



Blackheath_highway
ACTION GROUP

BLACKHEATH_highway ACTION GROUP

A joint initiative of the Blackheath Chamber of Commerce & Community Inc. and the
Blackheath Area Neighbourhood Centre

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26 October 2012

The Hon Duncan Gay MLC
NSW Minister for Roads and Ports
Level 35
Governor Macquarie Tower
1 Farrar Place
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Minister,

Submission: NSW Long Term Transport Master Plan draft report

We are writing to you in relation to the NSW Long Term Master Transport Plan draft report.

1 Blackheath Highway Action Group ('BAG')

The Blackheath Highway Action Group ('BAG') is a joint initiative of the Blackheath Area Neighbourhood Centre and the Blackheath & District Chamber of Commerce & Community. BAG has approximately 200 members and includes representatives from the Blackheath Area Neighbourhood Centre, Blackheath & District Chamber of Commerce, Blackheath Rhododendron Festival, the Blackheath Public School Council, the Blackheath Mount Victoria RSL Sub-branch, the Blackheath Streetscape Group and Friends of Blackheath Pool and Memorial Park.

BAG was established in 2008 in response to the State and Federal Government announcement to upgrade the Great Western Highway between Mount Victoria and Lithgow.

Since established BAG has coordinated various submissions on Blue Mountains transport issues and has formed alliances with many groups across the region including the Hartley Highway Action Group, the Mount Victoria Highway Bypass Action Group, the Katoomba Chamber of Commerce and Community Inc., the Blue Mountains Commuters and Transport Users Association, the Blue

Mountains Conservation Society, the Association of Concerned Mid Mountains Residents and the Bell Against the Highway Action Group.

BAG through its involvement in the Blue Mountains Commuters and Transport Users Association also participates in the Lachlan Regional Transport Forum, the NSW Commuter Council and the Western Sydney Public Transport Users group.

In November 2009 BAG, along with the Mount Victoria Highway Bypass Action Group and the Hartley Highway Action Group, collected more than 3,500 written submissions over a four-week period against the proposed upgrade of the Great Western Highway between Mount Victoria and Lithgow. BAG's strong support from the communities of the Blue Mountains and broader region, has been the contributing factor in the effectiveness of the campaign about a number of local highway safety issues.

2 BAG response to the NSW Long Term Transport Master Plan draft report

BAG is very concerned that the NSW Long Term Transport Master Plan draft report does not specifically address the development of a long term sustainable transport plan for the movement of freight and people across the Blue Mountains between Sydney and the NSW Central West. The draft report does not address the proposed future upgrade of the Great Western Highway west of Katoomba, nor does it consider future growth in freight movements across the Blue Mountains. The draft report also fails to address the constraints of the current transport network and associated community concerns. Future growth and development of the NSW Central West depends upon fast and reliable transport links to Sydney across the Blue Mountains.

The NSW Central West is dependent upon three transport corridors across the Blue Mountains for access to Sydney for the movement of freight and people. The three transport corridors are the Western rail line, the Great Western Highway and the Bells Line of Road. Each corridor has significant constraints and limitations. Numerous reports, including the Central West Transport Needs Study, the Evans and Peck Independent Report and the NSW Grain Freight Review, have been commissioned by all levels of government and local organisations. These reports have identified numerous constraints and limitations, yet the various recommendations contained in these reports continue to be ignored by both the Federal and State Governments.

BAG calls on the Federal and State Governments to develop and implement a long term integrated transport plan between the NSW Central West and Sydney and the ports of Newcastle, Port Botany and Port Kembla, which incorporates all modes of transport and considers the social, environmental and economic constraints of the Blue Mountains as well as the recommendations of the NSW Grain Freight Review, the Central West Transport Needs Study and the Evans and Peck Independent Review.

The Blue Mountains precinct is also closely linked with Sydney, particularly Western Sydney. Fast and reliable access to the Sydney metropolitan area is fundamental for the ongoing viability of the Blue Mountains economy. Local residents depend upon transport links to Sydney to access employment and key services such as medical and education facilities, while the local economy depends upon tourism primarily from Sydney.

