bicycle NSW

Creating a better environment for all bicycle riders

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22nd February, 2021

Dear Sir or Madam,

RE: Beaches Link & Gore Hill Freeway EiS application number SSI-8862

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed Beaches Link and Gore Hill Freeway EiS SSI-8862. Bicycle NSW has been the peak bicycle advocacy group in NSW for over forty-four years, and has over 30 affiliated local Bicycle User Groups. This submission has been prepared to be read together with the submissions of Bike North an affiliated Bicycle User Group of Bicycle NSW, and John Hawkins, a Bicycle NSW board member and subject matter expert on the needs of bike riders in the Northern Beaches.

This submission contains objections to elements of the project, its rationale and to the opportunities currently missed to maximise the benefits, and minimise harms, to people and the environment. It also contains recommendations for improvements in the way the project is designed and delivered, in order to enhance its safety and amenity for bike riders and the wider community. This submission will focus on the overall project and lessons from other state road projects, whilst the submissions by Bike North and John Hawkins provide vital granular detail of the local impacts on bike riders and communities.

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Learning from the past

Projects of this size and scope are an enormous community investment that should improve the lives of people for generations to come. They also should not endanger people during, or after, their construction.

Past projects have not delivered on their promises. The M7 Motorway has failed to deliver promised conservation offsets fifteen years on from development,[i] and Westconnex has not reduced traffic on Parramatta road.[ii] All of the previous warnings from City of Sydney Council, the National Trust and Infrastructure Australia about the ineffectiveness of building more roads to reduce traffic and congestion,[iii] are now coming home to roost. Sydney now has a large number of toll roads that are not delivering on predicted decongestion promises to taxpayers, or income generation promises to toll operators.[iv]

If you build for more cars, you get more cars

Providing physically separated networks of cycling infrastructure that enable kilometres travelled by car to be replaced with travel by bike, and reducing the speed of motor vehicle travel, all improve cyclist

safety.[v] Reducing motor vehicle use makes the road related environment safer for bike riding and active transport. Unfortunately, this project as currently designed, provides little additional cycling infrastructure and seeks to increase the speed and volume of car kilometres travelled.

The evidence is that providing more kilometres of roadway for car travel increases vehicle kilometres travelled by current residents, increases commercial traffic, and does not divert traffic from other types of road.[vi] Increasing public transport provision has also not demonstrated a reduction in vehicle kilometres travelled, and neither additional roadways or public transport provision reduce congestion.[vii] Instead, by making commutes faster, people are enabled to live further from their jobs, education, workplace and services. This encourages more motor vehicle travel, more energy consumption, and the generation of more pollution.

This undermines efforts to reduce carbon pollution outlined in treaties, legislation and policy as described in the Beaches Link and Gore Hill Freeway EiS (the EiS) at 26.2.1[viii] It also contradicts the NSW Government's Road User Space Allocation Policy which requires the avoidance of "…an overall increase in general traffic lanes for private motorised vehicles."[ix] Reducing commuting traffic for example on Military Road, will simply mean more people use it to complete other car journeys, rather than walking, cycling or using public transport. This undermines the stated goal of the NSW Government's Future Transport 2056 Plan[x] to have most short journeys completed by foot or bicycle, in order to enable a significant population increase in NSW.

Bicycle NSW recommends this project be required to develop a network of safe cycling infrastructure that would enable people to replace more motor vehicle journeys with active travel. The sections of shared user path as planned by the project at Balgowlah and Wakehurst Parkway[xi] are insufficient to create a network that could enable the replacement of car journeys with active transport. They also do nothing to reallocate road space away from motor-vehicle use.

Bicycle NSW recommends enhancing this project by developing safe cycling infrastructure within a 5km radius of the project, to enable more people to travel to work, education and services by bike. If developed in the initial stages, mode-shift to active transport could assist in alleviating road congestion during the works, and separating vulnerable road users from heavy vehicles.

Planning for the future

The Future Transport 2056 Plan and the Greater Sydney Region Plan were developed years before the COVID-19 pandemic, and whist chapter three of the EiS acknowledges the likelihood of changes in the way people work, it still builds on a forecast of the population of Greater Sydney growing to eight million people over the next 40 years, and a model of daily commutes to work.[xii]

A new public service policy announcement by the Deputy Premier of NSW requires that senior government roles be able to be based anywhere in NSW,[xiii] Infrastructure Australia reports high levels of remote learning continuing for university students, and a strong shift to active transport.[xiv] Urbanist Richard Florida[xv] forecasts that workers in the knowledge economy and creative class will increasingly eschew lengthy commutes in favour of working and meeting at local hubs in suburbs, high-streets and close to residential areas with high local amenity.

