

THE TRANSPORT NEEDS OF SYDNEY'S NORTH-WEST SECTOR

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NSROC Submission

Inquiry into the Integrated Transport Needs for Sydney's North West Sector

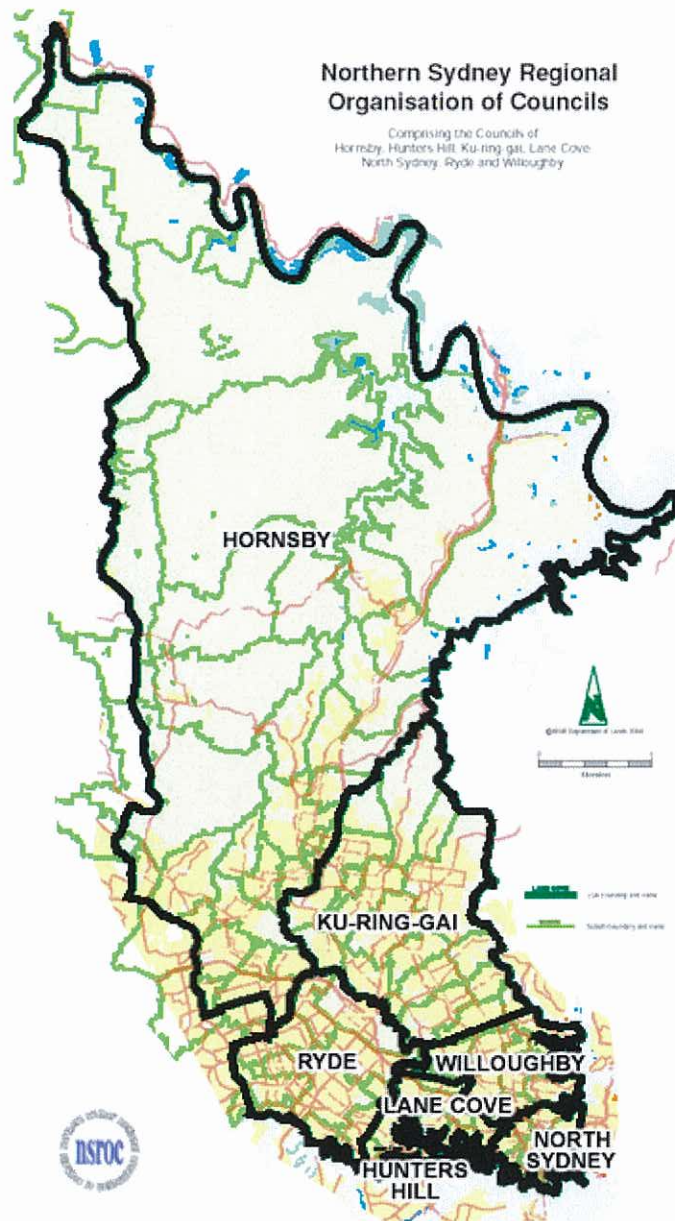


**The Legislative Council's General Purpose
Standing Committee**

October 2008

WHAT IS NSROC?

The Northern Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils (NSROC) is a voluntary organisation of local governments established to provide strong local government leadership; to work co-operatively for the benefit of the Northern Sydney region; and to effectively advocate on agreed regional positions and priorities. The councils under the NSROC umbrella are: Hornsby, Willoughby, North Sydney, Lane Cove, Ryde, Ku-ring-gai and Hunters Hill.



The NSROC councils are committed to the sustainable management of an area that covers nearly 700 square kilometres, and they serve a population of over half-a-million people. The region is home to a diverse collection of landscapes and communities, ranging from scenic waterways, bushland parks and areas of historical significance through to residential high-rise living and thriving commercial and retail centres.

TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE INQUIRY

Submissions have been invited by The Hon Jenny Gardiner MLC, Chair of the Legislative Council's General Purpose Standing Committee No. 4 (GPSC4) in response to the inquiry into the transport needs of Sydney's North-West Sector, including planning and funding of the North-West rail/ metro project. The terms of reference for the Inquiry are as follows:

That GPSC4 inquire into and report on the integrated transport needs of Sydney's North-West Sector and, in particular:

1. The requirements and plans for an integrated transport system in the North-West Sector, including road, rail and bus links,
2. The proposed funding of an integrated transport system for the North-West Sector, including the distribution of developer and State infrastructure levies,
3. The plans and funding for the North-West Metro and the NSW Government's decision not to proceed with the North-West Rail Link, and
4. Any other related matters.

