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Newcastle Inner City Bypass (Rankin Park to Jesmond)

EIS design December 2016

Newcastle Cycleways Movement Inc. (NCM) has been working for better conditions for cycling in the Newcastle and the Hunter region since 1977. In recent years we have developed a good relationship with Government agencies at all levels. As public consultation on major government projects became the, requisite process to follow, we have participated in these consultations. We are proud of the improvements we have helped to achieve.

NCM participated in the public consultation process for this project during May and June this year. Members attended several of the public drop-in sessions and the organisation made a submission through the formal channels, along with Bicycle NSW.

Amongst many other points raised the cycling community made it absolutely clear that the **disruption to the existing Jesmond Park cycleway was unacceptable**. It was therefore extremely disappointing to see that **not one improvement for active travel was implemented** into the EIS design over the Refined Design of May '16.

Our members and the general public were justifiably outraged at the continued use of the design for the northern interchange that disrupts the existing Jesmond cycleway. Two protests were held on site at the Jesmond Path and many people suggested boycotting the public consultation process.

However, for now, NCM has agreed to continue to work with the government public consultation process. We hope that by participating further the concerns listed below about how this design fails the active transport public will be addressed.

NCM acknowledges the RMS RP2J design team have heard our concerns and offered some gestures of goodwill to keep the consultation process on going. We appreciated the opportunity of a special briefing at the Darby Street RMS offices on Wednesday the 7th of December, 2016. (The December special briefing) Here we were shown conceptual designs of solutions that quite adequately addressed our concerns for both the southern and northern interchanges. However until these are included in the ongoing project design, the gesture of goodwill remains nothing but a hollow gesture that itself does nothing to improve the conditions for active transport.

Additional connectivity for pedestrians and cyclists

The EIS overview document and the primary EIS continually state there is “Additional connectivity for pedestrians and cyclists.” By the following account NCM’s position is that the current design offers a **net loss of connectivity**.

Lost connectivity:

1. The pedestrian and cyclist signalised crossing at the intersection of McCaffery and Lookout road.
2. The cycle lane on lookout road between the turn left into McCaffery and the through traffic lanes.
3. Numerous walking and cycling tracks throughout the bush land surrounding the hospital. Current tracks from the west used by staff to access JHH include, From
 - a. McCaffery
 - b. Cambridge Drive
 - c. Sygna Close
 - d. Kabbarli Court

These will all now have to use the path provided in the Hospital interchange, which is also an existing well used route.

4. Jesmond Park to Victory Parade.
5. Continuity of Jesmond Park path.

Downgraded:

1. The three sets of signalised crossings are at best a significant downgrade of the existing facility.
Figure 5.3 does not show these crossings as shared pedestrian and cyclist signalised crossings implying cyclist will be expected to dismount.
2. The existing peaceful fire trail in a natural bush setting is cut by the plan for the hospital interchange high speed off ramp from the bypass.
3. From the existing Jesmond path and along Newcastle road to the proposed Shared Path Bridge is ridiculously too long.

Upgraded:

1. The replacement of the existing signalised shared path crossing of Newcastle road with a shared path bridge is a welcome upgrade.
2. A shared path along Lookout Road to Blackbutt reserve, connecting to the existing underpass south of Grandview Road is a welcome upgrade to the existing practice of riding the shoulder of Lookout Road

“Additional Connectivity for pedestrians and cyclists”

1. ?

Provision for Active Transport:

There is an intent expressed in various Federal and State legislations that significant road infrastructure projects like this should provide for active transport modes, i.e. tax payer funded projects must provide for users of all modes of transport, in their design. The NSW State Government goal is 5% cycling trip mode share. However, **funding for cycling infrastructure continues to be around 0.6% of road infrastructure funding**. NSW Budget

expenditure on transport infrastructure is \$10billion per FY '15-16 to 17-18. Present expenditure on cycling infrastructure is approximately \$60 million per FY.

Whilst cycling mode share is typically in the order 1-2% it is internationally recognised as consistently higher around tertiary education facilities.

We note that this short section of inner city bypass is expected to cost more than twice the total cost of the whole CycleSafe Network proposal that would equip the greater part of Newcastle and Lake Macquarie LGAs with safe cycleways. This continues the over emphasising of roads that has been a feature of government spending for many years and leaves many other very productive projects unfunded.

