

**Submission  
No 21**

**INQUIRY INTO ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT  
IN CENTRAL WESTERN NEW SOUTH WALES**

**Organisation:** Central West Transport Forum

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Partially Confidential

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24/08/2011

The Director  
Standing Committee on State Development  
Legislative Council  
Parliament House  
Macquarie Street  
Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Sir,

**Re: Inquiry into economic and social development in central western New South Wales.**

I write on behalf of the Central West Transport Forum (CWTF). Thank you for the invitation to make a submission.

The Central West Transport Forum is the remnant of the transport interest section of the Futures 30 conference which was an initiative of the Cowra Sire Council to seek local input in various areas of community concern. The CWTF now has no connection with the Cowra Council.

Members of the CWTF are greatly concerned about the deterioration in transport services and lack of progress in improving highway infrastructure in the Central West. We are particularly concerned about the highway development lobbying activities coming principally from our local government bodies. We believe they are failing to ensure a sound examination of these problems.

The poor standard of our Great Western Highway connection to Sydney is causing serious regional disadvantage. In many cases drivers of both light and heavy vehicles, show worthwhile benefits in savings of time, energy and safety by diverting south and using the Hume Highway. This can often involve an additional 100Km of travel to get to Sydney. Another concern is that unlike other regions in NSW, the Central West does not have a road capable of allowing access across the Blue Mountains for B-Double trucks. These trucks must now be considered standard freight vehicles.

In recent years we have also seen the removal of both rail and air services to a number of towns in this region. Cowra is an example. This is placing greater stress on our road system which is clearly not keeping pace with demands.

We believe there are a number of causes contributing to this road planning neglect. The following points are relevant:

**1. Public apathy and lack of public participation in road development matters.**

To our knowledge, apart from single issue groups, there are no road user advocacy organisations based in the Central West. Such a situation is ironical considering the vital importance of the road

system to regional communities. Attempts to organise advocacy have been fragmented and poorly resourced reflecting the general public apathy in these matters. Similar problems can be seen in industry representations where the main efforts appear to be based on reforms to road use, taxing and regulation matters, with road development issues being largely ignored. There are also obstacles for community groups such as the costs of administration of formally establishing these organisations. The cost of public liability insurance remains an obstacle for any community group.

While the NRMA is a large and wealthy organisation which does offer some advocacy, it lacks the regional organisation or member conferences necessary to enable policy formulation to deal effectively with local and regional problems.

## **2. Local Government**

Local Councils have always been considered as the main avenue providing public support for a better deal for motorists. Unfortunately this is only partly true. We believe that a major cause of many of the problems in highway development stem from the government's failure to deal effectively with the problem of bypassing towns. This increasing problem, which applies to most large towns on highways, introduces conflicts in local communities. Much of this arises when projects such as ring-roads are proposed which attempt to solve a number of problems with the same project. These are rarely efficient and usually result in compromised outcomes for highway users. We believe that the problem of bypass planning is basically at the heart of our inability to get a satisfactory access road to Sydney.

We also suggest that the combined lobbying efforts of councils through CENTROC should be questioned. For instance, CENTROC has directed its entire efforts at an upgrade of the Bells Line of Road. It has ignored the need to look at alternative options for an expressway crossing of the Blue Mountains. We believe this failure to consider alternatives is a contradiction of the basic principles of planning. Furthermore, the \$560M program of upgrade projects being applied to the GWH by the RTA also continues without question. These projects are providing a speed restricted route that continues to travel through the residential and business areas of mountain towns. This cannot provide the needed express road connection to Sydney. It is also interesting to note that a number of RTA meetings recently held at Hartley and Mt. Victoria, in order to seek public views on changing the route of the GWH between Lithgow and Mt. Victoria, were not attended by representatives from western councils. There was however, a very strong representation from the local community at those meetings. We believe this lack of balance in consultation is also a matter of concern.

Sound planning strategies must ensure measures to manage the parochialism of councils in highway development issues. We believe this could come from measures aimed at engaging public representation from a wider area. This could also help to provide a more holistic approach to planning.

