

Submission
No 30

INQUIRY INTO CURRENT AND FUTURE PUBLIC TRANSPORT NEEDS IN WESTERN SYDNEY

Organisation: Western Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils Ltd

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Current and future public transport needs in western Sydney.

Submission to the NSW Government's Portfolio Committee No. 6 (Transport and the Arts)

September 2023

About WSROC.

Formed in 1973, the Western Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils (WSROC), represents local government across Greater Western Sydney.

Greater Western Sydney represents a significant geographical portion of the Sydney metropolitan region, covering over 5,000 square kilometres including a mix of regional centres and cities. Home to around half of Sydney's population, Greater Western Sydney stretches from the heavily urbanised, multicultural areas of Auburn and Parramatta in the east, to the greenfield growth centres of Blacktown and Liverpool, the rural areas of Hawkesbury and the World Heritage listed Blue Mountains.

Over the past 50 years WSROC has developed a strong reputation for bi-partisan advocacy on behalf of the needs of its councils, residents and businesses, especially in the key areas of economic and social development, job creation, transport and infrastructure, planning, health and the environment, and has proven itself a reliable partner in intergovernmental relations, regional strategic planning, and coordinating joint projects and programs.

WSROC welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the "Current and future public transport needs in Western Sydney" parliamentary inquiry.

Introduction.

The economy of Greater Western Sydney is the third largest in the country, contributing over \$155.3 billion to the nation's GDP. The population of Greater Western Sydney is 2,654,000 (2022) and expected to grow by another 800,000 by 2036. It has 989,000 local jobs and

1,224,000 employed residents, reflecting that 235,000 workers need to commute to jobs predominantly in the eastern half of the city¹ each and every business day.

By 2036 an additional 250,000 resident workers will be travelling outside the region for work.

“An important conclusion can be made at this point. The last two decades of growth in Western Sydney have not significantly advanced any regional centre or LGA as a significant supplier of jobs to Western Sydney’s growing workforce. The analysis shows that not even Parramatta can be held up as a Western Sydney success story in terms of jobs generation for the region. Parramatta is only holding its own as a jobs supplier to its local workforce. It does not yet host the level of jobs one would hope for from a genuine metropolitan centre.”²

Unless local job creation keeps pace with population growth, and there are no indicators that it will do so based on historical and recent trends then we will see almost 500,000 resident workers travelling to work in the east, and many of them will be professionals and those engaged in knowledge-based business services.

“Of major importance has been the labour force growth – actual workers – that has come from record levels of population growth. We have observed that Western Sydney’s in-migration flow is dominated by those aged 25 to 40 years, people in their prime working years. The cumulative effect of persistent migration and the natural growth that has accompanied it in Western Sydney, is that the region is approaching the size of Greater Brisbane in terms of total number in the workforce and has exceeded the number in the workforce in each of Greater Perth and Greater Adelaide”.³

Strategic planning documents of the early 2000’s targeted 70% of Sydney’s additional housing in existing areas and 30% in greenfield sites with 80% of new housing within walking distance of existing or new centres. The reality is that in recent years there has been substantial growth around the fringes of Sydney especially in Greater Western Sydney. We anticipate that this will continue given relatively recent announcements about “growth centres in the west” even as there is a concerted effort to build higher density in existing centres east of Parramatta.

Where greenfield developments do occur, they require planning that pays close attention to providing the essential transport linkages between residential development and the employment-generating industrial and commercial sites where the growing population will work. Further, it is imperative that investment in the necessary transport infrastructure occurs concurrently with such development, rather than lagging by decades as has happened too often in the past.

This has profound implications not only for development and urban design but also for the transport system. Greater Western Sydney already suffers from decades of under-investment in its transport needs affecting the liveability of its communities.

Many of the region's commuters face longer travel times, greater cost and greater inconvenience than most in Sydney. Unless there is a serious commitment to the region's transport infrastructure needs, the projected population growth will seriously compound these difficulties, affecting quality of life, impeding productivity and retarding the region's economic growth and its contribution to the state economy.

