

1. Introduction

1.1 Background to the Study

The Gold Coast City Council (GCCC) aims to provide a framework for a safe, accessible, efficient, integrated and environmentally sustainable transport system for people and goods, within the context of the Gold Coast City Transport Plan 1998 (CTP). The Council's strategic aim to reduce unnecessary car use, particularly for commuting to and from work, is complemented by its policies for improving the performance and accessibility of public transport, for enhancing conditions for cyclists and for making improved provision for pedestrians.

Cycling provides health benefits, is environmentally friendly and can be fun. It can also be an extremely practical form of personal transport, especially for short journeys. It is often quicker than the car for short urban journeys, and provides door-to-door access, with no parking cost or worry. Bicycles are cheap to buy and maintain in comparison to cars, and have no running costs such as fuel. For the less fit or active, electric bicycles are now available, which take the strain out of cycling.

Several recognised 'bicycle cities' such as Amsterdam, Beijing, Stockholm and, to an extent, Canberra and Melbourne, already exist. In them, bicycles are a normal part of everyday life. These cities have planned or at least catered for bicycles, and as a result, boast a relatively large proportion of residents who cycle - it is viewed as a legitimate transport mode and not just a recreational pursuit.

Since the 1970's, Gold Coast City Council (GCCC) has been pro-active in providing facilities for cyclists. The city's development density, location, topography and tourist appeal make its urban areas extremely well suited to the use of bikes for commuting and recreational trips. The city's bicycle network now covers over 620km; which is an increase of over 50% since 2001 BNOP Review took place. This indicates the growth taking place in the Gold Coast in relation to the provision of bicycle routes for all users.

The city's unique character and identity are largely shaped by a diversity of landscape elements, including extensive beaches, distinctive coastal development, mountain ranges and rural areas. These attributes, together with the maritime climate and proximity to Brisbane, have contributed to the city's consistently high population growth. They have also ensured high tourist visitation rates and made recreational activities prominent.

This rapid growth is placing increasing demands upon urban services and facilities. The city's current population, totalling 507,439¹ persons, is projected to increase in size to 572,809² in 2011, 632,368² in 2016 and 683,568² in 2021. Alternative modes of transport such as cycling, walking and public transport are seen as vital instruments to reduce this social pressure placed upon the city's road network.

As part of Council's commitment to achieve a more integrated and sustainable transport system, consultants COMPLETE were commissioned in 2007 to review the 1996 Bikeway Strategy, 2001 BNOP review and prepare an updated 2008 BNOP Review document.

The original study identified a network of strategic bicycle links, which provided the catalyst for more detailed local area bikeway planning and construction. The Council adopted the strategy in 1996 and the GHD BNOP 2001.

¹ Provisional data as at 30 June 2006 - ABS Estimated Resident Population Cat. No. 3218.0.55.001 Regional Population Growth, Australia

² GCCC - correct as at August 2005

Greater consideration of the operational realities of constructing the network is now required. Furthermore, major infrastructural and policy changes which have occurred since 1996 and 2001 that need to be considered in a revised strategy.

This document will take into account the expansion of the Gold Coast since 2001, the PNCP and review the strategic bicycle network that will need to feed these new urban areas.

Through Council's ongoing planning and review processes, the Gold Coast will become a 'bike city', where cycling will be a safer, attractive, efficient and convenient form of transport and recreation for persons of all age groups and skill levels.

1.2 Study Purpose and Scope

This review comes at a time when congestion on the Council's roads is increasing due to the rapid expansion and development of the Gold Coast. The state and local initiatives being implemented to encourage cycling as a preferred mode of transport in South East Queensland (SEQ) are crucial to ensure the Council's transport strategies are achieved / delivered. Accordingly, Council now seeks a comprehensive review of the 1996 Bicycle Network Operational Strategy and the 2001 BNOP Review, to address the challenges and opportunities of the city's growth, role and form as they continue to evolve.

The aims of the review process are:

- To adequately reflect community needs and expectations based upon existing and future land use patterns and population growth trends.
- To satisfy the objectives and reflect the action plans established within the Bicycle Transport section of the Gold Coast City Transport Plan, 1998 (CTP).
- To offer realistic priorities for bikeway development given the physical constraints of existing infrastructure and the economic realities of Council's Capital Works Program.

Accordingly, this review will focus on the location and implementation of the bikeway network, and its integration with the transport system and diverse land use fabric. The project scope does not extend to the behavioural and legislative issues addressed by the previous study.

The outcomes of the review will be twofold:

- a strategy document to guide Council's forward planning of the bikeway network over a 10-20 year period noted in section 11.6, Appendix B and on the plans contained in Appendix D; and
- an operational plan for the construction of the city's bikeway network for the next five years indicated on the plans contained in Table 12.1 and Appendix C .

The overall objective for this study is provided by the CTP:

To provide a comprehensive bicycle network throughout the City in order to offer a feasible and safe transport alternative and improve recreational opportunities.

