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CRITICAL TRANSPORT INFRASTRUCTURE SUPPORTING THE WESTERN SYDNEY INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT AND WESTERN SYDNEY AEROTROPOLIS

Organisation: BusNSW

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Inquiry into critical transport infrastructure supporting the Western Sydney International Airport and Western Sydney Aerotropolis

Submission by BusNSW – 31 March 2024

Introduction

BusNSW is the peak body for the NSW bus and coach industry. Our members provide essential services and are a key interface with the travelling public. BusNSW's mission is to foster the efficient and sustainable growth of public transport in NSW, and to promote the benefits of bus and coach travel.

Buses play a vital role in delivering public transport in NSW and, during 2023, carried more than 229 million passengers. This represents approximately 40 percent of total public transport patronage.

BusNSW members provide bus services under *Transport for NSW* contracts in Sydney metropolitan, outer-metropolitan, and rural and regional areas. This includes bus services that operate in Western Sydney. In addition to bus services, BusNSW members also provide "non-contracted" services in the *Long Distance, Tourist and Charter* (LDTC) sector.

Executive Summary

The areas immediately around the new *Western Sydney International Airport* (WSIA) are some of the most transport disadvantaged in Sydney. Many areas have no access to trains or light rail, with bus services the sole public transport option. Despite this, bus services in many of these areas are infrequent, and service coverage is poor. It is imperative that this situation be rectified well in advance of the Airport's opening.

While buses may be the only public transport option currently open to planners in many areas of West and South-West Sydney, this can have its advantages. The provision of rail services requires extensive planning and investment and offers limited flexibility. By contrast, the provision of bus services is fast, affordable, and adaptable to changing community needs. It can fill the current needs gap and evolve as required to service a burgeoning population. In short, the ability of buses to operate at short notice along a myriad of routes and with a minimum of infrastructure spending, and their capacity to carry a variable passenger load make buses an ideal solution for the range of transport needs of the new Aerotropolis.

BusNSW recommends the development of frequent shuttle services, supported by dedicated bus lanes and transit corridors, to connect major residential and commercial hubs such as Liverpool, Campbelltown and Penrith, to the airport. This will ensure that travellers and commuters have convenient and reliable options for reaching the airport, reducing the reliance on personal vehicles and minimising traffic congestion around the airport and commercial hubs.

BusNSW further recommends the development of rapid bus services interconnected with local bus and shuttle services. This approach would provide the airport and surrounding areas with efficient public transportation options, enhancing connectivity, accessibility, and mobility.

While commuter ease is clearly a priority, it is important that tourists and international travellers are not forgotten. For that reason, it is essential that the new airport incorporates infrastructure for buses and coaches providing long distance, tourist and charter services that provide a seamless transfer between the airport and destinations such as hotels, tourist attractions and regional centres. Such infrastructure should include bus and coach layover facilities with amenities such as waiting areas, restrooms, ticketing counters, and information displays. Planning for these initiatives needs to commence now. This will ensure a positive passenger experience and provide a welcoming environment for new arrivals to Australia.

In addition, given the move to sustainable transport technologies, infrastructure should consider the provision of charging stations to maintain the operation of zero emission vehicles.

More detailed information on these and other initiatives are outlined below, which we have divided into the six subject areas identified by the Committee's Terms of Reference; namely:

a) Options for Transport Infrastructure
b) Funding of Transport Infrastructure
c) Impacts of Employment Movements in West and Southwest Sydney
d) Integration with existing Transport Infrastructure
e) Reducing Road Usage around the Airport and surrounding regions
f) Other Related Matters.

a) Analysis of Options for Transport Infrastructure:

Public transport infrastructure associated with the new WSIA needs to consider, both bus services to and from the airport and employment hubs (regular passenger services), as well as long distance, tourist and charter services needed to provide a seamless transition for individuals and groups.

Regular Passenger Services:

Currently, areas in the vicinity of the new WSIA are poorly serviced by public transport. This is the legacy of "traditional" planning approaches whereby new residential areas of Sydney are built before appropriate public transport is developed. This approach has led to developments lacking the infrastructure required to meet future public transport needs. With the advent of the new Airport, there is a need for a fundamental shift away from this approach, with infrastructure, including for future public transport, to be built concurrently with development in and around the new Airport.

