

THE TRANSPORT NEEDS OF SYDNEY'S NORTH-WEST SECTOR

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14 October 2008

The Director
General Purpose Standing Committee No.4
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Sir/Madam

RE: Submission to Inquiry into Transport Needs of Sydney's North-West Sector

NRMA Motoring & Services (NRMA) is pleased to provide you with our attached submission for the Inquiry into the Transport Needs of Sydney's North-West Sector, currently being undertaken by General Purpose Standing Committee No.4.

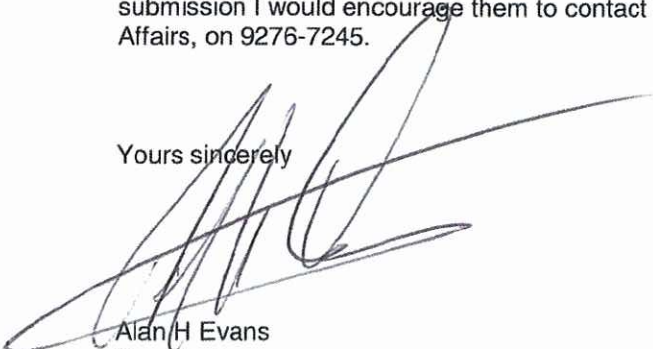
NRMA represents over two million members and is the largest motoring club in Australia. Our organisation works hard on behalf of its members to advocate on road funding, road safety, travel & tourism and other relevant public policy issues.

We have identified a number of key priorities for the Committee's consideration, relating directly to NRMA's role as a key transport stakeholder.

NRMA looks forward to working constructively with the Committee to achieve improved transport outcomes for residents in Sydney's North-West Sector.

Should the Committee's Members or staff require any additional information about our submission I would encourage them to contact Mr Chris Siorokos, General Manager – Corporate Affairs, on 9276-7245.

Yours sincerely



Alan H Evans
President

NRMA MOTORING & SERVICES

SUBMISSION TO INQUIRY INTO NORTH-WEST SYDNEY SECTOR TRANSPORT

October 2008

A Submission to
the NSW Legislative Council's
General Purpose Standing Committee No.4
by NRMA Motoring & Services



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NRMA Motoring & Services (NRMA)

The National Roads & Motorists' Association Limited (trading as NRMA Motoring & Services) comprises some 2.3 million Members in NSW and the ACT. For more than 85 years NRMA has represented the interests of motorists in relation to road funding, road safety and other relevant public policy issues.

NRMA began in 1920 when there were 20,000 motor vehicles on the road. One of the first services NRMA offered was car minding in 1924 when it was against the law to leave a motor vehicle unattended in the centre of Sydney.

Throughout the years, NRMA has fought for seatbelts in cars, road safety, drink driving education programs, better road funding and fairer petrol prices.

Today NRMA has grown and, in addition to roadside assistance, diversified to offer a range of motoring, travel, lifestyle and advocacy services.

NRMA remains a Membership organisation with a focus on Member benefits and roadside assistance.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

NRMA's submission is focussed on this Inquiry's First Term of Reference :

The requirements and plans for an integrated transport system in the North-West Sector, including road, rail and bus links.

Specifically, NRMA submits to this Inquiry its support for:

- Upgrading the M2 and would welcome action by the NSW Government to expedite the planning processes to enable works to proceed as soon as possible;
- The NSW Government providing a definite commitment to progress the F3 to M2/M7 (Sydney Orbital) through the planning and approval stages to commence actual construction as soon as possible. It should also commence planning now for a future far western connection from the M7 to the north;
- Confirmation of NSW Government funding for key North-West arterial road priorities, including planning and approvals so that works can commence without delay;
- Appropriate Park and Ride facilities in the North-West Sector;
- Consideration of more effective use of bus transitways (T-Ways) by permitting trucks on T-ways to reduce congestion, emissions and contribute to increased road safety; and
- Implementing improved planning mechanisms for North-West Sector Transport Projects to minimise delays in commencing construction and reduce exposure to increasing construction and material costs.

INTRODUCTION

NRMA Motoring & Services (NRMA) welcomes this opportunity to provide a submission to General Purpose Standing Committee No.4's Inquiry into North-West Sydney Sector Transport.

