

Submission  
No 164

## THE TRANSPORT NEEDS OF SYDNEY'S NORTH-WEST SECTOR

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Partially Confidential

RECEIVED

15 OCT 2008

Dear Hon. Jenny Gardiner MLC,

**SUBJECT: Transport in the Shire of Baulkham Hills**

The Shire of Baulkham Hills is a thriving area for many. Since the 1980s, it has transformed itself from a 'hillbilly' area to presenting itself as the 'centre stage' for Sydney's future. Many enjoy and agree with its pleasant natural surrounds and developed social and lifestyle facilities and activities, which would adequately explain the population explosion in the area in recent years. It is also attractive for commercial entities. Businesses and companies have sought refuge from crippling rents and stifling congestion and competition in the City of Sydney and have relocated to modern, purpose-built commercial precincts such as Norwest Business Park and the Castle Hill 'Light Industries' Area. This point can be enacted with the relocation of important, national corporations to Norwest Business Park such as Woolworths Limited.

It seems ideal. It seems that the Baulkham Hills Shire is a modern, thriving area of Sydney where its inhabitants may grow, work and play with freedom and without commuting ridiculous distances to the city, which offers nothing but organised misery and chaos.

It is not.

Although the area is prospering with growth, its transport system is the only piece of infrastructure that is acutely crippling and hampering the area of future growth and development. It has received virtually no physical attention for decades and is consistently 'swept under the carpet' by numerous State and Commonwealth Governments. Only the local Council has assumed physical interest in the necessary subject in recent years by the implementation of minor projects. This is to be understood considering the limited amount of funds available to the Council compared to the two other tiers of Government. All levels of Government obtain certain responsibilities and obligations to work efficiently with one another to provide sensible and successful transport infrastructure to the Shire, and indeed, any area in Australia. This has not occurred, which explains why all three levels of Government have a messy transport débacle on their hands. Any initiatives that are conjectured to provide relief, suffer from limited public consultation, incompatibility for future improvements/modifications and assessment of the consequential effects of the area.

Through observations, one may conclude that the planned projects for the area appear to be exclusively to generate political profit and popularity, rather than improving operations. Residents and workers in the area simply could not care any less about politics and will contribute nothing to a party's popularity until sensible initiatives are completed. Poorly planned and consulted public or public/private projects riddled with bureaucracy and inefficiency are expensive and nearly always create problems somewhere else on the network where further attention will be required. Some politicians never seem to understand this simple philosophy.

Being a fifteen-year-old student in Carlingford, to travel around this area or into other areas, I am heavily reliant on public transport or my own transport such as walking or cycling. There are only so many places you may expect parents to transport one. Through personal experience, research and attention in the press, it is easy to identify areas and bottlenecks in desperate need of attention and development.

Firstly, the Carlingford railway line. Although it does not initially service much of the Baulkham Hills Shire, it remains significant as many workers drive or catch a bus to Carlingford Station and travel to the city by rail. RailCorp chiefs, managers and planners have continually allocated this single-track branch line as a low priority when the CityRail network is subject to review or reform. The line obtains the potential to carry large volumes of commuters, especially in the peak periods, to or from the lower Baulkham Hills and upper Parramatta Council areas.

Except for one service, a four-car (usually non air-conditioned and dirty) train runs backwards and forwards between Carlingford and Clyde. If commuters wish to travel further than the terminus of Clyde (e.g. if they wish to travel to Strathfield, City, North Sydney etc.) it usually entails a hike up a flight of stairs to an aerial concourse and then down another flight of stairs to the relevant platform where an Eastbound connecting service is usually 5-10 minutes away. The interchange at Clyde can be frustrating, particularly in peak periods, as the maximum number of trains stopping at Clyde is around two per hour.

Clyde Station is particularly inconvenient for those who are physically impaired, infirm, those with bicycles or luggage as it obtains no lifts and no ramps to/from platforms. If one cannot climb stairs, they must await for an agonisingly slow stairlift for wheelchairs to transport them to the concourse and then another to the respective platform if necessary. By the time these movements are completed, the individual/s has probably missed their connection and is obligated to endure a lengthy wait for the next service to pause at the 'unimportant' station of Clyde. The stairlifts always require assistance from the Stationmaster.

