# INQUIRY INTO CURRENT AND FUTURE PUBLIC TRANSPORT NEEDS IN WESTERN SYDNEY

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15 September 2023

Ms Cate Faehrmann MLC Chair Portfolio Committee 6 – Transport and the Arts NSW Parliament Legislative Council

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Dear Ms Faehrmann

# NSW PARLIAMENT INQUIRY INTO PUBLIC TRANSPORT IN WESTERN SYDNEY - CUMBERLAND CITY COUNCIL SUBMISSION

I am writing in response to the NSW Parliament Inquiry into current and future public transport needs in Western Sydney. Cumberland City Council appreciates the opportunity to provide a submission, which was endorsed by Council at its Ordinary Meeting of 6 September 2023.

With the Cumberland Local Government Area population set to increase from 236,000 residents to over 300,000 residents by 2036, an additional 250,000 trips daily are projected to occur within the Cumberland transport network. Growing density, that is not equitably corresponded by public transport infrastructure, will result in greater reliance on private vehicle use which will place more burden on an already overloaded existing road network.

A detailed submission has been prepared for consideration by the Committee. The submission includes information on the Cumberland Local Government Area, current public transport provisions, identified opportunities for consideration and recommendations for investigation by the Committee.

Should you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact Daniel Cavallo, Director Environment and Planning on or

Yours faithfully

Peter J Fitzgerald GENERAL MANAGER

Enc.

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#### NSW PARLIAMENT INQUIRY INTO THE CURRENT AND FUTURE PUBLIC TRANSPORT NEEDS IN WESTERN SYDNEY – CUMBERLAND CITY COUNCIL SUBMISSION

#### September 2023

#### **Executive Summary**

This submission has been prepared by Cumberland City Council (Council) in response to the Parliamentary Inquiry into the current and future public transport needs in Western Sydney.

The submission comprises the following parts:

- 1. The Cumberland Local Government Area (LGA);
- 2. Current state of public transport;
- 3. Identified opportunities for public transport;
- 4. Future considerations for public transport improvements; and
- 5. Recommendations.

Emerging from recent LGA wide traffic and transport studies undertaken by Council, the use of private vehicle has been identified as the dominant mode of transport at two-thirds of all trips made within the Cumberland LGA. The current travel pattern is mainly influenced by the deficiency in accessibility to active and public transport modes. Public transport infrastructure in Cumberland LGA is signified by low frequencies and connectivity of bus and rail services in many areas outside the established major centres. The trajectory from this condition would be placing a pressure on main rail line that leads to overcrowding of the existing services and reliance on the use of private vehicle as the preferred option.

With Cumberland LGA's population set to increase from 236,000 residents to over 300,000 residents by 2036, an additional 250,000 trips daily are projected to occur within the Cumberland's transport network. Growing density that is not equitably corresponded by public transport infrastructure will result in greater reliance on the private vehicle use that will also place more burden on already overcapacity existing road networks.

Time is of the essence in achieving a transport modal shift to better meet transport demand now and in the future. These challenges, if not addressed in a timely manner, can affect the liveability and overall wellbeing of the Cumberland community. Council's position is that there is a need for future transport investment that delivers additional public transport services in the Cumberland LGA to support population growth. Apart from Council-led transport initiatives, regional planned transport investment and public transport upgrades by the State Government will need to be prioritised to improve public transport access for residents and visitors, both within and beyond the Central City District and Cumberland LGA, to Sydney's key centres. The delivery of the public transport infrastructure will need to consider and align with this planned growth. This is consistent with the directions, objectives and strategies of the Greater Sydney Region Plan in achieving the 30-minute city by the provision of improved and reliable connections to key markets such as the employment centres of Greater Parramatta, major ports and airports.

# 1. The Cumberland Local Government Area (LGA)

The Cumberland LGA is located within the Western Sydney and covers more than 72 square kilometres with 29 suburbs stretching from Rookwood Cemetery in the east, along the M4 Motorway and Western Rail Line in the north, and Prospect Creek in the south to Prospect Hill in the west.

Spatially, Cumberland LGA is strategically located in the Central City District, less than 5 kilometres south of Parramatta CBD and approximately 20 kilometres west of Sydney CBD. The new Western Sydney Airport at Badgery's Creek will be approximately 30 kilometres to the west of Cumberland. This context is also shown graphically in Figure 1.