The North-West is the fastest growing subregion in Sydney. It has a population of over 760,000 people and the NSW Government has identified that it will have the greatest share of Sydney's future housing growth (23 per cent) and future jobs (24 per cent) over the next 25 years.¹

Existing transport infrastructure is seen as inadequate by residents particularly due to the current lack of a North-West rail link, with the exception of CityRail's Richmond line (although previously a heavy rail line and now a metro have been proposed). The NSW Government has identified the area as having the lowest proportion of trips by public transport.² On an average weekday 79 per cent of trips by North West residents are made by vehicle, slightly more than 7 per cent by public transport and 13 per cent by walking/cycling. In the Sydney South subregion, by comparison, 68 per cent of average weekday trips are by vehicle, 12.3 per cent are by public transport and 18.6 per cent by walking/cycling.³

While improved public transport facilities in general are clearly needed, road links are particularly important to Sydney's North-West sector, whether for private vehicle use or public transport by bus.

This submission is focussed on the Inquiry's First Term of Reference :

The requirements and plans for an integrated transport system in the North-West Sector, including road, rail and bus links.

Specifically NRMA will focus its submission on the need for a number of key road priorities in the area, namely :

- M2 Upgrade/Widening;
- F3 to M2/M7 (Sydney Orbital) Link; and
- Other NRMA-identified North-West Sector arterial road priorities

Additionally, NRMA will state its case for :

- Improved Park and Ride facilities;
- More effective use of transitways (T-Ways); and
- Improved Planning for upcoming North-West Sector Transport Projects.

INQUIRY TERM OF REFERENCE 1 – *The requirements and plans for an integrated transport system in the North-West Sector, including road, rail and bus links.*

In relation to the Inquiry's first term of reference there are a number of North-West Sector road transport infrastructure priorities of importance to NRMA Members.

All currently require further action from the NSW Government to move forward to construction. NRMA submits that moving forward through the planning stages to construction for all of these projects is critical as they will form essential components of an integrated transport system in Sydney's North-West Sector.

1. M2 Upgrade/Widening

The M2 Motorway is a 21 kilometre toll road, opened in May 1997 and one of the major components of Sydney's not-yet-fully-completed orbital road system. It currently provides a four-lane motorway standard connection for both passengers (including public transport buses) and freight from the Westlink M7 to the Lane Cove Tunnel, linking the Lower North Shore with Sydney's North-West Sector.

Its importance is crucial, as many parts of the North-West Sector are not serviced by the existing CityRail Richmond and Carlingford rail lines. In the current absence of some form of rail passenger transport in these areas (whether metro or heavy rail), for many residents the M2 represents their sole effective transport connection to and from the Sydney CBD, the rest of Sydney and beyond.

In July 2008 the NSW Government announced that it had commenced negotiations on a proposal by Transurban for the upgrade of the M2 Motorway to alleviate congestion, including widening sections from two to three lanes and a new Park and Ride bus interchange.⁴ Congestion on the M2 has increased due to growth in Sydney's North-West Sector and on a typical working day the M2 is used by up to 45,000 bus passengers and over 100,000 motorists.⁵

NRMA submits to this Inquiry its support for upgrading the M2 and would welcome action by the NSW Government to expedite the planning processes to enable details to be finalised and works to proceed as soon as possible.

The current widening proposal appears to satisfy the movement of freight between the M7 and F3 via Pennant Hills Road, but does not seek to address the commuter congestion between Pennant Hills Road and Beecroft Road. Noise abatement concerns in residential areas built after the M2 was opened, such as the Forester Estate, need to be addressed. NRMA submits that the scope of the widening should be extended to include this eastbound section and also the westbound section between Pennant Hills Road and Windsor Road in order to provide the necessary capacity for the future. This is particularly relevant in the context of connecting a future F3 to M2/M7 link.

2. F3 to M2/M7 (Sydney Orbital) Link

The F3 to M2/M7 (Sydney Orbital) is a major "missing link" in Sydney's orbital road system. While it is of particular importance to this Inquiry's First Term of Reference, completing this project will also have national significance, particularly for the movement of road freight on the federal AusLink

Network, replacing the current unsatisfactory connection – Pennant Hills Road – between the M2/M7 and the F3 Freeway.

NRMA notes that construction of this link will alleviate the severe congestion along Pennant Hills Road as well as high noise levels, exhaust-related emissions and will improve road safety. Additionally, on a strategic level it will provide a far superior connection between the F3 and Sydney's orbital network, reducing traffic pressure on Pennant Hills Road in Sydney's North-West Sector.

