

To: The Chairman,
NSW Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works

From: Ms Tabitha Lloyd, Director
Australian Consultants for the Environment

Re: **Submission for the Inquiry into Infrastructure in
Coastal Growth Areas**

Purpose:

To provide a submission for the development of policy for infrastructure to support rapid coastal growth - "seachange migration" to the Central Coast, NSW. In particular, to provide advice and ideas for the development and enhancement of the public transport network as a means of minimising the adverse impacts of coastal growth and subsequent demands on existing resources, infrastructure and the environment.

Background:

It is my firm belief that enhancement and development of the public transport network will be the single most effective measure reducing pressure on existing and future infrastructure for coastal growth in the Central Coast region.

The Central Coast has an extensive but very often congested roads system. Private vehicle cars are the most common form of private vehicle transport within the region. The city design, roads linkages and lay-out is oriented heavily towards private vehicle use. There is little existing infrastructure for an extensive bus network to support existing rail services ie. in-efficient timetabling and services, fragmentation of services between several companies.

The current roads network and infrastructure would be highly suitable for the support of a more comprehensive public transport system including more frequent services of buses and trains, the provision of bus interchanges or centres and possibly a light rail / tram network.

Peak hour traffic within the Central Coast generally moves commuters at a snails pace and there are many 'road bottlenecks'.

There are many small schools and associated school traffic zones within the region which is a concern given the high volume of traffic already using the roads network.

Trains, however, are rarely congested and provide fast, fuel efficient and environmentally sensible transport delivering consumers metres from their destinations with minimal planning and individual effort. Commuters can 'relax, have a coffee and read the paper' en-route to their workplace arriving relaxed rather than stressed.

As a new resident to the Central Coast, I am getting to know my way around and have recently begun using the public transport network to catch buses and trains within the region. Making use of the network myself, having previously owned a private vehicle, I have been better able to make an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the public transport system and have used my observations to develop recommendations and ideas, detailed below.

Issue:

In preparing a policy to meet the needs of rapid population growth to the Central Coast, the State government should take both precautionary and immediate action.

This includes allocating resources to maximise the efficiency of existing public transport infrastructure and developing and implementing innovative programs to minimise future transport pressures caused by rapid population growth.

Consideration of the Issue:

Through my recent use of the public transport network within the Central Coast, I have made several observations and formed a range of recommendations and ideas.

Strengths of the Public Transport System within the Central Coast Region:

May I draw your attention to the following strengths which I believe should be maintained, enhanced and improved upon for future policy:

- there is sufficient public transport services to all regions of the Central Coast in the form of buses and trains providing good coverage of the area.
- the provision of a timetable information telephone service is excellent and should be continued.
- staff within the network are helpful, polite and professional.
- there is sufficient signage, staff and timetable information at train stations.
- there is sufficient lighting, surveillance and emergency protocols in place at train stations at night.
- there are some over-pass walkways in place at train stations allowing pedestrian access to avoid the crossing of major roads.
- there are some bus centres and taxi ranks at train stations which provide connecting transport services.
- pricing and fares are very reasonable.
- there are currently no restrictions on the size or amount of baggage carried by commuters ie. shopping bags and push-bikes are allowed.
- generally, the bus service is excellent.

Weaknesses of the Public Transport System within the Central Coast Region:

I have identified the following points as weaknesses which should be addressed in policy for the enhancement and improvement of the public transport network within the Central Coast:

- there is currently no public transport 'shop-front' which consumers can access during business hours to discuss services, obtain the latest / current timetable information and ticketing.
- the bus and train networks are independent of each other, not part of a state-wide or unified public transport service.
- the bus network involves 2 -3 individual companies which are apparently independent, in competition, not united.

- trains and buses are not always cleaned properly, they are old and run down and need improving.
- timetables for buses provided in written schedules are only available from bus drivers en-route, drivers do not always have sufficient copies for commuters.
- there is no internet site providing timetable information for all public transport services.
- there are not sufficient bus services on weekends and public holidays.
- there is insufficient scheduling of connecting / complimentary services for some areas within the region.
- train and bus services have been reported to be late, absent or not meeting current timetables, this suggests that driver salaries may be insufficient.
- there is some stigma / perception that public transport is used primarily by the poor or disadvantaged within the community.
- there appears to be a lack of pride for the environmental benefits of use and provision of public transport by commuters and staff.

