

BRINSMEAD TO FRESHWATER CONNECTION – APPLICATION TO ACTIVE TRANSPORT GRANTS PROGRAM 2026/2027

L&C | 79/7/1-01 | #7794409

RECOMMENDATION:

That Council:

1. Approves the application for \$3,000,000 funding under the Department of Transport and Main Roads 2026-2027 Active Transport Grants Program for the construction of the Brinsmead to Freshwater Connection project; and
2. Delegates authority to the Chief Executive Officer in accordance with the *Local Government Act 2009* to finalise any and all matters relating to the above application including the final grant funding amount and execution of an associated funding agreement should Council's application be successful.

INTERESTED PARTIES:

Freshwater Christian College (Lot 2RP825835)
FGF Developments (Lot 9SP100467)
Treeforce Association Inc.
Stratford and Freshwater Community Association Inc. (SAFCA)
Cairns Bicycle User Group (CBUG)

Note: The identification of interested parties is provided on a best endeavours basis by Council Officers and may not be exhaustive.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Applications for funding under the State Government's 2026-2027 Active Transport Grants Program are now open. The program is an amalgamation of the Cycling Network Local Government Grants and Walking Local Government Programs, for which Council has had great success in receiving funding for active transport projects previously. If successful, projects must commence before 30 June 2027 and be completed by 30 June 2030.

It is the recommendation of this report that Council submits an application under the grant stream *Cycle Network Local Government Grant (CNLGG)* for the Brinsmead to Freshwater connection, a long-term priority project for Council.

BACKGROUND:

The Active Transport Grants Program (the Program) supports Queensland Councils to plan, design and construct high quality and safe active transport infrastructure on the local

transport network – active transport means travel by walking and riding bikes.

The Program is administered by the Department of Transport and Main Roads (the department) and helps to achieve the department's vision of connected communities in a sustainable, thriving and inclusive Queensland. Funding is available to support the delivery of bike riding infrastructure on the Principal Cycle Network.

The Program is a competitive grants program and eligible applications will be assessed, scored and ranked using a Multi-Criteria Analysis (MCA) criteria, outlined below:

- **Connectivity** – Project connects people to key destinations, with priority to facilities that connect to:
 - schools (existing or new primary and secondary schools and colleges)
 - public transport stations and stops
 - hospitals/medical centres, tourist destinations
 - Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games venues.
- **Network Priority** – Project contributes to the delivery of a priority route identified in a Principal Cycle Network Plan
- **Demand** – Project delivered in an area with a high current and latent demand
- **Safety** – Project addresses major safety barriers for walking and bike riding to priority locations.
- **Infrastructure standard** – Project proposes to deliver infrastructure that is fit-for-purpose for location, demand and expected user type, and improves attractiveness for bike riding and walking and provide for improvements for universal access.

Council has previously received funding under the Cycling Network Local Government Grants program for the design of the Brinsmead to Freshwater Connection. The project received final approval from TMR's technical assessors and is considered "construction ready." In order to apply for funding for construction projects, Council must have an approved design under the program.

COMMENT:

Project identification

In identifying which projects to apply for funding under the *2026-2027 Active Transport Grant Program*, Council officers have:

- Reviewed Council's current 10-year CAPEX budget to identify potential projects that meet the eligibility requirements;
- Considered the likely performance of projects identified above against the grant award criteria;
- Considered the projects' 'readiness' for application including the extent to which information is already available or able to be obtained within submission deadlines to ensure a comprehensive and competitive application can be submitted. Such

information includes project costings, project drawings/concepts, project economic impact analysis etc.

Based on this process, it is proposed that an application be submitted for the Brinsmead to Freshwater Connection Project. The project will deliver approximately 1.2 km of off-road shared pathway connecting Loridan Drive Reserve to Ryan Weare Park via an alternative route to the highly unsafe Brinsmead Road. The project addresses a key missing connection in Cairns' active transport network and the Far North Queensland Principal Cycling Network Plan.

The pathway will improve safety and connectivity for pedestrians and cyclists by providing a separated, off-road alternative to the narrow existing road shoulders, particularly benefiting school students and local residents. The route is identified as a Priority A link in the Queensland Government's Principal Cycle Network, underscoring its strategic regional importance.

Council regularly receives CRMs about the lack of safe active transport in this location and it is a high priority for both the Stratford and Freshwater Community Association Inc. (SAFCA) and Cairns Bicycle User Group (CBUG).

As detailed design has been completed and approved by the Department of Transport and Main Roads (DTMR) it is considered a strong application that meets the eligibility criteria.

OPTIONS:

Option 1 (Recommended)

That Council:

1. Approves the application for \$3,000,000 funding under the Department of Transport and Main Roads 2026-2027 Active Transport Grants Program for the construction of the Brinsmead to Freshwater Connection project; and
2. Delegates authority to the Chief Executive Officer in accordance with the *Local Government Act 2009* to finalise any and all matters relating to the above application including the final grant funding amount and execution of an associated funding agreement should Council's application be successful.

