Illawarra Business Chamber/Illawarra First

Submission on:
Draft Future Transport Strategy 2056

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1. Introduction

The Draft Future Transport Strategy 2056 is an update of NSW’s Long Term Transport Master Plan. The document provides a 40-year vision for mobility developed with the Greater Sydney Commission, the Department of Planning and Environment and Infrastructure NSW.

The strategy among other priorities includes services to regional NSW and Infrastructure Plans aimed at renewing regional connectivity. Regional cities and centres are proposed to increase their roles as hubs for surrounding communities for employment and services such as retail, health, education and cultural activities.

2. Illawarra Business Chamber/Illawarra First

The Illawarra Business Chamber (IBC) is the Illawarra Region’s peak business organisation and is dedicated to helping business of all sizes maximise their potential. Through initiatives such as Illawarra First, the IBC is promoting the economic development of the Illawarra through evidence-based policies and targeted advocacy.

The IBC appreciates the opportunity to provide a submission in response to the Draft Future Transport Strategy 2056.

3. Overview of the Illawarra

The Illawarra region lies immediately south of the Sydney Metropolitan area, with its economic centre in Wollongong, 85km south of the Sydney CBD. The region extends from Helensburgh in the north to south of Nowra, including the area to the southern boundary of the Shoalhaven local government area (LGA) and the western boundary of the Wingecarribee LGA.

The Illawarra region has been growing strongly. The population between 2011 and 2016 has increased by around 2% per year, and was matched by employment growth. Shellharbour has been growing fastest in terms of the annual rate. Strong growth across region is expected to continue. Developments in Shellharbour, Wilton and West Dapto will add 160,000 people in 40,000 dwellings by 2036.

Improvements to transport connectivity are seen as crucial to the Illawarra region’s economic prosperity and employment opportunities (particularly in respect to the creation of youth employment opportunities). The economic and social benefits associated with improved transport links between Illawarra and Greater Sydney have been highlighted in a number of recent studies. With a growing population, transport within the region also needs to keep pace to avoid the problems of congestion, higher transport costs and liveability issues.

A major challenge confronting the Illawarra is the over reliance on a very limited number of main roads and a rail network constructed in the nineteenth century. The lack of redundancy in the Illawarra’s region’s transport network is also a vulnerability.

Specific comments in relation to the matters raised in the Draft Future Transport Strategy 2056 are provided in this submission.
4. Recommendations

In addition to the commentary provided in this submission the IBC provides the following recommendations:

- **The duplication of the Picton Road should commence within the next five years.** Recent improvements to the road have made a substantial difference and ongoing improvements focusing on safety and utility of the road are necessary.

- **Comprehensive studies be undertaken into the feasibility of the connection between Mt Ousley and Picton Road and the Mount Kembla pass route.** Studies should occur within the next five years. Pressures on Mount Ousley requires more immediate attention than the 10 – 20-year timeframe proposed in the Draft Future Transport Strategy 2056.

- **An assessment of the value of constructing a new crossing of the escarpment prior to the construction of the M9 Outer Orbital.**

- **The construction of the South West Illawarra Rail Link (SWIRL) at an estimated $1.7 billion should be a priority project delivered within the next 10 years.**

- **A substantial investment within the next 10 years be made to upgrade road networks supporting Albion Park and West Dapto noting the substantial population growth and development expected in these locations.**

- **Commitments to the following projects as noted within the next 10 years of the Draft Future Transport Strategy 2056 are supported:**
  
  o Princes Motorway interchange at the base of Mount Ousley
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  o Princes Motorway – Bulli Tops to Picton Road Intersection (state and Federally funded)
  o Albion Park Rail Bypass
  o Berry to Bomaderry Upgrade
  o Burrill Lake Bridge Replacement
  o Nowra Bridge over the Shoalhaven River subject to final Business Case and Federal Funding

- **Investment in park and ride facilities be considered across the Illawarra region for both rail and bus transport connecting the region to greater Sydney.** From the outset these facilities should be considered for Wollongong and Shellharbour.

