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26 September 2014

BIKE TAUPŌ SUGGESTIONS FOR THE TAUPŌ DISTRICT LONG TERM PLAN

Please find attached a submission from Bike Taupo on the Long Term Plan

Please note that we are more than happy to present our comments in person and discuss them with Taupō District Council Councillors and Staff.

Yours Sincerely



Rowan Sapsford

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BIKE TAUPŌ SUBMISSION TO THE TAUPŌ DISTRICT LONG TERM PLAN OPTIONS

Introduction:

Bike Taupō is a cycle advocacy group which provides the Taupō community with a voice for cycling. The organisation was formalised in 2002 and currently has over 2,500 members.

To date Bike Taupō has helped create a cycling culture within the district through constructing and maintaining nearly 200km off road tracks, partaking in continuous dialogue with regulatory authorities; promoting cycling and cycle safety and playing an active part in Taupō's growing cycling community.

Cycling is an important part of the Taupō economy. Bike Taupo alone has an asset base worth approximately \$3 million dollars, making Bike Taupo a significant investor in the local community. A survey undertaken in 2012 as part of an economic assessment of cycling in the District, and targeted at those who cycle in Taupō identified that on average each cycling visitor will spend \$1,250 in Taupō on each visit.

One of the resounding responses that was received in this survey when asked what could be included, was safety. Bike Taupō is also very concerned about the safety of cyclists in the Taupō District. This concern is not just limited to road cyclists using our rural roads, but also cyclists in town. If Taupō gets a reputation as an unsafe place to ride it could result in significant economic impacts, not to mention the actual physical harm to residents and visitors. A recent economic assessment of the value of cycling to Taupō, put it at least \$11 million dollars per annum.

Taupo is now an internationally recognised riding destination. In 2012, Taupo received silver level Ride Centre status from the International Mountain Bike Association. Taupo is one of only five silver level ride centers globally and the only one in the Southern hemisphere.

Bike Taupō believes that the safety of all of our road users is an important matter and has been advocating to TDC for nearly ten years on this point. Bike Taupō is disappointed that TDC appears to take a back seat on this issue and let our organization and other groups and individuals take the lead on cycle safety in the District. We note that the TDC website states that *“The Transportation team has the lead role in the delivery of a road safety programme and the walking and cycling network action plan”*. We have seen little evidence of this leadership of late. We would like to see TDC take a more active role in looking after the safety of cyclists and other road users in the District.

Economic Development – Destination Great Lake Taupō Funding

Bike Taupō supports the continued funding of Destination Great Lake Taupō (DGLT) at its current levels. DGLT provides a very valuable service and brings a lot of people to our District. DGLT has promoted Taupō as a cycling destination which mean more people ride our trails and support local cycling based industries.

We would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the DGLT team for the proactive and collaborative approach to marketing Taupo as a Cycling Destination. Bike Taupō has a good working relationship with DGLT and provides them with information and support to facilitate their ability to market Taupō District as a Cycling destination.

Bike Taupo supports the ongoing existence of DGLT as a council funded entity. The current approach ensures an effective and efficient approach to destination marketing in the Taupo District and one that means that they are able to capitalise on the natural assets that the District has.

Economic Development – Events

Bike Taupō supports the Council funded events team. Events a huge part of the Taupō District and create significant economic benefits. Taupō is an events destination and as such needs to ensure that these events continue in a coordinated and effective manner. Without a dedicated events team there is a serious risk of an ad hoc approach to events and an even greater risk of Taupō losing its world-class events label.

Bike Taupō benefits from events held in the area both financially and in the greater number of people that come to Taupō to ride our tracks as well as supporting and sustaining the cycling culture in Taupō. These benefits are at risk without a dedicated events team that takes a holistic and strategic approach to events management in the Taupō District.

Transport - Cycling Culture

Bike Taupō would like to see priority spending on making the urban areas of the Taupō District safer for cyclists. This includes signage, cycle lanes, better road sweeping, growing easy cycling opportunities (such as the lions walk) information for road users on sharing the road and

working with Bike Taupō and other groups to get more people on Bikes. BT would like to see more recreational and commuter cyclists in Taupō Town and strengthen the cycling culture in Taupō to reflect the fact that Taupo is now a world class cycling destination. It is this cycling culture which adds to Taupō as a destination for visitors and as a base for a lot of the events which are held in Taupō. A stronger cycling culture and better cycling infrastructure would also mean that the profile of cycling in Taupō would be greater which would have the potential to reduce accidents.

Bike Taupō's 'Kids Bike Taupō' initiative is proving effective with many children in numerous schools taking part. This initiative is growing the cycling base in Taupo meaning that in the future there will potentially be an increase in the number of commuter and leisure cyclists on the streets. Bike Taupō urges TDC to look at what has been done in centers such as Hastings and New Plymouth to see the kind of cycling based improvements that have been made and how these could be made in Taupō. Bike Taupō sees this as a priority for TDC if it wants the District to continue to have cycling as one of its defining activities.

On this basis, Bike Taupo submits that a review of the Councils' Walking and Cycling strategy is in order. Taupo District Council's Walking and Cycling Strategy was adopted in February 2010 and had a focus of making Taupo a cycling friendly District. Since 2010, Taupo has grown significantly as a cycling destination, the current plan does not reflect this and it is questionable whether or not the urban areas are cycle friendly, or whether the targets of the existing strategy have been met or are being monitored. Given the importance of cycling to Taupo, it is our preference that a specific cycling strategy is developed and is drafted to reflect the importance of cycling to the District. Bike Taupo is happy to work with the Council on the revision of this plan and recognises that it has a part to play in making this new strategy work.