BAG notes that the Infrastructure NSW State Infrastructure Strategy (October 2012) places great emphasis on the development of Sydney's motorway network whilst downplaying the need for

significant investment in public transport infrastructure. Research undertaken as part of the Long Term Public Transport Plan for Sydney Independent Public Inquiry indicates that reliance on private motor cars for access to employment, education and medical services increases the vulnerability of families located in the outer areas of Sydney. In addition, future petrol price increases will cause significant financial hardship and limit the aspirational opportunities of people living on the fringes of the Sydney metropolitan area. BAG believes that funds for government infrastructure investment should be directed to improvement of public transport in lieu of proposed development of the Sydney motorway network.

The public transport network also must be recalibrated to provide better links to the new employment centres of Macquarie Park, Norwest, Rhodes and Homebush Bay, particularly for residents travelling from Western Sydney and beyond.

2.1 Blue Mountains, the sandstone curtain between Sydney and NSW Central West

Increasing truck movements across the Blue Mountains along the Great Western Highway is negatively impacting on tourism, social amenity and the local environment.

There is a general community consensus that both the Federal and State Governments must work together to develop a long term integrated transport plan which provides the necessary transport infrastructure to enable the NSW Central West to develop while protecting the World Heritage Area and the social amenity and tourism economy of the Blue Mountains.

Many NSW Central West organisations such as the Centroc and the Central Western Regional Development Board have cited poor transport links across the Blue Mountains as a major hurdle to economic development.

Residents of the NSW Central West also need fast and reliable transport links to Sydney to access education and medical facilities as well as for recreation and to visit family members located in Sydney.

2.1.1 Existing transport links across the Blue Mountains

There are three transport corridors across the Blue Mountains between Sydney and the NSW Central West, the western rail line, the Great Western Highway and the Bells Line of Road.

Major traffic constraints exist on the Great Western Highway between Katoomba and Lapstone, including:

- 5 school zones.
- 22 sets of traffic lights with more planned.
- 18 different speed zones not including road works and school zones.
- The highway passes directly through the centre of many Blue Mountains villages including Blaxland, Faulconbridge, Lawson and Wentworth Falls.
- Unaddressed traffic black spots along the highway, for example:
 - The Peninsula Road intersection at Valley Heights.
 - The Macquarie Road intersection at Springwood.

- The Boland Avenue intersection at Springwood and related pedestrian crossing issues.
- The Station Street intersection at Wentworth Falls.
- The Falls Road intersection at Wentworth Falls.

These constraints will remain, even after the upgrade of the highway between Woodford and Katoomba is completed in 2016.

In addition, winter weather including black ice, mist and snow also impacts on the highway, limiting visibility and negatively affecting highway safety.

There are also major physical, economic, social and environmental constraints which significantly limit the scope to widen the Great Western Highway between Katoomba and Mount Boyce to the same standard as that of the upgraded highway between Lapstone and Katoomba, i.e. to a four lane dual carriage way standard.

In addition, there is considerable community opposition to the motorway style RMS concept design for the proposed upgrade of the highway between Mount Victoria and Lithgow. The general view across the communities of Blackheath, Mount Victoria and Hartley is that the highway along the current alignment should not be upgraded to a four lane motorway. The NSW Government made a commitment not to widen the highway through Blackheath in response to community outrage following the removal of historically significant trees along the highway by the RTA in 2008. Mr Phil Koperberg MP, former Member for Blue Mountains stated “*The Great Western Highway through the township of Blackheath will not be widened; however minor shoulder work and the realignment of the footpath may be necessary*”¹.

There is a ban on B-double trucks longer than 19m using either the Great Western Highway or the Bells Line of Road to cross the Blue Mountains. The NRMA noted in its monthly ‘Open Road’ publication that the Great Western Highway through the Blue Mountains is not a suitable (standard) B-double truck route².

