



## **SUBMISSION TO THE NSW GOVERNMENT: NSW TRANSPORT MASTER PLAN DISCUSSION PAPER (APRIL 2012)**

### **Introduction**

WSROC welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the NSW Long Term Master Transport Plan Discussion Paper.

Western Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils represents the councils of Auburn, Bankstown, Blacktown, Blue Mountains, Fairfield, Hawkesbury, Holroyd, Liverpool, Parramatta and Penrith. The local government areas represented by these councils cover 1.6 million of the 1.9 million people in Greater Western Sydney. The economy of Greater Western Sydney is the third largest in the country, contributing \$85 billion a year to the nation's GDP.

The population of Greater Western Sydney is expected to grow by another 1 million by 2036 (Metropolitan Strategy Review), representing almost 60% of Sydney's population increase over the next twenty five years. The Metropolitan Strategy Review targets 70% of Sydney's additional housing in existing areas and 30% in greenfield sites with 80% of new housing within walking distance of existing or new centres. These figures have profound implications not only for development and urban design but also for the transport system.

Greater Western Sydney already suffers from decades of under-investment in its transport needs. Many of the region's commuters face longer travel times, greater cost and greater inconvenience than most in Sydney. Unless there is a serious commitment to the region's infrastructure needs, the projected population growth will seriously compound these difficulties, affecting quality of life, impeding productivity and retarding the region's economic growth and contribution to the state economy.

WSROC's comments on the questions in this discussion paper are made in the context of the transport needs and the broader planning needs of Greater Western Sydney. WSROC also looks forward to the opportunity to respond further to the Draft Long Term Transport Master Plan due to be released in June.

### **NSW Government Transport Objectives**

#### **Question 1**

WSROC supports the general principle espoused in the Discussion Paper that "... the objectives for future transport should reinforce objectives for future land use."

One set of objectives cannot be achieved satisfactorily in isolation from the other. The NSW Long Term Transport Master Plan must be coordinated with the NSW 2021 Plan and the longer term Metropolitan Strategy. An integrated approach is needed which incorporates residential land use planning and employment-generating activities with the necessary transport links between the two.

As a starting point it must involve a serious focus on urban consolidation along existing rail corridors and a slowing of the inexorable urban sprawl into green field sites. This would reduce the rate of growth in private motor vehicle travel, increase the economic returns to public transport systems, bring significant social benefits and reduce the environmental footprint of commuting.

Economic modelling by the Centre for International Economics (*The Benefits and Costs of Alternate Growth Paths for Sydney, 2009*) estimates that a 70/30 infill/greenfield scenario over the next twenty five years would yield savings of \$3.2 billion or approximately \$11,000 a dwelling compared with a 50/50 development scenario.

Where greenfield developments do occur, they require planning that pays close attention to providing the essential transport linkages between residential development and the employment-generating industrial and commercial sites where the growing population will work. Further, it is imperative that investment in the necessary transport infrastructure occurs concurrently with such development, rather than lagging by decades as has happened too often in the past.

Another fundamental point needs to be made in this context. Land use planning must also focus on creating or relocating jobs to where people live. If the transport system's focus is to move a growing population from where they will live to where jobs currently are, it will never keep up with growth. Continued growth of population on Sydney's outer fringe must be accompanied by the generation of jobs, and jobs of sufficient diversity, in the region. Moving an ever-increasing number of people from the west to jobs in the east will consume more and more transport resources and is simply not sustainable. A crucial part of the solution to the "transport problem" lies outside the realm of transport infrastructure: it requires significant job relocation and employment generation.

For commuters, the priority of the transport system is to expedite their trip to work or study. For business, it is to facilitate their movement of materials and staff. For the Western Sydney economy it is to encourage business, improve productivity and support economic development and employment generation. For all in the community, transport is fundamental to the essential links with health, education, community services and social interaction that affect the quality of life.

## **Question 2**

The nine objectives listed in the Discussion Paper cover the essential aspects of customer needs, business and economic needs, efficiency and sustainability.

However, two areas could be made more explicit. A key aspect of "putting the customer first" and "economic development" is the role of transport in linking households to their places of work and study. Meeting customers' regular commuting needs is one of the fundamental roles of our transport system, with work, work-related business and education accounting for 47% of all trips. It is important that services are reliable, regular, safe, and efficient and have the capacity to meet this fundamental need. This is partly a function of service management and partly a function of adequate infrastructure investment.

Secondly, under "social benefits" explicit mention should be made of health impacts. Our transport system, along with our planning system more broadly, should encourage healthy lifestyles, a necessary component of which is exercise. Thus our transport system should facilitate walking and cycling, even for part of the daily commute.

