**Does your council invest enough in better streets?**

Act now for your chance to influence that! Every May/June, all NSW councils, by law, have to seek public input on their budget and plans for the next year (operational plan) and four years (delivery plan). By law, they have to taken into account any submissions. But hardly anyone does, so it’s very easy for you (and maybe a couple of neighbours/friends) to make your input count.

**Step 1**: search for “[council name] operational plan and budget 2023” on the web OR go to the council home page and look for “Have your say” or “Community Engagement” link where you should find it. If not, call or email the council to ask for the link.

**Step 2**: make a submission before the deadline which will be soon – late May or early June.

Two-minute version: in the comment box, or in an email to the email address shown, make a general, or specific comment. For example: please invest more in traffic calming around X school; or build more pedestrian crossings near the shops; or allocate more budget to build more of the bike plan in the next four years; etc - you get the idea. It’s that simple. They have to listen.

One-hour version: download the operational plan (which usually includes the budget near the end) and skim through it, noting or highlighting the useful bits. Look out for council’s strategic objectives and targets – these usually have good “Better Streets” related ideals that you can hold them to. Then look at the actions, and the budget figures (under capital expenditure). Start with praise for the good actions, targets and budget items, and then point out any gaps or areas to improve. Ideally, link your suggestions back to their strategic objectives that support your case. It works best if you underline or re-state at the end your clear and specific recommendations (eg. “Recommendation: spend the $50,000 allocated for upgrading the car park on Smith Street to a new pedestrian crossing instead”, or “Recommendation: increase the budget for XXXX”).

**Step 3**: amplify your submission: They’ll have to consider your recommendations and comments, but it will have even more influence if others make similar comments. Email it to a few friends or neighbours and encourage them to copy a point or two. Maybe post it on the local or school facebook group. And, best of all, email a copy to the councillors, so they can also see what input the community is giving – they might decide to vote for changing the budget to include your suggestions.

Late in June council will decide on the final budget along with any changes made to address community or councillor feedback.

Go for it! Make your views count.

Blacktown: <https://www.blacktown.nsw.gov.au/Have-Your-Say/Council%E2%80%99s-plans-for-202324> by 6 June

Blue Mountains: <https://yoursay.bmcc.nsw.gov.au/draft-operational-plan-2022-2023-including-draft-fees-charges-2022-2023> by 26 May

Camden: <https://yourvoice.camden.nsw.gov.au/draft-operational-plan-and-budget-2023-2024> by 16 May

Hills Shire: [www.thehills.nsw.gov.au/Contact-Us/Have-Your-Say/Have-your-say-on-the-Draft-2023-2024-HILLS-SHIRE-PLAN](http://www.thehills.nsw.gov.au/Contact-Us/Have-Your-Say/Have-your-say-on-the-Draft-2023-2024-HILLS-SHIRE-PLAN) by 17 May

Hornsby: <https://yoursay.hornsby.nsw.gov.au/dpop> by 15 May

Moree Plains Shire: <https://yourvoice.camden.nsw.gov.au/draft-operational-plan-and-budget-2023-2024> by 2 June

Penrith: <https://yoursaypenrith.com.au/draftoperationalplan2023-24> by 1 June

Wollondilly: <https://www.yoursay.wollondilly.nsw.gov.au/draft-operational-plan-2023-24> by 28 May

**Here is a long submission example to give you ideas, but remember even one sentence will work.**

Thanks for the opportunity to comment on Inner West Council’s draft plans and budget for 23/24, and for the well-presented information, including the video explainer. It’s great to hear there will be surpluses from next Financial Year and that the Council is in good financial standing, while delivering capital works and quality services to residents and businesses. Well done and thank you.

I support the plans and budget in general, and I’m pleased to see how well it reflects and delivers on the Community Strategic Plan. I am especially pleased to see the great investments in walking, cycling and place projects – the Greenway, future cycleways, footpaths, the PAMP, main street improvements, the Blue Green Grid, parks and tree canopy. These wise investments will help the local economy and main street businesses, youth and elderly well-being, physical and mental health of residents, air quality and reduce climate emissions. They meet many of the different objectives in the Community Strategic Plan. I ask that this level of investment is continued into future years on such projects, which in the near term means ensuring there are enough staff resources to plan ahead for future projects, particularly to connect up the bike network, and for safe walking and cycling routes around schools, and take advantage of continued grant funding from state government.