This suggests a need for greater development of active transport connections that focus on local neighbourhoods, on technology infrastructure to enable digital connections to work and study, rather than on the old models of commuting from suburbs to central work hubs.

Environmental impacts

The bitter irony of Chapter 26 of the EiS is that it goes to great trouble to assess the vulnerability of the project to climate change in accordance with the NSW Government's climate change projections,[xvi] and a range of relevant policies and standards,[xvii] without properly addressing the contribution this project will inevitably make to inducing more motor vehicle journeys that will further exacerbate the problem. The EiS contemplates increased bushfires, rising sea levels, more storms and increased temperatures, [xviii] but hopes that congestion reductions, electric vehicles and reducing stop start journeys will be effective to somehow offset inducing a far greater number of journeys by motor vehicle. If electric vehicles run on energy generated from fossil fuel sources such as coal-fired power stations, their journeys will continue to contribute to environmental damage.

The EiS neglects to address the probable impact of increased storm activity and rising sea levels on coastal communities such as the Northern Beaches. Amongst its many warnings, the Commonwealth report of the Senate Environment and Communications References Committee found that:

> "…Collaroy-Narrabeen Beach—the committee was advised that this beach is the most vulnerable to erosion from coastal storms in northern Sydney (and is considered be the third most at risk area from coastal processes in Australia). The Environment Institute of Australia and New Zealand noted that in 2016 an estimated $30 million in damage was caused by severe storms that eroded away about 50 metres of beach and caused extensive property damage…."[xix]

Dramatic images show storm impacts,[xx] and Northern Beaches Council currently acts to try to repair or prevent storm damage.[xxi] The EiS is currently missing a once-in-a-generation opportunity to play a part in reducing the transport contribution to climate change, rather than compounding the problem. It currently undermines the policies, treaties and strategies set out in 26.2.1 of the EiS. [xxii]

Substituting electric vehicle journeys, if run on renewable energy, could assist in reducing carbon pollution and the contribution of this project to climate change. However, at no point in the EiS does it mention incentives likely to improve the environmental impact of this project. Limiting or banning fossil fuel vehicles from using the new toll-ways, providing toll discounts for electric vehicle use, or providing a designated lane to make travelling by electric vehicle faster, could all help incentivise behaviour that will deliver on the government's stated objectives and the urgent need to reduce greenhouse gas pollution.

The best way to deliver improved environmental outcomes would be to reallocate above ground road space from motor vehicle to active transport use. For example, removing one road lane to create a bi-directional separated cycleway on Military Road would prevent the road-space freed up by this project being filled with additional motor vehicle journeys. Narrowing road lanes to calm traffic speeds and reallocating space to wider footpaths, could help improve pedestrian amenity and increase journeys by foot. Reallocating road space to trackless trams or 24/7 bus lanes could also improve public transport amenity and efficiency, whilst preventing road space freed up by the project being filled with additional motor vehicle journeys. Bicycle NSW recommends implementing these measures that would help maximise positive environmental impacts of the project, enhance transport amenity and accessibility for residents, businesses and the community, deliver on the government's stated objectives, and help prevent induced demand and negative environmental consequences.

Economics

The forecast cost to build this project is $14 billion, although it is worth remembering the cost of Westconnex was forecast at $10 billion and actually cost $15.8 billion.[xxiii] An investment of this magnitude should commit to delivering high quality bike infrastructure within a 5 kilometre radius of the project, and could do so for a small percentage of overall project cost. Westconnex and other toll roads have failed to date to deliver decongestion benefits to local roads, or promised active transport and improved amenity for local communities. The destruction and dangerous detours of the popular Lilyfield Road cycleway is highly likely to have prompted mode shift from bicycle to private motor vehicle use, adding to congestion.

The problem with the Socioeconomics calculations in Chapter 21 of the EiS is that the loss of community facilities and social infrastructure captured, and all the likely impacts on local communities represented on maps,[xxiv] are not compared with well researched, meaningful alternatives. North Sydney communities have been actively deterred from supporting rail infrastructure alternatives by demands that high density apartment developments be imposed as a condition of rail provision. No model has been presented that includes dedicated bus lanes, or incentives for electric car use, or other measures to counteract induced motor vehicle demand or carbon pollution.

