

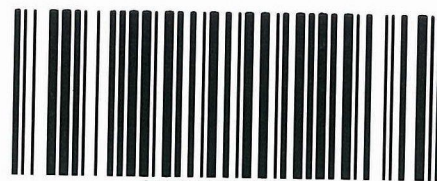
Major Projects Assessment
Department of Planning and Infrastructure
GPO Box 39, SYDNEY, NSW 2001

Attention: Director, Infrastructure Projects

By Facsimilie: 9228 6355

21 May 2012

**ComfortDelGro Cabcharge comments on SSI-5100
North West Rail Link Environmental Impact Statement 1**



PCU033976



ComfortDelgro Cabcharge (CDC) is the MBSC Region 4 bus operator on behalf of Transport for NSW (TfNSW) providing essential bus services, under the Hillsbus brand, on a daily basis throughout the impact area of the North West Rail Link (NWRL).

As the cornerstone of public transport in the Hills/North West region of Sydney, buses continue to play a vital role in delivering Public Transport in the short, medium and long term during both construction of, and subsequent integration with, the NWRL. Maintaining and improving bus services along the NWRL will have a positive impact on lowering traffic congestion, reducing pollution, improving health and safety, and increasing accessibility and mobility for Hills residents.

CDC welcomes this opportunity to comment on the NWRL EIS1. We note that CDC is currently working collaboratively with the NSW Governments North West Rail Link team to seek solutions which minimise impacts on bus passengers. CDC's submission to EIS1 is therefore brief and highlights key issues to be resolved.

1. Bus Priority Measures during construction

Public transport needs to provide a distinct travel advantage to encourage more people to shift from car to public transport. As such it is crucial that existing bus priority measures are maintained during the construction phase, and that bus priority through bus lanes, bus only access and bus signals are introduced around each station precinct to ensure quick and reliable access for buses and passengers transferring to/from the new train services. Bus priority needs to be maintained throughout the construction period.

2. Castle Hill Station Development Impacts

CDC is concerned with the dual traffic proposed for Old Castle Hill Rd in what is proposed as a replacement interchange whilst construction occurs. Old Castle Hill Rd currently experiences a very high level of bus activity as the major centre for the Hills district. Buses and general traffic currently only operate in one direction of Old

Castle Hill Rd between Castle St and the roundabout to the Castle Towers car park entry at Eric Felton St.

Three core issues arise from the proposed plans:

- Current layover areas will have to be relocated, but no site has been proposed. CDC is working with the NWRL to identify suitable areas, however it must be stated that any solution may be remote from the current interchange and impose significant additional time costs in terms of repositioning of buses and provision of meal/toilet facilities for drivers.
- Relocating all bus services currently using Castle Hill Interchange Stand C into Old Castle Hill Rd will significantly increase the risk of collision between buses, between buses and cars, and between buses and pedestrians. Solutions providing remedies to these risks must be provided.
- Hillsbus currently serves four major destinations from Castle Hill Interchange, being Sydney CBD, North Sydney, Macquarie Park and Parramatta. In addition the interchange is a major hub for school services in the Hills district. The current peak hour frequencies require that a minimum three buses be able to pick up at any one time. This is expected to grow further over the construction period of the station. Rank and layover capacity must be secured and constructed to provide sufficient capacity (including growth) for the full period of construction so as to avoid further impacts and uncertainty on the local bus operators and their passengers.

3. Rouse Hill Station Impacts

Issues noted for the Rouse Hill station precinct are similar to the ones identified for Castle Hill. Specifically for Rouse Hill we note the long turnaround movements for buses resulting from the relocated interchange. The relocated interchange also introduces a high level of mixed bus, car and pedestrian traffic which increases the risk of collision and injury. There is also a strong likelihood that buses will be impacted by traffic congestion around the Town Centre precinct, affecting timetables and reliability. Mitigation measures must be introduced to manage these risks.

4. Norwest Boulevard and Bella Vista Station Impacts

CDC notes that a realignment of Norwest Boulevard is required to create the station box, impacting on existing bus stops in Norwest Boulevard. It is important that bus access and existing bus stops are maintained fully operational to encourage further public transport usage during the construction period. CDC will have at least nine routes operating in and around the Norwest Business Park area and we have concerns about the reliability, legibility and accessibility of those routes to the travelling public. We note that significant worsening of level of service (LOS) for the intersection of Lexington and Celebration Drives, and ask that remedies including

bus priority be introduced to offset the E and F grade LOS proposed during construction.

5. Shared Bus and Construction Traffic Pavement Surface

CDC notes that the proposed construction traffic is likely to increase the pace at which the surface of existing bus roadways will deteriorate. It is crucial that existing and temporary bus roadways are constructed and maintained to a standard that will not be of detriment, firstly to passenger safety, but also to passenger comfort and increased wear-and-tear on buses and tyres.

6. Additional Matters of Concern

CDC would like to raise two further concerns matters of concern in relation to the Project Construction Phase.

Firstly, public transport patrons are currently enduring travel time uncertainty, delays and longer journey times resulting from the M2 Motorway upgrade. This 2 year project will only just have been completed by the time the NWRL construction starts. We have concerns for the longevity of the public patience with this state of constant upheaval imposed on passengers in the Hills and Northwest.

Secondly, the Transport Minister's announcement on 1 May 2012 to put to public tender Region 4 bus services in July 2013 introduces an element of uncertainty and risk that is not in the best interests of collaboration and continuity with Government, with a focus on customer outcomes, at this vital stage of NWRL development.



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