The Federal and State Governments are investing in the Northern Sydney Freight Line, the Southern Sydney Freight Line. In addition, significant investment continues to be made to complete dual carriage way highways between Sydney and Melbourne, from Sydney to Brisbane. However, there is no investment in rail transport infrastructure across the Blue Mountains, despite repeated requests from the communities of the NSW Central West and the Blue Mountains.

2.1.2 Blue Mountains, a City within a National Park and World Heritage Area

The Blue Mountains is city within a National Park and World Heritage Area. During the year ended 30 June 2009 there were 1.9 million domestic daytrip visitors, 605,000 domestic overnight visitors and 76,000 international overnight visitors³. The operator has reported that more than 1 million people per annum visit Scenic World located in Katoomba. The Blue Mountains is one of the major day visit destination in NSW. The ‘Three Sisters’ is one of the most internationally recognizable natural

¹ Media release Michael Daley NSW Minister for Roads dated 19 December 2008

² Open Road Magazine, February / March 2011

³ Travel to Blue Mountains Year ended 30 June 2009 Visitor Statistics published by Tourism New South Wales

attractions in Australia, third after Ayers Rock, and the Great Barrier Reef. Tourism is the major contributor to the local economy.

There are two transport links for tourists visiting the Blue Mountains, either by car or coach along the Great Western Highway or by train using the Blue Mountains Intercity Train service.

A lack of express train services on the weekend and continual weekend rail service disruptions due to track maintenance act as a disincentive for visitors to travel to the Blue Mountains by train. In addition, the lack of weekday rail services west of Katoomba has a major impact on the tourism villages of Medlow Bath, Blackheath and Mount Victoria, as well as the regional centres of Lithgow and Oberon. Residents and tourists can wait up for more than 2½ hours for a train at these stations on a weekday.

2.1.2.1 Impact on the Blue Mountains environment

The Great Western Highway traverses the Blue Mountains along a ridge. The Blue Mountains National Park and the Blue Mountains World Heritage Area occupy significant portions along both sides of the ridge and dominant the Blue Mountains landscape.

According to a recent RMS study completed by Cardno, more than 1,000 semi-trailers and 19m B-double trucks use the highway to cross the Blue Mountains each day.

BAG is concerned that increasing numbers of trucks on the highway will result in higher levels of pollution, which may negatively impact species of flora and fauna and their habitats within the Blue Mountains National Park, particular those within close proximity to the highway. We note that motor vehicle accidents along the highway often result in spillages of chemicals (such as coal products) that will inevitably find their way into water catchments through runoff, damaging sensitive flora and fauna within the Blue Mountains National Park and World Heritage Area.

2.1.3 Blue Mountains, a ribbon development along a ridge

The population of the Blue Mountains Local Government Area ('LGA') is 77,784 (2009). According to the Blue Mountains City Council website, the population of the LGA is ageing. The majority of residents are located along a ribbon of development that follows the Great Western Highway and the western rail line. The highway and rail line are the only two major transport links between towns and villages along this ribbon of development. Local business owners and residents rely on the highway to access essential services in the larger Blue Mountains centres of Katoomba and Springwood as well as Lithgow and Penrith and beyond. Residents also rely on Blue Mountains Intercity train services to access larger centres of Parramatta and Sydney as well as to commute to and from work.

Given the infrequent nature of public transport services between Mount Victoria and Lapstone, increasing numbers of local residents, especially the elderly, are relying more and more on using their private motor vehicles to travel to medical appointments as well to carry out their day to day affairs (i.e. shopping, banking, taking the children to school, etc.).

Increasing numbers of truck movements is causing noise pollution, negatively impacting upon the social amenity of local residents. The nature of ribbon development in the Blue Mountains has resulted in a large proportion of the local population residing within close proximity to the highway. Truck

noise is becoming more and more of an issue, particularly between 10pm and 6am. During the ABC Radio 702 live broadcast at the 2009 Winter Magic Festival, local identities Lincoln Hall and Jenny Kee were interviewed about why they moved to the Blue Mountains and what worried them most as local residents. Increasing numbers of heavy freight trucks was cited by both as their primary area of concern.