In calculating socioeconomics,[xxv] or human health impacts,[xxvi] the EiS also fails to properly reflect the increased risk of injury and loss of life for bike riders and pedestrians given the location of construction relative to schools, childcare facilities, parks and on routes large numbers of bike riders and pedestrians use regularly. Grieving families will not accept 'economic arguments' for the death of their relatives. This project is projected to take at least 5 years to complete, and careful planning needs to be undertaken to minimise risks. Conditions must be imposed on the contractor to ensure that profit motives do not see corners cut or the excuses repeated that Bicycle NSW has encountered on the Westconnex Rozelle Interchange, Sydney Light Rail or Parramatta Light Rail Projects.

Safe construction

Transport for NSW Projects are obliged to comply with the:

- Austroads Guide to Road Design – Part 6A Walking & Cycling[xxvii]
- Australian Standards:
    - AS2890.3 Parking Facilities: Part 3 – Bicycle Parking Facilities
    - AS1742 Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices
    - AS1743 Road Signs - Specifications
- RMS 2013 supplements to the Australian Standards including AS1742 Part 9: Bicycle facilities
- Austroads Guide to Temporary Traffic Management[xxviii]
- Austroads Guide to Road Design[xxix]
- Austroads Guide to Road Safety[xxx]
- Road Safety Plan 2020 (Towards Zero)[xxxi]
- Providing for Walking and Cycling in Transport Projects Policy CP21001[xxxii]
- Road User Space Allocation Policy CP21000[xxxiii]

Unfortunately, State projects such as the Westconnex Rozelle Interchange[xxxiv], Sydney Light Rail, Newcastle Light Rail[xxxv] and Parramatta Light Rail[xxxvi] projects have failed to comply with some or all of these standards at various points. This has endangered people who ride bikes, walk, use prams and wheelchairs, discouraged active transport use, led to injuries and fatalities. It has also produced diversions, pathways and interim infrastructure that are incoherent, unsafe and difficult to navigate. According to the Road User Space Allocation Policy the project must avoid:

> "…adverse impacts on road safety for all road users including a focus on vulnerable road users, particularly when considering re-routing heavy vehicles or public transport…discriminatory barriers to access an adjacent place or service due to people's physical ability…"[xxxvii]

Three critical failings of previous projects could be easily rectified on this project to improve safety, reduce costly re-work, and prevent these problems being repeated. Bicycle NSW recommends that:

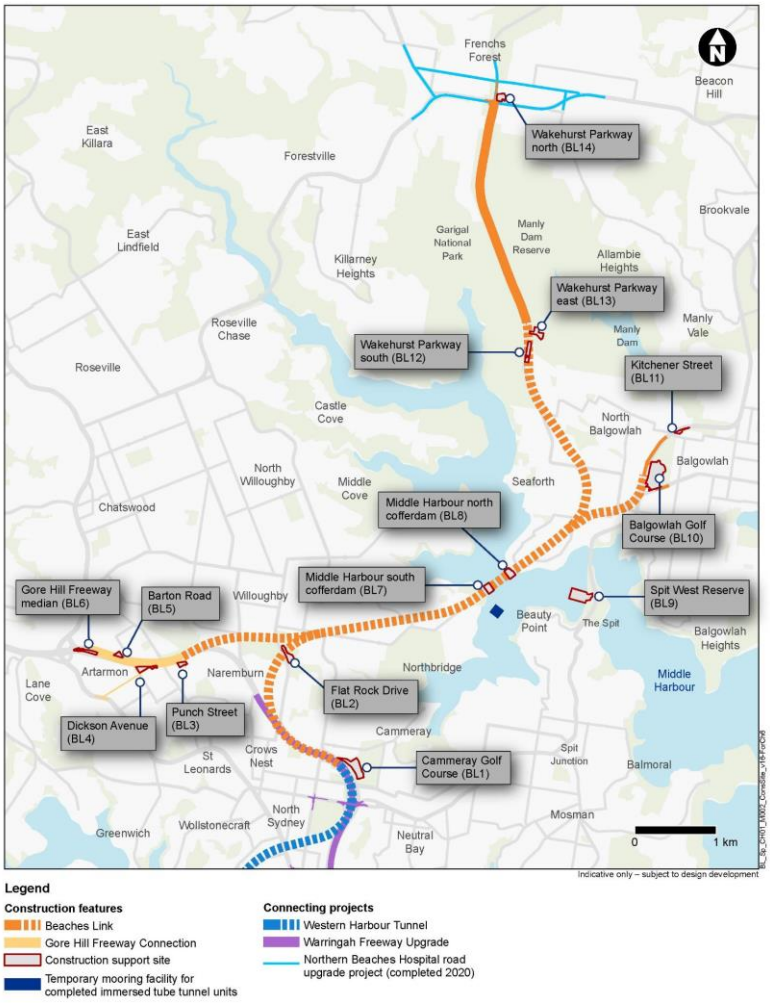
- active transport plans to enable safe cycling and walking during the project be drafted early to allow for review and project adjustment, rather than delayed until it is too late to make changes
- prior to opening any temporary or permanent facility for bike riders, an independent ride through audit be conducted on a bicycle to evaluate safety, coherence and conformity with relevant

laws, regulations and guidelines, as proposed previously to Ministers Constance[xxxviii] and Toole[xxxix]

