

Submission  
No 44

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

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## Submission on the current and future public transport needs in Western Sydney

Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development,  
Communications and the Arts

Submission prepared by:

**Blue Mountains City Council**

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the city within a  
World Heritage Area

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## 1. Introduction

Situated within a World Heritage National Park, the Blue Mountains Local Government Area offers an exceptional lifestyle within a connected and safe community, while also being one of Australia's premier tourist destinations. The design of transport infrastructure has a fundamental impact on the economic status, health and wellbeing of people in the community. It enables access to work, education, health and other key services, food and retail, plays an important role in addressing social isolation and inequity, improves overall accessibility and provides opportunities for active transport and daily physical activity. Future proofed transport infrastructure is vital to drive positive social and economic outcomes and most importantly environmental outcomes. As compounding natural disasters impact the Blue Mountains, it is essential our transport infrastructure is physically robust and plays a role in reducing climate change rather than contributing to it, keeping our community safe, moving and active.

We value safe, well-planned and accessible pathways of travel for all, that improve our connections with destinations and each other.

The enduring historic development pattern of Blue Mountains towns and villages along a railway line provides a solid transport foundation, concentrating the densest forms of development around transport and service nodes. Opportunities for increased public transport, as well as walking and cycling around our towns needs to be considered.

In the Blue Mountains, private vehicles are the predominant mode of travel, even for short trips.<sup>1</sup> The transport infrastructure and low-density nature of the population to date has meant that private vehicle use has been a major mode of transport. However, several characteristics of the car-centric transport network can be addressed so other more sustainable modes of transport can become safe and viable alternatives.

A proportion of the population choose to travel into Sydney for different employment opportunities or are willing to travel longer distances as a trade-off for the local amenity and lifestyle available to residents of the Blue Mountains.

As visitation to the Blue Mountains grows, a key challenge will be to ensure that infrastructure and transport services evolve. This will help maintain and enhance the high quality of life opportunities its residents and visitors experience, while ensuring the community's vision for environmental, social and economic sustainability is achieved.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://app.remplan.com.au/bluemountains/economy/workers/method-of-travel-to-work>

The Western City District Plan includes the priority of a '30-minute City'. To be within thirty minutes of employment, education and key services by public transport creates an inter-connected City. The lineal nature of the local government area, and substantial distance between the eastern and western extents, makes this a challenging goal for residents working within the City, but particularly for the significant resident commuter population. Work needs to be done to achieve the underlying objectives of a 30-minute City. This includes improved access to local job opportunities.

To address the current issues in the Blue Mountains requires improving public and active transport usage through enhanced transport connections. Central to improved connections within the local government area are three significant transport corridors: The Great Western Highway, Bells Line of Road, and the Western Railway Line. In combination, these major transport links are the infrastructure framework for local transport within the Blue Mountains, as well as providing a direct connection between metropolitan Sydney and the Central West. It is this dual role which presents both challenge and opportunity at the local level.

## 2. Strategic Context

This submission aligns with the following strategic plans:

### Local Strategic Planning Statement Blue Mountains 2040

The Local Strategic Planning Statement identifies nine local planning priorities. The key priorities that are referenced in this submission are as follows:

- Living sustainably in the City within a World Heritage National Park.
- Managing bushfire risk and responding to climate change in our unique environment.
- Planning for the increased well-being of our community.
- Sustaining a healthy local economy, including a focus on Katoomba as our strategic centre.
- Leading destination management and sustainable tourism.
- Improving local transport connections and accessibility, including walking and cycling.

### Integrated Transport Strategic Plan 2035

The key priorities that are referenced in this submission are as follows:

- Connected and vibrant communities.
- Usable bicycle riding and walking networks.
- Quality Public Transport.
- Efficient Roads and Parking.

### Disability Inclusion Action Plan 2017–2021

The key priorities that are referenced in this submission are as follows:

- Incorporate whole-of-route (including footpaths) approach to strategically plan universal access to key cultural, commercial and transport sites e.g., Blackheath and Hazelbrook Railway Stations.
- Consider accessibility for accessible parking that goes beyond compliance in future parking strategies to better consider the requirements for width and height of modified vehicles and vans.
- Advocate with the State Government and Transport Industry to provide additional accessible taxis and buses in the Blue Mountains.
- Discuss with Blue Mountains private bus company's provision of updated information on availability of accessible vehicles – look at SMS updates.
- Incorporate needs of people with disability in the Blue Mountains Integrated Transport Strategy.
- Public transport advocacy and accessibility.
- Re-establish the Blue Mountains Integrated Transport Forum to support increased service and accessibility of public transport for the Blue Mountains.
- Investigate the feasibility of providing charging stations for motorised scooters at key village locations.

