

29 November 2017

Dear Transport for NSW,

Draft Future Transport Strategy 2056 - submission

We appreciate having the opportunity to comment on the Draft Future Transport Strategy 2056 (“the strategy”) and the associated Draft Regional Services and Infrastructure Plan (“the plan”).

Background & context

The Northern NSW Local Health District is located in the north east corner of NSW and covers an area from the Queensland border at Tweed Heads down to Grafton and west out to Bonalbo and Urbenville. It includes the designated regional cities of Tweed Heads and Lismore.

We make this submission using an evidence based approach using NSW Health’s *Healthy Urban Development Checklist* (HUDC).¹ Chapter 10 of the checklist is titled ‘Transport and physical connectivity’ and specifically addresses transport issues. Its introduction states:

“...reliance on private vehicles for transport can have negative effects on our mental health and sense of community. Reducing the kilometres travelled by private vehicle and encouraging more active forms of transport (including public transport use) is an important objective for healthy urban development and environmental sustainability.”²

Therefore, a key focus for designing future transport systems and infrastructure which support health is to increase active transport modes (walking, cycling) and decrease sedentary behaviours (such as door-to-door private car use). Evidence suggests that prolonged periods of sitting includes time spent in cars and can be associated with increased cardiovascular disease risk and poorer mental health.³ An American study found that each additional hour spent in a car per day was associated with a 6% increase in the likelihood of obesity. Conversely, each additional kilometer walked per day was associated with a 4.8% reduction in the likelihood of obesity.⁴

Our response is also informed by other healthy built environment research including:

- University of NSW’s *Healthy Built Environment Indicators*⁵
- Government Architect NSW’s *Better Placed*⁶
- (the former) Premier’s Council of Active Living’s *Planning and Design Guidelines*⁷ (particularly the public transport section⁸)
- Heart Foundation’s *Healthy Active by Design*⁹ (particularly the section relating to ‘movement networks’¹⁰)

¹ <http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/urbanhealth/Pages/healthy-urban-dev-check.aspx>

² <http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/urbanhealth/Pages/healthy-urban-dev-check.aspx>, p

³ Billie Giles-Corti, Anne Vernez-Moudon, Rodrigo Reis, Gavin Turrell, Andrew L Dannenberg, Hannah Badland, Sarah Foster, Melanie Lowe, James F Sallis, Mark Stevenson, Neville Owen, ‘City planning and population health: a global challenge’ Published online September 23, 2016 [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(16\)30066-6](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(16)30066-6) p 6

⁴ Frank LD1, Andresen MA, Schmid TL, ‘Obesity relationships with community design, physical activity, and time spent in cars’ Am J Prev Med. 2004 Aug;27(2):87-96 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/15261894>

⁵ <https://cityfutures.be.unsw.edu.au/research/city-wellbeing/>

⁶ <http://www.governmentarchitect.nsw.gov.au/thinking/integrated-design-policy>

⁷ http://www.pcal.nsw.gov.au/planning_and_design_guidelines

⁸ http://www.pcal.nsw.gov.au/planning_and_design_guidelines/public_transport

⁹ <http://www.healthyactivebydesign.com/>

¹⁰ <http://www.healthyactivebydesign.com.au/design-features/movement-networks>

Transport modes, options and availability are particularly relevant to physical activity and population health. In 2016 over 53 per cent of adults in NSW were reported to be overweight or obese and over 42 per cent of adults do not do enough physical activity each week.¹¹

There is significant transport disadvantage in Northern NSW. The previous Northern Rivers Regional Transport Plan¹² states that: “The Northern Rivers region has an above average level of social disadvantage compared to the NSW median.” On average, North Coast residents have a household income two thirds of their city counterparts. There is a high reliance on private car usage and travel distances are generally longer, with places of employment, education and services spread out across the region.

