

# **Cycling Issues in Belmont**

Prepared by

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For consideration by

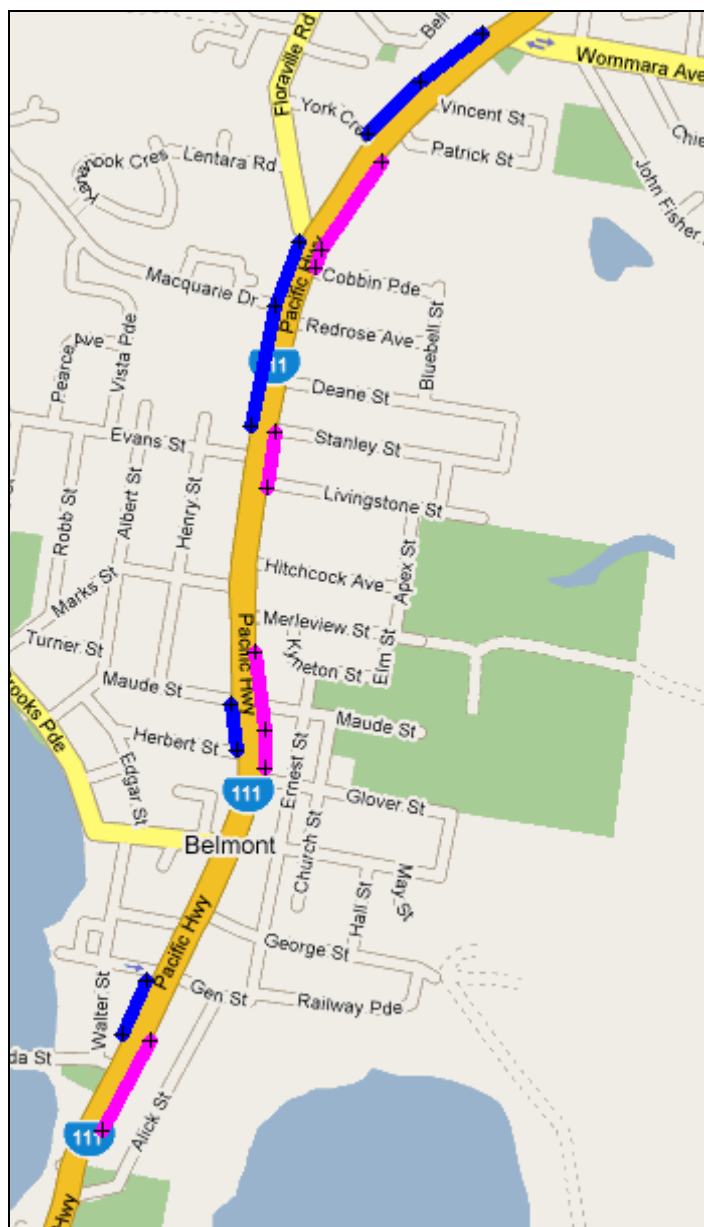
**Lake Macquarie Traffic Facilities and  
Road Safety Committee**