Figure 1: Cumberland LGA in context of Greater Sydney

Cumberland is one of the more populous and fast-growing local government areas in Greater Sydney. The LGA currently has a population of over 236,000 and, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, was growing at the rate of almost 4,000 people per year. The population is set to increase to over 300,000 residents by 2036.

# Transport Networks

The Cumberland LGA is surrounded by strategic road corridors including the M4, the A44 Parramatta Road/Great Western Highway, the A4 and A28 Cumberland Highway, with the M4 and A28 being part of the Parramatta Outer Ring Road and the A4 providing access to the Sydney CBD. The road network is also shown graphically in Figure 2.



Figure 2: Road network in Cumberland LGA

The area is also serviced by public transport, with the T1, T2, T3 and T5 train services all running through the area, and the Liverpool to Parramatta T-way providing a rapid public transport connection for much of the western part of Cumberland, which is not directly served by the Sydney Trains network. The train network is shown in Figure 3, and the bus network is shown in Figure 4. In addition, there is a limited cycling and footpath network in Cumberland, and this is shown in Figure 5 and 6.



Figure 3: Train network in Cumberland LGA











Figure 6: Footpath network in Cumberland LGA

The western half of Cumberland, along with a small pocket in the east, is not within an 800 m walking catchment, creating opportunities to increase public transport uptake. A number of natural and built features throughout the area act as barriers to car, cycling and pedestrian movements. These include the M4, Parramatta Road/Great Western Highway and the Main Western Train Line in an east-west direction, and the Cumberland Highway, A6, Cumberland Train Line and the Duck River in the north-south direction. Various crossings are located along the railway lines and major roads to connect different part of Cumberland to each other, although the distances between them can sometimes be significant, particularly for pedestrians and cyclists.

# Transport and Land Use Planning

Cumberland LGA has a distinct locational advantage due to its connectivity at the geographic heart of the Sydney region. It is serviced by the motorway network and centrally located between Parramatta and Sydney CBDs. Cumberland's most competitive feature is its accessibility to various distribution catchments across metropolitan Sydney. Many of Cumberland's centres and employment precincts play a critical and symbiotic role in strengthening the regional economy, Parramatta CBD and Greater Parramatta. As outlined in Cumberland 2030: Our Local Strategic Planning Statement, the importance of a two-way relationship with Parramatta CBD will be supported by Merrylands as a strategic centre that forms a key component of the continuing story of economic success for Cumberland. Council's plans and policies support the complementary relationship between Merrylands and Parramatta CBD to capitalise on the synergies between these two key centres. The overall relationship between centres and existing transport infrastructure of the Cumberland LGA is delineated in the strategic land use framework diagram below. The structure plan also aligns with the regional and district strategic directions outlined in the Greater Sydney Region Plan and Central City District Plan.



Figure 7: Cumberland strategic land use framework

Council has progressed planning for a number of centres and strategic corridors to facilitate additional housing supply and jobs growth, which would require to be corresponded by the provision of appropriate transport infrastructure. Public transport would be a critically important infrastructure to support the progress and development of the Cumberland LGA.

Key considerations related to the public transport provision in Cumberland include:

- Conduct Council-led transport initiatives;
- Collaborate with Transport for NSW for State-led transport initiatives;
- Encourage a shift away from private vehicles towards public transport and intermodal trips, including active transport; and
- Achieve the 30-minute city by providing improved and reliable connections to key markets such as the employment centres of Greater Parramatta, major ports and airports.

# 2. Current state of public transport in Cumberland LGA

This section responds to the following Inquiry terms of reference:

(a) availability and accessibility of public transport services across Western Sydney, the adequacy of connectivity between public transport hubs and commercial hubs and any gaps in services

#### Availability and accessibility of public transport in Cumberland LGA

The coverage of public transport availability and accessibility is highly focused mainly within the existing urban core centres. Cumberland LGA is serviced by linear rail lines, with a major interchange at Lidcombe. Whilst it is generally a well-serviced infrastructure particularly around the interchange, some parts of areas have limited access to rail (mainly in the western part of the area and a small portion in the south-eastern end). There are limited rail frequencies between Merrylands (and other T5 stations) and Parramatta CBD, and the existing infrastructure is considered to be insufficient to meet the needs of the current growing population. Some of the rail lines that service the LGA are crowded during peak periods. There are also lack of direct and fast connections between the core centres, as all of the fast train services lead to Parramatta.

