

**Submission
No 59**

INQUIRY INTO CURRENT AND FUTURE PUBLIC TRANSPORT NEEDS IN WESTERN SYDNEY

Organisation: Action for Public Transport (NSW) Inc.

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Secretary
Portfolio Committee No. 6
Legislative Council
Parliament House
Macquarie St
Sydney 2000
Submitted via inquiry website

Dear Secretary,

NSW Legislative Council Portfolio Committee No. 6

Inquiry into western suburbs public transport needs

Submission

Action for Public Transport (NSW) Inc. is a transport advocacy group which has been active in Sydney since 1974. We promote the interests of beneficiaries of public transport - passengers and the wider community alike.

For this discussion we focus on the suburbs west of Ermington, which not coincidentally is where Sydney's original tram system stopped. Although Leichhardt and Strathfield are undoubtedly west of central Sydney, they already have comprehensive public transport services. But further west, services are much poorer (particularly bus services, which were never brought into public ownership, apart from the purchase of the North and Western bus operation by the State Transit Authority; which passengers reported vastly improved services until the previous government re-privatised bus operations) .

The overwhelming emphasis in western Sydney has for decades been on increasing road space. Main roads typically bypass hubs, thereby permitting fast car travel in all directions. The result is that anyone who has a car relies on it for transport and anyone who does not is at a disadvantage, though less so if they live close to a railway station.

Public transport works best when it constitutes a network of fast, frequent and connected services. In a city as large as Sydney now is, the coverage of the network can be maximised by focussing on several suitably-placed strong hubs, each hub forming the centre of a region and containing a range of shops and services. Facilities such as schools and health services should be within easy reach of a hub. Within the region there need to be good public transport services radiating from the hub to cater for the relatively short ride from the region into the hub and back.

An effective network also needs faster public transport services connecting the hubs and facilitating travel between regions, with stops at least 5km apart. Where possible, these longer-distance services should connect to important facilities such as hospitals and tertiary education campuses.

Unfortunately, Western Sydney has grown into a huge area that does not fit the pattern described above. Blacktown, Parramatta, Liverpool and Campbelltown/Macarthur are obvious hubs. The proliferation of multi-lane roads, a lack of rail investment and deficient bus services throughout the western suburbs has influenced travel habits and land-use in an unsustainable way that will take determined action to rectify. As noted above, high-speed roads avoid hubs rather than pass through hubs and such roads actually weaken the hubs. Public transport can and does access employment and activity hubs without the negative effect of creating traffic congestion, in addition to its other benefits.

Low-density residential development in recent years has expanded onto the Nepean-Hawkesbury flood plains, adding to earlier environmental damage (to wildlife habitats and loss of agricultural capacity), the risk of flood losses to residents. The tendency of detached houses to take up larger and larger proportions of increasingly smaller blocks, has lowered residential amenity compared to older detached-house development, with loss of greenery and heat island effects giving residents in effect the worst of both worlds.

Discussion of each term of reference

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

Availability

The existing rail network (a legacy of the forward thinking of Bradfield) gives the backbone of good connections between Penrith, Mt Druitt, Blacktown, Parramatta and Liverpool (including the Cumberland Line). The failure of successive governments to invest in extending the rail network as Sydney's population grew was a major mistake. Excellent plans by Bradfield and by Ron Christie in 2001 (see appended map) were ignored and the problem is only now being addressed (in part) by a metro program.

Even a cursory glance at bus routes and timetables in western Sydney will reveal bus services that run infrequently outside of peak hours and not at all on Sundays. They have never provided an adequate system of public transport for Western Sydney (or for the areas outside the greater metropolitan area), which is more a criticism of government than of private providers with obvious commercial imperatives.

Privately operated bus services in Western Sydney performed the useful purposes of linking passengers to railway stations and providing school transport (paid for by government). They were never brought into public ownership, apart from the purchase of the North and Western bus operation by the State Transit Authority in 1999; which passengers reported vastly improved services, until the previous government re-privatised bus operations. Whether or not a system based on contracts can ever do as well remains to be seen, but it is increasingly evident that it is not likely to be cheaper, as theorised.

Accessibility

The term accessibility in the sense of availability is covered above. If it is intended to mean accessible to people of different abilities, we would support the work of [Sweltering Cities](#) which has noted the lack of sheltered bus stops, and the poor quality of footpaths for bus passengers in Western Sydney. We have [previously raised](#) the issue of the elimination of bus stops and the longer walking distances this creates, in the context of the eastern suburbs bus changes. The issue is just as pertinent if not more so in the western suburbs. Longer walking distances are a problem for everyone in hot and rainy weather but it is a particular problem for older people and those with mobility problems.

