

Submission
No 52

INQUIRY INTO CURRENT AND FUTURE PUBLIC TRANSPORT NEEDS IN WESTERN SYDNEY

Organisation: The Centre for Western Sydney

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The Hon. Cate Faehrmann MLC

Chair

Legislative Council Portfolio Committee No. 6 –
Transport and the Arts

Via portal

Dear Chairperson,

Re: Legislative Council Portfolio Committee No. 6: Transport and the Arts Inquiry into the current and future public transport needs in Western Sydney

The Centre for Western Sydney, a part of Western Sydney University, combines world-class research expertise, thought provoking events, and frank and fearless advocacy on issues of importance to Western Sydney. The work of the Centre for Western Sydney is guided by its ambition for a thriving region that is understood and respected for its strengths and contributions regionally, nationally, and internationally.

A public transport system that is fit for purpose is critical to driving productivity and prosperity for the communities and businesses of our region. In a period of rapid growth, transport is indeed, a primary key to driving the social and economic transformation of Western Sydney. In our consultations with stakeholders over the past twelve months, four broad principles have emerged regarding the effective and appropriate provision of public transport in Western Sydney:

- Affordability – public transport must remain an affordable option for all sections of the population.
- Accessibility – public transport must be physically, digitally and linguistically accessible for all residents.
- Connectivity – public transport must take people where they need to go – within and beyond Western Sydney
- Broader Impact – public transport investment must be viewed as a catalyst for development, liveability, employment and job creation.

Utilising these principles, the Centre for Western Sydney has developed ten recommendations for consideration as a priority by the committee, which will support the delivery of high-quality public transport services for residents.

If you require further information, please do not hesitate to contact Tom Nance, Policy and Strategy Lead, on

Yours sincerely

Professor Andy Marks

Executive Director
Centre for Western Sydney



CURRENT AND FUTURE PUBLIC TRANSPORT NEEDS IN WESTERN SYDNEY

INQUIRY SUBMISSION – SEPTEMBER 2023



**CENTRE FOR
WESTERN SYDNEY**

KEY PRINCIPLES FOR PUBLIC TRANSPORT DELIVERY IN WESTERN SYDNEY

Western Sydney's public transport system, and its subsequent impact on residents' participation in economic, educational, and social opportunities, is regularly featured in insights that are shared with the Centre for Western Sydney by representatives from industry, government and community across the region.

In the Centre's consultations with stakeholders over the past twelve months, four broad principles have emerged regarding the effective and appropriate provision of public transport in Western Sydney:

1. AFFORDABILITY

Public transport must remain an affordable option for all sections of the population.

With households grappling with rising costs of living, affordability of public transport must not be a barrier to residents accessing economic, social and educational opportunities. Any review must ensure that appropriate provisions are made to ensure that people on low incomes can access public transport, and that commuters more broadly in Western Sydney are paying reasonable fares.

2. ACCESSIBILITY

Public transport must be physically, digitally and linguistically accessible for all residents

Accessibility must be defined in broad terms, to ensure that the diverse needs of Western Sydney are met by the public transport system. Inclusive design of facilities which prioritises the needs of people with disability, an emphasis on commuter safety through all legs of the journey, and provision of information in languages other than English are just some of the critical considerations in this regard.

3. CONNECTIVITY

Public transport must take people where they need to go – within and beyond Western Sydney.

Historically the transport system has been designed to connect the East and the West, however this approach is no longer adequate. 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 economic development of the region. Multi-modal transport is also prevalent within the region, and any future developments must prioritise intra-regional connectivity and a seamless commuter journey across modalities.