¹ Profile.id .Idcommunity Western Sydney economic profile

² “Where are the jobs? Part 2: The Geography of Western Sydney’s job deficit” Author Prof P O’Neill

³ “Where are the jobs? Part 1: Eastern Sydney’s short lived jobs boom” Author Prof P O’Neill WSU

Investment in Western Sydney's public transport network, including links between the region's existing centres, is essential for addressing cost-of-living pressures associated with fuel and tolls, supporting the development of local economies, improving access to services for vulnerable groups, as well as meeting NSW's Net Zero target.

Historically the transport system has been designed to connect the East and the West of Sydney, this approach has been criticised as outdated by many agencies over a long period of time but significant transport investment continues along the east – west axis. Significant gaps in the system exist and must be addressed urgently, with intra-regional connectivity, particularly connecting the Macarthur, North West and Western Sydney Airport to the region, critical to the future economic development of the region. Multi-modal transport is critical within the region, and any future developments must prioritise intra-regional connectivity.

At a meeting of GWS Mayors in 2015, the group identified the lack of intra-regional access and connectivity as the number 1 regional priority. This remains true today.

What is possible – a lesson from the past

In the 60 years leading up to Australia's federation in 1901 the NSW population grew by just over one million⁴ people and the state went from no rail at all to a 4,580 kilometre network of tracks. Construction peaked between 1857 and 1889, when an average of 110 kilometres of rail line was laid each and every year for 32 straight years.

The scale of this undertaking is difficult to comprehend in today's terms. Tunnels were dug and bridges built with construction technology far inferior to that available now. The population was much smaller, and the public debt of 67 million pounds must have seemed overwhelming for such a small economy. The young colony did it and in so doing supported the economic expansion of NSW for over a hundred years.

Since these heady days for rail construction if we take the 65 years from 1941 to 2016, Eastern Sydney grew by approx. 1.25 million and benefitted from 17 additional rail stations, in contrast Greater Western Sydney grew by approx. 1.75 million and lost 8 rail stations⁵.

The challenge

By 2036 the population of Western Sydney will rise from 2.5 million to 3 million, the same number that comprised eastern Sydney in 2021. As a concept Western Sydney will need the same amount of transport infrastructure west of Sydney Olympic Park by 2036 as there existed east of Sydney Olympic Park in 2021.

This is not an insignificant undertaking and at the time of this writing there is no strategic plan that conceptualises the scale and nature of the challenge and then works backwards from 2036 to ensure that an appropriate level (quantums) and timing of investment is planned to occur to achieve the needs and aspirations of the residents and businesses of Western Sydney.

⁴ 300,000 to 1,400,000 between 1841 and 1901.

⁵ This includes South-West rail link and the North West Metro stations.

The growth challenge is also exacerbated by a historical deficiency in transport infrastructure investment since the 1940s.

It should be noted that it is not railway lines nor the preservation of rail corridors that facilitate the establishment of communities and businesses, it is railway stations! The lack of railway stations does not only manifest on existing rail lines in Western Sydney but is also a feature of the soon to be delivered metro line from St Marys to the WSIA.

Another reality is that nowadays we spend more time and money on business cases than our forebears did in actually delivering projects! Very recently the previous NSW State Government announced \$265 million to undertake a series of business cases for metro lines in GWS in addition to the metro line from St Marys to WSIA.

These rail lines are considered so fundamental to the well-being and prosperity of GWS that the need to develop business cases to demonstrate their utility and value to GWS must be questioned in light of the extraordinary expense associated with the business case development.

In any case despite repeated assurances by the previous State Government that business cases would be developed to demonstrate the value proposition and the relative priorities of the different segments of the north – south rail line (Hawkesbury to Campbelltown) getting access to the “business cases” has been impossible.

We still have no idea why the Government has prioritised the St Marys to WSIA segment above other segments and with such a limited number of railway stations along that link. The only explanation was that the Government was working to a budget rather than trying to optimise the benefits for GWS and local communities.

Why railway stations are so important and must become the focus in Western Sydney.⁶

An analysis of the level of population in Western Sydney that live within walking distance (800m) to a train station was conducted over two periods:

- Today – 2016
- Future – 2036

The analysis was based on three stages:

- Identify stations across Western Sydney and their 800m buffers
- Selection of geographic areas (SAFi areas) located within this buffer
- Population estimates in 2016 and forecasts to 2036

A summary of each stage is provided below.