Whilst the WSIA will be connected to St Mary's by a single metro line, there is a lack of train and light rail in other areas around the airport (unlike Kingsford Smith Airport and areas in Sydney's East). However, this opens the way for more innovative uses of bus services. In particular, the introduction of *Bus Rapid Transit* (BRT) interconnected with local bus services would provide residents in Sydney's west with improved and efficient public transportation options, enhancing connectivity, accessibility and mobility. BRT is a high-capacity public transportation system that combines the efficiency of light rail with the flexibility and cost-effectiveness of buses. It differs from regular bus services by featuring dedicated lanes, priority signalling, modern stations, and frequent service, offering faster and more reliable travel for passengers.

Guidelines and policies for the development of new streets and roads around the WSIA require bus priority measures at the outset. This includes a plan for the *Bus Rapid Transit* routes to ensure people in nearby areas who work at the new airport have viable public transport options. Liverpool and other parts of Western Sydney will simply be too far from the Metro Rail (Western Sydney Airport Line) to be able to consider it as an alternative. Dedicated bus lanes and transit corridors connecting major residential and commercial hubs to the airport are essential. Dedicated bus lanes can separate buses from general traffic, reduce congestion and improve travel times for commuters and other passengers to and from the airport.

Other infrastructure supporting bus use, such as bus shelters, signage, and priority signalling systems will also support the reliability and attractiveness of bus services, attracting more riders and reducing reliance on private vehicles. By prioritising investments in bus infrastructure in and around the airport, a more sustainable and accessible transportation network can be developed that serves the needs of communities across Western Sydney.

Introducing bus services from key transport interchanges, such as Campbelltown, Liverpool, and Penrith, to the airport will enhance connectivity and accessibility for passengers, reducing the reliance on personal vehicles and minimising traffic congestion. BusNSW notes that the NSW Government's 2023-24 budget included $302.7 million to be reserved for the *Western Sydney Rapid Bus Network*. BusNSW understands that a funding gap still exists to realise the desired permanent rapid bus solution for Western Sydney Airport

BusNSW also acknowledges Liverpool Council's proposed project, the *Fifteenth Avenue Smart Transit* (FAST) Corridor, which is a visionary project to deliver a high quality public transport link between the Liverpool CBD and WSIA. Under the *Western Sydney City Deal*, the NSW Government has committed to a rapid bus connection between the Airport, the new Aerotropolis and Liverpool's CBD in time for the airport's opening in 2026. The corridor is to include a four-lane urban road, new streetscape, including footpaths, cycleways, bus bays, signage and line marking as well as street lighting.

Long Distance, Tourist and Charter Services:

In addition to infrastructure for regular passenger services, infrastructure to support a network of long distance, tourist and charter services catering to both domestic and international travellers is essential. The new WSIA will need to be serviced by buses and coaches carrying passengers to and from Central Sydney and other tourist destinations in Greater Sydney and regional NSW. Planning for these coach services needs to start now.

The provision of parking for buses and coaches at the new Airport will be critical and involves the construction of bus and coach terminals equipped with modern facilities for passengers and drivers. Modern terminals with amenities such as waiting areas, restrooms, ticketing counters, and information displays will enhance the overall passenger experience. Infrastructure should allow passengers with disabilities to easily access buses and coaches and be supported by effective wayfinding signage.

There is a need for close collaboration between the airport authorities, tourism agencies and operators (e.g. via BusNSW) to ensure that bus and coach services are integrated into airport travel packages. By partnering with coach operators and tourism agencies, bus and coach services can be incorporated into tourist itineraries, promoting the use of high capacity vehicles and enhancing the overall visitor experience of Australia.

b) Funding of Transport Infrastructure:

The *Western Parkland City* in which the new Aerotropolis is situated will account for over 20 per cent of NSW's population growth by 2036, with nearly 1.39 million people. To keep pace with this growth, the *Western Parkland City* is likely to require 15-30 per cent of the NSW infrastructure spend – the equivalent of $60 billion – $120 billion in today's terms – over the next 15 years[1][1].