2.2 Transport issues for Blue Mountains residents who commute to work outside the LGA

According to the statistics published by Blue Mountains City Council at the 2008 Better Future Forum more than 58% of local residents work outside the Blue Mountains LGA⁴. The level of commuting by Blue Mountains residents to workplaces outside the Blue Mountains LGA is amongst the highest in the greater Sydney region. Commuters tend to either drive to work or travel on Blue Mountains Intercity trains. Commuters are a significant source of income for the Blue Mountains LGA economy.

The introduction of the 2005 Cityrail timetable saw additional stops added at Emu Plains and Penrith to both the Blue Mountains 'Fish' and 'Chips' express train services. As a result of these timetable changes journey times for the 'Fish' is now approximately 20 minutes longer than under pre 2005 timetables.

Following the introduction of the 2005 timetable more and more passengers travelling from Sydney to Penrith and Emu Plains began to use Blue Mountains train services thereby limiting seating availability for Blue Mountains commuters boarding at Parramatta, a major employment centre. Many Blue Mountains commuters boarding Blue Mountains services at Parramatta for the evening return journey are now forced to stand between Parramatta and Emu Plains whilst suburban services between these two stations are often underutilised because suburban passengers travelling from Parramatta to Penrith and Emu Plains choose the faster and more comfortable Intercity services. Whilst additional cars have been added to some outbound peak services, many off peak services are only have four cars. Overcrowding on outbound services continues to be a concern for Blue Mountains commuters and local residents.

We note that patronage levels on some Blue Mountains peak services are declining. However BAG believes the combination of significantly longer journey times and overcrowding are the primary causes for this decline. Importantly capacity growth for Blue Mountains and suburban train services is severely limited by the lack of capacity on the Western rail line.

The NSW Long Term Transport Masterplan must address the issue of the replacement of the Intercity 'V' train sets. These trains are fast coming to the end of their useful economic life. Despite this, no plans have been put forward for their replacement. Given the long timeframe to design, develop, construct and implement new rolling stock the lack of action in relation to the replacement of the Intercity 'V' train sets is a major community concern.

3 Western Sydney

Statistics presented at the Long Term Public Transport Plan for Sydney Independent Public Inquiry meeting held on 29 September 2009 at the Parramatta Riverside Theatre show significant growth in the

⁴ 2008 Better Future Forum, Blue Mountains City Council

population of Western Sydney. These statistics also show the number of dwellings in Western Sydney is anticipated to increase by 46% between 2009 and 2031.

A study commissioned by Parramatta City Council in 2006 revealed that more than 60% of people who live Western Sydney and work in the Parramatta CBD commute by car, whereas less than 25% commute by train. BAG believes longer journey times and significant overcrowding on the western rail line are the primary factors for the high use of private motor vehicles to commute to work and from work. This trend appears to be continuing, despite rising fuel costs and worsening traffic congestion. Therefore, BAG strongly recommends that the Long Term Transport Master Plan address the need for increased capacity on the western rail line.

“Without a second rail link across the harbour, the CityRail system will face paralysis by 2022. That is the finding of experts who have analysed the Keneally government's recent transport blueprint.” (Sydney Morning Herald, 31 May 2010). BAG supports widespread calls from industry, the academic world and the community for the construction of a much needed second rail link across the harbour. Such a rail link would provide much needed additional capacity for the Western rail line.

BAG also requests that the NSW Long Term Transport Master Plan incorporate the recalibration of existing public transport services to facilitate better public transport access to major non CBD employment centres such as Macquarie Park, Norwest, Rhodes and Homebush Bay. BAG envisages part of this process would be to include a change in focus from departure to destination point for key urban centres such as Parramatta, Hurstville, Epping and Chatswood.

