

Submission
No 20

INQUIRY INTO CURRENT AND FUTURE PUBLIC TRANSPORT NEEDS IN WESTERN SYDNEY

Organisation: Australasian College of Road Safety

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ACRS Submission – Current and Future Public Transport Needs in Western Sydney



About the Australasian College of Road Safety

The Australasian College of Road Safety was established in 1988 and is the region's peak organisation for road safety professionals and members of the public who are focused on saving lives and serious injuries on our roads.

The College Patron is His Excellency General the Honourable David John Hurley AC DSC (Retd), Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia.

To:

Portfolio Committee No. 6

Transport and the Arts

NSW Legislative Council

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Introduction

The Australasian College of Road Safety (ACRS) is the region's peak membership association for road safety with a vision of eliminating death and serious injury on the road. Our members include experts from all areas of road safety including policy makers, health and transport professionals, academics, community organisations, researchers, federal, state and local government agencies, private companies and members of the public. The purpose of the College is to support our members in their efforts to eliminate serious road trauma through knowledge sharing, professional development, networking and advocacy. Our objectives include the promotion of road safety as a critical organisational objective within government, business and the community; the promotion and advocacy of policies and practices that support harm elimination; the improvement of relative safety outcomes for vulnerable demographic and user groups within the community; the promotion of post-crash policies and practices; and the promotion of a collegiate climate amongst all those with responsibilities for and working in road safety.

The College believes that we should prevent all fatal and serious injuries on our roads; the road traffic system must be made safe for all road users; system designers should aim to prevent human error and mitigate its consequences; life and health are not exchangeable for other benefits in society; and that all College policy positions must be evidence based.

In this submission, ACRS explain how:

- Road safety is of paramount consideration in any review of current and future public transport needs in Western Sydney (or elsewhere)
- There are benefits for road safety from safe and efficient public transport particularly where end-to-end trips and the broader road travel of the road user is considered
- A timetable for the removal of level crossings in west and southwest Sydney is required

ACRS response to the Terms of Reference

The Terms of Reference for this review discusses the “social, economic and planning impacts of vehicle dependency and poorly integrated public transport”.

The ACRS believes that safety is paramount in all modes of transport. This is evidenced through the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and the Second Decade of Action for Road Safety, which inexorably links road safety and sustainable mobility:

Road safety requires addressing broader issues of equitable access to mobility and that the promotion of sustainable modes of transport, in particular safe public transport and safe walking and cycling, is a key element of road safety.

UN General Assembly Resolution – Second Decade of Action for Road Safety(1)

Road Safety Benefits of Public Transport

Public transport is the safest and most energy-efficient form of transportation(2, 3). Australian research has confirmed that a mode shift from private vehicle to public transport (i.e., train, light rail, or bus) for commuting would reduce not only total crashes but also the severity of crashes(4). Better public transport access and coverage will also reduce the incidence of risky driving behaviours, such as inattention, drink and drug driving(5).

Shifting the balance of transport infrastructure, policy, and funding away from private fuel-based transport and towards public transport will prevent road trauma and increase the sustainability of the transport system. As public transport ridership increases, road safety outcomes will improve.

Public transport growth also supports climate action, using less fuel and energy than private car transport. Notably, the success of public transport relies on non-motorised transport (including walking and cycling) that acts as a feeder to public transport stops/terminals. However, the lack of access to safe walking, cycling, and public transport infrastructure is a critical barrier to modal shift strategies for sustainable, active transport(6).

According to current public transport ridership data, capacity exists within the public transport system to increase ridership. Whilst ridership has increased in the past 12 months, a comparison of April 2023 to April 2019 shows that monthly trips in 2023 are still 29% below pre-COVID levels(7).

With regard to trains, despite new housing developments approved and/or under construction in areas such as Appin, Menangle, and Wilton, the ACRS is unaware of any plans by the government to extend the Sydney train or metro network beyond Macarthur railway station, which opened some 40 years ago.

Without viable and safe public transport alternatives, the use of multiple private motor vehicles will be the sole option for new households in these areas. Safe and sustainable mobility, including active transport, must be a core feature of new housing developments and a 'system-wide approach'.

Level crossing removal

Passenger rail services south of Macarthur share the Southern Highlands Line with freight trains. Level crossings are a feature of this line. Between July 2008 and June 2022, there were 92 collisions between trains and cars at level crossings in NSW, resulting in ten people losing their lives and 17 suffering injuries(8).

On 23 August 2023, a freight train crashed into a tipper and dog truck which had stalled across the tracks at a level crossing near Picton(9). The 2007 crash between a heavy vehicle and a passenger service at Kerang in north-west Victoria which killed 11 passengers highlights the ongoing and catastrophic consequences of level crossing crashes(10).

The appropriateness of maintaining seven level crossings on the Richmond passenger train line needs to be considered in terms of shifting demographics, new suburbs, planned infrastructure and increased density (Term of Reference (c)).

NSW Police Force and Transport for NSW considered non-compliance with level crossing controls at Pine Road, Fairfield to be so serious that an enforcement and awareness campaign targeted the site in 2022(11).

ACRS is seeking a timetable for the replacement and closure of the remaining level crossings in the greater west and southwest of the Sydney metropolitan areas.

End to end trips

Whilst public transport services particular routes, the ACRS believes that the broader travel of the road user should be considered. The promotion of safe, emission free, end-to-end travel should be also considered as a related matter within this Inquiry. Specifically, when a road user alights from a public transport service, their subsequent travel should also be supported to be both safe, and preferably, emission free.

ACRS-NSW acknowledges some policies and initiatives exist that promote sustainable end-to-end travel, such as allowing passengers to bring bicycles onto trains and ferries without charge. Unfortunately, the 2021-22 trial of bike racks on buses in regional NSW(12) produced no discernible outcomes. This is despite over 90% of Canberra buses being equipped with bike racks(13). Improving safe, secure, and free bicycle storage at transit interchanges would also be helpful.

ACRS has previously supported rebates for the purchase of e-bikes(14). Bicycles and other micro-mobility devices can 'book-end' many a public transport journey, provided they can be carried on-board without jeopardising the health and safety of others. They can reduce demand for commuter car parking, reduce suburban traffic congestion, and reduce emissions.

Further Reading

The ACRS Road Safety and Climate Change Policy Position Statement contains further discussion on many of the points contained in this paper. It can be found at: <https://acrs.org.au/wp-content/uploads/ACRS-Climate-Change-PPS-2023.pdf>

Conclusion and recommendations

The ACRS appreciates the opportunity to make this submission and contribute to improving road safety. We are particularly keen to highlight:

- Road safety is of paramount consideration in any review of current and future public transport needs in Western Sydney (or elsewhere)
- There are benefits for road safety from safe and efficient public transport particularly where end-to-end trips and the broader road travel of the road user is considered
- A timetable for the removal of level crossings in west and southwest Sydney is required

Please do not hesitate to contact us should you need any further information.

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