Submission on:

Proposed improvements for traffic and transport in Alexandria and Erskineville

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Christopher Standen has a PhD in transport planning from the University of Sydney. His expertise includes travel behaviour/choices, travel demand management, traffic engineering, active transport, transport economics and transport health/environmental impacts. He has taught transport and logistics at postgraduate level and regularly provides media commentary on transport issues. Previously, he worked in local government traffic engineering. This is a personal submission.

General

1. Collectively, the proposed (so-called) improvements are unambitious and will do little to reduce the impacts of motor vehicle traffic across Alexandria and Erskineville.

2. The proposed modal filters[1] are welcome, but addressing traffic issues on individual streets will simply divert traffic onto other local streets.

3. To create people-centred, low-traffic neighbourhoods (1), an area-wide scheme is needed that:

    a. Prevents through-traffic from using local/residential streets as much as possible.

    b. Addresses the reasons some residents choose to drive instead of walk/ride for short, local trips, e.g., safety concerns and motor vehicle priority at intersections.

    c. Maintains vehicle access to all properties.

[1] The proposal uses the term “street closure”, which is incorrect. The streets will remain open to everyone.

To use an analogy, the City is trying to put out fires (with piecemeal traffic restrictions) while adding fuel to the fire (with more traffic signals and ever-increasing parking supply).

4. The traffic calming measures are welcome, though insufficient, and will be undermined by the proposal to replace a traffic-calming roundabout on Mitchell Road with a speed-encouraging signalised intersection.

5. The one new continuous footpath proposed is welcome, but they are needed at all side streets. Continuous footpath treatments on local streets are now exempt from review by the Local Traffic Committee (LTC) process (2), so there is no excuse for not proposing more of them.

6. It is disappointing that the proposal will result in a net loss of one zebra/wombat crossing (removal of zebra crossing at Mitchell Rd/Harley St and no new ones). On local streets, these are now exempt from review by the Local Traffic Committee (LTC) process (2), so there is no excuse for not proposing any new ones.

7. Coulson Street was included in the previous Erskineville and Alexandria Traffic and Transport Study area. Why is it not included in the current proposal?

Proposed signalised intersection at Mitchell Road, Ashmore Street and Harley Street

8. I strongly object to the proposal to signalise the intersection at Mitchell Road, Ashmore Street and Harley Street.

9. Traffic signals prioritise motor vehicle traffic over pedestrians. This is at odds with the City's strategic plan direction 5: “A city for walking, cycling and public transport”.

10. Traffic signals here would impose yet more delay and inconvenience on people walking (i.e., having to activate a call button and wait for a green signal – or two signals if crossing diagonally). This would discourage people from walking for short, local trips. (The *Public Spaces Public Life Study* by Gehl Architects found that waiting at traffic signals contributed up to 50% of total walking times in the CBD.)

11. Traffic signals here would result in more peak-time motor vehicle traffic on Mitchell Rd. This is because replacing roundabouts with traffic signals increases road capacity, which induces/encourages higher traffic demand – in the same way that road widening does (3). With increased traffic capacity, navigation systems will send even more non-local traffic along Mitchell Rd.

12. The existing roundabout has a positive traffic-calming effect. Removing it would undermine other traffic calming measures proposed for Mitchell Rd.

13. The existing roundabout and crossing have an exceptionally low *objective* safety risk. There were zero crashes or injuries involving pedestrians or people cycling in the five years to 2021 (4). Signalising the intersection will not improve objective safety, and could actually reduce it.

    a. The consequences of a motorist passing through a red signal are greater than the consequences of a motorist not complying at a pedestrian crossing next to a roundabout, because:

        i. They are likely to travelling faster. There is no roundabout to slow them down and they may accelerate when they see a yellow signal.

        ii. Pedestrians are less likely to look for traffic before crossing at a signalised crossing than they are before crossing at an unsignalised crossing.

    b. The way traffic signals are phased in NSW means there is often conflict with motor vehicles turning on a green signal across the path of pedestrians crossing on a green signal.

    c. Reduced level of service/long delays for pedestrians is likely to result in people crossing on a red signal.

14. The existing roundabout and crossing have a moderate *perceived* safety risk due to Mitchell Rd's high design speed and frequent driver non-compliance at the crossing. But pedestrians should not be punished (with additional delays/inconvenience) for a safety risk that is caused by motor vehicles/drivers. Rather, the risk should be mitigated, e.g., by:

    a. Installing a modal filter on Harley St at Mitchell Rd.

    b. Reducing the design speed and/or posted speed limit of Mitchell Road to 30 km/h.

    c. Implementing traffic calming on all approaches to the roundabout/crossing.

    d. Improving sightlines and lighting.

    e. Converting the existing crossing into a wombat (raised) crossing.

    f. Installing wombat crossings on all other arms of the roundabout (i.e., fully protected roundabout).

15. I dispute the City's claim that it is not possible to convert the existing crossing north of the roundabout to a wombat (raised) crossing due to "drainage considerations". It is certainly possible from an engineering perspective, but may require additional works to manage drainage.

16. The indicative cost of signalising the intersection is $369,700 (2021 dollars), according to the previous Erskineville and Alexandria Traffic and Transport Study. Upgrading the roundabout could be done at a significantly lower cost.