The only exceptional service for the Carlingford line is the 7:01am from Carlingford in the morning weekday peak. After collecting passengers at the Carlingford line stations (including Clyde), the four car service continues to Central with its 'sardine packed' occupants. A few 'wafer thick' individuals are permitted to emerge at either Lidcombe or Strathfield. There is no other direct city service in either the mornings or the afternoons. There were one or two more many years ago, but were axed progressively when timetables were reviewed. The Carlingford line desperately requires these direct city services to be resumed and increased.

After reaching Clyde, if a person wishes to travel in a Westerly or Southerly direction, it becomes much more confusing. If one allocates careful attention to timetables, they may discover luck. They may not have to wait too long for a rare Richmond or Penrith train that pauses at Clyde. If one wishes to go anywhere else that is not east, they must wait (and sometimes quite a while) for a train to Granville (a major station just one stop and less than a kilometre away) where one must wait for varied periods of time for their relevant service. If one is travelling to a destination only serviced by intercity services, one may have to change trains, again, somewhere else. If one obtains sufficient sanity for a return trip to a Carlingford line station, they must do all of this again, but in reverse. All of the disclosed transfers and connections that may be performed are not only tiresome but they may be successful at eroding one's sanity due to accumulated frustration. Such movements also add significant time to total journey times. It is therefore, easy to identify an explanation for slowly declining levels of patronage on the Carlingford line.

Due to these predicaments, I am therefore suggesting that there should be more 'direct' city services between Carlingford line stations and the city during peak periods in the morning and evening. In addition, if all other Carlingford services are to continue terminating at Clyde, then Clyde Station should be given a higher priority so more 'mainline' services operating on the Southern and Western lines may stop at Clyde. If this is not possible then an attractive alternative may be to install a 'stop if required' system for selected services where an individual is able to press a button on the platform (within a reasonable amount of time before the train is due to pass) to indicate the train to stop. Another suggestion which may be the most effective (but most expensive) is for the Carlingford line to abandon Clyde altogether and instead, terminate at Granville with the construction of a new loop into one of the existing platforms, or a newly constructed one. It would be best for the loop to begin from the southern side of the Parramatta Rd. level crossing and cut through to a relocated small rail maintenance yard to the north-most Granville platform.

When operation improvements are pursued, it would be appreciated that individuals do not have to wait for ridiculous periods for a connecting service to continue their journey elsewhere.

If improvements are pursued, it can be assured that patronage levels will increase by a significant level in the future as I am writing on behalf of many others who agree with me.

With such a *débat* at hand, it is easy to understand why many prefer to further congest our roads and why many politicians of all levels of Government simply ignore the issue. In recent times, the only politicians who have/had active interests are the former member for the Commonwealth electorate of Parramatta, Ross Cameron and the current New South Wales MP for Castle Hill, Michael Richardson MP.

Also, in the past three years, the Carlingford line has received renewed competition from buses in the Carlingford area. When Harris Park Transport Co. collapsed in 2005, Sydney Buses assumed the vast majority of local services with the remainder to be operated by Hillsbus. Following this, Sydney Buses reviewed and altered the routes. Buses in the area of Carlingford Station now carry many more passengers between the interchanges of Parramatta and Epping. Many people are now using these services instead of the railway line to commute to the city. It therefore creates unnecessary, premature overcrowding of peak bus services. In many incidents, there is no space on the buses for those who require it the most (i.e. not near the station). These issues must be addressed sensibly and swiftly (to improve Carlingford line) otherwise deep issues may develop. Finally, as another suggestion, car-parking facilities at Carlingford Station require improvement. A respectable parking arrangement could be built upon the recently cleared, old railway yard, just beyond the platform.

It is vital that the Carlingford railway line remains open, convenient and relevant. Its disposal would be a ridiculous, narrow-minded decision that would cancel out any other improvements made in the area. It would be ridiculous to shrink our railway network when decent transport infrastructure such as this railway is required for the area and a modern industrialised city. It must be improved as Baulkham Hills Shire Council recently rezoned the area within a respectable distance from the station from low-density residential housing to medium-density residential housing. The Council performed this action, as it was a requirement by the New South Wales Department of Planning for the Parramatta Rail Link to pass through Carlingford. The proposed link was to connect Chatswood with Epping, Carlingford and Parramatta. The New South Wales Government then decided not to build the Epping to Parramatta section. So, as you may infer, the area is without a decent railway but large buildings are continuing to be built in the vicinity of the station. New developments in the area average around six to seven floors. They replaced ordinary detached houses. This current situation will generate much more traffic for the area and will strain infrastructure. The prospective residents must have access to adequate railway services from the Carlingford line if the current roads are going to have any chance at being free flowing for most of the day.