4 NSW Central West

The Australasian Rail Association identified congestion on the Cityrail network and the current curfew arrangements as major impediments to moving freight by rail through Sydney. Bryan Nye, Chief Executive Officer, Australasian Rail Association noted that ‘Sydney is a corridor bottleneck’ in a presentation entitled ‘The Future of Rail Freight in Australia’ which he gave at the Parkes Rail Conference in September 2006. This view is supported by the findings of the Central West Transport Needs Study. The Central West Transport Needs Study noted “*major constraint for increased freight traffic from the Central West is the significant growth in passenger trains within ... Sydney ... which reduces the availability of freight paths from the region*”.

In 2007 the Federal Government commissioned the Central West Transport Needs Study. Many of the report’s recommendations have not been acted on by either the Federal or State Governments.

The current transport policy of both the Federal and State Governments does not reflect the aspirations of the NSW Central West for a motorway link across the Blue Mountains to Sydney. Whilst BAG does not advocate for the construction of a motorway across the Blue Mountains, there is general agreement in the Blue Mountains precinct and the NSW Central West that significant investment in the highway west of Katoomba will not solve the transport needs of the NSW Central West. This view is supported by the findings of the Central West Transport Needs Study and the Evans and Peck Independent Review.

The current policy, which identifies the highway as an Auslink road freight corridor is not realistic because it ignores the limitations of the highway through the Blue Mountains and the views of key stakeholders including the local community and the freight industry.

The disjointed approach to upgrading the highway west of Katoomba, driven by the internal dysfunction of RMS is of major concern and frustration to all stakeholders. As we have noted above, what is required is a holistic approach to transport across the Blue Mountains which considers the requirements for the NSW Central West, factors in realistic growth targets yet is sympathetic to the environmental, social and economic issues in the Blue Mountains.

5 Our Long Term Transport Policy and Infrastructure Initiatives

There is strong community opposition to motorway style upgrades to the Great Western Highway west of Katoomba. The highway through the mountains will never be a heavy vehicle freight route, even after the upgrade between Woodford and Katoomba is completed.

BAG calls on the Federal and State Governments to abandon the proposed RMS concept design for the upgrade of the highway between Mount Victoria and Lithgow. Instead all levels of government must work together to develop a sustainable long term integrated transport plan for the NSW Central West which will foster economic and community development. The focus for the highway west of Katoomba should be safety and social amenity.

The NSW Long Term Transport Master Plan must also focus on an integrated public transport system for Western Sydney that provides increased capacity and establishes links to employment centres not currently serviced by directly by public transport.

BAG believes the following transport policy and infrastructure initiatives which we believe should be incorporated into the NSW Long Term Transport Master Plan.

5.1 Western Sydney

5.1.2 Expand rail capacity between North Sydney and Western Sydney

Expansion of rail capacity between North Sydney and Western Sydney through the construction of a second heavy rail harbor crossing will increase rail network capacity and provide additional Western Sydney passenger services, including express Blue Mountains services. BAG believes the development of a second harbor heavy rail crossing⁵ as an urgent infrastructure priority. The Long-Term Strategic Plan for Rail (June 2001) prepared by Ron Christie identified the need for a second harbor heavy rail crossing. We believe this aspect of the Christie Plan should be incorporated into the NSW Long term Transport Master Plan.

5.1.2.1 Construct the Parramatta to Epping rail link

Completion of the heavy rail line between Parramatta and Chatswood would allow for significant additional capacity on the Western line whilst also allowing for major improvements in public transport access to the key employment and education centre of Macquarie Park for residents in Western Sydney, North Western Sydney and the Blue Mountains. The line would also allow for improved public

⁵ Recommendation LT10, Page 23, Independent Public Inquiry, Long-Term Public Transport Plan for Sydney (2010) *Independent Public Inquiry into a Long-Term Public Transport Plan for Sydney: Final Report—Themes and Recommendations*, 26 May 2010, submitted to and published by *The Sydney Morning Herald*.

transport access to Chatswood. It would also allow improved public transport access to St Leonards, a key employment and medical centre located on the lower North Shore. This would benefit employers and employees as well as users of health facilities located at St Leonards whilst significantly alleviating traffic congestion on the M2 motorway.

BAG calls on the Federal and State Governments to incorporate the completion of the Parramatta to Epping rail link into the NSW Long Term Transport Master Plan.

