

**Submission  
No 34**

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

**Organisation:** Western Sydney Community Forum

**Date Received:** 18 September 2023

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Ms Cate Faehrmann MLC  
Current and future public transport  
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Dear Ms Faehrmann MLC,

Please find attached Western Sydney Community Forum's submission to the NSW Legislative Council Portfolio Committee No. 6 on its Inquiry into current and future public transport needs in Western Sydney.

Western Sydney Community Forum has reviewed the terms of reference. Western Sydney Community Forum welcomes this Inquiry and has developed six recommendations for your consideration.

Thank you for providing the opportunity to make a submission.

If you require further information, please do not hesitate to contact Shравan Guntuku, Manager Policy and Programs, on [redacted] or at [redacted].

Yours sincerely,

**Anita Hanna**  
Acting Chief Executive Officer

# Response to the NSW Inquiry into the current and future public transport needs in Western Sydney

September 2023



## Acknowledgement of Country

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We acknowledge First Nations peoples as the sovereign Traditional Owners and Custodians of the unceded lands and waters on which we work and live. We pay respect to Elders past and present. We respectfully recognise all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, their cultures and their heritage. We acknowledge past and present injustices and commit to walking alongside First Nations peoples.

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## Background

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Western Sydney Community Forum welcomes this Inquiry into current and future public transport needs in Western Sydney.

Accessibility to reliable and affordable public transport is instrumental in enabling people and communities across Western Sydney to feel and be connected. Access to reliable and affordable public transport improves quality of life and wellbeing by providing access to employment and education opportunities, healthcare, support services and amenities. Increased access also fosters social connections and reduces isolation.

Connected and integrated public transport networks can link Western Sydney communities to regional centres providing jobs, health and education services, recreation, arts and culture. For people with disability, accessible transport is key to living active and independent lives.

Limitations of public transport networks in Western Sydney has cost of living implications, including reliance on toll roads and reduces opportunities for incidental fitness. Well-connected public transport networks contribute to economic growth and to the wellbeing of the region, as the ability to use public transport enables individuals and communities to live actively<sup>1</sup>.

The population of Western Sydney is continuing to grow, and the new Western Sydney Airport will lead to increased development in the region. The rise in the number of people visiting, living and working in Western Sydney presents opportunities and challenges for transport providers. Population increases and higher residential density puts pressure on existing transport infrastructure and networks.

This submission was developed in consultation with member organisations and stakeholders, including transport providers, youth services, aged care services and local trusted place-based community organisations. It puts forward six recommendations for consideration:

1. Enhance the integration of public transport networks throughout Western Sydney, extending from central business districts to the outlying suburban regions
2. Promote active transport in Western Sydney by improving metro corridor infrastructure, including accessible lifts and bike paths
3. Establish an independent entity to thoroughly examine fare reform alternatives aimed at fostering increased public transportation utilisation
4. Investigate future transport technology, regulations, and legislation for seamless micro-mobility integration
5. Reevaluate limitations pertaining to the transportation of pets on public transit systems
6. Forge strategic partnerships with community organisations to launch targeted recruitment initiatives for long-term unemployed individuals in Western Sydney

## Western Sydney Community Forum

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Western Sydney Community Forum (WSCF) has led and shaped social policy and service delivery across greater Western Sydney for over 30 years. As a regional peak, WSCF champions solutions that sustain community resilience, health and wellbeing, and works with community organisations, joins with business and partners with government across all levels and services. WSCF is the regional social development council representing and supporting communities, and community groups and agencies in the region. This represents a population of over 2.5 million people and a community services industry that annually invests \$2.7 billion into the Western Sydney economy, according to the Australian Charities and Not-for-Profits Commission<sup>2</sup>. WSCF has an active and broad member and subscriber base (2,500) that includes a mix of agencies who connect with and provide services to people across greater Western Sydney. Members range from small community-based agencies to large charitable groups.

The health and wellbeing of individuals, groups and communities within Western Sydney is the primary concern of WSCF. This requires acknowledgement of the significant cultural, linguistic and religious diversity of Western Sydney's communities and the potential impact of any proposed social policy or legislative change.

## Western Sydney

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Western Sydney incorporates the local government areas of Blacktown, Blue Mountains, Camden, Campbelltown, Canterbury-Bankstown, Cumberland, Fairfield, Hawkesbury, Liverpool, Parramatta, Penrith, The Hills and Wollondilly. The region is rich with significant cultural, social and economic diversity.

