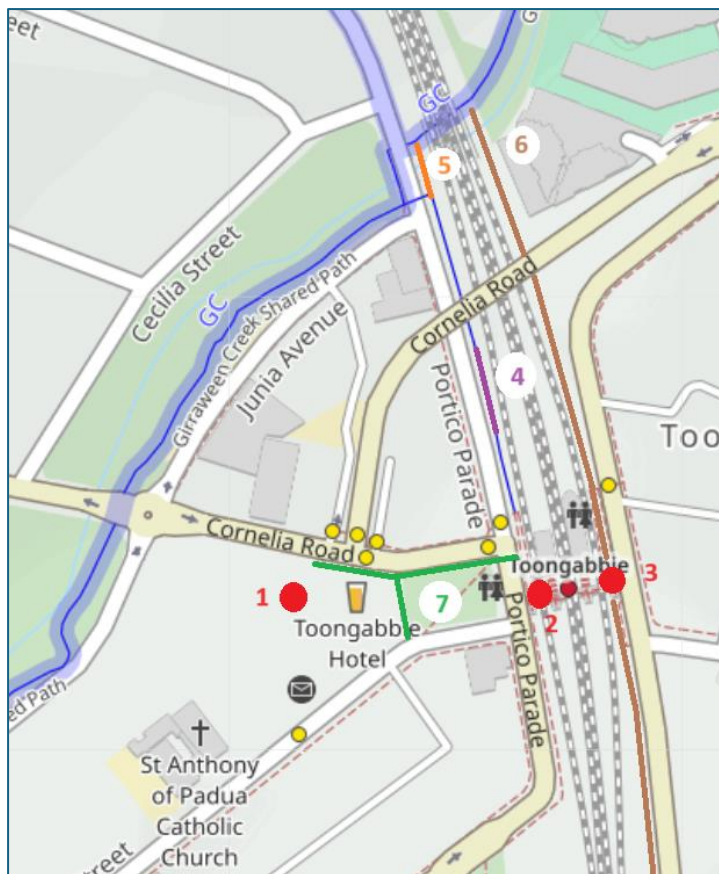
➤ Toongabbie Town Centre Precinct:

The following is a closer look at existing, proposed, and our suggested cycling-related infrastructure around the Toongabbie Town Centre Precincts. The numbered points relate to the numbered points on the map.

1. There is a bicycle parking rack provided on the ground floor carpark of the Portico Plaza Shopping Centre. The rack is closest to the eastern of the two entrances off Cornelia Rd. There is a centre road barrier in place in Cornelia Rd preventing vehicles or cyclists turning right into this entrance from the roadway. There is a reasonably steep entrance to the shopping complex off Junia Ave (close to the Girraween Ck shared path), but this leads to the basement carpark which requires going up a level to reach the existing bike rack.



*Portico Plaza Shopping Centre
Car Park Bike Rack*



Marked-up OSM cycling map

If this bike parking area is to be widely used, serious consideration needs to be given as to how cyclists can realistically and legally reach it.

2. There are Five inverted 'U' stands on Portico Pde, near the Toongabbie Station lift. This Google Streetview image from July 2023 shows 3 of the 5 allocated stands occupied by 2 bikes and a scooter. Other Streetview images back to 2020 show 2 or 3 bikes parked on each image.



Google Streetview image from July 2023.

3. There are another five inverted 'U' stands on the Wentworth Ave side of the station (in the Parramatta LGA). Although there no bikes parked here on the date this image was taken, several previous images each have 1 bike parked.



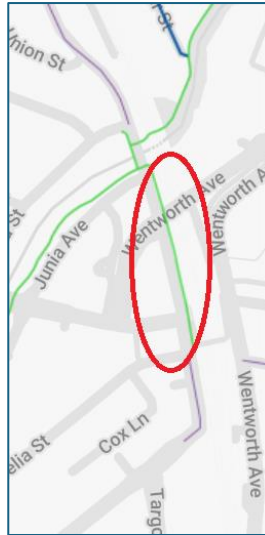
Google Streetview image from the same date as above.

- The path on the eastern side of Portico Pde between Junita Ave and Toongabbie Station is marked on the TfNSW Cycleway Finder^[6] as a shared path.

