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Sunshine Coast Council

via email

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Comments: Draft Coastal Pathway Master Plan

The Coolum Residents Association (CRA) appreciates the opportunity to comment on the Draft Coastal Pathway Master Plan. For safety, and for encouragement of physical activity and for the enjoyment of the natural world, CRA supports the development of dedicated pathways to separate bicycles and pedestrians from motor vehicles. Ideally, cyclists and pedestrians should be provided with separate pathways where feasible. The availability of a pathway which offers safe access to the Coast's natural environment is definitely considered to be of benefit.

The 2003 vision for the project is stated as:

“A world-class scenic coastal pathway, connecting communities, and enriching and diversifying the recreational experience of the Sunshine Coast.

An iconic coastal pathway integrating beaches, coastal lookouts, parks, local destinations, services and business for the length of the Sunshine Coast”.

The CRA supports the vision, however, **not unreservedly**. Possibly the vision is too grand. There are other specific concerns, but the question arise as to what constitutes a ‘world-class scenic coastal pathway’? Italy offers the Amalfi Coast and the Cinq Terre Coastal Walk. These coastal pathways have *evolved* to gain world recognition. It is not as if they were constructed as a result of some planning process. Given that it is the Sunshine Coast locals who effectively will be providing the financial investment, the focus should be to provide a pathway which will ultimately be of benefit to the backers, that is, the residents of the Sunshine Coast. If the Pathway, developed to a high standard for the benefit of the primary users, comes to be viewed as world-class, so much the better.

Specific comments will reflect the position of the CRA and primarily focus on the ‘Maroochy North Shore’ ie the coastal strip north of the Maroochy River to the Noosa Shire boundary.

Members consider the dunal areas north of the Maroochy River to the Noosa Shire boundary to be special, perhaps already ‘world class’ in themselves, in that they are more intact and have not suffered the damage to the vegetation which has occurred on much of the Coast. Many of our members are actively involved as volunteers in caring for our local coastal environment. Whilst supporting the concept of the Coastal Pathway, the listed social benefits are plausible, however, CRA cannot see any direct environmental benefits. There is a serious risk of increasing weed infestation if bushland must be cleared for pathway development. In addition, some economic benefits may accrue but any claims are simply assertions in the absence of evidence. As to the level of community support, this raises the question as to the basis of the claims. What questions were asked?

Regarding the Planning Principles, the criteria for achieving ‘world class’ standard need definition. If world class recognition is desirable, what it is?

Page 6 refers to design information attached to the master plan report. Presumably the design standards would include this information. It would be helpful if the design information were to be included in the Master Plan itself.

An issue related to this is the question of what constitutes 'close proximity to the coastline' as stated on page 10. A wider interpretation of what is meant by a coastal pathway would eliminate the pressure to route the pathway in areas of environmental sensitivity.

4.4 'Sensitive to the environment'

The discussion of policy for protecting dunal systems against erosion is fine, but there is more to be considered than erosion. CRA expects you will have had the matter also of the importance of maintaining dunal vegetation brought to your attention by other submitters. As Queensland's Coastal Management Plan 2013 states that

"Human-induced changes to dune systems and degraded dune vegetation can significantly limit the protection provided to development from coastal hazards" and

"Dune vegetation is naturally exposed to harsh environmental conditions, including sand blast, salt spray and high wind velocities. This can make dunes vulnerable to even small additional pressures, including impacts such as pedestrian use..."

These factors regarding vegetation should be written in to the Master Plan considerations. The issue is more than the impact which might occur during construction. The impact on sensitive native vegetation and fauna habitat could be the legacy of construction through hitherto uncleared areas. It should be the rule in developing the pathway that areas of coastal vegetation be left intact. As written, the Master Plan fails to deal adequately with this matter.

The Coastal area can be explored and enjoyed without destroying it in the process. The Pathway is a 'nice to have' facility and the desire to achieve close proximity to the coast should not be driving the decision making.

4.5 Well Connected

During the community discussion in the Coolum Civic Centre earlier this month a number of issues were raised. Clearly, through the Coolum Beach area, meeting the 'Strategic outcomes' as currently expressed in the draft Report present major hurdles. Something has to give if further development of the Pathway is to occur in the Coolum Beach area. Improvement to the section of the Pathway north from the Third Bay parking area north to First Bay, dangerous because it is heavily trafficked, narrow and steep apparently is not possible. The Coolum Boardwalk, which has now been incorporated into the Coastal Pathway, even though when it was constructed it was not intended to be used by cyclists. Signs directing cyclists to dismount were displayed at each end of the Boardwalk, but those have been removed. The status of the Boardwalk and a shared pathway should be clarified.

Moving further north through Coolum from the Surf Club/Tickle Park area to Lions/Norrie Job Park, the proposed routing along the dunal area is not supported given the need for the Boardriders in Tickle Park and the occupants of the Caravan Park to have safe access to the beach.

The introduction of cycle traffic moving through these beachgoers is an unnecessary risk. Additionally, the proposed route would go through dunal vegetation beside the Caravan Park which has already been the subject of much volunteer restoration and is not supported due to the damage to vegetation.

Proceeding on north through Lions Park/Norrie Job Park, the CRA would support the construction of a pathway on the east side of David Low Way to the Stumers Creek Road. CRA would not support concreting the grassed pathway from the Park to Stumers Creek Road. Many of our members have worked on bush regeneration along the grassed area, and would see a concrete path as despoiling a tranquil area where walkers can enjoy nature.

The CRA would oppose the introduction of a pathway to create a regional link to Noosa though the Noosa National Park north of Stumers Creek. Members have worked on weed control with QPWS on weed control in that area, and realize the area's natural values and sensitivity.

The CRA would urge recognition that the Coastal Pathway should not be routed though the National Park, and place effort on supporting the improvement of the existing pathway on the western side of David Low Way. This pathway is heavily used school days by students attending the Coolum State High School, regularly by local cyclists and walkers and along the southern-most section for access from Coolum Beach to the Coolum Sports Complex. These regular users deserve better than the existing narrow uneven bitumen surface.

Proposals were made during the community discussion to examine alternate routes through the Coolum area, including a route west of Mount Coolum. This is not a new idea, as the following comment was recorded in attached 1998 Workshops notes during the drafting of the Maroochy Plan 2000 planning scheme:

“The future bikeway plan could be amended to take into account the opportunity to cut across the back of Mt Coolum.”

In addition there is the possibility of developing a pathway along the bund wall on the west side of the Stumers Drain, north from the Coolum Sports Complex to the Coolum State School.

Looking at the proposed Pathway south of Coolum Beach, and north of the Maroochy River, the CRA has serious concerns with the long term planning option proposed on Maps 32 and 33 through Maroochy River Conservation Park. This is a sensitive ecosystem. Additionally, there are special indigenous sites in the Conservation Park. Rather than new construction through the Park, the line of the existing link should be upgraded as required.

The CRA does not support the development of the so-called missing link between Point Arkwright and Birrahl Park; construction there would result in further loss of vegetation in areas which have been rehabilitated by the community.

The CRA strongly objects to the proposed long term planning option through the dunal area in Yaroomba. This proposal would result in clearing of fragile vegetation which the community has been involved in rehabilitating.

In the Point Arkwright area, the CRA does not accept the need to classify what is shown as a 'high priority missing link'. The linkage proposed through the bushland '539' will undo rehabilitation undertaken under the Deed Of Agreement agreed to by the Sunshine Coast Council and Transport and Main Roads to co-manage this area with the community represented by Coolum and North Shore Coast Care and the participation of CRA.