## **3. Planning Authority**

The Environmental Planning & Assessment Act 1979, clearly indicates that the procedures used for planning public utilities are a responsibility of the Department of Planning. We believe that efficient highway development relies heavily on the wise application of land use planning. The obvious inconsistency in the Planning Department's lack of interest in highway planning compared with that of its scrutiny of private land use and building developments for example, suggests serious double standards. Examples of this deficiency can be seen in existing and planned projects of the GWH, the

Mitchell Highway and the Mid-Western Highway between Bathurst and Blayney. We believe that a more holistic planning approach to these projects would have ensured consideration of alternative route options with much improved long-term benefits for road users. An example of this can be seen in the works carried out on the Mid-Western Highway between Bathurst and Blayney where there could have been an opportunity to combine Mitchell Highway traffic with Mid- Western traffic at Vittoria. Such a project would have removed the Mt.Fitzgerald problem from the MWH and could also have allowed an efficient northern bypass of Bathurst. We believe this highlights the problem of current discrete project planning. We also believe that the provision of efficient town bypass corridors should have a high priority in the formulation of Local Environment Plans. This should not be left entirely to local government bodies.

Another area of concern connected to the above is the lack of scrutiny being directed to the planning organisation and work of consultants. Greater numbers of consultants are now being employed by government agencies such as councils and the RTA. There is considerable evidence suggesting that the fundamental processes of problem solving are often ignored. There are also questions about the degree of balance and extent of consultation being used in these investigations.

There are also questions as to the need for the Planning Authority to ensure that the benefits of current road construction technology are being reflected in benefits to the community. This should reflect the same concern and scrutiny as is being applied to the rules for efficient building development.

#### 4. RTA

We consider that the primary purpose of a highway system is to provide inter-regional connection. However, current planning appears to be reluctant to accept this view. The obvious and increasing demands now being placed on our road system must go hand in hand with changes to the way planning and development issues are considered. There has been a pleasing increase in Federal Government's acceptance in highway development responsibility. This should be expected however, considering the revenue derived from fuel taxes. We believe that a greater share than the current 20% of this fuel tax should be returned to upgrading the highway system.

We would like to suggest that any review of the activities of the RTA could consider the following:

- That given that the RTA has a monopoly of the planning, construction, regulation of road use and vehicle taxing, yet unlike most other government monopolies it has no regional advisory or liaison committees, consideration should be given to the establishment of such committees.
- That measures be in place to ensure planning protocols are in place to seek wider and more balanced inter-regional participation in planning events from local government, public and industry.
- That measures be in place to ensure that the actions of some communities and councils do not place impediments in the way of efficient service to others (assurance of service equity).
- That future planning strategies have greater emphasis on holistic long-term planning rather than piecemeal discrete project planning.

- That there be greater balance in planning by providing more public information about the organisation of project priorities including information about losses due to poor road performance as well as assumed regional economic growth projections.
- The use of basic planning procedures that consider ALL feasible alternatives.

## 5. Projects

Some specific project proposals taken from our Central West Transport Forum, website, are included in the attachments. Study of detailed topographic mapping is necessary for an understanding of these.

- 1) Lithgow bypass proposal.
- 2) Express highway for the Blue Mountains.
- 3) Bathurst and Mount Fitzgerald bypass proposal.

### Supporting documents attached :

- 4) Submission to RTA re:Lithgow to Mt.Victoria GWH planning.
- 5) Letter to Planning Director, Mr. Sam Haddad, re: highway planning.
- 6) Letter from RTA Chief Executive, Mr. Les Wielinga, re: planning alternatives for the GWH.
- 7) Submission to RTA re: Arup, Bells Line of Road inquiry.

### **Further reading:**

Environmental Planning and Assessment Act, 1979.

1:25,000 Topographic mapping.

Central West Transport Forum, website.

Planning NSW Community Engagement in the NSW Planning System. 2003

DUAP EIS Guidelines Roads and Related Facilities 1996.

Yours sincerely,

Graham Dun  
Central West Transport Forum