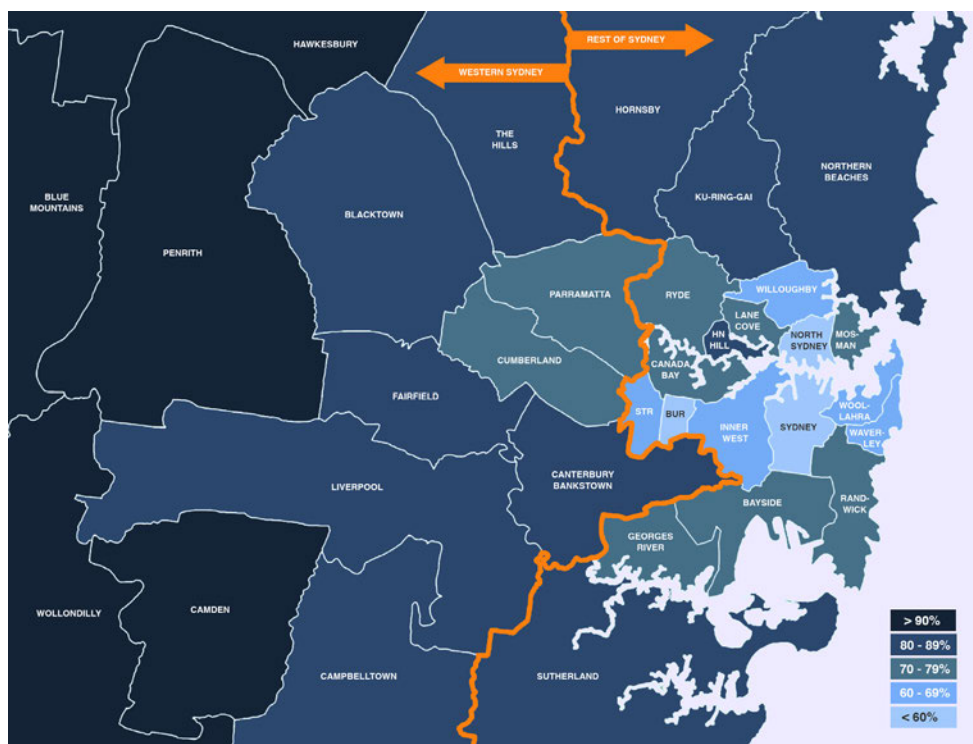
4. BROADER IMPACT

Public transport investment must be viewed as a catalyst for development and liveability.

Investment in public transport must deliver value for money, and therefore it is important that all positive impacts of development are considered and quantified. Proposed developments should clearly demonstrate how they will address Western Sydney's comparatively poor rates of liveability and participation. Additionally, given the state government's ambition to "build up and not out", all future public transport planning and development should also identify how it supports sustainable densification and the delivery of more housing.

A) 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

Integrated and well-functioning transport is not only a driver of economic activity, but also plays an important role in ensuring our society is inclusive and equitable. It connects people to their communities and importantly, the services they need for healthy and meaningful lives. The lack of availability, accessibility and connectivity within the region has created significant barriers to social and economic participation for residents, and has contributed to high levels of car reliance and congestion.



Proportion of population who used a private vehicle as sole means of travel to work, 2021

Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2023

Current residents who do use public transport face a lengthy walk to access services, with less than one in five dwellings in Sydney's West located within 400 metres walking distance of a regularly serviced public transport stop¹. This represents a significant barrier to utilising public transport for people with mobility issues, including older people and people with a disability. These long distances also have implications during warmer weather for commuters, with the region's relatively low levels of urban vegetation cover and higher levels of heat vulnerability a significant concern².

In the case that residents in Western Sydney do live within walking distance of a bus stop, there is a clear disparity regarding the frequency of services, contributing to lower levels of utilisation. The recent NSW Bus Industry Taskforce underscored this disparity of public bus services between Sydney's regions:

In areas of Sydney's Greater West, few services operate more than 45 times per day, and may have less than 12-hour coverage over the course of a day. By contrast, in Sydney's most established, well-to-do, and built-up areas, some bus routes have upwards of 200 services per day and may include services with all-day and overnight coverage³.

Despite rapidly growing populations, eight of the region's thirteen local government areas were ranked in the bottom one-third of LGAs in Sydney for access to public transport⁴. This represents a significant barrier to participation in the economy, with the lack of appropriate access to public transport compounding poor socio-economic outcomes in some of the region's most disadvantaged suburbs.