5.1.2.2 Complete the heavy rail network Capacity and Service Improvement Initiatives as set out in the 2006 NSW State Plan⁶.

The NSW State Plan as released in 2006 sets out heavy rail Capacity and Service Improvement Initiatives that we understand have been determined based upon the findings of the Metropolitan Strategy for Sydney, prepared by the NSW Government and released in 2005. We believe the heavy rail Capacity and Service Improvement initiatives should be adopted in full within the NSW Long Term Transport Masterplan as part of its key short to medium term recommendations. Quadruplicating the rail line between St Marys and Penrith is a key initiative of the heavy rail capacity and service improvement initiatives that BAG highlights as a short term priority for the Federal and State Governments.

5.1.2.3 Construct a Sydney West freight rail line between Rooty Hill and Leightonfield⁷

The Long-Term Strategic Plan for Rail (June 2001) prepared by Ron Christie recommendations include the development of a Sydney West freight rail line between Rooty Hill and Leightonfield, which would link key centres such as Wetherill Park and the proposed intermodal hub at Eastern Creek. This link will provide increased rail freight capacity and encourage further economic development in Western Sydney while alleviating road congestion.

The above infrastructure initiatives should be constructed and incorporated into the Cityrail heavy rail network in conjunction with the completion of the Northwest and Southwest rail links.

5.1.2 Investigate Western Sydney Fast Rail

Consideration should be given to the proposal put forward by the private consortium Western FastRail in 2006 for the introduction of fast rail services between Penrith and Sydney that was rejected by the State Government in 2008⁸.

5.1.3 Emu Plains Stabling Yard

BAG believes the proposed Emu Plains stabling yard should be completed as initially proposed by Railcorp on the basis that this will increase operational efficiency on the Western rail line. Currently terminating train services at Emu Plains must return Penrith yard, which limits movement of other services including freight trains. We understand that Penrith yard will reach full capacity, particularly

⁶ Appendix A, NSW State Plan, New South Wales State Government, November 2006

⁷ Page 69, Section 5, "Long-term Strategic Plan for Rail", Office of the Coordinator General of Rail, 13 June 2001

⁸ 'lemma Government's high-speed western Sydney rail link dumped', Joe Hilderbrand, Daily Telegraph, Monday 11 August 2008

when the new Waratah trains come online. If there is to be an increase in the number of services to Penrith then there must also be appropriate stabling yard capacity for these new services.

5.2 Blue Mountains

5.2.1 Rail

5.2.1.1 Train decanting operations at Mount Victoria

Currently Blue Mountains ‘V’ train sets are decanted at Mount Victoria station whilst occupying the main line. This is because the decanting facilities at Mount Victoria are located adjacent to the main line and not within the stabling yard which is located in very close proximity to the station. Currently the 5.08pm Sydney to Mount Victoria service does not stop at either Blackheath or Medlow Bath because it has to be decanted before the arrival at Mount Victoria of the 5.23pm service from Sydney which continues on to Lithgow. The repositioning of the decanting facilities to the stabling yard would allow the 5.09pm service sufficient time to stop at both Blackheath and Medlow Bath stations thereby improving service frequency and capacity for upper Blue Mountains train users, particularly tourists and commuters.

5.2.1.2 Bidirectional signaling between Emu Plains and Mount Victoria

Implementation of bidirectional signaling for the entire section of the Western line between Emu Plains and Lithgow would allow increased capacity on that section for peak Blue Mountains commuter services. It would also allow additional numbers of longer freight trains to enter the Cityrail network without disrupting existing passenger train operations.

5.2.1.3 Passing loops on the Blue Mountains train line

Lengthen passing loops at Lawson and Katoomba to the ARTC standard length of 1,800 metres to permit longer freight trains to run through the Blue Mountains.

We understand that restrictive train paths and insufficient siding lengths currently limit use of the Western line through the Blue Mountains by both freight and passenger services including Countrylink services.