Traffic calming scheme on Mitchell Road

17. I strongly support a traffic calming scheme on Mitchell Road but would like to see more details.

18. A well-designed traffic calming scheme would increase safety and reduce traffic noise levels.

19. The existing roundabouts on Mitchell Rd have a positive traffic-calming effect so should be retained.

Closing Maddox Street or banning the left turn from Euston Road into Maddox Street

20. I support a modal filter on Maddox St at Euston Rd. It will discourage through-traffic from using Maddox St while maintaining access to all properties.

21. The modal filter is likely to result in more through-traffic using Belmont Ln, Belmont St, Lawrence Ln, Lawrence St and Euston Ln. Therefore, modal filters must also be installed on these streets/lanes (where they do not already exist) in a way that maintains access to all properties and access for garbage trucks, etc. The traffic model used by Bitzios Consulting for the previous traffic study assumed these internal streets/lanes do not exist, so would not have been able to predict traffic being diverted onto them.

A traffic calming scheme for Maddox Street west of Euston Road

22. I strongly support a traffic calming scheme on Maddox Street.

23. A well-designed traffic calming scheme will improve objective and perceived safety, and reduce traffic noise levels.

24. I object to the raised threshold option due to noise impacts on neighbouring properties.

25. I have no objection to repurposing on-street parking spaces for traffic calming build-outs/raingardens, noting there is a good supply of car parking in the neighbourhood (112 vacant parking spaces advertised on spacer.com.au alone on 9 May 2023). Streets are more attractive and cooler with trees/plants in place of vehicle clutter.

26. The City's *Cycling Strategy and Action Plan 2018* shows Maddox Street is a future link in the City's Regional Bike Network. The traffic calming scheme should include (or at least be compatible with) a suitable bicycle facility. If a modal filter on Maddox St is approved, the reduced traffic volume may enable Maddox St to be upgraded to a quietway.

Proposed closure of Harley Street at McEvoy Street or Mitchell Road

27. I support a modal filter on Harley St. It will discourage through-traffic from using Harley St while maintaining access to all properties.

28. My preference would for the modal filter to be at the Mitchell Rd end of Harley St. Currently, some drivers turning left from Harley St into Mitchell Rd do not check for people using the crossing to their left because they are looking for traffic approaching from their right.

29. The modal filter is likely to result in more through-traffic using Belmont Ln, Belmont St, Lawrence Ln, Lawrence St and Euston Ln. Therefore, modal filters must also be installed on these streets/lanes (where they do not already exist) in a way that maintains access to all properties and access for garbage trucks, etc.

30. If a modal filter is approved, the reduced traffic volume may make Harley St suitable for a quietway. Although bicycle paths were recently installed on Harley St, and the resulting narrowing of the traffic lanes has had a noticeable traffic-calming effect, the sightlines at the intersections are extremely poor for both drivers and people cycling. A quietway would allow people to cycle closer to the middle of the street where reciprocal visibility is better.

Belmont Street north of Fountain Street - continuous footpath treatment

31. I strongly support a continuous footpath on Belmont Street north of Fountain Street.

32. Continuous footpaths (or wombat crossings) should be installed at all side streets in Erskineville and Alexandria. Note, such minor works are now exempt from review by the Local Traffic Committee (LTC) process (2).

Dadley Street at Lyne and Renwick streets - kerb buildouts/ intersection narrowing

33. I support the kerb buildouts/intersection narrowing.

34. Similar treatments are needed on many other local streets (e.g., Renwick St, Coulson St) to slow traffic and reduce traffic noise levels.

Proposed no right turn on to Henderson Road from Park Street or close Park Street at Henderson Road to traffic

35. I support a modal filter on Park St at Henderson Rd. It will discourage through-traffic from using Harley St while maintaining access to all properties.

36. The modal filter may result in through-traffic using other local streets instead. Modal filters could be installed on other streets within the Mitchell Rd, Swanson St, Railway Pde/Henderson Rd block so as to filter all through-traffic while maintaining access to all properties.

Other

37. Two important recommendations of the Erskineville and Alexandria Traffic and Transport Study are missing from the current proposal:

    a. Road narrowing along Coulson St. The traffic lanes are 4.6 metres wide in places, which is wider than a standard motorway lane. This encourages speeding, resulting in high traffic noise levels.

    b. Continuous footpath treatment on Coulson St at Hadfield St.

38. Additional mid-block pedestrian crossings are needed on Coulson St and Mitchell Rd. To improve walkability, crossings should ideally be spaced every 80 metres or less. Note, such minor works are now exempt from review by the Local Traffic Committee (LTC) process (2).

39. Continuous footpaths or wombat crossings should be installed at all side streets in Erskineville and Alexandria. Note, such minor works are now exempt from review by the Local Traffic Committee (LTC) process (2).

40. Reduce the kerb radius at all side streets to reduce the speed at which drivers turn in/out of them.

41. To improve safety and reduce traffic noise, reduce the design speed of all streets in Erskineville and Alexandria to 30 km/h or less.

42. Council should work with Transport for NSW to provide a safe crossing of Fountain St at Belmont St (school route to Alexandria Park Community School).

References

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