

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

Organisation: The Parks, Sydney's Parkland Councils

Date Received: 18 September 2023

Ms Cate Faehrmann MLC
Committee Chair
Portfolio Committee No. 6 – Transport and the Arts
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Ms Faehrmann,

Re: Inquiry into Current and Future Public Transport Needs in Western Sydney

The Parks, Sydney's Parkland Councils welcome the opportunity to provide this submission to the Portfolio Committee No.6 on the inquiry into public transport needs in Western Sydney both now and in the future.

Background

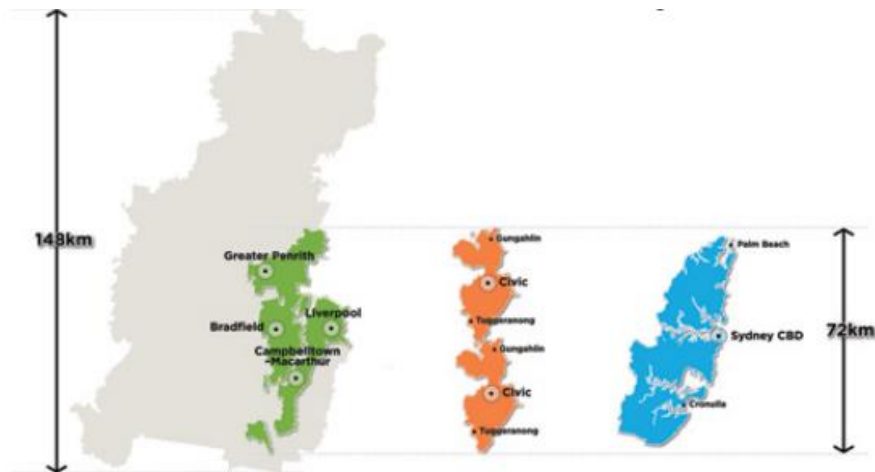
The Parks represents the eight Councils that make up the Western Parkland City, namely: Blue Mountains, Camden, Campbelltown, Fairfield, Hawkesbury, Liverpool, Penrith and Wollondilly. This geographic grouping was first outlined in the Metropolis of Three Cities paper published by the Greater Sydney Commission¹ and formed the basis for the alliance of Councils that then signed the Western Sydney City Deal in March 2018 with the NSW State and Commonwealth governments.

It should be noted that this submission represents the views and needs of the Western Parkland City, which is distinct to the traditional view of Western Sydney that includes geographic locations such as Parramatta, Bankstown and Olympic Park among others. As will be outlined below, it is our view that much of Western Sydney, what has now become known as the Central River City, has in recent years received considerably more attention and consequently funding than our City. Hence, we would like to assert our case for a more strategic focus on the needs of our City as opposed to the wider 'Western Sydney' region.

The Western Parkland City is a geographically diverse region of over 8,000 hectares with a vibrant multicultural population of over 1.1 million people. We would argue that our sustained success is not only a priority for New South Wales but nationally as while we bore 15% of Sydney's population growth in the decade to 2011, we are set to absorb 34% of the growth in the decade to 2041.² The urban development front of the Parkland City is stretched across a 72 kilometre corridor, the only such greenfield area in Australia, and already supports globally competitive industries of national significance.

¹ [A Metropolis of Three Cities | Greater Cities Commission](#)

² Sydney's Parkland Councils Future Horizons Benchmarking Report, December 2022, Sea and Star Advisory



The NSW State Government’s Blueprint³ for our region suggested that we might require 15-30% of the NSW infrastructure spend over the next 15 years to keep pace with this growth, a figure equalling roughly \$60-\$120 billion, however it could be argued that even this may not be sufficient.

Since 2011, NSW’s investment program, co-funded by the Commonwealth, has heavily prioritised ‘city-shaping’ and major place-making investments in Sydney City and to a lesser degree, Parramatta. Research commissioned by The Parks to benchmark our region against these other major centres⁴ showed such investment commitments for the City of Sydney and Eastern Harbour City totalled more than \$100 billion over the last decade, while the City of Parramatta and Central River City received more than \$60 billion in investment commitments. The Western Parkland City, on the other hand, only received about \$20 billion, less than one fifth that of Sydney City, with the majority of this funding concentrated in new State and Commonwealth assets based on or around the new airport. With our existing centres bearing significant investment backlogs, our vast geography requiring an increased scale of investment, particularly when it comes to transport connectivity, and our issues set to intensify as our population grows, we deserve more and better.

The Parks’ Councils wish to make a collective submission to the Inquiry, whilst acknowledging individual submissions may also be made by Councils identifying specific issues affecting their local government area. This submission is advocating for the Committee to consider:

a) Availability and accessibility of public transport services and the adequacy of connectivity between public transport hubs and commercial hubs;

There can be no denying the fact that transport connectivity is one of the major issues affecting communities in the Western Parkland City. Reasonable public transport options are very limited and our residents often find it nearly impossible to access local centres without transitioning through stations to the east first or relying on a car. For example, there are no trains that connect Campbelltown directly to Camden, or Liverpool to Picton. Public transport services that do exist can be hard to access as stations are too far away from residential

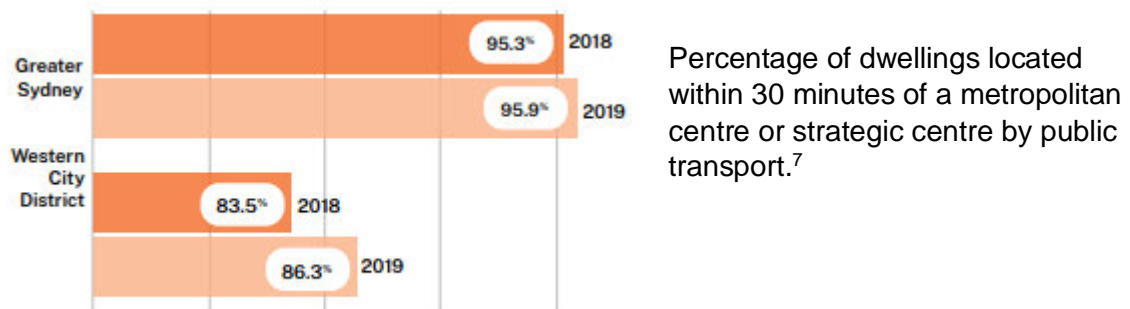
³ [Western-Parkland-City-Blueprint.pdf \(wpca.sydney\)](#)

⁴ Sydney’s Parkland Councils Future Horizons Benchmarking Report, December 2022, Sea and Star Advisory

estates, buses and trains do not run frequently enough and even when there is a service, they take far too long given the distances covered, the number of stops and road congestion.

The conviction that the Western Parkland City desperately needed a North-South rail line provided the necessary impetus for the eight Mayors of our City to agree to a Western Sydney City Deal.⁵ This North South Rail Link would become the spine of the Western Parkland City playing an essential role of giving our communities better, faster and easier access to jobs, health, education and leisure activities. Accordingly a metro or rail line from Macarthur to Schofields, including a South West rail link formed the first, and in our eyes, most important commitment of the City Deal. The second was for the delivery of rapid bus services from the metropolitan centres of Penrith, Liverpool and Campbelltown to the Western Sydney International Airport prior to its opening in 2026, to support activation of enterprise lands, jobs growth and connected communities. Without the rapid bus links, most residents in Liverpool and the south-west growth area will be unable to access the plethora of jobs offered by the 24/7 airport as they will be too far from the St Marys line.⁶ Despite this, the corridors for the rail lines have not been preserved, and there has been no announcement regarding the funding of either the metro lines or the bus.

While we acknowledge the difficulties of connecting such a vast region, we must do better. The communities of the Western Parkland City are currently much too far away from a bus stop or train station to make them accessible, leaving them with no choice but to be dependent on transport by car.



Even with good access, transport services do not run frequently or follow such long and circuitous routes, often with long wait times in between that they lose all feasibility for commuters as viable transport options.

