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Submission to North Shore City Council
on the
Cycling Strategy 2009 (Draft)

Introduction

Cycle Action is a voice for Auckland cyclists, whether commuter, recreational, or sports cyclists. We take into account the needs of all cyclists and potential cyclists, irrespective of their age, fitness or experience.

Our members are not just cycle enthusiasts. Among our over 200 members we have professional planners, engineers and managers. This response draws on their professional experience, as well as their practical knowledge acquired from many years of cycling.

We have a long history of working closely with Councillors and staff at North Shore City to both provide informed feedback on design initiatives, and to promote cycling generally.

We are pleased to be able to submit to Council on the draft Cycling Strategy 2009.

Our submission is split into a summary section highlighting our recommendations that will strengthen the goals and strategies presented in the draft 2009 Cycling Strategy, followed by a detailed review of those sections which we recommend revising.

Summary

In general Cycle Action applauds the new draft cycling strategy. It builds on the vision, strategies and goals of the 2003 Strategic Cycle Plan, and introduces modern design criteria for infrastructure provision. We are particularly pleased the strategy:

- Enthusiastically endorses cycling for the many social, health, community and environmental benefits it provides
- Acknowledges the many different types of cyclists there are, and discusses appropriate facilities for each
- Provides mechanisms for getting non-cyclists to start cycling
- Places cycling design decisions with qualified transportation engineers
- Acknowledges it is part of a holistic endeavour to manage our urban environments and transportation requirements to make them safer, more efficient, more people-friendly and more environmentally friendly
- Reinforces the importance of cycleway maintenance
- Conforms to the recognised cycle design principles of coherence (also referenced as connectedness in the draft), directness, attractiveness, safety and comfort.

The areas we believe need revision:

- The Goals are excellent but their targets anaemic, and need to be strengthened
- Strategy 2 requires more elaboration on the “softer” management practices of Traffic Calming and Traffic Demand Management, as these provide cost-effective engineering options for making cycling safer and more pleasant
- Strategy 4 needs to be strengthened with regard to motorist education.

We trust Council officers will duly consider our submission and update the draft strategy accordingly.

We also trust the subsequent implementation plan will receive sufficient funds to progress rapid deployment, particularly in light of recent comments in the press warning of possible cuts to the cycling budget.

Detailed Commentary

The following numbering system relates to section numbers and headings within the draft document. The sequential numbering does not reflect the relative importance of each item.

2.3 North Shore City Plans and Policies

The Strategy notes in Community Feedback for the North Shore City Plan 2006 - 2016 that people want “land use planning to be integrated with public transport”. However subsequently there is no elaboration on how this is to be achieved.

Cycling (and walking) is enhanced by an urban design strategy that reduces the need for private motor vehicle travel. Typically this “New Urbanism” approach involves a mixed-use strategy facilitating short trips, and the clustering of higher density housing along public transport corridors for those needing to commute greater distances.

Recommendation: The draft plan should be upgraded to reference such a strategy.

3: Vision, Goals and Strategies for Cycling

The Goals section requires an extensive update as the targets are not nearly ambitious enough, and as defined some are difficult to measure. Targets must be measurable to be achievable.

Goal 1 seeks to increase the number of people cycling, however the target is merely to double the number of people cycling by 2016. While this seems an admirable increase, numerically it represents an increase from 0.7% to just 1.4% of commuter trips. When one considers that Wellington, with its topography and climate presenting more challenges to cyclists, has a commuter percentage of 2.1%, the Shore target is woeful.

An admirable and achievable goal by 2016 would be to match or exceed Christchurch’s current figure at 5.1%. Beyond 2016 there is no reason North Shore City should not aspire to figures in excess of 25%, as achieved by progressive European cities such as Amsterdam and Copenhagen.

Recommendation: a) Rather than using the word “double” in the goal, state a numerical percentage, and b) Identify the numerical percentage as (a rounded) 5%.

Goal 2 seeks to increase the number of students cycling to school, and similarly needs to be quantified by numerical data. As per the draft strategy’s Appendix 2, an average of only 3% of students cycle to school, yet Belmont Intermediate achieves 26%. Clearly there is considerable room for improvement for most schools, with all the attendant benefits as stated in the goal.

Recommendation: a) Rather than using the word “double” in the goal, state a numerical percentage, and b) Identify the numerical percentage as 20%.