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## Background

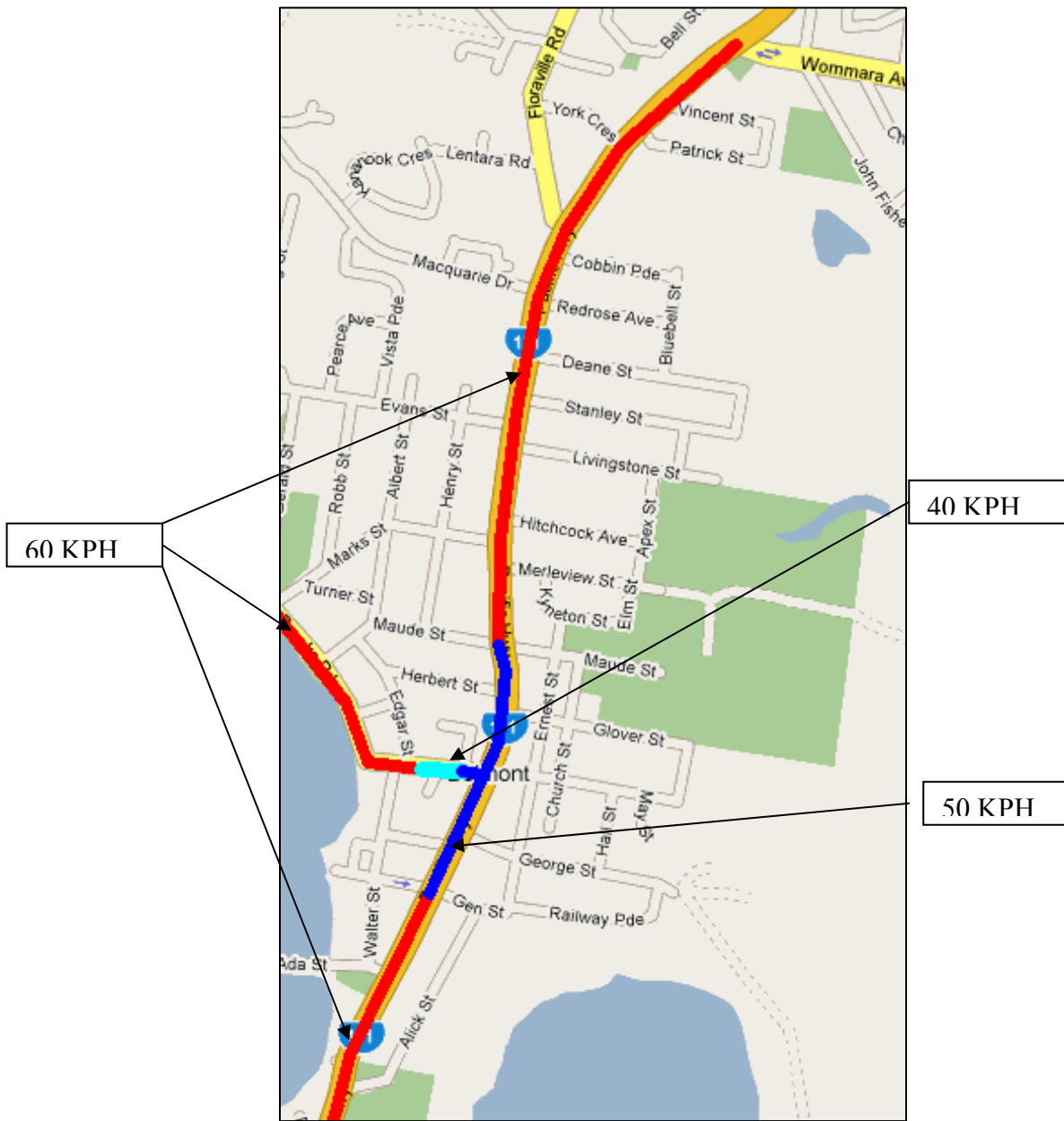
Belmont has increasingly become more dangerous for cyclists, both along the Pacific Highway and as a result of the new shopping centre development in Singleton Street.

Cyclist safety along the Pacific Highway was severely compromised by the RTA when it introduced the many S-lanes a number of years ago as shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1 S - Lanes on Pacific Highway**

This has been further exacerbated by a failure to also reduce the speed limit in these areas to compensate for the increased risk. Figure 2 shows the speed limits in the areas effected by these S lanes as well as the recent shopping centre development.



**Figure 2 Current speed limits**

The volume of on highway parking increases the risk to cyclists of being “doored” by a motorist opening their car doors into the face of an oncoming cyclist. This generally does cause substantial injury, and on occasion has also resulted in fatalities in other parts of the country. The high traffic volume increases the risk of a cyclist being run over if they are knocked from their bike by this “dooring”.

The alternatives to riding on the highway are limited, and in the CBD, they are narrow roads with a relatively frequent turnover of traffic and parking on both sides of the road. In the case of Ernest and Apex Streets, safety is significantly compromised by inattentive parents as they drop off/collect their kids before and after school. A similar problem occurs at Alick Street near the TAFE as inattentive drivers/students arrive/depart for their studies. Walter Street is effected by TAFE students, hotel clientele and LMYC members parking on both sides of the road, as well as the impact of RTA Office and the new shopping development near Macquarie Street.