"I have found bus connections unreliable in the past. Trains are usually OK but they don't connect with bus services very well. The train pulls into Campbelltown station as the bus pulls out. I will take a cab to and from the station rather than wait for a bus that may not come or be on time."⁸

Another key limiting factor is the poor walkability for public transport. Outside of the key strategic centres, the majority of residents live in low-density suburbs far from the strategic centres and employment hubs they access on a daily basis. Figure 1 demonstrates the

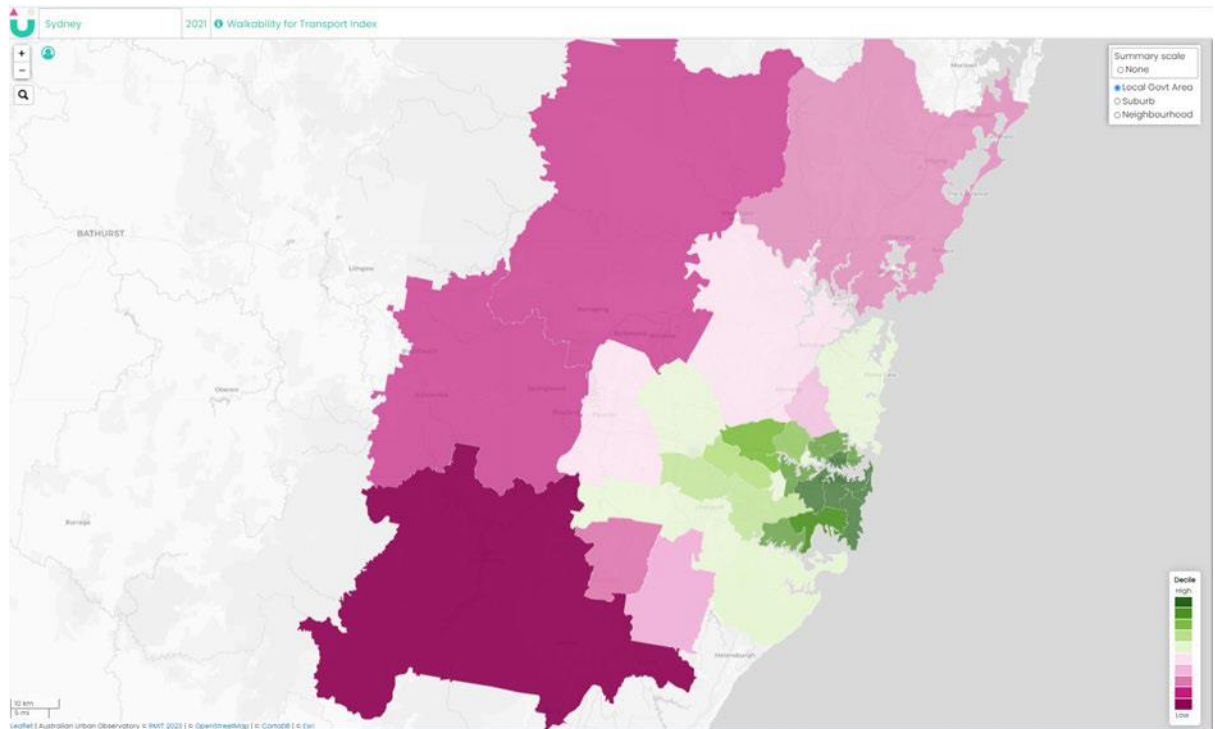
⁵ [Western Sydney City Deal - Western Parkland City Authority \(wpcasidney.com.au\)](https://www.wpcasidney.com.au/city-deal)

⁶ Workers left waiting for bus links to new Sydney airport, Matt O'Sullivan, The Sydney Morning Herald, August 22, 2023.

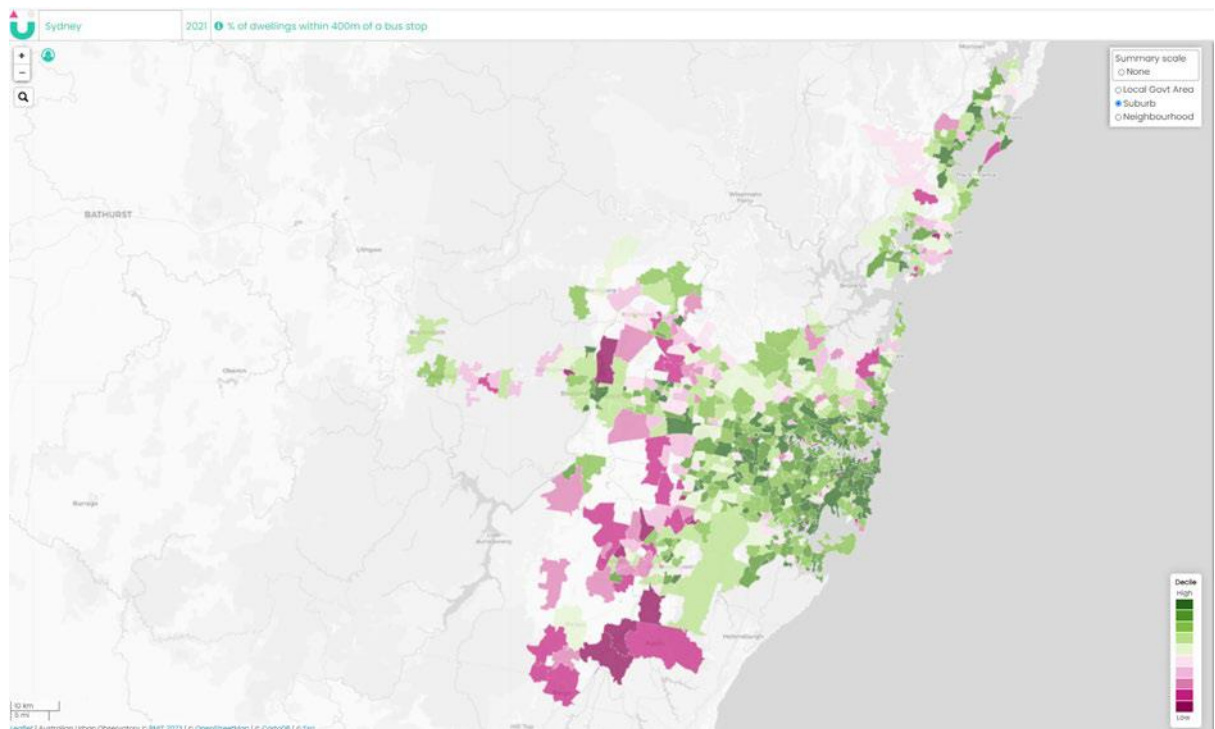
⁷ Western Parkland City Blueprint, WPCA, October 2022, p22

⁸ Sigrid (65-74), resident of Bradbury

disparity in walkability between LGAs in the Western Parkland City and those in the Central River and Eastern Harbour Cities.⁹



