

**REPORT ON PROCEEDINGS BEFORE**

**PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE NO. 6 - TRANSPORT AND THE  
ARTS**

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

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**At Ian and Nancy Turbott Auditorium (Building EE), Parramatta South Campus,  
Western Sydney University, Rydalmere on Monday 5 February 2024**

**The Committee met at 9:45**

**PRESENT**

Ms Cate Faehrmann (Chair)

The Hon. Anthony D'Adam  
The Hon. Rachel Merton



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**The CHAIR:** Welcome to the second hearing of the Committee's inquiry into current and future public transport needs in Western Sydney. I acknowledge the Burramattagal people of the Dharug nation, the traditional custodians of the lands on which we are meeting today. I pay my respects to Elders past and present, and celebrate the diversity of Aboriginal peoples and their ongoing cultures and connections to the lands and waters of New South Wales. I also acknowledge and pay my respects to any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people joining us today. My name is Cate Faehrmann and I am Chair of this Committee. I ask everyone in the room to please turn their mobile phones to silent.

Parliamentary privilege applies to witnesses in relation to the evidence they give today. However, it does not apply to what witnesses say outside of the hearing. I urge witnesses to be careful about making comments to the media or to others after completing their evidence. In addition, the Legislative Council has adopted rules to provide procedural fairness for inquiry participants. I encourage Committee members and witnesses to be mindful of these procedures.

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**Professor DAVID LEVINSON**, Professor of Transport, University of Sydney, affirmed and examined  
**Mr THOMAS NANCE**, Policy and Strategy Lead, Centre for Western Sydney, affirmed and examined

**The CHAIR:** I welcome each of you and thank you for making the time to give evidence. Would either or both of you care to make a short opening statement?

**THOMAS NANCE:** Firstly, welcome to Western Sydney University and thanks for joining us here today on our Parramatta South campus. I too want to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land we're on today, the Burramattagal people of the Dharug nation, and pay respects to Elders past and present, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander colleagues in the room today.

It's always been hard to get where you want to go in Western Sydney, especially if you don't drive. I was lucky growing up in Liverpool, on a main road with buses going to Liverpool station every five minutes. It meant I had a gateway to the world—to employment, to education and to recreation. Put simply, I had choices. Not all of my friends were so lucky. Getting their driver's licence wasn't just a rite of passage; it was a necessity. This is played out in neighbourhoods across the region—from Picton to Plumpton and from Mount Pritchard to Mount Annan—and it's brought into stark focus by the significantly higher proportion of residents who utilise private vehicles to travel to work and get to where they need to go.

A public transport system that is fit for purpose is critical in driving productivity and prosperity for the communities and businesses of our region. This means prioritising interconnectivity within our region where mass transit has largely been designed to transport people west to east and back again. It's critical that we get this right in Western Sydney where we're on the cusp of an economic boom led by the Western Sydney Airport and increased investment by industry in the region. If we don't deliver a public transport system that gets people where they need to go, we are at risk of missing this generational opportunity. Thank you again for the opportunity, Madam Chair, to provide evidence and I look forward to working collaboratively with the members of the Committee to advocate for evidence-based solutions for the current and future public transport needs of Western Sydney.

**DAVID LEVINSON:** I'm Professor of Transport at the University of Sydney. I'd like to highlight a few points from my submission. Plans should lay out a vision, consider many alternative possible futures, preserve options and recommend the first steps to move in the direction of the preferred vision. Soon thereafter, the vision should be updated. The next steps should follow on from that revised vision. Repeat. The current process is buried under an impossible desire for exactitude and certainty; uncertainty should instead be acknowledged and embraced. The core idea underlying transport and land-use planning is accessibility—a measure of how easy it is to reach valued destinations. Making the network more accessible means bringing origins and destinations closer in space and making the connections between them more direct and faster. To maximise access for the most people means we need to spend scarce dollars wisely. Generally, maximising access per dollar spent requires taking advantage of existing infrastructure first, before building new facilities.

The best transport plan is a good land-use pattern. From the point of view of minimising the total amount of transport required, ensuring a job-worker balance across space will at least allow all residents to work locally, rather than having to make long distance commutes across the metropolitan area as they do now, with large daily tidal flows of workers from Western Sydney eastward in the morning and the reverse in the evening. To reduce person delay, buses should be given traffic signal priority throughout the network and have exclusive bus lanes where needed. To speed up boarding, bus passengers should pay—tap on—before boarding buses, and all-door boarding should be encouraged. This is already the case for light rail. A fare reader at every bus stop with multiple passengers boarding will pay for itself in operational efficiencies.

As technology changes over the planning horizon, our conception of the bus will also change. Currently, we run large buses at low frequencies with circuitous routes that are designed to reduce walk access time at the expense of running time. This is because labour is scarce. In a world of automated vehicles, buses can be much more like shared taxis, running right-sized vehicles on fixed routes at high frequency, with other vehicles providing flexible, on-demand service. One of the best ways to take advantage of existing infrastructure is through infill stations. An important part of the public transport service is access and egress. In lower density areas, some of this will be by automobile, but with the advent of e-bikes, a much larger catchment area around stations is possible without relying on autos.

Each station should have access from a five-kilometre radius by either travel on low-speed roads or by separated bike, e-bike or micromobility lanes on all roads with speeds higher than 30 kilometres per hour. There should be direct footpath connections for everyone within two kilometres of bus or rail stations. Compatibility on

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metro technologies—train size and power—should be insisted upon. Metro lines should use interoperable vehicles. Planning and decision-making should be conducted openly and with transparency, and nothing should be considered "Cabinet in confidence" or "commercial in confidence", as those help avoid the mistakes of secrecy. I'm happy to answer any further questions.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, both, and for your extensive submissions, which have been read by us all and provide the basis for some good questions. I'll kick off with a general question to begin with. Mr Nance, how long have you been working in this area in terms of Western Sydney transport issues?

**THOMAS NANCE:** With the university, two years. But prior I was in a senior role in the not-for-profit sector and was advocating for transport not only as an economic issue but as social justice as well, so around 10 years.

**The CHAIR:** Professor Levinson?

**DAVID LEVINSON:** I've been working in transport for about 35 years. I've been working in Sydney since 2017 and on projects in Western Sydney since 2019.

**The CHAIR:** My question relates to what is identified, and has been for quite some time, as the lack of transport options in Western Sydney by successive governments. There's forums and, potentially, blueprints. We've heard this from multiple witnesses on the first day. What is the reason behind what we're clearly seeing? Is it a continuing lack of investment, particularly in new suburbs? This is a political question to begin with. If you could say from your perspective, working with the experts that you work with, why is it so bad in your view? Is it because the solutions haven't been placed on the table? Is it because we've got the planning wrong? Is it because governments want to invest in the east more than the west? It seems that we're hearing the same things that have been spoken about and told to committees like ours for quite a few years now, if not decades. I'll start with you, Professor Levinson.

**DAVID LEVINSON:** I'm not sure I agree with the premise that more investment has gone to the east than the west lately. I mean, we've got a north-west metro which recently opened. We have a Western Sydney airport metro, which is very expensive and under construction now. We have a Western Sydney metro, which, certainly, much of it is in the east but is reaching out towards Parramatta. I guess it depends on where you define Western Sydney and I'm not sure that that's—you have a mental image of Western Sydney, probably.

**The CHAIR:** Yes, I think in particularly the south-west area there is a gap. Obviously, everybody is talking about needing connections to Leppington and Glenfield. It was going to be a future question to you about the north-south rail or metro connection that many are talking about—so not just Parramatta. As you are indicating, yes, there are strong transport links, but there is a lot of Western Sydney that has missed out.

**DAVID LEVINSON:** Well, it hasn't been built yet. I guess the question is where do people live now? I mean, we're making a large investment in advance of population growth with some of these lines—the north-south Western Sydney airport metro line presently, which is built on an expectation of future development, while many people who live in places are currently underserved. So we're building routes in greenfields that aren't going to serve very many people for a long time while there are people who currently live in places that don't have very good service, and I think that's a question of misplaced priorities. Obviously, it's easier to build where nobody lives—you get fewer complaints, the construction process is less expensive, those kinds of things. But in terms of where the demand is, well, if nobody lives there and nobody works there, nobody is going to be riding a service there either, and coordinating all of this is hard, as people are discovering.

So I think focusing on where existing people are and taking better advantage of existing services and incrementally extending those services would be a useful thing to look at. For instance, for a relatively small amount of money compared to what's being spent, an extension from Leppington to the aerotropolis—if you build a transit-oriented development around those stations and you can bring that in under a reasonable cost, that's something that's worth doing. It has been taken off the table by the current administration, from what I read in the newspapers, but I don't think that's a permanent decision. I think that's a sequencing or scheduling decision.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. Mr Nance?

**THOMAS NANCE:** I have just a few things to add to that. I think, for me, what we've seen over the past decade in particular is the fact that investment and delivery of infrastructure hasn't kept up with population growth, so we see areas in the south-west, like Leppington, areas in the north-west—Riverstone and whatnot—and it's not just transport infrastructure. It's also schools, it's also health et cetera. But in terms of, I guess, the broad conversation around transport, there are a couple of things at play. I think, firstly, we need to not only look at transport just as a means unto itself but also what it unlocks. My colleague talked about transport-orientated

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development. There is a real opportunity to look at not only the, I guess, case to build in terms of connecting cities but also uplifting cities.

The other thing as well, though, I think it is really important to note is we can't talk about transport and the heavy lifting that our transport system does without having a real conversation around where the jobs are located. So we really need to talk about where jobs are concentrated, both in industrial precincts as well as cities, to get a real sense of where the priorities are and where places need to be connected, particularly when we're looking at connections within Western Sydney. So of course the link from Leppington to the airport is something that we definitely support at the Centre for Western Sydney, but we also need to look beyond that in terms of how we connect the people from Campbelltown and Wollondilly up to the industrial areas of Penrith where they might work, which is a 30- or 40-minute drive or a two-hour return round trip via train and public transport right now. So, for me, I really think it's about looking at, historically, not necessarily an underinvestment but, I guess, a delay or a lag in infrastructure delivery, but also really balancing where the current need is as well as future development and how we unlock that to its full potential.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. So you also mentioned the north-south connection there. Professor Levinson, you mentioned about the buses and different ways of shuffling people around, if you like, in terms of what's happening—the automated vehicles and what have you. That seems a world away, to be honest, in terms of where we are here in New South Wales with the New South Wales Government and what its focus currently is. Have you heard, with your discussions within the sector broadly, is there much interest and movement for not just the automated buses but also just the smaller more frequent shuttle buses taking people from suburbs to centres and to transport hubs? Does that have legs?

**DAVID LEVINSON:** It does in places. Certainly none of these are universal solutions but there are locations, like there is on-demand transport and smaller vehicles in the Macquarie Park area now, which is more cost effective than it is in some other locations that have been trialled and where the trials have not been continued. I think that's something that can be done on a case-by-case basis. The difficulty now is that labour costs are expensive and so you have to pay for the drivers for a relatively small number of passengers, and the advantage of these things is getting scale together. There are plenty of places where employers operate shuttle buses between stations and industrial parks, and they do that for their own workforce and they make it work, and universities do that. Western Sydney University has a shuttle bus to the city. If you have a misplaced land use that isn't on the mass transit system now, you can connect it with these kinds of systems. I think those are all feasible things to do.

Automation might seem a world away but these are 15-year time lines. We're looking at 20-year time lines, and in 20 years if on an exclusive right of way, automated buses are hardly out of scope. Your time line for building a new metro line if you started tomorrow and you had the design in place is a minimum five years, and you don't have those things in place already, so you're looking at 10, 15, 20 years already before a lot of these things get built. We need to be technologically aware of the things that are changing and keep that in mind as part of our design process.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** I want to pick up on this idea around automated vehicles, and I want to pose to you that given the time frames that you just talked about—a 20-year time frame—is it not possible that the automated vehicles will actually render rail lines redundant? Is it possible that small passenger vehicles that are run on an automated basis will totally transform the way transport operates in a city like Sydney? It's very difficult to say that public transport can meet the point to point benefit of a single vehicle. So I just wanted to pose that idea that maybe in 20 years, given a large proportion of the automobile fleet sits idle during most of the day, automated vehicles might be the future in terms of public transport needs.

**DAVID LEVINSON:** I think it's a scaling issue and a geometry issue. As automated as you made it, you could never get people in automobiles into the city of Sydney as an example because it's just too much demand and not enough space for private cars. In a lower density environment, then, yes, the time savings from the point to point transport is an obvious efficiency and if people can afford that, or you have small shared ride vehicles running along major routes and if someone lives 200 metres from a major route, they walk up to the route and there's a shuttle that drives down the route and will take them within 100 metres of their final destination and they walk the last bit of it, and that's something that's also perfectly feasible with an automated vehicle that's in a semi-protected environment now and perhaps in a next environment in 20 years.

The private automated vehicles that are being tested in the US in Phoenix and San Francisco are operating on city streets with a relatively okay safety record—not as perfect as we might like but this is 2024 and, if you're looking at 2034 or 2044, you have to imagine that a lot of those things get better over time. I think it just depends on how dense your markets are looking and how many people you have going between various places at a given time. But all of that says you need to be very cautious about very large investments down a particular path that

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are irreversible. You're making a very large commitment in something and if it looks like it has a reasonable shot of being technologically obsolete, maybe you make more incremental and more reversible types of decisions to give you more flexibility in the future.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** In your submission, Professor Levinson, you raised a really interesting point. I sat on an inquiry in the last Parliament around school infrastructure and there's certainly a trend of building larger schools—schools of 1,000 to 2,000 students. You raise the point about the drop-off and pick-up contributing to local traffic. Can you perhaps elaborate more on how we address that particular issue?

**DAVID LEVINSON:** I think we have, over decades, made schools larger and larger, and there are fewer and fewer of them per student. As a consequence, the distances that students are expected to travel to get to their neighbourhood school has increased and more and more students are thus being driven by their parents and grandparents to and from school every day. Some of them are riding public transport back and forth to school and fewer of them are walking and riding a bike than would have been true 50 or 60 years ago. This has a lot of adverse effects on children's independence and public health, and things like that, as well as needless traffic congestion. There are educational economies to be achieved, perhaps, by having larger schools. I'm not an expert in educational school sizing—

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** It seems to be a cost-based phenomenon.

**DAVID LEVINSON:** —but in terms of an outcome base I don't think that it has—certainly not at the primary school level—improved the outcomes that students will have in their education. So if you had smaller, more distributed schools that were in the neighbourhoods, then students would have the independence and expectation of walking back and forth to school every day. They could even go home for lunch. When I was growing up some kids would do that. This would create a different kind of environment. We talk about 15-minute neighbourhoods sometimes in the planning world and the idea of having things that you can reach within a small distance around your home is a good thing. I know there's all these conspiracy theories about that too, but we'll put those aside for the moment. Schools are one of those things that people should be able to walk to—at least primary schools—in their neighbourhood as part of having a life where you do not need an automobile on a daily basis and you only need it more for the exceptional uses rather than the standard uses.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** How practical is it? It's a very hot day outside today and the number of very hot days is obviously contributing to people being less inclined to use active transport. How realistic is it to expect that—

**DAVID LEVINSON:** I walked here from Parramatta Station this morning. It was a half-hour walk—hot and humid this morning—but there's a lovely foreshore path. Kids should get used to walking back and forth 15 to 20 minutes. Maybe not a half an hour—that might be too long for eight-year-olds—but 10 or 20 minutes should certainly be within their scope. I think it's realistic if we made a decision to do that, that as part of a new subdivision or development there would be plots of land for the local schools. That would be incumbent upon the schools—the public schools or a private school—to pick up and go there. There are other issues, like a lot of students go to private schools. That's going to entail longer travel than going to a neighbourhood school, potentially, if they're not in that neighbourhood. But I think those are things that can be worked through and we can be in a better position than we are today. We may never get the ideal but we can be better than the we are now and closer to where we were 60 years ago.

**The CHAIR:** I might throw to Mr Nance on this. Similarly, in Western Sydney, coming from the station and walking on the foreshore with trees is probably an exception rather than the rule in terms of what most people experience. Coming from school at 3 o'clock in January in certain suburbs where there just aren't those trees, there are lots of sidewalks and bitumen contributing to the urban heat island effect. How important is it for planners to think about the comfort levels? We're hearing from Sweltering Cities later about the appalling lack of bus shelters. Would you comment broadly in that respect?

How important is it for planners to think about the comfort levels? We're hearing from Sweltering Cities later about the appalling lack of bus shelters. If you wanted to comment broadly from that perspective—

**THOMAS NANCE:** First, I'll put on record that I drove in air-conditioned comfort today. I'm not as brave as my colleague. Urban heat is a significant issue for Western Sydney. In Penrith a few years ago, we had the hottest day on earth. For me, it is a significant issue, when we think not only about transport use and public transport use but also more broadly about how people are interacting with their communities and with infrastructure. Take the school drop-off, for example. As a father of three little ones, we take the car—the reason being not only because it's air conditioned and it's convenient, but there's other things at play as well. Of course,

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there's no tree canopy in terms of my children's walk from my house to school—none at all. That's an urban planning issue. I'm sure my colleagues later on will talk more about that.

But also, one thing I would raise as a parent of children, and something that we talk about in our submission when we talk about the accessibility of public transport, is it's also about safety. When we think about the commute to school or the walk to school, I know, as a parent—and parents across New South Wales and across the nation—I'm weighing up is it safe for my child to walk this route? Do they have to walk a different route? Is there too much traffic as they cross the road? I think there's a lot of factors at play both in terms of public transport usage but also walkability more broadly. But I do think temperature, particularly in summer, is one of those things. We need to look at how we design the physical infrastructure that supports public transport, like bus shelters and footpaths, that allows people with mobility issues to get there. We really need to think about that when we're talking about the key principles that underpin the current and future delivery of public transport.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Thank you, both, very much for coming and for your submissions that are very helpful to this inquiry. At a broader level, I was wondering if I could ask each of you in terms of what do you think should be done and what is the priority in terms of current and future public transport needs in Western Sydney?