In the last Annual Plan round Bike Taupo made a similar submission and received a response that it would be considered during the LTP process. In addition Bike Taupo was told that the purpose of the LGA 2002 had changed and there is a reduction in central government funding for cycling initiatives.

The Purpose of the LGA 2002 provides a framework and powers for local authorities to decide which activities they undertake and the manner in which they will undertake them. In addition the Act promotes the accountability of local authorities to their communities and provides for local authorities to play a broad role in meeting the current and future needs of their communities for good-quality local infrastructure, local public services. This Purpose provides wide discretion for Council to decide that Cycling is important for the economic, social and also environmental wellbeing of their community. Bike Taupo with a membership base of over 2,500 people provides a strong representation of the community which the Council should play a role in meeting the current and future needs of. It is the view of Bike Taupo that there is a lack of good quality local cycling infrastructure and that the key strategy document which guides the development of this infrastructure is out of step with the value of cycling to the Taupo District and its community.

The actual cost of implementing a revised strategy is unknown. As Taupo District does not have a current cycling strategy with actual actions identified or costed it is impossible to say that no money exists to undertake the work. Some actions could easily be very low cost (such as signage or education) and larger capital works could even be financed elsewhere, such as through alternative community based funding which community groups such as Bike Taupo are able to access. Stating that actions are cost prohibitive before they have been identified and financing options are considered, means that opportunities are likely to be missed to the detriment of the safety and the quality of Taupo District. As an example Bike Taupo was able to secure 2.3 million dollars from the government to construct the Great Lake Trail. Such a strategy is not one that the Council needs to develop and even action alone. Collectively Bike Taupō has a representation and access to information that means that we are able to work with TDC on such matter in a proactive and informed matter. The Long Term Planning process is now upon us and we urge TDC to seriously consider its cycling strategy in line with the real importance and opportunity that cycling presents to the Taupo District.

Transport - Poihipi Road

Bike Taupō would like to thank TDC for the sections of Poihipi Road that were widened this year. Council staff made the point to us that this was done specifically for Cyclists, but I am sure that there was benefit for other road users who are now using those stretches of road that are safer as a result. In our submission last year Bike Taupō submitted that we would like to see at least \$100k per annum spent on an annual basis beyond 2014 to widen Poihipi Road. This would enable the stretch of Poihipi Road between State Highway 1 and Whangamata Road to be widened so that there are good shoulders for the many cyclists to use this road, and use it safely. Bike Taupō has been advocating TDC on this for nearly ten years and wants to reiterate its observations that the current use (numbers of traffic and type) of Poihipi Road is far greater than what it was designed and built for many years ago.

In making this point, it is important to note that Bike Taupō is an active initiator of the Taupō Road Users Group that is focused on making our rural roads safer for cyclists. This is a collaborative group of which TDC is a member, as well as other road users, including trucking companies, the police and the wider cycling fraternity. Bike Taupō feels that it is important to make this point, as we are not an organisation who sits on our hands and waits for others to resolve matters.

Bike Taupō Funding

Finally, Bike Taupō supports a continuation of the level of funding that Bike Taupō receives from Taupō District Council on an annual basis. This funding is put to good use in the continued development of our world renowned mountain bike trails, our maps and website which assist people to ride in Taupō. The new funding for Kids Bike Taupō has already enabled many children to learn how to ride bikes in local schools. In the last 12 months the Kids Bike Taupō programme has had **5,000 kids** on bikes from schools in Taupō, Waitahanui, Turangi, Mangakino, Whakamaru and Mokai.

Hub and Bridge Developments

Bike Taupo has initiated two key infrastructure projects aimed at increasing cycle safety and facilitating use of its trails. These projects are:

1. The development of a pedestrian and cycling bridge over SH1 between the Amphitheatre and Countdown. The aim of this project is to create a safe walking and cycling link across this busy piece of road and ultimately form a key part of a Waitahanui to Aratiatia walking and cycling track. Bike Taupo urges Councilors to stand at the southern end of the Control Gates Bridge and observe the many commuters (mostly school kids) crossing this busy road the development of such a bridge will remove this risk.
2. The development of a mountain biking 'Hub' at the Hub Kitchen area at the northern end of Huka Falls Road. This consists of developing a network of beginner grade biking tracks, car parking and bike wash facilities. In addition another bridge is planned to link this area to the Craters of the Moon mountain bike park which sits over SH1 from the site. This development will broaden the biking opportunities for locals and visitors, provide much needed facilities for the thousands of cyclists that use the location and also provide a better linkage to the upper Waikato River trails. The development of the bridge will provide for safe and easy access across a busy road so that bikers are able to move between these track networks easily.

Bike Taupo has been working with Council staff on these projects and good work has currently been done. Bike Taupo would like to acknowledge the support that they have received from Council staff to date. Bike Taupo is not asking for Council to fund these projects as it is Bike Taupo's intent to find this funding. Bike Taupo does request that Council have these projects in the fore front of their mind as there may be associated work required, such as realignment of paths around the amphitheatre. Such work will be at minimal cost compared to the value of the assets and the safety improvements that the Taupo Community will be receiving.

Support for Wairakei Tourist Park and Greening Taupo

Bike Taupo would also like to acknowledge and support the work that is done by Wairakei Tourist Park and Greening Taupo. Bike Taupo has a close working relationship with both of these organisations. These organisations are successful in providing environmental and economic benefit to Taupo and have a history of working in synergy with Bike Taupo. This collaborative working relationship is important as the value that the community gains through such entities working together is multiplied given the volunteer base that is then combined. Bike Taupo supports the submissions of Wairakei Tourist Park and Greening Taupo to the LTP.