PURPOSE OF THIS SUBMISSION

The purpose of this submission is to highlight the current and growing need for adequate investment in transport infrastructure in the North West sector of Sydney. Specifically the NSROC councils recommend that the state government keep its promise to deliver substantive public transport infrastructure in the North West sector including a metro or heavy rail line as envisaged in the State Infrastructure Strategy and the Metropolitan Plan. This promise underpins growth in the new release areas to the north-west and will assist in dealing with current and predicted capacity constraints.

The Pressure of Growth

The NSROC area is experiencing unprecedented growth. State strategic land-use policies such as the Metropolitan Strategy appear set to challenge historical growth patterns and values of the region. The Metropolitan Strategy, announced by the State Government in 2004, has set growth targets for the whole of Sydney and divided these targets into regions. The proposed growth target for the NSROC region is 56,400 households which equates to approximately 130,000 people over the 25 years of the Metropolitan Strategy. The two subregional strategies which cover the NSROC region are the Inner North Subregional Strategy (North Sydney, Lane Cove, Ryde, Mosman, Willoughby and Hunters Hill) and the North Subregional Strategy (Ku-ring-gai and Hornsby).

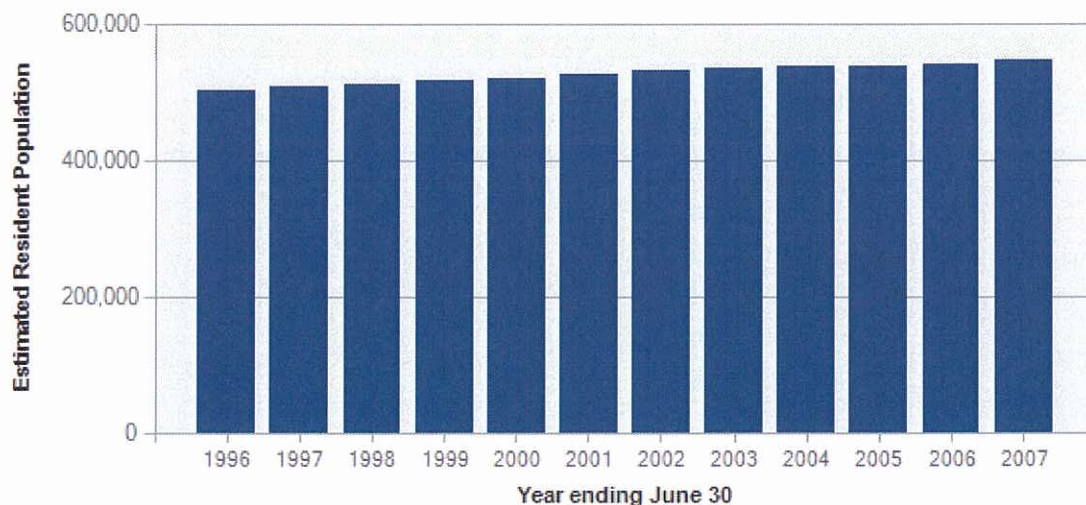
Local Government Area	Dwelling Target	Employment Capacity Target
Hunters Hill	1,200	300
Lane Cove	3,900	6,500
Hornsby	11,000	9,000
North Sydney	5,500	15,000
Ryde	12,000	21,000
Ku-ring-gai	10,000	4,500
Willoughby	6,800	16,000
Total	56,400	72,300

Dwelling targets and employment capacity targets for the NSROC Region, Department of Planning, 2007.

The two NSROC subregional plans, the Inner North Subregional Strategy and the North Subregional Strategy, were released in 2007. Central to the residential and employment targets contained within the Subregional strategies were the infrastructure commitments made in the State Infrastructure Strategy (SIS) which were to be provided to enable targeted growth through urban consolidation. The first and most important infrastructure item for transport identified in each Subregional strategy was the proposed North West – CBD – South West Rail link. Its value was that it would alleviate through traffic, increase opportunities for consolidation and connect the North West region to the rest of Sydney.

