



Healthy Cities – build the Cyclesafe Network

Why the Cyclesafe Network Project is needed

The Cyclesafe Network (CSN) is a system of family safe, easily navigated and usefully connected cycling, walking and shared paths across the Newcastle and Lake Macquarie local government areas. The plan is to connect 90kms of existing paths with 140kms of new construction to deliver an active transport network which will encourage local residents to cycle or walk to work, school, university, shops and other locations¹.

The aim of the network is to make walking and cycling for short trips – less than 2kms for walking and less than 10 kms for cycling – a viable alternative to car travel. With new State Government plans to increase the population of 'Hunter City' to 750,000² it is essential that active transport infrastructure be built to accommodate the increased travel demands of the growing population.

The CSN can be delivered in 3 Phases over 8 to 10 years, with Phase 1 being completed by 2019. Phase 1 includes completion of the high priority cycleways and shared paths already developed by Newcastle City Council and Lake Macquarie City Council. Many of these sites are 'shovel ready' needing only a commitment to funding to make them happen.

In addition to its transport infrastructure benefits, the CSN will also deliver health benefits to the population of the Hunter region by increasing physical activity as part of everyday life. This will help achieve the Premier's Priority goal to reduce childhood overweight and obesity by 5% over 10 years.

There are 61 schools with 63,000 children located within the catchment area of Phase 1 of the CSN. If 5% of those children began using the CSN for trips to and from school the 'monetised' benefits (calculated using the Transport for NSW Bike Facility Tool) would repay the cost of building the entire Network in just over 18 years³.

Why the Cyclesafe Network Project needs a co-ordinated infrastructure project approach

In order to meet the objectives of the CSN project – to deliver a family safe, easily navigated and connected system of paths within 10 years – the whole CSN project needs to be tasked to a relevant Hunter based Development Authority with a commitment to funding to completion.

Existing cycling and walking paths in the Newcastle and Lake Macquarie areas have been built in small sections with a combination of Commonwealth, State and Local Government funds. Much of this has been achieved in small local projects funded by local council rates augmented with small grants from sources such as the NSW Roads and Maritime Walking and Cycling Programs.

For example, the 15km Fernleigh Track, which is now a popular and well used walking and cycling path, took 12 years to build. This could have been more efficiently and economically completed had funding for the entire track been available from the start.

This piecemeal approach has resulted in long delays with disconnected sections of cycleways which require people to move between safe cycling paths and busy roads. This is a serious disincentive to everyday cycling especially for children and their parents, inexperienced cyclists, the elderly and people with mobility issues.

We propose that the CSN be developed and delivered as a single, co-ordinated transport infrastructure project, with funds committed from the lease of the Port of Newcastle. The NSW Premier Mike Baird was reported in May 2014 as saying that the lease would see \$1.5 billion flow into infrastructure projects. Of that only \$340 million has been allocated to the revitalisation of Newcastle.

Why Newcastle and Lake Macquarie

While this funding will directly benefit the residents and businesses of the Newcastle and Lake Macquarie areas in the short term, there will also be long term benefits for projects across NSW through the establishment of government processes for developing and delivering cycling based active travel infrastructure.

In addition, the proposed research which will accompany the CSN project will also help the development of other active travel infrastructure projects in NSW as there are currently significant gaps in the data used to build cost/benefit assessments for cycling and walking based transport infrastructure projects.

Advocacy for the CSN project is being driven by local individuals, community organisations and businesses and is supported by the University of Newcastle and both local councils. Both Newcastle City Council and Lake Macquarie City Council have cycling and walking strategies which outline future cycling/walking/shared path development.

There is strong community support for active travel – especially cycling and walking – across the Newcastle and Lake Macquarie areas. The area has a long history of workers cycling, from steelworkers in the 1940s and 1950s to today where the proportion of trips made by bike is double the state average.

The gentle topography and mild climate of the region make cycling and walking attractive if safe infrastructure is available. In suburbs close to the Throsby Creek cycleway, for example, 6% of trips to work are by cycling compared to 2% across the Newcastle LGA. Data indicates that many trips in cars could be converted to cycling or walking as 40% of trips are less than 2km and 80% are less than 10kms⁴.

The work already done to develop the Cyclesafe Network Project proposal has been a collaboration over many years between individuals, community organisations, local businesses, local councils and the University of Newcastle. These stakeholders are committed to continuing their support, ensuring that the CSN will be well used.

How much will it cost and how will it be funded?

Preliminary estimates indicate that the CSN could be delivered for \$164 million over 8 years as:

Phase 1 – 2016-2019 – 26 kms - \$31million

Phase 2 – 2018-2022 – 55 kms - \$73.3million

Phase 3 – 2020-2024 - 42 kms – \$55.9 million

We believe funding for the CSN should be made available from the \$1.5 billion of infrastructure funding created by the lease of the Port of Newcastle. To date \$340 million has been committed to the revitalisation of Newcastle but the *Plan for Growing Hunter City* signals a need for further commitment to meet the future transport infrastructure needs of the planned population increase.

Cost benefit analysis of CSN

The Cyclesafe Network Steering Committee commissioned an economic analysis using the Bike Facility Tool developed by Transport for NSW to model monetised benefits which could be achieved by a 5% increase in cycling use by residents in the area covered by the CSN, using 4 different scenarios⁵.

Scenario 1: If 5% of all the population within the CSN catchment used cycling for trips less than 10kms the total monetised benefit would be \$306 million per year, paying back the cost of building the CSN in 6.4 months

Scenario 2: If 5% of employed people aged 15 years and over used cycling for travel to and from work (less than 10kms), the total monetised benefit would be \$50 million per year, paying back the cost of building the CSN in 3.3 years.

Scenario 3: If 5% of children aged 5 to 19 years travelled to school (up to 2km for 5 to 9 year olds, up to 5 kms for 10 to 19 year olds) the total monetised benefit would be \$9 million per year, paying back the cost of building the CSN in 18.5 years

Scenario 4: If 5% of all the population within the Phase 1 catchment used cycling for trips less than 10kms the total monetised benefit would be \$170million per year, paying back the cost of building the CSN in 11.52 months.

Future research potential

It is difficult to undertake cost benefit analysis for cycling and walking infrastructure in Australia as there are significant gaps in the data available. Data is especially scarce for assessing cost benefits for increasing children's use of active transport rather than relying on parents driving them in a private car.

The Cyclesafe Network Steering Committee commissioned a critique by researchers from the University of Newcastle Faculty of Business of currently used guidelines and methods for analysis of active transport. This identified significant data gaps and a variety of assumptions which impact on current cost benefit models.

The collaboration of the University of Newcastle and the Tom Farrell Institute for the Environment in the CSN Project provides the ideal opportunity for research to be undertaken

alongside the building of the CSN to fill those gaps. This will allow more substantial data to be available to inform future active transport infrastructure projects across NSW.

Contact for further information

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¹ Cyclesafe Network Steering Committee. 2016. The Cyclesafe Network Active Travel Infrastructure Project. Consultative Draft.

² NSW Planning and Environment. 2016 *Draft Plan for Growing Hunter City*.

³ Cyclesafe Steering Committee. 2016. The Cyclesafe Network Active Travel Infrastructure Project. Consultative Draft.

⁴ Cyclesafe Steering Committee. 2016. The Cyclesafe Network Active Travel Infrastructure Project. Consultative Draft.

⁵ Cyclesafe Steering Committee. 2016. The Cyclesafe Network Active Travel Infrastructure Project. Consultative Draft