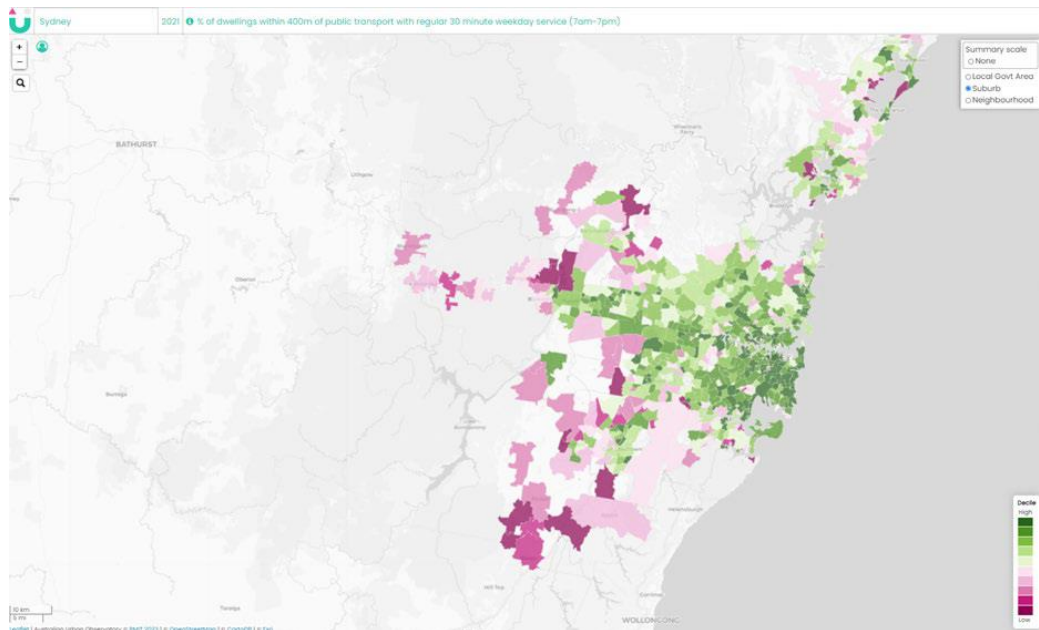
In many areas, the distances are just too great. In Figure 2 below, we can see how few of our dwellings comparatively are within 400m of a bus stop.¹⁰



⁹ The Australian Urban Observatory, www.auo.org.au

¹⁰ Ibid

Even with good access to public transport, whether bus or train, these services are not offered regularly enough to offer the convenience required. Figure 3 highlights the low percentage of dwellings within 400m of public transport that runs regularly every 30 minutes on weekdays (7am-7pm).¹¹



The ridiculous reality is that even now, there are a significant number of jobs being offered during the construction phase of the airport, but it is impossible for the young people who lack a license and/or motor vehicle who chronically need those jobs to get to and from the job site.

Unfortunately, the focus in Australia and particularly New South Wales has been on road infrastructure, rather than rail. It has been easier in the short term to focus on roads and this has been partly due to the perception that roads are quicker, easier and cheaper to build, but also that major road projects have been more easily adapted to a public-private partnership investment model (as is outlined in section g).

A logical assumption might then be that an increase in bus services is therefore the answer. However, buses suffer a capacity factor that can result in 'bus bunching' and city centres becoming completely jammed with very slow buses.¹² This is the reason why many cities globally have switched from buses to rail. It is imperative to note the relative capacities of modes, as set out below:¹³

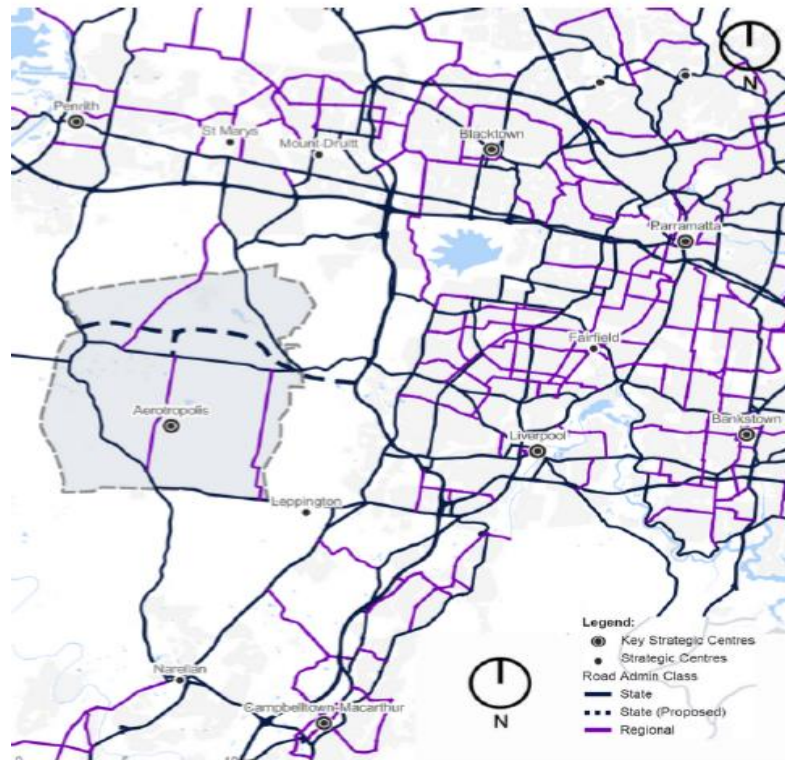
Mode	Carrying capacity (people per hour)
Freeway lane	2,500
Bus lane	5,000 to 7,000
Light rail	10,000 to 20,000
Heavy rail line	50,000

¹¹ The Australian Urban Observatory, www.auo.org.au

¹² Transit Oriented Development: An Australian Overview, Peter Newman, Curtin University

¹³ Ibid

It is also important to note that the Western Parkland City has not benefitted at the same level of investment in road infrastructure as the other two 'Cities' with our road arteries relatively underdeveloped.¹⁴



It is essential not only that improved connectivity between the various precincts within the Western Parkland City is provided, but also between the Western Parkland City and other parts of Sydney, to allow our people to access more jobs easily and a greater range of amenities than can be yet found within our city. Our people deserve better public transport with frequent services, particularly at night, that are safe, as well as better road connections, and safe and connected footpaths and cycle-ways that meet the needs of our significantly growing community.

"I moved to Oran Park from the Inner West and was without a car for a few months at first. To get into work, I needed to take two buses and a train, which was really difficult and added so much time onto my commute. Buying a car was my only option from there."¹⁵ "Moving recently from the Eastern suburbs, driving is the only option... Very poor bus transport option, from route varieties to frequency amount."¹⁶

Several Parkland Councils have committed to developing vibrant night-time economies in their larger centres driven by businesses that offer dining or entertainment activities after sunset. Safe and convenient public transport options are critical to this task. Aside from dining or entertainment activities, the Western Parkland City offers a range of employment opportunities in industries and professions that work outside standard business hours. Indeed, the Western Sydney International Airport is set to be a 24-hour facility. Access to

¹⁴ Sydney's Parkland Councils Future Horizons Benchmarking Report, Transport Update April 2023, Sea and Star Advisory

¹⁵ Tim (28), resident of Oran Park.

¹⁶ Sophia (35) resident of Oran Park

public transport services can be difficult to non-existent at night or outside peak periods. Consideration needs to be made for the safe and reliable provision of public transport services outside of standard business hours.

At the same time, to ensure that our industrial and commercial hubs such as Smithfield-Wetherill Park, Moorebank, Ingleburn, Minto and St Marys remain highly operational and efficient at moving goods in and out, we need a full rail freight capacity study. Each of the eight Councils has been experiencing issues with freight impacting on roads, and these can be expected to increase exponentially as the planned freight and logistics centre and agribusiness precinct etc. open along with the airport. In Wollondilly's case, there is no dedicated freight corridor with a separate track for freight trains, creating capacity constraints and impacting on passenger services through scheduling conflicts. The freight network across the Western Parkland City and how it interconnects to the Central River and Eastern Harbour Cities as well as NSW's regional areas needs to be considered as a network, particularly in terms of servicing both airports and key freight routes.

Gaps in service provision for lower density areas¹⁷ in the Western Parkland City can be addressed by:

- Integrating existing services through better timetable coordination;
- Having fare structures that do not penalise customers for using more than one mode of transport or breaking their journeys;
- Having staff in stations and at bus interchanges at night until the last service so people feel safe using public transport for shifts or at nights.