- **Further consideration should be given to aligning transport investment in NSW to the forecasted commitments of the Australian Government to ensure both alignment and a fair share of funding for NSW.**
5. Road

There are only three major viable connections across the Illawarra escarpment:

- Mount Ousley, the current single most important connection between the Illawarra and Sydney. Provides the only suitable access route for Higher Mass Limit (HML) vehicles across the escarpment.
- Bulli Pass, a crossing with difficult road geometry. It runs through unstable ground and has been closed for rock falls/landslides and maintenance.
- Macquarie Pass, on the Illawarra Highway, connects the Princes Highway and the Hume Highway. Its geometry is unsuitable for heavy commercial vehicles.

The road network within the Illawarra region is showing signs of overload. The section of road at the end of the Princes Motorway at Bulli Tops to the Picton Road interchange is below standard for the volume and type of vehicles that use it. Sections of the Princes Highway around Albion Park and Dapto carry traffic volumes that are beyond their effective capacity and this is resulting in long queues and delays during peak hours.

First 10 Years of the Strategy

The NSW Government has committed to the following projects within the first 10 years of the 40-year strategy:

- Princes Motorway interchange at base of Mount Ousley
- Princes Motorway – Bulli Tops to Picton Road Intersection (state and Federally funded)
- Albion Park Rail Bypass
- Berry to Bomaderry Upgrade
- Burrill Lake Bridge Replacement
- Nowra Bridge over the Shoalhaven River subject to final Business Case and Federal Funding

The priority assigned to these projects in Transport 2056 is supported.

The NSW Government has proposed the following initiatives for investigation in the first 10 years (subject to Business Case Development) of the 40-year plan:

- Picton Road and Appin Road Improvements
- M1 Smart Motorway
- Wollongong Rapid Bus package
- Bus Headstart for Wollongong

Forecasts, from modelling, indicate that without intervention, congestion caused by growing demand will severely exacerbate conditions on the main Illawarra road corridors. This will result in increasing travel times to areas of employment including to central Sydney, Wilton, Parramatta, Badgerys Creek and other growing areas. Forecasts of demand to the west of
Wollongong show that Picton Road and to a lesser degree, Appin Road, will become increasingly congested.

Currently, heavy vehicles make up more than 25% of the traffic on Picton Road and this composition is expected to be maintained with traffic growth estimated to increase by 5% per annum.

The principal road freight routes for heavy vehicles are along Mt Ousley, to Picton Road and then the Hume Highway, southwards to Victoria and beyond and northwards to Sydney and beyond. Relatively few heavy vehicles use the Princes Motorway/Highway to access Sydney or Port Botany. The preferred route is via Picton Road, Hume Highway and M5 East.

The heavy vehicles on the steep grades of Mt Ousley Road are testing the capacity of the road. In both directions, the heavy vehicles travel in the left lane, reducing the capacity of the road for cars to two lanes for much of the road and a single lane in some sections. During peak hour, the northbound volume on Mt Ousley is a total of 3,400 vehicles, of which over 500 are heavy vehicles. On the three lane sections, this means that the left lane carries over 500 vehicles per hour, while the two outside lanes carry a total of 2,900 vehicles. An average of 1,500 vehicles per lane per hour on a steep grade represents a traffic flow that is close to capacity.

At the same time, daily traffic volumes on Mt Ousley have been growing at 3-4% per year. Heavy vehicle volumes have grown at an average of 6% per year. As a general rule of thumb, a 6-lane highway has a practical daily capacity of about 50,000 vehicles per day. Mt Ousley Road is fast approaching this capacity and may constrain future growth of the Illawarra.

The IBC maintains the duplication of the Picton Road should commence within the next five years. Recent improvements to the road have made a substantial difference and ongoing improvements focussing on the safety and utility of the road are necessary. However, priority should be given to full duplication of the Picton Road between the Hume Highway and Princes Highway, rather than just improvements, to match the projected growth and usage of the road as the predominant east–west link to/from Wollongong. Picton Road is a key economic and social infrastructure asset for the Illawarra.

Next 10-20 years of the Strategy

The NSW Government has proposed the following initiatives for investigation in the 10-20 year period (subject to Business Case Development) of the 40-year plan:

- Mount Ousley Bypass investigation
- Illawarra Highway/Macquarie Pass improvements.