The *Casino to Murwillumbah Transport Study*, version 2.1 at 1.3¹³ provides a summary of the region’s transport challenges:

“1.3 The challenge: barriers to mobility and accessibility

There are a number of challenges to efficient accessibility and mobility within the region including the study area:

- **Dispersed population.** The region consists of several large towns separated by considerable distance with most social services existing in designated regional centres of Lismore and Tweed. Tweed Heads is also strongly linked to the Gold Coast for employment opportunities and economic growth
- **Widely dispersed social services,** stemming mostly from the concentration of social services in towns, which is typical for regional areas.
- **A transport system reliant on private vehicle use,** a consequence of low density population and large distances between regional centres.
- **An increasing dependent population.** The Northern Rivers has proportionally the highest number of people not in employment in NSW. The unemployment rate is also higher than the State average. While requiring greater access to social services, those over 65 and under 18 are also less likely to have reliable private vehicle transport. This presents particular difficulties for young people in accessing education, training and employment, and participating in sport, recreation and cultural activities.
- **Worsening levels of transport disadvantage,** where both the dependent population and unemployed people do not have regular access to cars, and public transport cannot provide a real alternative.
- **Existing public transport is limited.** The Northern Rivers bus network consists of a number of private bus companies operating town to town services as well as within towns. Bus services are largely planned around school services, limiting public transport options to key social services such as hospitals and education facilities. There is also little timetable and service integration, and coupled with relatively high fares this provides further disincentive to potential customers to use public transport.

The principal public transport challenge facing the Northern Rivers can therefore be summarised as a need to provide reliable access to social services for an increasing dependent population, across a widely dispersed area, particularly for those who do not have access to private vehicles.”

In this context transport is particularly important for influencing health outcomes.

¹¹ 2016 NSW Population Health Survey

¹² Transport for NSW, *Northern Rivers Regional Transport Plan*, December 2013
<http://www.transport.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/b2b/publications/northern-rivers-regional-transport-plan.pdf>, pp 4, 6

¹³ Transport for NSW, *Casino to Murwillumbah Transport Study*, Version 2.1 <http://www.transport.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/b2b/projects/c2m-transport-study-final-low-res-version.pdf>

Draft Future Transport Strategy 2056

Overall the strategy mentions health and wellbeing a number of times, although this is often in the context of environmental sustainability (eg. pp 28-29) rather than having health as a distinct focus. Of the plan's 6 overarching outcomes (p 19), 'wellbeing' is only mentioned in the context of outcome 6 – 'sustainability'. In this sense, the strategy would benefit from an upfront and explicit focus that addresses population health by focussing on transport modes that increase physical activity and reduce sedentary behaviours (such as car travel).

Recommendation 1: Make health a key focus of the strategy (and plan) in order to reduce private vehicle dependence and increase active transport modes (walking, cycling, public transport).

Integrated land use and transport planning

We are pleased that 'Promoting sustainable development and healthy lifestyles' is given specific treatment in part 9 by way of a 'Movement and Place Framework'(p 70):

The Movement and Place Framework underpins Future Transport and aims to improve the liveability of places in Sydney and Regional NSW through an integrated land use and transport planning tool that sets customer focused outcomes and delivers wider benefits for the health and wellbeing of the community.

However, we are unsure how this framework will be implemented and how the hierarchy of competing transport demands will be balanced? In this context, the diagram on p 71 needs further detail on how health outcomes can be prioritised in order that future transport developments incorporate active transport modes such as walking and cycling. In this context, regional areas (such as Northern NSW) suffer a disadvantage in that population centres and services are often geographically dispersed. This requires Transport for NSW to play an integral role in land use planning, in order that new development is located near existing services and infrastructure to allow easy walking and cycling and therefore decreased car dependence.

Recommendation 2: Prioritise active transport modes (walking, cycling, public transport) in the 'Movement and Place Framework'.

Recommendation 3: Transport for NSW be involved in land use planning decisions so that new developments are located in close proximity to existing services and include walking, cycling and public transport infrastructure.

Walking and cycling

We strongly support the strategy's reference to walking and cycling (p 71):

Walking and cycling have significant benefits for customers and the wider city. As well as supporting active and healthy lifestyles that prevent chronic illnesses, walking and cycling are efficient and community-centred ways to travel that can extend public transport catchments, reduce congestion and lower carbon emissions and air pollutants.

Coordinated investment to connect green corridors and spaces across the city will support compact development across the city, promote a more resilient urban

environment, and reduce obesity and inactivity. This 'green grid' will support walking and cycling around and between centres, extend public transport catchments and reduce car dependence.