Effectively what has been fundamentally lacking is an integrated transport plan for the whole region. As a priority, we need an integrated, well-maintained transport system that encompasses various transport nodes (freight, passenger and active) at the state, regional and sub-regional level and covers the full area of the eight Councils.

b) Current and anticipated levels of demand of public transport services and the public transport requirements to meet this demand;

The Department of Planning and Environment population projections and Common Planning Assumptions projections predict unprecedented growth in the region over the next 20 years between 2021 and 2041.¹⁸

High growth is expected in the following areas with the population projections for 2041 at:

- Camden LGA – 197,735 (and additional 89,827 people)
- Campbelltown LGA – 229,301 (an additional 54,640 people)
- Fairfield LGA – 247, 803 (an additional 37,000 people)
- Liverpool LGA – 232,303 (an additional 80,350 people)
- Penrith LGA – 270,477 (an additional 54,402 people)
- Wollondilly LGA – 90,356 (an additional 36,317 people)

As this shows, the Western Parkland City is one of the fastest growing regions in the State, driven largely by greenfield developments and urban intensification. This population growth

¹⁷ Stanley J.K, Hensher D.A., Stanley J.R 2022 Place-based disadvantage, social exclusion and the value of mobility, Transportation Research Part A: Policy & Practice , Vol 160 June 2022 pp 11-133

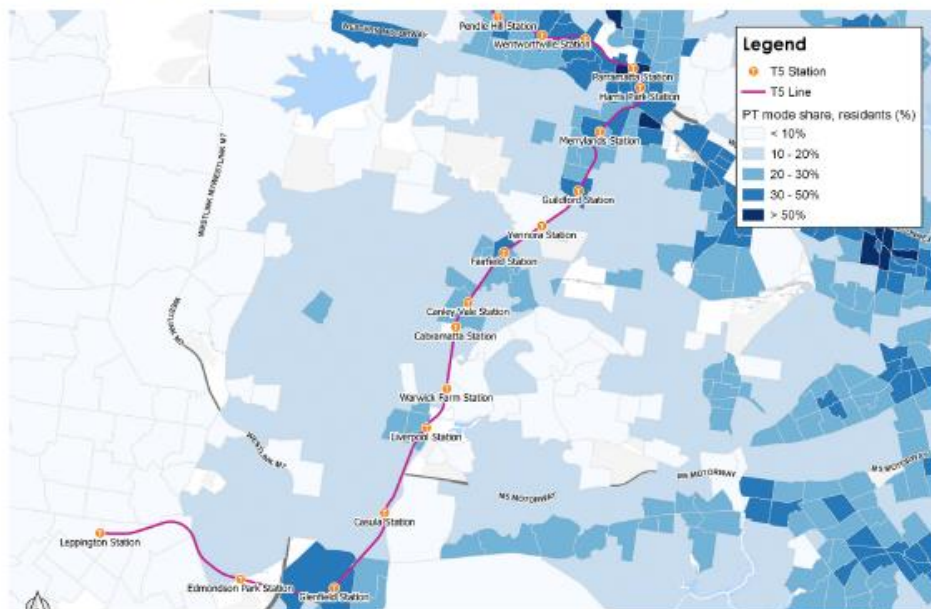
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tra.2022.04.005>

¹⁸ <https://www.planningportal.nsw.gov.au/populations>

will place additional demand on the current public transport needs and services in the area. Nevertheless, it has been argued that the business case for increased investment in public transport within the Western Parkland City does not necessarily ‘add up’ particularly when it comes to the Metro line. A study by Infrastructure Australia (IA) argued that “demand for the rail line would be significantly lower than its planned capacity in the initial years of operation, with passengers using less than 40% of the seated capacity in peak periods in 2026.”¹⁹ Consequently, it was not supported by IA as a Priority Infrastructure Project.

There is no doubt that use of public transport in the Western Parkland City is low. This reflects limitations of the assets and services as identified above but also the limited degree of integration between transport, land use and lifestyles.²⁰ Examination of the extent of public transport usage in the immediate station catchments on the T5 and T8 lines in south west Sydney reflect that other than in the Campbelltown station catchment, public transport did not support most commuter trips. Most catchments saw 30% or less of residents utilising public transport. Additionally, with the current limited place and rail node integration, it is impossible for Western Parkland City residents to access and enjoy our local centres without difficulty, or dependence on motor vehicle transportation.

Public Transport Mode Share, T5 Line Station Catchments

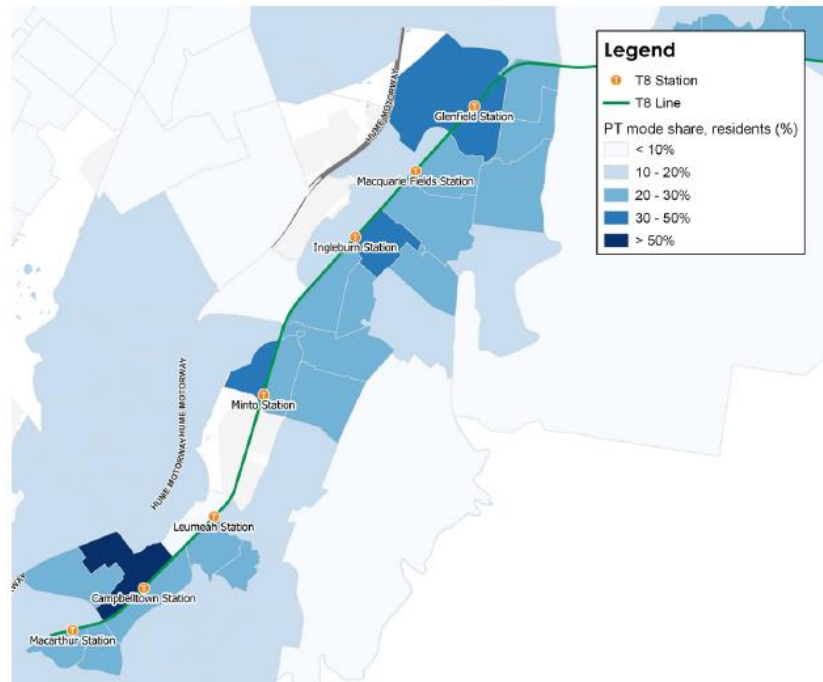


Source: Sea & Star Advisory analysis of 2016 Census data

¹⁹ Infrastructure Australia, Sydney Metro- Western Sydney Airport, Project business case evaluation

²⁰ Sydney’s Parkland Councils Future Horizons Benchmarking Report, Transport Update April 2023, Sea and Star Advisory

Public Transport Mode Share, T8 Line Station Catchments



Source: Sea & Star Advisory analysis of 2016 Census data

However, the fact that our City is forecast to grow substantially over the next two decades should not be forgotten. It should also be noted that we have a unique demographic profile with higher numbers of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities, seniors, socio-economically disadvantaged and First Nations peoples. We also have high numbers of shift workers and as noted above, young people with no ability to gain a license and/or access to a car. The unique needs of these cohorts and how best public transport should be planned and provided to meet these needs must be considered in the planning process.

It is instructive to note the findings in this regard of a staff travel survey conducted by the Greater Western Sydney Health Partnership, a partnership of the Nepean Blue Mountains, South West Sydney and Western Sydney Local Health Districts.²¹ Completed by 5133 of their employees, it reported that approximately 70% of all respondents had a commute time that lasted 46-60 minutes. The most frequently used commuting modes were private vehicles as the driver (72.8%), train/metro (12.8%) and bus (4.1%). Less than 5% used active travel methods such as walking or cycling. 4,082 respondents answered questions regarding barriers to public transport with the most frequently stated barrier being time constraints (47.3%), lack of public transport options (35.4%), too many interchanges between public transport services (33%) and unreliability of public transport (30.5%).