Western Sydney is home to 54,498 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This represents about 60 percent of the total Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population in Greater Sydney<sup>3</sup>. It is the most multicultural region in Australia and is home to more than half the population of Greater Sydney and about a third of the population of NSW<sup>4</sup>.

Western Sydney has long been known as a car dominated region, with an overall reliance on cars by residents. Currently, Western Sydney has an 83.5% car dependency, which is 21% higher than Greater Sydney<sup>5</sup>.

## Recommendations

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**Recommendation 1: Enhance the integration of public transport networks throughout Western Sydney, extending from central business districts to the outlying suburban regions.**

The Western Sydney region is currently grappling with a critical issue, namely, the lack of seamless connectivity between pivotal public transport hubs and essential commercial centres. During consultations with stakeholders, a litany of concerns emerged, chief among them being the unreliability of the bus timetable networks. This was characterised by frequent rerouting, thereby hampering the convenience of commuters who rely on the proximity of these bus stops to their parked vehicles near train stations. Evidently, this predicament has not gone unnoticed by community groups, including the Save T3 Bankstown Line, which has voiced significant apprehensions regarding the proposed concepts for replacing Sydney Trains at Yagoona and Birrong with Bus or Light Rail, once the Metro Southwest becomes operational<sup>6</sup>. The NSW Government, to date, has yet to provide definitive guidance on the long-term trajectory of rail services in the Western Bankstown region, a matter of considerable concern as we approach the 2030s.

The ramifications of Western Sydney's car dependency phenomenon extend beyond mere inconvenience, particularly impacting the younger demographic. Stakeholders report that young people often find themselves under undue pressure to commence saving for an automobile as early as the age of sixteen in order to access employment, education and essential goods and services. Compounding this issue are the difficulties young individuals face in securing access to suitable driver supervisors, a predicament exacerbated by inadequate public transport options. The consequences of poorly integrated public transport networks reverberate throughout communities, exerting a disproportionate burden on young people's access to education, social engagement with peers, and participation in social events. Concerning anecdotes emerged during consultations with stakeholders, illustrating the extent of the problem, such as six-year-old children subjected to 45-minute bus journeys to reach out-of-school hours care. This is further exacerbated by the fact that the buses are shared public transport vehicles, potentially placing these children at risk. In addition, stakeholders have reported that it is near impossible for residents to access essential health services such as General Practitioners, without a private vehicle, even when they are based less than five kilometres away.

The repercussions of suboptimal transport integration are significant, perpetuating car dependency and, subsequently, imposing considerable economic burdens on the Western Sydney populace. These costs manifest in various forms, including the toll expenses incurred on road networks and the escalating prices of petrol. Moreover, limitations in public transport networks contribute to the cost of living, as the reliance on toll roads and diminished opportunities for incidental exercise compound the challenges faced by residents. In recognising the vital role of well-connected public transport systems in fostering economic growth and regional wellbeing, it becomes increasingly imperative that forthcoming metro developments prioritise methods to enhance connectivity with crucial commercial hubs. A tangible illustration of this necessity can be found in Marsden Park and Mount Druitt, where despite its relative proximity, accessibility via public transport remains an arduous journey compared to a shorter drive. Addressing this disparity could significantly augment employment prospects for residents of these areas.

Moreover, Western Sydney regions such as the Blue Mountains confront substantial obstacles when it comes to public transport. The infrequency of the Blue Mountains train schedule, characterised by lengthy intervals between train services, poses a challenge. Community services have highlighted the adverse consequences of protracted train journeys, which often lack onboard public restrooms, in addition to the dearth of interconnections within the Blue Mountains train network. Travel times are undeniably extensive, with the journey from Blackheath to Central Station consuming two hours and twenty minutes.

### Recommendation 2: Promote active transport in Western Sydney by improving metro corridor infrastructure, including accessible lifts and bike paths.

It is imperative to prioritise the enhancement of public transport networks and the development of active transport pathways to curtail the growing dependence on automobiles in the Western Sydney region. Active transport, encompassing walking and cycling as modes of transit to and from various destinations, holds one of the solutions to addressing the chronic health challenges. This approach aligns with the recommendations of the World Health Organisation (WHO), which underscores active transportation to bolster physical activity levels within communities of all backgrounds<sup>7</sup>. Robust evidence underscores the pivotal role of policy investments that promote safe cycling and walking, not only in improving public health but also in combating climate change and fostering a healthier environment.