## **Question 3**

While the nine stated objectives deal adequately with customer, business and economic needs, they are not explicit enough on the need for long term transport corridor planning. Future transport corridors based on projected settlement patterns need to be identified well in advance of demand so that land can be quarantined, thereby minimising costs when construction is required. Past failures to preserve

transport corridors have added considerably to land resumption and construction costs and reduced governments' ability to meet community transport needs.

## **Sydney Transport**

### **Question 4**

There is no single answer to this question.

From the point of view of environmental sustainability a focus on public transport should be the first priority as public transport modes have a significantly lower carbon footprint than private motor vehicles. Social equity criteria would also favour public transport. On SEIFA rankings, Greater Western Sydney has four of Sydney's five most disadvantaged LGAs (Fairfield, Auburn, Bankstown and Campbelltown) yet in much of the region access to public transport services is far worse than in most parts of Sydney. The cost of private motor vehicle travel and for many families, the need for multiple vehicles, adds significantly to the costs of already struggling families.

However, it is acknowledged that providing comparable public transport services across the whole of Sydney is unrealistic in the short run considering the resources available to the Government. For those living along existing public transport corridors, immediate improvements are quite feasible and improved service levels on public transport should be a high priority. This should include the basics of frequency, reliability, safety, cleanliness and comfort and should be achievable with relatively modest capital investment.

For communities in designated growth areas and areas of medium to high population density which could be reasonably serviced by public transport options, the introduction of public bus transit-ways or light rail could be the investment which gives the highest short to medium term social, environmental and economic returns. For outer Western Sydney, significant improvements in cross-regional transport could be achieved by the introduction of strategically located north-south public bus services.

The longer term investments in heavy rail for the North West Rail Link and South West Rail Link are strongly welcomed by WSROC and will provide much needed infrastructure for the two regions. However, to maximise their value, extensions beyond the initial proposals should be considered. For the NWRL this must as a minimum involve an extension to link with the Richmond line. For the SWRL it requires consideration of a northwards extension into proposed employment lands.

However, for some of the lower to medium density developments on Sydney's outer fringe, comprehensive public transport services are unlikely in the short term. For many residents in Greater Western Sydney who have little or no access to public transport and are unlikely to for some time considering projected public transport expenditure, improved road systems are imperative.

The two highest priorities are the M4 East extension and the duplication of the M5. Even with current usage levels these major motorways are stretched well beyond capacity. With projected population increases and projected increases in freight traffic, the situation will be impossible without urgent improvements.

### **Question 5**

Given the region's projected population growth, a high priority must be to address the transport needs of Western Sydney which is already severely under-served and will have to provide for another million people in the next twenty five years.

Four of Sydney's five corridors marked as highly constrained are links between western Sydney and the east and the projected growth in Western Sydney will simply exacerbate these constraints.

Investment in transport infrastructure in Western Sydney has not kept up with population growth. The rail network in Western Sydney has not been significantly expanded since the 1930s yet the region's population is now five times the size it was then. The result is that residential growth has been pushed further and further from rail networks, with an increasing reliance on buses and private cars. Yet bus services, either private or public have not kept up and have not been adequately integrated with rail services. Cross-regional north-south public transport is almost non-existent for most Western Sydney residents and road systems are, in many cases, grossly inadequate. Inadequate planning for freight transport has added significantly to pressure on the region's roads.

Investment in transport infrastructure for Greater Western Sydney must cover the twin objectives of facilitating north-south travel within the region, particularly in the outer suburbs, while still improving travel to and from the CBD as well. The serious backlog in both public and private transport infrastructure means that both need to be addressed as high priorities.

In terms of public transport, infrastructure priorities should include:

- rapid completion of the South West Rail Link
- commencement of the North- West Rail Link, with an extension to the Richmond line
- duplication of the Richmond line
- Parramatta-Epping rail link, either heavy rail or light rail
- additional bus transit-ways including Parklea – Castle Hill
- improved transport interchanges and car parking facilities at strategic rail stations
- investigation of a proposed light rail network linking key centres in Western Sydney
- identification and quarantining of corridors for long term outer urban transport connections
- improved rail freight and intermodal network (see questions 17 -19)

Improvements to the road network are critical for the 70% of Western Sydney residents who travel to work by car (approximately 60% as driver and 10% as passengers). They are also imperative to reduce the economic cost of road congestion, estimated by the Bureau of Transport Economics to rise from \$4.6 billion a year in 2009 to \$7.8 billion a year by 2020.