## 3. Background

Home to 77,905 people, Blue Mountains supports 21,011 jobs and has an annual economic output of \$6.198 billion<sup>2</sup>.

With a spectacular environmental setting, the Blue Mountains is home to a community residing in 27 towns and villages, dispersed across 100km of mountainous terrain. Our City is located within the Country of the Dharug and Gundungurra peoples and includes areas that are of great cultural significance. The Blue Mountains has been home to Aboriginal people for thousands of years, and the Dharug and Gundungurra Traditional Owners have a deep and ongoing connection to their Country.

We are a low-density City comprised mostly of single detached dwellings on large blocks. Ribbons of development extend out along ridgelines, with many properties connecting directly to the

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<sup>2</sup> <https://app.remplan.com.au/bluemountains/economy/workers/>

surrounding bushland. This proximity puts our City at high risk of bush fires and creates a lengthy urban-bushland interface that requires environmental management. The Blue Mountains is a nationally and internationally significant World Heritage Area and unique visitor destination. Our natural areas play an important role in providing high quality drinking water to Sydney, as many of the City's waterways drain into Lake Burragarang. Approximately 74% of the local government area is national park, with only 11% available for settlement.

The Blue Mountains has the lowest population growth of all council areas in Greater Sydney, and further growth in the towns and villages of the Blue Mountains will be limited to local growth consistent with the local character. Although forecast population growth for the Blue Mountains is minimal compared to the rest of Greater Western Sydney, Blue Mountains residents will potentially benefit from the planned injection of jobs, and improvements to infrastructure and connections that will come with Western Sydney's population growth.

The topography of the Blue Mountains poses a considerable challenge for the provision of infrastructure within the area, as well as transport access to Greater Sydney from the Central West region and regional NSW.

The NSW Government is committed to upgrading the corridor along the Great Western Highway as the main road freight corridor over the Mountains, as well as the Main Western Train Line. Consultation continues regarding the most suitable way to achieve this goal. Upgrades to the Blue Mountains train line and the roll out of the new rail fleet will allow the network to operate at greater capacity while accommodating new and existing trains. The planned infrastructure investment in Western Sydney will create significant opportunities to grow both international and domestic tourism markets and will better connect visitors to the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area.

This will provide economic flow-on benefits to accommodation, hospitality, entertainment and leisure services in our City. In conjunction, the Western Sydney City Deal and subsequent Western Parkland City Draft Blueprint will continue to provide opportunities for Blue Mountains residents, particularly increased skills and employment pathways in emerging sectors in Western Sydney.

It is important that transport infrastructure and the public transport network in the Blue Mountains provides good, reliable, and frequent access to new jobs created by projects such as the Aerotropolis for residents of the Blue Mountains. Blue Mountains residents need to be able to reliably get to work "off the mountain" using fast and reliable public transport. Private vehicle travel over long distances to work is cost prohibitive for many and has impacts on health. For residents in the upper mountains, for example in Katoomba, Parramatta, a major employment area in Western Sydney is 80



km away. Good local public transport, active transport links, parking at transport nodes such as train stations and a fast rail network to Western Sydney, the Aerotropolis and Greater Sydney enables access to jobs for a diversity of residents.

The desirability of the Blue Mountains as a place to live, particularly with changing modes of working, has put pressure on the local housing market, particularly the rental market. Additionally, our ageing population means there is need for a greater range of housing types.

The area has seen rapid visitor growth in recent years – with an increasing proportion of visitors from Asia. Currently, the Blue Mountains region attracts over 4 million visitors a year which is predicted to increase to over 6.3 million by 2036<sup>3</sup>. These figures account for the growth of the Western City and the opening of the Western Sydney Airport.

The visitation from nearby and international travellers are focused at key times; being weekends, long weekends and school holidays. These congruent time periods of visitation create peak demands on the infrastructure and facilities of the LGA. These peak demand periods are burdensome on the parking facilities within the towns and villages as well as key destination sites such as Echo Point.

Domestic and international tourism is a major contributor to the Blue Mountains economy and employment, with flow on economic benefits to Greater Sydney and the surrounding regions.

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<sup>3</sup> BMCC DMP, 2017

## 4. Terms of Reference

- a) the availability and accessibility of public transport services across Western Sydney, the adequacy of connectivity between public transport hubs and commercial hubs and any gaps in services

Public transport plays a crucial role in reducing car dependency, managing congestion, and improving the overall liveability of population centres. It supports an inclusive community by providing mobility to a wide range of people, regardless of age, occupation, or socio-economic circumstances.