The pronounced deficiency in public transport connectivity across Western Sydney underscores the heightened significance of private vehicle reliance. Studies examining the livability of urban centres emphasise the qualities associated with effortless access to secure and convenient active transport networks. Particularly noteworthy are networks designed to cater to individuals of all age groups, an objective increasingly attainable with the proliferation of "3rd speed" mobility solutions such as e-bikes and e-scooters. These innovative modes of transportation, accessible within a 15-minute travel radius, not only facilitate healthier lifestyles but also alleviate traffic congestion while aligning with community preferences for alternative transportation options, particularly in the context of a post-COVID world.

While the NSW Government is currently investing in the enhancement of public transport services in Western Sydney, focusing on projects like Metro West, Metro South-West, and Metro-Greater West, it is evident that a substantial gap remains regarding active transport provisions for cyclists and pedestrians. It is paramount to undertake concerted efforts to develop the requisite infrastructure that encourages diverse modes of transportation, including the creation of dedicated cycleways along the Metro corridor and the establishment of spacious footpaths. Moreover, the construction of secure storage facilities in proximity to train stations and bus stops is essential to incentivise the use of public transport.

The imperative for comprehensive accessibility measures cannot be overstated. All train stations must be fully accessible to individuals of all abilities and should adhere to the Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport, a framework currently under review. Critical components of such accessibility enhancements include the installation of lifts and ramps where necessary, in addition to the provision of accessible toilets. These measures are indispensable in ensuring that as many users as possible can safely and comfortably access existing train stations. Regrettably, certain stations within Western Sydney, such as Chester Hill, Villawood, Macquarie, and Yennora Stations, continue to lack these essential accessibility features at the date of this writing.



### Recommendation 3: Establish an independent entity to thoroughly examine fare reform alternatives aimed at fostering increased public transportation utilisation.

The implementation of fare reform warrants careful consideration, as it holds the potential to serve as a powerful incentive for individuals to alter their travel behaviour and make choices that not only benefit themselves but also contribute to the broader community. By reforming fares, it can substantially enhance the range of travel options available to individuals and improve affordability, especially for low-income travellers and households. This becomes especially pertinent when considering the elevated costs associated with commuting toward the Central Business District (CBD) for residents of Western Sydney.

Exploring the prospect of conducting trials for free public transport access in Western Sydney is another avenue worthy of examination. Such trials could yield broader economic benefits that might offset any anticipated revenue shortfalls resulting from reduced ticket prices. As exemplified by the decision to temporarily waive public transport fees in 2022, there is empirical evidence to suggest that this approach can stimulate increased economic activity. During this 12-day fare-free period, initiated as an apology amidst ongoing industrial action affecting the city's train network, both trip numbers in Sydney and consumer spending experienced a marked uptick<sup>8</sup>.

An alternative to subsidising transportation costs for those who can afford it would be to establish more affordable flat-rate fares, or to waive fees for individuals with low incomes or residing in areas where public transport infrastructure is available but underutilised. As the construction of the new metro line from St Marys to Badgerys Creek airport is anticipated, which promises to address future transportation needs in the region, it is incumbent upon Transport for NSW to ensure that the fare structure for the Metro aligns with standard Opal fares on the existing lines. Additionally, efforts should be made to limit station access fees to maintain equitable access for all.

Considering these options, WSCF recommends the appointment of an independent advisor tasked with reviewing and offering recommendations on transport pricing. Such a move would serve as a catalyst for a more comprehensive reform process, providing the Government with invaluable guidance on setting future objectives in the realm of transport pricing and fare structures. This approach ensures that the development of fare policies is informed by a holistic understanding of their impacts, thereby promoting more equitable and accessible transport options for all members of the community.

#### Recommendation 4: Investigate future transport technology, regulations, and legislation for seamless micro-mobility integration.

Future transport technologies are poised to play a pivotal role in mitigating car dependency, necessitating a thoughtful approach to policy and legislative reform that accommodates these emerging modes of mobility. Among these innovative options are micro-mobility services, such as e-scooters and e-bikes, which belong to the category of lightweight personal vehicles designed to efficiently transport users over short distances at moderate speeds.