The main road priorities must be:

- the M4 east extension and the duplication of the M5
- improved regional road links with key industrial areas

### **Question 6**

Of the over 800,000 journeys to work commenced in Greater Western Sydney around 65% also have their destination in Western Sydney. Close to 70% of Western Sydney workers commute by car and only 13% use public transport, so improving the efficiency of the road network is critical for Western Sydney residents.

The critical issue in improving the efficiency of the road network is increasing capacity. In addition to the higher usage motorways such as the M4, M5, M2, it includes key arterial and link roads, particularly those connecting to employment areas.

However, measures are needed to increase the efficiency of existing road networks. Efforts must be made to reduce heavy freight traffic on major roads during peak times. This might be assisted by differential time-variable tolling charges, and/or gate charges at ports and intermodal terminals.

Allocating greater road space and priority to buses has the potential to increase bus usage and reduce car numbers on major arterial roads, but will only work if reliability, frequency, comfort and convenience can be guaranteed and if costs are competitive.

To support this, the provision of more carparks at strategic major bus stops would encourage park and ride commuting between outer suburbs and major centres. These options should be expanded for the most congested parts of major routes between Sydney's west and the CBD as well as centres such as Parramatta and Liverpool.

There is also a need for improved bus services connecting stations with major employment lands and business parks such as Eastern Creek, Wetherill Park, Marsden Park and Norwest Business Park.

### **Question 7**

For those Western Sydney communities serviced by rail, the main priorities are frequency and reliability of service. Outside of peak hour, services on many lines are far too infrequent. During peak hour there is a need for more express services from the outer suburbs to Parramatta and the CBD. On many services more carriages or more frequent services are needed to reduce the serious over-crowding which occurs during peak periods. While there have been some improvements in the comfort and cleanliness of carriages, and further upgrades are planned, there is still a long way to go.

WSROC welcomes the Government's intention to develop a Customer Scorecard aimed at improving transport service and customer satisfaction. However, these devices are only as effective as the commitment to addressing the issues raised by customers.

Public bus services in most of Western Sydney are inadequate and in many places are non-existent. There is a real need to expand the network to the outer western suburbs, including the provision of a north-south service linking Campbelltown-Penrith-Richmond/Windsor and a service linking residential areas and rail hubs to key employment lands such as the Eastern Creek precinct and Wetherill Park.

### **Question 8**

The main factor in the choice between bus and light rail must be the capacity to attract customer usage and to efficiently and comfortably transport the required number of people, bearing in mind the relative costs of the two modes.

For corridors which do not have adequate bus services, their introduction would bring the most immediate results. For those busy corridors where bus services do not give sufficient advantage to encourage people to switch from private car to bus, priority measures should be introduced to improve the convenience of bus travel and to increase the speed of bus journeys and make them more competitive.

In some key Western Sydney corridors connecting to regional centres such as Parramatta, bus services cannot cope with the volume of demand and projected population increases. Consideration needs to be given to a feasibility study for a Western Sydney light rail network which provides improved regional north-south connections to Parramatta as Sydney's second CBD.

Planning and infrastructure investment have to take a longer term view so that future transition from bus to greater capacity light rail services are practicable when population and demand levels increase.

### **Question 9**

The encouragement of walking and cycling has a number of potential benefits, particularly in terms of health but also in reducing, even marginally, pressure on other transport modes. If the Government's objective of doubling the number of short trips made by cycling in the next 15 years is to be achieved, measures need to be introduced to make it more attractive.

In the short term these could include

- safer and more convenient cycle parking facilities at stations and transport interchanges
- in conjunction with employers, the provision of cycle parking facilities at places of work
- measures to improve safety for cyclists
- cycle-ways in strategic areas, but ensuring that they don't impede other traffic flows

Longer term measures relate to strategic planning which should focus more on higher density mixed use developments which locate residential concentrations closer to shops, schools, community centres and other facilities and within walking distance of public transport hubs.

### **Question 10**

The main barrier to people using multiple transport modes is the inadequacy/unavailability of link services and facilities. For many commuters the primary link between residence and rail station (the pre-journey) is non-existent, while for others, the final link between rail station and place of work is not there. These gaps force many to drive.

The other key barrier is the inadequacy of interchange facilities. If interchange facilities are inconvenient, with long walks, stairs, poor travelling information and poor weather protection, commuters are less likely to change modes and more likely to use their cars. If car parking and bike parking facilities at stations are inadequate, unsafe, insecure, dirty or inconvenient, again, people are more likely to drive to work. Addressing these hindrances would encourage the use of multiple modes and to use public transport for at least some of the journey. Better coordination of timetables and fare integration would also help.