Contributing factors to levels of public transport utilisation are well known. Passengers want safe, comfortable, reliable, frequent, and fast travel services, with minimal wait times during intermodal transfers.

Public transport in the Blue Mountains is currently comprised of heavy rail and bus services. In 2023, for public transport trips in the Blue Mountains, 20% caught buses within the Blue Mountains, 18% caught trains solely within the Blue Mountains and 61% caught trains to and from Blue Mountains and Greater Sydney.

A Community transport service provides some options for older people, people living with a disability or other barriers to transport. Generally, users must be assessed and registered with My Aged Care or the NDIS. Research into community resilience has revealed that isolation is a significant issue for many people with mobility challenges. The Ageing Strategic Plan indicates some elderly residents feel that community transport to medical services and social activities is limited and costly. With the projections for an ageing population, the demand for community transport in the Blue Mountains is expected to increase significantly.

Improvements in public and community transport are crucial to reducing social isolation, minimising risk in times of emergency, and addressing anxiety relating to safety concerns.

As public transport services are managed by the NSW Government (with the exception of community services), BMCC will have limited capacity to implement initiatives and will be required to advocate to TfNSW for any proposed changes.

Collaboration will be key to achieving a public transport network within the Blue Mountains that is characterised by:

- high levels of service coverage;

- short walking times to public transport stops/stations;
- direct, reliable and frequent services;
- minimal wait times during modal interchanges; and
- appropriate levels of commuter parking.

Maintenance of the natural environment by managing the increasing parking demand and encouraging more sustainable forms of travel requires significant infrastructure investment. A medium to long term focus (as envisaged in the Destination Management Plan 2017) is to identify land at key visitation areas, where infrastructure can be established to centralise coach parking outside of village centres. The long-term focus is to develop sustainable methods of transport to move tourists between key destinations within the City (Action 8.12 of the Blue Mountains Local Strategic Planning Statement). Such a facility is seen as an important piece of supporting infrastructure that would greatly improve the management of tourist movements and minimise impacts on resident amenity. Opportunities to co-locate visitor information or other facilities at these locations could also result in economic benefit.

#### 1) Current Issues

Some of the key issues the Blue Mountains experiences with respect to public transport include:

- Pre Covid, trains on the Blue Mountains Line can operate at crush conditions due to high volumes of tourists. This results in an uncomfortable environment for some passengers (who are required to stand) and a potentially unsafe environment for the mobility impaired. Numbers are expected to return to those levels.
- Toilets also need to be open at train stations and on trains to facilitate access for a range of people. Older people, people with disabilities, pregnant women, women who have had children, older men and children all need good access to toilets to use public transport.
- Issues with staffing at train stations to assist elderly, those with mobility issues. Some stations also have a gap between the platform and the train and those with mobility issues require assistance.
- Blue Mountains City Council has an active Access Advisory Committee and is committed to providing and supporting active and accessible transport links however this can only be achieved through partnerships with other levels of government. For example, the benefit of providing accessible footpaths to a train station is forfeited if users are not able to get onto the train station.
- Current public transport services do not typically operate during periods that would support the Blue Mountains' night-time economy.

- Journey to work data (JTW) indicates public transport services are not being used by local residents to access their places of employment compared to using cars.
- Few bus services operate on Hawkesbury Road or the Bells Line of Road.
- Only ten of twenty train stations in the Blue Mountains are accessible by wheelchair.

## 2) Trains

The safety on train stations is important. Reports from young women, in the upper mountains particularly, are that they are experiencing sexual harassment around train stations. Messaging a zero tolerance of sexual harassment of violence, adequate staffing and training of staff, lighting and safe places will assist to keep people safe and able to use public transport. More frequent local train services also reduces wait times and exposure to potential harm.

Rail capacity can be improved. A case study was the Winter Magic event 2023 where each train had eight carriages and an additional service was provided every hour shows that the rail corridor can handle additional trains on the weekend, where capacity is required. The lack of services also impacts the nighttime economy and opportunities for young people.

Tourism services on trains and on arrival can be improved. Information points, Wi-Fi, QR codes, signage and wayfinding will assist the visitor's experience.

Transport for NSW's Future Transport Strategy sets the direction for localised plans and strategies, policy direction and prioritisation. Their aim is to connect customers and communities with a safe, reliable, sustainable and integrated transport system. Looking at the Blue Mountains separately will ensure that our differences to other areas is considered in this planning.

## 3) Bus services

There are 22 bus services in the Blue Mountains, excluding school services. These services are often characterised by low frequencies, circuitous routes and poor connectivity with other bus and train services.