Current demand for public transport in Western Sydney is substantial, with many commuters relying on it for daily travel. Anticipated population growth means that demand is likely to increase. Securing government funding is critical to meet future demand, improve current experiences and encourage uptake. Bus services need to be expanded and improved.

Both the public and private sectors have roles to play in improving public transport in Western Sydney. State Governments provide the funding to enable public transport (including buses) to operate. The NSW Government contracts private public transport providers (bus, ferry and light rail) or provides services directly (Sydney Trains, NSW Trains). Without appropriate state funding, public transport would cease to function.

Local Government also plays a vital role. Generally, buses travel on roads owned and managed by local councils. Similarly, some of the interchanges, bus stops and other infrastructure used by buses are owned and managed by local government. Often, local councils lack the funds to invest in infrastructure to the extent required, and such public transport investment competes with other priorities in local government budgets. Greater financial assistance is needed from both federal and state governments to allow councils to fulfil their transport infrastructure mandate. This is particularly the case for a major new development like the Western Sydney Aerotropolis.

Public-private partnerships (PPPs) may offer an opportunity to leverage private sector investment and expertise in delivering transportation infrastructure in and around the airport. Through PPP arrangements, private companies can contribute capital investment, technology solutions, and operational efficiencies, while governments provide regulatory oversight, land acquisition, and long-term planning. Collaborating with private sector partners can accelerate project timelines, mitigate financial risks, and enhance the overall quality of bus services, ultimately benefiting commuters and the broader community.

Finally, implementing user-based funding mechanisms, such as tolls and/or parking charges, may offer a sustainable financing solution to supplement public funding for transport infrastructure around the airport. Implementing charges would require careful planning and consideration of equity, affordability, and potential impacts on disadvantaged communities, particularly given the socio-economic disadvantages suffered by some population centres in the vicinity of the airport.

There is a need to consider the housing of buses required to provide regular passenger services to and from the Western Sydney International Airport, particularly as service frequency and the number of buses required increases. BusNSW understands that funding has been made available to secure land for a future Zero Emission Bus Depot as part of the Western Sydney Rapid Bus network. The NSW Bus Industry Taskforce recently recommended that *Transport for NSW* immediately commence the development of a Long-Term Depot Strategy for Sydney.

[1] [1] Western Sydney Parkland City Blueprint, Oct 2022, p.2

c) Impacts of Employment Movements:

The areas around the planned Western Sydney Airport are currently among the most transport disadvantaged in Sydney, with limited or no rail connections. As noted in the First Report by the *NSW Bus Industry Taskforce*,

"In large parts of west and south-west Sydney... buses are the only available form of public transport – and service coverage and frequency are poor."[12]

Ironically, it is these areas of Sydney that are experiencing the greatest population increase and which are the most socioeconomically disadvantaged, that have the poorest public transport access. In areas of Sydney's Greater West, few bus routes operate more than 45 services per day and many others have less than 12-hour coverage over the course of a day.

By contrast, over two thirds of Greater Sydney's bus patronage occur in the area defined as the *Easter Harbour City* (from Hornsby in the north, through the Sydney CBD, Inner West and Sydney Airport precinct to Sutherland in the south). These areas of Sydney which are the most established and affluent often have bus routes with upwards of 200 services per day, including services with all-day and overnight coverage.[2]

In short, there is a huge discrepancy in the availability and accessibility of public transport between Sydney's east and west. Careful planning is required to ensure that an effective public transport network supports the Western Sydney Aerotropolis and allows workers to take advantage of new employment opportunities.

The construction and operation of the airport and Aerotropolis will generate a substantial number of job opportunities across various sectors, including aviation, logistics, hospitality, and retail. With the influx of these new businesses, industries, and workforce, it is imperative to anticipate and address the transportation needs of employees commuting to and from their workplaces. Addressing the need for reliable and efficient bus services to transport workers is crucial for ensuring seamless connectivity and reducing reliance on private car travel and parking.

