



Brisbane Central Business District Bicycle User Group

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Dear Active Transport team

Draft Brisbane Active Transport Strategy 2012–2026

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the *Draft Brisbane Active Transport Strategy 2012–2026*. As the basis of Council's development of active transport for the next fourteen years it is important the strategy be a strong document that lays a solid foundation for the next fourteen years of work towards its goals across all of Council.

The Brisbane Central Business District Bicycle User Group (CBD BUG) is generally very supportive of the initiatives proposed in the draft strategy; by far our biggest concerns are what is *not* in it. Although there is certainly some potential in new initiatives such as Active Communities, by and large the strategy is a continuation of 'business as usual', and does not provide the basis for the significant attitudinal and behavioural changes necessary to achieve even the modest targets set in the *Transport Plan for Brisbane 2008–2026*.

A more ambitious approach is necessary if Brisbane is to have any hope of meeting its targets and not simply repeating the failures of the past.

Vision

The strategy needs to set a clearer and more aspirational vision for where it is trying to lead the city of Brisbane. The draft's summary of its vision mentions only development of a 'pathway network', and general recognition of the benefits of active transport. The strategy should be aiming much higher and broader than that, with key points much more along the lines of the vision expressed in the previous *Walking and Cycling Plan 2005–2012*: that "*walking and cycling are **safe, convenient and attractive** transport modes, providing a **genuine, sustainable alternative** to private motor vehicles*" (emphasis retained from the original). These points are vital, but have been almost entirely lost from the vision expressed in the new draft.

The vision's supporting text also needs to build a much stronger case for why it should be adopted. It needs to much more compellingly describe the benefits we stand to gain by adopting and implementing it in full, and the costs we face if we do not. The case it

builds needs to be convincing and credible to all stakeholders including audiences within Council, Councillors, and the wider community.

The vision in the draft mentions several areas in which life will be 'better', but without any sense of *how much* better. It makes passing reference to some of the serious challenges facing the city and Australian society generally, but needs to make more of an attempt to quantify how serious those challenges are, and how much active transport can contribute to solving them. Without that, the strategy is left looking like something that might be 'nice to have', but that is not particularly important.

The strategy should provide examples of how other communities have greatly enriched themselves by embracing active transport and reducing their dependence on motorised transport. This will help make the vision and its benefits more tangible, and help people 'buy in' to the significant attitude shift that needs to take place for any meaningful change to be possible.

Transport hierarchy

One of the fundamental underpinnings of the strategy should be the establishment of a 'transportation hierarchy', in which the most efficient and lowest impact transport modes (such as walking and cycling) are given the highest priority, and the least efficient modes (such as single occupant motor vehicles) are given the lowest. This methodology is increasingly being adopted around the world, in places as far away as Portland, USA and as close as the Sunshine Coast, and is helping to ensure that transport options overall are balanced and take into account each mode's true costs to the community.

This would be a significant change for Brisbane, which has traditionally assigned the reverse priorities, and would go well beyond 'just' the active transport strategy. Failure to make this change is one of the main reasons Brisbane has failed to achieve any significant improvements in active transport mode share to date. It will continue to fail until this necessary change is accepted and implemented.

Target breakdown

The strategy needs to be clearer about how it will achieve the mode share targets it is aiming to achieve. While the targets are broken down into a 'projected share' after each five year period, there is no detail about where the growth in mode share is projected to occur. Achieving the overall targets will require achieving higher targets in some areas (for example trips in inner city areas, say, or trips to local shopping centres), while the overall targets will not be met in some other areas (for example trips in outer suburbs).

The strategy should at least break the targets down by geographical area (similar to the breakdown of public transport targets in the *Transport Plan*), but also by other key factors such as basic demographics, trip distance, and trip purpose.

This is crucial in order to be able to understand how the overall targets can be achieved, and to ensuring that individual projects and programmes have appropriate targets. For example, if higher targets are required in inner city areas then need those targets defined so they can be use in planning all transport and related projects in those areas.

Modelling

The strategy needs to ensure that these targets are appropriately considered in other projects, to avoid the common practice where new road projects are justified on the basis of predicted future demand, while pedestrian and cycle facilities are excluded or removed from them on the basis of low existing demand. This currently occurs even in cases where existing demand is clearly being suppressed by a low level of service. Combined with the still standard 'predict and provide' approach to road building, this results in a vicious circle of decreasing active transport use and increasing car dependence.

One of the reasons this still occurs so commonly is the primitive state of active transport (and even public transport) modelling compared to modelling of private motor transport. The strategy should include an action to extend the Brisbane Strategic Traffic Model to consider all modes of transport equally.

Use of the road network

The draft strategy talks about cycling and infrastructure development as being almost exclusively on off-road pathways. There is almost no reference in the strategy to supporting or allowing for on-road cycling. This is in sharp contrast to the *Transport Plan*, which says more than three quarters of the cycle network yet to be constructed will be on-road.