Stations included.

It is important to note that the 2016 analysis is based on existing stations, while the 2036 analysis includes the existing stations plus Sydney Metro Northwest stations. The analysis includes the Sydney Metro South West. Parramatta Light rail is not included any calculation (2016 or 2036) due to the uncertainty of the final station locations.

⁶ Western Sydney Job Deficit Analysis Sep 2016 prepared by .id on behalf of WSROC

The Western Sydney International Airport Metro Line was not included in the analysis, however St Marys is an existing rail station so it has been included in the analysis. Of the other rail stations:

- Orchard Hills, to service a future commercial and mixed-use precinct
- Luddenham, to service a future education, innovation and commercial precinct
- two stations within the airport site, at the airport terminal and at the airport business park
- the commercial heart of the Western Sydney Aerotropolis (the area named Bradfield).

These are not focussed on the development of high-density residential centres, there will be mixed use but the limited number of stations along the corridor and the competing commercial uses will limit their impact on substantially increasing the percentage of population within reasonable proximity to a railway station.

GIS analysis.

The GIS analysis was based on the train station layer sourced from PSMA Australia Limited. This layer was updated with locations of recently built stations at Leppington and Edmondson Park. Combined this was the base layer used for the 2016 analysis. Based on this layer, .id created 800m radial buffers for each station. A spatial selection analysis was then undertaken to identify the SAFi geographic areas that were within the 800 metre buffers.

A manual analysis was also conducted to ensure that SAFi area selections were not under or over-inclusive. This consisted of a manual LGA-by-LGA scan which made sure that areas which were only partially within the buffer are not included. It also made sure that large SAFi areas which may not be selected with the GIS spatial analysis BUT do have current or future growth anticipated within the 800m buffer area, are included. The SAFi 'residential development layer' assisted with identifying future growth areas. The 2016 residential addresses assisted with identifying current state/distribution of population within a SAFi area to assist with decision making when selecting/excluding a SAFi area from the results.

The same process was applied to the Sydney Metro Northwest stations to build the 2036 analysis layer.

Population forecasts.

SAFi population forecasts are a key input into the accessibility analysis that follows. SAFi has been developed to provide unprecedented insight into the future of Australia's population – at both the macro and the micro level. These forecasts provide an expert and independent view of how the population will change between 2011 and 2036 at a very small geographic level (SA1 derived). They offer valuable insight into how the demand for products and services, which are targeted at specific age groups, will change. This level of detail is required in order to understand population change around stations to 2036.

The approach to developing SAFi forecasts has been to combine both tops-down and bottoms-up modelling techniques. The tops-down model limits the total amount of population within the context of natural demographic limits. This means that all areas add up to Regional, State and National totals. The bottoms-up model takes into account changes occurring to housing supply

at the local level, as well as relevant typologies of migration and area-specific birth, death and migration rates.

Analysis.

There is a large variance between LGAs in Western Sydney in terms of the proportion of residents who have reasonable access to train stations (includes train stations and some major bus interchanges that are located within the 800m of an existing/under construction station (e.g. Rouse Hill Town Centre).

Reflecting their role as economic and employment hubs, Canterbury-Bankstown and Cumberland 2016 have the highest proportion of residents living within 800m of train stations (both over 40%). However, some LGAs have less than 10% of residents who live in close proximity to train stations, including Camden where there are no existing facilities near population. For the region as a whole, 1 in 5 residents typically live within 800m of train stations.

In the next twenty years, there is estimated to be a small increase (+3 percentage points) in the proportion of Western Sydney residents living close to train stations.

This is largely influenced by:

- 23 percentage point increase in The Hills Shire LGA due to the development of the Sydney Metro Northwest stations
- 7 percentage point increase in the LGA of Parramatta that likely reflects proposed higher density transit orientated development.

Four LGAs are forecast to experience falls in the percentage of serviced populations due to proposed residential development in areas not within 800m of existing or future train stations.

While the proportion of population being serviced by train stations will likely increase for most LGAs, the actual amount of people unserved will increase due to forecast population growth.