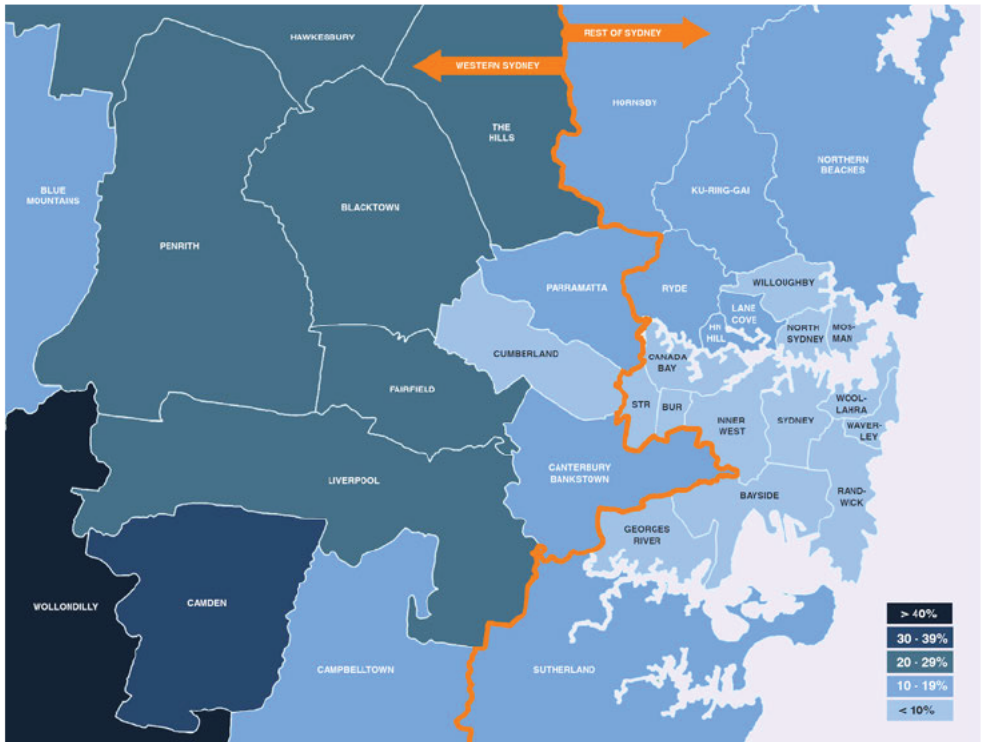
¹ *Western Sydney City Deal - Annual Progress Report 2021*

² *Liveability in Western Sydney, Centre for Western Sydney, 2023*

³ *NSW Bus Industry Taskforce - First Report, 2023*

⁴ *Funding the infrastructure of tomorrow, McKell Institute, 2022*

Western Sydney, particularly its outer ring, has a higher proportion of commuters who utilise a combination of private vehicle and train travel. This creates higher levels of demand for park and ride facilities, which are critical in ensuring at least partial usage of public transport.



Proportion of population who used a combination of private vehicle and train to travel to work, 2021

Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2023

RECOMMENDATION I: CONSIDER WESTERN SYDNEY’S TRAVEL PATTERNS WHEN MAKING DECISIONS REGARDING TRAIN STATION ADJACENT PARKING FACILITIES

Given the higher rates of commuters who utilise a blend of car and train travel to access, the NSW Government must ensure there are adequate park and ride facilities available for residents. Priority should be given to stations that support suburbs which are under-served by other modes of transport.

Mobility is often the primary consideration when examining the accessibility of public transport. While this is critical, there is an additional, significant factor which must be considered when examining the current and future public transport needs of Western Sydney – cultural and linguistic diversity.

Western Sydney is an exemplar of everyday multiculturalism. Bi-lingualism is prevalent, with 45.7% of residents speaking a language other than English at home in the region, and the majority reporting that they spoke English well or very well⁵. It is important to note however that over 200,000 people in the region that do not speak English well or at all⁶, with these people experiencing significant challenges in navigating and utilising the broader public transport system. These barriers must be addressed to enable participation in the community for this cohort, across economic, educational and social domains.

RECOMMENDATION II: TRIAL THE DELIVERY OF AUDIO AND DIGITAL ANNOUNCEMENTS IN LANGUAGE ON PLATFORMS AND IN TRAINS

The delivery of announcements in community languages removes a critical barrier for many residents in Western Sydney. This will support increased patronage for those who do not speak English well or at all, ensuring that they can confidently utilise public transport to participate in employment, education and social opportunities.