No bus services operate along the full length of the Great Western Highway in the Blue Mountains. While BMCC does not deliver the provision of bus services in the Blue Mountains, it is important for other external agencies to coordinate with stakeholders to provide improved bus frequencies and services.

The current frequencies, reliability and hours of service within the Blue Mountains means buses are not competitive with other forms of transport.

Increased frequencies and evening services will allow for greater coordination between routes/modes, ensuring that more journeys are possible. Simplifying the route network would allow for greater legibility of the network to potential users and lessen the duplication of routes.

Bus shelters are needed, increase the ability of people to use a bus service, particularly in the upper mountains where the temperatures are lower.

Community Transport services provided by the not-for-profit organisation 'Active Care Network' provides community transport services throughout Blue Mountains, Penrith and Blacktown local government areas. They provide transport for those who meet eligibility criteria e.g., aged, mobility issues, disability etc. An issue with community transport is whether people fit with current 'criteria' to be able to access these services.

#### 4) Taxis and Rideshare

Taxis and Rideshare services operate in the Blue Mountains. These services are supported by signage, lighting, and dedicated spaces.

Accessible taxis are available but need to be booked in advance so limit the ease of use. Taxi fare cost is a prohibitive factor for usage, particularly for young people. Also, taxis may service only particular areas.

#### 5) Commuter car parks

Commuter car parks in the Blue Mountains are owned by BMCC and the NSW Government. They are located at stations throughout the Blue Mountains, typically these are at grade, but a multistorey facility is located at Springwood.

The Citywide Parking Strategic Plan indicates some commuter car parks (particularly in the Lower Mountains) such as Springwood and Blaxland are operating at or near capacity. Because the cost associated of providing new car parking spaces is so high, the development of parking precinct plans and providing appropriate amenities and facilities to promote active transport would be beneficial.

Should the NSW Government seek to increase commuter parking in a way that minimises the impact on the urban form of the Blue Mountains, the BMCC may be supportive if presented. Potential locations for new or enhanced commuter parking could be identified in centres with population growth or where there is commuter parking spaces. Access to EV charging stations should be included in the planning.

- b) The current and anticipated levels of demand for public transport services and the public transport requirements to meet this demand.

The Integrated Transport Strategic Plan 2035 calls for improved bus services, including night-time public transport, with a particular focus on how trains provide a service for both local commuters and tourists. Availability of regular and reliable public transport within the City affects not only liveability but also the local economy. It can enable people to move freely and efficiently to essential services including hospitals and employment. It can also determine the availability of local people for late shifts at restaurants. It also enables the support of local music events, bars and restaurants and the ability to return to or from the City from music events or festivals

In the context of the resident commuter population, improvements to both the regularity, speed and quality (digital connectivity and comfort for long commutes) of rail services, could fundamentally improve connectivity for Blue Mountains residents. This is particularly true for Blue Mountains youth, for whom public transport and the lack of reliable connectivity between villages can affect opportunities for local employment. Additionally, faster public transport to access education and employment opportunities could encourage young people to stay in the Blue Mountains longer, rather than leave for opportunities in Greater Sydney.

Council will work with Transport for NSW to achieve these improvements to the rail network (Actions 9.11, 9.13 and 9.14 from the Blue Mountains Local Planning Statement Action 2040).

Many of these changes would be highly beneficial to the visitor population travelling to the Blue Mountains and moving from destination to destination within it. A medium to long term focus (as envisaged in the Destination Management Plan 2017) is to identify land to centralise visitor parking outside of village centres and, long term, the development of sustainable methods of transport to move tourists between key destinations within the City (refer to Local Planning Priority 7 from the Blue Mountains Local Planning Statement Action 2040).

A connected and vibrant community is one where interconnected networks enable people to come together and participate in community life, thereby enhancing physical and mental well-being. It is also where residents and visitors can meet their daily transport needs by walking, cycling and accessing public transport, as well as travelling by car.

Key to the Strategic Plan is the 'Movement and Place' approach, which recognises that streets are an integral component to the liveability of urban centres, rather than just a way to facilitate the movement of vehicles. This approach has also been formally adopted by the State Government in the Future Transport 2056 Strategy as the Movement and Place Framework.

- c) The changing nature of public transport needs due to shifting demographics, new suburbs, planned infrastructure and increased density.

The median age of people in the Blue Mountains LGA was 45 years based on Census 2021 data. Children aged 0 - 14 years made up 17.4% of the population and people aged 60 years and over made up 29.8% of the population<sup>4</sup>.

As people age, the rates of disability increase impacting in many cases the ability to drive. People's incomes also reduce over 65 years. Services such as community transport play an important role in bridging the gap generated from not being able to drive or own a vehicle.