Fundamental to the strategic land use approach taken by the State Government has been the concept of concentrating growth on existing transport nodes. In NSROC this has largely meant providing for growth around the existing heavy rail train stations, notwithstanding the well documented current capacity constraints of the system. At the heart of this approach was the expectation and the documented promise by the State Government that a new North West railway line would be built. When the decision was taken to proceed with a metro line instead of the heavy rail line (a decision taken in the absence of significant consultation with local government), this was largely supported because of the concern that **nothing would be built at all**. Both proposals service the North-West region and run through the NSROC region and both proposals have their advantages and disadvantages. At this stage NSROC does not have a view on which is the preferable option but maintains that it is not an option to do nothing or further delay this critical and overdue infrastructure.

Estimated Resident Population, Northern Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Estimated Resident Population Cat. No. 3218.0.55.001 Regional Population Growth, Australia

While strongly supporting a regional strategic planning process for Sydney's growth, NSROC has consistently expressed concerns regarding the limited amount of transport infrastructure provision identified in the overall Metropolitan Strategy and the draft subregional strategies that have been released. NSROC's concern is that the transport infrastructure is inadequate to sustainably address the growth envisaged in the strategy, particularly as growth targets are identified for a 25 year period, but infrastructure is only identified for the next 10 years under the SIS. The NSROC councils remain in the invidious position of having to plan for 30 years of population growth with the commitment of only 10 years worth of infrastructure.

The Trend Towards Congestion

Widespread media publicity has occurred recently over the growing concerns that the Greater Metropolitan Region of Sydney is facing traffic gridlock in the foreseeable future, and initially at peak hours. These stem from extrapolating the association between the rapid growth in private vehicle journeys over the past five years, with proposals for substantial residential growth areas in the outer fringe of the city that are unlikely to be serviced by new rail infrastructure within the next decade.

There will also be a substantial contribution to congestion in many areas from the rapidly increasing truck movements through the GMR. These are either smaller units working in the light industrial or commercial sectors and making local trips, or heavy rigid trucks or B-doubles carrying upwards of five tons across longer distances. A national debate is occurring over how Australia will cope with the need to move an increasing freight load around the country, and especially to and from its key shipping ports. Various policy initiatives have been announced recently at both the Federal and State Government levels to ensure the road-rail freight balance is optimised, but there is a growing expectation that cities like Sydney will experience a much greater interaction with heavy vehicles before changes can take effect.

The most popular estimates are that the number of heavy vehicle movements across Australia will double by 2015. Whilst a substantial portion of this will be cross-country by trucks carrying in excess of 35 tonnes, or by freight trains, almost 70% will involve intra-urban movements. This has focused the attention of Government and industry on the need for reform of this critical sector of the macro-economy, and an agenda is being developed by bodies such as the National Transport Commission that will most likely include proposals for

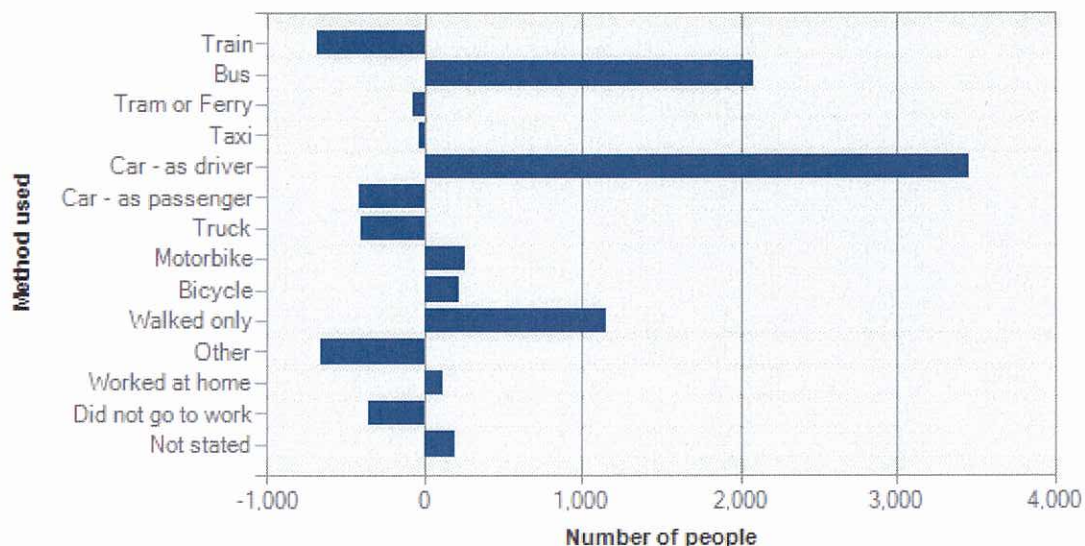
a number of long-term changes to the way in which heavy vehicles use, and pay for their use of, Australian roads. Notwithstanding this, recent press releases from the NSW Government voiced a commitment to “get trucks off the road” when the topic of the future planning of Sydney was discussed.

