

This submission relates to Section 9.5.1 “Future travel demand”, in particular the section headed “Bus” on page 9-7 of Chapter 9 “Traffic and Transport”.

It is requested that very serious consideration be given to retaining direct bus services to the Sydney CBD from those parts of the central and eastern corridor, especially the Baulkham Hills area, that have direct access to the M2 but are some kilometres away from the North West Rail Link. From these areas, buses can provide faster travel times to the CBD (especially during off-peak periods) than can be achieved by a combination of a feeder bus service, North West Rail and North Shore rail.

For people in areas close to the M2 who wish to travel to the City, accessing the North West Rail Link will involve travelling some distance to the west or north, ie heading **away** from their intended direction of travel. This is likely to act as a strong disincentive for people who currently use public transport in preference to their private vehicle.

At present the express bus service from Baulkham Hills junction to Wynyard outside peak periods on weekdays, in the evenings and all day weekends takes around 30 minutes (routes **m61**, 610X). The same journey via feeder bus to Castle Hill and rail is likely to take **twice** as long:

| | | |
|---------------------|---|---|
| Bus to Castle Hill | - | 11 minutes (current timetable) |
| Transfer time | - | 3 minutes (estimate) |
| Wait for train | - | 5 minutes (average off-peak estimate) |
| Travel to Chatswood | | 21 minutes (estimate) |
| Wait time | - | 2.5 minutes (average off-peak estimate) |
| Travel to Wynyard | - | 18 – 19 minutes (current timetable) |
| TOTAL | | Over 60 minutes |

Peak hour comparisons are more difficult because of traffic delays currently experienced on the M2 affecting bus travel times, but these should be alleviated when current upgrading work is completed in 2013, restoring the full use of bus lanes and providing additional overall capacity on the M2.

It is acknowledged that in peak periods, the average wait times at Castle Hill and Chatswood will be reduced, cutting the overall journey time by (say) three minutes, but this assumes that passengers will be able to get on the next available train at both Castle Hill and Chatswood. At Chatswood in the morning peak, notwithstanding a proposed increase from 17 to 20 trains per hour, this may not be the case where the next service is from Wyong, Gosford or Berowra and may already be fully loaded. It is also likely that the time taken by the feeder bus will be greater by 2019/2020 as congestion increases at Castle Hill.

It would be an extremely retrograde step for Baulkham Hills residents if the only public transport option available for travel to the City from 2019/2020 were to take twice as long as the current service.

A comparison could be made with another area where bus services take approximately the same time to reach the CBD during off-peak periods. A route 273 bus (Chatswood – City via North Sydney) takes approximately the same time to travel from North Willoughby to Wynyard during off-peak periods as a 610X or m61 takes to travel from Baulkham Hills to Wynyard. Yet no one suggests that this service should be discontinued and passengers from North Willoughby bussed to the nearest railway station, Chatswood, to catch the train.

A more appropriate comparison with Baulkham Hills passengers in terms of the extra time involved would be to take passengers from North Willoughby by bus in the opposite direction - to Gordon station – to catch a train to the City; a ridiculous diversion by any standard, but no different in terms of extra travelling time than expecting Baulkham Hills residents to travel to the CBD via Castle Hill and Chatswood if direct bus services are discontinued.

It is suggested that detailed studies be undertaken to assess the specific transport needs of the Baulkham Hills area, with particular regard to comparative travel times to the Sydney CBD by direct express bus services on the one hand, and the combination of feeder buses, North West Rail Link and North Shore rail on the other.

In particular, it is recommended that the following be assessed for the retention of direct bus services:

1. **Baulkham Hills junction and adjoining high density residential areas.** It may be feasible to retain the m61/610X service from Castle Hill, along Old Northern Road, providing the dual function of quick access to the City from Baulkham Hills (southbound) along with regular access to Castle Hill railway station (northbound) for people travelling to other destinations (eg Epping, Macquarie).
2. **The Gooden Drive and Cropley Drive bus stations on the M2**, that are uniquely able to service their local communities in Baulkham Hills and Winston Hills and provide fast access to the City.
3. **Route 614X, at least from Seven Hills Road** and south servicing the West Baulkham Hills, Winston Hills and Windsor Road Northmead areas. This service operates as far as Bella Vista, which is close to the proposed Norwest railway station, but the great majority of passengers are from areas further south and east, many kilometres away from the North West Rail Link.