The new traffic treatment in Macquarie Street and Brooks Parade that has been done as a result of the new shopping centre certainly does not live up to the promises given before the development was approved. I recall that there was supposed to be provision made for cyclists in Macquarie Street, and this has not eventuated. As well as that, the creation of an eastbound turn lane into Walter Street that starts in Brooks Parade has created a more dangerous squeeze point for eastbound traffic right on the corner of Macquarie Street and Brooks Parade, especially as it is in a 60kph speed zone. In addition, this corner has very poor sightlines, so that any vehicles queued to turn right into Walter Street are generally out of the sight line until an approaching vehicle is almost onto the turn into Macquarie Street from Brooks Parade.



**Figure 3 From Brooks Pde into Macquarie St**



**Figure 4 Taking the corner**



**Figure 5 Clear lane-marking and speed signage**

Figure 6 below shows a complete absence of any provision for cyclists in Macquarie Street. I do not consider the “Watch for Cyclists” sign to be any sort of provision towards cycling facilities, nor do I believe that they achieve very much.



**Figure 6 Absence of provision for cyclists**

# Recommendations

## 1. Traffic Lights

All sets of traffic lights should be adjusted to detect the presence of a bicycle from all directions. This is particularly so for cyclists wishing to cross/join the Pacific Highway.

## 2. Speed Limits

### a. Pacific Highway

The speed limit be reduced to 50kph between Alick Street in the south, to Wommara Avenue in the north in both directions. If policed, this will help to improve cyclist safety, particularly in the areas where the RTA has installed S-Lanes and made no alternate provision for cyclist safety. For the additional 2kms at this reduced speed, it will add less than 30 seconds to a journey, and probably only an extra 10-20 seconds when considering the effects of traffic lights on the speeds attained.



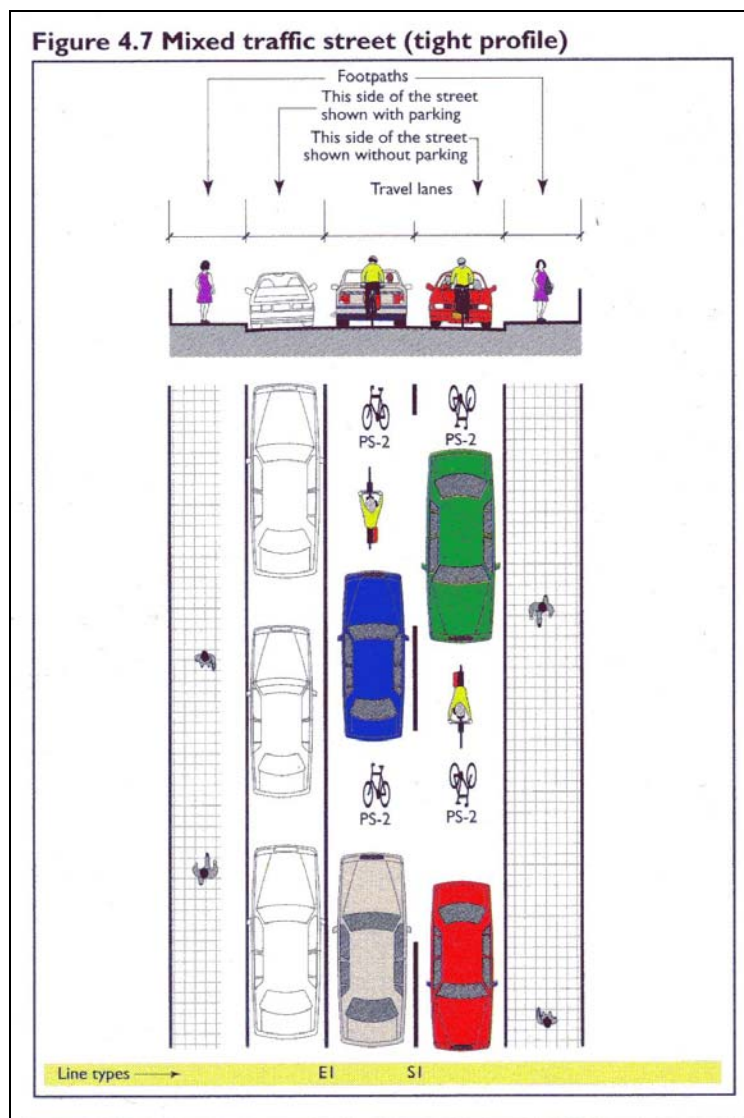
Figure 7 Recommended speed limits

## b. Macquarie Street and Brooks Parade

Reduce the speed limit on Brooks Parade/Macquarie Street for eastbound traffic to 40kph from Sharpe Street through to the Highway. This will help to minimise the risk of rear end vehicle accidents on the bend as more motorists take Walter Street, either as an option to avoid the additional bottlenecks caused by the new shopping centre access or to park to go to the shopping centre, and make it a little safer for cyclists in negotiating this busy section of road.