Unique Opportunity; Bi-directional parallel path, end to end:

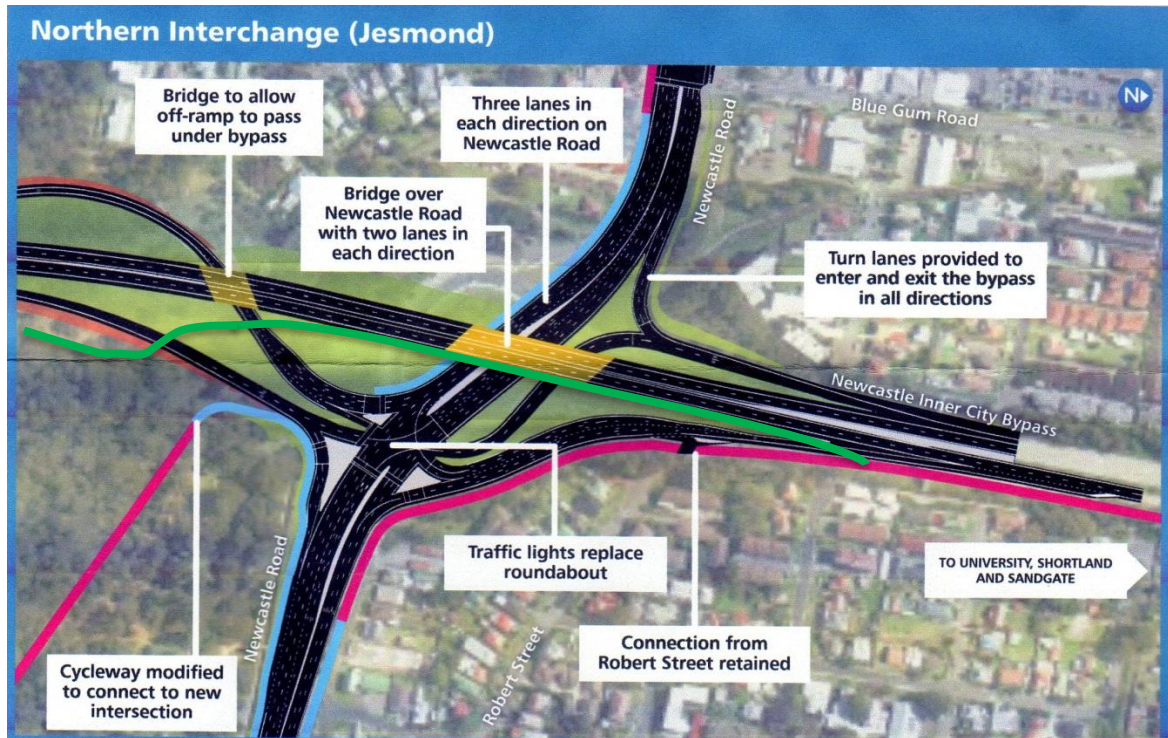
There is a once only ever opportunity in this project to provide an excellent high quality active transport link from the University, connecting with the John Hunter Hospital precinct, and then through to the Blackbutt reserve, at very little additional cost. There will never be another opportunity to build this shared path at anywhere near the cost that this would add to this project if done at the time of the bypass construction. Most Futurists predict a future with a stronger emphasis on active travel therefore this is an opportunity that cannot be missed.

This protected shared path would link in the north with the existing “University” path in the vicinity of the existing east-west shared path bridge as shown below. A new bridge in this vicinity has the height to clear the existing off ramps, and links in well with users from both sides of the existing bypass section. The shared path would then bridge Newcastle road with the bypass structure. A path of this design allows the fastest and most convenient connection for active travel between the University and the Hospital.



Location of proposed bridge from existing shared path to Bypass shoulder based protected shared path.

South of Newcastle Road this bi-directional shared path should keep away from the bypass as far as reasonably possible considering the best gradient to achieve the highest usage, the best and cheapest engineering, and the best amenity for the active transport users.



Proposed northern route of bi-directional shared path, end to end

Again the emphasis is that there will never be another opportunity to build this path.