Connectivity

Connections between the rail network and the metro network need to be much better. The development of the Aerotropolis corridor at Nancy Bird Walton Airport will leave this new centre accessible only by train / metro transfer. Similarly the emerging centres at Rouse Hill / Norwest are served by metro from eastern Sydney but lack rail connection to nearer western centres. The missing link between Tallawong and St Marys should be filled as a matter of urgency. We can see no sensible reason for metro vehicles

to be of different types, meaning that the same vehicle cannot be used on connecting metro lines i.e. they are not interoperable.

Connections between metro and rail should be cross-platform as they are at Chatswood, or by escalators if that is not feasible.

Parramatta, Epping and Macarthur are major hubs that will not be connected by the light rail line currently being built on the former Carlingford line. This is in our view a major deficiency left over from the short-sighted decision to curtail the Parramatta to Chatswood rail line which is now a part of the North West metro line that serves Epping, but not Parramatta.

Industrial centres also are poorly served by the current rail network. Additionally, reliability of the current network is reduced by frequent days of closure and bus substitution due to trackwork.

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

It is an error to use the "predict and provide" way of thinking about transport. The services provided affect the level of demand, which is the reason expanding roadspace never succeeds in its proclaimed mission of reducing traffic congestion. The same is true of public transport, but without the damaging consequences, as the late Paul Mees¹ convincingly established.

The north-west rail link was opposed (not least by the first head of Infrastructure NSW) on the basis that density was "too low" and hence demand was inadequate. It is now clear, as geographers have long known, that the existence of the line changed the pattern of development. It is also clear that people who live in houses do not have an innate aversion to using public transport. It just wasn't there, and now that it is, people are using the line to an extent sufficient to make a positive difference (as an added bonus, soon after the line opened traffic congestion in the area was reported to have eased).

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

The nature of public transport needs has always been broader than the peak-hour journey to and from CBD work that tends to dominate bus operations. People heading towards the city at around 5pm are too often left standing at bus stops, as empty buses pass by ("dead running") to keep to timetables for the journey out of the CBD. Industrial estates are not well served although they are a source of entry-level positions for people who may not be able to drive or to afford to run a car. Medical appointments do not keep CBD hours. The ability to work from home allows people to shift their hours to avoid the peaks, which allows a better use of the available vehicles.

APTNSW argues for services to run at intervals of 10 minutes or better throughout the day to meet all these needs, and to soften the peaks. In relation to demographic shifts, predictions are for a continuation of high population growth in Sydney. Large cities cannot function properly without serious public transport. The population of Australia overall may be ageing, but the sheer numbers of new residents may overwhelm any tendency to travel less (at least in peak hours).

The government has said it prefers to accommodate growth in established areas rather than to continue the outward expansion of Sydney's growth into areas of critical habitat. We hope that means development such as that on koala habitat at Mt Gilead on the south-west will not be countenanced. Even so there will be some new suburbs.

Our view is that transport provision in new suburbs should be completely aligned with land-use policy, aiming to reduce car use for journeys of all types with higher residential densities. New suburbs should be created around stations on rail lines, not between them, and any proposed rezoning of land that cannot be served by an existing rail line or a line for which funding is committed should be removed from planning documents. With current cost-of-living pressures, especially for housing, it is necessary to increasingly plan for citizens without access to cars, rather than seeing them as a residual or fringe part of the population.

For example intelligent planning would put primary and where possible secondary schools within walking or cycling distance for most pupils, rather than relying on parents bringing and collecting them by car.

The area of the former Greater Sydney Commission was expanded to encompass Newcastle, Wollongong and the Illawarra, Newcastle and Hunter regions. Newly developed areas are likely to have a high proportion of children who will require transport to schools and tertiary education. Families who are accustomed to higher car use, would be assisted with cost-of-living pressures if public transport services were good enough that a family required one car and not two per household.

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

We address this question by tackling it in reverse. Maximising public transport ridership has environmental, economic and social benefits:

- The **environmental** benefit is that less energy is consumed per passenger-kilometre than is the case for a single-occupant car. Until energy is supplied entirely from renewable sources, reducing energy consumption reduces greenhouse emissions and air pollution. Even if this can be achieved, the demand of roads and parking for large amounts of space exacerbates urban sprawl and threatens critical habitat, increases heat load and makes active transport difficult. Electrification of the fleet is no silver bullet.
- The **economic** benefit is that good public transport increases opportunities to participate in work, education and training, which increases productivity and reduces the need to welfare support. In addition, the total cost of running a loaded public transport vehicle and its track is less than the total cost of cars and the land take of the roads and parking that they would need
- The **social** benefit of having a good public transport service is connected with economic benefit. Good public transport enables everyone to access work, education and training, services and social opportunity whether or not they are able to drive and can afford to own a car.

A large proportion of residents are going to be without their own cars, including in many cases recently arrived migrants whose work is vital for many service and manufacturing industries. Improved public transport will benefit these people and also younger and older residents who will have access to more facilities and land use areas.

