Active transport in Newcastle – a ‘Connected City’

Newcastle City Council, through the *Newcastle 2030 Community Strategic Plan* (Revised 2013), sets out a clear vision for the ‘Connected City’ it would like Newcastle to be. The plan recognises that improved public transport is vital to the ongoing health of the city and should be complemented by active transport modes such as cycling and walking.

It is widely recognised that active transport is a key feature of liveable, global cities. This is reflected in Newcastle City Council’s *Hunter Street Revitalisation Strategic Framework (HSRF)* (2010), which identifies cycling as a key priority for Newcastle’s future transport network. The HSRF outlines cycling as the second highest design priority for Hunter Street, with a goal of delivering safe, separated cycleways throughout the city.

While conventional public transport is at the core of the Revitalising Newcastle program, active transport including cycling is important to the overall vision for the city centre.

The *Newcastle City Centre Cycleway Network Strategy* developed by the Revitalising Newcastle program carefully considers Newcastle’s and Council’s priorities on the journey towards becoming a more liveable, global city. It considers the important role active transport plays in providing access to the city centre as well as improving the health and well-being of the community.

While cycling infrastructure is ultimately a local government responsibility, just as public transport and the state road network are the responsibility of State Government, this strategy was prepared to consider the interface between light rail and a cycleway network for Newcastle’s city centre.

This strategy identifies opportunities for Council to consider as they plan for future active transport networks in their growing city. At the same time, the NSW Government is delivering significant improvements in public transport for the city from early 2018, when Newcastle Transport overhauls the bus and ferry timetables, and when light rail is running in early 2019.

As this strategy demonstrates, a well-connected city centre-wide cycleway network can be delivered and can co-exist with Newcastle Light Rail in the future. While the NSW Government will deliver the infrastructure and service improvements required to improve public transport in the city, ongoing Council-led planning and delivery will be needed to achieve corresponding improvements in active transport networks.
A connected cycleway network for Newcastle’s city centre

There is an opportunity in Newcastle’s city centre for a cycleway network that connects to key locations including Newcastle Interchange, University of Newcastle NeW Space, the Civic precinct, Marketown, Queens Wharf, Newcastle’s beaches and the East End. This network would include a major east-west route from Hunter Street in Newcastle West to King Street in Newcastle’s city centre, with north-south links to key locations.

The network was developed with Newcastle Light Rail and broader renewal activities underway in the city centre in mind. A Technical Working Group was established to develop this network, with representatives from Newcastle City Council, Transport for NSW, Roads and Maritime Services and UrbanGrowth NSW.

The proposed east-west route forms the spine of the cycleway network and would be a key travel route for most cyclists. The east-west spine is proposed as a separated on road cycleway that connects with the city’s existing cycleways.

The north-south links provide important connections between the spine of the network, key precincts and existing and future cycleways outside the city centre. Due to space and other considerations, the north-south links are proposed to be a mix of shared off road and on road separated cycleways.

The working group also considered which parts of the network should be prioritised. Consideration was given to the following objectives:

› maximising the potential to attract new cyclists to the network
› providing a facility that extends the urban activation benefits of light rail
› providing connections to existing major cycle routes surrounding the city centre study area
› minimising major impacts on traffic capacity and on-street parking
Figure 1 maps the proposed network and staging
Newcastle City Centre Cycleway Network

Preferred working and staging

- Bi-directional separated cycleway on one side of the road (Priority 1)
- Separated on road cycle lanes on each side of the road (Priority 2)
- Off road cycleway/shared path (Priority 3)
- On road cycleway/shared zone
- Dependent on development details

Existing facilities
Newcastle city centre cycleways

Providing a safe, efficient and user friendly network will encourage more people to chose to cycle to their destination. This means providing the right mix of cycleway types in the city centre. A range of cycleway types were considered for the network, to provide the best balance between user needs and space and other constraints.

The network includes separated off road cycleways, except in one location where there are space restrictions. The use of separated off road cycleways will provide a safer network and help encourage new users.

The network includes four key cycleway types:
End of trip facilities and other opportunities

Locating appropriate, publicly available end of trip facilities throughout the city centre encourages cycling where cyclists can securely store their bicycle, helmet and other items. For some destinations, the ease of locating and using shower and changing facilities will be a key driver behind whether people choose to cycle.

At one end of the spectrum, end of trip facilities will be a simple bike rack. At the other, fully equipped bicycle hubs can include lockers, showers, secure bike storage areas and even repair and maintenance services and hire bikes in a more comprehensive and often commercially-run arrangement.

Two tiers of facility type have been considered as part of the strategy:

**Tier 1** facilities include fully secured bike storage with showers and lockers. These facilities would be located close to major trip attractors such as train stations and universities and provide for long stay commuter trips where showering and changing are important. They may include commercial elements such as bike sales, hire and repair services.

**Tier 2** facilities are conventional bicycle racks. These facilities mostly cater for shorter term trips (although are often used for all day trips as well) and are typically located in publicly visible areas which provide passive surveillance.