This means over 560,000 extra people in the Western Sydney region will be unserved by train stations by 2036. Essentially, proposed train stations development and major PT orientated residential development is not forecast to keep pace with population growth.

Access to train stations has substantial ramifications for the level of commuting travel time and road congestion in urban areas. LGAs in Western Sydney have a higher proportion of car ownership than most inner Sydney LGAs (see Figure 29).

Table 11: LGA population proximity to train stations

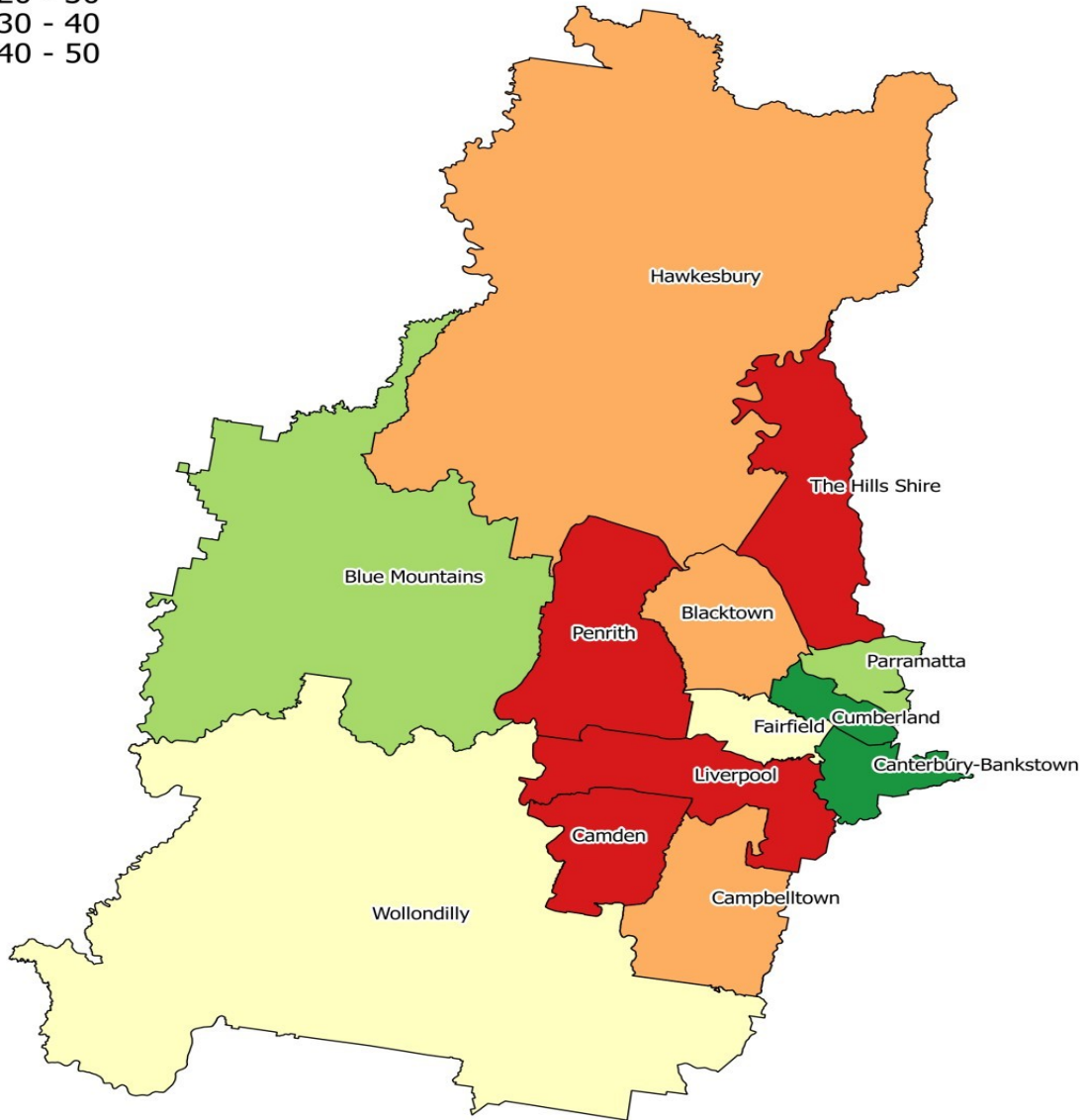
LGA	2016	2036	Percentage point change (2016-36)	Change in number of unserved population 2016-2036
Canterbury-Bankstown	44%	46%	2%	29,591
Blacktown (C)	14%	17%	3%	89,346
Blue Mountains (C)	39%	39%	1%	2,227
Camden (A)	0%	1%	1%	125,896
Campbelltown (C)	15%	15%	0%	33,575
Fairfield (C)	22%	25%	3%	10,882
Hawkesbury (C)	11%	10%	0%	9,168
Liverpool (C)	9%	8%	-1%	87,078
Parramatta (C)	36%	43%	8%	63,677
Penrith (C)	8%	11%	4%	34,837
The Hills Shire (A)	0%	23%	23%	23,065
Wollondilly (A)	25%	18%	-7%	29,438
Cumberland	41%	46%	4%	21,758
WSROC TOTAL	23%	26%	3%	560,538

