

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
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Date 24/02/2009

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

Dear Committee Secretary,

Western Sydney Community Forum welcomes the opportunity to participate in this enquiry into public passenger transport infrastructure and services.

We believe that the Federal government has an important role in providing and supporting better public passenger transport and look forward to increased federal funding for public passenger related transport in Western Sydney.

Sincerely,

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Western Sydney Community Forum

Introduction

Western Sydney Community Forum (WSCF) represents community organisations supporting and resourcing the most vulnerable and powerless people living in Western Sydney. WSCF seeks to provide regional leadership and facilitate collaborative action to resource and enable community organisations to effectively address issues relating to social justice and social inclusion. We believe our role is in strengthening community sector involvement in transport issues in Western Sydney and contributing all people living in Western Sydney.

Our members range from small community development organisations delivering services and community leadership programs at a grass roots and neighbourhood level, such as youth services, to larger organisations providing community wide support services such as those under home and community care funding program.

Staff at WSCF, have consulted with over 200 networks and interagencies, over the year and the consistent message we received is that the current transport options are poor and urgent work is needed to improve public transport connectivity in Western Sydney.

We believe that there is an obligation on government to provide fast, frequent and efficient passenger transport services that the community needs and has requested for many years. The failure to invest significantly will have dire consequences, social, economic and environmental which we are currently facing.

We believe that the liveability of Western Sydney is increased by having all members of the community able to access their destination with fast, efficient and environmentally sustainable passenger transport system.

a. an audit of the state of public passenger transport in Australia;

WSCF wishes to make reference to our WSCF Transport Position Paperⁱ. We wish to focus mainly on trains and buses which predominantly support people in Western Sydney who use public transport.

We are particularly concerned about the need to deliver passenger transport services to areas which are considered at high risk of oil and mortgage vulnerabilityⁱⁱ. These areas also tend to be in areas where no rail link is present, such as in the North West, South West and Western Sydney. In 2001, there were over 700,000 people who were living in transport disadvantaged areas in Western Sydneyⁱⁱⁱ. We estimate that this figure has increased due to an aging population and other factors, as mentioned above.

In general, transport planning has not responded to the need for 75% of all trips taken in Western Sydney. Public transport generally takes longer, and can be more expensive to get to your destination^{iv}. Most people choose to not to use passenger transport services, although others have no other choice and remain transport disadvantaged.

In auditing perceptions of public passenger transport, there is a psycho-social dimension often not explored by policy makers. There is a wide ranging community perception of public passenger transport as;

- Expensive
- unreliable,
- hard to use,
- non-existent on weekends and at night in areas not serviced by rail,
- dirty; and
- only used by those that cannot afford a car or drive or work in the CBD or major centres (congestion & parking problems)

b. current and historical levels of public investment in private vehicle and public passenger transport services and infrastructure;

Since the 1970's over 100km of motorways have been constructed to serve Western Sydney, including the M7 Orbital which added 40km and largely completes the motorway network. In the period since the 1930's the rail network in Western Sydney has had less than 15km of railway network added. Two bus transit ways have been constructed^v.

Sydney and in particular, Western Sydney has fallen behind in providing infrastructure for public transport compared to other cities. This reduction in passenger transport services will leave people living in Western Sydney exposed to higher oil prices, and unless suburbs are retro-fitted, may see people no longer lives in areas which have high transport costs, such as owning 2.7 cars per family and the associated costs in running and maintaining them^{vi}.

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

Health & Transport Partnership

There is wide ranging research and evidence noting that there are clear benefits arising from healthy urban design which facilitates environmental benefits and active transport. I.e. people feel safe and supported to move around their

neighbourhoods. Benefits include incidental exercise which increases mental health and reduces likelihood of obesity.

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2006) found that around half of the Australian population lacks the appropriate level of physical activity, a major cause of obesity^{vii}. Access Economics (2008) estimated the economic cost of obesity at approximately \$58.2 billion annually.

There are structural barriers preventing governments to work together to invest in public passenger transport. We recommend that there are cross-departmental objectives to deliver better transport and health outcomes.

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

Reducing Carbon Pollution

In order to reduce Carbon pollution, to preserve the existing environment and lifestyle we currently enjoy, the Federal government must re-direct funding to initiatives that will be compatible with this objective.