RailCorp's 2008 analysis of the modes of transport used by CityRail customers to access its railway stations shows that 46% walk, 12% arrive by bus, 14% drive and park and 17% are dropped at stations as private vehicle passengers (*A Compendium of CityRail Travel Statistics*, RailCorp June 2008.) This suggests the potential for increased usage if link services, interchange and parking facilities were improved.

### **Question 11**

The specific question of Port Botany is best left to those more directly involved with this issue.

The question of Sydney Airport has been dealt with comprehensively by the recent *Joint Study of Aviation Capacity in the Sydney Region*. WSROC's prime concern on this is to reaffirm its opposition to any proposal to divert air traffic from Sydney Airport to an airport at Badgery's Creek. The impact on surrounding communities, many of which have been developed since the former federal government scrapped plans for an airport there, and the extra pressures an airport would add to already stressed transport systems in Western Sydney, make the Badgery's Creek option unviable.

The other comment that needs to be made with respect to both Port Botany and Sydney Airport is that the projected growth in usage of both facilities reinforces the urgency of duplicating the M5. It also increases the urgency of switching as much of the associated traffic as possible from road to rail. The issue of freight traffic is covered in questions 17 - 19. A greater proportion of the increasing passenger traffic to and from Sydney airport also needs to be diverted to rail. A starting point here would be to make the cost of the current rail system more competitive than it currently is.

### **Question 12**

It is critical that strategic land use planning includes transport planning. Transport infrastructure must provide the critical connections between residential development and employment as well as the links to education, health and other essential services. According to the Metropolitan Strategy, 30% of the extra 1 million people projected for Western Sydney over the next twenty five years will be housed in greenfield areas. The transport needs of these 300,000 people will be significant and need to be provided concurrently with development, not decades behind as happens too often.

The South West Rail Link and North West Rail Link will provide a core of public transport services for people in the north-west and south west growth areas, but only to the extent that development areas are well linked to these two rail lines. It is essential that they are supported at least by connecting public bus services. Planning should also provide the flexibility to allow for increasing public transport capacity as population densities increase, by shifting to bus transitways and possibly eventual light rail connections to the major heavy rail networks. It is essential that north-south public transport options are provided, again at least initially through public bus services.

For the long term, transport corridors need to be identified and quarantined so that land acquisition issues do not prevent rail and road infrastructure being provided when needed. For outer Western Sydney this must include corridor identification for the eventual extension and linking of the NWRL and SWRL via the main western line. It must also include provision for an outer ring road(s) linking the north-west and south-west growth areas with employment lands and linking Campbelltown, Penrith and Windsor, possibly following the alignment of the Northern Road.

New release areas should not be considered without the capacity to provide essential public transport services. Local councils and regional organisations should be included in the strategic planning process.

## **Regional Transport**

### **Questions 13 – 16**

These questions are best left to organisations representing non-urban communities.

## **Freight Transport**

### **Question 17**

Improving the flow of freight across NSW is an economic and social imperative. As 27% of Australian containerised imports arrive through Port Botany before they are transported to other locations, much in Western Sydney, freight movement must be a key focus of Sydney's transport needs.

While Sydney's population is growing at a little over 1% a year, container volumes through Port Botany have been growing by 7.5% since its inception. This means the volume of Sydney's freight movements is likely to double within the next ten years, with a disproportionate impact on Western Sydney.

The economic cost of inefficient freight haulage and the social cost of increasing numbers of heavy vehicles clogging Sydney's roads, particularly the M5, necessitate urgent action.

The key priority must be to increase the proportion of freight which is carried by rail rather than road. The Government's aim of doubling this proportion should be the bare minimum considering the low current base.

This requires the construction of efficient intermodal terminals at strategic locations, particularly in Western Sydney, and the construction and/or upgrading of key rail linkages between those and Port Botany.

### **Question 18**

Where possible, freight movements must be kept out of residential areas and the movement of more freight onto rail will help in this.

Depending on their location, the construction and operation of freight intermodal terminals could potentially impact on residential communities and compromise their expectations of safety and amenity. For example, the proposed location of the Moorebank intermodal terminal is causing considerable concern for local residents. A thorough process of consultation with local communities is needed in these situations and should occur during the early strategic planning stage rather than too late when decisions have already been made.

Measures are needed to reduce freight traffic and its impact on commuter traffic during peak periods. As suggested earlier, these could include time-variable pricing and toll charges either on toll roads or at port gates. The benefit of the latter is that it is more inclusive and provides no incentive for freight vehicles to avoid charges by using non-tolled roads.