- safety audits, near misses and incidents on projects be reported transparently and in a timely fashion so that cycling, walking and community advocates can better advise project and contract managers on how to rectify issues

Finally, heavy vehicle safety standards used on most NSW Government projects currently fall well short of international best practice. This endangers the lives of all road users,[xl] especially people who walk and cycle, and it makes the job of heavy vehicle operators more difficult. Bicycle NSW recommends that the CLOCS standards used in the United Kingdom and Europe be adopted and implemented on this project,[xli] to improve heavy vehicle safety.

The EiS map at Chapter 6 6.1[xlii] highlights the imperative for safe heavy vehicle standards as access to construction support sites and the project will require five years of heavy vehicle movements on roads that many in these communities need to travel on daily by motor vehicle, bicycle and foot.



Maps contained in the EiS at chapter 20[xliii] make it clear how close the project construction support sites are to schools and community facilities, and that it will be impossible in many instances for bike riders and pedestrians to select alternative routes.

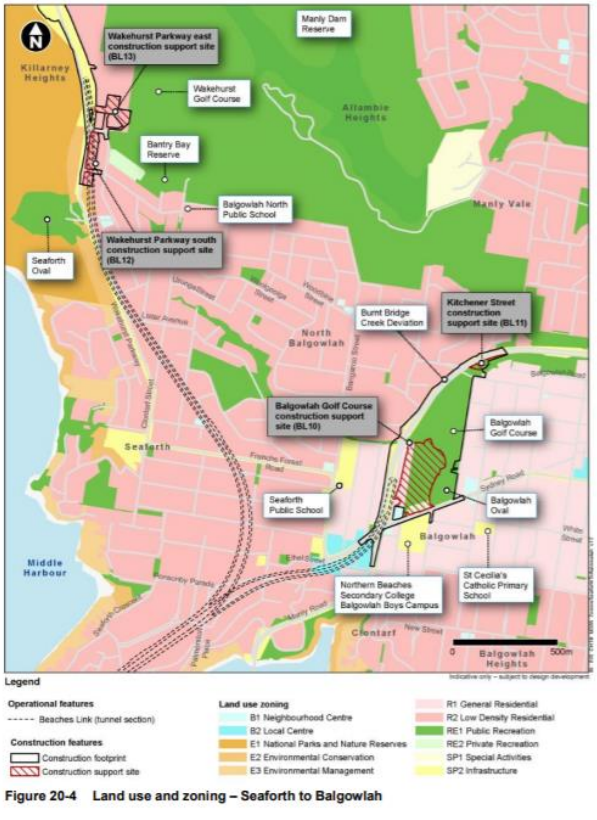


Figure 20-4 Land use and zoning – Seaforth to Balgowlah

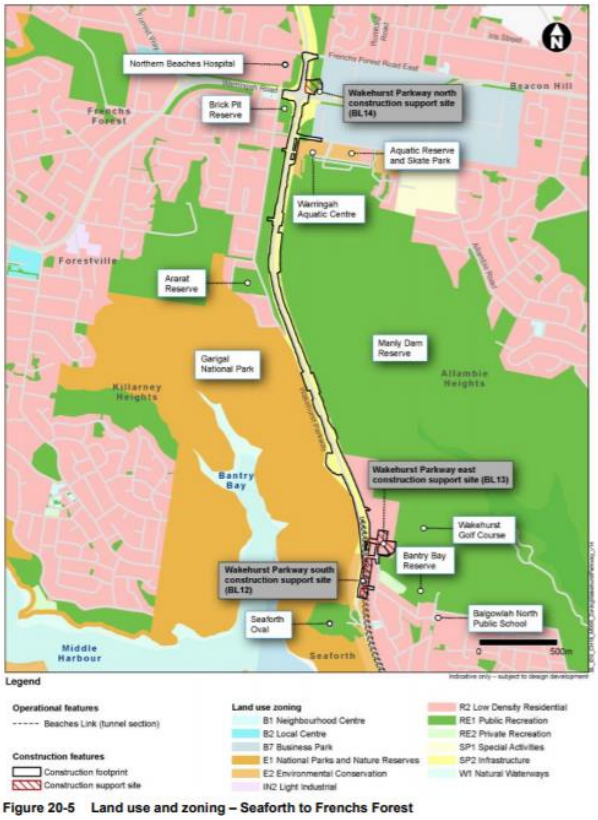


Figure 20-5 Land use and zoning – Seaforth to Frenchs Forest

It is imperative therefore, that the highest possible heavy vehicle safety standards be implemented on this project to avoid injuries or fatalities.