The Blue Mountains will have an increasing need for community transport services as our population ages, and older people move to the area from Greater Sydney due to increasing house prices across the region.

- d) The social, economic and planning impacts of vehicle dependency and poorly integrated public transport.

In regional and rural areas, transport disadvantage is a key factor in the ability to access opportunities for education, health and employment.

Transport disadvantage is of particular note where provision for public transport is less available, infrequent or non-existent. Public transport is also not an option for travel due to the lack of infrastructure.

Young parents and sole parents are particularly vulnerable to transport disadvantage. These transport difficulties can play a key role in social exclusion.

Good local public transport in the form of buses or trains, active transport links and parking at transport nodes allows residents to access job opportunities outside and within the Blue Mountains. For people unable to drive due to their age (e.g., teenagers, older people), or a health condition, unable to afford a car, or families unable to afford two cars, social and economic outcomes can be improved through good transport infrastructure and public transport. Whilst we have high vehicle ownership in the Blue Mountains there is potential for deepening social inequity if transport infrastructure networks continue to rely on private cars. In terms of economic disadvantage, 21% of couple families with children in the Blue Mountains have incomes below the NSW family medium

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<sup>4</sup> <https://app.remplan.com.au/bluemountains/community/summary?state>

income (ABS, Census 2021). 72% of sole parent families in the Blue Mountains have incomes below the NSW family medium income (ABS, Census 2021).

e) [The affordability compared with other areas of Greater Sydney and New South Wales and relative to means.](#)

Public transport affordability impacts access for residents to use those services. Lower-income individuals and families find it more challenging to afford regular public transport fares, especially when fares are not proportionate to income. Higher car and fuel costs are being borne by those households that have more than one car and who must travel further distances, particularly on toll roads.

Affordable transport options increase access to opportunities such as work, education, and childcare for a range of people, including those on low incomes and living with disability, improving the likelihood of moving out of a vulnerable social and economic position.

We are seeing rental stress, increasing from 8.4% of rental households in the Blue Mountains in 2016 to 44.7% of rental households in the Blue Mountains in 2021 (ABS, Census 2021). Since 2021 cost of living pressures have increased. Local services report an increase in people seeking basic goods such as food and clothing, including many families who have not been in this position previously. Local service providers report they have seen a significant increase of women, children and teenagers seeking homeless services. Therefore affordable, frequent, and reliable access to work, education, childcare, food, and retail is a vital part of reducing the slide to poverty for many families who are already feeling the pressure cost of living.

f) [The role of public transport and future transport technologies to reduce car dependency in Western Sydney, including barriers to improving public transport services.](#)

Emerging technology has the capacity to fundamentally change how people travel by providing bespoke services tailored to the needs of individuals. In the Integrated Transport Strategic Plan 2035, an action in this statement is to investigate these opportunities as a catalyst for future investment in sustainable technology and clean transport, to move both residents and visitors throughout the City.

Digital connectivity and enabling technologies will become increasingly essential to the operation of the transport system and our cities. The application of smart city principles will improve safety, reliability, demand management and operational efficiencies. They will also ensure we are ready for connected and automated vehicles.



Provision for alternate modes of transport also need to be included in planning and upgrades, for example allowing for bikes on train and busses. Including e-bike charge points at key locations will also assist with improving access to alternate modes of transport. Cycling is an essential element of an integrated and sustainable transport network, providing both local and regional connectivity. The key to creating bicycle friendly communities is to provide cycling networks and end of trip facilities at places people want to travel to, including town centres, workplaces, community, and educational facilities.

A quality pedestrian/bicycle riding network is crucial to encourage people to use these modes of transport within and between town centres. Walking is considered a viable alternative to replace trips made by car of 2 km or less, while bicycle riding is a viable alternative for journeys of 5 km or less.

Walkability is a measure of how 'walker friendly' an environment is to pedestrians. Measures that can increase the priority of pedestrian and bicycle riding networks and facilitate walkable neighbourhoods include:

- moderation and traffic calming measures, such a built kerb, raised thresholds and road narrowing;
- marked and raised pedestrian crossings;
- the provision of mid-block signal-controlled pedestrian crossings in areas of high demand;
- the provision of bicycle rider paths either on-street (for vibrant streets and places for people) or fully segregated (on motorways and movement corridors);
- designing roads that provide priority for pedestrians and high levels of permeability;
- reducing speed limits, i.e., 40 km/h for high pedestrian activity areas and 10 km/h shared zones; and
- removing obstructions on active travel paths and providing adequate lighting.

It is expected that improvements to the current active transport facilities within the Blue Mountains will increase popularity of walking and cycling. Active transport access is currently restricted and unsafe in parts between Medlow Bath and Mount Victoria, due to no infrastructure being in place.