### 3. Side Roads

The RTA Bicycle Guideline book shows the following recommended treatment for a mixed traffic street with a tight profile.



**Figure 8 Suitable traffic treatment for Belmont back streets**

The manual further describes the use of this road signage as

**Function:** Shared (with moving motor vehicles), unmarked operating space for riders on minor roads and residential streets. To provide bicycle access across the road network. Suitable in low-speed (less than 50 km/h), low-volume environments.

**Design:** Riders share vehicle lanes which are designed tight enough so that it is not possible to pass riders. NB: shared road lanes with a tight profile are not recommended on major roads (above two lanes).

**Comments:** Riders' full freedom of and access to the road network is preserved; safety at intersections with similar roads is increased; riders are less well protected than on separated or shared spacious-profile facilities; tight profile encourages lower speeds; physical methods to further reduce motor vehicle speeds are often necessary (LATM treatments); car parking in these streets can be a hindrance; the risk of illegal parking is high; motorists cannot pass riders and may pressure them to move faster or into lateral obstructions.

I recommend that this treatment of placing cycling symbols on the main traffic lane to indicate a shared traffic zone be adopted for

- a. Ernest Street from Gen Street through to Maude Street;
- b. Alick Street in its entirety;
- c. Apex Street from Hitchcock Avenue to Livingstone Street; and
- d. Walter Street in its entirety.

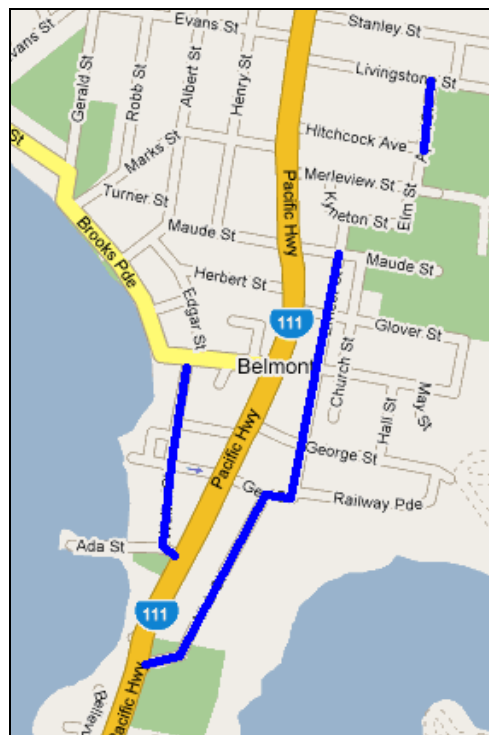


Figure 9 Shared roads

These roads satisfy the criteria for the recommended signage from the RTA's own manual on road treatments to assist in cycling safety. The following photo shows how it has been successfully used in one of Sydney's suburbs that has similar street issues to those found in Belmont.



**Figure 10 Shared lane bike symbols in Sydney**

This will have the benefit of alerting motorists to the probable presence of cyclists and their rights to be there, as well as providing cyclists with a direction to a safer route.

