



The ACT Equestrian Association Incorporated

ABN 47 674 025 536

All correspondence to:
The Secretary, PO Box 4, Curtin ACT 2605
Phone 02 6247 7843

www.actea.asn.au

President: Christine Lawrence

Vice-President: Cathy Banwell
Treasurer: Debbie Morrissey

Secretary: Beth Stone

Mr Andrew Barr
Chief Minister and
Minister for Tourism and Events
ACT Legislative Assembly
GPO Box 1020,
Canberra, ACT 2601

barr@act.gov.au

Dear Minister

Updated Stromlo Forest Park Master Plan

On behalf of the Canberra equestrian community the ACT Equestrian Association (ACTEA) would like to make the following submission in regard to the updated Stromlo Forest Park Master Plan as released for comment on 14 December 2015. While ACTEA has encouraged horse riders to fill in the survey at the Have Your Say website it is of the view that it's design is too simplistic and focussed solely on new infrastructure and discourages comment on how the proposed long term development of the overall Park will impact on different users. There is no comfort in this Master Plan, any more than the earlier 2010 version, that the government is interested in ameliorating the impact of their desire to completely change the nature of a once treasured recreational destination. The impression that ACTEA has formed from this Master Plan and the previous version is that the long term safety and amenity of equestrian users of the Park are not priorities. Collectively the proposed developments will make riding a horse anywhere in Stromlo an act of courage and force equestrians out of the Park altogether.

1. The old **Pipeline Road** that connects Uriarra Road and the Mount Stromlo Summit Road, for example, was originally designated as an equestrian trail and is still shown thus on the precinct map on the Stromlo Forest Park website¹. In practice, so many bike tracks have now been built across this road that only the most phlegmatic horse and rider would use it. This amounts to over one kilometre of lost equestrian trail and removes one potential loop ride on the eastern face of the mountain.

¹ http://stromloforestpark.com.au/images/maps/SFP_PRECINCTMAP_2013_white.pdf

ACTEA supported by funding from Sport and Recreation Services ACT

2. ACTEA notes that the 'possible' **Gondola To Summit**, which has been on the drawing board since the day Jon Stanhope opened the equestrian trails at Stromlo in 2010, has moved from directly over the top of the equestrian rest stop at Bluegums to what appears to be over the top of the downhill track. This has got to be an improvement but there will still be issues for horse riders using the top equestrian trail – unless the intention is to discourage them from doing so. Any development of a Gondola, whoever pays for it, **MUST** take into account the impact of overhead noise and potential falling objects on horses below.
3. The low cost **Accommodation** is inevitable but there are real issues associated with close contact between residences and horses. In the suburbs horse riders avoid the backyards of houses because of barking dogs, flying frizbees and flapping laundry and this plan appears to import them into an area riders might have believed was free of such things. Careful design and planning to separate these activities is not a given.
4. A **BMX Park** is now indicated between the Cotter Road and the Mount Stromlo Summit Road. In the 2010 Master Plan this was an area designated for a camping area at which some horse yards and float parking could be included for people travelling to ride in the Park. This camping area has completely disappeared. The BMX track is shown quite close to the fire trail which connects the National Equestrian Centre and Stromlo Equestrian Centre to the existing cavaletti entrance into the Park. It is unsafe to have such a facility so close to a horse trail. If a BMX Park has to be at this site then it should be much closer to the Cotter Road and BMX riders should be discouraged from taking their bicycles onto the equestrian link to the Mount Stromlo Summit Road.
5. There is a **cavaletti horse entrance** to Stromlo Forest Park on on the the Mount Stromlo Summit Road opposite the fire trail from Stromlo Equestrian Centre. This has been an entrance for horse riders for decades. It is disturbing that this equestrian entrance has been left off the Master Plan when other entrances are included. ACTEA would like to see this entrance recognised.
6. The plan for a Luge above Bluegums in the 2010 Master Plan mercifully seems to have disappeared from this latest version however a **Gravity Sport** facility remains. The structure would overfly several designated equestrian trails and ACTEA objected strongly to the idea when such a thing was mooted in the past. Screaming human beings dangling from wires and moving at speed over horse trails would not pass any risk management standards and at best suggests a lack of concern for equestrian safety and at worst a willingness to exclude hose riders from designated equestrian trails on the eastern face of the mountain.
7. ACTEA accepts the inevitability of the **District Playing Fields** being included in the Master Plan. Their existence, however, will influence the route, amenity and safety of the proposed Bicentennial National Trail link. The Master Plan is textless and contextless. ACTEA would appreciate an acknowledgement that planning for the playing fields will take into account the need to safely accommodate the BNT.