⁵ Australian Census, Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2023

⁶ *ibid*

RECOMMENDATION III: MATCH BI-LINGUAL TRANSPORT WORKFORCE TO COMMUNITY NEEDS

Bi-lingual members of the transport workforce are a significant asset, providing additional support to members of the community in ways which they can understand. There is an opportunity to deploy a deliberate strategy aligning employees who speak a language other than English with locations that would be most beneficial to the community.

Western Sydney's public transport system is undermined by its relative lack of connectivity and integration. Poor interconnectivity within the region is compounded by Sydney's transport network which is largely designed to transport people from west to east. The fragmented approach to connecting different modes of transport, along with absence of critical, cross cutting linkages in the region contributes to large commute times via public transport, with private vehicle usage often a more time effective way of navigating the region.


Private vehicle and public transport commute times compared


Source: Google Maps and Transport NSW Trip Planner

ENDEAVOUR CIRCUIT, HARRINGTON PARK (MACARTHUR REGION)

TO PARRAMATTA CBD

ARRIVING AT 9AM ON A WEEKDAY

 50 MINS - 1 HR 40 MINS

    1 HR 45 MINS

TO TOWN HALL STATION


ARRIVING AT 9AM ON A WEEKDAY


 1 HR 10 MINS - 2 HR 10 MINS

   1 HR 48 MINS

TO PENRITH CBD


ARRIVING AT 9AM ON A WEEKDAY

 35 MINS - 1 HR

    2 HR 17 MINS

TO LIVERPOOL CBD

ARRIVING AT 9AM ON A WEEKDAY


 30 MINS - 1 HR 5 MINS



    1 HR 29 MINS

SYNCARPIA STREET, MARSDEN PARK (NORTH WEST)

TO PARRAMATTA CBD


ARRIVING AT 9AM ON A WEEKDAY

 35 MINS - 1 HR 15 MINS

  1 HR 8 MINS

TO TOWN HALL STATION

ARRIVING AT 9AM ON A WEEKDAY

 55 MINS - 1 HR 50 MINS

   1 HR 23 MINS

TO PENRITH CBD


ARRIVING AT 9AM ON A WEEKDAY

 25 MINS - 45 MINS

   1 HR 7 MINS

TO LIVERPOOL CBD

ARRIVING AT 9AM ON A WEEKDAY


 40 MINS - 1 HR 20 MINS

     1 HR 39 MINS

LUCAS ROAD, EAST HILLS (SOUTH WEST)

TO PARRAMATTA CBD


ARRIVING AT 9AM ON A WEEKDAY


 30 MINS - 1 HR 5 MINS

   1 HR 21 MINS

TO TOWN HALL

ARRIVING AT 9AM ON A WEEKDAY

 45 MINS - 1 HR 15 MINS

  1 HR 1 MIN

TO PENRITH CBD

ARRIVING AT 9AM ON A WEEKDAY


 40 MINS - 1 HR 10 MINS

   1 HR 54 MINS

TO LIVERPOOL CBD

ARRIVING AT 9AM ON A WEEKDAY

 15 MINS - 30 MINS

  1 HR 3 MINS

The examples give an insight of the significant difference in travel times via private and public transport within Western Sydney and demonstrate the need for urgent investment in creating critical linkages across the region.

RECOMMENDATION IV: CONNECT THE CENTRAL RIVER CITY WITH THE METRO

The River Rail link, connecting Kogarah with Bankstown, Parramatta and Epping, would link Western Sydney to itself and the rest of Sydney. Investing in the delivery of this cross-cutting line would stitch together many of Sydney's rail and Metro lines, while reinforcing Parramatta's central role in both the region and the state's economy.

RECOMMENDATION V: CONNECT THE WESTERN SYDNEY AIRPORT METRO WITH THE REST OF THE NETWORK

It is essential that there are better connections the new Western Sydney Airport. Further investment is required into Western Sydney Airport Metro to extend it through the following connections:

- To the north, with Northwest Metro at Tallawong or Schofields to link Sydney's north and northwest to the airport and employment centres at Penrith.
- To the south, via Leppington, to connect with Sydney's heavy rail network at Glenfield, creating faster rail journeys from Liverpool and Campbelltown.
- A connection to the West Metro at Westmead to link the airport to Parramatta would create a rapid transit link across the three cities.