CBD BUG strongly supports the provision of high quality (safe and direct) off-road cycle paths where they are possible, but the unfortunate reality is that in most cases they are not. To date Brisbane's bikeways have been built where land is readily available, typically along creeks and other floodways, not necessarily where they are needed. Connecting them into a coherent and useful transport network will require much more extensive integration with the existing transport network, and the strategy needs to consider how to achieve that.

Where appropriate off-road paths cannot be provided, space will need to be allocated within the existing road reserve. In many cases that space will need to be physically protected from motor vehicles, for example with any of the several kinds of kerb treatment that are slowly being developed in Australia, or that are well established overseas.

Some of this may be perceived to be difficult in the face of the attitudes of some parts of society, but until it is accepted Brisbane will not be able to make any significant progress in reducing its excessive dependence on the private motor vehicle.

The strategy cannot simply ignore the essential role the road network has to play in establishing cycling (and walking) as a viable mode of transport.

Shared paths

Although the use of shared paths is well established in Australia, the evidence is mounting that their use needs to be reconsidered. Even with the low levels of traffic currently seen on shared paths there is increasing recognition of the conflict and safety issues that arise, as well as the greatly diminished overall capacity of paths with mixed traffic.

Shared paths are rarely seen in countries with higher rates of cycling, and it appears there is good reason for this. The strategy should include an action to investigate whether it is appropriate to build shared paths as commonly as is currently done, and what alternative treatments might be better in some cases.

This is the opposite approach to the proposed approach of introducing more signage to deal with the problem (priority one, action two). Signage is a last resort that indicates poor design, and has only limited effect. It may be necessary in the short term (given the large number of existing shared paths), but a real solution requires addressing the underlying problems.

There are certainly also issues based on a lack of respect for other path users, but those are essentially the same issues found on the road with lack of respect between different road users. The strategy should address them as the same issues, and not single out the issues on paths while ignoring the same issues on the road.

Safer local streets

One of the most important and broadly beneficial actions the strategy should include under priority two is the re-establishment of residential streets as safe and attractive places. The increasing dominance of the motor vehicle over the last few decades has diminished Brisbane's streets from safe, social places with a strong sense of community to mere traffic thoroughfares that are widely perceived to be unsafe and unappealing.

This change should be reversed through means such as reduction of speed limits (to 30 km/h), and a redesign of streetscapes more in line with existing 'shared zone' designs, which clearly convey that people can move freely in these spaces, and that motor vehicles should consider themselves guests.

Such changes would have little impact on overall motor vehicle trip times (because most time is spent on higher order roads), but would deliver huge benefits not only to cyclist and pedestrian safety but also to neighbourhood amenity, property values, social cohesion, and any number of other important aspects of the city. This approach has been very successful (and is becoming increasingly popular) in Europe and, with clear articulation of the benefits, can gain widespread support here too.

The draft strategy mentions the establishment of the 40 km/h speed zone in the CBD as a significant change in the past, but should include future actions to extend the zone through neighbouring areas such as New Farm and West End, and introducing and extending 40 km/h zones in suburban activity centres. Within the timeframe of the strategy these zones should be further reduced to 30 km/h.

Engagement with the Queensland Government

The strategy should include engagement with relevant Queensland Government agencies as a key activity. Their support will benefit many of the strategy's other components, and will be necessary in order to achieve some of the actions proposed above.

The strategy should also include making representations to the Queensland Government to address legislative barriers to active transport, such as road rules that discourage walking and cycling.

Cycle Infrastructure Policy

In recent years the Queensland Government has set some good examples of active transport policy and implementation. In particular TMR's *Cycling on State Controlled Roads* policy, now expanded into the broader *Cycle Infrastructure Policy*, has led to much greater and better provision of facilities for cycling. Importantly it has also led to significantly reduced costs in provision of cycle facilities, because facilities are increasingly planned and provided as a part of existing projects rather than as separate projects or last-minute retro-fits.

The lack of any similar effective policy within Brisbane City Council is obvious in comparison. Most major road projects still do not provide any serious provision for cycling, even on parts of the road network designated to be part of the principal cycle network. Any provision for cycling in other projects still tends to be an afterthought, and frequently leads to poor outcomes. It is often the case that provision for cycling is removed rather than added.

Needless to say, the strategy should include development, implementation and monitoring of a policy similar to TMR's *Cycle Infrastructure Policy* as a high priority.

Conclusion

While there are good things in the draft strategy, significant changes are required in order to give it much chance of being effective. In many ways the draft strategy is weaker than the previous *Walking and Cycling Plan*, but clearly it needs to be much stronger and a more integrated part of Brisbane's transport planning if it is to achieve the targets set in the *Transport Plan*, and if Brisbane is to avoid being left to another fourteen years of excessive car dependency and all its associated ills.

Finally, Brisbane doesn't need to reinvent the wheel. There are many examples from around the world of strategies and tactics that have been successfully employed to make walking and cycling the attractive, popular and respected modes of transport that they need to be in any modern, healthy city.

I hope you find these comments useful, and that you are able to use them to form a stronger final strategy. If you would like to discuss them further please feel free to contact us through any of the means listed at the top of this letter.

Yours faithfully



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