We are therefore strongly supportive of the future 'directions to investigate' outlined on pages 71-72 of the strategy. This is particularly relevant to Northern NSW where regional commuting statistics indicate (p 57) that 91% of people travel to work by car, while only a combined 9% walk, cycle or take public transport. We emphasise that these directions to investigate should be applied more broadly to regional centres and not just designated cities, as people in smaller regional towns generally have less opportunities for walking and cycling compared to their city counterparts.

Recommendation 4: Ensure walking and cycling infrastructure is prioritised for regional towns as well designated regional cities.

Due to longer travel distances in regional areas, cycling-only options is not feasible for the majority of people. In order to encourage mixed use transport modes and greater active transport, a combination of transport modes is necessary. This therefore requires public transport infrastructure that allows for convenient bicycle transport and storage to provide a seamless travel experience. We understand that currently regional trains (NSW Trainlink¹⁴) makes it difficult and inconvenient to take bicycles (require advanced notice, disassembling, boxing and extra fee). Further, many buses in Northern NSW do not allow bicycles on board and have limited storage capacity. There is also the need for end of journey showering amenities and bicycle storage facilities to make mixed transport modes easier and more enjoyable.

Recommendation 5: Provide bicycle friendly train carriages and buses and end-of-trip bicycle storage and showering facilities in order to encourage mixed transport modes.

Bike share schemes

We note the strategy's support of bike share services (p 35) and strongly support such schemes because they promote active transport. We note negative media relating to such schemes in recent times due to possibly improperly implemented schemes and encourage Transport for NSW to play an active role in ensuring such schemes are properly regulated and promoted. Increased cycling by using such schemes should be encouraged and negative experiences have the potential to detract from the health and transport benefits of cycling.

Recommendation 6: Ensure proper regulation of bike share schemes and promote their proper use and implementation.

Driverless vehicles

While driverless vehicles have the potential to revolutionise public transport and challenge existing private vehicle usage patterns, they could potentially exacerbate existing transport disadvantage and entrench sedentary behaviours. Regional areas such as Northern NSW may lag behind in the uptake of technological innovations like driverless vehicles due to socio-economic disadvantage or lack of infrastructure investment, meaning people remain reliant on private vehicle travel and/or legacy public transport. Further, door-to-door autonomous vehicles pose an increased risk of entrenching already sedentary behaviours and on face value are not likely to encourage greater physical activity. Although a 100%

¹⁴ <https://transportnsw.info/travel-info/ways-to-get-around/walking-cycling/travelling-with-bikes-surfboards>

autonomous vehicle fleet bring predictions of reductions in injury and death from road accidents, conversely there may be an increase in obesity due to decreased physical activity. This warrants further research and investigation.

These comments are also relevant to the discussion concerning assisted mobility devices (p 51), particularly how such devices will impact on physical activity rates for generally 'able-bodied' populations.

Recommendation 7: Research health impacts of driverless vehicles and how they are likely to impact on physical activity and sedentary behaviours.

Ride sharing

We support the strategy's treatment of ride sharing (pp 10, 14, 15), particularly the 'no regret' strategy: "Foster shared, demand-responsive services: enable flexible, shared use service models". Ride sharing and car pooling schemes have the potential to reduce private car reliance, engender social interaction and make travel more affordable. We do submit however, that such ride share schemes are likely to be taken up where there are sufficient population densities and technologically proficient users. In regional areas like Northern NSW where population centres are dispersed and ageing, there may be less of a demand for ride sharing services. Coupling ride sharing and on-demand technology with existing bus services has the potential to improve existing public transport patronage and increase the incidental physical activity associated with its use.

Recommendation 8: Implement demand responsive community based rideshare schemes in order to facilitate and encourage ride sharing, and investigate coupling such schemes with existing transport service providers (such as buses and taxis).

Draft Regional Services and Infrastructure Plan

We support the plan's reference to "Access and Social Well-being" (p 56), particularly recognition of the vital role transport has in ensuring access to jobs, education, health care and other services. This is especially important in regional areas where populations are dispersed and longer distance travel may be required. The *Healthy Urban Development Checklist* observes that:

"Public transport extends the distances that people travel by foot and bicycle because it is associated with higher levels of incidental physical activity than private vehicle use. In order to be viable, public transport must be supported by higher population densities. Lack of public transport in areas can contribute to inadequate access to vital goods and services, including jobs, healthcare, and healthy food..."¹⁵

Again, we emphasise transport's role in affecting population health and the need for the future transport strategy to prioritise health (see **Recommendation 1**).

