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Two-way streets, bike links and UTAS Inveresk: Cycling group calls for active transport focus



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Local News



Malcolm Cowan and Malcolm Reid, of the Tamar Bike Users Group, attempt to cross the Tamar Street Bridge - considered one of the more dangerous areas for cyclists in Launceston. Picture: Neil Richardson

Report after report and little action: that's how Tamar Bicycle Users Group sees the evolution of cycling infrastructure and active transport in Launceston over the past decade.

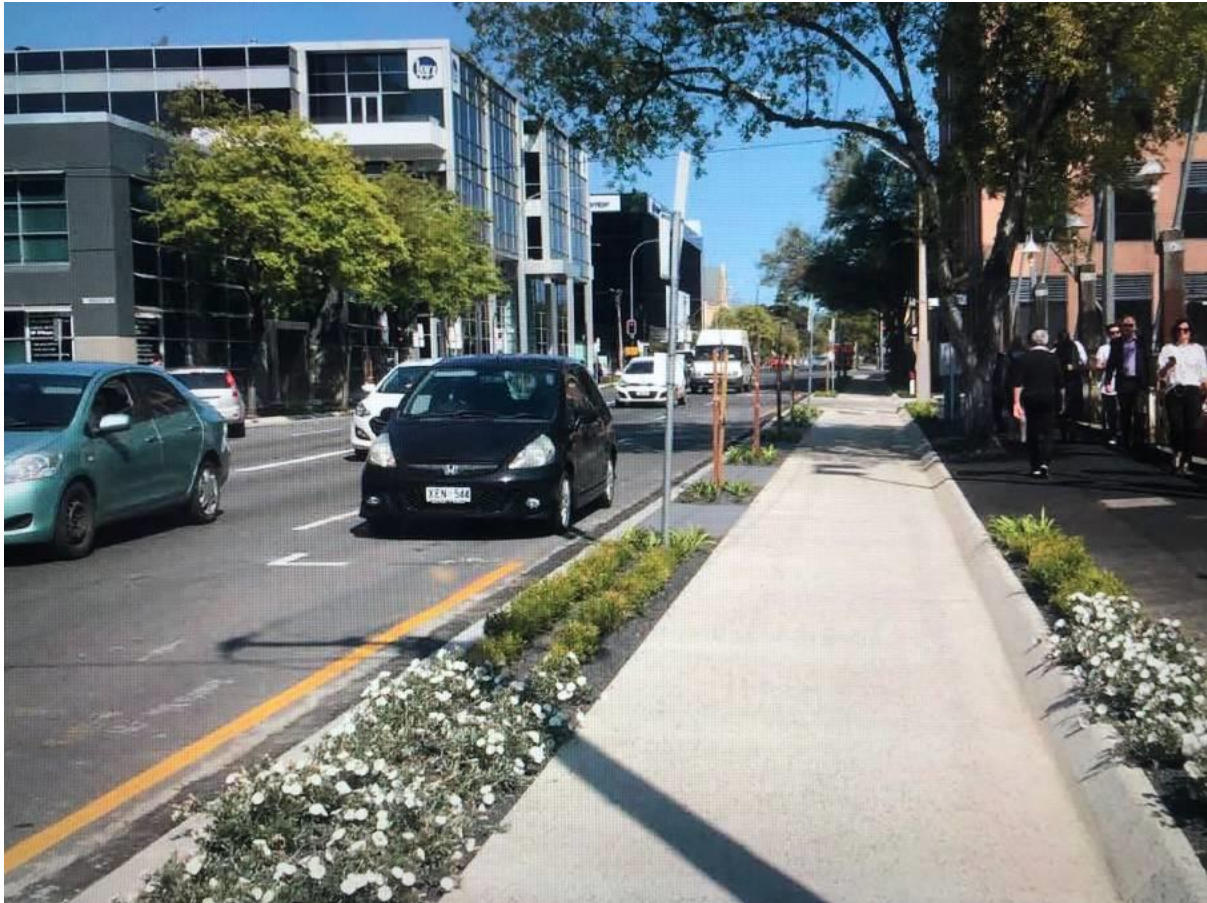
But now the group believes there are two key triggers for the city to fill the gaps for active transport - the need for construction stimulus during COVID, and the University of Tasmania's Inveresk relocation.

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The shorter-term priorities included the completion of the Inveresk-Rocherlea trail by providing a cycling link behind the Mowbray racecourse and sealing it from Inveresk to Vermont Road, sealing the north bank trail to the Silos Hotel and building an underpass under Henry Street to connect to the North Esk river trail.

Bolder idea include ending Launceston's one-way "blockie" street network by making it two-way with pedestrian islands in the centre and separated bike lanes.



An integrated bike lane in the Adelaide CBD, completed after years of trial and error. The council now believes it has found the right outcome.

TBUG president Malcolm Reid said the group had become concerned at the UTAS redevelopment debate continuously focusing on car parking issues, rather than a broader vision of being a hub for active transport.

"When it was first mooted, active transport was going to be key. But this appears to have become less of a priority," he said.

