

THE TRANSPORT NEEDS OF SYDNEY'S NORTH-WEST SECTOR

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Hawkesbury City Council

Submission to the NSW Parliamentary Enquiry by General Purpose Standing Committee No. 4 into the Transport Needs of Sydney's North-West Sector

Introduction

Submissions have been invited by The Hon Jenny Gardiner MLC, Chair of the Legislative Council's General Purpose Standing Committee No. 4 (GPSC4) before 17 October 2008, regarding an inquiry into the transport needs for Sydney's North West Sector. Hawkesbury City Council (HCC) considers this to be a most important issue for the Hawkesbury Local Government Area (HLGA) and, therefore, welcomes the opportunity to make a submission on this subject.

The 2006 ABS Census data shows that the HLGA has a population of approximately 62,000 persons. As would be appreciated, on a daily basis a large number of workers travel both in and out of the area. Of these workers, previous studies suggest that only a small number use the limited public transport options available. With a further 20,000 people moving into the area by 2031 under the State Governments' Metropolitan Housing Strategy, the transport situation will be only worsen without significant improvements to currently available transport services, facilities and infrastructure

Submission

Over the years HCC has continuously advocated for improved public transport options for residents of the HLGA as well as advocating the need to improve transport links with the Sydney Metropolitan Area. This submission will refer to a number of these issues.

North-West Metro Line Proposals

In a number of forms, the State Government has been proposing a rail link to service the North-West Sector for a considerable period of time and while the proposals suggest the service only being provided to the Rouse Hill area HCC has encouraged and supported the extension of this facility to Vineyard.

In early 2008 the then Premier of NSW, the Hon M lemma, announced the proposed construction of a European style North-West Metro Line extending from St James in the City to Rouse Hill. The

announcement indicated that the construction of this line would commence in 2010 with it to subsequently be fully operational by 2017.

While this announcement was most welcomed by HCC, as the provision of new infrastructure is a positive result for the region, some concern was expressed in view of the history of this link. Previous statements concerning a north-west rail link have envisaged the line ultimately being extended to Vineyard thus providing access to the new link from the Richmond line. Unfortunately, this announcement did not address this most important aspect of the proposed link.

HCC subsequently made representations to the Premier to obtain a commitment from the State Government that the proposed North-West Metro Line will be extended to Vineyard by 2020 thus ensuring access to this new facility from the Richmond line. HCC also requested the State Government to identify and acquire the land corridor required for a rail link between Rouse Hill and the Richmond Line in the vicinity of Vineyard. Further extension of the line from Vineyard to connect with the main western line is also supported by Council as a desirable and logical step to provide an interlinked transport network for the region.

Subsequently, the Mayor, Councillor Bart Bassett, attended a North West Metro Briefing and Consultation Session on Friday, 15 August 2008 which was attended by representatives of affected councils and other authorities and was also attended by the then Deputy Premier and Minister for Transport.

Following this meeting the Mayor submitted a Mayoral Minute to HCC indicating that at the Consultation Session, while the possible extension of the line from Rouse Hill to Vineyard was not on the agenda for discussion the then Deputy Premier and Minister for Transport indicated that he was open minded about the HCC's proposal that the line be extended from its currently planned termination point at Rouse Hill to Vineyard to ultimately connect with the main western line.

In addition, the proposals for the line suggested a facility to house and maintain rolling stock for the line at Bella Vista with residents in this location indicating their opposition to such a proposal. It was subsequently suggested that if the line was extended to Vineyard this could provide a suitable location for such a facility.

Residents in the Vineyard area have previously indicated strong support for the early release of that area for development as proposed by the Growth Centers Commission (GCC) and HCC has made representations to support the earlier release of the area than currently proposed by the GCC.

A proposal for the extension of the North West Metro Line to Vineyard would not only facilitate the early release of this area by the GCC but would also provide a much needed transport link and allow increased population growth and employment in this area.

In addition, Vineyard would appear to offer an ideal location to house and maintain rolling stock for the line, as land would be available for a facility to house and maintain rolling stock and this would also provide employment in the district.

HCC subsequently resolved:

"That in respect of proposals for the construction of the North West Metro Line, Council continue to support and encourage the extension of the line to Vineyard, and ultimately through to the main western line, and that for the purposes of further discussion Council indicate its in principal support for the location of a facility to house and maintain rolling stock in the Vineyard area if the North West Metro Line was extended to this location."

Accordingly, rather than review or delay the provision of this facility as currently being suggested HCC strongly urges the provision of this facility as well as its extension to Vineyard, and ultimately the to the main western line, as a matter of urgency.

Duplication of Richmond Railway Line

The HLGA's only rail access is provided by the Richmond line which is currently a single line from Blacktown to Richmond. Currently, the State Government is in the process of the duplication of this line to Vineyard. Whilst this duplication is welcomed it is suggested that the duplication of the line should be extended to at least Mulgrave and, ultimately, to Richmond.

In the current climate of people being encouraged to make greater use of public transport and rely less on the use of the private vehicle it is unacceptable to suggest that a major area such as the HLGA should be serviced by a single railway line with inherent limitations to the provision of a satisfactory level of service that would actually encourage the greater us of public transport.

In addition, the extension of the North West Metro Line to Vineyard as advocated in the preceding point would further enhance and encourage the use of public transport in the HLGA.