Goal 3 seeks to improve safety for cyclists. A laudable goal, but the target as stated is not quantified, and is therefore impossible to objectively measure. The goal should be restated as a linear reduction in accident rate per a measure of cyclist numbers, with a stated target by 2016.

Additionally, while acknowledging the need to reduce the perception of danger to encourage cyclists, the target is both impossible to measure, and somewhat misleading. The target should be to reduce the actual danger, not just the perception of danger. In fact it can be argued that a reduced perception of danger when in reality the actual danger remains can lead to an increase in accident rate.

The target should be restated to reduce the actual danger, which in turn will lower the perception of danger (assisted by education and promotion), which in turn will encourage more cyclists onto the roads.

Recommendation: Restate the target for Goal 3 accordingly.

Goal 4 seeks to improve convenience for cyclists by providing ready access to a cycle route. The target is reasonable, but should be accompanied by a timeframe, else it is meaningless.

Recommendation: Add “by 2016” to the target.

Goal 5 seeks to improve enjoyment in cycling, as measured by cyclist satisfaction surveys. However it is noted in the draft strategy that surveys “are needed”, with an action plan to perform such surveys. Clearly surveys need to rise to the top of the action list if this goal is to be meaningful. It is difficult to define realistic targets in the absence of existing surveys.

Recommendation: Retain the goal and target, with a note to update and quantify the target once surveys are underway.

Section 5 - Strategies

Strategy 1: Develop safe, convenient and quality cycle networks and supporting facilities to meet cyclist’s needs

Strategy 1 is endorsed, but under “supporting facilities” we note that only cycle parking, cycle hand rails and “learn to ride” facilities are referenced. For completeness this should also be supplemented by the following infrastructure facilities which can be “engineered in” relatively economically, but which provide considerably improved amenities for cyclists:

- Advance stop lines and stop boxes (as used to good effect at the intersection of Fred Thomas Drive and Anzac St/Taharoto Rd)
- Improved traffic signal detector sensitivity
- Advance green lights for cyclists
- Removing pinch points (which force cyclists into the path of motor vehicles)
- Blackspot remediation – a number of intersections and roads have known issues for cyclists
- Considering every roading project as an opportunity to provide cycle facilities.

Cycle Action Auckland is an incorporated society and registered charity with the objective of promoting cycling as a non-congesting, non-polluting, energy-efficient and health-promoting form of transport for the Auckland region. Cycle Action is affiliated to Cycling Advocates’ Network (CAN), a national voice for cyclists.

Strategy 2: Apply best practice cycle design guides to cycle networks and to cycle facilities

Strategy 2 is endorsed to the extent that it places infrastructure design in the hands of suitably qualified transportation planners and engineers.

However it does place a strong focus on infrastructure design, with very little commentary on “softer” management practices.

The IHT (UK's Institution of Highways and Transportation) defines a 5-Step Hierarchy of options to be considered to improve cyclist safety and amenity:

1. Reduce traffic volumes
2. Reduce traffic speeds
3. Intersection treatment and traffic management
4. Reallocation of carriageway/corridor space
5. Specific cycle facilities.

Interestingly, infrastructure provision, which is often the most expensive, comes last.

Two fundamental concepts address the first four bullets - **Traffic Demand Management (TDM)** and **Traffic Calming**.

TDM is mentioned only once in the Strategy, and not elaborated. Commentary should be made on the following TDM aspects which serve to address traffic volumes:

- Increasing the use of ridesharing and other commuting options that reduce traffic congestion
- Removal or indenting of parking on arterial roads, and increasing parking charges for long-stay parking
- Flexi-time work schedules with employers to reduce congestion at peak times
- Congestion pricing tolls during peak hours
- Roadspace reallocation, aiming to re-balance provision between private cars and for sustainable modes, particularly increased use of T2 and T3 transit lanes
- Time, Distance and Place (TDP) road pricing, where road users are charged based on when, where and how much they drive.

The only mention of Traffic Calming in the entire Strategy is buried in Appendix 6 – Route Design Process Maps, and then only as a side comment.