There is an extensive bus network serving the Cumberland LGA. However, bus services are infrequent outside of peak periods and outside of the Liverpool to Parramatta T-way. Some areas of growing density are also not well served by public transport, such as Parramatta Road corridor, Great Western Highway corridor, Woodville Road and Westmead area. The bus network does not connect these main corridors with the local centres and local train station, as all of the bus routes services are directed to Parramatta. These areas are also not fully covered by active transport networks.

It is noted that Transport for NSW has published the Integrated Public Transport Service Planning Guidelines that outlines the minimum level of service for public transport areas in the Sydney metropolitan area. A preliminary analysis by Council officers indicates that minimum service levels are not being provided in all parts of Cumberland, with gaps in service provision at night and on weekends.

#### Adequacy of connectivity between public transport hubs and commercial hubs

Cumberland LGA has a strong local identity which it derives from a network of centres and commercial hubs that foster a range of small and medium businesses. The centres are generally accessible and also provide connection to key social and employment destinations, and to broader strategic centres. The centres have an important role in providing local employment as well as a variety of businesses and retail opportunities of many sizes and formats. The higher order centres attract better growth for commercial and retail aspects. Existing public transport infrastructure is generally co-located with the larger centres and commercial hubs. As most commercial hubs are planned within a transit-oriented development area, adequate connectivity with public transport linkages would be offered.

#### Any gaps in public transport services

Key transport issues for Cumberland's public transport network include the following.

• Crowding on the rail network where the capacity of the Main Western Line to accommodate growth in the peak period is constrained. The T5 Cumberland Line (Leppington to Schofields / Richmond via Parramatta) is also experiencing crowding in peak periods.

- The current train timetable introduced in 2017 had a negative impact on some stations in Cumberland, including Auburn, Granville, Lidcombe and Merrylands. The train timetable reduced service levels and removed faster train services at these locations, increasing travel time for residents and workers. Council requests that the NSW Government's commitment to review the train timetable looks at the reinstatement of faster, more direct services at these locations and that services are reintroduced as soon as possible.
- Access to Parramatta is limited by infrequent rail services between Merrylands (and other T5 stations) and Parramatta CBD, combined with infrequent bus services outside the Liverpool to Parramatta T-way.
- Low bus mode share caused by infrequent services in the peak periods and low-quality facilities, such as bus stop accessibility.
- Some area subject to growing density are not served by public transport, such as Parramatta Road corridor, Great Western Highway corridor, Woodville Road and Westmead area.
- Public domain on some of the station forecourts lacks on presence and is not attractive to users, such as, Guildford Station.
- Ease of transfer between modes needs to be supported with appropriate infrastructure, facilities and access particularly for disabled person/s.
- Ensure safety and security of the users would be maintained while utilising public transport services, particularly at night time.

Some considerations that have been identified to improve the gaps in the public transport services within the Cumberland LGA are listed as follows:

- Improvements to train services, including reinstatement of direct rail services to the Sydney CBD from Berala and Regents Park, additional train services to meet customer demand, and faster train services that were lost in the 2017 train timetable
- Improvements to bus services, including turn-up-and-go services on the Liverpool to Parramatta Transitway, and ensuring that local bus services meet the Integrated Public Transport Service Planning Guidelines for the Sydney metropolitan area
- Provision of accessible and fit-for purpose public transport infrastructure, including bus stops, transport interchanges, train stations and active transport links
- Continuation of the Growth Services Program to provide new and enhanced bus services that respond to urban development and emerging travel patterns;
- Timely delivery of Sydney Metro West to support growth and development in the Cumberland area;
- Extension of Parramatta Light Rail to provide connectivity between Sydney Olympic Park and Lidcombe, as well as future opportunities between Westmead and Wentworthville; and
- Planning for future metro lines, including opportunities for new stations in the Cumberland area to support current and future needs.