At the same time, there is evidence of an increasing strain on the existing passenger rail system across all of Sydney, as well as an upward projection in the container freight that will be moved across suburban rail lines on its way to, or from, Port Botany. Congestion on the lines from both of these could induce a move to road transport so that traffic problems are compounded. There are two solutions to these transport issues. The first, as mentioned earlier, it to strategically plan for people to live near where they work and where public transport nodes are located, so that public transport and active transport can replace car use. The second solution is to create an efficient and affordable public transport system which encourages users to abandon private vehicle trips in favour of more efficient public transport modes.

The Decline in Public Transport

Unfortunately neither solution is being employed at present. As previously identified, strategic land use planning is attempting to consolidate development around transport nodes however this is not being matched by the agreed transport infrastructure. In the case of the North West Metro or Heavy Rail Link not being built, not only will the current rail system fail to manage anticipated population growth, but the trend away from public transport will be exacerbated over time. Unless substantial investment occurs in all modes of public transport, the road network will eventually fail due to increased patronage despite the modest increases provided through new road infrastructure such as the Lane Cove Tunnel. It should be noted that no new major road projects are anticipated for the NSROC region with the possible exception of a duplication of the Iron Cove Bridge although considerable scepticism exists around the likelihood of this project eventuating. The data below illustrates that within the NSROC region residents are actively moving away from public transport and using vehicle travel to get to work. It is believed that this same trend is replicated for non-work related travel.

Change in mode of travel to work, NSROC Region, 2001 to 2006 (Enumerated data)



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006 and 2001 Census of Population and Housing (Enumerated)

The Road Network

Discussions with each of the NSROC Councils showed that they ranked the current level of traffic congestion high in their list of concerns, and that it was becoming progressively worse across the whole region. Considerable recent attention has been given to the severe impacts likely to be created by the traffic congestion in the south and west of Sydney, but it appears that the point will be reached at some time in the future when the pain will be shared equally across the entire city.

The NSROC region is serviced by five major arterial roads in particular. These are the F3 Freeway from the north, the Pacific Highway, Pennant Hills Road, Lane Cove/Ryde Road, and Epping Road / M2 tollway. Anecdotally, peak hours on most of these roads on weekdays already extends from 6.30am to 9.30am and 3.30pm till 7pm. A characteristic of each is that none services only this region – all are corridors linking Newcastle, the Central Coast or the Northern Beaches to the city and further south (Pennant Hills Rd and Pacific Highway); or the city and Eastern Suburbs to the Western Suburbs and the Blue Mountains (Victoria Rd & Epping Rd); or the south-west region to the north and north east (Lane Cove Rd / Ryde Rd).

The new M7 tollway has aggravated the existing congestion on Pennant Hills Rd and Epping Rd / M2. Vehicles travelling from Melbourne to Brisbane confront a set of 20-30 traffic lights on Pennant Hills Rd before they reach the F3 on their way north. Alternatively, they concentrate on the M2 east of Pennant Hills Rd if they are heading to the city. Longer term, the progressive growth of the North West sector and then the addition of its new growth centre, will also cause more cars to feed out onto both the M2 and Pennant Hills Rd depending on their destination. This build up can be expected to occur unabated until the proposed rail line to the new growth centre in the north-west sector becomes operational after 2017.

In the longer term, the population of the Central Coast and Hunter Region are also likely to continue to swell in parallel with that of the Sydney Basin, be this strategically directed through the Hunter and Illawarra Subregional Plan or as a product of market forces. Again, there are no short-term plans to augment the rail system between the three regions, so that passenger cars are likely to remain the transport-mode of choice. The Pacific Highway at Wahroonga and Pennant Hills Rd at the F3 termination points will be the immediate recipients of this increasing pressure. The evidence therefore points to an inescapable move towards severe traffic congestion throughout the NSROC region well before 2034, and most likely gridlock during morning and evening peak hours.