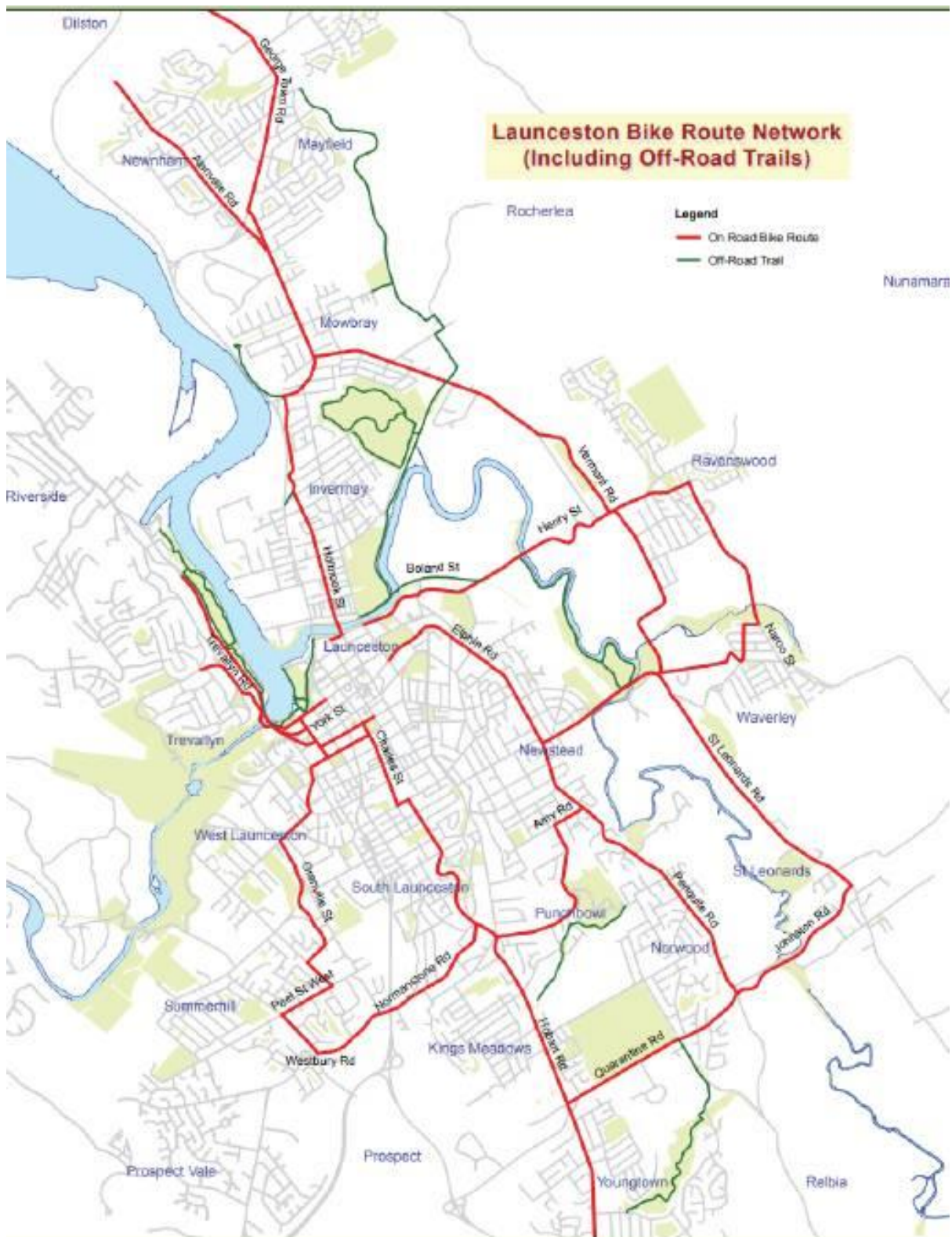
"We are worried Launceston is missing an opportunity to take long-term advantage of great increase in walking and cycling during COVID. The time is right to show bold leadership in remaking our city to give people a real choice whether to walk, ride or drive."

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One of the biggest barriers could be waiting for the cultural shift away from cars. But Mr Reid said there was already strong demand for cycling infrastructure that would only grow if the right decisions were made.

"We know this won't happen overnight but it is important that we start the redirection now," he said.

TBUG used the Tamar Street Bridge as an example of an area considered dangerous for cyclists - one of a number of parts of the city where cyclists were considered "in the way".



The area behind Mowbray racecourse is considered the "missing link" for cycling infrastructure in Launceston.

The City of Launceston has commissioned a range of reports in recent years to assess infrastructure needs, including the Gehl report Public Life Public Spaces, the Launceston Bike Plan 2004, Launceston Bike Strategy 2012, Passenger Transport Plan 2016, Northern Tasmania Cycling Strategy 2016 and others.

City Heart also started with a bold vision for a revolutionised CBD, but TBUG member Malcolm Cowan said action had been slow. He feared that cars were still being given too much priority.

"We regularly see \$1 million spent on roundabouts, even on back streets, but they can't seem to spend anywhere near that on bike projects," he said.

"Churchill Park was seen as a potential Park 'n Ride area, but there appears to have been no attempt to make this happen.

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"We'd be keen to have some trials - pop-up bike lanes, non-permanent infrastructure like bollards - as a way of starting that cultural change, showing that these things are possible."

But change could occur sooner rather than later.

The first stage of City Heart included changes to public spaces like Civic Square, but the second stage is set to focus on CBD streets.

City of Launceston general manager Michael Stretton said changes to the one-way street network were central to plans to build a bus interchange at the old Birchalls car park on Paterson Street.

"While the first stage of the Launceston City Heart Project was aimed at redeveloping our public spaces, the second stage of the project will involve changes to the Launceston's one-way traffic system," he said.

"Exciting proposals like the Launceston Bus Interchange will also necessitate changes to one-way streets in our CBD, and will create more opportunities for active transport."

The *Sunday Examiner* understands these proposals could be announced in 2021. Mr Stretton said the council had a range of competing interests to consider.

"Cycling infrastructure is one, along with sporting facilities, roads, footpaths and bridges, waste and recycling services, and many others," he said.

"The City of Launceston enjoys a collaborative relationship with cycling advocates like the Tamar Bicycle Users Group, and the Council agrees that less reliance on cars and more reliance on active transport should be objectives for our city."