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Bike North Submission

NorthConnex Environmental Impact Statement July 2014

To:
Director of Infrastructure Projects
Department of Planning and Environment
GPO Box 39
Sydney NSW 2001

Bike North recognises the importance of the NorthConnex project for road transport through Northern Sydney, and the potential for this project to facilitate transformation of the current above ground street network. Improvements to the amenity and operation of the corresponding above ground corridor are identified as key project objectives which should be appropriately planned and resourced.

Provision for cycling infrastructure is one such element for which the NSW Government has identified a commitment construct as part of major infrastructure projects such as NorthConnex. Cycling infrastructure will enhance the street environment and give improved mobility options for the community.

Submission Scope

This submission presents recommendations by Bike North of plan elements considered a necessary minimum for an effective use of NorthConnex interchanges and related infrastructure for cycling.

We examine the following aspects of the NorthConnex EIS:

- ◆ Importance of NorthConnex to Cycling
- ◆ NorthConnex Design for Cycling
 - a. Interchanges
 - b. Hills M2 Integration
 - c. Pennant Hills Road
- ◆ Construction Impacts and Provisions for Cycling
- ◆ Other EIS comments

Quotations from from NorthConnex EIS project document are shown in this submission and are presented in italicised text.

About Bike North

Bike North is a volunteer run bicycle user group, affiliated with Bicycle New South Wales, with 600 members and providing services to thousands of Sydney cyclists. We work with eight councils in northern Sydney, towards creating a bicycling friendly environment for all who want to use a bike for transport or recreation in northern Sydney.

As well as actively working with councils, Roads and Maritime Services / Transport NSW and other government authorities, we run a diverse, popular and quality program of social rides which is free and open to the public. More recently we have developed and offer an education program of cycling skills called 'Bike for Life' to encourage more skilled and confident bike riders in Sydney.

Bike North has worked with local governments councils, state government authorities and transportation consultant on a number of transport projects including:

- M2 widening – phase 1 and 2
- Lane Cove Tunnel Project
- Chatswood to Epping Rail Line
- North West Rail Link

NorthConnex and Cycling

Bike North wish to help ensure that the proposed NorthConnex investment enhances the opportunity for safe cycling in north-western Sydney.

Several NorthConnex project objectives are directly relevant to cyclists requirements:

- Provide a motorway that is safe and reliable for road users.
 - Cyclist are road users
 - Road users not just of the motorway but also at the interchanges and other NorthConnex facilities
- Assist in a reduction in traffic congestion, particularly along Pennant Hills Road, and provide shorter travel times for road users.
 - Cyclists are road users
- Minimise adverse social and environmental impacts in the local area during construction and operation.
- Demonstrate excellence in design and environmental sustainability.
 - Cycling being the most environmentally sustainable & efficient form of transport.
- ... improve local air quality and noise amenity along that (Pennant Hills Rd) corridor.

In addition, NorthConnex identifies its' aims to:

- Improve road safety for pedestrians, cyclists and motorists" along Pennant Hills Road.
- Improve travel conditions and local amenity for all road users including motorists, cyclists and pedestrians.
- Reduced delays for on road cyclists at intersections along Pennant Hills Road.
- Improve cyclist safety (reduced potential for crashes with other road users) as a result of lower traffic volumes, particularly lower volumes of heavy vehicles. However, the project is not anticipated to generate additional cycling trips on Pennant Hills Road.
- Improved amenity for cyclists.

The NSW Ministers for Roads and Ports and for Transport states in the Sydney Cycling Futures (2013) plan that a "safe and connected network of bicycle paths is an important part of Sydney's integrated transport system" (p2).

NorthConnex Design for Cycling

The actual NorthConnex tunnels will be off-limits to cyclists during normal operation. However, where interchanges between NorthConnex and existing road infrastructure are planned (Pacific Highway, Pennant Hills Road and the M2), provision in design and implementation for the safe and efficient traversing of cyclists is required.

Northern Interchange

"At the northern interchange cyclist use the shoulders of the M1 Pacific Motorway from the Pennant Hills Road intersection to Berowra. The remainder of the northern interchange does not provide dedicated cycling infrastructure."

"The design of the project has included specific provision for grade separated cycle infrastructure on the Hills M2 Motorway and the M1 Pacific Motorway at the main alignment tunnel connections. This would provide a safe cycling environment by removing the need to cross two traffic lanes."

The proposed grade separation for cycling infrastructure on the M1 Pacific Motorway interchange is a good solution. The grade separated cycling infrastructure provision at both the Northern and southern interchanges are a critical requirement and Bike North is keen to see the design details.

Southern Interchange

"The design of the project has included specific provision for grade separated cycle infrastructure on the Hills M2 Motorway and the M1 Pacific Motorway at the main alignment tunnel connections. This would provide a safe cycling environment by removing the need to cross two traffic lanes."

As with the northern interchange, the proposed grade separation for cycling infrastructure on the Hills M2 Motorway interchange is a good and necessary provision for which Bike North looks forward to seeing design details

Hills M2 Integration Works

"Cyclists travel in each direction within the road shoulder of the Hills M2 Motorway, providing access along the length of the motorway to local cyclist network links, although cyclists are currently banned from the eastbound carriageway of the motorway between Pennant Hills Road and Delhi Road due to ongoing construction works."

"On completion of the project, cycle access would be restored to the breakdown lane on the Hills M2 Motorway and the M1 Pacific Motorway."

"While cyclists are likely to be unaffected as they are permitted to use a portion of road space that is not used as a travel lane by general traffic, there is the potential that as traffic volumes and density on the corridor increase, a greater rate of incidents may occur which require vehicles to be stored in the road shoulder currently utilised by cyclists."