% of LGA population within 800m of train stations- 2016

Legend

% of LGA population within 800m of a train station

- 0 - 10
- 10 - 20
- 20 - 30
- 30 - 40
- 40 - 50

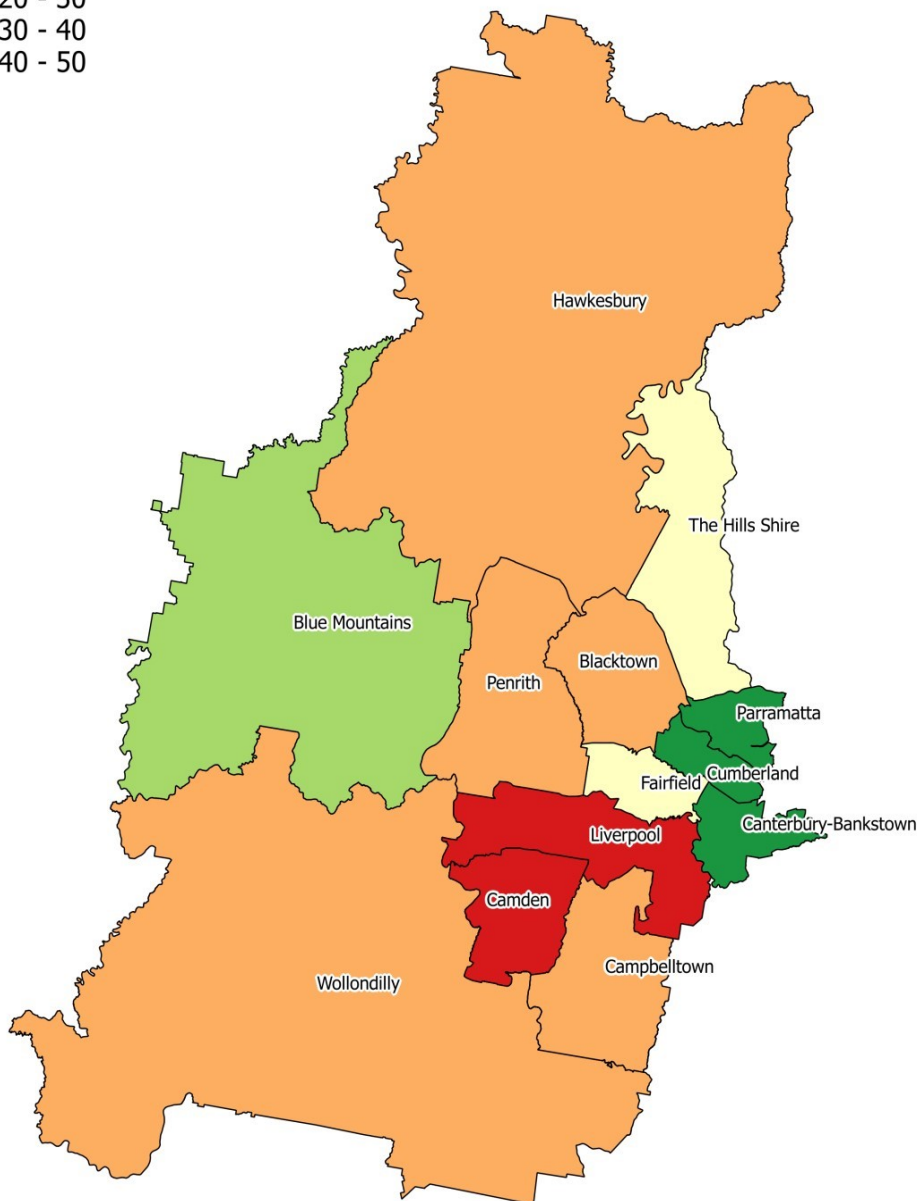


% of LGA population within 800m of train stations- 2036

Legend

% of LGA population within 800m of a train station

- 0 - 10
- 10 - 20
- 20 - 30
- 30 - 40
- 40 - 50



Recommendations.

Recommendation 1.

We have an incomplete but reasonable vision of land use for GWS, we have a reasonable perspective as to projected population growth, we have documented aspirations for investment and job creation, what we don't have is a "GWS transport plan" that not only ties all of these things together but explicitly supports their desired outcomes.

We have all of the elements that would allow the development of a 2036 (and perhaps 2056) end-state transport network for GWS that would ensure Western Sydney residents have access to the same level of services as other parts of the city.

Once this end-state plan is developed we could work backwards to identify what needs to happen by when. It would allow the identification of regional transport infrastructure priorities and their optimum times for delivery, and establish the appropriate funding mechanisms to make it happen. More importantly it would facilitate the attraction of greater levels of investment and allow an orderly development of new higher density communities around transport nodes.

The GWS Transport Network Plan 2056 (end state) must be in sufficient detail to encourage development i.e move from rail and road corridors to actual alignments, actual locations of stations and other transport nodes, etc.

Recommendation 2.

Today, just like the Sydney Harbour Bridge has shaped our city for over 50 years, a rail line from the Hawkesbury to Campbelltown will shape Greater Western Sydney for decades to come. No other single infrastructure project, including the Western Sydney International Airport will contribute more to the productivity, liveability and sustainability of the region.

The 65 km route could accommodate 34 railway stations at 2km spacings. Around these rail stations will be commercial and town centres, schools and health facilities, and villages in close proximity.