RECOMMENDATION VI: START PLANNING FOR CROSS-CUTTING RAIL LINES

One of the most important design goals for the public transport system in Western Sydney is to build cross-cutting lines. This means that instead of every line feeding into the CBD, Sydney will have a grid of rail lines with frequent service, making it easy to switch lines and for commuters to get where they need to in a time effective manner.

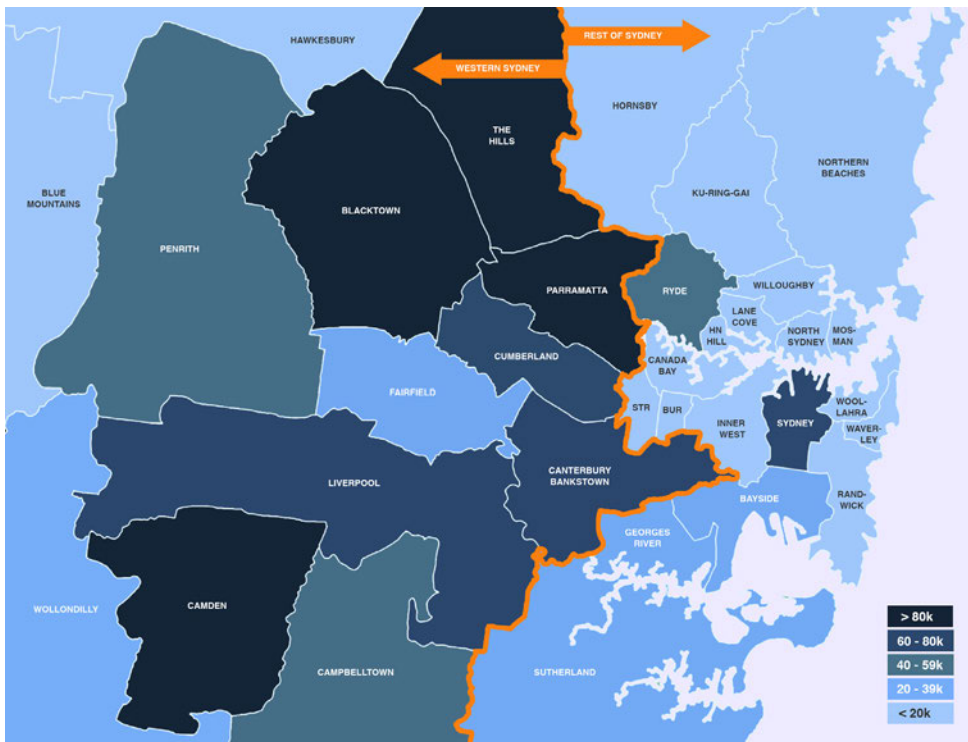
B) CURRENT AND ANTICIPATED LEVELS OF DEMAND FOR PUBLIC TRANSPORT SERVICES AND THE PUBLIC TRANSPORT REQUIREMENTS TO MEET THIS DEMAND

Western Sydney's population has grown significantly in the last decade, with over 2.6 million people now residing in the region⁷. The reality is that investment in public transport infrastructure has struggled to keep pace with this growth, with greenfield developments in the North West and South West remaining isolated from the network.

With around 800,000 additional residents projected to live in Western Sydney by 2041⁸, urgent action must be taken to understand upcoming demand, and the infrastructure required to support the growing population. Failure to do so will compound the region's reliance on private vehicles, lead to further congestion on its roads and continue to produce negative environmental impacts.

