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Attention: Director, Infrastructure Projects  
Major Projects Assessment,  
Department of Planning and Infrastructure,  
GPO Box 39, SYDNEY, NSW 2001.

## **BusNSW submission to the North West Rail Link Environmental Impact Study**

### **Introduction**

BusNSW is the peak body for the NSW private bus and coach industry whose members provide essential community services on a daily basis and provide a key interface with the travelling public. BusNSW's mission is to foster the efficient and sustainable growth of public transport in NSW.

BusNSW welcomes this opportunity to make a submission to the North West Rail Link proposal and outlines how an integrated public transport network can better serve the needs of Sydney commuters and increase efficiency.

### **Investing in Public Transport**

The overriding objectives, for any proposed investment into public transport, should be 'liveability' and 'sustainability.' The most liveable and sustainable cities invest heavily in public transport for:

- Economic benefit,
- Environmental benefit, and
- Community utility.

Mode selection should follow a functional analysis of what transport tasks are required on a corridor or geographical area. Feasibility studies of major transport projects should be undertaken before any decision is made on whether to proceed. Determining the most effective mode to deliver the required functionality would form part of the feasibility study.

Ninety per cent of the population should be within 400m of a public transport service and have public transport access to their regional centre with a maximum of one change of mode. BusNSW agrees that putting the customer first should be an objective of all transport planners and service providers.

It is important to ensure that sections of the community, including local bus operators (either through BusNSW or individual companies) are part of the planning process. Their local knowledge and past experience can provide valuable input which will reflect the operational environment.

Every dollar spent on transport infrastructure needs to maximise community benefit. All projects should be evaluated against a clear set of criteria that include sustainability, affordability, integration, connectivity, social benefit and equity. Transport infrastructure should provide equity of access to employment and essential services.

Historically, the road budget has outstripped public transport expenditure. Future plans should include the objective for each of the next 20 years to spend more on public transport than on roads to meet the needs of increasing passengers and greater network efficiency.

### **Evaluating Public Transport Projects**

The evaluation of projects, such as the North West Rail Link, should use moving people as a measure of effectiveness. The bus lane on the harbour bridge has fewer vehicles per hour than any of the other lanes on the bridge. However, it carries more people in that one lane during the morning peak than all other lanes combined. An objective for public transport in North West Sydney should be to maximise moving people using the most cost effective mode.

We support the need of public transport in areas of Sydney, such as North West Sydney, using an integrated network. However, without an alternative harbour crossing, the North West will continue to be backlogged and congested. A bus rapid transit (BRT) system would service the people of the North West more efficiently whilst costing much less to implement.

There are both physical and psychological barriers to using multiple transport modes. To generate network efficiency and encourage usage, a number of initiatives should be introduced to resolve these challenges; integrated ticketing, developed logical interchange infrastructure, mode coordination, and real time information delivered to the customer.

Unless services are reliable, frequent, direct, clean and safe people will not switch from car to public transport. The higher the frequency of services the more attractive they are to existing and potential customers. Buses are able to provide the most flexible and frequent services. The government should continue to invest in providing

high frequency services and extend the hours of operation along the strategic bus corridors.

Government should ensure any proposal to build commuter car parks at rail stations on the North West line gives full consideration to the impact on local bus services to the rail station including patronage impacts and traffic congestion. Priority should also be given to infrastructure that facilitates the use of public transport.

### **Infrastructure Requirements and Land Use Planning**

In order to develop a public transport culture the provision and installation of accessible bus stops (with supporting pedestrian infrastructure) and suitable turnaround locations that allows penetration into greenfield sites at each stage of development (or the early provision of multiple access points) are required.

Whilst the ultimate responsibility for strategic planning lies with the State Government, developers and local Councils need to play a key role in the planning and implementation process. It is often through decisions about staging and road network development that the provision of bus services for network efficiency can be hindered.

A focus on reducing the demand for car travel will continue to increase the viability of public transport. Investments in public transport have shown positive development growth of employment and commercial activities in regional centres across Sydney. Land use and transport planning need to be integrated to support sustainable development that meets the government objectives for economic efficiency.

Public transport needs to provide a distinct travel advantage in order to present a viable alternative to car travel. Buses should be given priority on strategic corridors, including feeder services to and from the proposed North West Rail Link, to encourage more people to shift from car to public transport.

The North West Rail Link requires investment in passenger facilities and researching the need for intermodal connection expansion. Investing in bus related infrastructure and service provision should be the first consideration of the North West Rail Link design, in order to connect and service a greater number of people.

BusNSW supports the North West Rail Link, however, for it to be effective, additional feeder services and suitable infrastructure, for buses and commuters, should be developed in order to achieve effective results. This includes, but is not limited to, depots for greater bus networks and services, passenger facilities and intermodal connection areas. Priority should be given to expanding the BRT network linking Sydney's regional centres.

All strategic land use planning must incorporate public transport as a determining factor when designing the road network and allocating zonings. A cohesive public

transport and land use plan is the only way to avoid the mistakes of the past. Sydney has suffered in the past from poor quality transport planning and decision making.

### **Metropolitan Bus System Contracts**

With the Government's focus on the customer and the view to improve the customer's experience, consideration must be given to the recent changes to private bus operator contracts linking the metropolitan regions of Sydney. Contracts based upon forced competitive tender arrangements risk imbalance and instability, overall effecting relations between industry and government. There is a risk that the introduction of new entrants who are not familiar with the region, current operations and service commitments, may not deliver the improvements to the customer's experience sought by government.

The government needs to consider the distractions to bus networks and potential fallouts for development projects, such as the North West Rail Link, as cooperation and coordination from the bus industry is required for the efficient management of integrated public transport in all metropolitan regions of Sydney.

There is also a need for government to consider impacts of the project on the metropolitan bus system contract performance regime. Infrastructure works associated with the North West Rail Link project are likely to affect on-time running and customer satisfaction for local bus services, which will be outside the control of the bus operator.

### **Conclusion**

In order for the North West Rail Link to improve network efficiency and enhance public transport quality for the greater metropolitan regions of Sydney, a coordinated approach, integrating all modes of transport, must be developed. Other public transport options should not be compromised in favour of the project; otherwise an improvement to customer service will not be achieved. Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) plans, targeting strategic corridors, must also be considered in order to eliminate congestion on the rail system and road network, whilst providing North West Sydney with an effective public transport system.

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