5.2.1.4 Reinstate the 1.2 cents per litre transport petroleum by rail subsidy⁹.

The 1.2 cents per litre transport petroleum by rail subsidy should be reinstated and additional funding and or tax incentives provided for the renewal of rail sidings and associated infrastructure. This is essential to encourage the transfer of petroleum freight from road to rail. All petroleum products are now transported by road across the Blue Mountains, which is a concern for the local community. BAG has been in discussions with the several key petroleum industry participants, all of whom support our calls for the reinstatement of the subsidy.

⁹ Scrapped in NSW 2008-09 Mini Budget, see Page A-10, NSW 2008-09 Mini Budget

5.2.1.5 Intercity ‘V’ train sets

Replace the existing Intercity ‘V’ train sets with a similar long distance intercity style train that provides passengers with a comparable standard of comfort and space. The new train sets should incorporate an interior design to accommodate extreme climatic conditions such as snow.

5.2.1.6 Fast services to Sydney

The Blue Mountains Commuters and Transport Users Association has long called for the reintroduction of fast services to Sydney. As noted above, journey times have significantly increased since 1995 and there is widespread support for peak express trains services to Parramatta and Sydney, which BAG fully supports.

5.2.1.7 Investigate future expansion of intermodal rail freight across the Blue Mountains

BAG calls on the Federal and State Governments to investigate the feasibility for trailer rail drive on drive off freight rail services and double stack container trains between Marrangaroo and St Marys.

5.2.2 Road

5.2.2.1 Bells Line of Road

We call on the Federal and State Governments to fully implement the short term recommendations of the Bells Line of Road Strategic Corridor Plan with regard to safety improvements as identified as part of the BLOR Strategic Corridor Plan community consultation process.

5.2.2.2 Great Western Highway through Blue Mountains

We call on the Federal and State Governments to:

- Address highway safety at Springwood and Valley Heights to enable westbound motorists to access Hawkesbury Road without diverting through Springwood along Macquarie Road,
- Install Safety Cameras at key intersections along the GWH to monitor speed and red light offences (to reducing speeding and running of red lights by trucks and cars), and
- Fund the construction of a network of cycle ways between villages to promote tourism and improve interconnectivity between various communities.

5.3 NSW Central West

5.3.1 Rail

5.3.1.1 Support Inland Melbourne to Brisbane Rail Line

BAG supports the construction of the inland rail line between Melbourne and Brisbane and believes this should be included in the NSW Long Term Transport Master Plan and the Infrastructure NSW State Infrastructure Strategy.

Completion of the inland rail line between Melbourne and Brisbane via Parkes is estimated cost \$3.7 billion¹⁰, significantly less than the proposed Northern Sydney Freight Line. Given both the Brisbane and Melbourne ports have excess capacity which can be utilized by NSW via this rail link thereby taking pressure of both Port Botany and Newcastle Port (which are running at above capacity levels). This would also allow containers and fuel for the NSW Central West to be transported via Parkes / Brisbane instead of coming from Sydney over the Blue Mountains.

5.3.1.2 Fund Central West Transport Needs Study rail recommendations

BAG calls on both the Federal and State Governments to fund the Central West Transport Needs Study rail recommendations¹¹. These include

- Construction of a crossing loop at Elong Elong and Merrygoen triangle junction (\$25 million)
- Investigation of Main West rail line long term demand and investment program (Mount Victoria to Parkes)

5.3.1.3 Maldon to Dombarton Rail Line

BAG fully supports the construction of the Maldon to Dombarton rail link¹², which should be included in the NSW Long Term Transport Master Plan.

5.3.1.4 Maryvale to Gulgong Rail Line

Complete construction of the Maryvale to Gulgong rail line. This project '*yielded benefit-cost ratios between 1.78 and 3.25 'depending on construction sequence and the discount rate'*'¹³.