**DAVID LEVINSON:** There's a lot of things that should be done. The things that should be done first are making the existing system and investments work as well as possible, because you can turn that around much faster than building new infrastructure. Buses can be deployed a lot faster than new train lines. Improving the bus network, doing things like bus shelters so that people are waiting in shade and doing things like planting trees now, because the best time to plant the tree was 30 years ago and you need to do that quickly—but the planting can be done relatively quickly, even if the maturation takes longer.

I mentioned things like, by making the system efficient, one of the things we can do is the Opal card readers can be at the bus stop rather than on the bus. It used to be that you paid the conductor on the bus and that's why we pay on the bus. But we don't have conductors on the bus and the bus drivers aren't responsible for enforcing payment anymore, so why are we still doing that? It's convenient to be able to do that, but that shouldn't be the only place you tap on. We could board faster. If we board faster, then we can have the buses go a little bit faster and turn around a little bit faster and get an extra run or two out of a bus per day, which adds up over time. There's a lot of little things like that.

I did a paper on train station entrances. If you have a train station that has a staircase on one end and people have to walk nearly two minutes from the other end to get to that end, if you're on the wrong side of the train station, you've got a four-minute walk, potentially, extra every day. You're less likely to take the train, the longer you have to walk. There's more developable area if you configure the train stations to have entrances on both ends. This has recently been done at Redfern and Erskineville stations, if you want to see an example of this. Opening up more areas to the existing public transport facilities that are there at the cost of a lift and a staircase, which is relatively inexpensive compared to the cost of a new line. I think there are a lot of small-ball things that you could do that will eke out additional ridership and make the world a little bit better for people: footpaths and bike lanes everywhere; bus lanes in lots of places where they could exist but don't exist so that the buses aren't stuck in traffic. If the people see the bus passing them they'll be more likely to consider riding the bus than if they see themselves passing the bus and don't want to be caught with all of those other people in the slower traffic—because buses have to stop and pick up other people, so they're going to be a little bit slower otherwise.

I think there are a lot of things—traffic signal timings. Again, traffic signal priority for buses and also for pedestrians can be reconfigured and, again, this can be done electronically. They could do this overnight, literally, in their control centre, if they chose to. It doesn't take years of planning and testing in order to do that. There is a lot of experimental work that we could do: "Well, let's see if this works. Try it. If it works, great. If it doesn't work, we can reverse it and roll it back." We did a lot of this during COVID and then we sort of forgot how to test things in the past couple of years. I think we should be more proactive about—it's called tactical urbanism—testing and experimenting and seeing what kinds of changes we can make quickly to make the world better.

**The CHAIR:** Mr Nance, your priorities—to that question?

**THOMAS NANCE:** For me, I'd say there are three broad buckets for the priorities. The first, of course, and what most people talk about, is the infrastructure piece. Really, for us, in our submission we prosecuted the case for connecting the Western Sydney airport metro with the rest of the network—in terms of north, in terms of south, to Leppington as well and extending it to Westmead—to make sure it was integrated. As well as that, we need to start looking at how we plan crosscutting rail links in the network in Western Sydney. But alongside that,



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I think there are, as my colleague said, some things which are relatively modest but we can get moving fairly quickly. I think there is a real case, given the cultural and linguistic diversity of Western Sydney, to be looking at piloting programs where there are in-language announcements at train stations and looking at how we can match the diverse workforce within our transport system potentially to stations so they can deliver customer service in language as well.

But the other thing I think is really important is the bang-for-buck piece. We are making huge investments in public transport, so how do we extract the maximum value? And, really, there are a couple of things there. First, we need to get savvy about really looking at how we measure impact of transport beyond transport, in terms of economic value, in terms of the value of catalysing transport-orientated development et cetera. We need to start looking at the impact measurement piece beyond getting people to and from where they need to go. As well as that, though, I think we can start looking at social procurement or targeted procurement when we're talking about transport spend and how we can use that as, I guess, an add on, if you will, to looking at addressing entrenched disadvantage, particularly in Western Sydney. And, finally, and most important—

**The CHAIR:** Sorry, the social procurement—that's in your submission but could you explain to the Committee what that is before you move to your third point?

**THOMAS NANCE:** Of course. Social procurement, in a nutshell, is a procurement model that really looks at addressing a social need alongside it. So, for example, when I think about transport procurement, some of the best social procurement programs I've seen have been working with major infrastructure developers, with community organisations, to deliver jobs to targeted communities—for example, First Nations people. But then it also delivers wraparound support to make sure they're supported to keep that job. And often, when it targets people who are in long-term unemployment who may be returning to the workforce, we can actually see a knock-on effect as they're able to get that job, they're supported to keep that job, and then that pushes them into the workforce. That's a really successful model when we think about government spending in terms of moving people away from reliance on services, reliance on social security et cetera. It's, I guess for me, a great economic model but also, as someone who is trained as a social worker, something that delivers a real clear social good.

Finally and just quickly, talking about bang for buck and extracting value, I really think—I know there are quite a few organisations and partners who have already provided evidence to this Committee who've talked about transport-orientated development, so I won't go over that too much. However, I think, particularly given the chronic shortfall of housing and the catching up we need to do in order to deliver that, there's the opportunity to do transport-orientated development but to do it well. Within Western Sydney, that's about really looking at population mix. It's not about dropping in a bunch of apartments, one-bedroom, stacked yea high; it's really about looking at community need, looking at green space and looking ultimately at how we can use transport development to create new city centres that are walkable, that are integrated and allow people to get in and out of public transport as they need.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Just picking up on that point, how do we do that through a private-driven development model?

**THOMAS NANCE:** In terms of the—

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** You talk about new town centres that have all these factors integrated. If the way we're kind of gaining densification is through private development, individual blocks, it is disaggregated, it is uncoordinated and so you end up with this sort of mishmash. They've got a very limited focus: on what's going to deliver the best return. Fair enough, they're in private business. They're not really focusing on the more important social coordination that might be produced by intervention at scale. If I look at the kind of developments—I live near Olympic Park. The Newington development is a fantastic case—bike paths, quiet streets, close to transport, trees, integrated landscape done on scale. Isn't that what we want to achieve? How do we do that through a privately driven development model?

**THOMAS NANCE:** It's incredibly hard if we're talking about infill development because, as you allude to, it's not one player you're dealing with. It's lots of small groups who are either developing or owning that land, and it takes a concerted effort to even get some movement, let alone the kind of master plan vision we talk about. Of course there are incentives there in terms of planning. There are things that can take place, but it's very difficult. Whereas if you're looking at transport-orientated development, for example, in that corridor between Leppington and the airport, since it's more of a greenfield site there is more opportunity to master plan and deliver that vision. However, I do acknowledge your point in terms of those existing transport corridors. In the Hills, for example, if you were to put a north-south rail link going from Tallawong down to St Marys, it would require significant

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thinking and a lot of, dare I say it, political will and also community goodwill to bring those kinds of plans to life, if you were going across an existing corridor of development.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** In terms of the overall transport spend, it seems that we disproportionately subsidise roads. I wonder if you'd offer comment—you've both spoken about fare structures—on the issue around whether a significant intervention might be around moving away from payment at point, so subsidising our public transport system so that it's very low cost or no cost, and what impact that might have in terms of the evolution of the cityscape.

**DAVID LEVINSON:** On the first question as to whether we're subsidising the automobile side versus the transit side, there is a lot of debate about that, and that sort of depends on many more people drive than use public transport, certainly in Western Sydney. So are you subsidising based on today's market share or based on your hoped-for future market share? There are arguments on both sides of that, and user fees are different. If you look at the fare box recovery rate for public transports or how much of the operating costs—leave aside the capital costs—are recovered, Sydney has a pretty low fare box recovery rate. That is, none of the capital costs are recovered and about 30 per cent of the operating costs are recovered from fares. Other cities around the world tend to be much higher. Fares are much higher in US cities and in some European cities—it depends. So whether you want to view this as—back when these were built many of them were privately provided, so of course they had to be paid for by the users. On the other hand, we don't charge for elevators every time you use an elevator—and that's a public transport system within a building—so where do you draw the line for this? It's an open question in how you design the system.

The risk of making it free is that you have a lot of people who don't have real transport needs riding around because they have no place else to go during the day. That makes it less pleasant for the people who do actually have to go somewhere, so you might be driving off some users with the other users using it all day. A fare is a way of separating out the wheat from the chaff, so to speak, and a way of ensuring that some people who are using it actually are making a trip for that purpose. What works in a small town or what works in a small, focused route like between an industrial park and a train station—that could be a free service—might not work for the system as a whole and then the revenue shortfall would have to be made up somehow. You'd save a little bit of money not collecting the fares but you'd lose a lot of money in the revenue, and that's a big revenue hole that has to be recovered.

**THOMAS NANCE:** If I could just add to that. We, in informing our submission, talked to quite a few community sector organisations who work with a wide range of the population across greater Western Sydney. The heart of the question is really about if we were to take away fares, would it mean that more people would be interested in catching public transport? At this point in time I would confidently say the answer would be no. For those who are already catching public transport it would be welcomed, particularly those who are paying significant amounts of money in their budget to get to work. However, for those who are choosing to drive or, often, who have to drive to their jobs—I think of tradies who go to job sites where public transport just isn't an option—we're seeing and we're hearing on the ground that they're going without food and they're going without luxury items in order to put petrol in their car. At some point, if the public transport system was viable for them, they would have made the decision to be catching public transport to save that money. Because we know it's more expensive to own and maintain a car—to put petrol in it, to insure it, to service it, et cetera. I think the fact that within the context of this cost-of-living crisis there are still a huge amount of motorists who haven't converted to public transport—I think we've got the answer in terms of additional reductions to fares driving more people towards public transport.

**The CHAIR:** I've got one more question about the rapid bus network. A number of witnesses have said, "Well, it's not really rapid now", in terms of what has been implemented. Just for the record so we can get this into the report: What did it need to have to be really rapid? What doesn't it have in terms of what's being implemented and what's needed—I know you mentioned this a bit, Professor—specifically in terms of what's being rolled out now?

**DAVID LEVINSON:** The T-way is a really good system. If you look at the T-way as a model for a bus rapid transit system, that's really good. It's on exclusive right of way for most of the line. It's got dedicated stations. It's got high frequency of service. It's got preferential traffic signals at places where it has to cross city streets. All of that is the kind of design that you'd be looking for for a rapid bus system. Short of that, it's going to be less rapid.

**THOMAS NANCE:** One of the things I'd add is that it's often about perception. People often hear rapid bus and they think, "I hop on and then I hop off at my destination and don't stop the entire way." For me it's about

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being really clear in terms of what we mean when we are delivering rapid bus services and managing the expectations of commuters, as much as anything else.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, both, very much for appearing. We're out of time for this session. Again, thank you for your extensive submissions and your knowledge in this area. It's very valuable for the Committee.

**(The witnesses withdrew.)**

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**Mr SHARATH MAHENDRAN**, Creator, Building Beautifully, affirmed and examined

**Mrs ALISON DENCH**, Resident of Western Sydney, affirmed and examined

**The CHAIR:** I assume both of you have short opening statements to make. We will proceed in the same order.

**SHARATH MAHENDRAN:** Good morning, panel, and thank you so much for offering me the opportunity to speak at your inquiry today. My name is Sharath Mahendran, and I am the creator of the YouTube channel Building Beautifully—a YouTube channel about transport and urban planning in Sydney. Since I started the channel around two years ago, my channel has achieved 36,000 subscribers and has amassed over 3.6 million cumulative views, which demonstrates the strong interest and passion in transport and the improvement of transport that Sydneysiders have. But more important than all of this, and the reason I'm here today, is the fact that I am a lifelong resident of Western Sydney, having been born and raised in the Hills district. I've seen firsthand how the lack of adequate transport links and a very car-centric form of urban planning has, for decades, encouraged car trips far more than public transport.

Research by Transport for NSW in 2023 shows that only 14 per cent of journeys to work from Western Sydney were made by public transport, compared with over double that—32 per cent of journeys—in eastern Sydney. This is an incredible and unacceptable deficit. But is that really all that surprising when we consider that only 30 stations are located west of Blacktown? The burden of housing new residents in Sydney largely rests upon areas west of Blacktown, such as Austral, Spring Farm, Marsden Park and Oran Park. Western Sydney dwellings are expected to grow by 41 per cent by 2041, without the public transport investments to show for it. Good public transport reduces reliance on motor vehicles, which helps to reduce global warming. Furthermore—and we've already heard about this today—public transport is four times cheaper than driving, according to Transport for NSW, which is a very relevant stat given the current cost-of-living crisis. Public transport is also believed to result in an additional eight to 33 minutes of walking each day, according to a NSW Health study, representing improved health outcomes for its users.

Although automated vehicles have their benefits in terms of they can be more reliable than public transport, public transport has the benefits that I have just said—it's cheaper and represents better health benefits. In the last inquiry, the Sydney Metro West came up quite a bit. Since that time, I applaud Labor for committing to building a Sydney Metro West station at Rosehill in December, pending successful investigations. Sydney needs more strong public transport decisions like this. The Government must commit to funding business case studies for various metro extensions. By extending the Sydney Metro City and Southwest to Liverpool and, perhaps, beyond, the Sydney Metro North West to Schofields and then St Marys, the South West Rail Link to the new Western Sydney airport, the Sydney Metro West to the new Western Sydney airport and aerotropolis, and the Sydney Metro Western Sydney Airport to Macarthur, a substantially more connected Western Sydney will be created. I also strongly urge the construction of a north-south metro that passes through Parramatta, ideally from Norwest to Kogarah, linking most train lines, to improve Sydney's inter-suburban and inter-regional travel and help improve access to Parramatta, which is meant to be Sydney's second CBD.

Crucially, these public transport links cannot be built without good housing. For too long the link between housing and transport has been unlinked in this city. The State Government invests billions in new metros and in public transport and yet largely leaves it to local councils to decide what gets built around stations. As a result, too many Sydneysiders have no choice but to live on the outskirts of our city, far away from new public transport. I urge this inquiry to help change this. Why are thousands of homes being built in, say, North Kellyville when still not one building has been built right next to Kellyville metro station? And that's just one example.

A recent KPMG study found that 49 per cent of the dwellings added in Sydney during the past 15 years were located within one kilometre of a train station. We should try to push that up to as close to 100 per cent as we can and build more density around train stations such as Glenfield, Blacktown and Penrith. New metro stations such as St Marys and Rosehill should have density planned in tandem with their construction in order to ensure taxpayers are getting as much bang for their buck as possible. I will state, however, that far more of the burden of housing should be placed on eastern Sydney, which has a majority of Sydney's trains and upcoming metro stations.

To finish up, bus routes in Western Sydney often run at woeful frequencies—take route 748, which is a crucial route linking Marsden Park to Schofields and Tallawong stations. This route runs every 15 minutes on peak, but only every 30 minutes off peak. That's an average wait time of 15 minutes for residents, and that is reflected across Sydney. You shouldn't need to drive to your local station to get to the city or wherever you need to go, because car parks inevitably fill up quickly. They have finite space, and they will never be able to

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accommodate every single car in a suburb of thousands. Western Sydney desperately needs better feeder buses to its train stations, running no less than every 15 minutes all day, and I would urge the Government to invest in this. Buses, however, are not the solution to the public transport needs of Western Sydney; they are merely a short-term fix that must be followed with rail investment. I thank the inquiry again for giving me the opportunity to speak to you today and I strongly hope that what I have said can help inform and shape the public transport of Western Sydney for years to come.

**ALISON DENCH:** I'd like to start by acknowledging we're meeting on Dharug nation land. I'd like to also thank the Portfolio Committee No. 6 for the inquiry. This is such an essential and important issue. As a dedicated and concerned resident of Western Sydney, I am here today to advocate for the rights and wellbeing of those in our community who are experiencing disadvantage and often do not have a voice. With a human-centred focus and a deep desire to nurture the capacity and capability of our local communities, I firmly believe that the cornerstone of a just and civil society lies in the fabric of our everyday lives. Embracing the philosophy espoused by Eva Cox, I firmly believe that a just and truly civil society is built upon a foundation of social connections, with public transport serving as a vital link between public and private spheres.

The current reality for many residents of Western Sydney is marred by inequities that permeate their daily existence. As Gough Whitlam astutely observed in 1972, a person's standard of living is increasingly determined by their geographical location, highlighting the profound impact of transportation access on socio-economic outcomes. Access to safe and reliable public transport is not only a matter of convenience but it's also a crucial determinant of overall health and wellbeing. It's a right, as a citizen. However, barriers such as geographical distance, transportation costs, language barriers, cultural differences and discriminatory practices effectively bar individuals from accessing necessary transport services and care.

Regrettably, these issues persist despite being consistently highlighted in the top five concerns during the local governments' community strategic planning processes across local government areas of Western Sydney. The voices of our residents continue to be disregarded, resulting in the inequitable distribution of public transport infrastructure and associated services throughout the landscape of Western Sydney. The disparities in public transport infrastructure across Western Sydney are glaring, with many residents facing inadequate access to bus stops and infrequent service intervals. Moreover, the existing transport options disproportionately favour affluent areas, exacerbating the socio-economic divide within the region. A significant proportion of Western Sydney's residents find themselves locked into car dependency and forced car ownership, leading to significant financial burdens and environmental consequences. The lack of viable alternative transport options not only strains household budgets but also contributes to longer commute times and limited access to essential services.

The projected population growth for Western Sydney for 2041 is staggering, yet new growth areas are being developed with little consideration for adequate access to public transport. Instead, the focus remains on car-dependent communities, neglecting the pressing need for alternative transport options. Rapid urbanisation outpaces the development of public transport infrastructure, leaving new communities and suburbs left bereft of adequate transportation options. As a result, residents face prolonged commute times and limited access to essential services, particularly in growth areas on the western fringe of Sydney. Despite these challenges, infrastructure expenditure remains disproportionately skewed towards motorways and roads, neglecting crucial investments in heavy and light rail, footpaths, shared pathways and cycleways, and the public corridors are skewed mainly towards cars. Those public spaces need to be more equitably used, particularly in relation to cycling and other alternative forms of travel.

