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GPSC's

Ms Rachel Callinan  
Director  
General Purpose Standing Committee No.3  
Parliament House  
Macquarie Street  
Sydney  
NSW 2000

Dear Ms Callinan

I refer to your letter requesting information on the questions on notice arising from the inquiry into the health impacts of air pollution in the Sydney Basin. Attached is the RTA response to the questions on notice. Also attached is a correction to the transcript of my evidence.

If RTA can be of further assistance in this matter, please contact Mr Michael Crowley, Manager Environmental Policy, on 9218 6420.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Les Wielinga'.

Les Wielinga  
Chief Executive

06.09.06



# Inquiry into Health Impacts of Air Pollution in the Sydney Basin

## RTA's Response to the Questions on Notice

1. Action for Air notes that behavioural change by motorists is as important as technological change of motor vehicles and fuels in reducing air pollution caused by motor vehicles. How has the Government promoted behavioural change by road users, including by encouraging road users to take fewer and shorter trips by car?

The RTA's contribution to encouraging road users to take fewer and shorter trips and promote behavioural change include:

- Encouraging the use of public transport by improving service quality and reliability through measures such as bus priority. Bus priority measures improve the efficiency of bus operations and include Bus Lanes, Transit Ways, priority traffic signals and bus bays along bus corridors. The NSW Treasury has allocated an additional \$90 million to RTA's budget over the three fiscal years (2005-06, 2007-08) to implement bus priority measures in addition to RTA's \$15 million annual bus priority budget.
- Reducing car dependency by encouraging teleworking, cycling, walking and public transport through the development of transport access guides, cycleway maps and safe cycling resources. The RTA provides assistance to government agencies and businesses on teleworking and supports staff telecentres in Gosford and Penrith.
- Identifying opportunities to improve existing facilities and services for sustainable modes such as cycling proficiency training, parking management for bicycles and cars, and fleet management for bicycles and motor vehicles.
- Greater use of E-commerce for doing business with the RTA that enables the community to access services on-line and therefore reducing trips.
- Improvements to the bike network and actively promoting cycling.
- Initiatives to improve pedestrian access. The RTA pursued a number of infrastructure projects to improve pedestrian access and safety and assisted Councils prepare Pedestrian Access and Mobility Plans (PAMP's) across the State. Across the State 72 PAMPs have been developed, including seven completed during 2005-06.

2. What will be the impact of the Government's decision to relocate container port facilities from Sydney Harbour to Port Kembla on air pollutants from trucks in the Sydney Basin?

The NSW Government's Port Growth Plan announced in October 2003 envisaged the relocation of container and car import trade from Sydney Harbour to Port Kembla. Sydney Harbour currently handles about 50,000 containers (Twenty Foot Equivalent Unit TEU's) and about 180,000 imported cars per annum. By 2020 car imports would have grown to about 250,000 per annum.

This relocation of trade to Port Kembla will remove about 170,000 truck movements from the Glebe Island/White Bay area of Sydney per annum and reduce local air pollution in this area. The overall impact of this initiative on air quality across the Greater Metropolitan Region is affected by a wide range of factors, including the implementation of future vehicle and fuel standards.

3. How does the Conditions of Approval process work in respect to privately financed infrastructure, such as road tunnels? Has the RTA put in place additional safeguards to ensure that air quality issues are adequately addressed as part of the environmental assessment process for privately financed projects?

The RTA is the proponent for all major road projects including privately funded and operated motorways and prepares an environmental assessment for each project. The Department of Planning in consultation with relevant agencies review assessments of major projects that have the potential to significantly affect the environment. The Minister for Planning has an approval role for such projects under Part 3A of the EP&A Act and can attach conditions to any approval issued.

The Minister for Planning's approval is issued to the RTA and it is responsible for ensuring compliance with the conditions of approval. During the construction tendering process the RTA establishes respective responsibilities for ensuring compliance with the conditions of approval between the RTA and the private sector entity responsible for construction/operation. This process is used to ensure that all conditions of approval will be met in the implementation of the project.

4. Can you advise the Committee of the environmental impact assessment process for major projects for which the RTA is the proponent? How does the environmental assessment process account for air quality issues, including the health impacts of air pollution?

An environmental impact assessment is undertaken for all RTA projects from major development works to routine maintenance to ensure that all environmental impacts are considered and assessed in accordance with the NSW Environmental Planning and Assessment (EP&A) Act 1979 and the Commonwealth Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act.

The RTA's internal guidelines, *Environmental Impact Assessment Policy, Guidelines and Procedures* detail the RTA's assessment process. For major projects where the RTA considers that the environmental impacts of a proposal are likely to be significant, an environmental assessment under Part 3A of the EP&A Act is undertaken.

The key elements of an environmental assessment are:

- The issuing of environmental assessment requirements by the Director-General of the Department of Planning
- Consultation with other agencies such as the Department of Environment and Conservation and Councils
- Environmental investigations, assessment of impacts and identification of appropriate management and mitigation measures to minimise impacts in accordance with the Director General's requirements
- Public exhibition of the documented environmental assessment
- Response by the proponent to issues raised during public exhibition
- Assessment of the project by the Department of Planning
- Decision whether to approve (with or without conditions) or not approve by the Minister for Planning

The air quality assessment would be considered as part of the environmental assessment. Specific requirements for the assessment, including air quality, are issued by the Director General of the Department of Planning. The Department of Planning generally consults with relevant agencies in

formulating the specific requirements. An assessment of the likely health effects of air quality impacts associated with the proposal is included as part of the air quality assessment.

#### **5. What role does the RTA have on monitoring compliance with the Conditions of Approval for major projects?**

The RTA as the proponent of a project is responsible for ensuring that the Conditions of Approval are implemented and compliance with the conditions is met. The RTA ensures that there are appropriate processes and procedures in place for monitoring compliance with the Conditions.