5.3.1.5 Blayney to Demondrille Rail Line

BAG supports the campaign to reopen of the Blayney to Demondrille Rail Line in conjunction with the completion of the Maldon to Dombarton Rail Line. There is widespread support throughout the Blue Mountains and NSW Central West for this rail line to be reopened. Accordingly BAG calls on the NSW Long Term Transport Master Plan to incorporate the future reopening of this line. We believe and appropriate consideration must be given to the economic, environmental and social benefits of reopening this line, particularly in relation to the transfer of heavy freight from road to rail and the associated cost savings for local councils and the NSW Government.

5.3.1.6 Main West Rail Line Deviation – Lithgow Yard to Number Ten Tunnel

BAG believes there is an economic justification to investigate the construction of a main line deviation between Lithgow Yard and Tunnel #10 to reduce the grade from 1:40 to 1:80 and eliminate tight curvature of the existing alignment. This is the steepest 'Up' section of the western rail line between

¹⁰ See www.artc.com.au/Content.aspx?p=175

¹¹ Page 44, Central West Transport Needs Study Summary Report, May 2009

¹² Maldon-Dombarton Rail Line Pre-Feasibility Study, 7 July 2009

¹³ Page 39, Sandy Hollow – Maryvale Railway: Economic Evaluation of Proposed Completion, Bureau of Transport Economics, 1979

Lithgow and Sydney (the remaining grade is 1:60 and lower). This section has very sharp curves making train operation slow and difficult for drivers. This deviation has been under consideration since the 1950's.

5.3.1.7 Central West XPT Service

The draft report highlights uncertainty regarding the future of Countrylink XPT services, particularly because the existing rolling stock is fast approaching the end of its useful economic life. BAG acknowledges that significant investment will be required to replace the current XPT fleet. However, substituting the existing XPT service, particularly for destinations such as Dubbo, is not an acceptable alternative in terms of passenger comfort and amenity. It is internationally accepted that the social benefits of a subsidised country rail passenger service far outweigh the subsidy cost. Natural disasters, such as the recent flooding between Kelso and Bathurst which led to the closure of the Great Western Highway, highlight the need for passenger train services as an alternative means of transport. The draft report does not appear to consider these factors when commenting on the future viability of country train services.

BAG supports the continuation of country train services in the NSW Central West.

5.3.2 Road

Finally BAG calls on all implement a long term sustainable road/rail transport plan between the Eastern ports and NSW Central West that improves safety on the Bells Line of Road.

6. Concluding remarks

The ad hoc politically driven approach to transport planning is a major barrier to the economic and social development of NSW. There also continues to be widespread community frustration at the lack of political will to tackle the big picture transport issues. If NSW is to resolve the transport planning challenges of the next generation and gain public confidence then the bureaucratic and political culture must change. So far we haven't seen any evidence that such change will occur, despite the changes in the transport portfolio in NSW.

BAG continues to experience an ad hoc politically driven approach to the proposed upgrade of the Great Western Highway west of Katoomba. RMS, and the Federal and State Governments have pursued a concept design for the upgrade of the highway between Mount Victoria and Lithgow, which is contrary to the recommendations of the Central West Transport Needs Study and the Evans and Peck Independent Review and despite widespread community opposition. Further, the RMS concept design has been released for public comment before the NSW Long Term Transport Master Plan draft report and the Infrastructure NSW State Infrastructure Strategy (October 2012) were released. The Bells Line of Road Strategic Corridor Plan has yet to be released.

Ironically neither the NSW Long Term Transport Master Plan nor the Infrastructure NSW State Infrastructure Strategy refers to the RMS concept design for the proposed upgrade of the highway between Mount Victoria and Lithgow. There is a clear disconnect between the various transport reports and plans in relation to the proposed upgrade.

The question for the NSW Government is will the NSW Long Term Transport Master Plan end up like all the other transport plans and reports before it, just another publication for the bookshelf? Or will the NSW Government find the political will to confront the real transport challenges that face us. These challenges will only get harder as petrol prices rise, government budgets tighten and the population increases and ages.

Please do not hesitate to contact me on (m) 0423 596 240 or by email, michaelpaag@gmail.com if you require further explanations and or additional information in relation to this submission.

Yours sincerely,
Blackheath_highway Action Group

Michael Paag
President

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