# 3. Identified opportunities for public transport in Cumberland LGA

This section responds to the following Inquiry terms of reference:

(b) current and anticipated levels of demand for public transport services and the public transport requirements to meet this demand

(c) changing nature of public transport needs due to shifting demographics, new suburbs, planned infrastructure and increased density

(d) social, economic and planning impacts of vehicle dependency and poorly integrated public transport

(e) affordability compared with other areas of Greater Sydney and New South Wales and relative to means

#### Current and anticipated levels of demand for public transport services

Parramatta has the highest frequency of trains (23 trains in one direction in the AM peak), Lidcombe and Westmead are also served by frequent trains. Auburn, Clyde and Granville also have a high frequency of service, although these are T2 stopping services only. However, the frequency of the T5 Cumberland Line is limited to only 2 trains per hour.

The current demands for the rail services exceed the existing infrastructure, as Cumberland residents experience train crowding, with the T1, T2 and T5 lines identified as being over capacity during peak periods. Further rail improvements would be required, and there is an opportunity for more frequent, faster train services to be provided to Cumberland residents as part of the forthcoming train timetable review committed to by the NSW Government .

The 30 minute city access for Cumberland to Parramatta indicates that there are large parts of the LGA that are outside of this catchment despite of having good bus network coverage. The reason is due to by low frequencies and connectivity of the bus services. Woodville Road, as an example, has only 2 buses every hour in each direction, despite of expectations of further development along its corridor. The highest bus frequencies can only be found on the Liverpool to Parramatta T-way (Route T80), Parramatta Road (Route M92) and Blaxcell Street (Route M91).

The Cumberland population is forecast to grow by around 30% to reach approximately 300,000 people by 2036, with an additional 250,000 trips daily projected to occur within the Cumberland's transport network. The anticipated levels of demands for public transport services would also be exponentially greater than current demands.

#### Changing nature of public transport

Through the Greater Sydney Region Plan and Central District Plan, Cumberland LGA has strategically set its contribution to the region's population, housing and jobs growth. However, the amount of current growth that Cumberland has achieved, has resulted in congested road network and overcrowded rail services at peak times. The Future Transport Strategy 2056 for Greater Sydney identifies a range of future investments that will transform the region's network in long term, but not many of these will be directed to the Cumberland LGA. Public transport infrastructure delivery will need to align with the existing and planned density growth within the Cumberland LGA. It is crucial that Cumberland LGA is not bypassed as the State Government delivers new city-shaping regional transport infrastructure to support growth across the Central City.

To ensure Cumberland can deliver on the State Government's growth target, a collaboration between the State Government and Council will be required to ensure that the new city-shaping regional transport corridors in the Central City will support the Cumberland LGA density growth. Specific priorities related to the changing nature of public transport provision within the regional transport corridors include:

- Sydney Metro: to identify the opportunities for increased Sydney Trains services once the Sydney Metro City and Southwest opens, and to harness the potential of the Sydney Metro West to Parramatta CBD to alleviate crowding on existing train services and to improve access to Westmead.
- Parramatta Light Rail: to integrate public transport network by connecting the new Light Rail network to Cumberland's existing public transport network at Westmead (potentially at Olympic Park and Parramatta CBD).
- Western Sydney Airport Parramatta Rail/Metro Link: to consider options for a direct rail or metro link between Western Sydney Airport and Parramatta CBD, in addition to the rail link proposed via St Marys that could serve centres in Cumberland LGA.
- Parramatta Bankstown Hurstville/Kogarah Rapid Bus Link/Mass Transit Link: to investigate this link potentially serving multiple Cumberland centres, such as along Woodville Road.

#### Social, economic and planning impacts

Cumberland is experiencing strong population growth. Whilst this growth is a positive influence on the community, it also presents multiple challenges such as the increased demand for the provision of services and social and physical infrastructure, amongst others. These challenges, if not addressed in a timely manner, can affect the liveability and overall wellbeing of the Cumberland community. Council has undertaken further investigations to identify the strengths, opportunities and needs of the growing community, and to help inform planning and prioritisation of infrastructure, services and programs. It will be used to collaborate with our community and relevant stakeholders on issues of importance and to advocate for the appropriate and timely provision of infrastructure and services.