#### **4. Create Belmont Bypass Cycling Route**

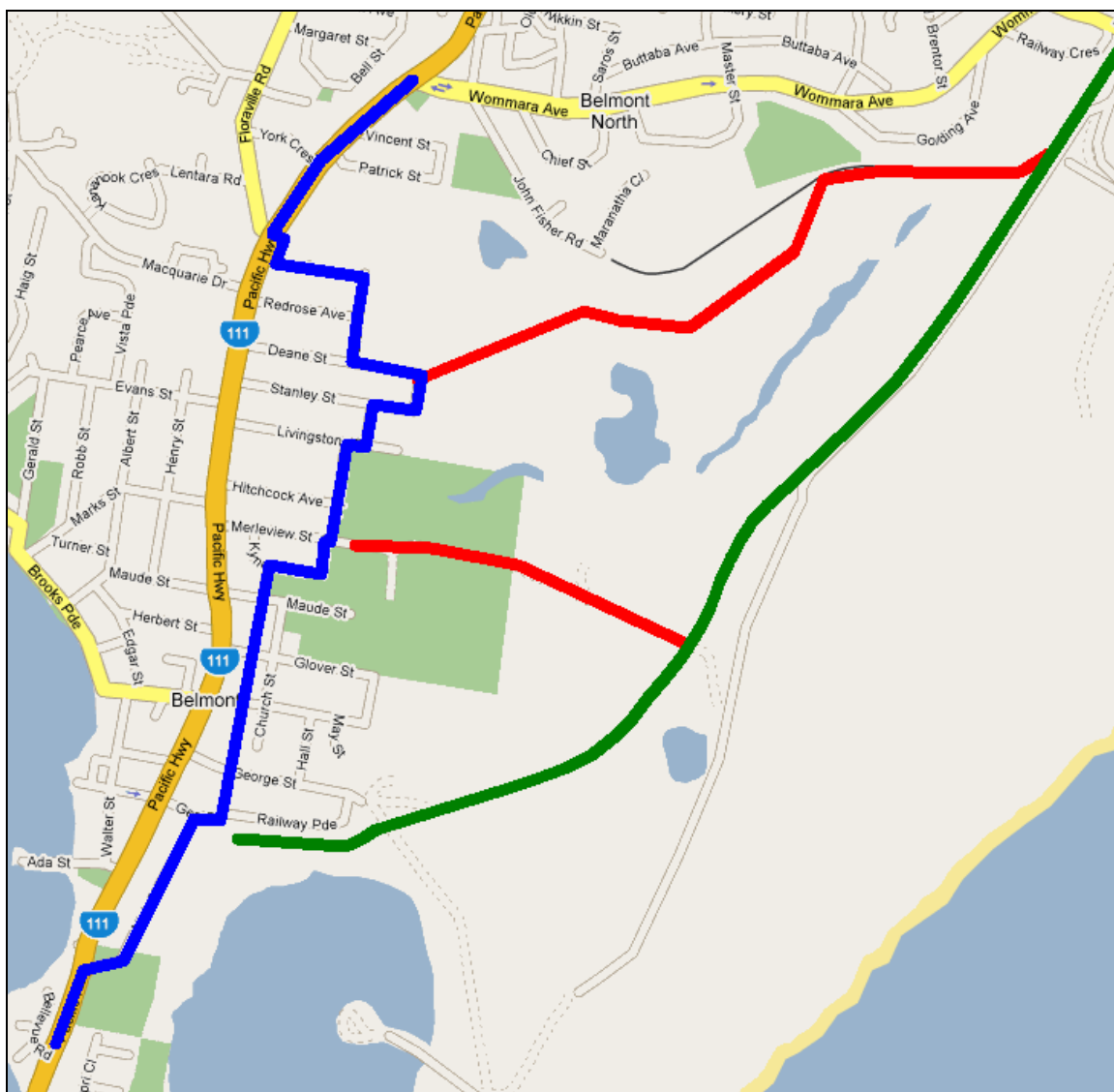
The completion of the Fernleigh Track – possibly in or after 2012-3 - will provide some cyclists with an option for bypassing Belmont, but not all. This does not solve the immediate problem of cyclist safety in Belmont, nor will it resolve safety issues for those who must ride through Belmont even after the track is completed. In my case, the completion of the Fernleigh Track through to Belmont will not make any difference, as I must always travel through Belmont along some of the routes previously shown to get to/from my home. This issue will apply to all local residents of Belmont. It is likely that the completion of the track will also draw cyclists into Belmont, adding to the need for better provision for cyclists in the area in the longer term.