⁷ *Western Sydney Community Profile, id. Group, 2023*

⁸ *2022 NSW Common Planning Assumption Projections, Department of Planning and Environment, 2022*



Additional people expected to reside in local government areas by 2041

Department of Planning and Environment, 2022

C) THE CHANGING NATURE OF PUBLIC TRANSPORT NEEDS DUE TO SHIFTING DEMOGRAPHICS, NEW SUBURBS, PLANNED INFRASTRUCTURE AND INCREASED DENSITY

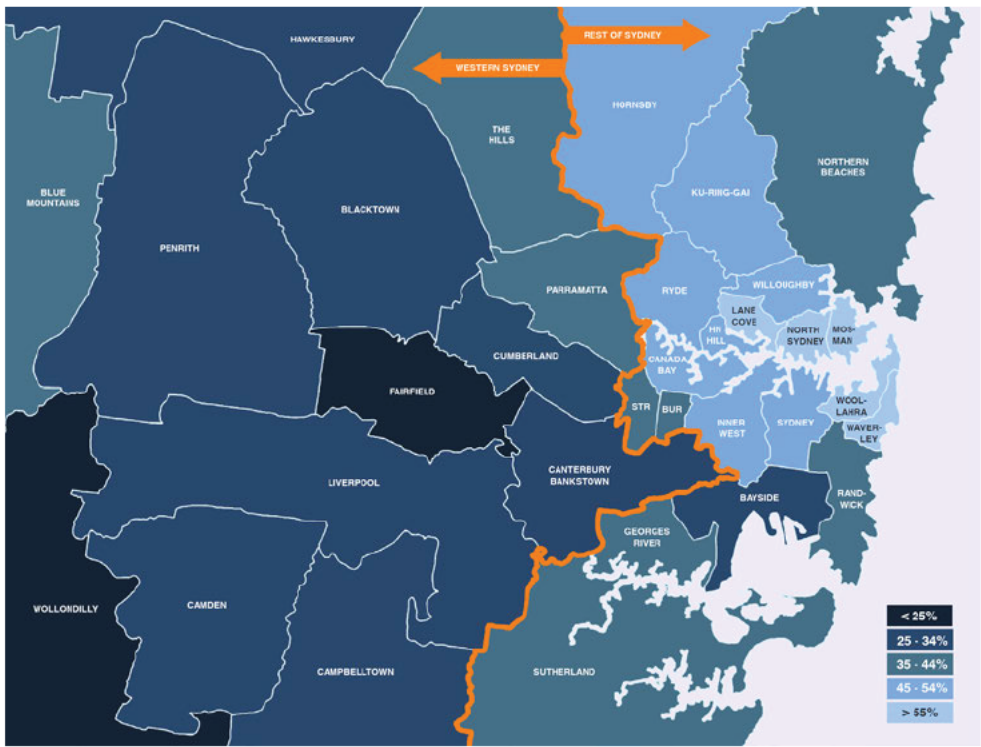
The changing composition of the population must be considered for future transport planning in the region. The cohort of older people in Western Sydney is projected to grow significantly over the next two decades⁹. While private vehicles are perceived as an ideal transport mode for older people, multiple accessible and affordable public transport options are critical to supporting the independence of older people within the community¹⁰.

While there has been a steady rise in the patronage of public transport since the pandemic, usage is still well below pre-pandemic levels¹¹. The emergence of hybrid and flexible working arrangements during and post-COVID is one of the key factors driving this trend and is envisaged to continue to impact public transport usage patterns.

⁹ 2022 NSW Common Planning Assumption Projections, Department of Planning and Environment, 2022

¹⁰ Transport and Mobility Needs for an Ageing Society from a Policy Perspective: Review and Implications, D. Lin & J. Cui, 2021

¹¹ Public Transport Trips - All Modes, Transport for NSW, 2023



Proportion of population who worked from home, 2021
Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2023

Since being elected in March, the new state government have been clear in their ambition to ‘build up and not out’. Development along major public transport corridors has been proposed as a viable way of delivering additional housing supply to accommodate the growing population in both Western Sydney, as well as NSW more broadly. Proximity to appropriate public transport is critical to delivering liveable accommodation, and there is the opportunity to recalibrate stations and town centres a multi-modal mobility hub in order to meet the subsequent demand and liveability challenges, including walkability and access to open spaces¹², which will be generated by higher population numbers.

RECOMMENDATION VII: RE-IMAGINE STATIONS AND TOWN CENTRES AS MULTI-MODAL MOBILITY HUBS

Stations and town centre must support better options for access by foot, bike and public transport, while at the same time being realistic about the fact that many, if not most, people will arrive by car. To accommodate micro-mobility, mobility as a service and on-demand mobility services, footpath upgrades as well as the addition of cycle lanes and car-sharing spaces should be prioritised to give people more options in the long run, even while being realistic about the need to accommodate driving in the short term.