8. Not all **Equestrian Trails** at Stromlo are marked in this Master Plan but then neither are all cycle tracks. One welcome new development is the long awaited inclusion of a specific route for the Bicentennial National Trail from the John Gorton underpass, around the playing fields and to connect with other equestrian trails in the Park (eg up to Bluegums) and to exit at the cavaletti on the Cotter Road. However labelling suggests equestrian trails in the middle of the cross country running track which must be confusing for everyone and is inaccurate in any case. How does this label for multiple generic 'equestrian trails' relate to the sign for the BNT?

9. The 2015 Master Plan, as posted on the consultation site, does not include West Stromlo. There is only a deceptive label for a **Road Cycling Circuit** near the Cotter Road. A normal reader would not deduce from the Master Plan that the label indicated a 12k, bitumen bicycle circuit through West Stromlo. Such a circuit has all sorts of negative implications for equestrians. One part of the circuit already exists in the form of a bitumen cycle path constructed on top of a designated equestrian trail running the length of the fire trail parallel to Uriarra Road. This 2km once offered pleasant, straight, rolling going for small groups of horses in company but has not been replaced by anything equivalent. The southern end of this circuit will link with the Mount Stromlo Road. The link between does not use existing fire trails in West Stromlo but crosses across many of them. This will be an expensive development and may be some years off but it is an issue for several reasons:
 - The Circuit crosses all the nice cantering hills in West Stromlo. Once it is constructed it will no longer be safe to take your horses for a canter for fear of either meeting a group of speeding cyclists, your horse losing its footing on the bitumen surface or the prospect of struggling to stop a fast moving horse because of the above;
 - There is only one public access point to southern end of West Stromlo, near the ACTEW waterworks, and it cannot be used safely by both horses and cyclists. Once a bitumen Cycling Circuit is built over this entrance there will be no public access to West Stromlo from the Cotter Road.

When it became obvious that the government was intent on turning the western side of Mount Stromlo into a bike park, despite public statements that it was to be a recreational destination for equestrians, the then General Manager Neil Guthrie said 21 November 2006,

It was my understanding that you have concerns that we will be developing this area as well. I can assure you that we have no plans to do this for the foreseeable future. We will be looking to manage this land in accordance [with] the necessary bushfire requirements and to develop it as a recreational space for equestrian users. It may be from time to time approved for use by other users (such as orienteering) for one-day events. I would see this latter requirement being an exception and not the rule.

In summary:

The Master Plan continues to display a complete disregard for the amenity and safety of equestrian users

- at least 5 kilometres of equestrian trail on the eastern slope of Mount Stromlo have been rendered completely unrideable since the Park was opened.
- the Gondola above the top-most equestrian trail, with overhead noise and even falling objects, will cut equestrian trails on the eastern side of the mountain in half.
- the gravity/flying fox introducing screaming human beings dangling from wires and moving at speed over horse trails will close two additional equestrian trails.
- the BMX Park next to the Mount Stromlo Summit Road is dangerously close to the access route for equestrians travelling from Stromlo Equestrian Centre and the National Equestrian Centre
- the absence of the cavaletti on the Cotter Road suggests a desire to ignore this equestrian entrance.
- the racing circuit in West Stromlo cuts many equestrian trails and will reduce the amenity of users and make yet another riding area very unsafe if not impossible.
- the southern entrance point for the cycling circuit to West Stromlo completely ignores the fact that it will destroy the only southern public equestrian entrance to this part of the Park..

In the recent past we have seen proposals to signpost these West Stromlo firetrails as running tracks and now to cement in place a racing circuit for bicycles. You might understand that we feel constantly under threat with little consideration of our needs or our history in the Park. Our sin appears to be that we do not want to hold competitions at the Park or hire it out to hundreds of interstate visitors.

I have copied this letter into the on-line survey but would like an actual response to our concerns. I can be contacted at the postal address above, at cflawrence@home.com.au or on 02 62885799.

Regards

Christine Lawrence
President
ACT Equestrian Association
1 February 2016