The concept of traffic calming is of fundamental importance to cycling safety and amenity, as it has the potential to turn our non-arterial urban streets into areas where new, young and inexperienced cyclists (and pedestrians for that matter – therefore of relevance to the Walking Strategy too) feel safe when venturing out onto the roads. Such facilities can include:

- Motor vehicle free zones
- Residential zones where children, cyclists and pedestrians have priority over motor vehicles. These go by the names of “living streets”, “home zones” or woonerf (in Holland)
- Reduced speed limits in residential areas and near schools
- Road and adjacent environment treatments that visually reinforce the lower speed limits

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- Reduced permeability for motor vehicles (eg shutting off a residential through-street to motor vehicles, median diverters to prevent motor vehicles making turns, but allowing cycles through)
- Speed tables, humps and chicanes
- Narrowing lane widths and providing restrictive points (which serve to reduce vehicle speed) while providing shoulder and through access for cyclists.

We recommend that the concepts of the IHT 5-step hierarchy, Traffic Calming and Traffic Demand Management play a prominent role in the Strategy.

Note that it is not a given that all these measures will necessarily be implemented. However they deserve a place in the transportation engineer's kit bag, validated by references in the Strategy.

Section 6.3 of Strategy 2 (Design Process) identifies the need to assess the needs of each type of cyclist. Given that Strategy 5 promotes cycling for non-cyclists, an important addition to this section is to assess how the facility will encourage non-cyclists to start cycling.

Strategy 3: Maintain cycle infrastructure to a high standard

Strategy 3 is endorsed. Infrequently swept and poorly maintained cycle lanes/paths are dangerous to motorists and cyclists alike should cyclists swerve suddenly to avoid an unexpected hazard. Anecdotal evidence also suggests many unreported cycle accidents are the result of a poor pavement surface, or poor transitions from one surface to another.

Strategy 4: Support education and training programmes to improve cycle safety

Strategy 4 is endorsed. Safety for vulnerable road users is paramount, and a key aspect of improving safety is educating all road users (including motorists and pedestrians) on how to behave on mixed mode facilities.

The strategy wording suggests North Shore City will participate in national and regional cycling initiatives. We believe this could be strengthened to more than "participate", and more proactive measures taken such as:

- Independent educational material distributed to residences, eg with Council newsletters
- Independent education campaigns
- Additional roadside signage used in hazardous areas, eg where cycle lanes suddenly disappear, and in areas where there is a high density of cycle accidents.

Additional motorist education (and associated enforcement) should be the primary focus here. There is a common perception among locals and overseas visitors alike that many New Zealand drivers are aggressive, undisciplined and discourteous. While unpleasant for motorists, these attitudes are positively frightening for vulnerable cyclists.

Strategy 5: Support programmes promoting cycling

Strategy 5 is endorsed. It is particularly important that cycling is seen as a viable alternative to motor vehicles for short trips, so non-cyclists are encouraged out on their bikes. Having a greater number of cyclists about contributes to the “critical mass” theory, where cyclists are **expected** to be on the roads rather than appearing as a novelty. This makes the entire roading environment safer for all.

In Section 9.1 of Strategy 5 (The School TravelWise Program) a number of bullets identify how School Travel Plans can encourage cycling. Given the importance or role models to many children, we recommend the addition of a bullet promoting sporting role models who are either cycling champions, or include cycling in their events or training. Hayden Roulston, Sarah Ulmer, Terrenzo Bozzone, and Tom Ashley immediately spring to mind here.

Strategy 6: Improve the co-ordination of efforts among cycle groups

Strategy 6 is endorsed. We are pleased to be identified as one of North Shore City’s partners concerned with enhanced design, safety and promotion of cycling.

Strategy 7: Ensure that where possible adequate resources are available to implement the Cycling Strategy

The words “where possible” should be removed from Strategy 7’s description. North Shore City has both a legal and moral obligation to deliver mixed mode transportation infrastructure, and to enhance the safety of vulnerable road users. The entire Cycling Strategy is predicated on these outcomes.

Leaving the words “where possible” in place provides a perfect opportunity for the entire Cycling Strategy to be marginalized and gather dust on a shelf.

Appendix 6 – Route Design Process Maps

The red through green graph identifying the type of cycle path to be provisioned as a function of traffic speed and volume has to be interpreted very carefully. It is easy for a layman to simplistically look at this graph and instantly arrive at a conclusion as to the type of cycle facility warranted, whereas it is merely an input to the expert judgement of a traffic engineer who needs to consider a wealth of additional factors. It should be annotated accordingly, or removed altogether.

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission. For further information, please contact:

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