The most relevant data available was that collected in the traffic survey undertaken during 2002 by the RTA as part of a three year repeating cycle covering the whole of the State of NSW. This recorded the Annual Average Daily Traffic (AADT), which is assessed as the total volume of traffic recorded at a specific road location taken over a calendar year, and divided by the number of days in that year.

For the purposes of this exercise, only those roads that recorded a minimum AADT of 70,000 vehicles per day at some point along their monitored length was included, since this figure was considered to represent considerable existing congestion. This showed that, of the 19 arterial roads that exceeded this flow throughout all of the Greater Metropolitan Region, eight were in the NSROC region and another three were contiguous with it (i.e. as feeder or off-take roads). That is, half of the most congested traffic thoroughfares throughout Sydney were either in the region or skirted it. The maximum traffic counts recorded on the key roads of interest were:

Epping Rd	76,000	
F3 freeway at Wahroonga	79,000	(feeder road)

James Ruse Drive	73,000	(feeder road)
Lane Cove / Ryde Rd	77,000	
Military Rd	77,000	
Pacific Highway	71,000	
Pennant Hills Rd	79,000	
Victoria Rd	89,000	

(For comparison purposes, certain roads on the southern side of the Harbour Bridge showed inordinate congestion as well. General Holmes Drive carried 134,000; Southern Cross Drive 119,000, Parramatta Rd 89,000, and the Princes Highway 87,000. The M5 east was not functional when the AADT data was collected but now probably exceeds the worst of these)

The data excluded the M2 tollway which crosses the boundaries of three of the NSROC LGAs and the additional impacts of the completion of the M7. This carried an AADT of 69,000 in November 2002. Since most of this traffic would have entered or exited at Epping Rd in the east, it could have represented a significant double-counting to include it. Nevertheless, the volume of traffic carried on this road reinforces the notion of the region facing a dismal future from heavy congestion. Importantly though, the figure for the M2 for May 2005 was 76,000, notwithstanding there was a significant toll increase in that period. If this percentage increase were to be applied to the table above on a compounding basis, the totals that result would be disturbing.

There is one LGA that warrants specific attention in this analysis, and that is North Sydney. It sits at the northern confluence of the Sydney Harbour Bridge, the Sydney Harbour Tunnel and the Cahill Expressway. The total AADT recorded for these three roads was 350,000 vehicles per day, all of which travelled past or through the Council's area, and reflects the adage that "all roads lead to Rome ". The underlying stress on this part of the road system is demonstrated quickly if a car breaks down on any of these Harbour crossings at morning or evening peaks hours. The jam occurs swiftly and can take hours to clear.

The Bus Network

One of the modes of public transport that is widely used throughout Sydney is public buses. These travel from outer suburbs to the city and criss-cross the inner suburbs so are a preferred mode in many areas because they are flexible in their routes and timetables. Their use will continue to be preferred by many commuters to the private vehicle in inner areas because of their relative efficiency in moving people at peak hours, and especially where the RTA is able to provide preferred lane access.

However if the bus network in the northern region is to assist in relieving the traffic congestion developing north of the Harbour Bridge, new strategies must be found. These could include an increased commitment to bus / rail links (such as is being developed at Chatswood); an investigation of possible sites where buses from outlying areas can consolidate their passenger loads into a lesser number of units dedicated to travel into the city; and greater incorporation of car-parks near bus access points in the outer suburbs so that car commuters can use public transport for the last segment of their trip. The much touted bus reforms have not had the significant impact heralded by the State Government and many components of the reforms in the NSROC region have yet to be instituted. Simply put bus reforms and the provision of additional buses will not solve the significant transport issues of the region as they rely on the existing road network (which is at capacity) and are not a preferred modal choice for long journeys, non-peak journey and radial journeys.

The Rail Network

The North-West rail/ metro transport system is a key transport priority for Sydney. However, there is also a general need for the State Government to increase its funding commitment to the upgrading of existing public transport systems and the construction of new public

transport services throughout Sydney. The NSROC councils are already grappling with issues associated with transport, specifically an infrastructure network that is operating at, or close to, capacity. The NSROC councils are experiencing significant population growth and have committed to accommodating further growth through the State Government's Metropolitan Strategy. The acceptance of the population growth and employment targets by the NSROC councils is and always has been predicated on the State Government honouring its infrastructure commitments.

