

Submission  
No 141

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

**Name:** Mr Wayne Merton MP  
**Position:** Member for Baulkham Hills  
**Date received:** 21/10/2008

---

## **NORTH WEST SECTOR TRANSPORT INQUIRY SUBMISSION**

There is little doubt that the main issue of concern to the residents of North Western Sydney is that of transport, including the provision of adequate roads for the area.

The basic facts are that the area has a fast growing population which has substantially been caused by State Government decisions, including policies to increase housing densities and by the effect of the North West Sector Development first announced in 1985 by a previous Labor Government.

It was indicated at the time that this development in the Rouse Hill/Kellyville area, when completed, would have a population in the vicinity of 250,000 (a similar size to that of Canberra) living in some 80,000 new dwellings.

In recent years, the growth of this development of the North West Section and the area generally accelerated with a buoyant economy.

In addition, the further release of the Balmoral Road area and the Kellyville North area for residential development has increased the potential population by another 18,400

Baulkham Hills Shire Council advises that some 40,644 new residents have moved into the area between 2001 and 2006.

Forecasts issued by Baulkham Hills Shire Council indicate an estimated change in the population of the Shire between 2006 and 2021 as 68,013 people.

Further information contained in the Environmental Assessment and Concept Plan for the North West Rail Link refers to 18% of Sydney's estimated population growth by 2031.

It should be noted that, in addition to the population figures contained in the Baulkham Hills Shire Council estimation, the Blacktown City Council should experience a similar growth in that section of the Council that forms part of the North West Sector (i.e. that area west of the Windsor Road which includes suburbs such as Kellyville Ridge, Stanhope Gardens and Glenwood).

On 29 June 2007, the then Planning Minister, Frank Sartor, announced that the North West Growth Centre would include 16 precincts and contain about 66,000 new homes.

At the present time, approximately 80% of the total household trips are by car with 1.7 cars per household and car ownership one of the highest in the State with the distance travelled by car per household estimated at 27 km a day, compared with 11km per day in the Eastern Suburbs.

## **PUBLIC TRANSPORT OPTIONS**

Apart from taxis and the totally inadequate Carlingford rail line, which only operates between Carlingford and Clyde where commuters have to change trains for the city (other than one direct service a day), the only form of public transport available to Hills residents is buses.

Most residents travelling to the city either use their cars or the Hills City Express Bus service operated by Hillsbus on the M2 motorway. This service carries some 12,000 passengers a day and is rapidly growing.

Whilst this is generally a good service, it is not unusual for Baulkham Hills residents to face queues of up to 100 people in the morning at Baulkham Hills junction (at the corner of Windsor and Old Northern Roads) with a similar situation in Clarence Street, Sydney in the afternoons for commuters travelling home.

Baulkham Hills commuters are frequently forced to travel to and from the city whilst standing most, if not all, of the way.

Many commuters have expressed their concerns to me of standing in the bus whilst travelling on the M2 motorway at 100 kph.

Commuters also complain of buses going passed them at peak hours and not stopping as the buses are full.

Many people do not believe that the situation has been improved by the State Government assuming ownership of the buses and the companies only being paid to operate the service.

The failings of the State ownership of the buses have been illustrated by the Hillsbus company requesting from the State Government in April 2006 an additional 20 buses to meet the rapidly increasing demand. The company was allocated only 7 and only recently were promised additional buses. This has not assisted the company in meeting the growing demand for its service.

The reality of relying on buses as essentially the only form of public transport is that they simply cannot cope with the present and anticipated growing demands of the area.

The local roads including the Windsor Road (notwithstanding its recent upgrade) are inadequate for the buses needed for the area, together with the cars used by local residents, many of whom find it essential to use a car for their employment.

Rapid bus services can carry a maximum of 4,500 people an hour, whilst the Preferred Project Report on the North West Rail Link estimates some 14,000 an hour for heavy rail.

The present Government has recently introduced a "bus only" lane on the Windsor Road at Northmead which has reduced the road to a single lane status for part of the AM period causing additional congestion and chaos.