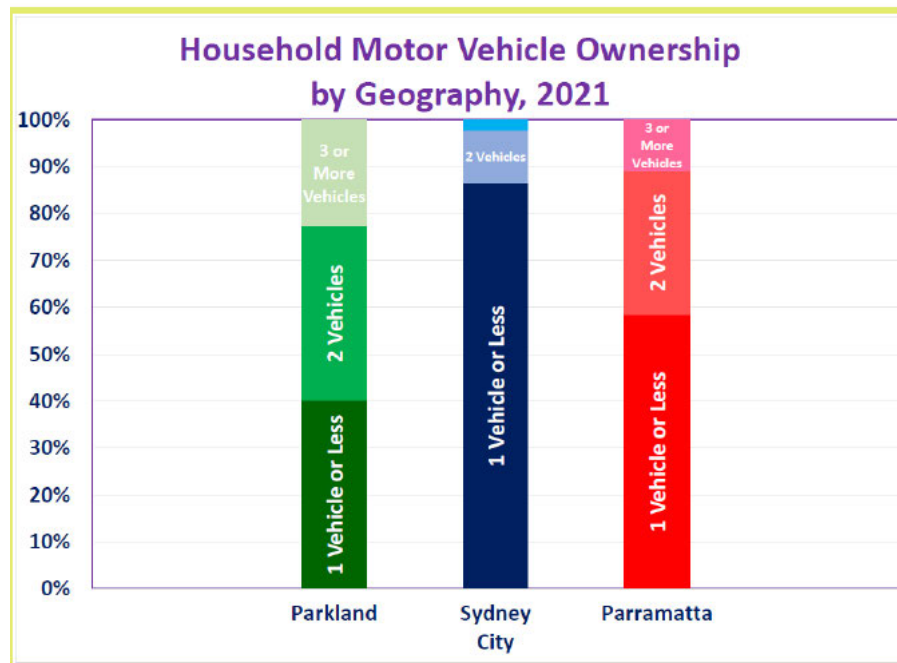
The reality is that it is extremely difficult to predict anticipated levels of demand when services do not currently exist or are too infrequent to provide the convenience and access required and hence drive demand.

In addition, many of the rezoning applications in the Western Parkland City have been approved when there is no appropriate transport infrastructure in place, such as Wilton, Appin, and Austral. In fact, Wollondilly has no electric trains at all with only a diesel service and this has capacity constraints as noted above. This is a major issue. Our people have

²¹ GWS Health Partnership Staff Travel Survey, May 2021

had no option to date but to rely predominantly on transportation by internal combustion engine (ICE) motor vehicle.

This can be clearly evidenced by the fact that while only slightly more than 10% of Sydney City households have two vehicles or more, this is true for the majority of WPC households.²²



Source: Sea & Star Advisory analysis of 2021 Census data

It is currently forecast that Stage 1 of the Western Sydney International Airport will deliver approximately 10 million passengers in its initial years of operation, ramping up to around 80 million per year once a second runway and other facilities are built.²³ Fast and efficient rail links will play a crucial role in ensuring the success of this airport, not only to allow workers to access their jobs, but to allow our residents to use this airport for travel and tourists to access and enjoy the various sights and experiences unique to the Western Parkland City while limiting road congestion and emissions. It will be the key to unlocking the economic potential of the airport and to rebalancing Greater Sydney.

If we do not have better public transport systems in place within the Western Parkland City by then, we will miss out on the economic and social benefits of the airport, which may find itself under-utilised. A North South Rail Link would connect our metropolitan clusters and create the connections we so desperately need, linking Greater Penrith to the Eastern Creek Growth Investigation Area, the Western Economic Corridor, St Marys, Liverpool and Campbelltown-Macarthur regions to the airport and beyond.

We firmly believe that if a safe, well-connected and convenient public transport system is provided, our people would slowly transition to increasingly using it, particularly our new residents.

²² Sydney's Parkland Councils Future Horizons Benchmarking Report, Transport Update April 2023, Sea and Star Advisory

²³ [AnewairportforWesternSydney.pdf \(westernsydneyairport.gov.au\)](https://www.westernsydneyairport.gov.au/AnewairportforWesternSydney.pdf)

c) Changing nature of public transport needs due to shifting demographics, new suburbs, planned infrastructure and increased density;

The Western Parkland City has borne the burden of population growth for Greater Sydney for some time, taking 15% of the population growth for New South Wales in the decade until 2011. This is only set to increase with forecasts predicting one third of all population growth of new residents to Sydney to be in our City by 2040.²⁴ At the same time, our communities are best characterised by their long term contributions to NSW's economic and social fabric, with 82% of residents considered long term as they called NSW home 5 years' previously.²⁵

The key issue being faced is the sheer scale of development. With growth areas scattered across a development front of 72 kms within an area of 8000 square hectares, there are huge geographic distances to cover. This creates an unprecedented challenge.

Consequently, many of our new growth areas for housing such as Wilton, Appin, Menangle Park, Greater Macarthur and Oran Park have been developed in locations with no or extremely limited public transport access and with little prior thought given to how it may be subsequently provided. There is now an overwhelming gap in the provision of infrastructure and services that will take decades to fill. In the meantime, given the long distances these residential precincts are located from strategic centres and employment opportunities, our residents are forced to rely on travel by private vehicle. This sustained pattern of economic expansion led by Sydney City and population, dwelling and labour force increases concentrated further West brings Sydney's transport networks and the essential need to provide the connectivity to link the two into sharp focus.

As the experience of the COVID lockdowns made starkly apparent, where many in our region were vilified for being 'super spreaders', the majority of the workforce in the Western Parkland City do not have the luxury of taking a break from the long commutes by working from home. Our people tend to be in essential industries that require them to work onsite such as construction, freight and logistics, transport, warehousing, health services and so on. They hence cannot sidestep the need for transport to work.

In addition, our greater population of young people and children need more frequent and direct services to educational institutions. With the delivery of schools to new communities also years behind, children are often currently forced to travel long distances to get to school by private vehicle.

At the same time, as with other parts of Sydney, we have significant pockets of elderly residents and for public transport to be accessible, they require lifts at stations, low-access buses, ramps, clear signage and assistance at stations/stops.

The issues we face are not easily remedied, even with the will to do so. A perfect example of this is provided by the work done to date on fulfilling the Rapid Bus Commitment made under the City Deal. The original commitment was for rapid bus services to run from Liverpool, Penrith and Campbelltown to the airport as an interim measure before metro lines could be built. However, this project has hit obstacle after obstacle. The overwhelming need to cover a higher percentage of the population led to the suggestion to include further stops, creating even more circuitous routes and hence longer travel times. The road infrastructure in place is insufficient in that there are no dedicated bus lanes and only the possibility of creating signal

²⁴ Sydney's Parkland Councils Future Horizons Benchmarking Report, December 2022, Sea and Star Advisory

²⁵ Ibid

priority options at some traffic lights on the route. This, however, does not overcome the congestion on the roads, which continues to worsen, and will only get worse with the predicted greater population density, as the evidence as set out below makes clear. Lastly, there initially appeared to be no planning for where the buses could deposit passengers at the airport leading to a proposal that they be dropped off at the aerotropolis to take the train to the airport. The end result – a far from ‘rapid’ bus and possibly a service that will then remain largely underutilised.

It will take the concerted effort of the three levels of government working together to ameliorate the existing state of public transport in the Western Parkland City and provide the public transport options so desperately needed.

d) Social, economic and planning impacts of vehicle dependency and poorly integrated public transport;

As the Western Sydney Health Alliance continues to showcase, our residents’ health and circumstances are shaped by the distribution of money, power, and resources at global, national and local levels. Where people are born, grow, live, work and age impacts upon their health.²⁶ Social determinants of health are mostly responsible for health inequities – the unfair and avoidable differences in health status seen within and between communities. Common social determinants of health include employment status, level of education achieved, working life conditions, housing, social inclusion, non-discrimination, access to health services and **access to public transport**.