After much community debate in recent years, the 2007 Pearlman Review recommended that the preferred route identified in May 2004 (the Purple Option within the Type A Corridor – a tunnel broadly along the same route as Pennant Hills Road) now be progressed to detailed design, economic and financial assessment and environmental assessment.⁶

A small amount of federal funding (\$500,000) for planning is referred to in the 2008-2009 NSW Budget.⁷ The Australian Government is expected to ultimately provide the majority of funding for this link. However, NRMA believes that the NSW Government, for its part, still needs to give this project a far higher priority. NRMA submits to this Inquiry that the NSW Government should provide a definite commitment to progress this project through the planning and approval stages so that actual construction can commence as soon as possible, when federal funding becomes available.

Additionally, there is a need to ensure that a North-West integrated transport system continues to be viable in the longer term. NRMA therefore submits to this Inquiry its support of the other major Pearlman Review finding, namely that NSW Government planning for a far western connection from the M7 to the north (the Type C Corridor) commences immediately.⁸ The NSW Government has already stated that it considers it "prudent" to purchase and reserve lands for an outer western Sydney Orbital to accommodate future growth in Sydney.⁹

3. Other NRMA-identified North-West Sector arterial road priorities

Effective arterial road links are an essential component of any integrated transport system. NRMA's 2008-2009 Budget Submission to the NSW Government identified a number of North West Sector priorities that were identified to be in need of funding. These were :

- Windsor Road widening;
- Schofields Road Upgrade;
- Old Windsor Road/Norwest Boulevard upgrade;
- Old Windsor Road – Old Toongabbie to Baulkham Hills network improvements; and
- Windsor Road – Northmead network improvements.¹⁰

These projects were not allocated funding in the 2008 NSW Budget.

NRMA also notes that some of these were previously identified in November 2006 by the NSW Government as "pinch points" when it announced a \$100 million in funding for a traffic Network Management Strategy to improve traffic flows on Sydney's major road corridors. The relevant North-West Sector roads identified at the time were :

- Old Windsor Road – Toongabbie to Baulkham Hills;

- Windsor Road – Northmead; and
- Richmond Road.¹¹

However, two years later, most of these corridors and other identified projects have still not had any projects funded because preliminary investigations and planning work remain incomplete.

NRMA also supports the specific arterial road priorities recently identified by Baulkham Hills Shire Council.¹² :

- Creation of an underpass at the junction of Old Northern Road, Windsor Road and Seven Hills Road, at Baulkham Hills [understood to be substantially complete];
- Upgrade and widening Burns Road and Memorial Avenue linking Windsor and Old Windsor Roads at Kellyville [understood to be substantially complete];
- Widening and upgrade of Showground Road from Castle Hill to Carrington Road at Castle Hill, understood to be a straightforward project due to the road reserve already being in place to enable widening to occur;
- Priority connection of the west facing M2 ramps at Windsor Road interchange at Baulkham Hills, and associated additional car parking facilities [making use of the vacant government land on the north west corner of this intersection];

Upgrade of seven major intersections along Seven Hills Road and Old Northern Road –

1. Baulkham Hills Road and Seven Hills Road, Baulkham Hills (unless west facing ramps are provided on the M2 at Windsor Road);
2. Copley Drive and Seven Hills Road, Baulkham Hills;
3. Arthur Street and Seven Hills Road, Baulkham Hills [provision of traffic signals];
4. Hastings Road and Old Northern Road, Glenhaven [to address an adverse crash history];
5. Kenthurst Road and Old Northern Road, Dural;
6. Galston Road and Old Northern Road, Dural;
7. Glenhaven Road and Old Northern Road, Glenhaven

In addition to the pinch points identified by the RTA, NRMA would also like to see the southbound right turn bays extended in Mona Vale Road at Telegraph Road and at Pentecost Avenue and a comprehensive review of parking restrictions, including clearways on arterial roads to remove bottlenecks and keep people moving.

NRMA submits to this Inquiry that the NSW Government needs to confirm that funding is available for these North-West arterial road priorities and that it accelerates the planning processes so that specific works commence without further delay.

4. Improved Park and Ride Facilities

NRMA's 2008 Park and Ride Research Report clearly identified that Park and Ride facilities such as car parking at key transport interchanges are an important way to improve the attractiveness of public transport.¹³ Of 600 motorists who were surveyed, almost half said they would use Park and Ride facilities rather than drive to work if facilities were available in secure areas. Many are avoiding existing train stations due to a lack of parking facilities.

