

WOLLONGONG TRANSPORT COALITION

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Submission

Senate Inquiry into the investment of Commonwealth and State funds in public passenger transport infrastructure and services

Introduction

The Wollongong Transport Coalition (WTC) was formed by local people fifteen years ago with the aim of responding to the then Commission of Inquiry to examine the impact of the expansion of the Port Kembla Coal Terminal (PKCT) on the region. WTC has recently been reactivated in the light of a proposal by the PKCT in 2008 to double the road haulage of coal from a high level of 5 million tonnes per annum (mtpa) to 10 mtpa [1]. This is at a time that car carrying ships have started arriving at Port Kembla which put up to 24 truck movements per hour, transporting new cars, on major highways leading from Port Kembla.

WTC is seeking a Public Inquiry to ensure that the NSW State Government adequately investigates the impact of the PKCT expansion on the Wollongong region in terms of infrastructure or the lack of it, daily commuters, business, tourism and environment. In addition, WTC is supporting improved public transport and completion of the Maldon Dombarton rail link to carry both coal and cars, and to free up the existing Sydney – Wollongong railway so it can offer more passenger train services.

Terms of reference

1. An audit of the state of public passenger transport in Australia

Public transport in the Wollongong region consists of the NSW rail route from Sydney to Bombaderry (South Coast line) [2] and private buses offered by Premier Illawarra, Dion's Bus Service, Greens Northern Coaches and Kiama Coachlines. The bus services provide inter and

intra suburban transport. The University of Wollongong runs a bus service (free of charge from 2009) between the train station in North Wollongong and the university; in March 2009 there will be a free loop service between Wollongong city, the university main campus and the new Innovation Campus.

Efficiency: It is estimated that over 20,000 people commute daily from their homes in the Wollongong region to Sydney for employment purposes [3]. Most of these people drive, but thousands are dependent on rail. Wollongong-Sydney passenger trains take at least 90 minutes to traverse just 80 km, giving an average travelling speed of just 53 km/h. Some train trips from Wollongong to Sydney Central can take up to 2 hours. There are two, or at most three trains during the morning peak and off-peak week days revert to just an hourly service, with every second train being a slow one.

This level of service compares poorly with equivalent services in other states (e.g. Geelong to Melbourne (four trains per hour on weekday peak hours), Gold Coast to Brisbane (at least three trains per hour, and Perth to Mandurah (six trains per weekday peak hour taking just 48 minutes for 72 km which is 90km/h).

Social cost: Many Wollongong commuters need to travel from Sydney Central to the Eastern suburbs or to the North Shore for their work thus adding to the total travel time. The social cost of up to 5 hours of travel on top of a full working day is huge and has an adverse effect on family life and community [4].

Financial cost: Buses in the Wollongong region do not offer travel passes (e.g. weekly, annual or TravelTen [5]) while transfer between bus routes is not permitted on one ticket. In contrast to Wollongong, Newcastle buses and ferries are part of NSW Government Sydney Buses which offer term passes and combined tickets [5].

Environmental cost: It is well known that trains and buses, with reasonable to good loading factors use less energy to move people and freight than cars and trucks do. This reduces dependence on oil use and also reduces carbon pollution. In addition, electricity can be used to move trains.

Safety: There are many incidences of harassment, assault and theft on the Illawarra trains. Trains are considered un-safe as there is inadequate or no security staff at night and in the weekends [6].

2. Current and historical levels of public investment in private vehicle and public passenger transport services and infrastructure;

3. An assessment of the benefits of public passenger transport, including integration with bicycle and pedestrian initiatives;

4. Measures by which the Commonwealth Government could facilitate improvement in public passenger transport services and infrastructure;

About 35,000 vehicles a day travel over the Mount Ousley Road, the main road from Wollongong to Sydney [7]. This includes trucks and commuter vehicles. The expansion of the PKCT and the Port Kembla Port in general (for example, 250,000 cars per annum are now transported from Port Kembla to Sydney by road) is anticipated to result in an increase of heavy vehicles on the road. An expected growth in population especially in the Southern suburbs [7], will bring more cars onto the roads.

Freight trains: PKCT has proposed to increase road haulage of coal from 5 mtpa to a maximum of 10 mtpa. The increase of heavy truck traffic in addition to the estimated 24 truck movements per hour (transport of new cars), is expected to have an effect on the safety of other road users and on road maintenance [7]. An increase in noise and pollution is expected for people living along the transport corridor.

As noted by the NSW Department of Planning, PKCT is seeking approval to remove the current restrictions on road delivery to its terminal to allow coal and bulk products to be received 24 hours a day, 7 days a week; and for its existing rail and road receipt, stockpiling and ship-loading operations [1].

The Australian Government has allocated \$300,000 for the Maldon to Dombarton Freight Rail Line Pre-feasibility Study [8]. This railway line could in principle carry the movement of coal from the Southern coalfields which are at presently being hauled by trucks. Coal from the Western coalfields is usually transported to Sydney and transported to Port Kembla via the South Coast rail line. The transport of coal and other goods takes place outside the hours allocated for passenger transport [7] and occasionally causes interruptions to the passenger's trains. Conversely, at present, freight trains are subject to lengthy curfews during weekday peak hours.

The Maldon-Dombarton railway line could free up the South Coast line and thus carry coal from the Western coalfields as well as other goods from Sydney. Wollongong needs extra passenger trains and at present, there are constraints on providing new train paths.

Passenger trains: The development of a more reliable, fast and efficient train service in tandem with compatible bus services between the major suburbs and railway stations to meet the main commuting trains as well as adequate parking and pick up/drop off facilities, would demonstrate a progressive commitment to the region's future.

WTC would also like to see the Maldon Dombarton rail link used for passenger trains during weekday peak hours to offer a Wollongong-Campbelltown-Parramatta commuting service.

5. The role of Commonwealth Government legislation, taxation, subsidies, policies and other mechanisms that either discourage or encourage public passenger transport

If one drives a car for work purposes, it can often be claimed as a tax deduction. The same deductions do not apply to use of public transport.

The former (Howard) Federal Government denied funds for developing urban public transport. Such funds were available under the Whitlam, Fraser, Hawke and Keating governments. It is understood that electrification from Coniston to Dapto was assisted with some Federal funds for urban public transport. WTC would like to see reinstatement of Federal funds for urban public transport.

6. Best practice international examples of public passenger transport services and infrastructure.

It is not necessary to go overseas to find international best practice. In Western Australia, Perth to Mandurah has six trains per hour during weekday peak hours taking just 48 minutes for 72 km. In addition, Perth urban rail services have the option of using Smart Cards as well as paper tickets.

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References

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