- g) The 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.

There may be opportunities to explore with tourism operators of shared value partnerships moving both residents and visitors alike around the Blue Mountains.

Other bus services include the Active Care Network service, which provides transport for elderly or disabled residents who are unable to drive or otherwise get to medical appointments, shops, and other places of need, as well as the Explorer sightseeing tour services through Katoomba and Leura.

Provision for car share spaces and encouragement of the development of a car share scheme within the Blue Mountains could reduce the need for parking spaces. Car share schemes, such as GoGet, currently established at Katoomba railway station, enables individuals to hire a vehicle for short periods of time and are increasing in popularity. Participating in a car share scheme can be a cheaper alternative to owning and maintaining a car, while providing the same convenience as owning a car. Residents who participate in a car share scheme are less likely to own a car and may not want to pay additional costs for a property that has a parking space.

Car share schemes are typically most prevalent in inner-city areas where higher population densities in combination with extensive public transport networks and active transport discourage car ownership. Feasibility assessments would be required to assess the practicality of providing car sharing in larger town centres similar that at Katoomba.

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

The Blue Mountains population forecast for 2041 is an increase of 1,087 people<sup>5</sup>. The Blue Mountains has the lowest population growth of all council areas in Greater Sydney, and further growth in the towns and villages of the Blue Mountains will be limited to local growth consistent with the local character.

There will be however, an influx in visitation and that needs to be prepared for when planning. The development of the visitor sector and capturing the employment and economic benefits arising from the visitor economy in the Blue Mountains is of critical importance.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://app.remplan.com.au/bluemountains/forecast/summary?state>

With a growing number of passengers, the demand for services will increase and the job opportunities with that, will also increase.

(i) Any other related matters.

#### 1) Great Western Highway

The Great Western Highway is a Road of National Importance (RONI) transport corridor and provides a 'local' route for residents and visitors of the Blue Mountains, enabling connectivity between the majority of the population centres for shopping, recreational, social and employment.

##### a) Freight

The efficient movement of freight in the Blue Mountains is required to provide goods that satisfy the needs of businesses, residents and visitors.

As the primary route between Sydney and Western NSW, the Great Western Highway carries greater volumes of freight year on year. Highway upgrades have improved freight movement, and this provides productivity benefits for NSW. However, the impacts on the local environment, local traffic movement, and the amenity, safety and character of villages within the Blue Mountains are increasingly adverse.

A change in state and federal government policy resulting in transportation of freight by rail to trucks has increased congestion, noise and environmental impacts within the Blue Mountains.

The doubling of freight movements by heavy vehicle across the mountains in recent years is having an adverse impact on highway efficiencies and amenity. This increase is forecast to continue as infrastructure projects in the Sydney basin to draw quarry materials from west of Katoomba.

Where a high level of dependence on road-based freight occurs, a key concern is to mitigate the impact on communities and other road users such as pedestrian and cyclists. As the Great Western Highway travels through most the Blue Mountains' population centres, this is of particular importance to BMCC and local residents.

##### b) Great Western Highway Upgrades

Together, the Australian and NSW Governments are potentially investing more than \$4.5 billion towards upgrading the Great Western Highway between Katoomba and Lithgow.

The Katoomba to Lithgow duplication will provide major economic and safety benefits. It will improve the connection between Central West NSW and Sydney, reduce congestion, improve resilience and freight productivity, and provide a safer and more reliable journey for thousands of residents, commuters, tourists and freight operators who travel in, around and through the Blue Mountains.

This also has the potential to compound these environmental issues by further prioritising regional freight movement through the Blue Mountains and confirming the Great Western Highway as the dominant east-west regional freight route for NSW. The location, layout, and design of any highway upgrade or duplication can significantly impact on the safety, amenity, and connectivity of the villages it passes through. Council will continue to advocate for the best outcome for the local area in any transport decisions affecting the Blue Mountains, including advocacy for alternatives to regional road freight (Actions 9.1 and 9.7). A series of actions in this Local Planning Statement are focused on this issue.

Beyond impact within the urban areas of the City, it is essential that any upgrades are both designed and constructed to reflect the World Heritage setting and overall environmental sensitivities of the area. This includes water sensitive infrastructure to preserve the downstream environment and visual permeability to maintain and enhance existing vistas of the World Heritage National Park. Council will advocate for and work with Transport for NSW to achieve these outcomes (Action 9.3).

The transport corridor has a major influence over the management of stormwater from its related infrastructure. Of particular importance are the high number of water detention basins the Roads and Maritime Services has installed in recent years as part of the Great Western highway upgrade. It is an action within this strategy to explore options around better water quality and reuse.