These new bus routes and timetables need to align with the needs and preferences of employees, such as early morning and late-night services to accommodate shift workers, express routes to major employment centres, and integrated airport shuttle services. By tailoring bus services in collaboration with local businesses and industries, TfNSW can enhance the efficiency, effectiveness, and uptake of public transport, ultimately contributing to a more sustainable and inclusive transportation system in Western and Southwestern Sydney.

Moreover, implementing measures such as real-time tracking, scheduling, and passenger information systems can improve service reliability, reduce waiting times, and enhance the overall passenger experience, ultimately encouraging more commuters to choose buses over private cars in this growing area of Sydney.

Recognising the significant employment movements expected in Western and Southwestern suburbs of Sydney due to the development of the airport and Aerotropolis is essential and needs to occur now. Collaborating with local businesses and industries to tailor bus services to meet the specific needs of new workers is essential for optimising workforce mobility and accessibility.

[2] NSW Bus Industry Taskforce First Report, July 2023, p.12

d) Integration with Existing Transport Infrastructure:

Seamless integration of bus and coach services with existing rail and road networks is essential for creating a comprehensive and efficient transportation system that meets the diverse needs of commuters and travellers to and from the airport. One approach to achieve this is through the development of integrated transportation hubs and interchanges, located at key transit points where rail, bus, and coach services intersect. These hubs should be designed to facilitate smooth transfers between modes, with amenities such as clear signage, accessible pathways, and integrated ticketing systems to streamline the passenger experience.

Prioritisation of bus lanes and infrastructure upgrades will play a pivotal role in enhancing the efficiency and reliability of bus and coach services to and from the new airport. Dedicated bus lanes along congested corridors provide priority access for public transportation, reducing travel times and improving service reliability. Infrastructure upgrades such as *Bus Rapid Transit* (BRT) systems with dedicated lanes, enhanced stations, and high-frequency services will offer fast, efficient, and high-capacity transit options. By reallocating road space and implementing traffic signal priority systems, buses and coaches can move more freely through traffic, minimising delays and improving overall travel efficiency.

Implementation of *Intelligent Transport Systems* (ITS) will further enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of traffic management and bus operations. By leveraging advanced technologies such as sensors, cameras, and predictive analytics, ITS enables real-time monitoring of traffic flow, congestion, and incidents, facilitating dynamic adjustments to traffic signals and route planning. Predictive modelling and data analytics can forecast traffic patterns and demand fluctuations, allowing for proactive planning and resource allocation. Dynamic routing and scheduling algorithms adjust bus routes and frequencies in response to changing road and traffic conditions, optimising resource utilisation and maximising service reliability.

Additionally, passenger information systems provide real-time updates on bus schedules, routes, and service status, empowering passengers to make informed travel decisions and reducing uncertainty and anxiety associated with waiting times and delays. Overall, the implementation of ITS in and around the airport will enhance the efficiency, reliability, and passenger experience of bus and coach services, contributing to a more seamless and integrated transportation network.

Buses stand out among mass transit options due to their inherent flexibility. Unlike fixed modes such as rail and light rail, buses can be readily redeployed to adapt to evolving land use and people movement needs. Consequently, they are often the primary solution during planned or unforeseen disruptions in the broader transport network. They step in to substitute trains during track maintenance, bolster services for significant events, and assist in emergency situations when other services are suspended.

A new Sydney Metro will become the transport spine for Greater Western Sydney, connecting communities and travellers with the new Western Sydney International Airport and the growing region. It is critical that the six new metro stations have infrastructure to support the operation of bus services to replace Sydney Metro services when maintenance is required or due to unplanned events. The infrastructure should allow buses to pick-up and set-down passengers in close proximity to the metro stations and have parking available for standby buses to layover.

e) Reducing Road Usage:

Promotion of bus services as a sustainable alternative to private car usage is crucial for the new Aerotropolis. Marketing campaigns emphasising the environmental advantages of bus travel, along with its affordability and convenience, can raise awareness and shift attitudes toward these more sustainable modes of transportation. Additionally, providing incentives such as discounted fares, loyalty programs, and promotional offers can further incentivise individuals to choose buses as their preferred mode of travel, ultimately reducing reliance on private vehicles and mitigating the negative impacts of car dependency on the environment and public infrastructure.