Upgrade of Blacktown/Richmond Roads

A further important transport issue affecting the HLGA is the current unacceptable state of the Blacktown/Richmond Road access to the LGA. Currently, the roadway is only a single lane in each direction from the M7 Motorway. Since the opening of the M7 Motorway the demands placed on this access point have increased considerably and extensive delays now regularly occur, particularly during peak periods.

To adequately service the HLGA this road requires upgrading to a dual carriageway in each direction to improve travel times; improve access to the HLGA as well as improving the flood evacuation capacity of the road.

Transport actions referred to in the draft Subregional Strategy for the North West Subregion (further referred to in a following point) do not address any future upgrade of Blacktown/Richmond Road to Windsor and Richmond or the flood evacuation capacity of this road. The draft Strategy provides for duplication of the road to Marsden Park to service this part of the North West Growth Centre. The upgrade of regional flood evacuation routes influences the capacity of future residential development in Richmond and Windsor as noted in the Housing section of the Strategy.

Further, access to the M7 is a critical issue for residents of the Hawkesbury to provide cross regional links. Widening Richmond Road all the way to the Northern Road/George Street intersection and then onward to Richmond should be considered urgently as this road improvement is essential to the HLGA and North West Growth Centre for improved access to Sydney Orbital road network (M7) and for the population to access educational institutions at UWS, TAFE and the RAAF base at Richmond.

Traffic Issues – Richmond and North Richmond Areas

Richmond and North Richmond are significant centres of residential, retail and commercial development in the HLGA. As a result of the growth of these areas significant peak hour issues occur through out these areas on a regular basis. These issues also have a flow-on effect to those living in areas beyond these centres due to the ongoing difficulties experienced in travelling through the areas to access Windsor or other parts of the metropolitan area.

Early morning traffic queues extend to Colo High School and in the evening it is not uncommon to have traffic backed up well into Richmond for an extended period. These problems exacerbate the already lengthy travel times that residents must endure to get to and from work, which in turn impacts on the quality of life for themselves and their families.

It would appear that the major cause of the traffic problems within the Richmond and North Richmond area is the capacity of the intersection of Bells Line of Road and Grose Vale/Terrace Roads combined with motorists driving a "rat run" through Crowleys and Yarramundi Lanes and Old Kurrajong Road. When traffic on Kurrajong Road slows due to increased volumes, vehicles traveling on Old Kurrajong Road are being allowed into the flow, which further impacts on motorists traveling on the main road system through Richmond. In addition, the bridge across the Hawkesbury River accessing North Richmond is also a significant limiting factor.

Council has continually requested the RTA, through the Local Traffic Committee, to investigate the intersection of Kurrajong and Old Kurrajong Roads with a view to improving traffic conditions, however, Council considers that it is imperative that all the traffic issues within the Richmond and North Richmond areas should be reviewed and strategies developed to improve the problems currently being experienced in peak periods.

Transport and the draft Subregional Strategy for the North West Subregion

In December 2007 the NSW State Government released the draft Subregional Strategy for the North West Subregion for public comment. The North West Subregion includes the Local Government Areas of Baulkham Hills, Blacktown, Blue Mountains, Penrith and Hawkesbury. The Strategy contains a number of visions for the North West Subregion, including *"Greater public transport use supported by major transport infrastructure investment"*.

A critical element of the Metropolitan Strategy aims is to improve transport between Sydney's centres. At a local level, the Strategy envisages improved local transport such as walking and cycling facilities and bus services that link neighbourhoods, villages and town centres to major centres.

The draft Subregional Strategy seeks to increase public transport use; improve public transport services; improve access to centres and connect the growth centres. However the transport actions fail to look ahead to 2031 when an additional 140,000 people will be living and working in the North West Subregion and therefore lacks provisions for appropriate infrastructure.

The North West Rail Line is planned to be completed to Rouse Hill by 2017, but now subject to review by the State Government. The extension to the Richmond Line remains as a *"possible"* extension and the draft strategy contains actions to investigate this matter further, including to *'protect a corridor to relieve pressure on the Richmond and Western Line'*. However, no time frame for this has been included in the draft Strategy.

Further, the transport actions do not address any future upgrade of Blacktown/Richmond Road to Windsor and Richmond as referred to and addressed in a preceding point.

The draft strategy seeks to improve access to regional centres and connect people to these centres, including the regional city of Penrith. However, there does not appear to be any actions that seek to improve public transport links to Penrith or other adjoining areas. Strategic bus corridors have been implemented or planned for other localities but not between Castle Hill or Penrith and Windsor and Richmond. There is no provision for any transport upgrade/link from Windsor/Richmond to the nearest regional city of Penrith. Council submits that the State Government must facilitate the strengthening of transport links between the north west and south west Growth Centres which build

on the existing transport corridors via Windsor. It is essential that the existing public transport and road network services within the subregion is improved to facilitate the aims of the draft strategy as well as adequately catering for the transport needs of the subregion.

Conclusion

HCC thanks the Standing Committee for the opportunity to comment on a number of issues effecting transport in the North-West Sector, with particular reference to the HLGA and requests that the Standing Committee given appropriate consideration and weight to these matters as that are of significant importance to the residents of the area.
