

**Submission
No 16**

**INQUIRY INTO CURRENT AND FUTURE PUBLIC
TRANSPORT NEEDS IN WESTERN SYDNEY**

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Legislative Council Portfolio Committee No.6 – Transport and the Arts
Inquiry into current and future public transport needs in Western Sydney
PARLIAMENT HOUSE
SYDNEY 2000

Dear Committee

I write as a long-time resident of the Campbelltown area, with over thirty years interest in transport policy. Some of my articles can be found at thejadebeagle.com, and at Pearls and Irritations.

This is a submission to the above Inquiry. It recommends a formal Commission of Inquiry into Sydney transport. Among the purposes is to ensure the basis of policy is sound, factual, and free from contamination by improper motives.

The submission comprises three further parts: background; analysis; recommendation.

Background

Transport in Sydney is riddled with avoidable problems. No doubt, angst – even anger – in its western parts about those problems motivated the Committee to commence this inquiry. I congratulate the Committee for so doing.

The problems can be traced to two principal causes.

First is the philosophy pervading public policy for many years. This might be best expressed today as insulating Sydney's eastern elites from the wash-worthy westies. In transport, this gives rise to the axiom: east of Strathfield - public transport, west - motorways.

The second cause is the former Conservative Government seeking to forever hard-wire in such division. Thereby depriving most of Sydney's population – which resides west of Strathfield – from the opportunities of the metropolis. This can be seen most graphically by the 'three cities' and the breaks of rail gauge – the first since Federation – of Sydney Metro.

While for analysis or public relations, policy makers might like to compartmentalise the metropolitan region, to seek such division – as recently done - mistakes means for ends. Transport policies that aim or further such division impose high economic and social costs.

Associated with those attitudinal causes is treatment of citizens by Ministers and officials with unconcealed contempt. Governments have deceived the community via ex-post justifications for 'transport plans' cast in stone well before any nominal community consultation and to cover-up their inclinations towards geographic segregation. Deceit has become so routine and prevalent Governments and Departments seem to have great difficulty discerning real facts from their fictions.

A leading example is the Western Sydney rail study and associated decisions leading to 'Future Transport 2056'. These involve such stupidities – like the Western Sydney Airport Sydney Metro being designed to forever preclude connection to any other rail line 'because single deck and double deck trains cannot operate on the same tracks' - as to suggest maladministration.

The concern is not hurt feelings but policy made with blind prejudice – unknowingly making dreadful decisions. Which in transport industries can easily become dangerous to public safety.

Today's poor public transport services, endless rail reliability failures, road traffic problems and difficulties in accessing services and opportunities result more from policy making attitudes than budget constraints. Continuation of the present malaise, such as signalled by conversion of the Sydenham-Bankstown line, means the situation will worsen.

Analysis

Much transport policy and planning by the State and Commonwealth is perceived as irredeemably incompetent. The dominant issue facing the Committee is lack of trust by ordinary residents of Sydney in any transport 'initiative.'

From a blank-sheet perspective, the top policy priority for transport and land use is identification and servicing of the least mobile precincts and routes. For transport, that means major freight origins and destinations served by large vehicles. It means protection of the community from adverse effects of such freight movements. It means concentration – not dispersal - of such activity into a few precincts and routes. Necessarily those routes traverse Sydney to Port Botany, Kembla, and Newcastle. Demonstrating, inter alia, the counter-productiveness of trying to divide Sydney for transport purposes.

The next blank-sheet priority is connectivity of personal travel from all areas in Sydney to those places with the highest agglomerations. The task is mass commuting. Since the advent of private cars, that has required seamless travel to/from major nodes. Now, for example, between Liverpool, Penrith etc. and all points on the global arc. This 2nd priority is trunk rail and bus rapid transit routes across the metropolitan area to the central city - along which travellers need not change among public transport vehicles.

Other aspects of transport, including freight distribution, local car parking, bus scheduling, light rail, 'active' modes etc. 'hang-off' such routes. For these, service delivery will reflect characteristics of the trunk routes, irrespective of origins/destinations of travellers or freight. Planning should recognise that reality.

Inefficiency or ineffectiveness on trunk routes cannot be remedied by, and will adversely affect, planning and performance of these other aspects. NSW policy makers should – but apparently do not – know attempts to create 'thirty-minute cities' cannot sidestep those issues, not least because those attempts are based on the mistaken belief equilibrium travel times are an aim rather than relatively constant resultant. Connectivity – access - matters more than mobility – speed. -

Yet recent developments on trunk routes are designed to frustrate connectivity. For example, the North-West-Bankstown Sydney Metro aims to prevent seamless metropolitan rail travel. It bifurcates the global arc, stranding Kingsford Smith airport from other nodes along it. The result is destruction of value and opportunity. Similar comments could be said for the Western Sydney Metro – a 'right project in the wrong place'.

Sydney no longer faces the blank transport sheet it did in 2011. In the present circumstances the highest transport priority for the metropolitan area – and any part of it – is mitigation of the

discontinuities imposed by Sydney Metro projects and associated neglect of pre-existing trunk rail routes. That requires a thorough public inquiry.

There is little point in tinkering with innumerable locality specific requests, or mode-specific bits and pieces, while Sydney's trunk transport systems are hamstrung and suffer repeated unpredictable failures due to mis-analysis excused by fabricated explanations.

While the transport strategy remains misdirected, transport tactics will be largely ineffective.

Current reviews, such as ordered by the present Government, were set very limited tasks avoiding this core problem. Nonetheless, even they implicitly acknowledge the absence of a proper strategic approach renders their narrow focus intractable. In effect they are saying a much deeper and wider review, with greater powers, is needed to address the causes of the symptoms they are identifying.

Since 2018, both Mr John Menadue AO and I have publicly argued for such a review.

Recommendations

The Committee should

1. acknowledge the social and economic necessity to have Sydney operate as a whole and repudiate attempts at sub-regional (transport) planning aimed at dividing its community;
2. change its terms of reference to Sydney transport;
3. recognise and condemn the impact of poor attitudes on transport policy;
4. recommend a formal and public commission of inquiry into Sydney transport to restore public confidence in, and provide a basis of competent advice to, government.

I would be happy to expand on any aspect of this submission in writing or by appearance if the Committee so wishes.

Yours sincerely

J Austen
31 August 2023