

THOUGHTPIECE – Dr Steven Fleming

Few are old enough to remember Newcastle's main steelworks (BHP) in the 50s. Almost everyone working there cycled. Imagine thousands leaving just after the whistle, in 2, 3 and 4 abreast columns dissipating across a flat city—flat because it once was a swamp.

Cycling is as natural to Newcastle as it is to Amsterdam and both cities are the same geographical size. The difference is Newcastle is ruled from a hilly city, two hours South via car. Most edicts impeding improvements to Newcastle's cycling, are issued from Macquarie Street, Sydney.

Even more detrimental is the thinking that comes from elsewhere, and the past, for example the thought that new buildings need car parks, even if they are served by light rail.

At the Future of the City Centre symposium held in Newcastle, NSW in March, I presented an argument for a car-free city centre policy for Newcastle, along the lines of the policy adopted by Oslo, another 19th-century city. To save the encircling roads (Stewart Ave, Park Ave and Memorial Drive) becoming choked with car traffic, a policy of disinfection and bike-friendly street planning should radiate across the whole basin, starting with brownfields unlocked for development with extra bike paths along our canals. Indeed a complete 7.4km loop could be established using Styx Creek and Cottage Creek as the basis.

Finally, I showed how express trains with bike carriages, could connect Gosford, Tuggerah, Morisset, Newcastle, Maitland and Williamtown as a region. It would involve giving those stations bike-friendly catchments, twenty-five-times larger than the catchments they have if you think about on walking.

The main drawback with cycling is comfort. Why swap a life of comfort with a house and garage for on in the city with bike theft and raincoats, especially if you are raising young children? My talk included architectural solutions for all of these problems, based around the idea that bikes are still useful inside and can be covered from the worst of the weather with canopies that double as solar power collectors.

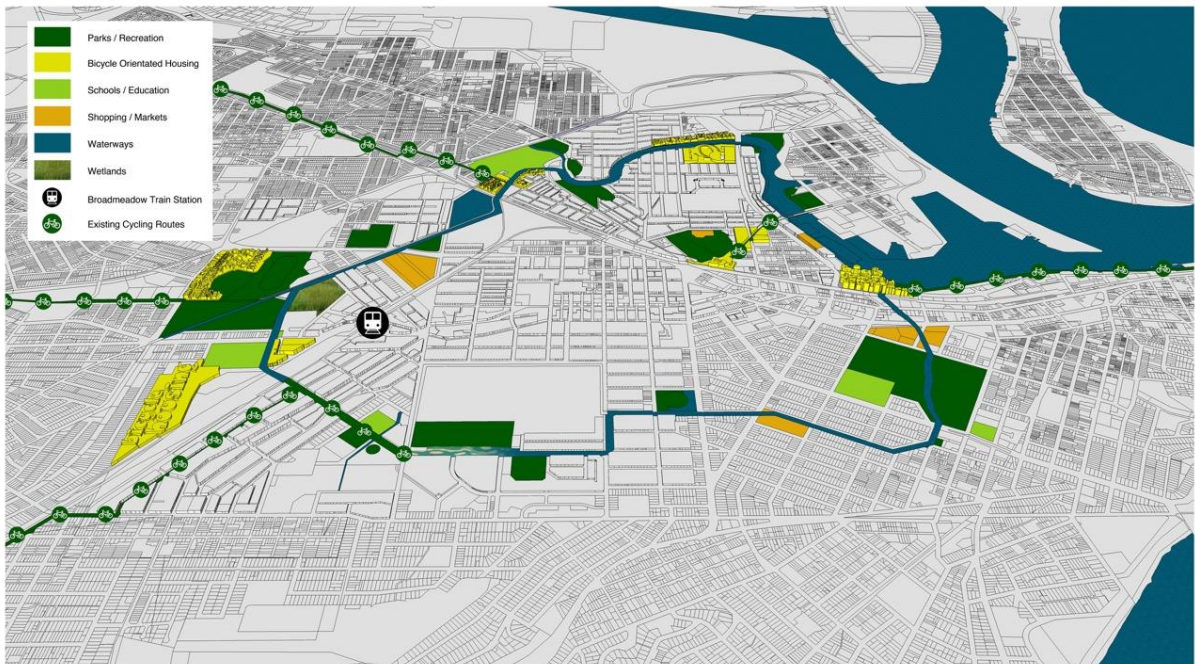
A Nolli Map of Newcastle, from a risk averse cyclist's perspective.



The same Nollipedia map, accentuating the impact of arterial roads that lack any safe crossing opportunities:



The “Newcastle Waterway Discovery Loop”, incorporating a bicycle-oriented development vision for brownfields and greyfields (in yellow) and running via sports fields, retail and schools.



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