Results from Council's Community Satisfaction Survey note that access to transport is a key indicator of well-being satisfaction. However, people with disability have notably given a lower rating for accessibility of transport. A set of future considerations targeted at encouraging the community to take more public transport that has been identified. Amongst those, buses have been recognised as a key connection between centres and other public transport services. Subsequently, Council has undertaken further analysis to address the poor access of the bus facilities and is developing a bus stop audit to assess and prioritise on the improvements required.

#### Affordability

Cumberland City has a significant proportion of residential land use when compared to adjoining Councils. About 57% of the local government area is zoned for residential purposes and, according to ABS data from 2016, there are an estimated 67,815 households. Data from the 2016 Census indicates that detached houses (low-density housing) are the dominant dwelling structure, with over 55% coverage in Cumberland, followed by medium-density (24.7%) and high-density (18.7%) housing. The majority of the medium and high-density dwellings are located in close proximity to centres that are based around train stations and transport services; and are composed of predominantly two-bedroom stock. There is a growing demand in Cumberland for one and two-bedroom housing, as well as larger dwellings to accommodate families and multi-generational households. It is expected that there will be an increase in number of lone person household over the next 20 years, especially around the

areas convenient to travel along the train line corridors. Housing affordability and mix are important considerations for the Cumberland community, particularly given the diverse household structures within the area. Housing affordability relates to the general affordability of both rental and purchase housing on the open market, and is not limited to those on low to moderate incomes. Private renters in Cumberland are experiencing the highest rental stress within the Central City District. In Cumberland, 23% of all households have a very low to moderate income, and are paying more than 30% of their income on rent. Homelessness is also an important issue in Cumberland, with over 3,000 people identified in this category, primarily through living in overcrowded dwellings.

Housing provision and housing affordability are important priorities for Cumberland City Council. As such, Council has undertaken and prepared several assessments and strategies related to housing across the Council area. The Cumberland Local Housing Strategy identifies the key priorities, objectives, and initiatives for future planning, delivery, and design of housing within Cumberland. It also outlines how Cumberland will meet the housing priorities in the Central City District Plan. A corresponding focus has been placed on affordable housing through the Cumberland Affordable Housing Strategy.

# 4. Future considerations for public transport improvements in Cumberland LGA

This section responds to the following Inquiry terms of reference:

(f) role of public transport and future transport technologies to reduce car dependency in Western Sydney, including barriers to improving public transport services

(g) role of the public and private sector, including local government and the use of innovative funding models, such as transit oriented development and value capture mechanisms, in public transport provision

(*h*) staffing and future workforce planning, taking into account predicted service demand based on predicted population growth in Western Sydney

(i) any other related matters.

#### Role of public transport and future transport technologies

The role of public transport to reduce car dependency is evident. The current travel pattern within the Cumberland LGA is mainly influenced by the deficiency in accessibility to active and public transport modes. Public transport infrastructure in Cumberland LGA is signified by low frequencies and connectivity of bus and rail services in many areas outside the established major centres. This results in heavy reliance on the use of private vehicle as the preferred transport option.

There is a role for Council in supporting future transport technologies where they can add value to achieving Council's vision and objectives for the transport network to reduce private vehicle dependency. By working with the wider NSW transport cluster, Council has the opportunity to place the Cumberland LGA at the forefront of transport innovation within the Greater Sydney. Specific priorities to explore and advocate in support of the Council's vision, which include:

- Car sharing: working with major car sharing providers to deliver comprehensive car sharing coverage for Cumberland LGA, helping to reduce private vehicle dependency and utilising the parking spaces more efficiently.
- Opal controlled commuter car parking: working with State Government to expand the trial of the Opal Controlled Park & Ride Stations to ensure that car parking allocation will be prioritised for public transport users.
- Electric vehicle infrastructure: working with State Government to deliver public electric vehicle charging infrastructures in centres, commuter car parks and major regional corridors while developing standards for electric vehicle charging infrastructure in new developments. This would be complemented with Council's electric vehicle charging infrastructure policy that is currently under development.
- Flexible on-demand transport services: continue to explore the potential of on-demand transport services to fill gaps in area that is outside the public transport services, following the trial completed for Greystanes and Wetherill Park in 2018, as well as insights from the current on-demand services provided between Lidcombe and Newington.