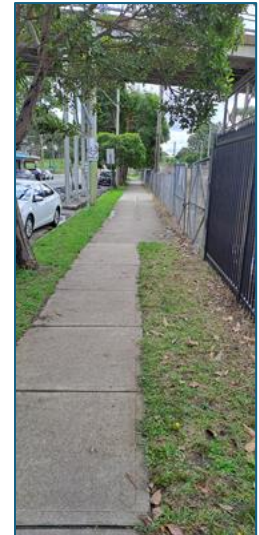
Most of this path is 2.2 to 2.3m wide, which is wider than the shared path minimum of 2.0m but narrower than the recommended minimum of 2.5m.

However, there is an approximately 40m section of this corridor which is only around 1.2m wide.

Widening this section would make this into a usable shared path, and an important route for getting cyclists to the station and town centre from the existing Girraween Ck path.



Marked-up Screenshot from TfNSW Cycleway Finder^[6]



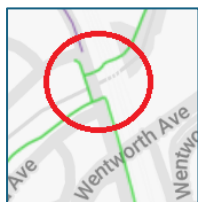
Narrow and Wider sections of the 'shared path' along Portico Pde.

We hope that the text to the right from the Jirramba Precinct Concept Plan was referring to the widening of this path – but it was one of the items in *The Plan* that lacked clarity from our perspective.



Screenshot from *The Plan's* Figure 13.

- At present those travelling from the above shared path and wanting to cross under the railway line at Girraween Ck need to cross Portico Pde twice, on either side of the Girraween Ck bridge.



Dual crossings of Portico Pde, either side of the Girraween Ck bridge.

A shared path crossing of Girraween Creek on the eastern side of Portico Pde would form an important missing link in the local Active Transport network.

As this bridge and approaches would span the boundary with Blacktown Council, Cumberland needs to work with Blacktown to make this link a reality. These inter-council bridges have been installed in the past as evidenced by the separated footpath bridge over Girraween Ck alongside Octavia St some 600m away.



Looking south across Girraween Ck from the existing railway underpass to the 'shared path' along Portico Pde. A bridge in parallel to the road bridge would improve connectivity for pedestrians and riders.



Google streetview image of the parallel bridge alongside Octavia St across Girraween Ck between Cumberland & Blacktown LGAs.

6. This is the planned Toongabbie to Parramatta Active Transport Corridor^[2] which is mainly within the Parramatta LGA (except for the section in Westmead between Bridge Rd and the end of Bailey St which is in Cumberland LGA).
7. Although not an ideal route, this may be one potential option that would use the new signalised crossing of Portico Pde for access to the existing bike parking rack in the Portico Plaza Shopping Centre and to Aurelia St. If this route is considered viable, the new signalised crossing lights across Portico Pde should be fitted with either separate bicycle lanterns or combined bicycle/pedestrian lanterns. It would be ideal if the shared path could be continued along Cornelia Rd to join up with the Girraween Ck shared path. Aurelia St would be great as an Active Transport Corridor. It could either contain a separated path or become a true shared on-road space if the speed limit was reduced to 30 kmph. Octavia St or Girraween Park could be used as an Active Transport Corridor to connect back to the Girraween Ck path.

➤ Closing Comments:

- Although outside the scope of the town centre precinct, there is considerable potential for building additional shared paths that would help funnel cyclists into the town centre precinct and encourage cycling around the area. These include possible options to connect Girraween Park to Oramzi Rd via the end of Teague St and C V Kelly Park, and Targo Rd to C V Kelly Reserve via the old tramway route through Keene Park.
- One suggestion for making Aurelia St more vibrant would be to move most of the on-street parking to off-street satellite parking areas around the precinct perimeter. As people walk a little further to their cars (if they still choose to drive), they walk past other businesses and the chances of them supporting these businesses increase. The more pleasant the environment the longer people will be encouraged to stay.
- We would be happy to clarify any of the points outlined in this document or assist in any other way to improve *The Plan*.
- This feedback was prepared by Rob Kemp on behalf of CAMWEST Bicycle User Group Inc.

References:

- 1 <https://haveyoursay.cumberland.nsw.gov.au/projects/download/17444/ProjectDocument>
- 2 <https://participate.cityofparramatta.nsw.gov.au/toongabbie-westmead-active-transport-corridor>
- 3 <https://haveyoursay.cumberland.nsw.gov.au/projects/download/17666/ProjectDocument>
- 4 <https://www.cumberland.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/inline-files/draft-public-domain-plan-granville-town-centre.pdf>
- 5 <https://happycities.com/blog/how-to-create-vibrant-streets-focus-on-what-people-can-see>
- 6 <https://maps.transport.nsw.gov.au/egeomaps/cycleway-finder/>