The Windsor Road commencing at the Baulkham Hills shopping centre also has a bus priority lane for 24/7 which is both unrealistic and unnecessary as buses in off peak hours, particularly in the late evening hours, run infrequently.

### **THE NORTH WEST BUS TRANSITWAY**

The Carr-Iemma Government constructed the above facility from Rouse Hill adjacent to the Old Windsor Road via Westmead Hospital to Parramatta.

Local residents report that this does not enjoy high patronage. One of the reasons for this is that there are inadequate parking facilities for commuters adjacent to the Tway.

Further, the Tway only offers transport to Parramatta and has no direct access to the M2 motorway.

It is submitted that direct access to the M2 would not only encourage more residents to use this service but it would also take both cars and buses off the Windsor Road.

Accordingly it is recommended that the Government, together with the operators of the M2, investigate the feasibility of constructing a direct access from the North West Tway to the M2 motorway.

### **HEAVY RAIL V METRO**

The Carr-Iemma State Government announced in 1998 that a heavy rail link between Epping and Rouse Hill was to be built in two stages. The first section between Epping to Castle Hill was to be completed by 2010 with a further extension by 2014.

It is now accepted that construction has not commenced making it impossible to complete the Castle Hill section by 2010.

Further, the concept has now been dumped in favour of a Metro proposal announced some months ago.

Whilst it is conceded that the Metro may have some advantages, the reality is that, for the following reasons, the heavy rail should be constructed in preference to the Metro.

The important issue of costs of the project indicates that the Metro is likely to cost an estimated \$12 billion which is some three times that of the heavy rail (estimated at \$4 billion).

Whilst it has been suggested that this could be further reduced by building the Norwest to Rouse Hill section above ground, it is my belief that local residents simply do not want this.

Further, it is submitted that it is not environmentally or ascetically acceptable to build a rail link above ground in the 21<sup>st</sup> century unless there is no alternative.

The claimed cost saving has to be taken into account with the additional cost of acquisition of the land and the possible effect on property values should it partly proceed above ground.

Further, there are doubts as to whether a Euro-style Metro is suitable for the long distance between Rouse Hill (and potentially Vineyard at a later date) and Epping.

Local residents would not wish to stand for nearly an hour between Rouse Hill and St James.

This would reduce the commercial viability of the link and make the conditions similar to the existing bus service.

Problems exist with the integration of the Metro with the existing City Rail link meaning people travelling to North Sydney would have to change to City Rail at Epping - another commercial negative for the project.

If it is proposed to stage the development, then the first stage should be the Epping to Norwest Business Park.

Stage 2 should proceed to Rouse Hill.

Norwest Business Park is a major employer where some 25,000 jobs have been created with a further 15,000 projected within the next 10 years.

Major companies such as Woolworths, Resmed, Wyeth Australia, Optus and Cathay Pacific have established their headquarters in the area.

Public transport problems and traffic issues, centring on accessing the area via Norwest Boulevard, have caused some of the companies based in the area to relocate and others are giving serious consideration to this.

It is clear that the heavy rail is the most realistic proposal for the North West.

This can happen if the Government has the commitment and determination.

The Metro with a cost of \$12 billion is regarded by many local people as a fantasy.

A rail is needed urgently.

The original heavy rail concept should be reinstated forthwith.

The State Government has claimed that the planning for the heavy rail was well advanced - notwithstanding no construction work has taken place on the project.

If this is the case, and the project is revived, construction should be able to commence at an early date – certainly quicker than the Metro – which would appear to have had little, if any, detailed planning work carried out.

**WEST FACING RAMPS AND NORWEST BUSINESS PARK**

Reference was made on page 4 (Heavy Rail v Metro) of the traffic difficulties experienced by businesses in Norwest Business Park where some 25,000 jobs have been created with a further 15,000 jobs projected within the next 10 years.