In its Park and Ride Research Report NRMA also identified a number of ways that existing Park and Ride facilities can be improved relatively simply. These should also be taken into account when implementing Park and Ride facilities at new transport interchanges on the North-West Sector:

- Providing better information on Park and Ride facilities to commuters. Including facility location, space availability, train/bus departures and downstream roadway conditions. Websites, street signage (fixed & variable) and council brochures can all be utilised.
- Improving security (eg lights/CCTV);
- Increasing 'Kiss and Drop' zones at train stations and bus stops;
- Improving disabled/mobility access and providing shelter from sun/rain/wind; and
- Implementing a strategic, collaborative approach to the investment, planning and co-ordinating of Park and Ride facilities between State Government and Local Councils.
- NRMA notes that a new Park and Ride Interchange at Herring Road forms part of Transurban's proposal to upgrade the M2.¹⁴ As noted previously, NRMA believes there is an opportunity to develop an additional Park and Ride site on the northwest corner of the intersection of the M2 and Windsor Road interchange at Baulkham Hills, making use of the vacant government land on the north/west corner of this intersection.
- Additionally, the NSW Government has indicated that it will assess each station on its proposed new North-West Metro and that parking will be included "...where practical and appropriate".¹⁵

A number of public transport links either currently exist or have been proposed for Sydney's North-West Sector. This includes the existing Richmond CityRail line, the North West Bus T-Way and the North West Metro proposal (replacing the earlier North-West heavy rail line proposal).

NRMA submits to this Inquiry that, no matter what public transport improvements currently exist or are ultimately proceeded with, the provision of appropriate Park and Ride facilities at all of these must be an essential component of any integrated transport system for Sydney's North-West Sector.

The benefits from providing better public transport options for the North-West Sector will be negated if appropriate Park and Ride facilities are not available to assist and encourage commuters to access them.

5. More effective use of Bus Transitways (T-Ways)

Recent reports of low volumes of buses using the purpose built T-Ways in North-West Sydney is a serious concern given the significant capital expenditure that has been committed to these projects. Only 195 buses were reported as using one T-Way in both directions on an average weekday compared to 108 buses on Saturday and 74 buses on Sunday¹⁶, resulting in a significant amount of spare capacity.

In light of this NRMA submits that the NSW Government should investigate the potential for Transitways to be used by private buses, trucks and taxis as well as T-Way buses. A trial operation or thorough public review would need to be conducted, and its viability would need to be evaluated, relative to increasing frequency of bus services on T-Ways over time. This would not only increase the long term viability of T-Ways but has a number of other advantages including reducing congestion and emissions on parallel roads and improving road safety. It may also provide an opportunity to leverage funding from the Australian government due to the increased economic benefits of this type of project.

6. More effective use and expansion of T2 and T3 Transit Lanes

The planning and implementation for Transit Lanes appears to have lapsed in recent years and insufficient enforcement of existing lanes has resulted in a number of lanes being removed in favour of readily identifiable 'red' bus lanes. The only new Transit Lane initiative on Epping Road and the Gore Hill Freeway is an example of inadequate planning as it has resulted in both a disjointed lane and inconsistency in terms of the number of persons per vehicle required.

This lack of planning is in stark contrast to US car dominated States such as California, for example, where a large number of Transit Lanes are under construction, programmed or being proposed to add to the existing large number of lanes already in place.

The benefits of adding Transit Lanes are well documented and include:

- moving twice as many people as a regular traffic lane (during peak hours)
- decreasing commute times for all drivers
- promoting ridesharing
- reducing traffic congestion
- lessening the hours of congestion

NRMA believes a network of Transit Lanes should be planned and implemented across North-West Sydney along with opportunities for enforcement to ensure the lanes operate effectively.

7. Improved Planning for upcoming North-West Sector Transport Projects

In this submission NRMA has already identified specific transport requirements for the North West Sector, including projects such as the M2 and making provision for Park and Ride facilities. However one particular theme that is common to all of these is the need for improved planning processes to ensure that projects are commenced in a timely manner once funding becomes available.

The projects nominated in this submission have already been previously proposed by NRMA, other transport stakeholders and various government agencies over a number of years – they are not “newly thought up project ideas”. They are strategic identified projects that require implementation. To achieve this will require a better and more effective planning approach.

