

Submission

No 16

INQUIRY INTO THE UTILISATION OF RAIL CORRIDORS

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Submission to the NSW Parliamentary Enquiry into the Utilisation of Rail Corridors.
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Submitted online. No part of this submission is confidential. Prepared by Dr Ben Ewald, vice-president of NCM, summarising discussion of a draft at a general meeting.

Newcastle Cycleways Movement is a community organisation with 600 members in the greater Newcastle area, with the charter of improving conditions for cycling. Shifting part of the urban transport task to bicycles would have widespread health, environmental, economic and social benefits but is currently constrained by safety concerns on busy and dangerous roads.

The Maitland to Newcastle rail corridor was created in 1856 in a phase of nation building when the population was low and pressure on land was less. Transport was by ship, train or horse, and part of the impetus to build the railway was the cost of dredging the channel for river steamers to reach Morpeth. It could never have been imagined that roads would become unsafe for pedestrians and cyclists. As community needs have changed we welcome the review of the use of railway land to facilitate sustainable urban renewal and development by allowing other compatible uses that can safely be combined with rail services, as long as this does not interfere with the railway use of the corridor. Now that there is greater pressure on land space it is logical to squeeze extra functions onto the existing rail corridor, especially new cycleways that provide a community transport objective fully compatible with the original objectives of the rail corridor.

There are many locations in which construction of a cycleway along a section of rail corridor would solve an existing safety problem, some of them requiring the use of only a few hundred metres of railway land. In this submission we will detail four local examples, however around the state there would be many places where the best and cheapest solution to a cycling problem would involve the use of railway land.

Example 1 Maud St Waratah.

Newcastle's cycle route six connects the University's Callaghan campus to the CBD, with a major TAFE campus along the way. The University is to build a new CBD campus at Civic, so there will be heavy demand on both the rail link and the cycleway between these two parts of the University. Route 6 is on quiet back streets until it reaches the foreshore cycleway, but currently there are two dangerous road crossings so the route cannot be recommended to novice cyclists. The Hannel St crossing has recently been approved for a set of traffic lights, however the only solution to the Maude St crossing needs access to railway land.

Maud St carries a large number of vehicles per day, including many large trucks. The current cyclist route crossing from Prince St to Vera St has a small centre refuge at a place only 80m from a rail bridge so sight lines are obstructed. Being only 160 m from the major intersection with traffic lights at Lorna St, another set of lights would greatly slow traffic. There is no space for a tunnel or overpass, and these options would be very expensive.

The best solution would be to bring a cycleway off Prince St at Alfred St onto the rail corridor, 370m alongside the railway, under the road bridge, and a further 360 m along the rail service road to meet the existing off road cycleway. The cycleway would be isolated from the tracks by

fencing and access for rail maintenance vehicles would be preserved. As well as avoiding a dangerous crossing this route would avoid a hill, ensuring that cyclists will prefer the new cycleway.

This proposal was discussed in the community and championed by Newcastle City Council staff already in the 1990s but efforts at that time were met with stonewalling and lack of co-operation from railway authorities. Safety was cited as the reason for blocking the proposal, without proper consideration of how safety could be maintained and a cycle connection created.



Fig 1. Connection from Prince St Waratah to the University cycleway, Callaghan.

Example 2, Adamstown.

In Adamstown there is a spot where two major existing cycleways come close but there is no connection between them. A 280m link along the railway corridor could link the Fernleigh track to the North-South cycleway. The Fernleigh Track extends 15 Km to the south, and the North south extends 2.5 km each direction from this point making this an important missing link in the cycleway network.



fig 2. On the left in red is the North-South cycleway, on the right in red is the Fernleigh Track, and in blue is a proposed link along railway land.

Example 3 Kotara to Cardiff.

A cycleway along the Sydney-Newcastle rail corridor 3.6 km from Kotara to Cardiff would be a major project for the longer term, and would be of great benefit for cycling. Cardiff is a major employment centre with a large industrial area, and is close to Glendale which has a large retail centre, a TAFE college, and is planned to have a major transport interchange. Kotara is a retail area with a large high school, and connects through to the central plain of Newcastle. The current cycle route from Kotara to Cardiff has the difficulties of a large hill, and crossing the Newcastle inner city bypass road which is extremely busy. A cycleway along the rail corridor would avoid cyclists using Myall Rd, Main Rd, Park Ave and Carnley Ave. These roads are steep and winding, and there was a cyclist death on Carnley Ave in recent years. Opening a safe cycle route between these destinations would make cycling an attractive option for many trips that are now done by car as there is no easy and safe cycle route.

The rail corridor has plenty of space, with a service road on both sides of the track for most of this section and several options for where a cycleway could connect to quiet back streets. A cycleway would require a 200m tunnel parallel to the railway “Tickhole” tunnel, and it is rumoured that there is already a spare tunnel there which would reduce the cycleway cost if it turned out to be suitable.



Example 4, Crossing railway lines at stations: Broadmeadow & Warrabrook.

To cycle from Nineways to Waratah, or from Adamstown to Islington the safest and most direct route is through the tunnel under the railway at Broadmeadow station. It is currently illegal to cycle through the tunnel, although 99% of the time there are no pedestrians there. Likewise at Warrabrook there is an overpass that makes a perfect cycling connection that avoids busy roads, but for no apparent reason it is illegal to cycle on the overpass. With some goodwill and ingenuity from rail authorities these crossings could be opened to cycle traffic without endangering pedestrians.

Recommendations

Railway land should be made available for cycleways where this can be achieved safely and without interference with rail services.

Safety concerns should not be allowed to block cycleway proposals without first seeking the input of engineers with experience in the design of cycleways.

That there should be a facilitated process for local councils to negotiate with railway authorities without unreasonable barriers.