The recent decision to abandon the future development of a Belmont bypass to the eastern side of the existing building development by both RTA and LMCC is only going to create a more dangerous CBD for cyclists. The increases in traffic volumes that will be experienced within years to come will require a major re-think of traffic and parking within Belmont itself. Not only will through traffic be a significant problem, but local traffic issues will also create some difficult problems given the current available road space. Planning for this should be underway to accommodate these changes that will become increasingly necessary. I see this proposed bike bypass to be an interim measure and it will need to be considered along with all of the other issues that this decision will force upon the town planning and layout.

To enable cyclists to have an improved safer access through Belmont, a cycling route through the town should be implemented. It can be done utilising streets to the eastern side of the Highway. However, there needs to be some improvements made to facilitate this. I recommend that the following route be considered for implementation. It is far from ideal, but it is better than what is currently provided.

Once the Fernleigh Track is complete through to Railway Parade and the John Darling spur line is linked to the eastern end of Deane Street via the Burma Track, people from Belmont North and beyond will have easy and relatively comfortable access to Belmont CBD, schools and sporting facilities, as well as the opportunity to travel further south along the wide shoulders of the Pacific Highway beyond Belmont South. At some stage it may be appropriate to consider a link from the eastern end of Merleview Street to the Fernleigh Track. This would increase the access to Belmont

and the Track as well as providing the opportunity for looped walks or bike rides utilising the connections that may be available.



**Figure 11 Proposed Belmont Bypass Cycle Route**

**a. Southern access to Belmont Bypass**

Alick Street forms a natural southern entry/exit for cyclists wishing to bypass Belmont’s numerous traffic hazards. However, there is no safe access for those wishing to take this route when travelling north along the Highway. In order to facilitate this, I recommend the adjustment of the median strip to accommodate a cross over point for cyclists and pedestrians from the nearby bus stop. The following Figure 11 is from the RTA’s handbook and can be used as an example of the treatment for the median strip. I have reviewed the location, and it appears that this can be done without too much of a problem by moving the southbound traffic slightly to the east to accommodate the additional width of the median strip. The location at the intersection has good sight lines of both north and southbound traffic to enable a cyclist or pedestrian to cross with a higher degree of safety.

The added benefit to a cyclist of this access point is that it eliminates the hazards caused by parked cars in the northbound lane to the south of the Gunyah Hotel and the unnecessary climb up to Gen Street.

Figure 7.7: Bicycle route (in bicycle shoulder lanes) crossing a road via a central refuge.