Integration with the Hills M2 motorway is critical. Widening works have been proposed for the westbound section of the M2 between Pennant Hills Rd and Windsor Road. We understand these works are to be managed as a separate project to the NorthConnex Tunnel. However a requirement of these future works should be the inclusion of improved cycling infrastructure.

Pennant Hills Rd

"The length of Pennant Hills Road between the southern and northern interchanges is not listed as a cycle route. However, a length of cycle way is provided on the northern side of the road from Duffy Avenue to Dartford Road."

"... there are no parallel routes for cyclists to access along the Pennant Hills Road corridor, leaving cyclists with currently limited dedicated options. Hornsby Council recognises the Pennant Hills Road corridor as a 'high difficulty' cycle route (Hornsby Shire Council, 2008)."

"Provision for cyclists northbound and southbound on Pennant Hills Road across the interchange."

Pennant Hills Road is a natural cycling arterial corridor in a district which has very poor cycling infrastructure. The NSW government has committed to the provision of cycling infrastructure as part of the works associated with major infrastructure projects. It is reasonable that dedicated cycleways be installed along Pennant Hills Road in both directions. Provision of this cycling infrastructure would be consistent with the cycleway built along Epping road in association with the Lane Cove Tunnel construction.

Pennant Hills Road cycleways would also be consistent with the stated project objectives of returning Pennant Hills Road to the community and improving the amenity of the above ground corridor.

Provisions for Cycling During Construction

“Under the ‘with construction’ scenario, cyclists may experience increased delays at intersections for on-road cyclists due to an increase in traffic volumes along the corridor. Cyclists may be diverted through or around construction sites and / or be required to dismount at certain locations in order to ensure their safety is not impacted by construction of the project.

Additionally, there would be no cyclist access to certain sections of the Hills M2 Motorway and the M1 Pacific Motorway during construction works. During the construction period, alternative cycle routes would be established. The alternative cycle route for the Hills M2 Motorway is likely to be consistent with the route recently utilised during the construction of the Hills M2 Motorway Upgrade project. The alternative cycle route for the M1 Pacific Motorway would be likely to use the Old Pacific Highway to Berowra.”

“Construction of the Hills M2 Motorway integration would necessitate the temporary exclusion of cyclists from the Hills M2 Motorway westbound carriageway and the M1 Pacific Motorway between Pennant Hills Road and Ku-ring-gai Chase Road. An alternative off motorway cycle route would be provided during this period. Further information is provided in Section 7.1 (Traffic and transport).”

“Overall, the traffic management plan would set out the strategy and procedures to minimise, mitigate and communicate the impacts of the construction of the project on the capacity, performance and safety of the local road network and traffic systems. The traffic management plan would also address the management of impacts on emergency services, cyclists, pedestrians, public transport and parking.”

Detailed consultation should be undertaken with cycling organisations to establish reasonable provisions and traffic management plans to cover the construction period. The traffic management plans for cyclist indicated in the EIS are embryonic and cannot be relied upon for acceptable and safe bicycle travel. Detailed travel routes and traffic management are required to help ensure routes are viable and are upgraded to a suitable standard for cycling during construction.

In this regard:

- Suitable independent consultants experienced in cycling infrastructure design should be employed.
- Requiring cyclists to dismount and walk through diversions must be avoided.
- Frequent maintenance of alternate cycling routes/provisions must be included, such as vegetation overgrowth cut-back and path cleaning (especially after adverse weather events).

Detour and diversion facilities for cyclists must be established and confirmed to be compliant with the detailed traffic management plans prior to commencement of construction (of the affected section), and must be included within the deed of approval together with practical means by which issues can be reported and resolved.

Recommendations

● Project Management

- A suitable independent contractor experienced with cycling infrastructure design should be appointed to manage the development of and oversight of cycling provisions
- The NorthConnex project team and Independent cycling infrastructure consultant should include consultation with cycling organisations in the development of the cycling infrastructure designs as they apply to both interim provisions during construction and permanent cycling infrastructure.

● Construction Area Provisions for Cycling

- The NorthConnex project team to be obliged to incorporate recommendations of the Independent Cycling Infrastructure Consultant into the detour and diversion facilities, and into the design of the final project infrastructure.
- Deed of approval requirements by the Director-General should include:
 - independent contractor assessment of impacts and mitigation strategies for cycling and pedestrian access and safety associated with those ancillary works around the project corridor
 - consideration of opportunities to integrate interim construction provisions for cycling and pedestrian elements into the surrounding street networks.

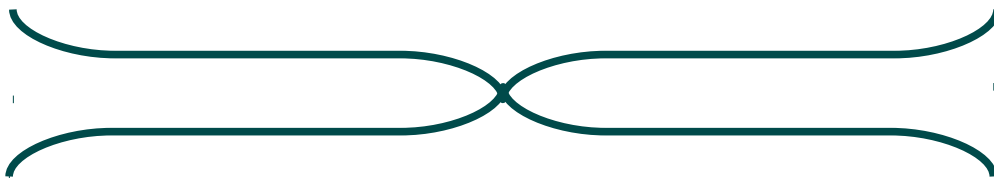
● Project Design Objectives and Cycling

Dedicated cycleways should be constructed along Pennant Hills Road in both directions

Conclusion

The NorthConnex EIS acknowledges NSW government plans and policies for cycling. The EIS also declares objectives for the future condition of the Pennant Hills Road corridor. The EIS however does not adequately represent those plans and objectives with corresponding initiatives which can reasonably be expected to achieve the desired outcomes.

Additional design work and commitment to cycling infrastructure is required which should be developed as and constructed in association with the NorthConnex tunnel works.



Please refer any questions about this submission to:

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