Recent events indicate that the North-West Metro, or its predecessor, the North-West Heavy railway line, may be substantially delayed or not built at all. This possibility would invalidate the rationale of the residential expansion plans of the North-West release lands and exacerbate the current through-traffic issues the NSROC region is already experiencing. In essence such a decision would render the Metropolitan Strategy as essentially meaningless and further alienate the NSROC communities from further regional strategic planning processes undertaken by the state.

The short-sighted decision to truncate the Epping to Parramatta heavy rail line has already put significant demands on the regional network and failed to address the transport needs of the parts of the North West sector most distant from the city, including the proposed land release areas. The completion of the Epping to Parramatta rail line is essential to cater for the continued growth of the North West. This will provide full access between Parramatta/ Castle Hill/ Hornsby/ the City/ Chatswood and Macquarie University/Business Park.

If the Metro option proceeds, (in contrast to the heavy rail originally proposed), the continuation and integration of this Metro Line must be made a priority. Any future/further development of Epping Station to accommodate the North-west Rail, regardless of the form it may take, must include meaningful community consultation. Sufficient "kiss and drop" facilities to be included at all stations along any proposed new rail lines, with other (bus etc) public transport linkages and parking facilities being provided where assessed (in consultation with the local community) to be appropriate.

It is also essential that there be easy ticketing and pedestrian access links between the new North-West transport system and the existing CityRail network at the various nodes where these services meet. Of particular importance are the modal links at Epping, into the Epping to Chatswood train line under construction, and the links at Wynyard train station then onto the North Shore line.

Relevance of State Policies

The NSW State Plan, released in November 2006, provided overarching goals for all state planning, including: healthy and harmonious communities, a high quality public transport system with cycling and pedestrian networks, improving urban environments, stimulating business investments, providing for open space and the arts and increasing the number of dwellings within thirty minutes travel of a Strategic Centre. Specifically Priority E5:Jobs Closer to Home includes the Target of 'increasing the percentage of the population living within 30 minutes by public transport of a city or major centre in Greater Metropolitan Sydney' (page 124). The data quoted in the State Plan posits that only 59% of the population of the North West have access to a city or major centre within 30 minutes by public transport. **This figure is the lowest in Sydney.** Unless additional infrastructure and investment is provided, this target can not be met.

Identifying Infrastructure Needs

In response to the evident infrastructure constraints within the region NSROC commissioned a series of reports in 2004/05 to examine the issue of long term sustainability within the context of significant population growth. The three resulting reports provide a robust analysis for examining infrastructure provision at a range of scales, and when considered in

combination with the work done by the State Government in developing the Metropolitan Strategy, the State Infrastructure Strategy and the State Plan, they foreshadow a significant gap in what is needed to maintain the transport needs of the region. The three reports are:

1. The Economic Contribution of the NSROC Region (Centre for International Economics, December 2004)
2. NSROC Regional Social Report (Le Bransky, October 2005)
3. The Environmental Impacts of Population Growth on the NSROC Region (Noonan, October 2005)

(These reports can be viewed at www.nsroc.org.au)

The economic analysis undertaken by NSROC indicates that the NSROC region is a highly productive region, producing a significant proportion of the output from Sydney and gross state product (GSP) for New South Wales. The NSROC region is estimated to contribute approximately 16 per cent of Sydney's GRP (of \$208 billion), 11 per cent of New South Wales' estimated GSP (of \$283 billion) and 4 per cent of national output or gross domestic product (GDP) (of \$787 billion) (Centre for International Economics 2004).

It is well known that transport infrastructure capacity is a limiting factor on urban consolidation and population growth. Accordingly NSROC has identified the following key transport infrastructure priorities in its own Subregional Planning Strategy released in 2006:

- Completion of the Parramatta – Chatswood Rail Link;
- Completion of the M2 – F3 Orbital Link;
- Hornsby to Newcastle High Speed Rail Link;
- Bus-only Transit way between Chatswood and the Brookvale / Dee Why Centre;
- Integrated public transport to Macquarie Park;
- A second Harbour Bridge Rail Crossing;
- A pilot Project to introduce Demand Responsive Transport Public Transport Services that complement and meet service gap areas under the new Principal Bus Contractors arrangements;
- Creation of transport strategy for the Victoria Road corridor, to address private vehicle and public transport;
- Improvements to major intersections on state arterial roads;
- Retention of existing ferry services in the region and exploration of possible extension of the ferry services;
- Creation of a Pacific Highway Corridor Strategy to relieve growing pressure on this major North-South artery; and
- A strong focus on, and commitment to, active transport (bicycle and pedestrian) programs and infrastructure.