One of the major issues is the high volume of traffic on the Norwest Boulevard which generates chaos not only at peak periods but also during non working hours, particularly at weekends.

It is believed that a factor that contributes to these conditions is the number of cars that use Norwest Boulevard to access the M7 motorway.

There is no access at Baulkham Hills to the M2 motorway which links to the M7.

Preliminary work had been carried out on the construction of ramps at Baulkham Hills adjacent to Junction Road during the construction of the M2 but, apparently due to cost constraints, the construction of these ramps did not proceed.

It is generally believed in the local community that these ramps should be constructed which would allow access to the M2 at Baulkham Hills rather than for traffic to proceed further up the Windsor Road to utilise Norwest Boulevard.

This would reduce traffic on both the Windsor Road, Norwest Boulevard and also some of the residential streets of Winston Hills.

It is believed that Transurban, the owner of the M2 Motorway, have had discussions with the RTA regarding the construction of these ramps.

It is recommended that the State Government agree to the construction of the west facing ramps on the M2.

## **EPPING TO CHATSWOOD RAIL LINE**



Whilst the Fahey Government had announced in 1994 to upgrade the Carlingford line and extend it to Epping, the Carr Government in 1998 agreed to extend the line to Chatswood.

However, some time later, when costs of the project went over budget, the Epping to Chatswood section was scrapped.

Construction of the Epping to Chatswood section is still proceeding with the result that local commuters will end up with half the original distance of the link costing twice the estimated budget price of building the complete Parramatta to Chatswood line.

The Parramatta to Chatswood rail would not only benefit local residents but also many thousands of people from Western Sydney who desire direct access to Chatswood and the northern suburbs.

This fact was put forward at the time as the major attraction of the facility.

### **WINDSOR ROAD JUNCTION, BAULKHAM HILLS**

The intersection of Windsor Road, Old Northern Road and Seven Hills Road is not only a major intersection for North Western Sydney residents but it is also used by thousands of motorists who travel through Baulkham Hills to Parramatta or Hawkesbury and the Central Western region of New South Wales or to the Central Coast via Wiseman's Ferry.

As stated elsewhere in this submission, North Western Sydney residents are dependant on buses for public transport and they are virtual captives to local and arterial roads in the area.

Motorists using Baulkham Hills Junction are subjected to virtual traffic gridlock during peak hours.

Baulkham Hills Shire Council has advised that the daily traffic volumes on each of Windsor Road/Old Northern Road and Seven Hills Road at this intersection exceeds 40,000 vehicles.

Baulkham Hills Shire Council earlier this year adopted a Baulkham Hills Town Centre Development Plan that will substantially increase housing densities and provide additional retail and commercial development for the area.

Council has realised that an essential part of these changes to the local planning scheme should include the construction of an overpass/underpass at this intersection.

Council formally moved at its meeting on 25<sup>th</sup> March 2008 that Windsor Road go underneath the junction of Seven Hills Road and Old Northern Road.

All three roads are under the control of the Roads and Traffic Authority.

Windsor Road, apart from the main access to Parramatta, is also used by motorists to access the Hawkesbury and Central Western New South Wales.

I am advised that the Roads and Traffic Authority had agreed with Baulkham Hills Shire Council to look at this proposal at the time plans were announced for a controversial additional bus lane at the intersection.

I have raised this vital project in the New South Wales Legislature on 10<sup>th</sup> April this year but I have received no response from the Minister for Roads.

I believe the upgrading of this major intersection is an essential item to improve transport in the area.

## **SOLUTIONS**

1. Revive the commitment to build the North West Heavy Rail Link.
2. Provide access to connect the North West Bus Transitway directly to the M2 Motorway.
3. Provide more buses to Hillsbus.
4. Construct the Epping to Parramatta Rail Link.

5. Long term planning to commence for an extension of the rail link to Vineyard.
6. Construct the M2 west-facing ramps on Windsor Road.
7. Underpass for Baulkham Hills Junction.

**WAYNE MERTON MP**  
**17 October 2008**