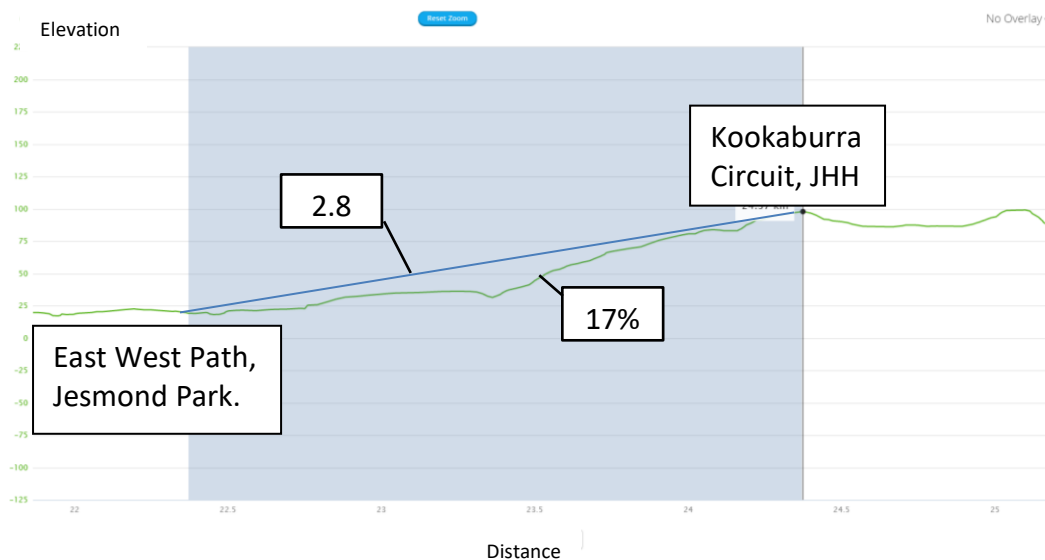
In the southern interchange this path would reasonably connect with the signalised crossings at McCaffrey Drive.

Proposed Shared Path Bridge over Newcastle Road:

NCM welcomes the reference change and associated design modifications, from “footbridge” in the May ’16 Revised design, to “Shared Path bridge” in the EIS Nov ‘16. The illustrations of this proposed bridge, in the EIS show a much more acceptable design of bridge compared to the Revised Design May ’16.

NCM has a number of concerns about this route. One might use the old saying, "The Devil is in the detail."

- 1) A significant problem with this proposed route is the existing path from Jesmond Park to the hospital precinct. Whilst this existing path is well used by many cyclists most days, it is a very poor standard. It would not meet any current Austroads guidelines for width, gradient, or curve radius. It achieves 17% gradient at its worst and has an average of 8% for a length of 700 m.



Linear section profile of the existing Jesmond park to JHH path.

A theoretical uniform grade path the length of the existing track is still 2.8% for 2.37 kms. Not an insignificant hill for infrequent riders. Note; the “Cycling Aspects of Austroads Guides, Figure 7.2 Desirable uphill gradients for ease of cycling” is a graph showing length of path to acceptable angle of gradient. This graph maxes out at 200m at which the maximum acceptable gradient is 3%, maximum desirable 2%. It is not desirable to maintain 2.8% for 2.37kms.

This existing path certainly does not meet the CycleSafe Network design criteria of being user friendly enough to encourage more people to ride to work.

- 2) The plans in the EIS do not show the connection of this bridge with the existing path up to the hospital precinct. At the December Special Briefing, council raised their concerns about the route implied through Jesmond Park. Neither of the existing routes, either through the park from the signalised, at grade crossing, nor the path on the east side of the oval in the vicinity of the rose garden are Austroads standard acceptable paths.

RMS must resolve with council and NCM an acceptable connection with this shared path over bridge of Newcastle road, and the route through to the hospital precinct.

3) The existing path is not lit at night. It should be lit in-order to meet the CycleSafe Network objective of encouraging the significant number of shift workers in this precinct to consider active transport. The bypass end to end shared path would have a much stronger passive surveillance.

Interchange Detailed Plans

The following sections of this submission refer to identified interchanges of Southern, Hospital, and Northern and were originally written based on the Revised Draft Plan May 2016. Some notes have been added referring to details in the EIS December '16 or discussion at the December Special Briefing.