Furthermore, the benefits of smaller public transport projects in transport-disadvantaged, urban-fringe suburbs cannot be overstated. These initiatives yield tangible socio-economic benefits, including lower crime rates, increased employment, improved health outcomes and enhanced social inclusion. It is imperative that such benefits are factored into cost-benefit analyses of public transport projects. It's more than just making a buck. We need to look at the social outcomes of our community to be a truly civil society. Spatial inequity mapping highlights stark contrasts in access to jobs, education and services across Sydney, underscoring the profound impact of geographical location on individuals' quality of life. Addressing these disparities requires concerted efforts from all levels of government, as well as meaningful engagement with private corporations to ensure equitable access to essential services like public transport.

In conclusion, I again express my sincere gratitude to the Committee for undertaking this critical inquiry into the current and future public transport needs of Western Sydney. By investing in equity-based transport options and fostering collaboration across sectors, we can work towards creating a truly civil society where everyone has equal access to essential services and opportunities for socio-economic advancement. Thank you for your attention to this critical issue.

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**The CHAIR:** Thank you both for your submissions. We have read them in detail and they're very excellent. I wanted to just do a quick high-level political question at this point. We've heard the Premier, especially recently—maybe in the past six months—particularly stress the need to build up not out, indicating that he does want to see, and we've seen, potential rezoning efforts, which are now underway. However, the "out" hasn't stopped. The phrase is being used as the reason for the infill. But are there any examples, or are you aware, of anywhere that has stopped in terms of those south-west growth centres? If you could also comment on just how inequitable the transport situation is for Wilton and Appin, which I understand doesn't have any.

**ALISON DENCH:** Nothing has stopped; if anything, it has ramped up. It's just unbelievable the amount of growth and infrastructure build that's happening without any view or thought around public transport and how we're going to get around. It's going to continue; it's not going to stop. It'd be great if we could build up instead of out, but the horse has bolted. It's happening; it really truly is happening. The inequities and the disparities around accessing public transport are just going to be exacerbated more and more because of this. What needs to happen is more view about interconnections within Western Sydney and looking at building up those centres within Western Sydney for people to be able to access those services rather than having to do miles and miles of trips into major centres, like Westmead Hospital, Liverpool Hospital, even into Sydney. And jobs.

We have communities out our way that are very focused. Their roles and jobs are in those service industries. They can't work from home. They have to get about and get to—they provide, themselves, essential services, which are often very difficult to get to. You can travel two hours just to get 50 kms. It's crazy. It took me an hour and a half just to travel from Theresa Park to Parramatta this morning. It's going to get more and more congested, and putting rapid buses on the roads is only going to increase that unless we put in some significant infrastructure to allow for those buses to get through quicker.

**SHARATH MAHENDRAN:** Pretty much mirroring what Mrs Dench has just said, I don't believe that we are really stopping the out. It seems like the out is still continuing in places like Oran Park, Marsden Park and Bingara Gorge. There, sadly, will always be a market for building out, but that's primarily because we're not building up enough. I personally believe more of the burden of building up should be placed on eastern Sydney because, after all, much of our massive public transport investments are being focused there. Look at the Sydney Metro City and Southwest; that is primarily sitting east of Parramatta. Look at the Sydney Metro West; while it will definitely benefit Western Sydney, much of it is being built in eastern Sydney regardless. However, we aren't really stopping the building out.

I would recommend that we try our best to slow the building out because there are so many negative impacts of car-dependent sprawl. We're talking about the urban heat effect, which has already been mentioned today. I'm not going to quote the exact figure, but it costs a lot more to build a house on greenfield land as opposed to infill housing, which represents a massive tax on the Government. I would recommend that it slows, but these places are already there. Oran Park is already there. Marsden Park is already there. There are already people living there. That is why I return to what I said in my opening statement, where I reaffirmed that we must continue to build and extend our metros. Labor has not committed to that yet. I understand that money isn't infinite, but eventually we do need to extend the Tallawong metro to Schofields and to St Marys.

Every day on my YouTube channel—maybe not every day but many times a month—I hear people asking, "Why have they not extended the metro from Tallawong to Schofields and beyond?" That is a massive gap in the metro network, which would really help people up in Marsden Park. "Why don't they extend the Western Sydney Airport metro south towards Oran Park and Macarthur?" That would help people in Oran Park get around easier and actually get towards the city much faster. Urban sprawl is not ideal. We need to stop blocking infill housing, but much of this urban sprawl is already there, so we need to be building the metros and the public transport links to accommodate for it.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. It's your understanding, as you said with Oran Park, Marsden Park and others, that they have been built without that transport infrastructure being placed first. Now, as they stand, are there frequent bus services if there is no rail—or metro, obviously—going to those places? Are there frequent bus services, do you know?

**SHARATH MAHENDRAN:** I'm not aware of Oran Park but I know that Marsden Park—I mentioned it in my submission—while it seems to get a bus roughly every 15 minutes in the peak, that goes down to only every half an hour towards Schofields and to Tallawong. I personally don't believe that is frequent enough because a half-an-hour service represents an average of a 15-minute wait. I believe not many people are willing to risk a 15-minute average wait. Imagine you miss that bus; you're going to have to wait another half an hour. In reality most of us here in practice, if we have a half-hourly bus, are probably just going to want drive to Tallawong or to Rouse Hill and just park our car there. I've already mentioned how expensive owning a car is. Imagine needing to

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own a car and spending something like 10 grand a year on owning a car just because your local bus is only running every half an hour to your local metro station.

**The CHAIR:** Just one last question in terms of your submission, Mr Mahendran. You say in part two, "Conduct investigations to identify more rail corridors", that what you've suggested above is very detailed. Thank you so much for your extensive work and knowledge. You're studying, or you have completed, civil engineering, is it?

**SHARATH MAHENDRAN:** Still studying.

**The CHAIR:** You do say that these "are merely proposals that the Government has already made". What do you mean by that?

**SHARATH MAHENDRAN:** For part one, you mean?

**The CHAIR:** Part two, "Conduct investigations". But you reference part one. So the Government has already investigated all of those that—

**SHARATH MAHENDRAN:** No, they're purely proposals. You may or may not remember that the Liberal Government, in the lead-up to the New South Wales State election in 2023, said that they would fund business case studies for all of the extensions that are on page 3. Labor only committed to Tallowong to St Marys and aerotropolis to Macarthur. I'm yet to hear anything from the Labor Government indicating they're actually going to commit to those, but all of these have been proposed. There's no business case studies to back them up. Business case studies take years so, at the earliest, these metro lines wouldn't be able to be opened for the next 15 years, and that's if we started a business case study today.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Thank you, both, for your submissions. There's a slight tension in the two submissions. Mrs Dench, you're advocating that there's probably more bang for the buck if we invest in an extensive bus network, whereas, Mr Mahendran, you're more focused on the big ticket, major rail infrastructure projects. Obviously, government has to choose. Perhaps you might make a comment about that tension in terms of the two, I would argue—

**The CHAIR:** Mrs Dench first, in terms of is that the right summary of the submission?

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** —contradictory positions.

**ALISON DENCH:** I'm highlighting the fact that buses are the only solution that has been looked at at the moment and the issues there. I would rather see light rail. I would rather see those permanent connections and corridors built so people can get around and they're more permanent. Buses can be stopped tomorrow and lost tomorrow. If we're looking at rapid bus—which we've just heard a business case is going to take years—they're the bandaid solution in the interim, so let's do that well. Let's try to do it as best as we can until we can get more permanent in. I don't think it's a tension of one or the other. We need to look at multiple ways in which to address the need in the here and the now, and the future needs that are coming.

**SHARATH MAHENDRAN:** I'd like to echo that sentiment. I don't think it's buses versus metro. I personally strongly believe that metros do need to be built but, at the end of the day, as I've just said, my best estimate would be, if we started today, it wouldn't be 15 years until many of these metros were built. In the interim we need better buses. We need buses that are running much more frequently. We shouldn't have a bus every half an hour to your local train station. Tallowong metro has a train to the city every 10 minutes. That's a brilliant frequency. That's an average of only every five minutes. But if you live in Marsden Park—during the day you need to wait half an hour to get to that metro station—you're not benefiting from that very frequent service because your bus isn't good enough. I would say, yes, we absolutely need the metro investment, but in the meantime we definitely need the bus investment too. It's not one or the other; I think it's both.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** They both cost money, and there's a limited budget in terms of the priorities of government.

**ALISON DENCH:** I hear what you're saying there about the cost, the cost factor, what should come first and how do we spend our resources. It's how we actually determine what is cost effective or not cost effective. If we don't incorporate the social factors and the implications, it's going to cost us a lot more in the long term, with crime rates, social isolation and mental health issues that we're going to have to fork out resources in other areas, such as health and education, to address. We need to be doing some really strong cost-benefit analysis that includes the social impacts and implications for us to see what's of more benefit and where the best bang for buck is going to be.

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**The CHAIR:** Mr Mahendran, do you have something to say about that as well in terms of cost effectiveness?

**SHARATH MAHENDRAN:** I think I've said what I can say about that. Mrs Dench has summarised it well.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Mr Mahendran, you list a number of projects. Which one do you think should be at the top of the priority list?

**SHARATH MAHENDRAN:** That's a good question. They're all very important. I think one of the most essential ones, which is somewhat low-hanging fruit and I think would be most budget friendly, would be Tallawong to St Marys. I know that many people who live in the Hills, myself included, really despise the three-kilometre gap in a new metro between Tallawong and the T1. You can't get from Tallawong to Schofields easily. So people from Blacktown who work at Macquarie, for example, or people from the Richmond area or the Schofields area who work at Macquarie or work at Chatswood, they don't get to benefit from this metro that runs every 10 minutes to those areas. I personally believe that should probably be the priority.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Mrs Dench, if I could put a similar question to you. You cited your trip from Theresa Park to here and the time on that. What do you think the priorities are in terms of public transport for the southwest?

**ALISON DENCH:** For the southwest itself, I think it's more—you need a multilayer approach. It's not bus, it's not rail, it needs to be things like on-demand services to help people who truly need assistance and don't have opportunities and ways to get around. It's things like car sharing, car pooling, looking at those other sorts of initiatives, looking at how we can fund social enterprises to help—their focus is a social outcome, not just a making money outcome; it's about what those social outcomes are—to provide some different types of transport needs and solutions. That comes with listening to people, and understanding and hearing what people say will address their needs and how they can get around.

It is going to be years and years before there is a rail line from Theresa Park to Parramatta. It is a known thing. I'm going to have to use a car. My next generation and possibly the generation after that are going to have to use cars until things are in place, which is going to have such big impacts—if that sprawl keeps heading out our way—on our future generations. So we need to be looking at multiple ways in which we can provide solutions. It's not a single silver bullet answer. It's a multifaceted way on how we're going to approach this and it comes from collaborating, talking, listening and understanding people's needs and hearing what they see as a solution as well for their area. Place-based solutions are going to be a big part of our way forward to help people.

**The CHAIR:** Every witness has stressed the need for connectivity between north-western Sydney—broadly, The Hills—as well as southwestern Sydney, and talked about the north-south rail link as well as connections with the airport metro. How much of a difference would connecting the north and south by rail or metro—well, roughly metro—make to Western Sydney residents? Has there been research or work on that, or even just from your own anecdotal evidence and experience?

**ALISON DENCH:** Yes, look, it would make a major difference and a major impact for people being able to connect and get around within southwest Sydney. The whole idea of you've got that spine going up from north-south you can then—tentacles integrate people moving within. Not everybody in southwest Sydney travels to Sydney. Not everybody goes there every day. We travel within, we work within and around and we don't have those networks or those connections like eastern Sydney has. So it's about we build that spine and other things will come as a result of that. It's critical.

**SHARATH MAHENDRAN:** Sydney has been designed to funnel people into eastern Sydney. It's all about getting you to eastern Sydney. Every train line goes into Central, into the City Circle. That's not how a good public transport network should work. A public transport network should also allow for circumferential travel. If we, as a State, are serious about making Parramatta Sydney's second CBD we need to make sure we have better north-south links to that city centre. As Mrs Dench has mentioned, not everyone in Sydney is trying to get to Sydney as it is. Many people work within Western Sydney, work in places like Liverpool, Blacktown, Parramatta.

My girlfriend is currently doing a placement at Liverpool Hospital and lives on the other side of Sydney. It would take her two hours to commute to Liverpool from the other side. It would take her much shorter to get into the Sydney CBD. These are the real people who need better links within Western Sydney in order to get to their jobs and their occupation, because at the end of the day not everyone works in Sydney CBD. We shouldn't even have a public transport network that relies on where people work: it should be where you go to school, it



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should be where you want to go out for entertainment, for dining. All sorts of things should be accommodated for to reduce car dependency, for all the reasons that I discussed in my opening statement.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** On that question, we heard evidence in our last hearing around the effective dismantling of one of the north-south links, which is the link that exists between Parramatta and Bankstown as a result of the conversion. I wonder if you might offer some comment about that.

**SHARATH MAHENDRAN:** Parramatta and Bankstown?

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Yes, there's an existing standard rail link that takes you from Parramatta that can get you to Bankstown via Auburn.

**SHARATH MAHENDRAN:** That train line, I think it used to exist but that hasn't existed for years. That would be a brilliant line.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** The line is still there.

**SHARATH MAHENDRAN:** Yes, the line is still there. There's no service that takes you straight from Parramatta to Bankstown. The metro in its current form, nothing about it would eliminate the possibility of a train service from Parramatta to Bankstown because the section of line north of Bankstown—Birrong and Berala and all of that—that's still going to be heavy rail, so actually that would be a brilliant idea to have a service that did that. Instead of just shuttling people between Bankstown and Lidcombe, maybe have it go to Parramatta instead.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** You mentioned the lack of development around Kellyville station. What's your understanding around why that hasn't actually happened?

**SHARATH MAHENDRAN:** Truthfully, I'm not entirely sure. I look at the website quite often and there are these beautiful pictures of what they plan for it to look like. Chris Minns has just announced that Kellyville will be one of the priority precincts, but the reality is Kellyville metro, since 2019, there is still nothing there. It's the same at Bella Vista; it's the same at Cherrybrook. As someone who lives in the Hills, I would be more than happy to see some density built there because instead we're having people living on the outskirts of Marsden Park and Oran Park, and there will always be a market for detached houses like that but there will also be a market for living next to a metro station with services every four minutes in peak and every 10 minutes off peak, so I don't see why we should deny people that.

**The CHAIR:** It's probably that developers can see that they can make money pretty easily in certain fringe urban areas. Mrs Dench, do you think that's part of this?

**ALISON DENCH:** I concur. Definitely, it is part of that.

**The CHAIR:** On that note, we will break now. Thank you so much again for your detailed submissions and your extensive passion and work in this area. I really appreciate you giving evidence.

**(The witnesses withdrew.)**

**(Short adjournment)**

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**Mr JEFF ROORDA**, Director – Infrastructure and Project Delivery Services, Blue Mountains City Council, sworn and examined

**Ms LISA LAKE**, Mayor, Cumberland City Council, affirmed and examined

**Mr DANIEL CAVALLO**, Director – Environment and Planning, Cumberland City Council, sworn and examined

**Ms GAIL CONNOLLY, PSM**, Chief Executive Officer, City of Parramatta, affirmed and examined

**The CHAIR:** Welcome back to our next session. I assume you have an opening statement to read for each council.

**LISA LAKE:** Thanks for giving us the opportunity this morning to provide information to this important inquiry. Just to give you a quick introduction to our local government area, Cumberland Council was formed in 2016 as part of a merger of parts of Auburn, Parramatta and Holroyd. Our current population is now over 236,000 and it's projected to increase to 300,000 by 2036. In the last 10 years we've seen a growth of 65,000 people—close to the size a regional town like Coffs Harbour or Port Macquarie. With this increased population it's projected by my officers that an additional 250,000 daily trips within Cumberland's transport network will occur. However, we know that the area relies heavily on private vehicles. We have a high level of disadvantage. I know you've heard from Fairfield council last year—they have the lowest SEIFA score. We have the second lowest SEIFA score in Sydney.

**The CHAIR:** Could explain what SEIFA stands for?

**LISA LAKE:** Yes. The index that they use is the index of relative socio-economic disadvantage and we have the second lowest score in Sydney. We have a young population; it's lower than the New South Wales average. Our average is 34 in Cumberland. We have high unemployment, particularly amongst youth. Forty per cent of our community rent their homes. Twenty-three per cent have very low to moderate incomes and they pay more than 30 per cent of their income on rent, so they are in rental stress. We have a high level of homelessness and over 3,000 people primarily living in overcrowded dwellings. So good public transport is critical to Cumberland. It makes it cheaper for people to travel to work or to shopping or to schools or get around and it increases the amount of money that they have for other essential items. It can mean the difference in Cumberland between a person accepting a job opportunity or not.

My point today is, in your focused planning growth from this panel—and I appreciate the good work of this Committee in looking further west in the areas of the north and the south there—what we ask you from the Cumberland community's perspective is please don't bypass Cumberland. We would like you to look at improving our train service. We have train crowding on the T1, T2 and T5 lines. We would like some more frequent trains. We would like some faster train services. We would also like you to look at our bus services. We have an extensive network of bus services, but they don't work very frequently outside of peak periods.

We have some high-growth areas, such as along Woodville Road. That affects Fairfield and Liverpool as well, but only two buses an hour run along Woodville Road at the moment. Other areas of high growth are Parramatta Road, the Great Western Highway and, of course, around Westmead where the Sydney Metro West station is planned. They're all around where bus services into those areas would be very helpful. The Liverpool to Parramatta T-way is a great bus route, but we'd like to see that as turn-up-and-go, especially on hot days like today. We support the delivery of the Sydney Metro West. We ask for its delivery to be timely. We note that 2032 is the current anticipated date. We would support further stations between Parramatta and Sydney Olympic Park. We suggest Silverwater. We say that would alleviate some of the transport congestion down at Lidcombe where the interchange is. There's also room there, we believe, for a commuter car park. That would be very helpful for the residents of Cumberland.