1.3 What has been achieved since 2001?

Since Council's adoption of the 1996 strategy and the 2001 review, significant progress has been made towards construction of the cycle network, together with other related initiatives. Major advancements include:

- ongoing provision of on-road and off-road bikeways, covering over 620km (an increase of over 50%) and providing improved network connectivity;
- deployment of bicycle support facilities (e.g. parking structures) at major destinations (e.g. rail stations);
- appointment of a part-time Bicycle Facilities Officer to Council;
- continual implementation of the CTP including actions to improve the cycling environment, targeting:
 - **The bikeway network;**
 - Provide an on-going program of bikeway construction consistent with the local area bikeway plans
 - Provide a cycling and pedestrian bridge across the Nerang River at Southport
 - Ensure connectivity of on-road facilities
 - Provide bike lanes, and in some cases, off-road paths on main roads
 - Provide facilities for safer access to schools as part of the network
 - Utilise existing and proposed transport corridors for commuter facilities (e.g. along railway routes)
 - Construct the Helensvale to Robina Veloway
 - **Inter-modal and end-of-trip facilities;**
 - Install secure bike parking facilities, showers and lockers at major centres and places of employment
 - Consider options for taking bicycles on buses, for example bike racks
 - Progressively upgrade inter-modal transfer opportunities between bikeways and public transport

(further work / funding is required on this aspect, as not many facilities have been implemented over the past five years. Further studies need to be undertaken to ensure that cyclists have adequate facilities at the end of their journey.);
 - **Quality of facilities;**
 - Construct new facilities to current standards and guidance
 - Upgrade and maintain existing facilities regularly
 - Incorporate the needs of people with mobility difficulties into bikeways, so they are wheelchair accessible
 - **Provision of resources (funding and personnel);**
 - Provide sufficient funding and specialised staff to facilitate cycling projects

– **Education and awareness;**

- Undertake education projects focusing on:

- Benefits of cycling to the whole community including motorists
- Development of cycling skills for children and adults
- Safe cyclist / motorist / pedestrian interaction; and
- Produce current publication of bicycle network

(further work / funding is required on this aspect to set up a program of education for all ages); and

– **Encouragement (cycling events/programs etc).**

- Stage regular encouragement cycling events such as Bike Week

It is vital that GCCC set up events throughout the year to highlight the various advantages of cycling to the community. This will require support from all areas of Council

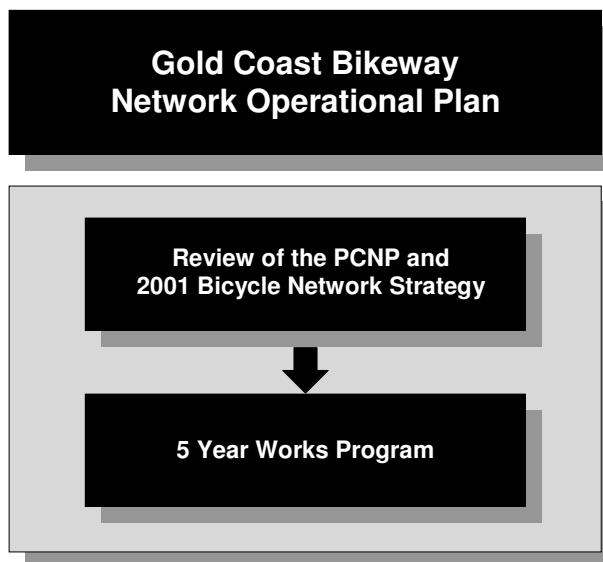
- The Greenheart is a major parks development of over 3500 hectares within the central area of GCCC. It will provide open space cells, parkland cores, lakes, water trails, sporting facilities, cultural and community facilities, grand parkways, public transport connections, trails and circuits. It will also integrate cyclists into the Greenheart and provide a high quality Cycle Circuit, with the potential to stage national road cycling and triathlon events;
- Green Bridges are to be provided at strategic locations throughout the Gold Coast area to improve connectivity between local centres and attractions for people who walk and cycle;
- the release of several other major policy documents by all levels of government, emphasising the benefits of cycling and the need to increase bicycle usage, for transport, health and financial purposes; and
- greater commitment by Council and the State Government to include bikeway infrastructure in the road network planning and development approval processes.

Other recent projects/events impacting on the Coast's cycling environment include:

- sustained levels of high population growth;
- the rail extension from Beenleigh to Robina was completed and is now operational, and construction is underway with the extension from Robina to Varsity Lakes with a completion date of 2010;
- planning for further extension of the rail line to Coolangatta is underway;
- the Pacific Motorway Upgrade Project (including proposed improvements for cyclists) is in the planning stage;
- the release of the Council's new Planning Scheme (Version 1.1 January 2007) under the Integrated Planning Act 1997 (IPA) and IPA Infrastructure Guidelines 1/04 Priority Infrastructure Plans October 2004.

1.4 Report Context and Structure

The revised strategy is one of two inter-related components in the Gold Coast Bikeway Network Operational Plan - a total planning and implementation strategy for the city's cycling environment. Each component is described below.



Bicycle Network Strategy Review

The revised strategy is a forward planning tool to guide short and long term network planning. Its findings and recommendations provide the framework for the proceeding Five Year Works Program.

The Strategy addresses bikeway related infrastructure and policy advancements made since 2001, existing conditions for cycling in Gold Coast City, QT's PCNP the community's needs and priorities, together with opportunities, constraints and funding sources for bikeway provision. Based on these findings, it proposes a network of cycle routes and an action plan for their implementation.

Five Year Works Program

Based on project priorities established by this review process, a five year works program, including financial costing for approximately 104 individual bikeway projects, including three green bridges, has been prepared.

1.5 Planning Horizon

As discussed, this report, the revised strategy, is based on a 10-20 year planning horizon.

It is recognised that only sections of the recommended bikeway network are likely to be completed during this time. Accordingly, the Strategy is intended to provide an overview of preferred bicycle route locations, construction standards and project staging that may be reviewed and added to over time. This approach will ensure that the Strategy is a "living" document that responds to new opportunities for cycling as they arise.