Southern Interchange:

NCM welcomes the inclusion of the cycleway on the eastern side of Lookout Road. However purely as drawn in Figure 5-1a (p96 EIS) it would be of little value as it has no feeder connections. Figure 5-4 (p108 EIS) shows the path north of the McCaffrey Drive intersection but there is no indication of continuing further north.

NCM's recommended route from the city, east, to JHH, is from Curzon Road, Carrington Parade, New Lambton Heights. The island on Carrington Parade at the intersection of Lookout Road is currently a problem for east bound riders.

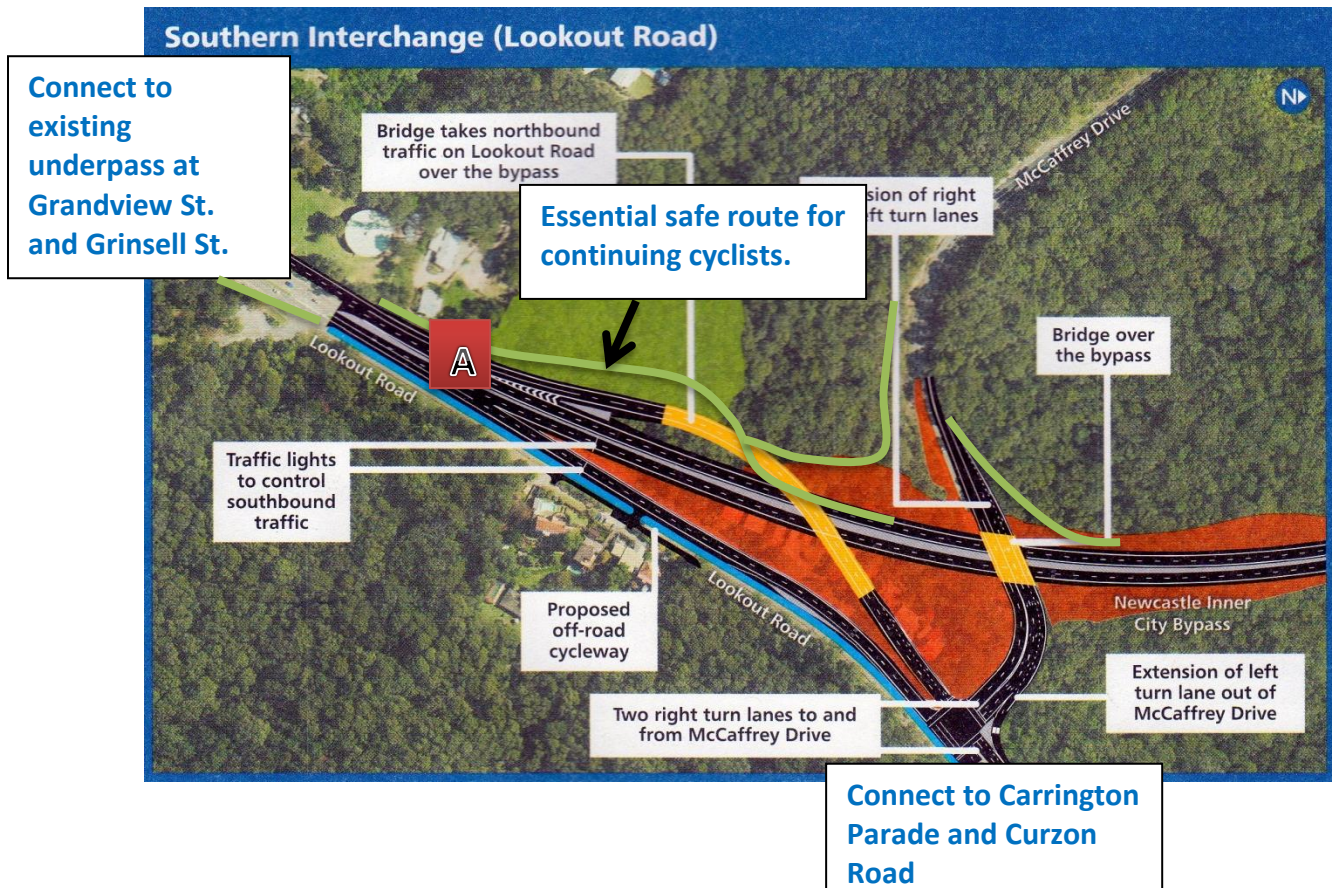
This proposed Lookout Road path should continue north and provide for cyclists taking this route, and resolve this island problem.