It will be important to consider proximity to key destinations, as well as current and future development in the city centre in determining the best location for each type of facility. One opportunity could be to include end of trip facilities as a Council requirement on future educational and commercial developments in the city centre.
In addition to end of trip facilities, customer and educational needs, and opportunities for e-bike sharing schemes should be considered.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opportunities</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>› The proposed cycleway network in this strategy is a new model for Newcastle and includes interfaces between the cycling network and general traffic (similar to cycleways in Sydney’s city centre). These require different safety and courtesy considerations to current cycleway facilities in Newcastle.</td>
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<tr>
<td>› An education campaign would help cyclists identify the location of new routes (and the location of end of trip facilities), cycleway type and how to use them.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>E-bike and bike sharing</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>› Bicycle sharing and e-bike schemes are commonplace in global cities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>› An expanded cycleway network presents opportunities to further investigate private and public delivery options for a bike sharing or e-bike scheme.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 2 maps the suggested locations of end of trip facilities*
Development of the *Newcastle City Centre Cycleway Network Strategy*

Transport for NSW developed this strategy in consultation with Newcastle City Council, RMS, Urban Growth and with the assistance of Bitzios Consulting, one of Australia’s leading independent, specialist traffic engineering and transport planning consultancies. The strategy draws upon studies into active transport performed by Bitzios and others for organisations including Newcastle City Council.

The strategy ensures we have the right solution for both busy commuters and recreational cyclists travelling through the city centre. It also sets a direction for Newcastle City Council to consider as they plan future active transport infrastructure throughout the city centre.

In developing the proposed cycleway network, the working group considered:

› existing transport and cycling strategies in Newcastle
› the location of key routes outside the city centre that require connectivity
› key destinations within the Newcastle city centre
› key cycling customers for the city centre facilities and their needs and constraints
› physical and access impacts, opportunities and requirements associated with the location of the Newcastle Light Rail stops

**Figure 3 shows the study area**

**Key**

- **Existing Off Road**
- **Existing on Road**
- **Informal Existing On Road**
- **Study Area**
About Revitalising Newcastle

The NSW Government is investing over $500 million in the Newcastle city centre via the Revitalising Newcastle program. Light rail is one of Revitalising Newcastle's key deliverables.

The program also includes other major transport and urban renewal projects underpinned by six key principles:

- **Bringing people back to the city centre**: Re-imagine the city centre as an enhanced destination supported by new employment, educational and housing opportunities and public domain that will attract people.
- **Connect the city to its waterfront**: Unite the city centre and the harbour to improve the experience of being in and moving around the city.
- **Help grow new jobs in the city centre**: Invest in initiatives that create jobs, with a focus on innovative industries, higher education and initiatives to encourage a range of businesses to the city centre.
- **Create great places linked to new transport**: Integrate urban transformation with new, efficient transport to activate Hunter and Scott streets and return them to thriving main streets.
- **Create economically sustainable public domain and community assets**: Leave a positive legacy for the people of Newcastle. Ensure that new public domain and community facilities can be maintained to a high standard into the future.
- **Preserve and enhance heritage and culture**: Respect, maintain and enhance the unique heritage and character of the city centre through revitalisation.

About Newcastle Light Rail

Newcastle Light Rail will provide a frequent, reliable and comfortable journey through Newcastle’s city centre, connecting key activity precincts and revitalising the city centre’s once thriving main streets.

The 2.7km system will carry up to 1,200 people an hour through six stops in total, beginning at the Newcastle Interchange at Wickham and running through the city centre to Pacific Park, just 200 metres from Newcastle Beach.

Newcastle Light Rail will integrate with a vastly improved public transport system. The new operator of Newcastle Transport will take over existing services on 1 July 2017, overhaul bus and ferry timetables in early 2018, and will operate light rail when services start in early 2019.

Transport for NSW engaged extensively with the community on the Review of Environmental Factors (REF) for Newcastle Light Rail, which was on display during April-May 2016 and garnered about 400 submissions. This Cycleway Strategy was a key commitment made by Transport for NSW in response to feedback provided in the REF process.

This strategy shows that light rail does not preclude, and can complement the delivery of a well-connected cycleway network within the city centre, giving Novocastrians more travel choices and improving the health and wellbeing of the community.
About the cycleway network strategy

The aim of the strategy is to propose a cycleway network that meets the following needs:

› demonstrates a fit for purpose cycleway network that can coexist with light rail
› connectivity to surrounding, established cycle routes and facilities
› ensures Council’s vision is achievable alongside light rail
› links to key destinations such as Newcastle Interchange, the University/Civic Precinct and Hunter Street Mall in an east-west direction
› provides north-south connections between residential areas to the south and activities within the city centre
› provides a high profile east-west spine to encourage new cycling users into the city centre
› maximises the use of separated cycleways to encourage less experienced cyclists into the network
› is supported by end of trip facilities and effective marketing and education to maximise the potential mode shift to cycling for a variety of trip purposes.

The strategy identifies a cycleway network for the Newcastle CBD which would integrate with surrounding cycleway networks, as well as other transport and revitalisation projects underway in the city.

Reference documents

A number of strategies and plans influenced this strategy. These included:

› Newcastle Transport Strategy, The City of Newcastle, September 2014
› Newcastle Inner City Bike Lanes Investigation, Bitzios Consulting, November 2014
› AS2890.5-1993 Parking Facilities – On-Street Parking, Standards Australia
› Guide to traffic management: part 4: network management, AGTM04-14, Austroads, 2014
› Newcastle Light Rail Review of Environmental Factors, Transport for NSW, April 2016
› Newcastle Road Safety Strategy, NSW Government, 2012
› NSW Bicycle Guidelines Version 1.2, RMS, July 2005
› NSW Bike Plan, NSW Government, 2010

More information

For more information about the Newcastle City Centre Cycleway Network Strategy, the Revitalising Newcastle Program or Newcastle Light Rail visit revitalisingnewcastle.nsw.gov.au