Key issues impacting upon the availability and accessibility to public transport services in Western Sydney relate to these social determinants of health. The Public Transport Accessibility Level (PTAL) measures transport accessibility and PTAL scores each area based on proximity and frequency of public transport services. The Mckell Institute highlighted the unequal access to public transport in Western Sydney and of the 33 Sydney LGAs, the top three with the best access to public transport are all in the East and the North districts.²⁷ These differences are significant. While the median PTAL score is 15, the lower third of LGAs have a score of between two (Wollondilly) and ten (Liverpool). The top tertile ranges from 18 (Canada Bay) to 52 (City of Sydney).²⁸

Review of the official statistics collected by Transport for NSW as part of its Household Travel Survey reveal a marked disparity in the travel behaviours of WPC households against those of the rest of Greater Sydney.²⁹ While the jobs deficit in the West leading to high numbers of residents being forced to commute long distances to work has long been understood, WPC residents actually face longer travel times for all kinds of trip purposes. Shopping trips are 4.5 times longer than those in Sydney City, childcare and education trips are 93% longer than Parramatta and 3 times longer than for Sydney residents and recreation and social trips are up to 4 times longer than for Sydney residents. In short, our communities have too few amenities close to home, forcing them to travel longer distances.

In the Western Parkland City in 2022/23 on an average weekday, total vehicle driver trips are 2,175,000. In comparison on a daily basis, 215,000 trips are made by public transport

²⁶ https://www.who.int/health-topics/social-determinants-of-health#tab=tab_1

²⁷ https://mckellinstitute.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/McKell_Super-Funding-Infrastructure.pdf

²⁸ <https://opendata.transport.nsw.gov.au/dataset/ptal-public-transportaccessibility-level>

²⁹ Sydney’s Parkland Councils Future Horizons Benchmarking Report, Transport Update April 2023, Sea and Star Advisory

and 433,000 are walking only.³⁰ Western Parkland residents undertake 6,000,000 daily car trips that are less than 5km.

Such limited public transport options lead to:

- Social exclusion and time-poor lifestyles
- Environmental impacts
- Economic inefficiency
- Reduced public health

Better access to current public transport networks, improved bus routing that link residential areas directly to main urban precincts, an increased workforce capacity and more bus and rail services are needed in Western Sydney. This is critical to address the current need and demand that will come from the impending population growth.

This dependence on the motor vehicle has led to fewer people adopting an active transport approach, with only 10% of residents making trips by walking in comparison to 18% for Greater Sydney.³¹

*Driving is the only realistic option to get around Campbelltown. Cycling, walking and buses are all options I'd love and have used frequently when living in other cities. My health was much better when I didn't have to rely on a car to get around.*³²

Public transport patronage brings good health benefits both at the individual and community levels as the use of public transport usually involves some walking to and from transit stops such as train stations or bus stops. Good access to public transport is associated with walking sufficiently each week to meet physical activity guidelines. Public transport use can add eight to 33 minutes of physical activity per day.³³

We know from conservative research analyses that improving accessibility to public transport will improve population health by facilitating physical activity and lead to healthcare cost savings compared with business-as-usual.³⁴ Multi-directional, high-frequency improvements to public transport networks can generate significantly greater health and economic gains in relation to physical activity, body weight, health-adjusted life years gained and healthcare cost-savings.

The availability of trains and buses is not enough in itself. Public transport users require the supporting infrastructure that will get them to the station or bus stop, such as cycle ways and footpaths. There is a missed opportunity through delivery of new transport infrastructure projects, such as the Sydney Metro Western Sydney Airport line, to integrate with an accompanying commitment to bus services, or cycling and pedestrian links throughout the Western Parkland City. Where commuters often rely on a car for part of their trip, the ancillary facilities needed include commuter car parks, kiss-n-ride, or taxi stands. There also

³⁰ <https://www.transport.nsw.gov.au/data-by-six-cities>

³¹ Sydney's Parkland Councils Future Horizons Benchmarking Report, Transport Update April 2023, Sea and Star Advisory

³² Amanda (35-44), resident of Campbelltown

³³ Rissel. Et al 2012, Key health benefits associated with public transport: a rapid review. An Evidence Check Review brokered by the Sax Institute for the NSW Ministry of Health.

³⁴ Brown et al, 2019, Better transport accessibility, better health: a health economic impact assessment study for Melbourne, Australia, International Journal of behavioural Nutrition and Physical Activity 16:89

needs to be provision of a high level of comfort and safety for users through shelters offering weather protection, adequate lighting at night, and separation from main roads.

As has been amply evidenced by the Western Sydney Health Alliance, public transport is also not just about people on seats, it's about which people can get on the seats, and how much their life can be changed through improved mobility and inclusion. Social exclusion creates costs for both the excluded person and also for the wider community, with those who are socially excluded commonly having a higher risk of being unemployed, poorer mental and physical health, being less socially connected and some are more likely to engage in crime and/or substance abuse.³⁵

This is a real issue in the Western Parkland City. In 2021, 87,294 (7.6%) people who spoke a language other than English at home reported difficulty speaking English, and 74,176 people (or 6.4% of the population) in Western Parkland Councils reported needing help in their day-to-day lives due to disability. This is higher than the NSW percentage. One of the largest changes in family/household types in Western Parkland Councils between 2016 and 2021 were Lone person households (+14,147). In the 2021 Census, there were 71,151 (18.4%) lone person households in the Western Parkland City. Social connection between people is important for mental health and contributes to an improved quality of life and lack of public transport opportunities can potentially exacerbate social isolation. In fact, research has shown that local bus services would only need to carry eight or nine passengers an hour for societal benefits to outweigh the financial cost of running the bus.³⁶ Improving public transport access in the Western Parkland City can have a societal benefit through better health and wellbeing, increased employment and reduced crime, and these financial benefits should be included in cost-benefit-analysis.

The Commonwealth Bureau of Infrastructure and Transport Research (BITRE) remains a leading authority on relationships between growth in vehicle usage, arterial road networks, road network investment and congestion costs. While COVID interrupted the steady profile of growth in Sydney's avoidable congestion, the re-established trend of growth in population, vehicle kilometres travelled and traffic has restored the rising profile of avoidable congestion costs.³⁷ These costs will disproportionately be borne by households and businesses who:

- Are more car reliant;
- Have longer distances to travel;
- Live and work in areas where the arterial road network is more sparse and incomplete in its coverage;
- Live in areas with higher rates of increase in population growth and vehicle usage;
- Enjoy limited place integration around public transport hubs.

On a per person basis, the BITRE figures suggest Sydneysiders will bear roughly twice as much avoidable congestion costs in 2030 than they endured in 2010. With accelerating population growth, higher rates of car ownership, longer trips and a relatively immature and underdeveloped road network, Western Parkland City residents will bear this increase disproportionately. Without significant investment, population growth will mean that our City's

³⁵ Baumeister et al, 2005, Social Exclusion Impairs Self-Regulation, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 88, 4, p589-604

³⁶ Stanley et al, 2022, Place-based disadvantage, social exclusion and the value of mobility, *Transportation Research Part A: Policy and Practice*, 160: 101-113

³⁷ Sydney's Parkland Councils Future Horizons Benchmarking Report, Transport Update April 2023, Sea and Star Advisory

rate of growth in congestion will likely outpace the rise in Sydney’s congestion by a significant margin.

It should also be noted that despite road networks in the newly built new release areas being built according to the Indicative Layout Plan (ILP) with an approximate 9m carriage way width, significant congestion is still being experienced due to the impact of on-street parking caused by the high number of vehicles per household.

Our residents are facing some very real issues that have inevitably lead to significant health impacts

	NSW (Average)	Blue Mountains	Camden	Campbelltown	Fairfield	Hawkesbury	Liverpool	Penrith	Wollondilly
Arthritis	8.4	8.4	6.6	8.6	7.1	9.1	6.1	7.9	9.4
Mental Health	8.0	8.0	7.2	7.7	4.9	9.3	5.2	8.9	8.2
Asthma	7.8	7.8	7.8	8.5	5.1	8.5	6.3	9.1	8.7
Diabetes	4.8	4.0	4.1	6.7	6.8	4.8	5.6	5.5	4.4
Heart Disease	3.9	3.9	2.9	3.7	3.6	4.0	3.0	3.6	3.9

Prevalence of top 5 chronic conditions in Western Parkland City Councils in comparison to NSW.³⁸

The traffic congestion is leading to increased stress from long periods spent sitting sedentary in cars on congested roads. The resultant higher emissions is leading to worsening air quality, affecting respiratory and cardiovascular health and this lifestyle is leading to obesity and a far higher rate of serious health problems impacting mental health and life satisfaction.

