

19 November 2015

Mr Chris Gell  
Environment and Planning Directorate  
GPO Box 158  
CANBERRA ACT 2601

## **DRAFT BELCONNEN MASTER PLAN**

Dear Mr Gell

Pedal Power ACT welcomes the draft Belconnen Master Plan (MP) as a constructive approach to improving the design of the Belconnen Town Centre (BTC). If properly realised, it will begin to lift the centre from its outmoded 1970's layout dominated by private motor vehicles into an urban area where walking, cycling and public transport are encouraged.

We have attached detailed comments on the planning strategies, including areas where we think the draft plan can be improved.

A specific issue is that the MP should refer to the new ACT Active Travel Framework and expand on how its themes will be applied to the BTC. While Transport for Canberra remains an important planning document, the Framework is a more specific and up-to-date template for cycling. It should also refer to the recently released Statement of Planning Intent.

In general, we believe the MP should go further in reflecting a new transport hierarchy which puts active travel highest, then public transport, and the needs of private vehicles last. Support for this hierarchy is noted in the Statement of Planning Intent. This is implied in the MP, but a stronger reflection of this principle is needed if progress on a more liveable BTC is to be achieved. This is reflected in our recommendation for the entire BTC/Bruce precinct to be declared an Active Travel Zone.

In that context, the MP should take the opportunity to articulate the 'vision splendid' of bold active travel initiatives that could transform the BTC over the next 20 years. One of the Statement of Planning Intent's actions is: 'Integrate innovative techniques ... Fit-for-purpose infrastructure ... into the planning and design of urban renewal precincts and transport projects.' We appreciate that there are budgetary and political constraints, but would like to see a final MP that sets out without compromise what needs to happen to build on the well-known advantages of cycling for inner urban transport.

For example, we appreciated the MP's strong proposals for north-south cycle routes, but were disappointed that the draft MP was silent on our suggestion of an east-west cycleway linking the Bruce institutions with the BTC. The proposal for 'improved cycling access along College Street', while not entirely clear, leaves much to be desired. College Street is a 60 km/h arterial road with very heavy traffic, and currently one of the ACT's most dangerous and unattractive routes for



*More Canberrans cycling, more often, for a better community*



*Cycling Advocacy  
Recreational Rides  
Five Peaks Challenge*

*Centenary Trail Blaze  
Fitz's Challenge  
Amy's Big Canberra Bike Ride*

*Ride to Work  
Ride or Walk to School  
Ride Safe to School Day*

*Cycle Facilities Rating  
New Horizons  
Bicycle Maintenance*



cycling. The MP should grasp the need for dedicated cycling paths that are completely separated from interaction with motor vehicles, with more grade-separated crossings like the Aranda footbridge. There is mounting evidence that this is the only way to address our members' concerns and reap the benefits of increased cycling mode share, particularly by women and children.

We were somewhat surprised that the draft MP did not make much more of the potential benefits of safe, direct cycling links between the BTC and the major institutions in the Bruce precinct. The two areas really need to be considered as one from an active travel perspective. Past ad hoc development has highlighted the risk of considering the BTC in relative isolation.

Finally, we urge the ACT Government to benchmark BTC cycling against international best practice. It is no longer good enough to say that "Canberra has the nation's highest cycle usage rate", even if that were true (Darwin is slightly higher). The final MP should acknowledge that Belconnen's cycle commuting rate is negligible by comparison with other developed countries, and state clearly how that is going to be turned around — in fact how the BTC, with the right planning and political will, can become an active travel showcase.

If you wish to discuss or clarify any points in our submission, please contact Pedal Power's Advocacy Team volunteer, Roger Bacon: [roger.bacon@tpg.com.au](mailto:roger.bacon@tpg.com.au)

Yours sincerely

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**Pedal Power ACT**  
**Belconnen Draft Master Plan – Feedback November 2015**

**Aspects of the draft Pedal Power supports**

- the summary of the need for improved cycling links (para 4.2.2)
- better cycling connections to Lake Ginninderra (4.2.6)
- recognition of the opportunity for separated cycle lanes (4.2.7)
- development of a shared path link on the Lake side of the Arts Centre (5.6.4)
- improved cycling connections within and through the BTC, including redevelopment of Joynton Smith Drive and Lathlain Street as a priority cycling corridor (5.6.9)
- enhancing an active frontage for the Westfield Mall on Benjamin Way, with plenty of bike parking (Figure 35)
- coherent cycling connections through and around the BTC, better lighting and signage, including for the Centenary Trail in the BTC (5.6.9).

**Suggestions for Improvements to the draft**

**A bolder vision for active transport**

We don't get a sense that the MP gives separated cycling routes sufficient priority as a transport alternative, despite the compelling reasons set out in para 4.2.2. The MP is an important platform to say what should be done to turn the BTC into an internationally recognised model for urban cycling. The MP should have 'encouraging cycling' as an explicit aim.