We would like you to look at Parramatta Light Rail extensions. Our submission talks about a potential extension from Sydney Olympic Park down to Lidcombe, and also Westmead down into Wentworthville, where there is high growth. This morning is very opportune; we would really love to do something with our bus stops. We would like more seats at our bus stops. We would like shelter from the heat and shelter from the rain. We would be very happy to build them. In fact, we'd love to build the bus stops, if you could help us financially with such a project. We would like to see better lighting, disability access and safety and security along some of our older train stations. I'd highlight the forecourt at Guildford station, where many women tell me they feel very unsafe. We would be pleased if you would continue with the growth services program. I note Mr Cavallo can speak to you further about that. Supporting our growth and the changing travel patterns of the area would be useful. We also suggest some community consultation to get some more feedback at a micro level.

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**JEFF ROORDA:** First of all, I commend the terms of reference of this Committee for something that is critically important at this time. What we've seen after four natural disasters is the impact on the connections between planetary health, transport planning and trends. One of the issues with transport planning has been the fragmentational siloing of transport planning into multiple modes that ignore external effects, particularly biodiversity and climate. A little bit about my background that is relevant to our submission: Before joining council in 2021, I spent 25 years as a specialist in transport planning across Australasia and the US—most recently, the rebuilding of the BART network in the greater San Francisco Bay Area to include not just the operational matters of the rapid rail system but also the surrounding impacts on stations, the economies and transport patterns around those stations.

Blue Mountains, we believe, is a crucible of what's coming in terms of transport planning. My colleagues can speak with much greater authority on the social impacts and the impacts on local communities, but this is an example where we are looking at from four million up to 6.3 million projected visitors. Just to give you some frame of reference, that's about the same as the Grand Canyon National Park in a country that has 12 times the population. Again, some kind of context: Stonehenge is one million to 1.3. We have that within a very small population, within which a very small percentage is actually available for development because we're surrounded by World Heritage national park that serves as the lungs and the mental health of a surrounding large city.

The particular issue that we could learn from that experience is that one of the dilemmas has been the siloed approach to transport planning. In particular, the assessment of BCRs—benefit-cost ratios—on projects has ignored really important things like biodiversity and making sure infrastructure is fit for future. When we start looking at the historical operations of the Sydney rail network, we believe that is a facility that has a lot more capacity but is limited by operational factors. Certainly for the Blue Mountains, we have that main corridor through the mountains that has enormous additional capacity if we could connect it to the surrounding infrastructure, like parking, like accessible transport and like connections to where the key destinations are. I think that's not just an issue for the Blue Mountains; it's an issue for all the areas of how you make better use of the existing corridors. The learning for BART was that even within Bay Area Rapid Transit they have silos of operation, so the people who run trains are only interested in running trains and really struggle to think about the connections to surrounding communities. That provides one of the opportunities for our transport planning.

One of the key issues is how do we then encourage that transfer from individual private cars, which becomes a planetary health, to actually the connection between destinations and stations, which requires a different thinking process about the investment in stations. Our observation is that Sydney Trains, within their budget limits, has done a remarkably good job, which is work in progress, on safety, on disabled access, and there's a lot of room to go. But that in itself presents an opportunity of rethinking the investment. The point about the whole-of-government approach and what we call in Blue Mountains "rainbow asset management"—we call it that because, historically, infrastructure investment has just focused on the black and the grey, the concrete and the impervious, and that usually reduces biodiversity. Historically it has not included things like, "How do we devise projects that improve biodiversity? How do we improve projects that make us fit for future?" Looking at investment in infrastructure then becomes whole of government, not just State, because when we start looking at planetary health—for us, the impact of a World Heritage area next to a large city becomes a really big deal.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Mr Roorda. This is a short opening statement, so we can tease this out in questions.

**JEFF ROORDA:** That concludes my opening statement.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you very much. Ms Connolly?

**GAIL CONNOLLY:** Thank you, Chair. I will be brief because I will assume that the Committee has read council's submission. In summary, council has resolved to support the Government's additional housing targets, particularly for the City of Parramatta, to help meet current and future demand for housing in the Sydney metropolitan area. However, that support is subject to the provision of critical community infrastructure, in particular transport. The City of Parramatta has benefited from various transport announcements in recent years—metro west, light rail et cetera—but in December we saw the Government announce an additional 25,000 homes at Rosehill. In other words, a city within the city; roughly 100,000 people over the next 15 years living in a city that's already close to one-quarter of a million people. The council's position is that it would be pleased to work with the Government, particularly in regards to the provision of the necessary transport infrastructure to support that housing not only at Rosehill but in our other growth areas.

We have some very specific requests from the community for you to consider. They include that we want the Government to commit to and fund the delivery of the Sydney Metro West as a central plank, of course, to

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facilitating that increased housing supply not only in Parramatta but across metropolitan Sydney. Also, of course, the council wants the Government to include new stations at Camellia and Newington or, at a minimum, futureproof their provision as part of a Metro West corridor.

We want the Government to commit to and fund stage two of the Parramatta Light Rail to support our existing high-density precincts but also these new precincts around Rosehill and other parts within the city. Provision of that infrastructure will also help our neighbours at Cumberland. We'd like the Government to commit to a clear timetable for the delivery of additional metro rail links within Sydney because, whilst my submission is Parramatta focused, Parramatta also has regard to our position within the greater metropolitan area and how we can assist our neighbouring councils and other critical infrastructure that the Government is building, such as the aerotropolis, to achieve the most in terms of productivity and liveability.

We request that the Government provides a clear timetable for the delivery of additional metropolitan rail links within Western Sydney, with particular emphasis, of course, on connecting Parramatta to other parts of the metropolitan region and the new airport. We'd also like the Government to commit to the Parramatta CBD access strategy. This is a strategy that we began with the Government some time ago, which has been delayed. It identifies some critical transport accessibility issues within Parramatta that need to be addressed and it is appropriate that they are addressed now with the provision of light rail stage one and the metro. And finally, of course, last but not least, provide increased capacity for bus, ferry and active transport networks as the critical parts of the network that support the bigger, sexier, shiny projects that have been delivered already and, in particular, bus and ferry to Sydney Olympic Park as an emerging residential destination. I'm here to answer any questions that the Committee may have. Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you very much. I just wanted to get a sense from each council about the level of collaboration and coordination that is in place now with the State Government. I note, particularly, Cumberland's submission. There is a theme running across all four of your recommendations in that regard. What are the mechanisms that are in place now to work with you, involve you, in the planning of transport services and, ideally, this kind of co-investment? I say that reluctantly because I am aware of the cost shifting that goes to local government and you probably shouldn't have to pay too much for transport services anyway as a council. I might start with you, Mayor Lake.

**LISA LAKE:** I guess from our point of view we've certainly been involved in setting the housing targets that are now currently set. The housing targets were set on a district level. We were involved in determining the housing targets that would apply for Cumberland to that district level and we're in a position now where we're working towards meeting those housing targets. In relation to future housing targets, well, we're waiting for some further information from the Government at this point. I guess that would be the situation.

**DANIEL CAVALLO:** I've got some more information.

**The CHAIR:** What about transport services as part of that? What we're hearing is that the housing targets are happening but with transport services there is a lack of commitment and planning. Everybody is talking about housing going in place but not enough transport options.

**LISA LAKE:** I'll hand that to Mr Cavallo, if you don't mind?

**DANIEL CAVALLO:** In terms of liaising with Transport, at officer level there is dialogue and discussion. What limits, I suppose, the effectiveness of those discussions is the funding and the commitments from government beyond that. So using the example of transport services, council has met with various parts of Transport around opportunities to improve transport services in locations where we're planning growth so they can forward plan and feed it into their planning process, but a lot of the time there is a gap between us speaking at officer level and then having clarity from government on the direction or the decision or which way forward they wish to go.

So we're finding, generally, with Transport that when there is a specific issue, a specific project, a specific initiative that they've got a mandate to deal with, we obviously have very good, proactive discussions, and Transport at an officer level has been trying to be more proactive with councils over the past few years, which is pleasing. But what we find is that it's really driven by the mandate of what the agency can or can't do. We can explain, for example, that we need more services at Westmead and at Woodville Road, for example, because we've got planned housing growth there. However, they don't really have a funding mechanism or program that we can advocate that this would be a good approach to go to.

The mayor referred earlier to the growth services program, for example. That program provided funding for new and improved primarily bus services. At the moment, our understanding is from reading the task force

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reports and other information that the funding isn't there. It was in the past, and Cumberland did benefit from improved service levels and new routes as a result of that. I think in terms of the collaboration, the talking is there but there's no commitment or direction from government in terms of how they move that forward. If we understood what the parameters were at an officer level, we could also target our discussions to focus on areas we've got that have the most chance of success in getting that collaboration and delivery.

**GAIL CONNOLLY:** From a transport perspective, we're lucky as a council that we enjoy the benefit of established quarterly meetings with Transport for NSW. My understanding is that they arose as a result of the Parramatta Light Rail project. I do not think—but I'm not sure—that they were in existence prior to those projects being announced, so similar to what Daniel said, in response to one-off projects those mechanisms are formed. Ours happens to be a quarterly project control group meeting or liaison meeting, if you like. It has every chance that it could disappear once the light rail is up and operating or if the transport department considered it was no longer necessary. We have similar regular meetings with the department of planning.

But in terms of recent announcements—for example, the 25,000 homes at Rosehill—it would have been nice to have a statutory delivery authority, a planning authority that consisted of Planning and Transport, with the necessary powers established prior to that announcement so the council would know who the point of contact was and where we should go. We've reached out and said, from the council's point of view, we'd be happy to take the lead role in planning the precinct both for transport and for land-use planning because we think that, at this point in time, we could probably do it better and coordinate it better than the two State agencies. We have a wealth of experience in our planning and transport teams. We are lucky we are a large council. We have the benefit of that. We can step in and take a lead role.

However, for smaller councils, they rely pretty much on, at an officer level, trying to extract personal contacts or personal interactions and trying to establish networks as a result of those. But I think, moving forward with the Government's announcement for 47,000 homes, I think it was, before Christmas—12 precincts over the next 15 years—unless there is an established team within the department of transport with Planning that is able to work with the local councils around those 12 high-priority—we think they're all tier one railway stations they've picked, or something like that—unless that collaboration is there with the councils and written into legislation or regulated, I think it'll be very ad hoc in its approach.

There is a precedent for this. When the north-west and south-west growth centres were announced back around 2005 by the Department of Planning, councils were guaranteed buy-in to the planning and transport planning processes through the State Environmental Planning Policy, which gave them a specific, regulated role with those two State agencies in helping to plan and deliver those precincts. I would hope that going forward that's a model that could be used not only at Rosehill but in all the other transit-oriented developments that were announced by the Government, and for major projects that may occur in other areas. But I think, in summary, it's been ad hoc. It relies on personal relationships and networks, to date. Unless you have a brand-new, sexy, exciting, funded project then you're really at the whim of the relevant bureaucrats in any one agency at any one time.

**The CHAIR:** We'll go to you in one second, Mr Roorda. I just want to follow up on a question in relation to the approach that council made to the Government I understand—Transport and Planning—to have some kind of a role or a leading role in the planning of Rosehill. Is that correct? What has happened to that request?

**GAIL CONNOLLY:** At the moment it's an informal request at officer level, and it has been made to the ATC as well as the department of planning. We've indicated a willingness to the bureaucrats that we would like to take a lead role and we would be willing to have a formalised role similar to what the councils had in the growth centres SEPP where council had statutory recognition that we were an important partner in it. I'm under no illusion that we will get the lead role. I think the Government will create some sort of delivery authority which has Planning and Transport on it. But certainly, at the very least, the council wants a regulated or statutory guarantee that we are a stakeholder that needs to be heavily involved in the planning of that city for around 100,000 people because it is literally on our doorstep.

**The CHAIR:** I assume you'll take that to the Minister at some point. At this point, it's with the public servants?

**GAIL CONNOLLY:** Correct. There has been an informal discussion with council about how we would manage that, but the announcement of course came at the end of last year after our last council meeting. At the moment it is a discussion amongst stakeholders at an officer level only, but I have had this informal discussion of course with the Lord Mayor and some councillors. There is a view that Parramatta council should be the lead agency and, if we're not, we should be an equal partner with Transport and with Planning to help deliver that precinct.

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One of those reasons is that in one of my former lives I was the executive director of metropolitan planning and I also wrote the first metropolitan strategy in 2005. I wrote the metropolitan transport plan for the Department of Planning, so there is some good experience in planning growth centres and planning strategic documents at a State Government level, and I also have a wealth of knowledge and experience in my planning and transport team. So we are very well positioned to take that particular location off the Government's hands and let them concentrate on the other half of its housing targets. Let's be clear, Parramatta has half of all of those housing targets to be delivered near transport-oriented development stations in the next 15 years. We have half. We're happy to take that and manage that and the Government can concentrate on the rest. But that will progress in the future as a formal request.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, that is very clear. Mr Roorda, you remember my question about coordination and collaboration with Government. How does it happen in Blue Mountains City Council?

**JEFF ROORDA:** Yes. We currently have regular—about quarterly—and productive meetings with Transport for New South Wales with the director at CO level. They focus on roads and active transport, but they are helpful and productive. We have a similar transport planning with national parks because 74 per cent of our geographic area is actually national park and that's where a lot of the major destinations and transport load comes from—also very productive and regular meetings.

The area for improvement is with heavy rail. We've had great difficulty engaging with operators in heavy rail. We've had some success on individual events. When we have a major event we ask for additional trains to be scheduled. In terms of collaboration and operating things, that's okay. But we have bridges that have load limits. Where roads are diverted into local road networks, they are destroying the local road networks. They've been there for years. We keep writing letters and no-one's interested. It's the heavy rail operator that just looks at operating the train and nothing outside that boundary, which has been a real challenge for us because that misses the connections between parking and all of the connecting infrastructure.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Ms Lake, you spoke about bus shelters. I want dive down a bit into the detail around that. Is there an agreed standard about where and when a bus shelter is required? Is there an Australian standard that says there should be a bus shelter at this location when you have so many people using a bus stop?

**LISA LAKE:** I understand there are some guidelines. Mr Cavallo can give you the detail.

**DANIEL CAVALLO:** In terms of bus stop shelters, there are some general guidelines that are available but a lot of that is based on older information or based on different sources from other jurisdictions outside of New South Wales. So a lot of the work we do is reliant on various standards or examples of work that has been done to demonstrate what is required. With bus stops and shelters, a lot of it comes down to not just the comfort of the passengers but also equal access in terms of the footpaths and the pads and getting onto the bus. There are various standards; there's not a single source that we go to. Council's done work in terms of auditing our bus stops and understanding what the gaps are, but we've based that on consulting and expertise on other jurisdictions and other councils at what they've done, not necessarily a document I can point to you today and say, "This has got everything we need in that regard."

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** There's no statewide standard about where and when you would site a bus shelter?

**DANIEL CAVALLO:** Not to my knowledge. State Transit, when it was around, had its own guidance and other jurisdictions have their own guidance. But I'm not aware of a recent consolidated standard that applies statewide.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** What role does the council play in terms of determining the route of a bus route?

**DANIEL CAVALLO:** In terms of the bus route, a lot of that's driven by the State. Council may get opportunities, depending on the officers, to provide input into that or provide submissions, but primarily with routing that's being driven by the State Government. That comes back to the point that the mayor—

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Are you consulted about the routes? Is there a formal process for when a route is being proposed or being proposed to be altered that the council would be consulted? If you're going to site a bus shelter in a particular location and put public money into that, even if it's a moderate amount, what certainty do you have that that route is not going to be changed and that infrastructure is then going to be rendered redundant?

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**DANIEL CAVALLO:** Typically, if council was undertaking an upgrade program, we'd be consulting with the relevant agency to make sure that there wasn't a plan that may alter or change that. Traffic committees may have some delegations in terms of moving and relocation of bus stops, depending on the terms of reference for each council, but primarily it's more about the working relationships rather than a formalised, structured process around routing, for example. In terms of some infrastructure, there are links to State policies and to traffic committees around that. But in terms of the routes—where the bus goes, for example—councils have limited direct involvement in that.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** You've done an assessment for, say, Cumberland, as just a case in point, around your needs for bus shelters?

**DANIEL CAVALLO:** Yes.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** How many do you need?

**DANIEL CAVALLO:** With the bus stops, we've analysed the bus stops in terms of meeting DDA requirements. Bus shelters is a component that's above that. We've got a low number of thousands of bus stops across Cumberland and a proportion of those would need bus shelters. The bus shelter is really based on the space that's available on the verge to facilitate it but also what the purpose of the bus stop is. If someone is waiting at the bus stop to get to a shop or to get to work, that makes sense to have a shelter there. If the bus stop's primarily for people to get off the bus and go, that doesn't necessarily need a bus shelter because no-one's really staying there; they're moving on.

The work we've done has identified what upgrades are required and it's identified some standards or some guidance that we can apply around bus shelters. There would be in the hundreds, in terms of those low thousands, that we'd recommend for a bus shelter, given its purpose in the network. But obviously we'd look at that on a case-by-case basis to make sure that was supported by the community and also technically able to be delivered.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** How much do they cost?

**DANIEL CAVALLO:** My understanding is it's in the low tens of thousands for a bus shelter. Some councils have commercial arrangements with advertising bodies to provide that, but Cumberland's experience on that is that, depending on the market cycle for advertising and depending on if there's other advertising structures in the area—for example, with Telstra and their phone booths—that can drive the interest of that market to actually participate and commercially assist council in providing those bus shelters. There'd be a lot of local routes that there wouldn't be an interest for advertising because there's not too many people driving there, for example. Outside of that, then it would have to rely on funding of some sort, either given to council or by council, to deliver that infrastructure.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Is there a specific State fund to fund this kind of stuff? How do you actually fund it?

**DANIEL CAVALLO:** My understanding is the only funding associated with shelters and infrastructure is for regional areas, that there's a small funding program that's provided. In terms of the metropolitan area, it's really reliant on the councils to deliver it or the State, if there's a particular project that they're working on and they provide that infrastructure as part of that project.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Bus shelters seem to be a recurrent theme. We've had a number of witnesses who've raised this as a good, low-level, low-cost investment in terms of transport infrastructure. If there's no specific funding from the State, do you think there should perhaps be some kind of fund established for funding—and this is something that all panellists might want to make a contribution about—for that specific purpose? Do we need a specific fund for that type of bus infrastructure to be provided?