The rail line would create a highly liveable corridor up to 1km on either side of the tracks that would accommodate 650,000 people within walking distance of a railway station. Over two thirds of the expected 800,000 extra residents (up to 2036) of Greater Western Sydney would be served by rail transport without a need for buses and cars!

Properly planned access to these railway stations would contribute to walking and cycling as part of the commute making a substantial contribution to the obesity and diabetes epidemic in Western Sydney.

Local jobs within the town centres on supporting services could total 70,000 on par with the jobs ultimately generated by the Western Sydney Airport but that could be delivered quicker.

The rail line would provide access to the last affordable industrial lands in Sydney and connect residential areas to local employment lands, acting as a catalyst for investment that is sorely needed to deliver the 250,000 local jobs over the next 20 years.

In 2016 the population of Greater Western Sydney was 2,232,000, the lack of an intra-region rail link from the north to the south effectively splits Greater Western Sydney into three east-west zones along the Richmond, Penrith and Liverpool rail lines separated by distance. In 2036 when the resident population hits 3,100,000 and the Western Sydney International Airport is operating will we have connected and prosperous communities from the Hawkesbury to Campbelltown or not?

WSROC recommends the accelerated delivery of the North South/Western Sydney Airport Line from the Hawkesbury to Campbelltown in its entirety, not just St Marys to the Western Sydney International Airport.

(Northern Extension - Tallawong to St Marys and the Southern Extension WSIA to Campbelltown)

Recommendation 3.

The distances between railway stations along the T1 line between Blacktown and Penrith (up to 4.6km) are some of the longest throughout Sydney's rail network.

Increasing the number of railway stations between Blacktown and Penrith along the T1 line so that more communities can be within walking distance of a railway station and also provide opportunities for local businesses.

The six metro railway stations between St Marys and WSIA/Bradfield City being built in time for the opening of WSIA does not substantially improve access to rail services for the commuters and residents of Western Sydney.