#### Role of the public and private sector

Council is currently undertaking the development of a Walking and Cycling Strategy to provide a framework for improvements to meet current and future needs, as well as integrating with

the broader transport network. Improving active transport infrastructure helps lead to a modal shift from private vehicle usage to public and active transport.

Considering the above, Council advocates for the continued grant funding of identified active transport infrastructure to support delivery of the 15-minute active transport vision set out in the Six Cities Region Discussion Paper. The draft Region and City Plans should also work with Council's to identify their existing and proposed, regionally significant active transport corridors to support any grant funding. In Cumberland this includes the transition of the Duck River and Prospect Creek Corridors to service both commuter and recreational functions.

A funding mechanism that allows for bridging the gap between State funding and local infrastructure contributions should be developed to assist in the collaboration works between State and local governments to improve infrastructure, as the public transport is State, not Council, operated infrastructure. Provision of additional grants in the short to medium term to Council could assist in delivering the infrastructure requirements that may be managed locally.

#### Staffing and future workforce planning

Cumberland LGA is home to substantial industrial and employment lands accommodating a diverse range of jobs and services. The Cumberland's economy provides over 86,000 local jobs in over 20,000 businesses. The main industries in Cumberland contributing to local employment are manufacturing, retail trade, transport, postal and warehousing, construction, healthcare and social assistance, and education and training. Cumberland appeals to these sectors as a destination due to accessibility to various distribution catchments across metropolitan Sydney. Council recognises the opportunity to transition the area's economy into high order and productive industries and the knowledge based intensive economy. Council actively seeks to leverage its employment and innovation lands to increase economic efficiencies and ultimately grow Cumberland's local economy to help create more local employment and investment. The prospect of a better connected area will be a catalyst for investment in our employment lands precincts. Our traditional industrial base continues to offer strong employment opportunities, while at the same time our employment precincts are transitioning to embrace innovation, creative and technology-based industries. Our population is young and increasingly tertiary educated, providing a ready workforce to support new and emerging enterprises.

As Cumberland LGA is also situated directly adjacent to the City of Parramatta and will function as its inner-city suburbs in the future. To support this growth, there needs to be increased funding for additional public transport services in the Cumberland LGA as this will support equity while attracting knowledge and key workers to housing that is within 30 minutes of the Central City CBD, complimenting the growth of Greater Parramatta and the Westmead Health and Innovation District.

# 5. Recommendations

The following recommendations are provided by Cumberland City Council for consideration by the Inquiry into the current and future public transport needs in Western Sydney.

# Recommendation 1

That the State Government consider and prioritise public transport services and infrastructure for the Cumberland LGA with ongoing collaboration with Council. This includes, but is not limited to, the following initiatives:

- Improvements to train services, including reinstatement of direct rail services to the Sydney CBD from Berala and Regents Park, additional train services to meet customer demand, and faster train services that were lost in the 2017 train timetable
- Improvements to bus services, including turn-up-and-go services on the Liverpool to Parramatta Transitway, and ensuring that local bus services meet the Integrated Public Transport Service Planning Guidelines for the Sydney metropolitan area
- Provision of accessible and fit-for purpose public transport infrastructure, including bus stops, transport interchanges, train stations and active transport links

#### Recommendation 2

That the State Government consider and align the public transport services and infrastructure delivery with planned growth with the Cumberland LGA. This includes, but is not limited to, the following initiatives:

- Continuation of the Growth Services Program to provide new and enhanced bus services that respond to urban development and emerging travel patterns;
- Timely delivery of Sydney Metro West to support growth and development in the Cumberland area, including the potential for a new metro station in Silverwater that provides access to residents and workers of Cumberland LGA;
- Extension of Parramatta Light Rail to provide connectivity between Sydney Olympic Park and Lidcombe, as well as future opportunities between Westmead and Wentworthville; and
- Planning for future metro lines, including opportunities for new stations in the Cumberland area to support current and future needs.

#### Recommendation 3

That the State Government review the existing gaps identified within public transport services and infrastructure in Cumberland LGA, and involve close and ongoing collaboration with Council and the local communities to support the improvements required as part of service planning and delivery.

#### Recommendation 4

That the State Government provide grants in the short to medium term as a collaborating funding mechanism with Council in delivering local infrastructure requirements associated with public transport, such as public domain improvements, bus stops, footpaths and cycle paths.