**DANIEL CAVALLO:** Council's submission does flag the need for that—for having a specific fund that the State contributes to—to assist councils in delivering that. I'll take it more broader than just a bus shelter. I think it's also about the bus stops, making sure that they're designed to the right standard and that they're accessible for passengers to use as well. Having an ability to receive some funding that contributes to those upgrades would be useful, and that's consistent with the submission that council has resolved and provided.

**GAIL CONNOLLY:** I don't think City of Parramatta Council has a resolved position on it, but my personal view, in terms of just bus stop infrastructure, is stops and shelters that are required to be funded on State and regional roads, there should be a State Government fund. Stops and shelters that are required to be funded on local roads, councils should be able to levy developer contributions for it because one could argue there's a nexus between additional demands being generated by, say, a bunch of apartments being built on a particular bus route,

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and the developer should have to contribute towards transport infrastructure in that area such as bus stops and bus shelters.

Daniel can correct me if I'm wrong, but it's not something, I understand, at the moment that the developer contributions section 11 provisions of the EP&A Act allow a council to levy for. To me, it's a bit of a no-brainer. Additional people, additional services, additional bus stops—the council should be able to levy a component of the cost from those developers to provide that infrastructure. That's my personal view; it's not the council-resolved position.

**JEFF ROORDA:** There are two reference documents that we use. One is the *Western Sydney Engineering Design Manual*, and that also references a partner document, which is the New South Wales bus infrastructure guide. Both of those are technical documents and useful to that extent. What's missing is the strategic connections to disabled access when we connect a station, then, to the bus stops and the bus route.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Is there a case, given that the State Government determines the routes, that maybe they should just be responsible for the shelter infrastructure as well—that it's not actually something that councils should do; that the State Government should perhaps take over that function?

**The CHAIR:** This is your opportunity, Councillor.

**JEFF ROORDA:** My response is yes, because we don't control, for Blue Mountains, the major public transport driver, which is the rail network. So it's the connection between the rail network and the destinations that become problematic, and most of those—we're working with national parks to better understand what those connections look like, but that's also the opportunity of using those connections both for buses but other methods to actually build the connection, which is bus stops, active transport and the connections for disabled access.

**The CHAIR:** I'll just jump in. This is specifically in relation to the Blue Mountains and the rail transportation, which I think everybody from the Blue Mountains through to all of Sydney will tell you is just not ideal. There's a reason why, I think, so many people who choose to go to the Blue Mountains for the weekend take their car and they don't get the train. I'm sure you've lobbied the Government over many years in terms of what that service should look like. Has any work been done in terms of the type of trains? How much of it should be express? Has there been some work into the ideal train service that would service the needs of the Blue Mountains as well as tourists? Has that work been done?

**JEFF ROORDA:** No.

**The CHAIR:** Do you have any thoughts on it now?

**JEFF ROORDA:** Yes.

**The CHAIR:** Great.

**JEFF ROORDA:** Who do we talk to has been a problem, without—

**The CHAIR:** Try here, to begin with. If you could put it on the record, we'll see what we can do.

**JEFF ROORDA:** National parks and the connection and dialogue with national parks is excellent. Transport for NSW similarly. Even though, in theory, trains come under Transport for NSW, in practice, at the operational level, that doesn't quite work. In terms of the transport planning, what would really help is to say who, in terms of strategic planning of not just the rail corridor but outside the rail corridor, so that we actually have a strategic transport planning—someone to talk to at a strategic level in terms of transport planning, because that feeds us into all the detail. Where do you have the bus routes? Where should the connections be? Where should the bus stops be? A lot of that is councils doing their own strategic plan without necessarily knowing how to have a voice that connects to the rail network, both heavy rail and light rail.

**The CHAIR:** What happens in your quarterly meetings though? You said you have quarterly meetings with Transport. Isn't this all talked about there?

**JEFF ROORDA:** Yes, but we don't really have anyone from—we don't yet have a good connection through to representatives from heavy rail.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Mayor Lake, if I could ask you to pick up the issue on density. I'm just making reference to your very detailed submission, and thank you, everyone, for providing these to the Committee. I make reference to the second page, talking about the growing density. It says:

Growing density that is not equitably corresponded by public transport infrastructure will result in greater reliance on the private vehicle use that will also place more burden on already overcapacity existing road networks.



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I was wondering if you might be able to elaborate a little bit more on that in terms of the impact on the community.

**LISA LAKE:** When we talk about our growing density, that's very obvious. At a councillor level, we are seeing very distinct population growth. That has been very frequent; that has been very recent. In 2023, for example, we welcomed 4,000 new Australian citizens into Cumberland. What we are seeing in the area is more and more interest in migration to our particular area of Cumberland, and that's because that's where the communities are living, and that's what attracts people to our area. The growing density is certainly an issue for us, and connecting that to what is a fairly ageing transport service in our area is certainly the focus and why I have chosen to come in here today.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Further to that, are discussions in place with Transport or the New South Wales Government in terms of public transport infrastructure in response to density—particularly probably more in light of the announced new housing density targets and where they are going to go and the impact on available public transport? I'm wondering where the discussion might be at with the Government on that.

**LISA LAKE:** I think the discussion at this point—and Mr Cavallo can give you more detail—I would say it's much more directed with the planning officers and that department rather than Transport at this point.

**DANIEL CAVALLO:** In terms of the discussion, as I mentioned before, a lot of that is linked at officer level, which is flagging the opportunities and the issues. As I mentioned before, the discussions are happening, I suppose, at an officer level with preliminary discussions around future targets and future requirements in terms of transport and need, but we are still waiting for that to be translated into policy direction or to clear guidance around the programs or funding and how that can be facilitated.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** If I could pick up a similar issue with our colleague Ms Connolly from Parramatta city council. If I could pick up the issue of density that you raised in terms of the housing targets and what's been announced for Parramatta, and then bringing it back to public transport and infrastructure. You might be able to elaborate on that.

**GAIL CONNOLLY:** The council's position has been that in the first instance we have a district plan and it set a housing target for the period '21 to '26, from memory, and the council has zoned enough capacity to meet about 99 per cent of that target. We have indicated officially to the Government that the council stands ready to accept more density and increase those housing targets subject to the provision of infrastructure. We are taking a realistic position that we can accept greater density if stage two of the light rail proceeds, if we get those additional metro stations, things of that nature, and of course bus and ferry services—improvements in those services.

Parramatta regards itself as a global city. Western Sydney is a global city. We understand that we have to do the hard yards in terms of additional housing and additional density. But, with that, we want all of the benefits that global cities have when it comes to transport infrastructure. That infrastructure has to align with the density at the same time that the density arrives. With Rosehill we have a perfect opportunity to make sure that the houses arrive with the metro station and with the light rail stage two station. All of the planning work has been done for it; we just need to get on and build it.

Our position is that Parramatta is eminently suitable, with infrastructure that is already in place plus infrastructure that is planned, if it is delivered, to accept greater densities and accept additional housing targets beyond what we already have. The council stands ready to do it subject to the provision of that transport infrastructure. We are in, I think, a much better place than Cumberland. Cumberland is on our periphery. They enjoy some heavy rail access and bus access, but certainly not the same benefits that Parramatta enjoys. We understand that we probably have to do more than our fair share when it comes to density because we have the benefits of that infrastructure, in the same way that other centres around that enjoy a railway station or a tier one railway station or a transitway need to do their share of the heavy lifting as well in terms of density.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** In terms of discussions with the Government on the public transport infrastructure, are they currently in progress or to be determined?

**GAIL CONNOLLY:** They are ongoing. The council has had a consistent position when it comes to the provision of light rail—both stages. We've had a consistent position with the provision of metro in terms of where it should go and the number of stops. We have also had a consistent position with our integrated transport plan of where the next phases of metro rail should go. So we are very much firmly looking at the next 25 years. It is presumptuous to say it's a given that we think that Metro West will happen. There will be a couple of railway stations in the Rosehill area around that peninsula, but we are now focused on out to the west to the airport; future

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**CORRECTED**

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connections, perhaps up to the north, Epping; very much on the Parramatta to Kogarah railway line, which is something that both councils—Georges River Council and Parramatta council—have been working on for a while. We have designed the route. We have got it ready to go. We are looking way beyond what is on the current books, if I can call it like that, and looking to the future and planning for those future corridors: metro, light rail, bus, active transport.

**The CHAIR:** I will jump in with a question around the Parramatta to Kogarah rail link. Can you explain to the Committee a little bit more as to where that is up to in terms of being before government? That is a proposal that the two councils have worked on. Can you expand on that for us?

**GAIL CONNOLLY:** Correct. I was the general manager at Georges River Council a couple of years ago. We worked closely with Parramatta council to design and plan a corridor for the Kogarah to Parramatta rail link. There is an entire document called the River Rail which shows the potential corridor and how it could perform and what sort of service it should be. It very much has the opportunity to connect one economic powerhouse, being the airport at Botany—the Sydney airport—with the west. It is a document that both councils have supported for a while. It is very much based on known transport corridors that Transport have been identifying for 10, 20 years. It's that critical north-south corridor that does not exist in our railway system. You only have to look at the Sydney metropolitan rail design to see that there is no north-south connection, which is why everyone gets on King Georges Road and drives every day from Hurstville to Parramatta.

We have a few north-south transit ways and they do what they can, but we all know the heavy lifters are metro rail and heavy rail. That document has been with Transport for NSW for some time. It is recognised as a critical corridor and one of the highly travelled corridors, but I don't think it's emerged yet as something, in terms of funding, for further alignment investigations. It certainly doesn't enjoy the same status as the potential light rail stage two corridor, where we know the planning has been done and they're looking at land acquisitions et cetera. My understanding is that it's certainly something for the future but nothing that's been seriously progressed by Transport for NSW at this stage. It's one of many corridors they've identified. That's one example of the councils doing the heavy lifting where they thought that the Government—Planning and Transport—weren't giving enough priority. That document has been in existence for—I'm going to guess and say—about three or four years and it's readily available on the websites of the councils.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** I'll just jump in on that. One of the areas targeted for increased density is Berala. That's one of the stations on the link from Bankstown through to Lidcombe. Obviously, that's going to be adversely affected by the conversion of the existing rail link to metro. I understand there's an existing rail corridor that runs all the way to Parramatta. If there's going to be further infill development in Berala, is that not a time to perhaps look at that first link—the Bankstown to Parramatta line—and be advocating for direct rail services from Bankstown to Parramatta using the existing rail network?

**The CHAIR:** That was also mentioned in Cumberland's submission.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** I'll direct it to Cumberland and to Parramatta, if you want to offer some comment on that.

**DANIEL CAVALLO:** I understand many years ago there was a peak link along the Bankstown line that went to Parramatta and that was removed due to conflicts of the broader rail network and facilitating that service as well as the demand. I think, strategically, having an improved mass transit link between Bankstown and Parramatta makes sense. I think there's opportunities to not just use existing network where you can but also look at further opportunities. We know in Cumberland's instance, for example, with River Rail—while it doesn't call out the section within Cumberland beyond the existing stations, we've got our Woodville Road corridor and we've got Merrylands, which is our strategic centre.

There are other ways that we can improve the links, but I think what's important is having the planning in place, as Gail said. Councils have done the planning in the absence of the State. Our council's local strategic planning statement calls out these longer term corridors that government has identified—both the Parramatta to Bankstown link as well as a link from Westmead to Western Sydney airport—but what's missing is the leadership from the State Government to actually do the initial planning. That planning could influence land-use decisions, it could influence investment decisions and it could influence how we preserve that corridor for the longer term. Even if government couldn't build it today but if there was a longer term need for it, we could make sure we're securing it now.

So I think longer term there's benefit of it. I think shorter term it's probably looking at other networks such as the bus networks and improving that connectivity, because we know that there's significant pressure on the train network. Council wants more services. The risk I see with that proposal is that the strengthening of the

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**CORRECTED**

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existing overcrowded services may be impacted if you provided that link on the existing infrastructure, which is providing a small segment rather than those dominant flows at the moment. I think there's longer term need but there's probably some shorter term opportunities. We can look at frequency on buses, for example, but I think longer term, governments identify these dotted lines. It's about having the early planning work and working with the councils to give a bit more definition so we can all move forward and plan accordingly.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Those stations are at risk, aren't they? Once the connection is lost with the existing rail network from Bankstown through to Lidcombe, it's just going to be a spur line effectively. Isn't that the case? The viability of that line is potentially brought into question. Once you have the west and southwest metro put in place, you're going to have just a short service of four or five stations. How do you maintain the viability of that?

**DANIEL CAVALLO:** What government's foreshadowed is that, for Regents Park and Berala, which is in Cumberland, they'll have a direct city service restored via Lidcombe, which was an old timetable that had that service, and they'll be reinstated. As you rightly mentioned, there will be that shuttle service between Lidcombe and Bankstown. Potentially, there's an option as part of the planning to look at how you could integrate that network, but I think that's a broader discussion for government and for the councils, rather than making a definitive commitment today on that.

**The CHAIR:** Just in relation to the Metro West project, the Parramatta council's submission, Ms Connelly, really stresses the need for additional stations between Sydney Olympic Park and Parramatta. You have mentioned Camellia, I think, and Silverwater/Newington. Just tell us why that's so important and why you think, while the Government is building this metro and planning it, that that must be included now in any review of the costs and any new business cases.

**GAIL CONNOLLY:** My view is pretty simple. The life expectancy, the lifetime of a metro railway line is more than 100 years, 120 years, and we don't want people sitting around in 120 years, looking back and saying, "We should've built those two or three railway stations in that peninsula when we had the chance, and now we've lost that opportunity forever, for the sake of"—my understanding is it's around two years and \$2 billion extra to put in those station boxes. We shouldn't lose that opportunity just for short-term delivery. In my view—and I know this isn't shared by other councils along the line. But, certainly, City of Parramatta's view is that the opportunity should be taken now to provide, at the very least, those station boxes, because we don't want people in a hundred years time saying, "If only they had put in two or three extra stations." For the sake of a delay now and extra funds now it will be worth it in the future.

Planning a metropolitan area—putting my old town-planning hat on—is something that you do in chunks of 30 or 50 years, in the same way that the Greater Sydney Parklands were planned 30 years before they were delivered, the M7 corridor et cetera, the airport. I was involved 30 years ago in preserving the land for that airport. These things take time. We don't want to be here in 30, 50, 100 years time saying, "If only we had provided those station boxes." My submission to the inquiry around Metro West was that those boxes should be planned for and provided now. And, even if they're not fully constructed, the fit-out infrastructure should be there if the Government wanted to come along and fill them in later, but the corridor should be absolutely planned and delivered and constructed, and so should the station boxes. The final location—the council's position is Camellia and Newington. Whether it ends up as Silverwater doesn't matter, but my submission was that the Government should be planning the entire peninsula, not just looking at a couple of housing bubbles around a couple of potential station sites.

That entire peninsula needs to be reviewed. It used to form an important employment lands role. The entire peninsula does not necessarily provide that role anymore. Parts of it do, around Silverwater, very important employment lands, but north of that you've got old, contaminated sites that are probably not going to be suitable for employment lands entirely in the future. The Government needs to take hold of the entire peninsula and have a good look at it. Certainly, the council's prepared to zero in and focus on Rosehill Gardens Racecourse, but that broader exercise needs to be done by the Government, and it needs to be done fast, and the original thinking around the metro was speed. It was pre-COVID. The critical measurement was productivity. You had to be able to get from Parramatta CBD to Sydney CBD in under 20 minutes. Then COVID came. Everyone worked from home. Everyone's travel patterns changed. Everyone works from home now. The interconnections within a city are now proving to be far more important in terms of cities and their productivity, rather than necessarily connections between Parramatta and the CBD.

My view is that you cannot have a seven-kilometre section of metro line without stops. No other city in the world does that. No other global city in the world does that, and we should not be doing it here in Sydney. There are opportunities there now to futureproof it, put those two station boxes in and get on with it. Who knows?

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The housing supply that that entire peninsula can deliver will certainly be greater than 25,000 houses if that work is done. Without those two stations, I'm not sure that it can be more than 25,000 houses. That's my view.

**The CHAIR:** We're technically out of time. Mr D'Adam, I know you have got a couple of burning questions. Do you want to ask one?

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Yes. We talked about interconnectivity. The Parramatta Light Rail project, stage two, is projected to stop at Carter Street. I think the Cumberland council is suggesting that it should link up to Lidcombe station. Can you elaborate on how that might work?

**LISA LAKE:** Yes. There has been quite a lot of consideration at council about this, so I'll let Mr Cavallo give you some more detail.

**DANIEL CAVALLO:** Thank you, Mayor. In terms of light rail stage two for Parramatta, as you said, it stops at Carter Street, which is at the tail end of a developing area. But that tail end isn't closely linked to an interchange. Council has done some initial planning work, and council has resolved and put that forward to the State Government as part of our submissions for the EIS for Parramatta Light Rail, stage two. We see that for a fairly short link between Carter Street and Lidcombe, on a fairly direct route, we can link employment areas, we can link retail and we can link an interchange, and actually make it easier for people to get around that area but also alleviate some of the pressure at Lidcombe as an interchange. At the moment, everyone is coming to Lidcombe by car or being dropped off because those strong transport links aren't in place. There's a lot of benefit with a short link that improves the connectivity of the broader light rail system but also will help local movements and take some of the pressure off places like Lidcombe, which is a large interchange but also an area that has got density growing as we speak.

**The CHAIR:** When you said it's small, how many kilometres are we talking?

**DANIEL CAVALLO:** It's about three kilometres.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. That's very interesting to finish on. I'm sorry to have to finish with these witnesses; we could keep going. Thank you again for your extensive submissions and your work in this area. Hopefully this Committee can make recommendations that you will be pleased with.

**(The witnesses withdrew.)**

**(Luncheon adjournment)**

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**Ms ANNE STUART**, Director, Planning, Education and International Programme, Family Planning Australia, sworn and examined

**Ms CAECILIA ROTH**, Senior Policy Officer, Family Planning Australia, affirmed and examined

**The CHAIR:** Welcome to the next session of today's hearing. Do either of you have a short opening statement to make for the Committee?