Other observations and ideas:

I have developed the theory that to achieve greater use of the public transport system, we must provide greater incentive by identifying and replacing the need to use individual vehicles for transport. This would involve assessing our current vehicle useage patterns and identifying those habits which could be changed for the use of public transport.

We are currently adapted to the convenience of having a private vehicle to make any short, local and intra-state journeys. Most people would not dream of abandoning their private vehicles to use the public transport network. There are many reasons for this including:

- perceived unreliability of public transport services
- perceived inconvenience of having to plan travel more carefully and access and wait for services

- perceived lack of hygiene and cleanliness of public transport vehicles
- prestige and convenience of using a private vehicle to conduct shopping and short trips
- inconvenience of the limitation on personal luggage which can be carried during a journey
- perceived greater personal safety for using a private vehicle

Proposed Solutions:

1. Maintain existing services and timetables.
2. Provide for increased services to cover the needs of all user groups, particularly at peak travel times, in all areas and to allow for development of complimentary timetabling / scheduling.
3. Improve the professional profile and image of the public transport system:

Corporate

- ⇒ Develop a single agency or company to oversee and manage all public transport services within the region, including buses and trains
- ⇒ Provide centrally located shop fronts for inquiries and timetable information and purchase of tickets and travel passes in addition to existing information and ticketing services

Human Resources

- ⇒ Conduct communications and customer service skills training for staff
- ⇒ Provide uniforms, good pay rates, incentives and privileges to staff such as health care plans with gym memberships, stress management classes, self-development courses and leadership programs
- ⇒ Develop a “public transport service guarantee” based on an incentive program aiming to increase useage of the public transport network by ensuring timeliness of services and efficiency; assign teams within the company which can

compete for reward incentives by achieving efficiency of their services ie.meeting schedules and timetables

Infrastructure and Resources

- ⇒ Provide for new and luxury-style vehicles (buses)
- ⇒ Conduct an extensive refurbishment of trains and buses currently in service
- ⇒ Conduct refurbishment, cleaning, painting / etc. of trains and buses to incorporate new corporate logos including painting of train stations, bus stations and interchanges
- ⇒ Increase services available on trains and buses; food machines, advertising, media

Promotions

- ⇒ Conduct extensive advertising campaigns for promotion of new and revised services with a focus on reducing environmental pressure and impacts to coastal infrastructure
- ⇒ Provide for regular cleaning of buses and trains and develop a 'public transport vehicle standard' and guarantee
- ⇒ Provide for on-line access to timetable and journey planning services and company information including environmental efficiency information, economic efficiency and benefits, information on sister agencies within Australia and other countries with developing public transport services and a vision for the public transport future
- ⇒ Provide a "corporate transport service" for company functions and conferences

4. Develop suitable infrastructure; bus interchanges, bus lanes, cycleways, footpaths

Other:

Design alternative travel strategies which meet consumer activity needs:

- ⇒ conduct an assessment of current private vehicle useage patterns within the Central Coast
- ⇒ provide public transport options for specific events; public, private, community and cultural
- ⇒ conduct local promotional marketing for the public transport service and its restructure
- ⇒ encourage corporate car pooling
- ⇒ provide baggage and luggage holding services within the transport network; lockers at train stations, workplaces, on-board public transport vehicles ie. buses
- ⇒ plan for the development of an extensive network of cycleways, over-passes and footpaths - particularly footpaths
- ⇒ ensure there is sufficient infrastructure (footpaths and cycleways) available for commuters to use alternatives to private vehicles for access to popular areas within the Central Coast ie. Terrigal, Gosford, The Entrance, Woy Woy
- ⇒ provide consumer incentives for use of the public transport network
- ⇒ provide a consumer feedback service

- ⇒ develop a “public transport services plan” detailing existing timetables and services rationale, available for public comment and review within a given timeframe ie.6-12months

- ⇒ allow for public input to services design ie. routes and timetables
- ⇒ allow for a “hail & ride” option for buses for all services
- ⇒ conduct education and advertising campaigns to detail how commuters can change their habits from use of private vehicles towards use of public transport

Recommendations:

Based on the ideas and information provided in this submission, it is my recommendation that the Committee on Public Works develop a radical re-development program for the public transport system within the Central Coast, NSW and gain funding to enact the above solutions within a structured strategic management plan.

Your sincerely

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