

**Submission
No 167**

THE TRANSPORT NEEDS OF SYDNEY'S NORTH-WEST SECTOR

Name: Ms Jennifer Farrer

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TRANSPORT IN NORTH WEST SYDNEY
SUBMISSION TO UPPER HOUSE COMMITTEE OF INQUIRY

I have lived in Castle Hill for 21 years and have seen the area grow. Much of this experience has been painful as roads have become more and more congested and journey times have extended.

I am sure that my suggestions on how to solve the transport problems in The Hills are not new but I am writing this submission because I think that the Committee needs to hear from as many residents as possible about the problems which we encounter in travelling around. I write as a driver and as a commuter on public transport. I also think that the solutions should be found in public transport options as much as possible.

1. M2 Bus Service.

This has been a life saver for residents. Before its introduction we had to drive to a railway station, find somewhere to park and then catch the train. Travel time to a station varied according to the volume of traffic and was quite unpredictable so an early start was essential. The same could be said for the parking. Being able to catch a bus which travelled express to the city is absolutely marvellous especially in peak times. However, there are huge problems mainly because it is so popular. Residents have to endure conditions which at times are uncomfortable and unsafe. People are crammed on to buses until even a Japanese rail commuter would find it too crowded. The buses then proceed to travel at 100kph along the M2. It is

amazing, and a tribute to the drivers, that so far there has not been a serious accident. I have seen more and more buses added to the routes so much so that at certain times of the day the bus service is actually adequate to meet demand. This is not true at the weekends. I often work in the city on Saturdays and Sundays and the bus service is very unreliable. This is bad news when you have to start a job at a set time. People who work at the weekend are entitled to as reliable service as those who work on weekdays.

Suggestions for improvements to the M2 bus services

1. Have prepaid tickets available for purchase at outlets such as newsagents in the same way as for the government buses. At Castle Hill in the early morning peak there is the opportunity to purchase a ticket before you get on the bus. This reduces the time taken to load the bus significantly. Conversely getting on the bus in the city particularly on weekends and at night can take forever as a large number of people purchase tickets from the driver.
2. More buses particularly on weekends. There is now a service from Castle Hill Monday to Friday in the off peak every 15 minutes which is excellent. However, there are still not enough buses in the early morning peak . I am sure any one who lives in Baulkham Hills or West Pennant Hills will tell you this as they are the ones who see the buses fly by their stop with "Sorry Bus Full" signs. Leaving the city between 4.00pm and 5.00pm is also difficult. There also should be buses on the other routes at weekends and not just Routes 610 and 619.

3. As we are going to be dependent on buses for the foreseeable future there should be a dedicated bus lane on the M2. This will enable buses to actually stick to the timetable instead of being held up in traffic. Journey times fluctuate widely due to different traffic conditions which makes it very hard to actually plan when you will arrive at your destination. When conditions are very congested on the M2 the bus will sometimes continue along Epping Road and only join the M2 after the Epping tunnel.
4. More commuter parking for bus travellers near the major stops. The options for commuter parking in Castle Hill are woeful.

2. Travelling by car from North West Sydney to the CBD and the Eastern Suburbs

As with public transport this can be quick or slow depending on the time of day, the weather and the time of the year. It is amazing how much quicker it is to get around in the school holidays. If only parents would let their children catch public transport. Not only would they acquire a lifetime habit and learn to be independent but we would all save money not sitting in as many traffic jams. However, the BIG Issue is the cost of the road tolls. Sure we can have a quicker trip into the CBD or the airport or the Eastern Suburbs if we want to invest serious money on the tolls for using the M2, Lane Cove Tunnel, Harbour Tunnel/Bridge and the Eastern Distributor. Most of us do and if you are not travelling on these expensive roads every day it is affordable. However the issue here is one of fairness. Why do residents in North West Sydney have to pay so many tolls when the toll on the F3 was

abolished years ago and there is now a cash back scheme for the M4? I don't feel like a wealthy person (my income is less than \$50,000p.a) and yet the government obviously thinks we can afford it. The reality is that the necessary infrastructure has been built late in the scheme of things and so we are saddled with the cost because the government did not want to or did not have taxpayers' money available to build it. This is the main reason why we don't have a railway which leads on to the next point.

Suggestions for improving travel to the CBD from North West Sydney

1. Build a railway. We are tired of promises and schemes which never leave the drawing board. There seems to be a wish on the part of people in government who plan and fund public infrastructure projects that somehow a solution to providing public transport for the hundreds of thousands of new residents who are coming to live here as a result of government planning will be provided without costing the government money. The T-Way bus service which was built to much fanfare and apparently cost quite a lot was seen as a solution to the public transport needs of the people of Rouse Hill and Kellyville. However, it is only a partial solution as it only takes people to Blacktown or Parramatta. Any transport system which requires people to break their journey and make a connection is not as attractive as one which takes them to their destination all the way. This is why the M2 bus is more popular than taking a bus to a railway station such as Pennant Hills or Parramatta.

3. Travelling by car from North West Sydney to other parts of Sydney

The M7 has made a big difference to journeys west from the Hills. Unlike the toll roads mentioned above it is much better value for money in terms of the cost for each kilometre travelled. Journeys to the North would be improved if the missing link between the M2 and F3 could be built.

4. Travelling around the North West

Most residents travel around the North West by car because the bus routes tend to be radial to centres such as Castle Hill, Blacktown and Parramatta. I have actually done some journeys by public transport when I have been without a car. The 131 500 Infoline gives you all sorts of options if you find yourself carless but you have to have plenty of time to make the connections.

Suggestions for improving travel around the North West

1. Look at community bus services which would use small buses on flexible routes.
2. Look at timetables of existing bus services. People are not going to use public transport if the travel time is inordinately long. It should be possible to travel from Castle Hill to Parramatta in less than 45 minutes. There is no encouragement to use public transport when it is so slow.
3. Upgrade some of the bottlenecks around the area. Widen Showground Road. Look at better traffic management in Norwest Boulevard. It is problems.

4. Look at bicycle paths which are useful for commuters rather than just recreational use. Many of the roads in this area do not have footpaths so there is space for bicycle paths on the verges.

Jennifer Farrer