Public and active transport infrastructure

Transport for NSW Projects need to comply with the:

- Future Transport 2056 Plan[xliv]
- Disability Inclusion Plan[xlv]
- Older Persons Transport and Mobility Plan 2018-2022[xlvi]

In order to do so they need to ensure that the infrastructure they develop enables and promotes walking and cycling for short journeys, and is accessible to all. Many of the diversions on the Westconnex Rozelle Interchange Project and Parramatta Light Rail Project have severed cycling connections, diverted bike riders onto busy or dangerous roads, provided incoherent wayfinding, introduced dangerous features into the road related environment or completely excluded use by bicycle riders and users of mobility assistance devices. Lessons must be learned from previous projects and these negative impacts avoided.

Bicycle NSW again recommends the early preparation of active transport plans and diversions to allow for review by walking, cycling disability and health advocates to enable project adjustment. Independent ride through audits, transparent reporting of their findings and of safety audits, near misses and incidents on projects would provide the best opportunity for cycling, walking and community advocates to advise project and contract managers on ways to rectify issues in a timely and efficient manner that protects people and supports the objectives of the NSW Government's plans.

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There are a range of issues and risks with this project that merit careful consideration and amendment to improve safety, amenity and impact. Previous government projects have suffered unnecessarily, and incurred additional re-work expenses when active transport plans have been de-prioritised or left till too late, sensible advocacy has been ignored, and transparency has been lacking.

Bicycle NSW and its' affiliated Bicycle User Groups have a long history of providing sound advice to government to improve project delivery for communities, and generations to come. We hope that the Beaches Link and Gore Hill Freeway EiS will realise the opportunity to make NSW better, rather than worse, for all bicycle riders.

Yours faithfully,

Bastien Wallace

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Bicycle NSW

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National Greenhouse and Energy Reporting Act 2007 (Cwlth) ; *Direct Action Plan* (Australian Government, 2014) ; *NSW Climate Change Policy Framework* (OEH, 2016a) ; *Environmental Sustainability Strategy 2019-2023* (Roads and Maritime Services, 2019).

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[xvi] Transport for NSW, Beaches Link and Gore Hill Freeway Connection; Chapter 26 Climate Change and Greenhouse Gas, at 26-1 [Online as at 11/2/2021] https://majorprojects.planningportal.nsw.gov.au/prweb/PRRestService/mp/01/getContent?AttachRef=SSI-8862%2120201220T233142.345%20GMT
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- National Climate Resilience and Adaptation Strategy (Department of the Environment and Energy, 2015)
- NSW Climate Change Policy Framework (Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH), 2016a) Environmental Sustainability Strategy 2019-2023 (Roads and Maritime Services, 2019)
- Australian Standard AS 5334-2013 Climate change adaptation for settlements and infrastructure – A risk-based approach (Standards Australia, 2013)
- Australian and New Zealand Standard AS/NZ ISO 31000:2009 Risk management – Principles and guidelines (Australian and New Zealand Standard, 2009)
- Climate Change Impacts and Risk Management – A Guide for Business and Government (Australian Government, 2006)
- Technical Guide for Climate Change Adaptation for the State Road Network (Roads and Maritime Services, 2015e)
- Guideline for Climate Change Adaptation, Revision 2.1 (Australian Green Infrastructure Council, 2011)
- Climate Risk Assessment Guideline (Transport for NSW, 2019b).

The methodology for the climate change risk assessment was based on the Australian Standard AS 5334-2013 Climate change adaptation for settlements and infrastructure – A risk based approach. This standard follows the International Standard ISO 31000:2009, Risk management – Principles and guidelines (adopted in Australian and New Zealand as AS/NZ ISO 31000:2009), which provides a set of internationally endorsed principles and guidance on how organisations can integrate decisions about risks and responses into its existing management and decision-making processes. The methodology was also guided by the draft Technical Guide for Climate Change Adaptation for the State Road Network (Roads and Maritime Services, 2015e).

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[xxv] Transport for NSW, Beaches Link and Gore Hill Freeway Connection; Chapter 21 Socioeconomics [Online as at 11/2/2021] https://majorprojects.planningportal.nsw.gov.au/prweb/PRRestService/mp/01/getContent?AttachRef=SSI-8862%2120201220T231157.749%20GMT
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