**CAECILIA ROTH:** I just wanted to start by thanking the Committee for the opportunity to give evidence at today's hearing. Family Planning Australia is the leading provider of reproductive and sexual health services in New South Wales. We are now in our ninety-eighth year of operation, working with communities across New South Wales and in the Pacific region and engaging in advocacy at local, State, national and international level. Everybody in every family should have access to high quality reproductive and sexual health education, information and services. We do this primarily through our fixed clinics here in Western Sydney in Newington, Fairfield and Penrith, as well as Newcastle, Dubbo, some outreach clinics in other metropolitan and rural locations, and we have phone and online telehealth services as well.

We also provide health promotion activities and resources to communities across New South Wales, and our research centre contributes to the sector's evidence base. Education programs are a significant way that we build capacity of the health, education and community sectors. We do this by training doctors, nurses and midwives to provide clinical services in reproductive health care. We also train teachers, disability workers, youth workers and other professionals to deliver inclusive and evidence-based sexuality education and support. Face-to-face training is mainly held in the training rooms at our head office facility in Newington, as well as some other New South Wales locations and some online options.

Our submission for this inquiry focused on the need to improve public transport in Western Sydney to provide better access to health services, particularly around the site of our office in Newington, where we relocated from Ashfield in December 2021. Whilst our Penrith and Fairfield clinics are close to train stations, public transport in the Newington area is limited, which impacts on the ability of our clients to access services, including course participants attending training. Much of our service delivery is targeted towards priority population groups who have a greater reliance on public transport. This includes young people, people travelling from rural, remote and regional locations, people with disability, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Our team of around 100 staff based in Newington are also impacted, with around 50 per cent of the staff dependent on cars for their commute—private vehicles—and those depending on public transport frequently feeling the frustration of infrequent bus connections and delays, resulting in long travel times, often double or more the time it would take to drive the same distance. Poor transport connections in Newington also have been a factor contributing to some issues attracting and retaining the specialised workforce that we need to run our services. Access to sexual and reproductive health care and support are essential to physical and mental health and wellbeing, so we ask the Government to prioritise accessible and affordable public transport in Western Sydney, such as including a train station in or close to Newington in the planned Sydney Metro West rail project, and other options to shorten travel times and reduce traffic congestion.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. It is good to have businesses and organisations represented in this inquiry. We have not had that, so your perspective is very important. When you moved from Ashfield to Newington were there expectations at that time that there would be different public transport options than there are now, or is it the case that you were surprised at the lack of public transport options after Family Planning moved there?

**ANNE STUART:** We investigated fully what was there and we knew that there were bus linkages from Lidcombe and Rhodes, et cetera. We were surprised at how unreliable some of those bus options were. A really good example is the on-demand buses. We knew that they came from the station and could service our area, but they really are variable in their reliability. Our staff can't rely on them to get to work on time, basically.

**The CHAIR:** They're different in their variability, I think were your words, so not reliable. Could you give us some examples of what that means? These are the bus services from—was it a particular train station?

**ANNE STUART:** An example I was given from a staff member today was the bus service from Lidcombe station, the on-demand bus. It's about the responsiveness. You call it up like you would a taxi or an Uber. Sometimes it's there within, say, 10 minutes but other times it can be a lot longer to actually get there to provide a service from Lidcombe station to the Newington site.

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**CAECILIA ROTH:** And some of the other ones, like the bus services that link into some of the train stations like Auburn, Strathfield, Parramatta, are not always on time and they're not that frequent, so sometimes they might be only every 20 or 25 minutes, particularly after hours when we're—we have core office hours up to five but our clinics do run until eight on two evenings a week and on Saturdays, so it's less frequent after hours. People can spend quite a bit of time just waiting for connections, whether that's waiting for a bus or waiting for a connection then to the train station. One of the stories that we share is people on their way to Strathfield station often missing a connection because of the traffic on Parramatta Road, and you're sitting on the bus waiting for that. So all of those things just add to the travel time and frustration with getting to and from our Newington site.

**The CHAIR:** Do you have figures or estimates of how many people access your services, have to travel to your services, every week, for example? Do you have those numbers?

**ANNE STUART:** Within our submission we said that there is approximately just under 13,000 people that access both Newington and Penrith. I can't accurately tell you the Newington numbers.

**CAECILIA ROTH:** Yes, I think that would be over a year.

**ANNE STUART:** Over a 12-month period.

**The CHAIR:** At this point in time, how are they getting there currently, largely?

**ANNE STUART:** By car.

**The CHAIR:** Are you finding that your clients, patients, are able to—that they're driving cars, that they own cars, because I think you also talked about the vulnerable and socio-economically disadvantaged communities?

**ANNE STUART:** Yes, our current clients are accessing the service. But, as an NGO, part of what we're funded by NSW Health to do is to access marginalised populations and we know surrounding in Auburn and Cumberland and those areas that there are more marginalised populations, and for us it is about the people who don't have cars, who aren't getting access to the services and probably can't afford to get a taxi or an Uber to get to our service. Added to that is we know that we're a niche service as a reproductive and sexual health service. We know that in Western Sydney there is a lack of health services and a lack of reproductive health services, and some of our health services are quite time critical. So for us it is about the clients we are not seeing and it's about improving access for the Western Sydney population to all health services, not just ours.

**The CHAIR:** Could you talk about the difference moving out to Newington compared to Ashfield—just a general sentiment of accessibility in terms of transport, being somewhere that had those connections? Is there a very stark difference between where you are now and Ashfield?

**CAECILIA ROTH:** For staff, I think definitely there is a difference and we did have people—I mean, obviously, when a business moves there is also going to be an impact on staff. But I think it was, as Anne was saying, people didn't expect that it would have as much impact because it looked good on paper, that there were going to be lots of links. I don't have an exact number, but there was a proportion of staff who ended up moving on, leaving the organisation, because of so much additional travel time and cost as well with tolls and just having a different route and spending more time on the way to and from work. We don't have numbers around that but we know that there is definitely a proportion there. With staff, definitely there was a very different feeling about the ease of getting there and back. With the clients, Anne might have more of an idea.

**ANNE STUART:** We haven't actually surveyed the clients in terms of the transport options. We expected moving from Ashfield to Newington that we would lose some clients around the inner west area, but we were also committed because the highest reproductive and sexual health need is in south-west and west. So we made a commitment to move towards the need where we provide services. I guess the difference for us with the services at Newington rather than Ashfield is we have a day surgery. Not only are clients coming for general consultations and contraceptives and STI tests and cervical screening; they're coming for day surgery from around metropolitan Sydney, from Newcastle, from Dubbo et cetera, which adds more complexity.

**The CHAIR:** What you're advocating for is an additional—which a lot of witnesses to this inquiry have done—is it Metro West in terms of an additional station? You're no doubt strongly arguing for the Newington Metro West station. So that's what you'd like to see. That's not out until probably 2032. Is there anything in the meantime for the Newington area that you're advocating for or that you know that other local businesses or organisations would like to see?

**ANNE STUART:** I'm not a transport expert and we would love to see other options to shorten travel times and reduce travel congestion. One of my staff members today was saying that even things like a safe cycle

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path from the stations to the Newington area. They would actually ride from Lidcombe station or even Olympic Park, but at the moment they have to cross too many busy roads and it's just too stressful for them. I guess in the interim, knowing full well not only the cost but the time delay in Metro West, looking at the bus connectivity and services to be extended in terms of, after five o'clock, a little bit more reliability or even more reliable on-demand buses available.

**CAECILIA ROTH:** Or more frequency as well.

**ANNE STUART:** Correct.

**CAECILIA ROTH:** That would help.

**The CHAIR:** You've mentioned the bicycle path. Do you know whether there are any areas where that could go? Is it that they have to cross multiple busy roads to get from Lidcombe to Newington to your clinic, your facility? Is it clear to them? In terms of the people who would like to ride from the station that there is a distinct—what's the word I'm looking for?

**ANNE STUART:** Pathway.

**The CHAIR:** Yes, pathway, thank you.

**ANNE STUART:** I don't know but we'd be happy to get back to you on it.

**The CHAIR:** Yes, if you could ask people who are keen cyclists. That's often one thing that is looked out for, that here is a perfect place for that bike path to go.

**CAECILIA ROTH:** I think crossing Parramatta Road is one of the big ones, because all of the train stations are on the other side of it. That's obviously a major issue. You can't just go down a motorway. That's one of the things, finding places where they can cross over that. Yes, some of those other major arterial roads but we'd have to ask. We don't have so many cyclists to us but we do have one in particular who is very keen and has investigated multiple routes.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** I don't know if you're aware, there is a proposal to convert one of the rail corridors that runs from Lidcombe through to Olympic Park into a rail trail, so effectively a bike path that would cross the M4 and Parramatta Road and create that connectivity between Lidcombe. Is that something that you would be supportive of?

**ANNE STUART:** Absolutely.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Whereabouts in Newington are you? Are you on the Silverwater side of Newington?

**ANNE STUART:** We're on Holker Street. We're just opposite the shopping centre. We're between the shopping centre and the justice facility, Silverwater jail.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Obviously, there is not just your organisation but there's a need for transport connectivity to the MMRC at Silverwater there. A lot of people want to visit family members who are being held there. Obviously there's a need for a regular and reliable bus service there. That's something that you would support?

**ANNE STUART:** Absolutely.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** I also understand that the Parramatta Light Rail stage two is intended to kind of run to the bottom of Holker Street. Were you aware of that?

**CAECILIA ROTH:** No.

**ANNE STUART:** No.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** When that stage two development is finalised, there's likely to be light rail that will connect—well, we had a submission from Cumberland council, who appeared before us just before the lunch break, proposing that the light rail be extended to Lidcombe station, so that would create connectivity from Lidcombe station through to the bottom of Holker Street and then obviously connect through to Parramatta. That's something that you would also be very supportive of?

**ANNE STUART:** Very.

**CAECILIA ROTH:** Yes, that sounds really good.

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**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Thank you very much for your submission and time. I very much appreciate it all. Just in terms of priority, what would it really be? Is it really the bus in terms of the frequency, more services?

**ANNE STUART:** You've got a priority and you've got a time factor, so if there are things that we can do in the interim whilst the light rail comes, it would be buses and cycleways because I think buses would be accessed more by staff and clients. But certainly the cycleway would be supported as well.

**CAECILIA ROTH:** We didn't know about the light rail but I think we'd be very interested to find out where that would be happening and when that would be happening, because I think people would be quite interested in that because we do have a number of people that go out in the direction of Parramatta and also Lidcombe. So we'd be quite interested to find out more about that.

**The CHAIR:** Stage two, which the Government hasn't committed to yet either, in terms of Parramatta Light Rail—not wanting to get too political with you—do you have any messages around the length of time the projects are taking and trying to get some solutions earlier? Note that's impossible for light rail and metro as we mentioned. You've talked about the cyclepath. Is there anything else? For example, you also talk about on-demand buses, but are there other types of shuttle buses? Could the bus services be improved to Newington?

**ANNE STUART:** Of course, yes.

**The CHAIR:** Who operates the bus services at the moment that go there?

**ANNE STUART:** They're all government buses.

**CAECILIA ROTH:** Yes, they're all Sydney buses.

**The CHAIR:** At the moment in peak hour, what is the frequency? You said at the very beginning that staff just can't rely on them or clients—probably staff in terms of getting to work at a particular time but I assume that's the same with appointments—can't rely on them. Where are these buses coming from and why are they so infrequent? Is it because they're full? Is it because of staffing issues? Do they just not turn up sometimes? Do you have any more details of that?

**CAECILIA ROTH:** In my experience a lot of the time, they're coming late or if they're coming, the travel time is longer than expected and that means that people are missing connections. A lot of the time with buses, obviously that's about traffic, just that reliance on the roads and having so much volume of traffic on the roads. If a bus is coming and then it's taking longer to get where it's going, it's usually because it's sitting in traffic. That seems to be one of the major reasons why people get frustrated with it, and then just the frequency of it.

If you've only got buses coming every 20 minutes or every 25 minutes for some of them, even during peak hour, that's quite a long wait. If they're not coming exactly on time and you miss one, you're spending a lot of time waiting for the next one. So those sorts of things, I think it's about coordination and then it's about reliability and then having realistic timetables. All of those things, they're interrelated but then come back to some of those bigger questions around reducing reliance on cars and getting traffic off the roads, and that's where something like a light rail or the Metro West heavy rail would be ideal because it would be taking cars off the road, essentially.

**The CHAIR:** You said that a significant part of your client base are coming from south-west and north-west Sydney—those kinds of growth centre areas. At the moment, when you are approached by a client to come to your facility, you have to tell them how to get there, or what you say on your website. What instructions are you giving them? Is it largely, "The best way to get to our facility is by car"? It's difficult for you to recommend public transport options to them?

**ANNE STUART:** We give them the parking options, the bus and where the bus stops are and where the stations are. We give them all options.

**CAECILIA ROTH:** We have a map and some descriptions on the website. You hear people explaining over the phone as well. We have plenty of parking and it's free parking for them to come where we are, which is actually one of the advantages over Ashfield, where I think we had maybe three client parking spaces, whereas now we have a lot more space. So that was another bonus of our new site. But we give people all of the options, and then obviously they need to make decisions around how they can best get there.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you very much for attending. Thank you for your submission and for highlighting the importance of more train solutions to Newington.

**(The witnesses withdrew.)**



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**Ms SANAA SHAH**, Western Sydney Community Campaigner, Sweltering Cities, affirmed and examined

**Ms EMMA BACON**, Executive Director, Sweltering Cities, affirmed and examined

**Mr MICHAEL TIMMS**, Co-chair, New South Wales Chapter, Australasian College of Road Safety, sworn and examined

**The CHAIR:** Let's kick off again and start this next session. We'll go straight to opening statements. Ms Bacon?

**EMMA BACON:** Sweltering Cities is an organisation that works directly with communities impacted by extreme heat to advocate for more liveable, equitable and sustainable cities. We are a health promotion charity trying to reduce the prevalence of heat-related disease in communities across Australia. We started and did our first work in Western Sydney almost exactly four years ago. We have had since then thousands of conversations with people across Western Sydney about heat health impacts. Western Sydney faces a much higher burden of disease than other parts of the city due to extremely high temperatures during summer and also higher risk factors, including age, disability, socio-economic status and other factors that mean that people in Western Sydney are more likely to get sick or die during heatwaves.

Through those conversations, we found that issues of accessible public transport kept on coming up again and again. People would tell us that they couldn't even leave the house on hot days because they would walk down the road on unshaded paths and then wait 20 minutes in the sun with no shelter and no seat for a bus that might not even turn up. It led to them feeling ill. It led to them staying inside and becoming isolated. Very early on in this process I spoke to a woman with a young child who had her daughter on 1 January. She told me about the incredible anxiety she felt of taking her daughter in Penrith with her baby strapped to her chest on a 40-degree day, waiting for the bus, and the concern she had for her daughter's health and safety. Just trying to get to medical appointments in summer in Western Sydney is a really important issue for a lot of people.

In 2022 we started looking at the Busted Bus Stops program. This is because we found that the heat health impacts of having unsheltered bus stops were leading to heat-related disease—dehydration, sunburn. We've worked with the Cancer Council to specifically advocate connecting the fact that skin cancer is Australia's national cancer, as they say, and that being in unsheltered bus stops for minutes—hours, potentially, each week—is a higher risk factor. We also talked about the social impacts of really low-quality public transport infrastructure, including, again, isolation and feelings of disconnection, which make heat health risks an even higher problem.

We found through our work that there is no central map of public transport infrastructure that Transport for NSW has when it comes to bus shelters, seats or shade. It's hard for people to navigate what is an accessible stop. In order to solve that problem, we worked with community residents across Western Sydney to map their local stops. Last year we had mapped 500 alone in the Penrith area. Penrith—this local government area, this electorate—is somewhere that gets to over 50 degrees on the ground, if you can imagine standing on the road and it is 50 degrees where you are. We found through this community research project that over 70 per cent of stops have no shelter, shade or seat. The people of Penrith, whether they're going to a hospital, whether they're going to school, whether they're in an aged-care facility—all different areas are facing these extremely hot and in fact dangerous conditions just trying to get around their suburb.

We are advocating for the State Government to fund bus shelters, seats and public transport infrastructure across the west, specifically funding bus shelters for local government to implement. When we worked in the Penrith area, Penrith council reported that they have a budget to install four new shelters each year, which is just going to be a drop in the bucket of this problem. Blacktown council, which is another highly impacted area that my colleague Sanaa can speak to—we've got some more case studies—has budget for one additional shelter per ward, per year. That's five new shelters per year in one of the highest growth areas of our city. This is a problem that needs to be solved by the State Government. As I said, we have some more case studies, some stories from around the area, but this is a summary of what we'll be talking about today. The totally inadequate bus stop infrastructure in Western Sydney is having significant health impacts on the community. It's an easily solvable problem.

**MICHAEL TIMMS:** The Australasian College of Road Safety is the region's peak membership association for road safety, with a vision of eliminating death and serious injury. New South Wales is currently experiencing the highest levels of road trauma this decade. Last year over 350 people were killed in crashes on our roads. These additional 70 deaths represent a 25 per cent increase over 2022. Crashes in New South Wales also send 10,000 people to hospital each year. ACRS appreciates the opportunity to appear today because road trauma, much of it involving private motor vehicle usage, will not be reduced without a corresponding increase

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in public transport ridership. The United Nations Second Decade of Action on Road Safety and the Sustainable Development Goals are now aligned. Public transport, safe walking and cycling are key elements of road safety and sustainable development.

Finally, I inform the Committee of two road transport safety incidents occurring since submissions closed that are relevant to points made in our submission. Only last month a passenger train struck a large trailer, which was allegedly on a level crossing at Vineyard in Western Sydney. Fortunately no persons were reported injured, but a 16-year-old boy is currently before the courts. We were also saddened by the death in October last year of a 13-year-old boy at Appin in the Macarthur area. The student was crossing the road after getting off a school bus when he was hit by a truck. Road safety is of paramount consideration in any review of current and future public transport needs in Western Sydney or elsewhere.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Mr Timms. Thank you both for your submissions. We've read them, and they will be taken into consideration as well. I just want to go to Sweltering Cities, to begin with. What's the situation now? The evidence that we've received from your submission around the slow rate of which these shelters are being built—and fully funded by councils, it seems—I think is shocking. That's what we're trying to find out. How are they funded? What's the level of New South Wales Government contribution compared to local council? Is there a strategy by the New South Wales Government to fix and upgrade bus shelters across the State?