It is recommended that BMCC continue to work with Transport for NSW to ensure that the transport corridors are maintained at an agreed service level to not adversely impact safety, efficiency, amenity and operational capacity.

#### c) Congestion points on the Great Western Highway, and local linkages

Increased traffic on the Great Western Highway through the Blue Mountains (partly due to increased visitation in the region) has resulted in congestion points affecting safe and effective traffic movement.

The Transport for NSW proposal to duplicate the Highway between Katoomba and Lithgow will further increase congestion at choke points and makes the upgrade of key intersections even more

significant. The structure of the local government area as a string of villages along the Great Western Highway, provides both a major and singular connection via road and rail, but also bisects many villages into a 'north' and 'south'. Recent grant funding has provided the opportunity to progress a number of key active transport projects across the City. However, to enable a comprehensive approach to such infrastructure, including a focus in linkages which support active movement by residents but also key connections for visitors, will require significant support.

To create a connected City and for the purposes of emergency evacuation, improved connection across the highway and enhancement of local linkages is essential. In any upgrade of the Great Western Highway, the Council will continue to advocate for greater connectivity across the highway, including pedestrian connectivity (Action 9.4 from the Local Strategic Planning Statement 2040). Council will also review and update the Local Link Road Strategy to identify potential new routes that may facilitate the mobility of residents and visitors within and to the Blue Mountains (Action 9.9 the Local Strategic Planning Statement 2040). This will aid evacuation during emergencies, but also improve day-to-day local movement within the City for residents and visitors.

Additional and significant traffic volumes result from tourism within the Blue Mountains Local Government Area. Long term it will be important to find ways to move visitors through our towns and villages via sustainable, emission- reduced methods. Our strategic plans identify that over the medium term, investigation of options for centralised coach parking outside of village centres is required to enable delivery of a longer-term vision to develop sustainable methods of transport to move tourists between key destinations within the City. Such facilities and methods are seen as important pieces of supporting infrastructure that would go towards addressing impacts on resident amenity, but also to reducing emissions within the City. Connected to this, is the need to coordinate the delivery of local transport infrastructure to support and enhance the walkability and pedestrian/cycling connections within and between towns and villages; making them more liveable and sustainable.

The environment of the local government area (topography, distance and single access points) result in substantial challenges in preparing for and managing extreme fire and weather events. An action of the Local Planning Statement is to review the Local Link Roads Strategy and Local Emergency Management Plan (Actions 2.2 and 2.3) to consider both emergency management and local movement within the City. The emergency management response will incorporate the use of open space areas as helicopter landing sites during these emergencies. Longer term opportunities should also be explored to incorporate infrastructural improvements which support resilience and emergency response scenarios.

## 2) The Aerotropolis and connectivity to the west

Connectivity to the Western Sydney Aerotropolis is a central focus of the Western City District Plan. A focus for the Blue Mountains is to move the transport of bulk products such as coal, gravel and fuel to the rail line, rather than road routes. Council supports the location of intermodal facilities on the fringe of the Sydney Basin such as Penrith, Bathurst, Parkes and Dubbo, and the provision of dedicated rail lines to allow greater separation of passenger and freight services. In particular, a line duplication between Penrith-St Marys and Strathfield-Central is seen as integral to meeting inter-regional connectivity objectives.

Notwithstanding, the Council maintains its concern over the potential impacts from the Western Sydney Airport on the World Heritage environment of the Greater Blue Mountains, on the amenity of Blue Mountains residents and the resulting potential adverse effects on the local economy (refer also to Local Planning Priority 1).

The Australian and NSW Governments are funding a 10-year \$3.6 billion road investment program in Western Sydney. This will deliver new and upgraded roads to support the economic growth of Western Sydney and the operation of the Western Sydney Airport.

These upgrades will enhance the operation of the Blue Mountains' arterial road network. In the context of supporting the increased use of sustainable modes of travel (particularly train services), these road upgrades should be accompanied by improvements to the public transport services within the Blue Mountains.

Consideration should also be given to the increase in visitor numbers given the proximity of the airport and the Blue Mountains. They should be encouraged to catch public transport so having those options available from the airport is important.

## 3) Improving walking and cycling networks

Our walking and cycling networks are addressed and promoted through the Pedestrian Access and Mobility Plan 2025, Blue Mountains Bike Plan 2020 and Draft Active Transport Plan, which work towards prioritising pedestrians and cyclists as key users of the road space. It is vitally important that the network has the human scale to encourage social connectivity, active travel modes, and user safety (Action 9.2 in the Local Strategic Planning Statement 2040).