### **Question 19**

This question is better left to those with the required technical expertise.

## **Funding**

### **Question 20**

The question of willingness to pay for improved services does not have a unilateral answer. Socio-economically disadvantaged households, of which there are many in Western Sydney already face severe cost-of-living pressures and generally commute further than most other Sydney residents. Even marginal increases in transport costs would impact far more heavily than on households in more affluent areas and/or those commuting smaller distances to work. Despite the burden, some commuters would see a modest increase in user charges as acceptable if it meant more reliable and comfortable public transport services or less congested roads.

### **Question 21**

Any consideration of a demand management approach to transport must consider the impact on travellers as transport needs, especially for non-optional commuting, have to be met one way or another. Studies generally show that the demand for transport is quite inelastic, generally between -0.3 and -0.5. This is what one would expect, particularly for travel to work.

Management of demand between various transport modes is more pertinent as elasticities of demand between competing modes may be higher, depending on the availability of travel options. However, this

is not universally the case and the demand for private transport would be very inelastic in parts of Western Sydney where public transport options are so limited. The use of pricing measures to manage demand in regions where there are few options simply add to the costs of travel and impact more severely on the most disadvantaged. (See Question 23).

An important factor affecting demand in the medium and longer term is the proximity of jobs to housing and this should be a public policy priority. The best long term demand management policy would be to ensure increased availability of local jobs thereby reducing the need for lengthy travel to work. If population growth continues strongly in the outer suburbs while employment opportunities continue to focus on Sydney's CBD, no amount of extra spending on transport infrastructure will satisfy the growing demand. A major part of the long term solution must be the relocation of more jobs to Western Sydney. The Government can and should lead the way in this by relocating many of its own agencies to major centres in Greater Western Sydney.

### **Question 22**

Before addressing the question of "new revenues or charges", a more fundamental issue must be raised: that is, the question of borrowing for infrastructure funding. The Discussion Paper seems to assume that infrastructure needs to be self-funding or funded from consolidated revenue and clearly omits the question of debt financing. While this might be more rightly a matter for Treasury than Transport, it can't be ignored as its implications for transport are critical.

NSW suffers from a debilitating infrastructure backlog which has seriously impeded economic growth in this state as well as causing serious inconvenience and cost to commuters and businesses. As indicated above, Bureau of Transport Economics' figures estimated the cost of Sydney's traffic congestion alone to be \$4.6 billion a year in 2009.

The aversion to debt exhibited by both sides of politics has prevented the level of public sector investment needed to address the infrastructure deficit. Yet economic analysis has shown that government borrowing for productive capital infrastructure is beneficial to governments as well as to the broader economy (Deloitte Access Economics and Grattan Institute 2011, Lateral Economics 2010). If a meaningful impact is to be made on the state's transport infrastructure deficit, serious consideration needs to be given to this question.

The question of increased charges or "new revenues" (presumably taxes) should only be pursued after the question of borrowing has been fully investigated. Even then, increased user charges are not likely to increase available funds sufficiently to deliver transport needs within a much shorter timeframe. In the absence of substantially higher capital funds, they are more likely to add to the burden of travellers without delivering any significant benefits in the short or medium term.

### **Question 23**

If further road pricing is to be introduced, the issue of equity needs to be considered. The concept of charging for distance travelled, as operates on the M7, appears prima facie to be fair. However, it overlooks the fact that many of those forced to travel longer distances to work are amongst the more socio-economically disadvantaged. This is the case for many Western Sydney commuters who can't afford to live closer to their place of work and are already carrying the cost of travelling much further than Sydney averages. The additional burden of increased road user charges would simply add to those pressures. The other issue of equity relates to the availability of public transport alternatives. Applying

tolls where road users have no public transport alternative, as is the case in much of Greater Western Sydney, is not as fair as applying them where public transport is a viable option.

If a decision is made to increase road user pricing, it should operate in a way to reduce pressures in the most congested corridors and at peak times. With electronic pricing, this flexibility should be possible. For example, differential pricing for large carriers using main commuter corridors could apply higher charges during peak commuting times and lower out of peak times. This could be helpful, for example, in reducing the volume of large trucks on the M4 and M5 during peak times.

Kerry Bartlett  
Chief Executive Officer  
WSROC Ltd  
PO Box 63, Blacktown NSW 2148  
Tel: 9671 4333; Web: [www.wsroc.com.au](http://www.wsroc.com.au)  
April 2012