If the policy is to encourage deep cuts in Carbon emissions, alternatives must exist for people to use, if the policy is to leave the car at home.

Federal Transport Behaviour Change Programs

Funding for active living programs which include incentives for using public transport (such as recently been done by the health department) would be useful.

There is a great need to start a funding program to increase the access to all people to enable local and state governments to meet their obligations under the Federal disability standards and to meet the *Disability Discrimination Act* requirements.

Smart link: Sharing Transport Resources

Presently, under the Smartlink project there is an identified way of sharing capacity in the unused community assets. The Smartlink project has identified space in unused vehicles and has developed technologies which are possible to coordinate and support groups who would have been otherwise unable to access transport.

A key requirement for this government funded program to work is the need for legislation to enable all government funded transport assets (e.g. cars, community buses) to be placed on to a register to be coordinated locally. Unless this is done there is bureaucratic and organisational reluctance to enter into the scheme.

- e. the role of Commonwealth Government legislation, taxation, subsidies, policies and other mechanisms that either discourage or encourage public passenger transport; and

Major Cities Unit

The Major Cities Unit should consider the role of public transport in the economic and social development of cities. The Major Cities Unit is a new unit in the Federal Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government's folio, aims to re-establish the role of cities as economic powerhouses. Given the importance of transport to a city's economy, the Major Cities Unit could usefully consider ways in which it can incorporate transport into its agenda.

Australian Transport Council

The Australian Transport Council is a forum of Commonwealth and State Transport Ministers. It has recently adopted a National Transport Policy Framework which, amongst other things intends to:

“identify and adopt Australian national service standards for public transport to promote social inclusion by connecting remote and disadvantaged communities^{viii}.”

Disappointingly, considering the potential for the Framework to addressing transport disadvantage and environmental justice, peak community organisations do not appear to have been consulted.

Australian Transport Council should include the issue of social inclusion in its Terms of Reference, making reference to the critical role that transport plays in reducing social exclusion, and regular reports are made available to the Federal Minister for Transport and Infrastructure.

Social Inclusion

Accessible transport is the keystone that facilitates a person's participation in their community, society and also impacts collectively on our community wellbeing. Groups who are vulnerable and impacted by lack of transport include the unemployed, older people, young people, single parents, migrants including refugees, the Indigenous community, people on low incomes, and persons with disabilities^x.

Social inclusion indicators need to be developed which include a measure for identifying populations who are transport disadvantaged i.e. people who have reduced accessibility to places where they must frequent. This will help guide better planning and resource deployment to achieve multiple government policy objectives.

Marketing & TravelSmart Initiatives

There is a clear need for a nationally branded to promote TravelSmart programs at a community level. Essentially this is a behaviour change through education program which will need to be implemented at a local level. This program could also be introduced to involved people at a local level, fighting climate change and working with state transport authorities.

Manufacturing fund for buses & trains in Western Sydney.

Recently there was support given to car manufacturers to produce 'green cars'. We see that over the next 30 years there will be increase demand for buses, trains and transport infrastructure. Now is an opportune to start planning and building this infrastructure and investment in locally made transport infrastructure. Western Sydney currently is a manufacturing hub and initiatives to build infrastructure should be investigated with training providers, governments and local businesses in Western Sydney

Infrastructure Australia

Infrastructure Australia is the Commonwealth body with possibly the most important role to play in supporting bus services in Western Sydney. It is an advisory body set up to recommend priorities for infrastructure funding, policies, prices and regulations. The body has released a report listing the national infrastructure challenges possible courses of action that have been identified as suitable for funding by the newly established \$20 billion Building Australia Fund.

We recommend a quarter of the Building Australia Fund to be allocated to public transport and cycling facilities, and at least 1% of GDP per year thereafter.

FBT

There are no FBT or incentives to use public passenger transport. The Cycling Promotion Fund (CPF) in its submission in the Australia's Future Tax System noted that there are two main issues:

- "1. Its general concessionary nature which favours motor vehicles over other forms of transport; and*
- 2. The distorting incentives provided by the distance based thresholds used in the current formula".*

Further that:

Supporting analysis by the ICAA (2006) based on ATO and Treasury data indicates that, by using the statutory formula method, approximately 43.1 per cent of potential FBT on cars was foregone in 2003-04.