We support Lismore and Tweed Heads being designated regional cities as part of the Draft Regional Services and Infrastructure Plan (p 6). We would like more information on what this means for levels of transport services and infrastructure in comparison to localities not designated as regional cities? We suggest that regional towns in the Northern NSW Local Health District such as Grafton, Casino and Kyogle would also benefit from integrated public transport plans, particularly to improve residents' access to education, employment and leisure activities.

¹⁵ <http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/urbanhealth/Pages/healthy-urban-dev-check.aspx>, p 75

Recommendation 9: Develop integrated transport plans for regions that incorporate a region's towns, cities and key service centres so that a holistic and seamless transport network is provided.

We are pleased that walking and cycling get some mention in the plan, although 'active travel' is only mentioned once (p 76). We emphasise that active travel is as important for regional areas as it is for cities and encourage a plan that prioritises walking and cycling (see **Recommendation 4**).

State-wide infrastructure initiatives

We are supportive of the state-wide infrastructure initiatives which include (p 22):

"Completion of 2 km radius walking catchment investments for Regional Cities and Centres"

"Provide for priority walking access and bicycle parking within interchange precincts"

We emphasise our previous observation that regional towns (not just designated 'regional cities') would benefit from integrated transport plans which combine walking, cycling, bus and train infrastructure. Regional areas are particularly car reliant and simply providing some cycling or walking paths without integrated connectivity to public transport will have limited effectiveness (see **Recommendation 9**).

We also make the observation that some of the state-wide infrastructure initiatives risk being a 'shopping list' of ideas where not all projects will be completed, due to inadequate funding or prioritisation. In this regard we emphasise our previous comments that a key focus of the future transport strategy needs to be about reducing sedentary (private vehicle) transport modes and increasing active transport (walking, cycling). "SECTION 4 Customer outcomes for Regional NSW" (p 75) is a case in point. These 10 customer focussed outcomes make no mention of health, wellbeing, active travel, walking or cycling. Considering current obesity rates and people's increasingly sedentary lives, one of these outcomes needs to be focussed on getting people more active in their daily lives. Although Transport for NSW has probably traditionally not viewed having any role in population health, transport is an integral part of health as discussed above. We therefore emphasise the need for health to be one of the customer outcomes for regional NSW (see **Recommendation 1**).

Casino-Murwillumbah rail trail

Of particular relevance to Northern NSW is the future of the Casino-Murwillumbah rail corridor. While historically used for public transport rail services, this disused corridor now offers the opportunity for recreational cycling and walking along its 130 km length. If development of the corridor into a rail trail is to proceed we strongly recommend that bicycle-friendly integrated public transport connections and end-of trip facilities (showers, storage) be provided.

Recommendation 10: Any development of the Casino-Murwillumbah rail trail should include public transport connectivity that allows for easy bicycle transport and end of trip-facilities. Eg. bike friendly buses, showers, storage

We note the observation on p 39 of the plan: "Corridor protection for Higher Speed Connections" and assume this refers to high speed rail? High speed rail offers opportunities for faster travel times to Brisbane and Sydney for health, employment and leisure activities and is therefore supported. In order to provide optimum health benefits such high speed rail connections need to be part of an integrated transport network (buses, taxis, walking, cycling) in order to reduce individual car dependence and increase the incidental physical activity associated with public transport use.

Commuter bus services

Commuter bus services specifically designed to suit the work hours of employees in large organisations present an opportunity to increase public transport patronage and reduce car dependence. We note the recently announced 6 month trial of a commuter bus service between the coast (Byron Bay, Lennox Head, Ballina) and Lismore in response to a request from the Lismore Sustainable Transport Group (of which we are a member). For such services to attract passengers, travel times that are competitive with car travel times and capped weekly ticket prices are recommended. Further, such bus services will be more attractive to commuters if they allow easy transport of bicycles (no requirement to box or disassemble) and have wireless internet. Such add-ons would incentivise more workers to travel by bus. A funded promotion campaign with sufficient lead time to advertise and attract potential passengers is also needed.

Recommendation 11: Investigate the introduction of commuter bus services for regional areas specifically focussing on high demand transport routes and large employers. Include provision for easy bicycle transport (no boxing, disassembly), wifi, capped weekly tickets and funded promotion campaign.

Yours sincerely,



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