Reforming State Government Policy

Since the 1980s the State Governments have been pushing the build, own, operate and transfer public-private partnership that has seen a number of large tollway road infrastructure projects built such as the Cross City Tunnel and the Lane Cove Tunnel Project. This capacity to tap into new sources of finance to fund road building increases the pressure on the State Government to give in to the roads lobby and defer adequate transport planning which meets the needs of the existing and future populations, particularly within urban areas. If the large scale urban growth envisaged in the Metro Strategy takes place through urban consolidation, despite enormous spending on road infrastructure, these systems will essentially fail.

In contrast funding for public transport, which has the potential to meet the expanding population, is woefully inadequate. Without improvements to the public transport system and travel demand measures, additional road capacity provided by major road infrastructure

will ultimately be taken up and will lead to further congestion downstream. Once road capacity has been improved and congestion and travel times reduced there will be less incentive for people to change their mode of travel to public transport.

NSROC recommends that a single Sydney Transport Authority should be implemented to co-ordinate and integrate all modes of transport, so as to avoid each mode being planned and operated in a competitive and self-serving manner.

NSROC also recommends that as part of its response to the transport issues of the North West sector, the following reforms should be pursued as a matter of priority and urgency:

- Commitment and Commencement of the North-West Metropolitan Railway Link or the North-West Heavy Rail Line
- Significant Reform of the State Transport Bureaucracy
- Integration of Ticketing
- Investment in Public Transport
- Fast track bus improvements

Conclusion

The trend for the North West sector of Sydney is for the volume of traffic to unavoidably grow to unmanageable levels, or at least in the absence of a major paradigm-shift in the land-use planning or transport management thinking. Much of the congestion that currently occurs involves peak-period travel between home and work, and this is the most likely element to face gridlock the earliest. Residents in the North West sector are living further away from their place of employment, and increasingly in areas that are poorly serviced by efficient public transport. The pressure to use a private vehicle is irresistible in these circumstances and will continue to be so until suitable travel alternatives are offered.

The NSROC region is facing extreme traffic pressures over the next 30 years, and gridlock at many pressure points well before this time. This represents the single most important impact of a substantial population growth in the region, and in the absence of a comprehensive sustainable transport strategy, will seriously impede the goal of increasing the population within the NSROC borders.

The focus of a new approach to transport provision in the North West sector should therefore take account of how various forms of transport through the NSROC region are to be integrated to allow the greatest volume of people to be moved as quickly as possible, using the lowest number of conveyances. This should include for example, providing facilities at rail stations that have car-parking and bus access, single tickets to cover the costs of all three, and bus and train timetables that truly link.

In response to the Terms of Reference of this Inquiry the following observations are made:

1) There is a clear and demonstrable need for an integrated transport system in the North-West Sector, including road, rail and bus links. From the planned growth within the NSROC region alone it is clear that the current transport infrastructure will not cope with anticipated growth over the next two decades. Combined with the new release areas and the outlying elements of the North West sector, this makes a compelling case for a significant and immediate investment into the transport system servicing this sector. Moreover the state government has predicated all of its recent strategic planning on the provision of a North-West railway link to manage anticipated growth. To not proceed with this proposal imperils the sustainable growth of the region and imperils the legitimacy of the State Plan, the Metropolitan Strategy and all related state planning and infrastructure policies.

2) Funding is a key issue in addressing the transport needs of the region. Given the current state financial predicament and global credit crisis, innovative solutions are needed. However this should not mean there is a deferment of the North West rail link (metro or

heavy rail) but rather alternative funding arrangements should be considered. The strong economic value to the state provided by the North West sector rests on a workable transport system. Investment now in transport infrastructure will assist in arresting the decline in Sydney's economic performance comparative to Melbourne and Brisbane and stimulate further employment and investment activity.

3) NSROC does not have a formal position on the merits of the North-West Metro as apposed to the North-West Rail Link. It should be noted the City of Ryde does support progressing the North West Metro as opposed to the North West rail link. However, as stated earlier, one or other of these projects must proceed if confidence is to be restored in the state government's ability to provide the key infrastructure necessary for predicted growth and to honour its commitments to an electorate which has grown weary of continual delay and broken promises.