Doubling the number of railway stations along the St Marys to WSIA metro link (and also for the northern and southern extensions) will facilitate the development of a "corridor of liveability" that would lead to the establishment of new town centres and the accommodation of up to 500,000 new residents within walking distance of a railway station.

Recommendation 4.

The south-west rail link has been a public transport investment disappointment in that it has not spurred substantial development along its corridor over the past decade. The commuter car parks have been well used and the railway stations provide additional access to Sydney's rail network but it has not been the catalyst towards walkable communities to public transport facilities.

The extension of the Leppington Line to Western Sydney International Airport will not only provide direct access to the airport from local communities but will also connect a major regional centre (Liverpool) to the airport.

Recommendation 5.

WSIA will have restricted connectivity with the public transport system (rail) for quite some time. Alternative public transport connectivity with neighbouring regional centres such as the cities of Penrith, Blacktown, Campbelltown and Liverpool will be a critical priority for self-evident reasons. WSIA and Bradfield City must not be “islands” of progress but rather fully integrated (in terms of transport, services and economic development) with the adjoining communities.

A comprehensive public bus transport network (and services) for Western Sydney and focussed on intra-regional access and high connectivity between WSIA/Bradfield City needs immediate attention. This network must recognise that local communities need better intra-regional access (especially along the north-south axis) as well as the need to provide express services between regional centres and WSIA/Bradfield City.

One idea that has merit is a “Smart Transport” corridor that provides for express transport services between the Liverpool CBD and Bradfield City/Airport as well as providing for local community connectivity with the airport and Liverpool CBD.

Develop a comprehensive plan for a Western Sydney Bus Network that integrates with existing and planned rail transport nodes.

Recommendation 6.

The north-west growth area and other adjacent development along the Richmond rail line requires a complete duplication from Schofields to Richmond.

The rail line serves passenger rail services, duplicating the line can improve commuter services, reduce travel times, and encourage more people to use public transportation, which can help alleviate road congestion.

Duplicating this rail line will also improve the reliability of rail services. In the case of a single-track line, any disruptions such as maintenance work or incidents can cause significant delays. With duplicated tracks, trains can be rerouted onto the other track, minimizing disruptions and maintaining schedules. This line is quite often out of service due to maintenance activities on the single line track.

Prioritise the duplication of the rail line from Schofields to Richmond.

Recommendation 7.

The provision of bus stops/shelters throughout GWS is well below what is experienced in “Eastern Sydney”. Most bus stops consist merely of a bus stop sign or if you are lucky, an upturned plastic milk crate to sit on.

There are over 45 different styles of bus stop/shelters ranging from a single pole with a small sign with no additional amenity to passengers right through to modern glass and aluminium structures whose primary function appears to be the provision of an electronic advertising sign.

The vast majority of bus-stop shelters and their siting provide inadequate levels of amenity and protection from weather, especially the extreme heat regularly experienced in Western Sydney.

In Eastern Sydney the sheer number of journey options and frequency of bus services may make the lack of amenity at a bus stop an inconvenience, but this is not the case throughout the majority of Western Sydney. Waiting for a bus for 20+ minutes in full sun on a day between 30 – 45 degrees for the young and elderly, or those suffering from problems associated with chronic disease is not just a question of discomfort. A recent ABC program measured the outside temperature at bus stops in Western Sydney without a shelter as high as 65°C. Bus frequencies can be as low as 60 minutes, making unsheltered bus stops challenging for commuters during hot summer conditions.

The evidence in the public domain makes a compelling case for a fundamental review of Sydney's bus policy framework. The broader agenda should be to integrate bus passenger road-side infrastructure with the "Smart City" objectives for Western Sydney. In practice this would simply be the integration of bus stop/passenger shelter with the "smart roadside".

The current system of delivering bus-stop/shelters/interchange infrastructure is ad-hoc, fragmented and lacks appropriate prioritisation and funding.

Standards be developed for a bus shelter that provides appropriate levels of safety and amenity for public transport users in Western Sydney especially for extreme heat and heatwave conditions.

Funding be provided for a program to deliver bus shelters in accordance with community priorities.

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