NRMA submits to this Inquiry that the NSW Government must complete the pre-construction planning and approval stages for key “upcoming” projects, such as those NRMA has nominated in this submission. This will allow construction to commence in a timely manner once funding

becomes available. It will assist in preventing situations where project construction is delayed because planning work is not complete.

Completing planning and approval processes now will also mean less exposure to increasing construction and material costs.

Additionally, in cases where a major federal funding contribution will also be required, such as with the F3 to M2/M7 (Sydney Orbital), having planning and approval completed will improve the NSW Government's leverage with the Australian Government when seeking federal funding by clearly demonstrating that NSW can progress projects in a timely manner.

CONCLUSION

NRMA submits that there are a number of critical road infrastructure projects that, if constructed, will deliver greatly improved transport outcomes.

Projects such as the M2 Widening/Upgrade, F3 to M2/M7 (Sydney Orbital), and arterial road upgrades will be key components of an integrated transport system for Sydney's North-West Sector.

When further public transport options are developed for the North-West Sector, Park and Ride facilities will become even more important and NRMA's research on how to improve these should be taken into account.

An assessment of the types of vehicles permitted to use Bus Transitways needs to be undertaken and a trial of private vehicle types considered.

A network of T2 and T3 Transit lanes needs to be planned and implemented across North-West Sydney along with opportunities for enforcement to ensure the lanes operate effectively.

Introducing more efficient project planning and approval processes will result in new road infrastructure being built more quickly, efficiently and less expensively than is currently the case by reducing exposure to increasing construction and material costs.

This will also be particularly important in ensuring that NSW is in an effective position to source and leverage Australian Government funding, where appropriate, such as with the F3 to M2/M7 (Sydney Orbital).

ENDNOTES

¹ NSW Department of Planning, *North West Subregion Draft Subregional Strategy*, December 2007, p.3.

² Ibid. p.92.

³ NSW Department of Planning, *South Subregion Draft Subregional Strategy*, November 2007, p.94.

⁴ See Media Release: *NSW Government to commence negotiations for planned M2 upgrade*, July 10, 2008.

URL:

http://www.hillsm2.com.au/transurban_online/ne5nav_hills.nsf/LinkView/28C6DEED15145431CA257482001F1255ABD5DAB709F88F70CA25703E0064DA30

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Hon M. Pearlman AO, *Independent Review of the F3 to M7 Corridor Selection*, August 2007. See Ms Pearlman's cover letter to the then federal Minister for Local Government, Territories and Roads and also the Executive Summary (p.4)

⁷ NSW Government, 2008-2009 Budget, *Budget Paper No.4 (Infrastructure Statement 2008-09)*, p.5-56.

⁸ Pearlman, op.cit., See Executive Summary (p.4) & p.77.

⁹ NSW Government, *Infrastructure Audit Submission to Infrastructure Australia*, June 2008, p.22.

¹⁰ NRMA Motoring & Services, *2008-2009 NSW Government Budget Submission*, p.9.

¹¹ See Hon M. Iemma MP, Media Release: *\$100 Million to Fix Sydney's Traffic 'Pinch Points'*, 20 November 2006.

¹² Baulkham Hills Shire Council, Media Release: *Mayor Welcomes Parliamentary Probe Into Systematic Discrimination On North-West Infrastructure Needs*, 2 September 2008.

URL : <http://www.baulkhamhills.nsw.gov.au/Content.aspx?PageID=15&ItemID=176>

¹³ NRMA Motoring & Services, *Park & Ride : Investigation and Audit of Park and Ride or Alternatives in Metropolitan Sydney, the Central Coast, Newcastle and Wollongong*, February 2008.

¹⁴ See Media Release: *NSW Government to commence negotiations for planned M2 upgrade*, July 10, 2008.

URL:

http://www.hillsm2.com.au/transurban_online/ne5nav_hills.nsf/LinkView/28C6DEED15145431CA257482001F1255ABD5DAB709F88F70CA25703E0064DA30

¹⁵ See Sydney Link, Frequently Asked Questions : "Will parking be available at the stations?"

URL: <http://www.symlink.com.au/site/page.cfm?u=76>

¹⁶ See Daily Telegraph article 17 September 2008 "Hillsong Church drives review of T-Way lane use"

URL: <http://www.news.com.au/dailytelegraph/story/0,22049,24356493-5001021,00.html>