

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

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**Date received:** 17/10/2008

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## **Recommendations**

- 1. The urgent need for a consistent transport plan, where every action is consistent with the implementation of this plan.**
    - a. The integration of road and public transport planning;**
    - b. The immediate introduction of a 24-hour bus lane from Rouse Hill to the city;**
    - c. Reintroduction of the North West rail project;**
    - d. Maximise opportunities to undertake work on the integrated transport plan when other related works are being undertaken.**
  - 2. The identification and annexing of future public transport corridors in Sydney's North West.**
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## **Introduction**

1. Twenty years ago, much of Sydney's north-west was rolling hills dedicated mainly to rural activities. It was fairly flat, sparsely populated and served by a two-lane road from Parramatta to Richmond and a single-track railway branch line from Blacktown to Richmond.
2. Since that time, Sydney's north-west has been recognised "as one of the fastest growing regions in New South Wales." As a general rule it would be fair to say the transport infrastructure has belatedly followed the development and growth, rather than preceding it.

3. While there have been some improvements, the region continues to play “catch-up” and remains poorly supported in terms of transport infrastructure and expectations enjoyed by much of Sydney.
4. The Labor government, after many years of pressure from local government and community groups belatedly resolved to widen Windsor Road from Parramatta to Windsor to four lanes, with the four-lane road opening in December 2006.
5. The significant construction of this major artery and the Parramatta – Rouse Hill T-Way, offered a unique opportunity for concomitant cost-effective construction of components of the north-west rail link including transport/retail hubs and major interchanges.
6. The four lane Windsor Road is a major artery and has already reached capacity for extended peak hours. Since its opening, there has been a strong case for six lanes and further underpasses at major intersections.
7. The NSW Government appears to have abandoned its 10-year plan to expand the CityRail network with new lines to the north-west and through the CBD.
  - a. In the past decade, journeys on Sydney's rail system have increased by only 6.6 per cent.
  - b. The comparable figure in Brisbane was 39.5 per cent, and in Melbourne, the increase was a staggering 58.6 per cent.
  - c. While the Parramatta to Chatswood rail line offered considerable benefits to Western Sydney, the deletion of the Parramatta to Epping section limits the viability of the Epping to Chatswood section.

- d. A rail link to the north west has been proposed for many years, yet little action was taken to earmark rail corridors or undertake any preliminary construction work when related major infrastructure projects were undertaken:
  - i. Redevelopment of Castle Towers;
  - ii. Major construction of Windsor Road;
  - iii. Opening of significant new sub-divisions.
- 8. While the significant increase in the cost of petrol has changed commuting habits, the lack of new services and an infrastructure 'log-jam' has resulted in a public transport system operating beyond capacity and increased patronage on all forms of public transport.
  - a. While Sydney's population grew by 4.1 per cent in the past five years, the use of public transport grew by only 1.4 per cent.
  - b. Public transport trips boomed by 41 per cent in Brisbane between 1997 and last year and by 33 per cent in Melbourne in the past decade, according to new analysis by the Bureau of Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Economics.
  - c. In Sydney, trips grew by just 2.7 per cent, and were completely swallowed by the 10.4 per cent growth in population over that time.
- 9. M2 buses carry a significant number of passengers, yet are forced to compete for road space for most of the journey with hundreds of cars, often carrying only the driver. It is illogical not to have a dedicated bus lane from Rouse Hill to the city.

## North West Rail Link

1. On 22 November 2006 the Transport Infrastructure Development Corporation (TIDC) released an Environmental Assessment and Concept Plan of a proposal to construct the North-West Rail Link that would provide a new heavy rail link between Epping and the regional centres of Castle Hill and Rouse Hill. The North-West Rail Link would be a twin track passenger railway, approximately in length, connecting with the existing Northern Line between Beecroft and Cheltenham stations and terminating at Rouse Hill.
2. The Western Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils (WSROC), in their response to the Plan supported the proposed Rail Link, indicating
  - a. The rail line will deliver a wide range of benefits to the community including improved accessibility to the public transport network, improved travel choice, reduced car dependency and demand on the arterial road network and potential for travel time savings. It is entirely consistent with the NSW Government's Metropolitan Strategy **City of Cities** and the State Environmental Planning Policy (Sydney Regional Growth Centres) 2006.
3. The 2007 State Government publication **Better Transport for the North-West** (February 2007) advised *The government has started buying land for the new rail line in the north-west.*
4. The **State Plan**, released later that year, indicated that the North West Rail Link and the Redfern to Chatswood Rail Link would open in 2017, *providing direct access between the North West and the 'global economic corridor.'*