This translates to an annual subsidy of more than \$1 billion, with both the total revenue and percentage foregone increasing over time. The basic reason is that the statutory percentages are too low and do not adequately reflect the real proportions of private versus business travel.

This \$1 billion subsidy for motor vehicles results in allocative inefficiencies in transport related investment decisions involving cars and alternative options such as bicycles and public transport, which do not receive any FBT concessions. Inefficient over-consumption of cars leads to inefficient car use and inefficient allocation of car inputs such as fuel — which also exacerbates problems with un-priced third-party externalities such as congestion and greenhouse gas emissions, respectively.

In regard to the increased distances, the CPF found that

In addition to the overall concessions that favour motor vehicles over other forms of transport, there is an incentive for cars to be driven greater distances in order to obtain significant further tax reductions — resulting in further inefficiencies in the allocation of car inputs such as fuel and in relation to transport related decisions involving cars and alternative options such as bicycles and public transport. Increased car use also exacerbates the problems with un-priced third-party externalities such as congestion and greenhouse gas emissions as outlined above.

Public passenger transport is not able to be salary packaged. It would be also difficult to achieve as there is no zone based ticketing which covers the private bus system and currently no zone based ticket exists for trip areas in Western Sydney.

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

Garry Glazebrook, a prominent transport academic states that we are already 30 years behind other countries. It is sad that we did not have the foresight to make significant investments in the way we planned our cities, especially regarding car dependence.

We are seeing the decline of oil and the increased frequency of natural calamities such as intense bushfires, and extensive flooding. Best practice has recognised these issues as real and is pushing cuts to green house gases. We need to set a target of 80% reductions to enable our economy to remain internationally competitive. Transport pollution plays a significant role in reducing this pollution

Several Key areas of best practice are:

Walkable Neighbourhoods & Active Transport, making sure that people can access goods locally, by walking or cycling and that they feel safe and enabled to do this. See generally Peter Newman, he is a world leader in Pedestrian Oriented Design, Green Oriented Design and Transit Oriented Design.

Transport system – Generally there needs to greater mobility and accessibility. All people should be able to move about the community without impediment. It should be clean reliable, affordable, available and easy to use.

Sustainability – Transport system run on electricity which is locally generated or powered by Li-Ion batteries, which cars are plugged into the Grid, see Peter Newman generally.

References

- ⁱ Paul Falzon, 2008, *WSCF Transport Position Paper*, Western Sydney Community Forum,
<http://www.wscf.org.au/uploads/File/WSCF%20Transport%20Position%20Paper%20web.pdf>
- ⁱⁱ Jago Dodson and Neil Sipe, Griffith University, *Unsettling Suburbia: The New Landscape of Oil and Mortgage Vulnerability in Australian Cities*, Urban Research Program Research Paper No. 17 August 2008
- ⁱⁱⁱ Hurni, A, (2006) *Transport and Disadvantage in Western Sydney*, a partnership research project, University of Western Sydney and Western Sydney Community Forum.
http://www.wscf.org.au/uploads/File/Transport_disadvantage_report_web.pdf
- ^{iv} WSCF Transport Position Paper & Transport and Disadvantage in Western Sydney
- ^v WSROC, (2007) *Federal Election Issues Paper* – statistical snapshot P.19.
- ^{vi} Garry Glazebrook, *Designing a Thirty Year Public Transport Plan For Sydney*, Draft Discussion Paper, v 14, February 2009.
- ^{vii} Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2006 *Australia's Health 2006*, Australian Government, Canberra.
<http://www.aihw.gov.au/publications/aus/ah06/ah06.pdf>
- ^{viii} National Transport Commission, 2008, *National Transport Policy Framework – a new beginning*, Advice to the Commonwealth Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government
- ^{ix} *Transport Social Disadvantage and Wellbeing Conference*, Melbourne 5-6th April 2006. Key Findings,
<http://www.monash.edu.au/cemo/Transport2006/keyfindings.html>
- ^x Cycling Promotion Fund, *Submission into Australia's Future Tax System Review Panel, 17th October 2008*.