¹² *Liveability in Western Sydney, Centre for Western Sydney, 2023*

D) THE SOCIAL, ECONOMIC, AND PLANNING IMPACTS OF VEHICLE DEPENDENCY AND POORLY INTEGRATED PUBLIC TRANSPORT

Poorly integrated public transport is a key contributor to vehicle dependency in Western Sydney, with many residents relying on private transport to support their day to day lives. This has a range of implications regarding the social, economic and educational participation for residents, particularly those from low socio-economic backgrounds.

Utilising public transport is significantly less expensive than private transport. Due to weekly travel caps, the most a commuter will pay when utilising public transport is \$2,600 per annum, compared to approximately \$26,500 per annum in costs associated with owning and operating a private vehicle in Sydney¹³. Residents who live in the pockets of Western Sydney where private vehicle ownership is a necessity due to poorly integrated public transport options are therefore faced with additional costs, which impact on their quality of life, wellbeing and ability to participate.

While parts of the region are undergoing an economic transformation, Western Sydney does not generate enough employment opportunities for residents, with 29.9 per cent of workers in Western Sydney travelling outside the region for work each day¹⁴. The location of these jobs, combined with fewer and less integrated transport options, makes the usage of private vehicles necessary, with residents paying more in fuel and toll related costs due to the significant distances travelled.

The lack of direct public transport options between Western Sydney's metropolitan and employment centres must be urgently addressed to ensure that access to a private vehicle does not continue to be a significant predictor of economic, educational and social participation for residents. Particular consideration should be given to how the Western Sydney International (Nancy-Bird Walton) Airport and the Bradfield City Centre are linked appropriately to the broader region in order to ensure an integrated transport experience for travellers and workers and unlock the full potential of its 24 hour operation model.

E) THE AFFORDABILITY COMPARED WITH OTHER AREAS OF GREATER SYDNEY AND NEW SOUTH WALES AND RELATIVE TO MEANS

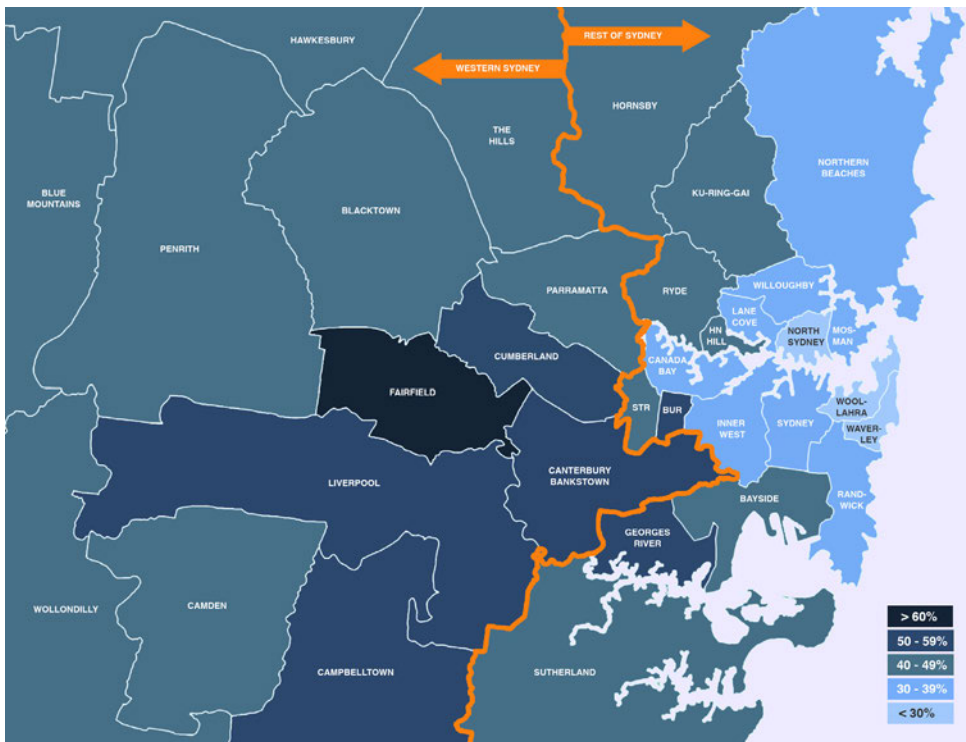
In the context of the rising costs of living and lower income levels across the region, affordability is a significant consideration when designing public transport systems that meet the needs of the people of Western Sydney.