Action 1.5.1.1 is to *Prepare a plan to transition council to a sustainable fleet*, by December 2023. For a more productive and cost-effective fleet electrification, this should include a fleet of e-bikes for staff use at the various depots, offices and facilities, along with a training and encouragement program to ensure it is well used. This also enables IWC to show leadership, not just in reducing transport climate emissions, but also in healthy and space efficient transport. Likewise the Electric Vehicle Encouragement Plan (action 1.4.2.1) should primarily support those in greatest need to use e-bikes for access to jobs and services, as it is more cost-effective and equitable than assisting wealthy people with other transport options to upgrade to a Tesla.

The Delivery Program’s Principal Activities include “*Develop planning controls that protect and support a sustainable environment and contribute to a zero emissions and zero waste community*”. This should include removing parking minimums in areas with excellent access to public transport, such as within 400m of stations. This measure, by not forcing developments to allocate space and cost to housing cars, will also aide the housing affordability objectives of council, under outcome 2.4.

Outcome 2.3 – *public spaces that are welcoming, accessible clean and safe*, is a high priority, for local business success, as well as for community building and resilience. I support the principal activities and actions, and recommend that more improvements in amenity and safety could be made faster with staged approaches to road closures and reclaiming road space in simple ways first until capital funds are available for the full upgrades, to enable the program to be extended. Some such changes will also now be easier to achieve since the TfNSW temporary delegation has given councils more control over changes on local roads.

I fully support the principal activities and actions under outcome 2.6, for walking and cycling. As above, please ensure this level of investment in walkable, bikeable and liveable communities can be kept up by allocating staff resources to planning further projects. For action 2.6.1a – it may be wise to measure the usage of the bike network more often than every two years, to have better and more timely indication of how council is tracking on this goal.

CSP strategy 2.6.2, “Manage the road network to increase safety and prioritise active and public transport over private motor vehicles” is crucial for health, economic vitality, climate and equity and is strongly supported, including “programs and initiatives that improve road safety and management of traffic and parking”. I see that the Councillor priorities for the term, adopted in February 2022, includes “Support walking buses and safe walking around 15 local schools” but I cannot see how that priority has yet been translated into operational plan actions or KPIs yet. This seems to need further work to translate it into projects, or is there progress already being made, for which it would be good to know how many schools, so far?

Under outcome 3.3, The local economy is thriving, for principal activity, “Promote the Inner West main streets to encourage additional footfall in collaboration with local businesses” – this ties in closely with encouraging and facilitating walking and cycling from the local catchment, to residents’ local high street. Once in a car, those customers are too easily lost to more distant businesses. The activity of “place-based planning for town centre improvements” should look closely at the walking and cycling accessibility from nearby areas to the town centre, and increase the supply of well-located bike racks as a way to signal the welcome to ride or walk. Similarly, outcome 4.4 and the various actions relating to council’s community facilities, should include looking at walking and cycling access and adding bike racks.

Lastly, many of the strategies and plans being developed next financial year (for example, the Community Safety Action Plan, Children and Youth Strategy, Community Wellbeing Strategy, Disability Inclusion Action Plan, Recreation Strategy and Park Plans of Management) would all be strengthened by incorporating walking and cycling, for equity, safety, health and climate co-benefits.

Recommendations

1. Ensure sufficient staff resources to plan ahead for future projects and secure state government funding, especially for cycleway projects to connect the bike network and to ensure safe routes to schools
2. Include and prioritise e-bike fleet and supporting measures in the sustainable fleet plan (action 1.5.1.1) and electric vehicle encouragement plan (action 1.4.2.1)
3. Update the planning controls to remove parking minimums in locations with excellent access to public transport
4. Investigate extending the number of public space amenity and safety projects more quickly, by using temporary or interim materials initially until full streetscape upgrade funds can be available, and by using the new TfNSW Temporary Delegation to cut red tape
5. Increase the frequency of bike counting for more timely and useful data to measure progress against the target
6. Add operational plan actions, and attendant budget, for addressing the Councillor priority of supporting safe walking around 15 schools (or, provide an update on how this is going)
7. Include walking and cycling access plans, and addition of plentiful, well-located bike racks in place-based town centre planning, and plans for council facilities
8. Include walking and cycling in other council plans and strategies being developed this coming financial year.

I would be happy to discuss further specifics or examples to illustrate the recommendations.

And finally, an extra thank you for the street sweepers – when they regularly clean the cycleways it shows people who are choosing healthy and sustainable transport that their choice is valued and they matter. It is very much appreciated.