Micro-mobility services demonstrate efficacy when used in conjunction with public transport to facilitate access to what are often referred to as "transit deserts." These are geographic areas where conventional public transport networks may fail to provide adequate connections, a situation that is notably prevalent in segments of Western Sydney. These modes of transportation hold immense promise in offering a broader spectrum of mobility choices, reducing traffic congestion, and curbing emissions, thus contributing to a more sustainable urban transportation landscape<sup>9</sup>.

Currently, e-scooters find themselves in a legal grey area in NSW under the Road Transport Act 2013 (NSW)<sup>10</sup>, as they are deemed "motor vehicles" due to their propulsion or assistance by an electric motor rather than human power alone. As such, they require registration and insurance to be utilised on public roads, a process rendered unfeasible under existing NSW laws.

Recognising the burgeoning popularity of e-scooters and the imperative to prudently manage their usage, Transport for NSW has taken a proactive step by initiating a trial of e-scooter shared schemes in select locations, including Western Sydney locales such as Western Sydney Parklands, Mount Annan, and Liverpool. This trial, spanning from July 2022 to June 2023, sought to evaluate the safety, viability, and advantages of e-scooters as a convenient, enjoyable, and eco-friendly mode of transport for short journeys. It is advisable that a strategy is unveiled alongside requisite legislative reforms and infrastructure enhancements to facilitate the safe and widespread utilisation of e-scooters.

Drawing inspiration from the Australian Capital Territory's (ACT) Transport Strategy of 2020, which champions and encourages innovative forms of mobility, including shared, dockless bikes and e-scooters, the ACT Government has fostered an environment conducive to the integration of these services into people's daily commutes. The ACT model has successfully established public-private partnerships with two privately owned micro-mobility operators, Beam and Neuron, which provide shared dockless e-scooter services across various areas, including the Canberra CBD, Inner North, Inner South, and Belconnen, since late 2020. This initiative has further expanded the landscape of shared mobility services, which already included Airbike (pedal bikes) and Popcar (cars), both of which have been operating since 2018<sup>11</sup>.

### Recommendation 5: Reevaluate limitations pertaining to the transportation of pets on public transit systems.

As it stands in NSW, the current regulations regarding pet transportation stipulate that pets are not permitted aboard trains, and on buses, their presence is contingent upon the driver's permission, provided they are securely confined within a suitable box, basket, or other appropriate container throughout the journey. Consultations with WSCF's stakeholders have cast a spotlight on the ramifications of these restrictions, particularly in the context of bushfire seasons that periodically afflict bushfire-prone regions, such as the Blue Mountains. Residents of these areas face unique challenges, especially when evacuation becomes necessary, as they contend with the limitations imposed on pet travel via public transport.

Considering these, Western Sydney Community Forum puts forward a recommendation for the implementation of changes to pet transportation policies. This recommendation is inspired by the practices adopted in numerous European countries, including the United Kingdom, where pets are allowed to travel either on leads or within carriers, thereby affording greater flexibility to pet owners and potentially fostering a more pet-friendly and compassionate transportation environment. By modifying the current regulations and adopting practices that accommodate pets during transit, NSW can enhance its preparedness and responsiveness during challenging situations like bushfires. Additionally, this adjustment aligns with evolving standards of pet-friendly transportation observed globally, promoting a more inclusive and considerate approach to the needs of pet owners within the community.

### Recommendation 6: Forge strategic partnerships with community organisations to launch targeted recruitment initiatives for long-term unemployed individuals in Western Sydney.

In Western Sydney, commuting beyond one's local area is a common necessity driven by limited employment opportunities that align with individuals' qualifications and skills. This predicament is exacerbated by the imperative to secure suitable employment in response to the escalating costs of living, including housing costs. Consequently, Western Sydney residents incur higher out-of-pocket expenses as they must travel greater distances to earn commensurate incomes compared to their counterparts residing closer to their workplaces.

Compounding this issue is the evident shortage of staffing in various sectors, underscoring the imperative of implementing targeted recruitment initiatives. These efforts should specifically address communities in Western Sydney grappling with additional barriers to employment, including individuals with prior incarceration histories or those from First Nations and culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds. Moreover, consultations have underscored a concerning trend wherein young people are compelled to relocate from regions within Western Sydney characterised by deficient transport connectivity. This migration trend further exacerbates workforce challenges and has substantial implications for future workforce planning in the region.

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