Figure 5-4 doesn't show the signalised crossing as being a shared bicycle and pedestrian facility, as the current southern crossing is.

The proposed footpath over Bridge 2, parallel with McCaffrey Drive, should be a shared path to connect to the proposed Lookout Road shared path. Figure 5-7 (p116 EIS) shows the cross section of this bridge and should include a protection barrier between vehicle traffic and the proposed 2500 minimum shared path.

The EIS claims this path will join up with the existing underpass of Lookout Road near the intersection of Grandview Parade, via the carpark of Blackbutt Reserve. The gates to this car park are locked overnight, prohibiting free bicycle access. The grade from the car park down to the eastern end of the would need to be reduced for safe approaches, and the existing track is not sealed. There is a lot of work to resolve these problems before the claim can be accepted that the proposed Lookout Road Path links with this underpass.

Ideally this path should continue to the signalised intersection of Carnley Avenue thus allowing connection with the existing Grinsel Street cycle route/path.



Point A in the diagram above; where the Lookout Road traffic has two lanes to continue north along to the existing lookout road presents a serious safety hazard to people riding north along the proposed bypass, i.e. to the University. This requires them to change across 2 lanes of full speed traffic. This is similar to the situation at Hexham where north bound traffic veers left to take the Hexham Bridge. Cyclists continuing north have the option of a slip lane west of this bridge bringing them to the Oak Hungry Jacks signalised intersection. Using this precedent a similar resolution is also proposed here for Lookout Road, referred to as the Essential safe route for continuing cyclists above

NCM acknowledges that during the December special briefing the RMS RP2J design team were able to show conceptual work on a route much as indicated.

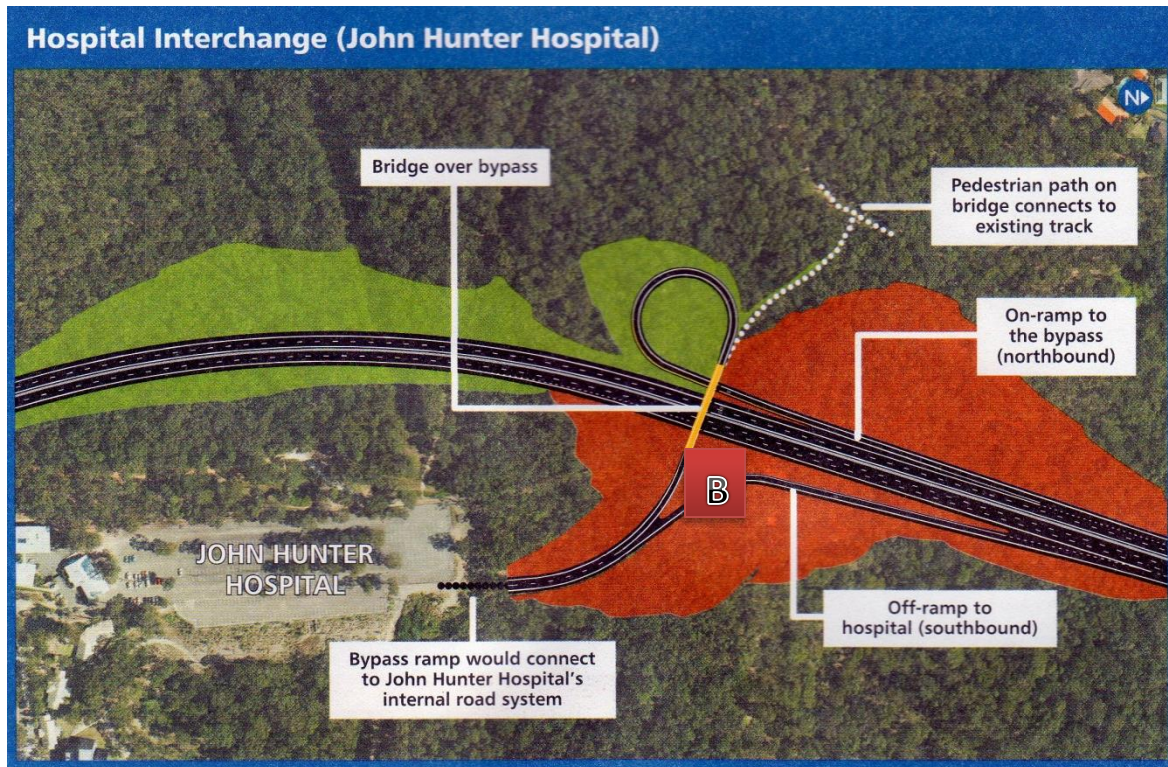
Please also consider the provision of a small and direct path off the above Essential safe route for cyclist directly onto the re-aligned McCaffrey Drive, avoiding the need to continue to the proposed lighted intersection.