The establishment of park-and-ride facilities can also act to encourage the use of public transport, particularly in areas with limited parking availability and high traffic congestion. By providing secure parking spaces at strategic locations near transit hubs and major employment centres, park-and-ride facilities enable commuters to conveniently park their cars and transfer to buses for the remainder of their journey. This not only reduces the number of cars on the road but alleviates parking pressures around the airport terminal.

Collaboration with local authorities to develop strategies for reducing road congestion around the airport and surrounding areas will be essential for improving overall traffic flow and enhancing the efficiency of transport networks. This collaboration should involve the development of a comprehensive traffic management plan that addresses congestion hotspots, optimises road infrastructure, and prioritises the movement of buses and other public transit vehicles.

By implementing measures such as traffic signal synchronisation, lane management strategies, and intelligent transportation systems, *Transport for NSW* can streamline traffic flow and minimise delays for both commuters and freight traffic. Additionally, promoting transportation modes such as *Bus Rapid Transit* (BRT) systems and pedestrian-friendly infrastructure can further reduce dependence on private cars and alleviate pressure on road networks. By working closely with stakeholders and leveraging data-driven approaches, authorities can develop tailored solutions to address specific congestion challenges around the airport and surrounding areas, ultimately improving overall mobility and accessibility for residents and visitors alike.

f) Other Related Matters

In terms of reducing congestion and encouraging public transport in and around the new airport, the provision of adequate parking spaces and facilities for bus and coach layovers will be essential. Layover facilities serve as temporary resting areas for buses and coaches between scheduled trips, allowing drivers to take breaks, perform vehicle checks, and conduct routine maintenance tasks. By ensuring the availability of sufficient bus parking facilities equipped with amenities such as restrooms and passenger waiting areas, the new airport can enhance the comfort and convenience of drivers and passengers alike. Designated layover areas should be strategically located near transportation hubs, transit terminals, and major routes to minimise travel disruptions and optimise operational efficiency.

Integration of amenities for drivers is required to facilitate effective fatigue management and compliance with work and rest hours under the *Heavy Vehicle National Law*. Layover facilities should include comfortable rest areas furnished with seating, rest areas, and utilities for meal preparation. Access to amenities such as toilets, showers, and cooking facilities can help alleviate stress and promote relaxation during layovers, ultimately enhancing driver performance and passenger satisfaction.

The introduction of recharging and refuelling stations for zero emission vehicles, can provide benefits for operators. By supporting the use of zero emission vehicles, recharging and refuelling stations reduce the WSIA environmental impact and ensures that passengers do not experience any unexpected interruptions to services due to battery depletion. This will allow buses and coaches travelling long distances to pick up passengers to charge batteries prior to a return journey. In the planning phase, it's also prudent to contemplate future prospects for operators utilising buses and coaches powered by hydrogen fuel cells to access hydrogen at the WSIA.

Conclusion:

The demand for buses and coaches within and around the Aerotropolis is paramount, especially considering that buses currently represent the primary mode of public transportation across significant parts of Western Sydney. Given this context, buses emerge as not only the most expedient but also the most efficient means of establishing public transport to bolster the new airport's operations.

Moreover, buses and coaches will serve as essential conduits for diverse travel needs, catering to both individuals and groups seeking long distance, tourist, and charter services. Their versatility and accessibility render them vital components in facilitating seamless connectivity and enhancing the overall transport experience for residents, commuters, and visitors alike.

Recognising the pivotal role of transport infrastructure in the success of the Western Sydney International Airport and its accompanying Aerotropolis, proactive investment in critical transport networks becomes imperative. Early commitment to developing the necessary infrastructure for a well-connected and accessible transportation system will not only accommodate the airport's anticipated growth but also elevate the quality of travel for passengers and tourists, thereby fostering sustainable development and economic prosperity in the region.