**EMMA BACON:** As far as we're aware, there is no strategy on this front. Bus shelters, unfortunately, fall into a bit of a governance—the governance around them is sometimes unclear, because in some local government areas they're entirely contracted out to private contractors, such as the City of Sydney, for example. All of their public infrastructure is done by advertisers, who build the shelters. In other areas, there is some State Government responsibility for major roads, we've been told. In other areas, it's local council who are responsible for installing, maintaining. Then you have bits of infrastructure—chairs, things like that—that people aren't quite sure how they got there, when they were installed. As I said, there is no centralised map or data about this. I would say that there is no current plan around this.

**The CHAIR:** It almost sounds like it's something easy to push into the other agencies, the other level of government's responsibility, if it's not clear.

**EMMA BACON:** Yes, we find that local government are being told it's their responsibility, but they don't have the resources to fix the problem. My colleague Sanaa can also speak to the issues specifically in areas like Schofields, which are new growth areas, as an example of where this is a problem, this is very centrally planned, but local government doesn't have the resources. Do you want to tell them about Schofields?

**SANAA SHAH:** Yes. So our mapping exercise—we did over 2,500 bus stops—we found some very stark differences, actually, between Western Sydney and the inner west and other wealthier suburbs in Sydney. In the inner west, so suburbs such as Ashfield and Strathfield, 34 per cent of the bus stops don't have shade, shelter or seating. Compare this to the north-west, which, as we know, is a hotspot for growth—it's projected, I think, to grow by 109 per cent—and you have 73 per cent of bus stops that don't have shelter, shade or seating. You'd hope that in suburbs which we know are hotter, like the north-west, there would be more infrastructure, not less. So, yes, it's a very shocking issue, and I think it can be easily remedied.

**The CHAIR:** I have a lot to ask about bus shelters; I'm sure other members will as well. Mr Timms, do you have research in areas such as—we've talked a lot in this Committee about the eastern suburbs and how much public transport they have access to compared to areas which are heavily public transport-reliant. Is there a correlated difference between road accidents where people are less reliant on public transport?

**MICHAEL TIMMS:** Certainly it depends on alternatives and what options people have. Some people feel as if they have no choice but to—for argument's sake—use a private motor vehicle. One of the things that we've talked about in our submission was new housing developments going in throughout the Macarthur and also western suburbs and the lack of public transport facilities, really, giving people no choice but to use private motor vehicles, and that feeds into the tolling debate about road tolls and reducing the cost for people. But we would say that there are alternatives to road tolls that don't involve the use of other roads and that one of them could be trains or buses. I suppose, in terms of data, I looked closely—and, again, I looked at it the other day—at the public transport ridership data that crated during COVID, for obvious reasons, and it really hasn't gone back up to that 2019 level. Unlike road trauma, which is now—we are now back to where we were, in terms of road deaths, in 2019. It's interesting that you talk about bus shelters. One of the issues of bus shelters where you do have heavily treed areas is footpath distortion and damage due to tree roots. That then feeds into another hazard for public transport users of trip hazards. You can see where this issue really—the strands of the spaghetti really do reach out in a number of ways.

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**The CHAIR:** Can I check that public transport usage hasn't come back to pre-2019 levels? You were having a look at that in terms of data. Was that specifically Western Sydney related? Did you have examples of that, or was it overall, Sydney-wide?

**MICHAEL TIMMS:** Well, it is overall, but there is open-source data which provides you with bus ridership and train ridership. If you look at the Central Coast line, ridership is down; the western line, ridership is down; the airport line, which goes out to Campbelltown, ridership is down. So there is capacity to increase public transport usage.

**The CHAIR:** One last question in terms of your submission for me was that you emphasised getting rid of level crossings in New South Wales. In terms of how that relates to Western Sydney—particularly Western Sydney in terms of safety—the stats that you have provided, are they broken down in terms of the collisions between trains and cars in Western Sydney, or is that across all of New South Wales? Sorry to dive so deep into the data.

**MICHAEL TIMMS:** No, I'm glad you did. I have to say that we've been blessed in Sydney in terms of level crossing removal. A lot of the heavy lifting was done in the 1970s and the 1980s. I grew up in Merrylands. There were a couple of level crossings near where I grew up which were replaced many, many decades ago, and that has obviously reduced that interface between trains and vehicles. That's where the risk lies. If you can have grade separation, that eliminates that risk. They have been struggling in Melbourne. You have probably followed the level crossing removal program that they have undertaken in Melbourne in the last five or so years. That's because they didn't do the work that Sydney did, so now they have had to undertake a massive program. Level crossing safety gets a little bit—it's not present of mind, in a lot of ways, in Sydney motorists because it's not something that we have to deal with on a daily basis. But there are something like 1,400 level crossings throughout New South Wales, obviously mostly in regional areas, but you do have some of them, and development is now encroaching on those level crossings, as we had with that incident last week.

**The CHAIR:** Mr Timms, we're trying to stick to Western Sydney, though I'm tempted to go beyond that.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** I want to ask you about bus stop standards. I think in the proceedings before lunch we asked about bus stops, and the gentleman from Blue Mountains City Council indicated that there was guidance in terms of how you construct bus stops but there wasn't really a statewide standard. Can you maybe elaborate on what the state of play is in terms of statewide standards? Is there best practice in terms of what a good bus stop looks like?

**EMMA BACON:** That's a really interesting question. This is something we looked up really early on, because a lot of our data collection was also done using Google Maps to identify where the stops are, using the bus stops and longitude and latitude. You will find a little wheelchair accessibility sign on Google Maps for stops where they are a bit of dirt and then a small bit of concrete is the bus stop location, and that is classified as accessible. We are still trying to track that down. As far as we can see, the main standard is about it being a point of departure. There's a lot about wheelchair accessibility. So it's about whether people can get from the bus stop to an accessible bus, and that is what the standard is. As far as we can find, there is no standard around what the bus shelter itself should be like—if there should be seating, if there should be lighting, if there should be information.

What this means is that there has been some funding around people with vision impairments—the dots that you have on the ground to help people navigate. You will have instances in parts of Western Sydney where there will be no footpath, just grass, and then a small block of concrete with some blocks on it indicating that this is a bus stop point of departure, but it doesn't connect to anything else, including any other pavement.

As far as we can tell, there are no accessibility standards for the shelters themselves. This is obviously a big problem and there should be community consultation with people with disabilities, with carers, with schools and with others to say what is the best standard for bus shelters in terms of materials to make sure that they don't get too hot, and to say what is the give and take between shade or visibility. Is safety an issue, in which case, should there be lighting at night, or other information? It is a big gap and actually a huge opportunity to consult with the community about what they'd like to see. Bus shelters or bus stops are more than just a point of departure. People wait there. So what should it be like as they wait there? As far as we know, those standards don't exist.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** There is no Australian standard for bus stops?

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**EMMA BACON:** We haven't been able to find a New South Wales standard. We haven't looked for a Federal standard. I'm not sure if there is a Federal standard around that. But, regardless, the bus stops in Western Sydney aren't being held to any standard at the moment.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** I'm sure you're right. In some of the material around your bus stops campaign you made a statement around renewably powered transport. Is there some nexus between bus stops and renewable energy—is that what you're suggesting?

**EMMA BACON:** This comes from feedback we've also got from people, especially around schools, that having buses idling, waiting for a long time—that if they are petrol-powered buses and if they are waiting next to you for a long time, the fumes can have a big impact on people and they make it less pleasant to be waiting there at the bus shelter. We also know, as an organisation that is focused on cooling down our suburbs, making our homes safer and making our planet and our cities more sustainable, that renewably powered public transport is going to help to reduce the carbon emissions. That will contribute to meeting our carbon emission goals, which will mean that the planet won't get as hot and Western Sydney won't get as hot. That is partly about fumes and partly about contributing to the broader New South Wales carbon emission reduction goals.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Does your organisation have a system for rating the quality of bus stops? Is there a scale between totally terrible and fantastic?

**EMMA BACON:** What we did was run a campaign for the worst bus stop in Sydney. We took our thousands of bus stops that people had sent us or sent descriptions of, and we selected the worst nine. Of those nine, we allowed people to vote and we identified that the worst bus stop in Sydney is one in Erskine Park which is along a narrow road with lots of heavy truck traffic. There is grass just here that has snakes in it. There is no shelter or shade. It is just next to a whole lot of houses. Apparently, according to the data, two or three people use it a year, which is unsurprising since, again, there are snakes there. We have focused more on identifying what the examples are of really bad ones, which are incredibly common, more than rating the existing good ones, partly because we work predominantly in Western Sydney. If we wanted to rate the really good ones, we would probably have to work in other parts of the city.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Finally, can I ask about what response you have had from Transport for NSW to your campaign? What level of engagement have you had, and what kind of response have you had in terms of what you are proposing?

**EMMA BACON:** Sweltering Cities is a member of the Western Sydney heat taskforce, which WSROC runs. Through that, and through other conversations with people in the department of environment and other areas, we have talked to people from the department of transport and they have been very positive, but I would not say that those are official communications from people at a high level. It is more feedback from staff saying we agree this is an issue and we'd like to see some change. This comes back to the governance question that you asked about earlier. Whose responsibility is it to make sure that the people of Western Sydney can catch the bus? Is it council? Is it State? That becomes a problem. The governance issue has come up when we have talked to Transport for NSW staff.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Have you done any work in terms of how much it would cost to bring the bus stops of Western Sydney up to a suitable standard?

**EMMA BACON:** We believe that an investment of \$20 million in the next budget would help fund up to 2,000 shelters across the city. We think that we should target areas around hospitals, schools, social housing, aged-care facilities—things like that—and that that, as an initial investment, would go a long way towards addressing the problem in some target areas.

**The CHAIR:** I have further questions on that but I'm going to go to Ms Merton.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Thank you very much for your submissions and participation. If I could pick up on the bus stops, Ms Bacon. In terms of a community opinion or willingness in terms of shelters and wanting shelters on bus stops in local neighbourhoods, is there anything that you've picked up on that?

**EMMA BACON:** We've heard from our big community surveys that the majority of people would like better bus infrastructure. My colleague, Sanaa, has actually prepared some stories that we specifically chose for you to hear from members of the public directly.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Were they on the back of your submission, those comments?

**SANAA SHAH:** Yes.

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**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** I read those, yes.

**SANAA SHAH:** And new ones as well.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** They're lovely.

**SANAA SHAH:** As Emma was saying, we run the Summer Survey, which is Australia's biggest community survey on heat, health and homes. One very major thing that's come up is a lot of people want better bus stop infrastructure. That's a way that they'll see that their suburb can be transformed into a more sustainable spot. I think it shows that there is really large support for better bus stop infrastructure and, like Emma was saying, we do have some stories. For example, Sue in Penrith told us that many bus stops in her area don't have any shelter or seating at all. That's also compounded by the fact that there aren't enough mature trees in the area to provide any shade when you have to catch buses. Not only is there no shelter or seating, there is also no shade at all when you're using the bus stops.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** In terms of the inquiry into current and future public transport needs—and I appreciate what we've discussed—what else remains a priority for you on this?

**EMMA BACON:** Beyond bus shelters?

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Yes.

**EMMA BACON:** What we hear a lot from people is that it's that last kilometre that has become a really big issue for them in the heat. So they might live a couple of kay or a kilometre from Mount Druitt railway station, or places like that, but because it's so hard for them to walk in the heat and there's really unreliable public transport and there is no shelter or seat, that becomes an issue. It's prioritising, for really impacted communities, the last kilometre, whether through buses or on-demand travel and things like that. We work a lot with communities who are more impacted by extreme heat who also happened to run public transport, whether because they have disabilities, because they're older people, because they're young—lots of different factors—or because they're low socio-economic status. So public transport is a real priority for these communities. Whether it's buses or a more extensive train network or things like that, it is the fear of getting sick or of exposing children or people you care for to extreme heat. For example, it's going to be 40 degrees today in Blacktown. In about an hour schoolkids are going to go out and we know that a huge number of them are going to be standing with no shelter or seat in the Blacktown area trying to get home. That comes up again and again and again—how do people get around who rely on public transport?

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** If I could just put that same question to Mr Timms. Just in terms of the inquiry into current and future public transport needs in Western Sydney, what would be a priority from where you sit?

**MICHAEL TIMMS:** As we said, we are trying to achieve reductions in road trauma. Public transport provides an alternative mechanism for people to use a service instead of taking a private car. Public transport is statistically safer. We were talking about trains—obviously that's probably the safest form—but as far as road transport, as far back as 20 years ago the Australian Transport Safety Bureau recognised that bus transport is the safest form of vehicle transport. Any steps that can be taken to encourage public transport usage would certainly be encouraged by the Australasian College of Road Safety.

**The CHAIR:** In terms of encouraging people to use public transport, the provision of bus shelters where none exist right now, I assume it's your evidence or you believe that that would really encourage people to take more buses. I think we've heard one of the reasons why some of the bus services are being cancelled is because they're not being potentially used enough. It's kind of this chicken and egg in some ways. It's that the infrastructure needs to be encouraging people to use it and it needs to be comfortable, so do you think that people would be using buses more if that infrastructure was there?

**EMMA BACON:** Yes. We have heard from people across the city. They've said specifically that they are less likely to catch public transport in the heat, where there is no shelter or shade. That's something—again, we're doing another round of our summer survey at the moment. We're asking people about whether they're less likely to walk, to exercise, to socialise, to catch public transport in the heat, and the majority of people in Western Sydney are expressing that.

I think there are two issues here. One is we want more people to catch public transport—100 per cent—but, for the people who are catching public transport, it should be safe. The people who are waiting at bus stops with no shelter, no shade, no seat, and getting sick and going home and calling an ambulance or feeling the health impacts of that later or having the mental health impacts that we know come from exposure to heat—I think

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heatwaves are our deadliest environmental disaster. They kill more people than all others combined. They have physical, mental health impacts. We know that they have maternal-health impacts. Exposure to high temperatures at any point in pregnancy can lead to a higher instance of stillbirth and miscarriage. So exposure—it's not just about collapsing at the bus stop on the day, but it's also long-term health impacts. So this actually relates to not just encouraging people to use public transport but making sure that the system is safe to reduce the burden of disease in Western Sydney.

**The CHAIR:** I have one more question in relation to that for the purposes of us compiling this report. I assume there's medical bodies that say that people shouldn't be standing for a certain number of minutes in the direct sun when it's over 35 degrees. There's rules around kids in playgrounds and now rules around outdoor workers. Is there that kind of information or research that you could potentially give the Committee as well? You can take it on notice to give us or do you know now to tell the Committee?

**EMMA BACON:** I think the two sources I'd direct the Committee to is firstly to the Cancer Council, who, as I've said, we've worked with and spoken to, and they've said that shade is a big priority for them, especially for young kids, who—20 minutes in a really hot sun, so burning at a young age is really damaging. I direct Committee to the Cancer Council. Also, Sydney and New South Wales is extraordinarily lucky in the academics who work on heat health across the universities. UWS, UTS, Sydney Uni are just an incredibly high standard. They are world leaders in heat health studies. At Sydney University you have the Heat and Health Research Incubator, who do extensive studies about what exposure to heat does to the body. So we can direct Committee's staff towards those resources, but those two places are a really good place to start in terms of that exact evidence, so what does standing at a bus stop on a 50-degree day, on a 30-degree day do to the body and at different ages and what risk would that pose to people.

**The CHAIR:** We're out of time for this session now. Thank you very much for both of your submissions and your evidence. The work you do in this space is very valuable for our inquiry.

**(The witnesses withdrew.)**

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**Mr MATT THRELKELD**, Executive Director, BusNSW, sworn and examined

**Mr JOHN KING**, President, BusNSW, sworn and examined

**The CHAIR:** Who is giving a short opening statement?

**MATT THRELKELD:** Good afternoon. My name is Matt Threlkeld. I'm the Executive Director at BusNSW. I'm joined by the president of the association, John King. BusNSW is the peak body for the New South Wales bus and coach industry and represents government-contracted and non-contracted bus and coach operators across the State. BusNSW's mission is to foster the efficient and sustainable growth of public transport and to promote the benefits of bus and coach travel in New South Wales. Buses play a vital role in delivering public transport in New South Wales and, during the 2021-22 financial year, provided approximately 44 per cent of total public transport trips. In the same period, funding for bus services accounted for around 15 per cent of New South Wales government expenditure on operating public transport.

Western Sydney is a vast and diverse geographical area which continues to experience significant population growth. Despite this continued growth and the socio-economic disadvantage faced by many in the area, Western Sydney has limited access to public transport. In large parts of west and south-west Sydney, buses are the only available form of public transport, yet service frequency and coverage could be considered poor. In contrast, the Eastern Harbour City has high-frequency bus routes, with upwards of 200 services per day, including all-day and late-night coverage. The discrepancy means that buses in Sydney's west are generally not frequent enough to be a compelling alternative to the private car.

BusNSW supports the prioritisation of medium- and long-term bus service growth funding for underserved communities, including new rapid bus routes in the west. Furthermore, BusNSW would like to see a better correlation between population growth and the level of bus services provided. Beyond an increased level of services, Western Sydney needs more bus priority infrastructure and new bus layovers to improve operating efficiencies, including modern facilities for bus drivers to have breaks. We look forward to ongoing consultation with the bus industry on this important topic and thank the Committee for the opportunity to participate in the inquiry. We are happy to take any questions.

**The CHAIR:** Just taking a step back for a minute, we've heard a bit today about a lack of frequency of bus services and not really going to where is needed. Of course, in other places they provide a very essential, reliable service. How are the bus routes determined? If you're operating in a particular area, the private sector, do you have a say in determining that? Do you say, "This is commercially viable for us to do this", or does the Government step in and say, "We need a bus service to these areas"? How does that work?