❖ *Fast-tracking of the North West Rail Link to The Hills by two years.*



- *Stage 1 from Epping to Hills Centre will be completed by 2015, providing three new stations - Franklin Road, Castle Hill and Hills Centre.*
  - *Stage 2 from Hills Centre to Rouse Hill will be completed by 2017, providing three new stations - Norwest, Burns Road and Rouse Hill.*
5. In March 2007, the Labor Government went to the electorate with the State Plan as a pivotal commitment. While many considered a North-West rail link by 2017 was still overdue, there was an expectation the Labor Government, if re-elected, was committed to the project and would complete it by 2107.
6. On 2 October 2007, the **Hills News** reported that:
- A push by Treasurer, Michael Costa's department to derail the \$3 billion North West Rail Link in favour of cheaper buses sparked outrage in The Hills last week. The Premier and the Transport Minister, John Watkins, say the railway will go ahead in 2015. But Mr Costa – the minister who truncated the Parramatta-Chatswood line in 2003 – has remained silent while his senior officials have mounted a campaign to have the scheme re-examined.*
- Cynical Liberal MPs Michael Richardson (Castle Hill) and Wayne Merton (Baulkham Hills) said the message was clear: "You can't trust the Labor Government. They say the "writing was on the wall" two weeks ago when the government announced it was likely to abandon the Harbour rail tunnel it previously said was integral to the rail link.*
- The Herald report cited cost-conscious, rail-averse officials in Mr Costa's Treasury trying to dump the link, arguing that alternative solutions for the north-west had been properly considered.*
7. This may have been a "judicious leak" to soften the public up for an announcement abandoning the rail link and replacing it with the North-West Metro.

8. On 17 March 2008, the Premier Morris Iemma announced Sydney will have a metropolitan style rail system (Metro) linking the city's north-west to the CBD in a \$12.5 billion project to be fully operational by 2017.
  - a. The 17 station project on Tuesday, which will begin at Rouse Hill and travel though the north-west to St James station, in the city centre.
  - b. The project will replace the government's previous plan for the northwest rail link, which was to make use of the existing heavy rail system.
  - c. The first Metro train will run in Sydney in 2015, operating between Castle Hill and Epping with the entire line to be fully functional two years later.
  - d. Mr Iemma said it would be the first in a series of metro lines which could also link Parramatta and the CBD and a south-east line running from the city to Maroubra and Malabar.
  - e. Mr Iemma also said the project was not dependent on the privatisation of NSW electricity sector.
9. A State Government publication **Greater Western Sydney - Regional Delivery Update 2008**, advised *The North West Metro—a high frequency and high capacity metro line will run between the city's north-west to the CBD to meet the needs of a growing population. The first metro trains will run to Sydney in 2015, operating between Castle Hill and Epping with the entire line to be fully functional two years later (by 2017).*
10. Opposition transport spokeswoman Gladys Berejiklian said the public was entitled to be sceptical about the latest announcement of a metro line from Rouse Hill to the CBD by 2017.

*I find it hard to believe that a project that's been announced for 10 years in relation to the northwest heavy rail link, which has today been scrapped, and that a new project has been announced (and) will be completed within those time frames.*

*If the plan went ahead, it meant commuters may be forced to stand for the entire 44-minute journey from Rouse Hill to the city.*

11. While the State Government has hyped this metro with glossy advertisements and a TV advertisement by a helicopter Traffic Reporter, there does not appear to have been any explanation why the North-West Rail Link was dropped in favour of the more expensive Metro proposal.
12. On 5 September, Michael Costa, the former Treasurer announced at a press conference that NSW was broke, and could not afford a number of key infrastructure projects. He said NSW is facing a dramatic drop in revenues from stamp duty approaching \$200 million in the first two months of the 2008/09 financial year, as a result of the economic slowdown, while also disclosing that the state is faced with a dramatic blow-out in the health budget running to hundreds of millions of dollars.
13. On October 7, 2008, **The Sydney Morning Herald** reported the Federal Government has told NSW not to bother asking for funds for the \$12 billion North West Metro project because there are no federal Labor votes in it.

*The Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, and the Treasurer, Wayne Swan, told a meeting in February involving the former premier, Morris Iemma, and senior state bureaucrats that they were not interested in the rail project because Labor had no marginal seats in the area it would service, senior NSW sources said.*



*The revelation comes as Mr Rudd is scheduled to deliver a speech in Brisbane today in which he will stress that decisions on financing projects out of the \$20 billion Building Australia fund will be made on merit*

*Canberra's reluctance to advance funds could effectively kill off or severely delay the metro project. The State Government has been noticeably silent on the prospects for federal funding for the scheme since February, despite Mr Rudd making it clear Canberra is keen to make the \$20 billion in infrastructure money available to the states. (Andrew Clennell and Linton Besser)*

14. On the same day (7 October 2008) the Queensland government announced plans for a \$14 billion rail project in Brisbane, to be part-funded by the federal government's \$20 billion Building Australia fund. ***The Sydney Morning Herald*** reported:

*Last week, state and federal leaders at the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) meeting agreed to fast track big-ticket infrastructure spending to help shield the economy from continuing global financial turmoil.*

*Premier Anna Bligh on Tuesday released the Inner City Rail Capacity Study, proposing new tracks along two lines, from the southern Gold Coast and the western Ipswich lines, extending to the north of Brisbane.*

*It would feature underground tunnels up to 13km long, and stations at Spring Hill, Woolloongabba, the CBD, the RNA showgrounds and West End, that would be up to 45 metres underground.*

*Ms Bligh said the massive projects were likely to cost up to \$14 billion, but with federal government's funding the first stage could begin by late 2012.*

15. It is hard to fathom how this project could receive federal funding while a similar project (the North West Rail Link) with significant economic and social benefits could

be rejected. A rejection “as there are no Labor votes in it” suggests the ultimate hypocrisy and manipulation and short-term thinking.

16. The conclusions are that:

- a. The North-West sector has been toyed with by the NSW Labour Government.
- b. Without any will and commitment to an expanded, coordinated and resourced public transport infrastructure, Sydney’s North West Sector will continue to languish and struggle with a disjointed, fragmented, overcrowded and ill-conceived public transport system.
- c. The NSW Labor Government is adept at making announcements, but has missed significant opportunities to manage Sydney’s growth in a fair and equitable manner and build world class public transport system for a world class city.

There are risks and costs to a program of action.  
But they are far less than the long-range risks and  
costs of comfortable inaction.

John F Kennedy

## **Bus Transport**

1. The opening of the M2 in May 1997 resulted in an overwhelming demand for bus travel from the north-west sector to the city.
2. As fuel prices have risen, so has demand for the services.

3. Hillsbus currently operates over 90 M2 services from the north-west to the city every weekday between 6.00am and 8.30am (passing the Barclay Road) bus station together with over twenty services entering the M2 at Pennant Hills Road.
4. The majority of these services are at capacity long before their final pick-up, leaving (frustrated) passengers to wait for a later bus. Often this can be several buses later. [Calls to Hillsbus regarding extra buses to carry the passengers left behind are met with the response that the passengers should write to the government.]
5. These buses carry a significant number of passengers and the service is running at capacity, with (presumably) more services planned. Yet these buses, each carrying 64-92 passengers at peak hours, are forced to compete for road space for most of the journey, with hundreds of cars, often carrying only the driver.
6. While this M2 bus service has reached a 'tipping-point' that warrants replacement with a light or heavy rail alternative, it is illogical not to have a dedicated bus lane from Rouse Hill to the city. This would lead to a significant reduction in journey time, better utilisation of the bus fleet and greater comfort and certainty for passengers. It would almost certainly also lead to a reduction in the number of cars on the M2, the Harbour Bridge and Tunnel and the city.
7. While the M2 bus services warrant consideration of a replacement service, in the short term (at least until 2017 when the Metro/rail Link is due to open) there is an urgent need for additional services (both peak and off peak) to meet the continually increasing demand.
- 8. It is recommended the Upper House Committee recommend the immediate introduction of a 24-hour bus lane from Rouse Hill to the city.**



## Appendix 1 – Planning

### Extract from “Stateline” – 30 June 2006

QUENTIN DEMPSTER: When an audience of staff, bureaucrats and fellow MPs gathered on Monday to listen to their leader, they were probably wondering what it was that the Premier was planning. After all, in 11 years of Labor rule, there has been no shortage of plans. Remember these?

PREMIER (2004): The first time a government is spelling out this detail over 25 to 30 years.

PREMIER (2002): This is basically a five year plan.

PREMIER (2005): This is part of a detailed plan to make our city the most vibrant and the most liveable in the world.

PREMIER (1998): We’ve got a plan for our future.

PREMIER (2005): There have been plenty of plans for Sydney over the last half a century.

At this press conference on Monday 26 June 2006 to announce the “Plan to have a Plan,” the Premier said:

*An enterprise as large and as complex as the New South Wales government must be guided by clear plans for the future. With a \$40 billion budget and more than 300,000 staff, we need a much more rigorous approach to planning. We have to anticipate future challenges and find the policies that will enable us to meet those challenges. That means, first of all, consciously deciding to plan for the longer term. Yes, there will always be the unexpected events, but we should not be caught on the hop by challenges that are obvious and predictable, such as the ageing of the population or the growth of coastal communities. That means the vast bulk of our policies, our spending and our actions should be guided by the plan.*



In response to a Stateline question from Quentin Dempster concerning public scepticism and cynicism, the Premier replied:

*The plan on its own is not enough. There must also be a commitment to put our plan into practice, to do what we plan. That's critical. Public cynicism about politics is largely the result of the community's perceptions that commitments are not firmly adhered to.*