We need a Western Parkland City Transport Plan for improved access across the region and beyond, including better public transport, better road connections, less congestion, high quality digital access (to allow for remote working options), and walkable neighbourhoods to break the dependence on the motor vehicle.

e) Affordability compared with other areas of Greater Sydney and New South Wales and relative to means;

The affordability of public transport can only be judged in relation to people’s incomes and the majority of our residents are in lower socio-economic categories.

The Australian Automobile Association’s transport affordability index suggests that typical annual vehicle costs are about \$25,600 per year, with fuel composing about 20% of those costs and tolls a further 19%.³⁹ Inevitably, higher car costs are being borne by those

³⁸ Western Sydney Health Alliance, Workforce Planning Statement endorsed by the Steering Committee, September 2023

³⁹ Sydney’s Parkland Councils Future Horizons Benchmarking Report, Transport Update April 2023, Sea and Star Advisory

households that have more than one car and who have to travel further distances, particularly on toll roads. With WPC households having an average of 1.8 cars, compared to 0.7 for Sydney, making roughly 65% more car trips than residents of Sydney city and travelling for 13 kms on average (against 9.5kms for Sydney city), our households must outlay \$57,800 annually. This is approximately three times as much as Sydney residents' typical annual costs, which are around \$18,750.

At the same time, Western Parkland City households' living standards are lower, and have grown more slowly than the rest of Sydney.⁴⁰ While real living standards did increase for residents of the Parkland City with a 69% growth in weekly household income on 2006 levels, these gains were still substantially lower than in other areas, with growth in Sydney City's weekly household income of 84% on 2006 levels and that of Parramatta an incredible 97%. In addition, once the increase in household income less change in housing costs and adjusted for inflation over time (real purchasing power) is calculated, it can be clearly seen that the increases in income for the Western Parkland City households has been far more modest at \$11,000 (or a 24% increase). This is in comparison to Sydney at \$17,500 (+34%) and Parramatta at \$20,000 (+ 44%).

In addition, Western Parkland City households are relatively disadvantaged with some communities with extreme concentrations of relative disadvantage in a way that other parts of Sydney do not have. For example, St Marys/North St Marys are in the bottom 5-10 percent of most disadvantaged suburbs, Fairfield is in the bottom 5%, Miller, Cartwright, Busby and Sadleir are in the bottom 2-3 per cent and Airs and Claymore near Campbelltown in the bottom 1 per cent.⁴¹

This highlights the lack of equity in NSW as it shows that the more socio-economically challenged populations are moving out to car dependent areas where they can afford housing but are forced to spend far more on transport with some families spending up to 40% of their income on transport.⁴² With ongoing car costs such as fuel and tolls showing no signs of becoming more affordable, there is an opportunity to convince people of the benefits of utilising public transport, but only if it is as available, frequent and convenient as it is in the Eastern Harbour City.

It is also important to note that eligibility for concession fares remains a major barrier to people experiencing poverty and disadvantage to accessing the public transport network.⁴³ We would encourage the adoption of the recent recommendations of the IPART Opal Fares 2020-2024 *Ensuring Affordability Report*⁴⁴; namely:

- Providing discount fares to NSW residents that hold a current Commonwealth Health Care card;
- Trialling a program whereby community service organisations and charities can purchase discounted public transport passes to be provided at no cost to vulnerable people (a trial is being undertaken in Victoria and could provide some informative insights);

⁴⁰ Sydney's Parkland Councils Future Horizons Benchmarking Report, December 2022, Sea and Star Advisory

⁴¹ <https://profile.id.com/western-parkland/seifa-disadvantage-small-area>

⁴² Transit-Oriented Development: An Australian Overview, Peter Newman, Curtin University

⁴³ NSW Council of Social Services of NSW submission to IPART Issues Paper (NCOSS submission), p.8

⁴⁴ https://www.ipart.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/information-paper-final-report-opal-fares-2020-2024-ensuring-affordability-february-2020_0.pdf

- Considering expanding free travel for passengers with a permanent physical disability or cognitive condition that prevents them from using the Opal ticketing system.

It is also worth noting that the 2023 'State of the Arts in Western Sydney' report from the Centre of Western Sydney⁴⁵ looked at how public transport impacts negatively on cultural attendance and participation of residents in arts and cultural activities. It found that disparities in attendance and participation rates are shaped by the limited transport connectivity between western Sydney residents and cultural institutions concentrated in eastern Sydney. When travelling to cultural institutions in a private vehicle, the report found that the combined costs of tolls, fuel and parking could reach up to \$105 per day for residents travelling from Oran Park to Sydney Theatre Company in Dawes Point. Should a resident in Oran Park opt for the more affordable public transport option, this would cost \$16.80 on weekdays or \$8.40 on weekends but takes a staggering 4 hrs to travel to and from the Sydney Theatre Company.

It is important for the Government's bottom line to get this right as data on global cities suggests that "the more a city has committed itself to public transport infrastructure, the less the city spend overall on transport; and the more a city has built itself around car dependence, the more of the city's wealth is wasted on just getting around."⁴⁶

f) Role of public transport and future transport technologies to reduce car dependency in Western Sydney, including barriers to improving public transport services;

As has been clearly identified above, if we want to reduce car dependency, we **must** provide a viable alternative. Therefore, having reasonable access to frequent, on time and appropriately integrated public transport options plays an absolutely essential role in the uptake of public transport. To increase its appeal, the following critical aspects must be addressed: access, frequency, reliability, convenience, safety and cost.

Technology-enabled solutions can improve access, reduce inequity, minimise environmental impacts and ensure we are resource efficient, by:

1) Providing more efficient and reliable services.

Through the use of data analytics from data collected through ticketing systems, we can understand which are the busiest times/days/routes and so ensure that services are scheduled at times that offer the maximum convenience and along routes where the highest demand lies. This ensures that public transport use is maximised and becomes more environmentally friendly. This also allows for dynamic pricing approaches, lifting demand and/or increasing the viability of accessing the services for our socio-economically disadvantaged residents. In addition, monitoring of the movement of public transport can deliver better connections between multiple modes of transport, reducing wait times and improving customer satisfaction. The increase in shared mobility options such as bikes and electric scooters can also contribute by making access to and from stations and bus stops physically possible without a car, acting as 'first mile' or 'last mile' connections to a user's destination. Lastly, technology can and has allowed for the use

⁴⁵ Itaoui, R., Merrillees, D., Gerace, G. (2023) State of the Arts in Western Sydney, Parramatta, Centre for Western Sydney <https://doi.org/10.26183/tvye-5r23>

⁴⁶ Sustainability and Cities: Overcoming Automobile Dependence, Newman PWG and Kenworthy JR, Washington DC, 1999

of cashless pay options, significantly increasing the convenience for the average user, as well as allowing for savings on personnel costs.

- 2) Contributing to a safe environment on the trains and buses as well as stops and stations.

The use of crowd monitoring software with AI to identify risks (such as people carrying weapons or leaving unattended baggage on platforms) can be added to our existing surveillance systems, providing enhanced security to stations and bus stops. Security systems linked to smartphone apps are already in the market that are designed to alert authorities immediately and notify them of a customer's GPS location in the event of an incident and these could be adopted. They could also be linked to sensors that are designed to react to loud noises to floodlight a specific area and improve the safety of station platforms or bus stops late at night.

- 3) Delivering peace of mind to customers.