The social, economic and environmental impacts of vehicle dependency and poorly integrated public transport are the reverse of these positive outcomes: environmental damage, economic exclusion, higher costs to government and families, and social disadvantage.

The *planning impact* will be that everything planners have learned since the 1960s about how to build healthy, prosperous and sustainable cities will have come to nought.

e. affordability compared with other areas of Greater Sydney and New South Wales and relative to means

The Opal ticketing system has improved interchanges among transport modes and the legibility of using the system. However average distances travelled are still greater than in eastern Sydney so average fares paid will tend to be greater. A move towards flatter fares (i.e. larger fare zones) might tend to reduce this inequality. See Martens' book² about fairness in transport.

f. role of public transport and future transport technologies to reduce car dependency in Western Sydney, including barriers to improving public transport services

Arguments favouring increased road provision increasingly promote electric vehicle and autonomous vehicle technologies as the answer to current problems. However neither of these are advanced to a widely acceptable and affordable stage. And neither of them can change the laws of geometry: the space that each car requires both on the road and for parking. Consumer preference is currently moving towards larger cars and 4WDs (see e.g. [Monster trucks: Australians embracing RAM and other](#)

[US pick-ups](#)). This trend would require existing road and parking allowances to be increased not reduced.

The quality of bus services may be improved with a shift to electric buses, and the local benefit in terms of air quality and noise reduction is clear.

Light rail should be considered as a means of connecting residential suburbs / areas to regional centres, and for links between major centres where heavy rail / metro capacity is not yet needed. Light rail has an inherent advantage over bus services in attracting passengers and providing a high quality (level) of service, and where possible should be provided when housing construction is in its early stages. Express or traffic-prioritised bus services can be considered while light rail is under construction to support and build up demand.

There are likely to be pressures for increased adoption of guided bus or "trackless tram" technology for new routes. These should be treated with considerable scepticism:

- The supporting technologies may not be consistently available (currently supplied from China).
- For this mode to compete, investment and maintenance in elements including road surface, structures, customer information and vehicles will need to be high and sustained, far closer to a light rail line than a standard bus route, and reducing the relative cost difference to rubber tyres v steel wheel / steel rail.
- It is worth noting that a guided bus technology of the 1980s, the O-Bahn, has never been used in the world beyond Adelaide. Prototype guided bus routes in Nancy and Caen (France) are also being replaced by light rail.

The built and planned mix of metro and double-deck lines to Nancy Bird Walton Airport has already complicated the planning picture and reduced options for unbroken trips. Parramatta and the new airport line could be linked by a line passing through Blacktown.

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

Public sector provision would be preferred to private sector in providing local transport services, given experience with privatisation of the routes formerly run by the STA in Sydney. (Bus services in Western Sydney have always been privately provided, apart from the north-west bus services, following acquisition of the contract rights by the STA in 1999) This would enable a focus on providing fast and reliable services with the passenger, not the shareholder, as the focus.

Private provision of bus services has already resulted in poorer service to the public, evidenced in the breakup of route 418 (originally Bondi Junction to Burwood via Sydenham and Burwood) to three services, and M92 (Sutherland – Parramatta) into two, for reasons related to the private providers. This removes a large part of the cross-suburban advantage of these routes.

On the larger scale of infrastructure provision, transit-oriented development should be the standard in any new urban area, and value capture mechanisms should certainly be recommended for capital (rather than recurrent) financing purposes.

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

We will state the obvious here – privatisation of services appears to have depended on reducing the wages and conditions of bus drivers to allow for a profit margin for private operators. The results are in.

i. any other related matters

The Committee may be aware that Future Transport 2022 (p.76) predicts that by 2030 transport will be the single largest source of carbon emissions due to increasing emissions from general traffic, heavy traffic, aviation and shipping. The car-dependence that has been allowed to develop in Western Sydney

was a mistake that we should correct, not repeat in other areas proposed for urban development in years past, when the consequences were perhaps not properly appreciated.

We respectfully draw the Committee's attention to the concept of fairness in the provision of public infrastructure. See book by Martens².

Conclusion

- Residential development should no longer be planned or permitted in areas that lack access to fast and frequent public transport; the design of streets and roads should accommodate and foster the use of active and public transport.
- This approach would also be consistent with sensible principles of avoiding development on agricultural land, floodplains and wildlife habitat.
- Investment priority should be given to public transport improvements, including buses for the most local routes, light rail for feeders to major heavy rail centres and extension of heavy rail and metro routes. Metro routes should add to public transport coverage rather than cannibalise existing rail lines,
- Connections between rail lines should be used to transform the radial system focussed on a single CBD to a "web" network focussed on several key nodes. All-day frequencies of 10 minutes or better across the network should be introduced.
- The T5 Cumberland line service should be accelerated and extended to serve Campbelltown - Penrith.
- Bus contract areas should be reconsidered and reduced in number to allow longer-distance bus routes between centres to be restored, rather than broken up.