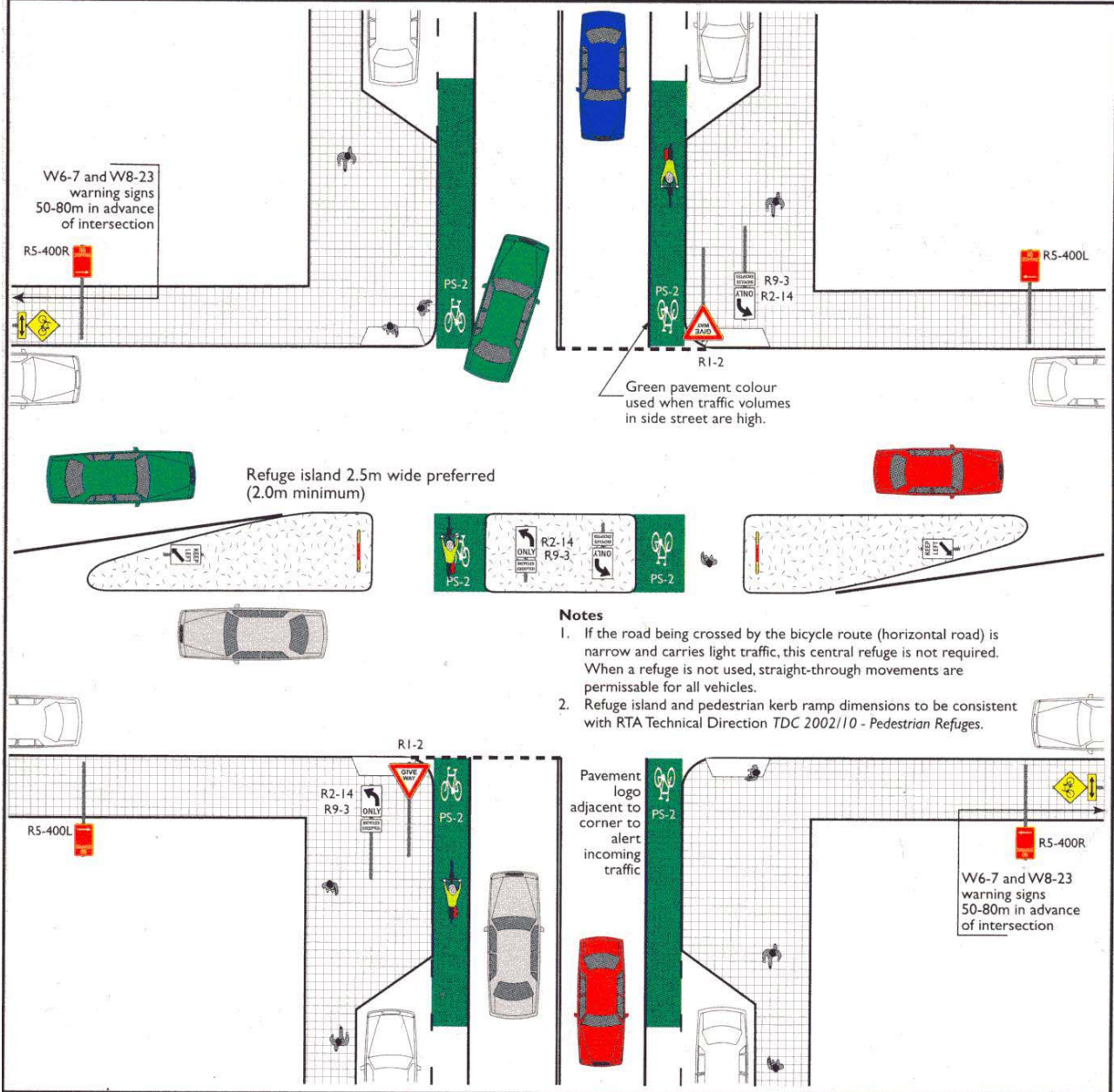


Figure 12 Cyclist crossings

While the placement of the crossing would be preferable at the entrance to Alick Street, the width of the northbound road shoulder would need to be widened to facilitate a waiting bay for cyclists to hold until it is clear to cross the northbound lanes to the median strip. The following photo would suggest that this is achievable by moving the median strip further east.



Figure 13 Alick Street - Pacific Highway intersection

**b. Road Work Required between Deane and Stanley Streets**



Figure 14 Link road between Stanley and Deane Streets

The above image clearly shows the curbs at the end of Stanley and Dean Streets. These should be improved to provide a less severe and more cycle friendly access to this short street. The road is also in need of some minor maintenance. The southern end of the Burma Track to John Darling can be seen linking into Deane Street. When the mine was operational, this was a clear hard packed track 3-4 metres wide.

### c. Northern Access to/from Belmont Bypass

Two short off road cycleways should be built to eliminate the dangers created by the installation of the S-Lanes to the north of Cobbin Parade. This will allow cyclists to more safely access the bypass route. The image below shows the recommended placements.



Figure 15 Northern bypass off road cycleway access

The existing footpath south of the access road to Bunnings is currently being used by many cyclists as an off road cycleway. It should be designated a shared cycleway to prevent these people from breaking the law in order to safeguard their own lives, and ideally, modified to a normal cycleway recommended width.

Both sets of crossings of the Pacific Highway at Floraville Road should be marked as bicycle/pedestrian crossings, again to allow cyclists to cross the highway mounted without being seen to break the law.

The existing footpath north of York Crescent and to just beyond the Wommara Avenue traffic lights should be made into an off road cycleway.

#### **d. Signage**

Often cycle routes are one of the best kept secrets of local areas because they lack appropriate signage. In order for this proposal to be successful, the route should be well signposted and publicised. This should consist of both road markings and signposted images.

## **Conclusion**

I acknowledge that there will be some expense incurred in improving the existing lamentable safe cycling opportunities through Belmont. However, I don't think that the amounts involved would be onerous, particularly as it has the potential to encourage cycling and reduce the potential for fatalities, as well as utilising much of what is already there. I recall a number of years ago being told that RTA placed a value of \$1million on a life. I already know of at least one cyclist who has been killed while riding through Belmont. How many more will it take to get something done for cyclist safety in Belmont?