The Shire of Baulkham Hills also requires improvements for its cycleway network, particularly in the lower part of the Shire or 'East Ward' as the Council recognises it. Currently, existing cycleways in the area are disconnected, isolated, too short and force cyclists into heavy traffic when they conclude. Others are too narrow or simply too close to cars and therefore dangerous. There are virtually no off-road cycleways or 'shared paths' (between cyclists and pedestrians) as they are sometimes known, in the East Ward of the Shire.

Improvements to the cycleway network also ought to be of paramount priority as it may be noticed that there are now many more individuals who cycle on public roads that is not always suitable for cyclists and obtains hazards that may invite accidents. It is essential that the Council and the RTA work with one another in a harmonious and efficient partnership to further develop cycling facilities in the Shire of Baulkham Hills.

I believe it is also important for the RTA to further advertise its bicycle safety and regulations campaign much more vigorously. It may be noted that some cyclists have no knowledge of regulation or safe conduct and therefore, unknowingly pursue stupid or dangerous risks that may finalise into a life-threatening occurrence.

Moving to other areas of the Shire, I favour the originally proposed North-West Rail Link to the recently conjectured Metro Link. The Metro is not consistent with the remainder of Sydney's railway network, CityRail. Additionally, the original proposal would be much more fiscally attractive as much of the planning work is already completed and may be easily integrated

into the existing CityRail network. The final cost of the original project may be further reduced by increased efficiency within the New South Wales Government and financial assistance from the Commonwealth Government and its 'Building Australia' fund. The Metro project is an unfavourable alternative. It is very expensive (something that New South Wales cannot afford) and all planning work would have to be acutely reassessed. Therefore, the original money already invested into the original proposal would verify that it was a total waste of public money. Additionally, there is no demand for continually arriving Metro trains in the Baulkham Hills Shire outside peak times. This would consequently leave many services during the day and on weekends with virtually no passengers and heavy debts for the operator. Furthermore, I believe that the Metro is unnecessary in the Inner West area of Sydney as it enjoys a (mostly) efficient bus network compared to that in the Baulkham Hills Shire. The Inner West railway would also not be very far from the proposed link and would consequently and unnecessarily duplicate railway services in that area. No location has been identified for the development of a suitable terminus of the Metro in the city and if the line and its trains are able to integrate into the existing CityRail network.

The Metro would not be as useful and as successful as the originally proposed link and is fiscally irresponsible. It would be expensive for the developer, operator and passengers. As I stated earlier about many projects, the Metro appears to be another mere political exercise (by the former Iemma Government) rather than a true commitment by a Government that is expected to demonstrate leadership and initiative and improve the transport and congestion of the area.

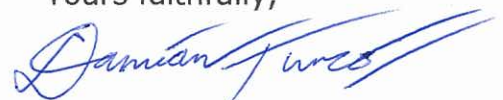
It is also a great disappointment to the area that the development of the Tcard failed. In an area where most people must use many different modes of transport offered by many different companies to travel around and out of the area, Tcard would have attracted many people to the public transport system. It would have been extremely simple and convenient to use and would have brought Sydney's transport system up to date with many other international cities in the aspect of ticketing. Its development must be resumed immediately.

With relation to the Castle Hill T-Way, I am in favour of it, but conditionally. I favour it if there are at least a few services commencing at Castle Hill to continue to Parramatta and/or Rouse Hill.

I also favour the Council's decision to propose a bus lane along Highs Rd and Aiken Rd in West Pennant Hills to improve local bus services. Further investigations may be pursued, if desired, by contacting Baulkham Hills Shire Council. I favour it, as there is no real efficient link connecting the immediate Carlingford area with Castle Hill. Many bus routes are very prolonged and thread themselves through many residential streets.

I believe if we can create a mostly efficient, reliable and sensible planned public transport system and cycleways in which the two have priority over cars, then we will not require useless and overdeveloped motorways and freeways which do nothing except ruin an area due to the generation of pollution and surrounding congestion. Surely, we have learnt from the sins of the Lane Cove Tunnel and the Cross-City Tunnel.

Yours faithfully,



Damian Turco.