In closing ...

We would be pleased to appear at hearings if desired.

References

¹ Mees 2009 How dense are we? Another look at urban density and transport patterns in Australia, Canada and the USA. State of Australian Cities Conference, Perth, 25 November 2009. *A copy is submitted separately from this document*

² Martens, K. (2016). Transport justice : Designing fair transportation systems. Taylor & Francis Group. ISBN 978-0-415-63832-6

Jim Donovan
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Figure 5.9 from Christie's 2001 report "Long-term Strategic Plan for Rail"

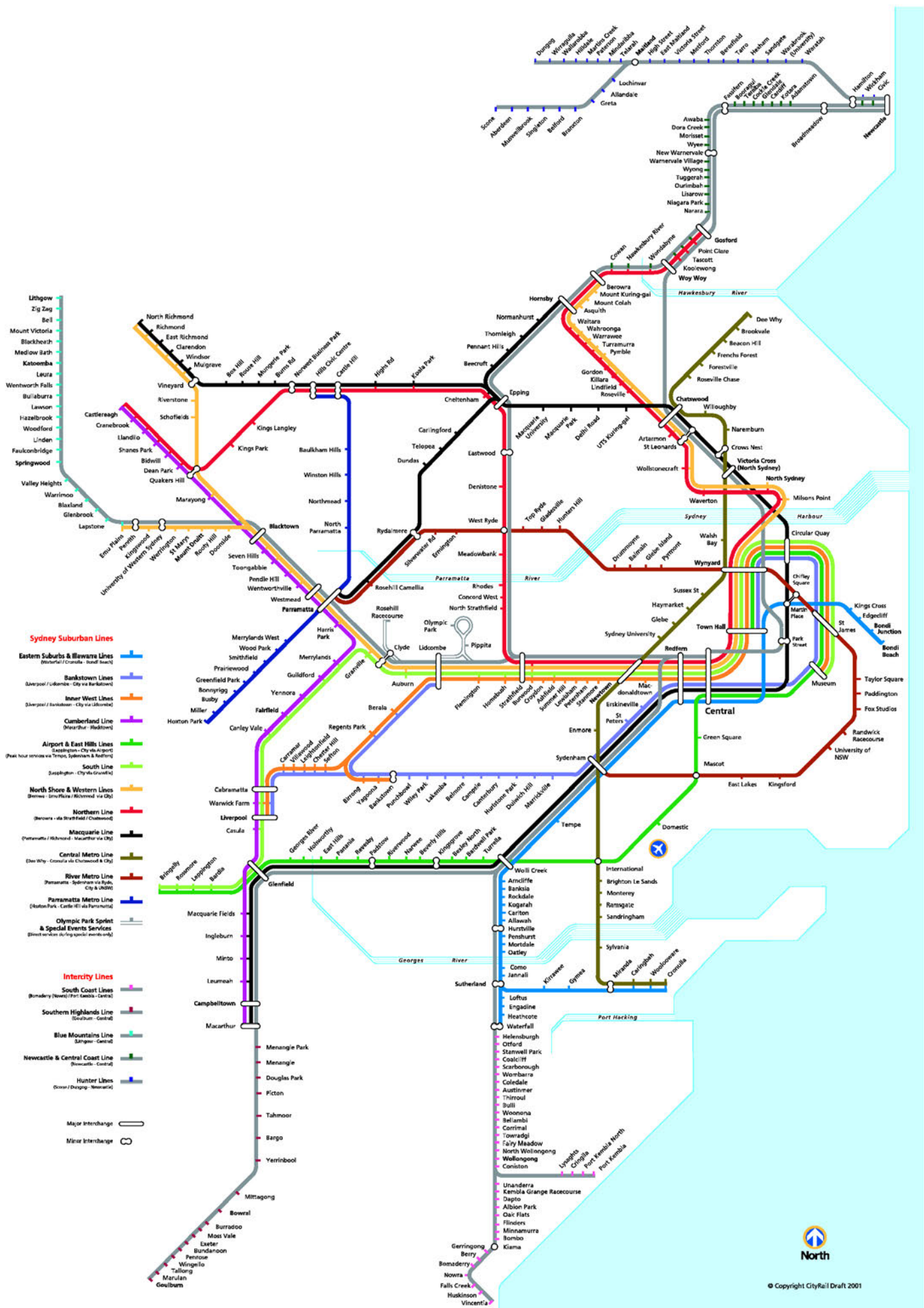


Figure 5.9. Indicative possible train operational patterns on the indicative "ultimate" rail network shown in Figure 5.8.