**MATT THRELKELD:** The New South Wales Government controls the planning of the services through Transport for NSW. Operators do have an opportunity to provide input into the process or where they believe there are changes needed to deal with changes within the community. However, ultimately, it is government who controls the approval of the actual routes and the frequency of those routes, as well as when they start and when they finish—so the coverage during the day.

**The CHAIR:** Is there communication over that time if, for example, for a particular bus route for a particular area you're finding that there's not enough patronage? Is there this ongoing communication with the Government about "This 3.15 p.m. service, we're only getting four people on it"? What does that look like? Do you then advocate to drop that? Because we are hearing about the dropping of services and how that happens.

**MATT THRELKELD:** The contracts do have that opportunity for the operator to put forward an alteration to the services. And then the Transport for NSW planning team would assess that, and they would consider the impact on the community and where there may potentially be an impact on the cost to government based on those changes that are proposed. That would need to be assessed, but any change would have to be approved by Transport prior to it being implemented.

**The CHAIR:** Basically, you have got a contract that says we are expecting a certain number of patronage on these bus services. You don't get that, so you are not getting the money. The Government is not meeting its side of the contract. Is that a little bit about how you say it works? You are guaranteed a particular income in terms of patronage. If it doesn't happen, you go back and say, "This isn't working for us. It's costing us too much money to operate this particular service."

**MATT THRELKELD:** It's important to note that there's no link to patronage or fares. It's a gross cost contract that we are talking about in Greater Sydney, whereby the operator is paid based on the services that the New South Wales Government is procuring. In the case of Greater Sydney that has been through a tender process.



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Then in terms of any change to that, that would need to be considered by government. But the fare box itself goes back to government. That is something that Transport for NSW would need to consider before approving any change.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Can I just jump in there? Does that mean there's no capacity for a private bus operator to schedule its own route if it thinks there's profit to be made in running a bus route to a particular location?

**MATT THRELKELD:** Technically that is correct. It would need to be approved by Transport for NSW.

**The CHAIR:** Do any of your companies have anything to do with the provision of infrastructure such as bus shelters? I don't know if you heard the last witnesses from Sweltering Cities, but making the point of how many bus stops there are without appropriate shelter. Is that all just completely on local government and State government, or do some of the bus companies have anything to do with that at all, that side of it?

**MATT THRELKELD:** I might let John come in here, given John is a bus operator. It is largely about local government, but I might get John to provide some real life examples.

**JOHN KING:** Thank you for the question. Typically it's for the local government but we work within the traffic committees. If we've got a high volume stop, if the local government get funding for it then we will work with them to where that infrastructure should go and be best placed. But typically the operator has nothing really in the process of any infrastructure on bus stops, other than maintaining the bus stop signage to make sure that the information on that bus stop is always correct.

**The CHAIR:** That's interesting, because it does seem to me that it would be potentially financially attractive to make the bus shelters and experience of waiting for a bus more desirable for patronage, hence the question. It seems to potentially be better for you to spend that money than government. There is no requirement whatsoever for any contribution?

**JOHN KING:** No.

**MATT THRELKELD:** I think that's a question of cost recovery, which would be of benefit to government, obviously, if the amount of fare box was to increase based on those types of initiatives.

**The CHAIR:** Mr King, what do you think of the state of bus shelters and bus stops in Western Sydney generally, if you've got any specific examples? We have heard, and I have seen many myself, of just grass, a single pole, no seats, where people are expected to stand in the hot sun. We are hearing today 40 degrees in Blacktown. What is your experience of them?

**JOHN KING:** Yes. It's across the whole State typically, and it comes back to infrastructure funding that councils apply for through the State Government to upgrade those particular parts of the infrastructure. There are plenty of examples out there where, you're right, it's about a B pole stuck on the side of the road with a bit of paper on it. They're mostly not disabled accessible either, so there is some oversight on that side of it. But, yes, typically we don't provide the infrastructure within our environment, we'll call it, purely because of the funding and what we could get over in other places around the world as such, yes.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** I was going to ask about the network effect of expanding services. I don't know whether you've got any research that might cast some light on this question. Is there an impact if you increase the services? Is there a nexus between the rise in patronage versus the increase in services? Is there some kind of established nexus there? If we expand the bus services across the whole network by 15 per cent is there likely to be a consequential knock-on in terms of increased patronage—even if it's less than 10 per cent?

**JOHN KING:** I think there is plenty of evidence in any sort of network jurisdiction that high frequency always will deliver a better outcome and grow passengers. There is no doubt about that. Infrequency in services just basically tells you it's quicker to get in the car and not wait around on a bus stop that's not conducive to waiting out of the weather. So high frequency always is a positive and will grow passengers, but you've got to find that balance on the balance sheet of what is frequency and what does that number achieve for the community.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** If you increase the frequency, how much additional patronage can you expect in a network? Is there some research that you could point us to that demonstrates that?

**JOHN KING:** No, it's just history—knowing that when we put high frequency services on, people use them.

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**CORRECTED**

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**MATT THRELKELD:** Yes, there is a correlation there. It varies depending upon certain externalities such as the density of the population in the particular area. But we'd be happy to take that one on notice and provide you with some information to in regard to that research that has been undertaken for other jurisdictions.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** I think you make the point in your submission that buses are an easy way to scale-up public transport capacity fairly quickly and it has that competitive edge over other modes that require a much greater investment over much longer time frames. What kind of impediments are there to a significant scaling up of the bus network in Western Sydney?

**MATT THRELKELD:** I think that—

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Things like—I think you pointed out this in your submission—workforce constraints. Matt, perhaps you could elaborate on that?

**MATT THRELKELD:** Yes. Certainly, drivers is the main one that comes to mind in the current environment. We'd like to think that that's moving in the right direction in terms of the recruitment of drivers in Western Sydney and across the State. Outside of that there is the buses themselves and the procurement of buses, and then there is the consideration of where those buses are housed. So they're both capacity and I think one of the things that we pointed out in the submission was around the need for Western Sydney and Greater Sydney in general to have a long-term depot capacity that looks at what happens in terms of growth of services and then the additional peak bus requirement for that.

**The CHAIR:** Is there already a problem with depots in terms of bus storages in this area? In terms of any growth of additional services, additional buses, are we at capacity now? Is that what you're saying?

**MATT THRELKELD:** I think we're close to capacity, based on our knowledge of the operations in Western Sydney, so we do think it's something that the Government needs to consider. I know that at the moment the New South Wales Bus Industry Taskforce, which I sit on, is looking at that particular issue. And the aside to that is the transition to zero emissions and what that may mean in terms of having infrastructure at these depots to be able to charge the buses and whether that may in some cases reduce the capacity that we currently have based on a diesel fleet. That's something that industry is working through at the moment.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** What's the breakdown in terms of—are there electric buses running? What's the percentage of the fleet that is currently operating?

**MATT THRELKELD:** Electric?

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Yes.

**MATT THRELKELD:** It's very minimal. I think the last count that I saw was just over 100 in Greater Sydney. When you look at the Government's plan to transition 8,000 buses by 2047—and that's across the State—then, yes, there's a lot of work ahead of us in terms of that transition process.

**The CHAIR:** So that's 2047 for every bus? In your submission it's the government-contracted buses within Sydney that have the 2035 target, is that correct?

**MATT THRELKELD:** That is correct, yes.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Who owns the fleet? Is that owned privately? Are your members just contracted to provide the service or do they actually own the fleet?

**MATT THRELKELD:** It's a good question and the answer is somewhat complex. Ultimately, government has control over the fleet. In some cases the operator has purchased the bus and it sits on the operator's balance sheet; however, through a tripartite agreement or through a contract clause the operator would be required to hand that bus over to a successor operator if they were to lose a contract. That's for most of the fleet that is operated by the private operator regions, even though they're all private now. But the four regions in Sydney that were previously operated via the State Transit Authority, in the case of that fleet, government has ownership of those buses that were transferred to the private operators following the franchising process.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Thank you very much for your submission and for your attendance today. I very much appreciate that. Page 8 of your submission talks about the private sector:

... as of late 2022 all bus services within the Greater Sydney region ... are delivered by private companies under Transport for NSW contracts.

Is that still the case today?

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**CORRECTED**

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**MATT THRELKELD:** Yes. So that was just in relation to my previous comment whereby the four regions that were previously operated by State Transit Authority were franchised and are now operated by private operators, meaning that all New South Wales government bus contracts across the State are now operated by private companies.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** I think there's a reference in your submission in terms of affordability of fares and "Opal Plus" is mentioned. I was just wondering, in terms of the private sector delivering the bus services for government in terms of affordability of fares, is this part of the Government's Opal system, given they're private contracts?

**MATT THRELKELD:** That is correct, yes. Government has full control over the fare and the fare products. Coincidentally, IPART has just commenced a process to review fares for the Opal network, including for bus services. Submissions I think are due in approximately four weeks for that review, and as part of that review IPART will determine what they believe should be the maximum fares to apply, taking into account a number of different issues, and then the Minister will determine what the fares should be under that maximum that is determined by IPART, or at that amount determined by IPART potentially.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Some of the private bus companies, such as Forest buses and the Hills buses, or something like that—they all operate on the Opal system, do they?

**MATT THRELKELD:** Yes, correct.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** I think Madam Chair touched on this just in terms of the depots and storage and availability of buses. What are the current issues on that in terms of some of the growth areas around the north-west in terms of the bus depot availability?

**MATT THRELKELD:** That at the moment is sitting with the operators, or it has historically been with the operators, to consider what their growth may be and to ensure that they do have capacity, and have, in some cases, looked at acquiring land well in advance to be able to deal with that. Given a little bit of a change to the environment, or in some ways a quite significant change, in relation to the transition to zero emissions, as per my previous comments, that has given the impetus for government to get more involved, I think, in the planning of depots and long-term strategy. Particularly where government may invest in infrastructure for the charging of zero-emission buses, the government obviously would like to have access to that depot for the longer term.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Just one final point, and Madam Chair mentioned this, in terms of we've heard evidence earlier today about unreliable bus services and them being infrequent and things like that. Commuters have also reported in terms of the driver shortage leading to cancelled services. I know we've touched on that. I'm just wondering if there's a bit of an update as to where you think we might be at in terms of recruiting new drivers, or what we're doing on this.

**MATT THRELKELD:** There has been, I think, considerable progress in this area, and that's partly based on the assistance from the New South Wales Government through a campaign to recruit drivers and a number of other initiatives, including making it easier to get a bus driver authority, and then the operators involved have done a lot of work and looked at new ways to recruit drivers. I think at this point we're reasonably comfortable with where the level is at, although there is some work still to do and we need to be mindful of our ageing workforce and that there will be an ongoing need to bring in new drivers in the future.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** What's causing the shortage?

**MATT THRELKELD:** That's a good question. Certainly COVID was a big issue for the industry. We had an average age of around 57 for bus drivers across the State, and then during the COVID period a lot of older drivers decided that it was maybe time to retire. Through that COVID period we lost around 11 per cent of the driver cohort. At the start of COVID there were about 28,000 bus drivers in New South Wales who held an authority to drive a public passenger bus, and then we saw through that two-year period a loss of around 3,000 drivers, so there has been a need now to try to build that up again. But outside of that, I think the low levels of unemployment across the board have certainly impacted the bus industry.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** It's a salaries issue, is it?

**MATT THRELKELD:** That's certainly a consideration, so that's something that is being looked at at the moment. Generally, the operators involved have negotiated wages and conditions with the Transport Workers' Union or, in some cases, with the RTBU. But, yes, I guess it's a factor that needs to be considered as well, looking at the future of the industry.

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**CORRECTED**

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**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Are the conditions the same across the network? Do different operators all operate under a standard set of industrial conditions and salary rates?

**MATT THRELKELD:** There are variances. Since the Fair Work process came in and we moved away from what was previously a State award for motor bus drivers and conductors, we've seen through the cycles some variation in terms of rates and conditions between the different operators. Then there's the consideration of the drivers that were previously employed by the State Transit Authority, who were on a different agreement with different terms and conditions. So there is a variation between operators.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Does that mean in different regions with different operators, effectively you're operating on a cost-plus basis contracts, so the profits would be different? The profit rate would be different in different regions, is that right? If the wage structure of your workforce is different, there's a different cost structure in terms of the workers in different regions, different operators, some operators are going to make more money than others, based on the wages differential?

**MATT THRELKELD:** I wouldn't say they'd make more money. Certainly, they may have a difference in their labour costs. But in terms of the procurement, it's based on a competitive tender, so the proponents that are tendering for those contracts take all of their costs, including labour, into consideration and what margin they may think is appropriate. That's what government then assesses and determines the successful proponent around.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Those who have got a lower wage cost have a competitive edge in the tendering process, don't they?

**JOHN KING:** No, not necessarily. If you look across every EA, we're that close in a sense of normality, in that sense. The way you're doing it, whether you're a smart scheduler or how you actually deliver the service to the community—

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** So BusNSW wouldn't oppose some kind of levelling, of bringing everyone into some kind of standard set of industrial arrangements?

**MATT THRELKELD:** That is something that is being, I guess, considered at the moment. But, because of the nature of the industry and the system, it is quite difficult with contracts in place and government funding contracts and those costs. If there was to be some form of recalibration to facilitate for wage rates to be the same for drivers in Greater Sydney, for example, then there would need to be different adjustments to payments to those operators. You would also need to consider some other costs. For example, the drivers may have different superannuation above the superannuation guarantee, just based on what has been negotiated through the enterprise agreement bargaining process. Those things would need to be considered as well if there was to be any sort of standardisation of rate.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Can I ask about the rapid transit infrastructure? Obviously you make the point in your submission that this is more cost-effective, I suppose, than putting in a metro line or other forms of—how does it compare in terms of the capacity to move people at a lower cost? Do you have an ability to quantify the benefit, I suppose, of people moved per kilometre on a rapid transit bus route as opposed to a metro?

**MATT THRELKELD:** Yes, look, it is complex. I'm happy to take that one on notice and provide you with some detail around the different capacities per hour based on the different modes. Certainly there's been a reasonable amount of research done in this space. We'd need to take into account a few variations depending on the location and the infrastructure, for example, that might be provided in terms of buses and the priority, and whether they were operating on transit ways or mixed in general traffic, for example.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Do you have a map of routes that are amenable to conversion to rapid transit for Western Sydney?

**MATT THRELKELD:** Yes.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Is there an aspiration in terms of where you would like to see rapid transit? If you have that, if you could provide that to the Committee it would be useful. Is there a top three or four routes that you think should be top of the list in terms of prioritisation by government?

**MATT THRELKELD:** Yes, we can certainly provide that. Late last year Transport for NSW released the On Street Transit White Paper, which identifies 39 routes that could potentially be converted to rapid bus routes. From memory, I think around 30 per cent of those routes are based in Western Sydney, essentially west of Parramatta. But yes, we can certainly provide those to you. They do incorporate the three proposed rapid bus routes to service Western Sydney airport as well.

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**CORRECTED**

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**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** How quickly is the government able to implement a rapid transit approach? What's the rough time frame—a couple of years, three years, five years? How long does it take to put the infrastructure in—

**MATT THRELKELD:** It is dependent on the amount of infrastructure that's required. Generally the procurement of the buses and the recruitment of the drivers is the easier part, noting that obviously the current environment is making it somewhat difficult to recruit drivers. But the time frame would be dependent on the amount of infrastructure required in terms of those bus-only transit ways et cetera. But I'm happy to also take that on notice and come back to you with a little bit more detail around that issue.

**The CHAIR:** I might just jump in there and ask a few more questions around it. The Government's commitment last year—the \$305 million or whatever it was over five years and identification of a couple of corridors—doesn't seem like enough. I think a lot of people are talking about how the BRT was committed by the Coalition. It was a commitment by the Coalition, and I think the Labor Government as well in opposition said that they'd do it. The commitment of \$305 million is an investigation, if you like, over a number of years, isn't it, rather than committing to it and saying, "Let's do it"? Clearly it is needed in Western Sydney. Are you aware of the particular corridors that they're identifying in Western Sydney? Do you have particular recommendations for others, or to fast-track—if this Committee were to recommend the fast-tracking of a couple, for example, are there particular ones that are just so obvious that would make a difference in Western Sydney?

**MATT THRELKELD:** We're not privy to the detail around that. We certainly are well aware of what's been in the public domain in terms of the intent for the three routes to service Campbelltown, Liverpool and Penrith. But the detail is probably a question for Transport for NSW at this stage in terms of the actual routes that those buses may take and what bus priority is being planned.

**The CHAIR:** Does the time line for these rapid transit corridors—I'm not even sure if you're aware of the time line, but is it frustrating that it's not happening sooner? Do you think that you'll see some good corridors within the next few years?

**MATT THRELKELD:** I think it's unlikely in the next couple of years in terms of rapid bus services, but we know there is an intent to stage the project, so to at least have those services up and running in some capacity. But as the activity around the airport grows and there's a need to transport more workers and to provide services for the commuters and tourists as more planes come in and out, the intent is to gradually increase frequency coverage and to add more infrastructure that will hopefully make those buses operate quicker and more reliably.

**The CHAIR:** And you're on that taskforce, did you say? I know it's dealing with the driver shortage. Is it also tasked with looking at projects like this?

**MATT THRELKELD:** It is at a high level, yes. Certainly, looking at that—and, as I mentioned, it is part of the on-street transit white paper, but the sort of detail, I guess, in terms of engineering requirements is something that Transport for NSW is working on. That's my understanding.

**The CHAIR:** Mr King, once they are put in place, such as the northern beaches rapid bus transit, for example, is it a very exciting, desirable thing for a bus company to have that as one of their key contracts, if you like, a rapid bus lane, knowing that it probably does make a big difference in patronage because that's when you get your frequency of services? Can you speak of the difference or the way in which it increases patronage when you do have those rapid bus transit lanes and services?

**JOHN KING:** Yes, absolutely. As long as we've got priority to do it, it is exciting to give the amenity to a community and get them out of the car. I mean, our congestion that we deal with every day is in relation to not being able to jump over the infrastructure that's in front of us. As long as government are prepared and have the tenacity to actually prioritise, we can then deliver a higher level of service across the board, and we do in our industry regularly every day. So it is exciting.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you so much for your evidence. It's very valuable.

**(The witnesses withdrew.)**

**The Committee adjourned at 14:35.**