During the December special briefing, the need to bring cyclists safely off the bypass, riding south, and onto Lookout road was also raised. The problem here is the cyclists approaching this intersection are coming out of a steep climb with a slow pace, and may take some time to move across to the left of Lookout Road. A refuge in the tapering island was suggested. A ramp should also be provided to ensure cyclists can get off Lookout Road, and onto the shared path.

Hospital Interchange:

The provision of access across the proposed bypass on the side of this bridge is an excellent and vital inclusion. RMS designers are to be congratulated for the vision of providing this for the future link.

NCM welcomes the change of reference to Shared path in the EIS..



NCM concedes that the need to provide for emergency service vehicles means the NCM proposal in May submission cannot go ahead. The shared path must be on the north side of Bridge 3 as per Figure 5-16 (p140 EIS) Existing and proposed Fire Trails.

As drawn by the dotted white line in the RMS diagram above, on the northern side of the proposed Bridge 3, this path links to the "no man's land" at point B above; between the on and off ramps. This presents a problem for active transport users to cross the Off ramp to Hospital. The Current EIS shows no protected or safe crossing option.

Discussions at the December Special Briefing did not come to any satisfactory resolution of this conflict. We wait to see what the RMS RP2J design team can propose to make this a safe crossing for all active transport users.

Figure 5-8 (p117 EIS) raises further concerns about this design.

If this is a genuine shared path there should be protection between the traffic lane and the shared path. 2.5 m is not wide enough for a fire truck in an emergency situation.

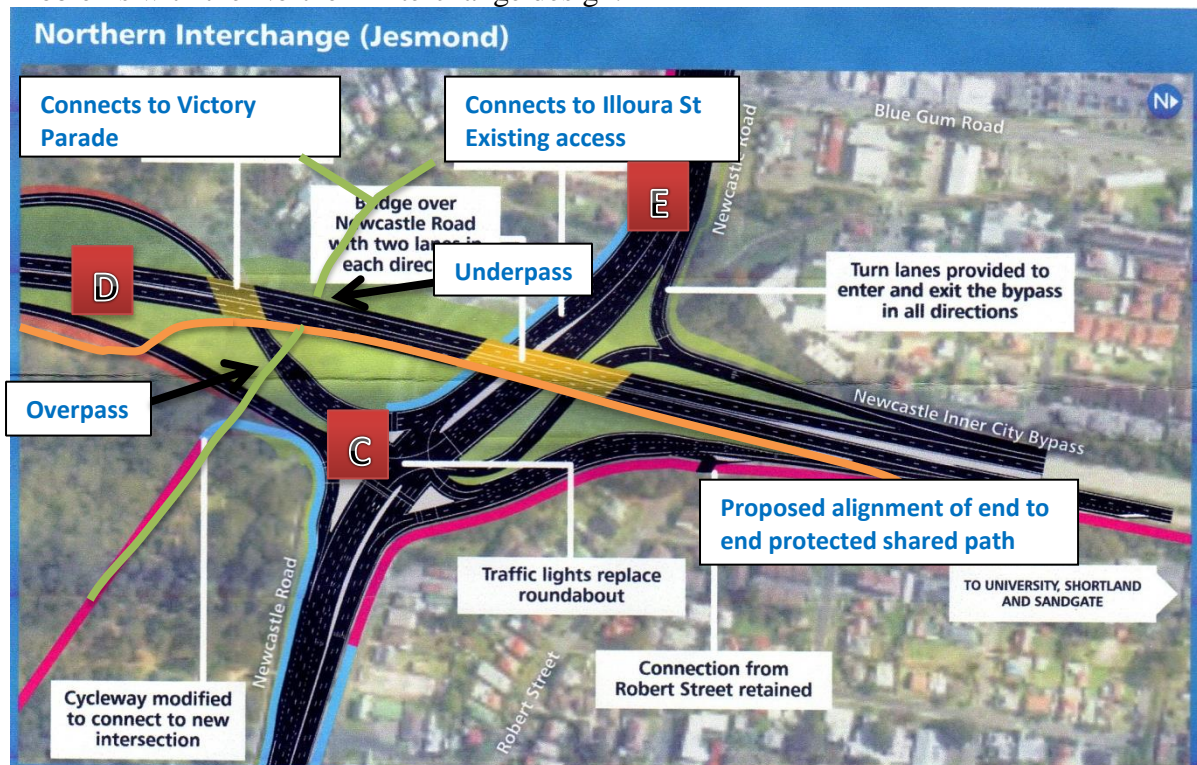
Northern Interchange:

Here NCM has considerable concern about how the very popular existing Jesmond park path is cut. **This destruction of one of Newcastle's most popular cycleways is unacceptable.** It has been the concern of a large number of members contacting the NCM committee, both in May and during the EIS public exhibition period. This was the reason for two protests against this proposal in Jesmond park in November and December 2016. The provision of three new signalised crossings at point C below means users are faced with 4 stop start crossings within approximately 250m.

The RMS RP2J design team are now fully aware of our outrage that this was not corrected in the EIS designs released in November.

During the December special briefing a perfectly acceptable draft overpass underpass option was tabled, showing very little disruption to the alignment of the existing Jesmond path, a slight ramping of this path on the eastern approach to the interchange, and the end of this modification coming back close to the existing intersection of three paths in Jesmond Park..

Problems with the Northern interchange design.



NCM's preferred route, coming from Bluegum Road crossing to Jesmond Park is to use the Illoura Street access point to this path, rather than the Newcastle Road route at point E due to the wide and frequently blocked driveways to the Jesmond Executive Villas. Traveling west however the lack of provision of path, on the corner of Illoura along Newcastle Road means cyclists are forced to use this path in front of the Villas. This project provides an excellent opportunity to include this 20 m of path and improve this continuity.

Currently many cyclists use Newcastle Road for higher speed training. Often these riders will head north along the Inner City Bypass. NCM would like to see a bike box and associated signal button or sensor activation, allowing cyclist to wait safely, forward of and visible to the traffic also waiting to turn right, through the 'S' under the bypass and then north along the existing bypass.

Conclusion:

The cycling community were outraged that despite participating in the May June 2016 public consultation process the illustrations published with the EIS in November showed no improvement for cycling facilities from that first process.

To cut one of Newcastle's most popular existing cycle routes is unacceptable.

The Hunter Regional Plan 2036, released by the NSW Government Planning and Environment earlier this year promises to support increases in walking and cycling.

“Improvements are being made to the planning and delivery of Greater Newcastle's active transport network. This includes the CycleSafe proposal, an initiative that aims to connect 90 kilometres of existing cycle paths with a 140 kilometre network of new construction to deliver a system of safe, easy to follow walking and cycling connections throughout Newcastle and Lake Macquarie.” P48

As it stands the EIS for the RP2J bypass proposal makes a mockery of this boast.

Active transport is seen as an essential part of the future of all liveable and desirable cities. Urban planners worldwide are including active transport infrastructure.

With the growing epidemic of sedentary lifestyle diseases rapidly becoming the leading cause of death and an ever increasing burden on the health care budget, there needs to be a coordinated whole of government approach to tackle this problem. The provision of active transport infrastructure is seen as an essential part of this whole of government approach.

The corrections to the EIS are not unrealistic asks. As stated above the NSW budgeted expenses for transport infrastructure is approximately \$10billion per year for the next 3 years. Cycling infrastructure budget is approximately \$60 million. This is 0.6% funding to achieve a stated goal of 5% mode share.

Yours Sincerely,

Peter Lee

President of Newcastle Cycleways Movement.

This submission was written by Peter Lee with contributions from several other NCM members.