Option 2

That Council does not support the submission of application for funding under the Active Transport Grant Program 2026-2027 for the Brinsmead to Freshwater Connection project.

CONSIDERATIONS:

Risk Management:

There is a risk that actual project costs may differ from anticipated costs. In order to apply for the maximum grant funding available, a revised Quantity Survey was sought in February 2026 to ensure cost estimates are still accurate.

The project requires a minor land acquisition from an adjoining landowner (Lot 9SP100467) adjacent to Freshwater Creek to accommodate the shared path. Council sought in-principal support from the land owner as part of the design phase for the acquisition of an easement however these discussions will be revisited if the recommendation of this Report is endorsed and if the funding application is successful.

The approved design interfaces with the entrance and carparking at Freshwater Christian College. Council will need to reengage with the school regarding the design and identify any necessary amendments should funding be secured.

Council Finance and the Local Economy:

The following table sets out the estimated project capital costs and requested funding amounts.

Table 1: Estimated project capital costs and funding amounts

	\$M (ex GST)
Estimated project capital cost	\$6M
Estimated Council funding contribution to project capital cost if application successful	\$3M
CNLGG funding sought	\$3M
<i>CNLGG funding as a % of estimated project capital cost</i>	50%

As indicated in Table 1, it is recommended that Council apply for 50% (the maximum available) of total project capital costs.

Council’s adopted capital works budget has the following allocation for this project:

Project Name	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	TOTAL
Brinsmead to Freshwater connection	-	\$3,000,000	\$3,000,000	\$6,000,000

The program requires approved projects to commence before 30 June 2027 and be completed by 30 June 2030. As such, no changes to timing in Council’s adopted capital works budget are required at this time.

In the longer term, the project is expect to deliver positive economic impacts by supporting increased active transprot, improving access between key community destinations, and enhancing connectivity within the local walking and cycling network. On average, every \$1 invested in cycling infrastructure returns almost \$5 to Queensland in health benefits, reduced traffic congestion and other benefits. Construction activity is also anticipated to generate short-term economic stimulus through procurement opportunities and local employment. Improved pathway infrastructure can further contribute to broader community welbeing and place-making outcomes, strengthening the liveability and attractiveness of the area for residents, visitors and local businesses.

Community and Cultural Heritage:

The project will deliver significant benefits to the local community by providing improved recreational infrastructure that supports greater access for a wide cross section of residents. The shared pathway will enable safe and convenient walking, cycling and general recreation encouraging healthier lifestyles and creating an accessible public

asset. More than 802,000 Queenslanders ride a bike each week and 1.53 million say they are interested in riding to school or work if the conditions were right. To validate the importance of active transport infrastructure, Cairns residents have consistently reported in every Our Cairns Survey that footpaths are highly important to improving liveability in Cairns.

The project will also improve local transport infrastructure by delivering a separated, off-road route that enhances safety for pedestrians and cyclists. By reducing reliance on narrow road shoulders, the pathway provides a safer and more attractive option for active travel, particularly for school students travelling to and from Freshwater Christian College and for commuters seeking alternatives to car travel. As a Priority A link in the Queensland Government's Far North Queensland Principal Cycling Network Plan, the project completes a critical missing connection within the local cycle network, improving accessibility to parks, residential areas and community facilities.

Natural Environment:

The construction of the Brinsmead to Freshwater Connection involves several key environmental considerations due to its proximity to Freshwater Creek and the presence of mapped remnant vegetation along the alignment. Portions of the proposed route traverse areas identified as essential habitat, meaning some vegetation clearing will be required. The pathway crosses Freshwater Creek at a location designated as a "purple" high-risk fish passage waterway by the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF). As a result, Council must secure the appropriate DAF approvals and ensure all construction activities comply with the regulatory requirements for working within a high-risk fish passage area.

Temporary disturbance to natural vegetation is expected during construction; however, these impacts will be carefully managed and mitigated through targeted revegetation and rehabilitation initiatives. Council intends to work collaboratively with local environmental groups, to undertake reinstatement planting in affected areas.

Overall, although the project presents some localised environmental impacts, these can be effectively managed through the required statutory approvals, proactive mitigation strategies, and comprehensive post-construction revegetation commitments, ensuring the path is delivered in an environmentally responsible manner.

Corporate and Operational Plans:

The project aligns strongly with Cairns Regional Council's Corporate Plan 2025–2030, Focus Three; Design for Liveability. By delivering a safer active transport link and improving access between key community destinations, the pathway supports Council's goals for liveability, resilience and sustainable infrastructure planning.

Statutory:

Nil.

CONSULTATION:

This project has been intensely advocated for by residents and community organisations for many years and is expected to be highly celebrated. Council will undertake all usual

consultation activities associated with a construction project at the appropriate time.

Should the funding application be successful, stakeholder consultation (including with both impacted landowners) will be revisited to ensure the project risks associated with infrastructure on non-Council controlled land are mitigated.

ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment 1 – project site map

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tim Dendle', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Tim Dendle
Executive Manager Community Spaces

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Destry Puia', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Destry Puia
Director Lifestyle and Community

Attachment 1 – Project Site Map