The use of GPS tracking technology and open data to allow customers to see exactly where a train/bus is and how much longer it will take to reach a station/stop, or even how crowded they are, can better manage expectations, prevent long and frustrating wait times and give customers peace of mind. This allows for the planning to achieve better connectivity between transport modes both publicly and privately operated, by enabling users to access information and make mode and connection choices that meet their needs. Trip planning apps are also important as they give users the confidence to know they can utilise public transport and get to an important event on time. Lastly, timely and accurate information about parking opportunities at or near to stations (an unavoidable need for the majority of Western Parkland City residents who do seek to travel by train) can be provided through smart kerb/smart parking apps.

- 4) Ensuring costs are reasonable.

By allowing for time-sensitive pricing policies through online ticketing options, services can be provided in off peak times that may be more accessible for some of the less economically wealthy demographic groups within the Western Parkland City. It would also be good for some sort of concession fare system (as Seniors already enjoy) to be implemented for the people experiencing severe economic distress, particularly given the current costs of living crisis Australia is experiencing.

It should be noted that a significant barrier to the successful, population-wide implementation of the above measures exists in our City and that is the issue of digital inequity. This must be also factored in to any policy consideration. Our research⁴⁷ has shown that not all Western Parkland City residents have access to the latest smart phone, many have data limitations due to a far higher percentage of people choosing pre-paid plans, many people are not native English speakers and our City as a whole, has more blackspots and areas with 'spotty' and inadequate internet access. These issues will need to be addressed, should we wish to realise fully the benefits of such data and technology.

Another barrier may be a lack of user trust in new technology, as well as concerns that enhanced technology solutions may displace low-skilled workers.⁴⁸

It should be noted here that a more fundamental shift is required - all levels of government need to work together to develop a better system of land use planning to ensure zoning and land release policies are aligned with public transport development plans. We cannot

⁴⁷ The Australian Digital Inclusion Index Report for the Western Parkland City, Centre for Sustainable Impact, Swinburne University, August 2023

⁴⁸ Using data and technology to integrate mobility modes in low income cities, Dana Yanocha, Jacob Mason and Jonas Hagen, November 2020

continue to develop growth areas geographically distant from strategic centres and services and amenities essential for liveability.

Such behaviour can lead to a significant barrier to improving public transport, which is that the lack of planning upfront results in no preservation of corridors, and a subsequent proliferation of housing contiguous to or even over future rail corridors. This creates discontent and opposition by residents when corridors are then announced and in some cases, leads to considerable pressure to put such rail lines underground; this is not only cost prohibitive but significantly complicates and lengthens the time it takes to construct the rail lines.

At the same time, the lack of clarity for developers and potential residents around exactly when and where rail lines will be built and where stations will be located means they are unwilling to invest in a precinct, preventing effective public-private partnership approaches.

Lastly, a clear barrier to funding of transport infrastructure in Australia is the lack of understanding that it needs to be a long-term strategy. This means that while the cost-benefit analysis may appear unimpressive and presenting a weak business case for investment, the future growth of the Western Parkland City and of Sydney in general, as well as the needs of future populations need to be considered.

g) Role of the public and private sector, including local government and the use of innovative funding models, such as transit oriented development and value capture mechanisms, in public transport provision;

The last few years have been testing for nations around the globe and we are cognisant of the challenges faced by the Commonwealth and NSW State Government in dealing with the bushfires, floods and COVID. We understand the fiscally constrained environment both levels of government are facing and agree that the time is right to consider innovative funding models. The Western Sydney City Deal actually has as one of its commitments, P7, a focus on innovative planning to meet infrastructure needs (with a focus on transport and water), but though much work has been done, it has proven difficult for an effective model to be developed. There is definitely scope for innovative thinking, new approaches and greater collaboration between the three levels of government to tackle this challenge and possibly examples in other countries from which we could learn. The European Commission, for example, manages the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF), an EU mechanism that groups EU financing for three sets of trans-European infrastructures, namely energy, transport and digital into one fund. The European Commission just announced in June this year that it was injecting 6 billion euros into 107 transport infrastructure projects to support projects that deliver more efficient, greener and smarter network of railways, inland waterways and maritime routes, including major cross-border rail connections.⁴⁹ By enabling synergies between the transport, energy and digital sectors, the CEF is able to leverage funding from both the public and private sectors, while increasing legal certainty.

As was noted earlier, the government in Australia did identify an effective way to deliver major road projects, which continues to be successful to this day. By using toll roads and providing government guarantees, state governments were able to not only secure roads but gained substantial cash grants from the private consortiums for the right to build them.⁵⁰ In

⁴⁹ EU invests 6.2 billion Euros in sustainable, safe and efficient transport infrastructure, Press Release, 22 June 2023, European Commission, Brussels

⁵⁰ Transit-oriented Development: An Australian Overview, Peter Newman, Curtin University

Sydney, this has resulted in over \$10 billion worth of toll roads being built since the 1990s. Unfortunately, to date there has been no similar funding mechanism developed for rail and it remains the sole responsibility of the State and/or Commonwealth Government to fund.

Proposals to build fast, heavy rail using tollway financing have been put forward such as for the Western Sydney Fast Rail, as well as the consideration for the effective leveraging of land development opportunities to implement light rail options, however these have not been approved by state governments in Australia.⁵¹

There can be no doubt that transit-oriented development, with communities designed around public transport hubs such as stations, make sense. If we could provide the private sector with the surety around land development opportunities, rail would be automatically integrated with land use, the investment in the rail would be optimised for all parties and consequently financing locked in.

This would ensure that we could overcome car dependence and achieve our vision for a well-connected, 30-minute City that offers a range of active and public transport options. It should also be noted that a Federal Government report in "Sustainable Cities found that while the perceived costs of car use are around 6c/pass-km, the real costs are closer to 60c/pass-km whereas public transport is perceived to cost 11-20c/pass-km while its real costs are 20-30c/pass-km.⁵²

It is important also to remember that a significant global problem is looming with regards to car dependence and that is the issue of oil vulnerability. Already the soaring costs of petrol are cutting deep into the pockets of the average Australian and as petrol becomes scarcer, it is American and Australian cities that will be most vulnerable. Moving to road infrastructure that allows for greater deployment of electric vehicles is inevitable but constructing extensive electric rail systems with transit-oriented development built around stations provides the best solution, and hence should be prioritised.

h) Staffing and future workforce planning, taking into account predicted service demand based on predicted population growth in Western Sydney.

As has been shown, there is a desperate need for the Western Parkland City to be connected to itself, in order for our people to be less disadvantaged and enjoy a life that is convenient, less stressful, healthier and more affordable. An efficient, safe, reliable, comfortable and reasonably-priced public transport system is hence critical and should be prioritised by the State Government to address the inequity that currently exists. This must encompass not only additional metro lines and considerably more train stations but a network of buses, both rapid and standard, to meet the ever-growing needs of our communities. To achieve this, there will be a requirement for more bus and train drivers, more customer service staff and security personnel, more maintenance staff and mechanics and possibly a growing cohort of data specialists, among others.

We are confident that given the current and predicted population growth, the ongoing issue of needing more jobs offered locally, the diversity of our workforce (which can be leveraged for their language skills and cross-cultural understanding for customer-facing positions such as drivers, station staff and so on), the Western Parkland City has the human capital

⁵¹ Hass Klau C (2004) Bus or Light Rail: Making the Right Choice, (2nd Ed) Environmental and Transport Planning, Brighton, UK.

⁵² House of Representatives (2005) Sustainable Cities, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra.

potential to cover any future workforce needs. By taking a proactive approach to workforce planning and skill development and leveraging the skills and determination of our residents, the public transport sector can be prepared to meet the predicted growth in service requirements that the population growth in the Western Parkland City will demand.

Please feel free to contact our Executive Director Joanna Kubota on _____ or
or myself on _____ or
should you have any questions.

Yours sincerely,

Ben Taylor
Chair, The Parks General Managers' Group,
Chief Executive Officer, Wollondilly Shire Council