Project approvals normally include a condition(s) requiring the proponent to submit a compliance report to the Department of Planning at various stages during the development of a proposal (eg prior to construction and prior to commencing operations) advising how the conditions of approval has been met.

#### **6. Are there any mechanisms available for changing the Conditions of Approval in light of the emerging air quality issues?**

The conditions of approval for a project are set when the project is approved by the Minister for Planning. A key principal of planning legislation is that once a planning approval is provided the proponent has certainty regarding the requirements for the project. This enables a proponent to determine whether to proceed with the project based on approval conditions and consequently enter into contracts for the delivery of the project. Changes to conditions of approval have the potential to generate significant costs due to the need to vary contracts and therefore would create potential liabilities for the government.

7. In 2002, the EPA indicated that it was concerned about air quality in the Lane Cove tunnel: 'air quality remains the principal operational phase environmental concern. The EPA is unable to assess the predicted air quality impacts in the absence of 'outstanding information requirements'. Regardless of the EPA's concerns, Michael Najem, General Manager of the RTA's legal branch, advised the environmental manager to proceed with construction: 'The fact that the EPA is still not satisfied with the information provided by the RTA on what are clearly operational issues, is no basis for delaying the approval process under Part 5'.

#### **8. On what basis does the RTA override the expert advice of the EPA and NSW Health in relation to air quality and health impacts of infrastructure projects such as Lane Cove tunnel?**

The RTA does not override expert advice of EPA or NSW Health in relation to air quality and health impact of infrastructure projects. The advice referred to in the question is an extract from the legal advice. This advice was clarifying EPA's role under the EP&A Act in the review of RTA's Representations Report for the Lane Cove tunnel project. The advice was only one source of input to the decision to be made by the Chief Executive of the RTA to seek approval from the Planning Minister in respect of the Lane Cove tunnel project.

The additional information requested by the EPA, as part of the planning approval process, was subsequently provided by the RTA and the responses were included in the Director General's report.

**9. Why will regular portal emissions from the M5 East tunnel be permitted? If so, when will these commence?**

The RTA is required to comply with the conditions of approval for the operation of the M5 East tunnel. Increased dispersion from the portals would be subject to planning approval. The announcement of the M5 East air quality improvement plan by the Minister for Roads June 2006 included a proposal to release emissions from the tunnel portal for management of in-tunnel haze. A modification to the conditions of approval will be sought from the Department of Planning for the proposal. As part of this process an environment impact assessment will be prepared and will be exhibited for public comment.

**10. Has the RTA monitored air quality at the tunnel portals of the Cross City tunnel? If not, why not? If yes, why has such data not been publicly available?**

The Cross City tunnel has four separate monitoring stations at ground level and elevated locations for air quality monitoring in accordance with the requirements of the Conditions of Approval. Real time air quality monitoring information in addition to information for previous hours, weeks and months is available on the Cross City tunnel website. Portal emissions from the Cross City tunnel are not permitted by the project Conditions of Approval except under certain prescribed conditions.

**11. Given that cars emit more exhaust fumes in stop-start traffic than at high speeds, what measures is the RTA taking to ensure that there is less congestion and therefore less exhaust fumes in Sydney?**

The RTA is pursuing a range of measures to reduce both the growth in congestion and vehicle emissions in Sydney. These measures are aimed at giving people across Sydney more travel choices and reducing reliance on driving, and include policies and programs to support the use of the road network for public transport, walking and cycling.

Key action areas for the RTA include the following:

- Providing bus facilities including transitways, bus lanes and other bus priority facilities, as part of the joint RTA / Ministry of Transport Strategic Bus Corridors program.
- Implementing cycling and walking programs including promotion, infrastructure and education.
- Implementing travel demand management programs such as teleworking, telecentres, Transport Access Guides for major developments, mobility management, and encouragement of car pooling and public transport use. The NSW Department of Planning are also running a "TravelSmart" program for NSW.
- Integrated land use and transport planning – including: working with other agencies (such as the Growth Centres Commission and local councils) and major developers to promote urban design outcomes which make it easier for new suburbs' residents and visitors to walk, cycle and use public transport; with the Department of Planning, producing related resources such as *Planning Guidelines for Walking and Cycling*, and supporting demonstration projects for public transport-oriented developments along major roads.
- Promoting the efficient operation of the road network through the activities of the Transport Management Centre, including incident management and use of the Sydney Coordinated Adaptive Traffic Signals (SCATS) suite of systems; and through initiatives to encourage the progressive take-up of electronic tolling technology.
- When planning road infrastructure improvements, giving appropriate priority to the alleviation of the impacts of urban congestion on the movement of people and goods.

- Developing an orbital road network to reduce stop-start travel.
- Promoting the use of an electronic tag system on tollways.

The RTA is also a member of the Urban Congestion Management Working Group of the Standing Committee on Transport that is preparing a cross-jurisdictional report for the Coalition of Australian Governments (COAG) Urban Congestion Review. COAG has requested the completion of this review by February 2007.

## 12. What was the basis for the removal of the EPA Monitoring Station from the highly polluted Sydney CBD, prior to the opening of the Cross City tunnel?

This is a matter for the Department of Environment and Conservation.

## How many vehicles in the RTA fleet?

Currently, the size and composition of the RTA light fleet includes 23 hybrids, 457 passenger vehicles, 1222 commercial vehicles (utes, 2 or 4 WD, vans) and 1 motor bike. This is a total of 1703 light vehicles.

Currently, there are 676 plant items and 619 trucks in the RTA fleet. This is a total of 1295 heavy vehicles.