The NSW Government wants cycling to be a preferred mode of transport for short trips and a viable safe and efficient option for longer trips. Safe and connected cycling networks across Greater Sydney

will enable more people to ride their bikes as part of everyday travel. Strategic cycleway corridors for the Six Cities will provide the foundation for safe and convenient cycleways that better connect centres, precincts and places, while supporting councils' local bike networks.

Implementation of these plans will, over the long term, create a safer and more connected pedestrian and cycleway network in the Blue Mountains. An initial review has identified that there are several pedestrian attractors further from major town centres of high value and in need of greater prioritisation. An increased emphasis on connections to natural attractors such as local parks, trail heads and other recreation facilities will further improve Council's commitment to facilitating active and healthy lifestyles.

Priority must be given to footpaths and cycleways with accessible links to public transport, to improve the amenity of the City's streets, particularly within town centres. Pedestrian focused strategies have been included in the master planning of town centres, including widening of footpaths, additional safe crossing points and the strategic provision of car parking. Such strategies will be included in future master planning processes, including for Katoomba. Introducing specific planning controls around Green Travel Plans being required for significant traffic generating development is a related action (Action 9.15 in the Local Strategic Planning Statement 2040).

A major active transport project is the Great Blue Mountains Trail, which provides a separated pedestrian and cycleway between Mount Victoria, Blackheath, Katoomba and Leura. This is part of an identified Green Grid project (refer Local Planning Priority 3) to create a safe east-west walking and cycling connection from Penrith to Blackheath. This is a high priority project for the Council and is being undertaken in stages with completion of the Trail currently programmed for 2025.

\$3.2 million is being invested for the Active Transport Links project, The Greater Blue Mountains Trail. This will 4.5km of walking and cycling tracks to connect key towns in the Blue Mountains.

With the need to create and enhance existing connections around our numerous train stations to our towns and villages, the scale of infrastructure investment is significant. Many of these linkages would benefit not only residents, but also visitors who utilise these same access ways and services. Actions in this statement call for state government support for the construction of core active transport infrastructure at key locations.

#### 4) Innovating and adopting technological improvements

Emerging technology has the capacity to fundamentally change how people travel by providing bespoke services tailored to the needs of individuals. EV's are becoming an integral component of

private vehicle ownership and for public transport. We need to ensure that we do not fall behind in providing the infrastructure to support this technology which is here now. An action in this statement is to investigate these opportunities as a catalyst for future investment in sustainable technology and clean transport, to move both residents and visitors throughout the City.

## 5) The Blue Mountains Sustainability Model and Planetary Health

The Blue Mountains Sustainability Model was established 20 years ago. It focuses on the improvement of quality of life: both for ourselves and for the planet. This is achieved through an investment in and strengthening of our environment, our community and our infrastructure. It also emphasises fair and equitable action at all levels (from the individual to a global scale). It identifies this action should be environmentally responsible and resource efficient to enable the creation of liveable, vibrant and creative communities.

However, the creation of the model and synthesis of these concepts in a Community Strategic Plan almost 20 years ago, was groundbreaking. It set the Blue Mountains at the forefront of environmental planning and centred our integrated planning and reporting framework on our environmental setting.

This fundamental recognition of the inherent connection between the quality of life of people and the life of the planet, also closely accords with the discipline of Planetary Health.

Planetary health is rooted in understanding the interdependencies of human and natural systems. We live longer and more prosperous lives than ever before, however many of the socio-economic processes which have led to this prosperity (including agricultural, industrial and technical advancements) have taken a heavy toll on the Earth's natural systems.

Land, culture, and health are inextricably entwined in many Indigenous societies, and the depth of spiritual connection to land is unique. The subtle interaction of the tangible and intangible aspects of Ngurra (Country) and the profound role it plays in the lives of Traditional Custodians, can offer wider insights into how human societies could better thrive.

The Blue Mountains sits on the edge of the largest metropolis in Australia and yet is surrounded by one of the most delicately calibrated ecosystems, recognised worldwide for its ecological value. As one of only two cities in the world within a World Heritage National Park, the Blue Mountains local government area is perfectly placed to be a leader in responding to climate change and striving to be a City that models sustainability and sustainable living, as well as sustainable industries and innovations.



## Relevant Supporting Documents:

<i>Reference</i>	<i>CM Record</i>
Community Strategic Plan 2035	22/200078
Integrated Transport Strategic Plan 2035	18/236363
Local Strategic Planning Statement	22/164812
Open Space and Recreation Strategic Plan	18/155716
Citywide Parking Strategic Plan	18/53265
Disability Inclusion Action Plan	23/184691