**Study area**

The MP should pay more attention to the need for cycling links between the BTC and surrounding areas, in particular the major institutions in the Bruce precinct.

For example, para 5.6.6 mentions "improving road and pedestrian connections" between the BTC and UC; cycling connections should be included.

**Active Travel Framework**

In setting out the planning context, the MP should reflect the policies in the ACT Active Travel Framework, which is not mentioned in the draft. The ATF gives a clearer and more up-to-date statement of ACT Government policy intent on cycling and walking than the Transport for Canberra document.

The MP should explicitly reflect the key approach in the ATF: that active transport should have the highest priority for facilities and funding, followed by public transport and then private vehicles. This was the first recommendation in our submission.

## **Parking**

The Executive Summary should adopt more sophisticated wording than 'ensure supply meets demand'. The body of the MP recognises that supply and demand have to be managed (similar to the approach being adopted in Civic), if the area and funding dedicated to parking space is not to distort BTC planning and land use. A linear expansion of parking supply in line with projected population growth is unsustainable. The days are ending when people could expect to drive to a town centre and park outside their destination at little or no cost. Canberra is after all a major capital and no longer a quiet country town.

Demand management (reflecting official ACT policy of "making walking and cycling the easiest travel options to encourage active travel") should include:

- priority for provision and funding of active and public transport options;
- limitation and removal of on-street parking; and
- flexible pricing.

Supply management includes:

- relocation of long-stay parking away from core areas;
- use of smart parking technology such as variable pricing, so that the price increases as available spaces reduce, and reduces as more spaces become available; and
- a radical increase in attractive bike parking close to retail and community facilities.

To avoid long-stay charges, people are already parking cars at John Knight Park, the Belconnen Markets and streets south of Belconnen Way. Completing car trips on a bicycle is also becoming more common.

## **Cycling**

The MP should acknowledge that the Belconnen ride-to-work mode share of 1.8% is negligible by international standards and needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency.

Two critical needs identified in the Pedal Power ACT member survey were for continuous safe east-west and north-south cycle routes, and a cycle bypass right round the BTC.

The MP should do more to address the critical need for high-quality off-road cycling links within and through the BTC and the neighbouring Bruce precinct. Our original submission proposed an off-road east-west cycleway with grade-separated crossings of Haydon Drive and College Street; instead the MP relies on "improved cycling access along College Street". This limited approach is inadequate and problematic; College Street East is inherently unattractive and dangerous, a narrow congested 60 km/h arterial road. The MP should reflect a bolder approach and vision for the simple reason that if it remains necessary for riders to 'navigate vehicular traffic', many people won't ride and the BTC will not realise its potential or help the Government achieve the cycling mode share targets it set in Transport for Canberra.

In the Summary of Principles and Strategies (p.62), the principle dealing with transport should specify encouraging a major increase in cycling participation.

The MP should confirm the need for protected cycle routes across **and around** the BTC (para 5.6.9).

### **The future cycle network (Figure 37, p.80)**

All the proposed new on-road cycle lanes must be physically separated from vehicular traffic, otherwise most 'interested but concerned' potential riders won't use them. They should also have priority over vehicles and priority at intersections with, for example, physically protected designs (without vehicle slip lanes).

To complete a cycle bypass of the BTC on the eastern side, a new separated cycle path should be provided between the Emu Bank frontage and the Eastern Valley Way corridor. This route should be flagged as a Main Cycle Route, as it will be an important way around the BTC. This missing link is shown on the attached map.

In retaining and improving the shared path along the Lake frontage at Emu Bank, care should be taken not to repeat the mistakes made at Kingston Foreshore, ie by ensuring that developments don't encroach on the cycling space (which should be wide enough for current peaks and future cycling walking usage).

A shared path link is needed across the top of the Northern Peninsula next to Ginninderra Drive.

### **Speed limits**

The proposed 40 km/h zones in Figure 38 (p.82) are too small. Our original submission recommended "a default 40 km/h speed limit on all other roads in the study area that are currently rated below 60 km/h". This should be implemented to encourage active travel.

A related Pedal Power recommendation which has not been adopted is that the entire study area should be designated an Active Travel Zone.

### **Maintenance**

As recommended in our original submission, the MP should commit to maintaining major on- and off-road cycle routes to the same standard as roads.

### **Further studies**

Studies are proposed on a design manual, road traffic, public transport, carparks and accessibility. A study should be included to look specifically at an area-based approach to bring BTC and Bruce cycling facilities up to international best practice.

**NEED FOR A SHARED PATH LINK BETWEEN EMU BANK AND EASTERN VALLEY WAY**