Cost-of-living pressures are acutely, and often disproportionately, felt in Western Sydney. Nearly half of all Western Sydney households earn less than \$2,000 a week (49.2 per cent) compared to 45.3 per cent in Greater Sydney. There is also a higher proportion of low-income households, those earning less than \$800 per week, in Sydney's West with 19.2 per cent compared to 17.9 per cent in Greater Sydney¹⁵.

¹⁴ *Transport Affordability Dashboard, Australian Automobile Association, 2023*

¹⁴ *Western Sydney Community Profile, id. Group, 2023*

¹⁵ *ibid*



Proportion of population who earned under \$800 per week, 2021

Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2023

Transport costs along with utilities and food and non-alcoholic drinks consistently ranked in the top five areas of most spending pressure in the past year in a recent cost-of-living survey by the NSW Council of Social Service. On top of this, NCOSS found that 28 per cent of those they surveyed were unable to afford to travel for essential reasons such as work, education, or healthcare¹⁶.

While concessions for a range of cohorts, including those seeking employment, are welcome, stakeholders have reported that workers in Western Sydney with minimal wages who depend on public transport have been facing significant hardship, directly impacting their decisions related to employment and study. Furthermore, commuters from the West are less likely to take advantage of discounted off-peak fares, due to longer travel times and inflexible working arrangements.

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

In the past decade there has been an unprecedented investment in transport related infrastructure in Western Sydney, with major projects including the Parramatta Light Rail and the Metro Western Sydney unlocking transport corridors and subsequently, connectivity for residents which supports them to work, live and learn. While data is collected to identify the utilisation of transport services, there appears to be a gap in data which demonstrates the value that transport creates across other domains related to social, economic and liveability outcomes.

¹⁶ Barely hanging on: The Cost-Of-Living Crisis in NSW, NSW Council of Social Service and the UTS Institute for Public Policy and Governance, 2023

RECOMMENDATION VIII: DEVELOP AN IMPACT MEASUREMENT FRAMEWORK WHICH ENCOMPASSES THE BROAD RANGE OF OUTCOMES ACHIEVE THROUGH PUBLIC TRANSPORT DEVELOPMENT

To meaningfully articulate the value of investment in the delivery of public transport, the NSW Government must develop an impact framework which measures public and private spending across the variety of social, economic and liveability indicators that quality public transport systems contribute to.

Investment in transport infrastructure has generated a significant amount of employment opportunities for those in Western Sydney, however these are often confined to individual projects, and do not address long term patterns of disadvantage in the region. For investment to be of maximum value, broad impact and legacy must be considered during procurement, particularly in regard to entrenched issues that are prevalent in Western Sydney including generational unemployment and low levels of educational attainment.

RECOMMENDATION IX: ADOPT A WHOLE OF GOVERNMENT APPROACH TO SOCIAL PROCUREMENT TO DELIVER LASTING IMPACT IN WESTERN SYDNEY

The NSW Government should consider deploying a framework for social procurement, with clear targets aligned to the specific opportunities that exist in Western Sydney, to create certainty and promote innovative partnerships between public, private and social enterprise organisations that drive change.

With increased development in Western Sydney, there is the opportunity to explore public/private funding models to deliver vital transport infrastructure. Recently, there have been prominent examples of developers volunteering to fund public infrastructure in exchange for permission to build increased homes. This is an emerging area, and more work must be done to understand both the opportunities and the challenges that these partnerships will deliver to support decision making.

RECOMMENDATION X: EXAMINE FEASIBILITY OF PUBLIC/PRIVATE FUNDING MODELS FOR TRANSPORT INFRASTRUCTURE

In order to proactively encourage and capitalise on opportunities for public/private funding models, the NSW Government should conduct a feasibility study, detailing both the benefits and ways to manage any potential risks that are identified.



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