

This prototype guide is written for Bicycle User Groups to help you understand the Council Management Planning and budget process and how you can have input.

What is a Council Management Plan?

The Management Plan is the council's primary corporate planning document, outlining their activities and priorities for the next year and beyond. It sits above the annual budget and resources plan.

So, if you would like to influence your council's priorities and budget, read on!

Councils are obliged by law¹ to do the following:

- produce an annual management plan and budget;
- specifically address issues identified in council's compulsory State of the Environment report, and also other council documents such as their social plan;
- have at least 28 days of public consultation;
- take into account public submissions in the final documents;
- approve the final versions at a council meeting by the end of the financial year.

Normally, councils put out their management plans around mid-May each year.

How do we get a copy?

Ring the council to find out when they are releasing their management plan and budget. The council may make the documents available from the council (either just to view or to take away) and/or at local libraries to view and/or from their website. Some councils have a public meeting at which they present the main points and field questions (and maybe give away copies). Councillors, too, will all have a copy.

The documents usually include the following:

- Draft Management Plan (priorities and activities);
- Draft Resources Plan (budget amounts allocated by project);
- Draft Operating Budget (budget by council section); and
- Draft Fees and Charges (list of fees and charges).

Tip: This is different from other management plans that the council might have for parks or development areas. If the council officer doesn't know what you're talking about, say it is about the council budget, or ask to speak with the corporate planner or the person who prepares the council budget. You do *not* want to speak to a town planner or duty planner.

¹ Local Government Act, section 405

How do we have input?

Council may provide a variety of mechanisms for accepting submissions from the public. It might accept the comments on a phone message line; by email; and by post.

A BUG submission (see below) can be reinforced by supporting submissions from BUG members and other local cyclists and residents.

Depending on your own circumstances and relationships, you may also want to:

- (a) talk with the relevant council officer (eg. traffic engineer) to test the viability of your suggestions, and maybe get their help to fine tune your ideas; and/or
- (b) talk to one or more councillors to get their support for your recommendations (this can be risky if you don't know the politics well – use with caution).

Where you can, link up with council policy or issues raised in other council documents. For example, the State of the Environment report might have references to air pollution targets (supports your call for increased infrastructure funding), or the Social Plan might refer to the need to improve access for youth to local facilities (supports your call for bike lanes to the local swimming pool and youth centre).

What is a “submission”?

A submission is just a letter, email (or phone message), stating your comments. It can be simple, short and informal. Or, you can make it more substantial if you want, by the following:

- use letterhead;
- start with a paragraph introducing the BUG (eg. affiliation with BNSW, membership, coverage area, role);
- then have a summary of recommendations;
- then for each recommendation, put the reasons, justification, evidence of community need, supporting quotes from council policy, etc.

A supporting submission can be someone calling/writing/emailing saying that they support the BUG submission. They might add that they particularly support one specific recommendation. Or, they can just make their own points which happen to coincide with [some of] those made in the BUG submission.

What might we ask for?

Funds for: the development or revision of a bike plan*; implementation of part of the bike plan*, a transport planner; widening of paths through parkland to be sufficient for shared use; infrastructure in new developments; and specific infrastructure or promotion projects run by the council or the BUG, etc.

**The RTA bicycle matched funding and council budget cycle*

The RTA offers matched funding to council's spending (usually up to a maximum of \$50,000pa) for development, revision and implementation of council's bike plan, and sometimes other works, safety improvements, grate replacement and parking facilities. This can provide an incentive for council to allocate funds to projects the RTA agrees to match. However, there are plenty of other funding sources that can be used (see forthcoming BUG Local Government Advocacy Guide), and shouldn't be used as an excuse by council for limiting funding to RTA matched projects.

Applications for RTA matched funding need to be submitted to the RTA the previous September. That is, council needs to identify, design and cost the proposals before September, submit, wait for approval and then include that project in the subsequent council budget next June. So you won't be able to ask for projects in this budget that rely on matched RTA funding unless it was submitted last year. But do start talking to council now about preparing their plans & applications in time for this September.

Funding sources in the budget

The budget (or "Resources Plan") should show the allocation for each project for this year, last year and the next two years. For this year, it should also show other sources of funding for that allocation, for example, from grants (from RTA, Federal Roads to Recovery, Sport & Rec, etc) or from Section 94 (developer) contributions.

Keep in mind that building a constructive long term relationship can be more valuable than pushing one barrow with all your might. Taking an approach of the BUG being there to *help* the council to better meet the needs, health and safety of its constituents, and its policy obligations might get you further in the long run. Look at who you can work with for best effect, whether council officers or elected councillors.

Recommended reading: "How to prepare a bike plan" from the RTA on 1800 060 607

Understanding the Council Management Plan Process

A Guide for BUGS