The IBC recommends comprehensive studies are undertaken into the feasibility of the connection between Mt Ousley Road and Picton Road and the Mount Kembla pass route. These studies should occur within the next five years. The IBC contends the pressures on Mt Ousley requires more immediate attention than the 10 to 20-year timeframe proposed in the Draft Future Transport Strategy 2056.
20+ Years of the Strategy

The NSW Government has proposed in the 20+ year period (subject to Business Case Development) of the 40-year plan:

- Outer Sydney Orbital Stage 2 – Hume Highway to Illawarra

The question will arise whether a new crossing of the escarpment should occur prior to the construction of the M9 Outer Orbital. With residential developments planned around Wilton and West Dapto and the increased travel associated with the construction and subsequent operations at the Badgerys Creek airport.

Travel to the north of the Illawarra – Sydney Airport, Port Botany, the Sydney CBD and areas further north – is mostly constrained by the road network within Sydney, specifically at the Georges River and the road network north of it. The journey from Wollongong to Sydney CBD is approximately 85 kms. It takes around the same time to travel the first two thirds of the journey as the last one third.

6. Rail

The main rail line between the Illawarra and Sydney is the South Coast Line. The South Coast Line runs from Bomaderry (near Nowra) to Waterfall at the southern edge of the Sydney Trains Network. The South Coast Line continues through to Central station and terminates at Bondi Junction.

According to the current Sydney Trains timetable, it takes 87 minutes to travel the 82 km line (ie 56 km/h average speed) between Wollongong and Central station in Sydney during the weekday morning peak. To reach Parramatta station at the geographic centre of Sydney, the journey from Wollongong (via Redfern) takes a further 27 minutes at best.

On average, the total commute times between Wollongong and stations in south west Sydney, such as Liverpool (125 minutes), Leppington (130 minutes) and Campbelltown (131 minutes), are all over two hours.

This lengthy commute for workers, students and tourists reduces economic and social opportunities for both Illawarra and Sydney residents in terms of accessing a wider range of jobs, business, trade, education, leisure and housing choices.

Improving rail connectivity will provide substantial net economic benefits to the Illawarra and south west Sydney. The IBC commissioned the SMART Infrastructure Facility, University of Wollongong to examine a range of measures to improve speed and reliability of rail connectivity between the Illawarra and Sydney. A link to this report is provided below.

The Construction of the South West Illawarra Rail Link (SWIRL) at an estimated $1.7 billion should be a priority project delivered within the next 10 years. This rail link would improve connections between NSW’s second port and greater Sydney, improve connectivity between the Illawarra and Badgerys Creek and reduce congestion pressures on the existing South Coast Rail Line and existing road network.
The South West Illawarra Rail Link (SWIRL)

- Benefit Cost Ratio 1.13 (79%, 50 years)
- $1 invested in the SWIRL would provide a return to the Illawarra of $1.84
- Over 1,100 additional permanent jobs in the Illawarra
- $2.6 Billion Gross Regional Product in the Illawarra

**With SWIRL**
- Estimated time:
  - WOLLONGONG ↔ CAMPBELLTOWN: 60 minutes
  - WOLLONGONG ↔ LEPPINGTON: 91 minutes
  - WOLLONGONG ↔ LIVERPOOL: 91 minutes

**Without SWIRL**
- Estimated time:
  - WOLLONGONG ↔ CAMPBELLTOWN: 131 minutes
  - WOLLONGONG ↔ LEPPINGTON: 130 minutes
  - WOLLONGONG ↔ LIVERPOOL: 125 minutes

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**Current Rail Network**

**Badgers Creek Airport**
More than 43,000 passenger and freight vehicles make the trip between the Illawarra and greater Sydney each day. Given existing congestion pressures and a lack of an affordable and efficient public transport link business, investment and tourist opportunities are being lost.

The NSW Government has proposed the following initiatives for investigation in the 10-20 year period (subject to Business Case Development) of the 40-year plan:

- Maldon to Dombarton railway line
- Electrification of the intercity network to Bomaderry and duplication of the South Coast Line

It is noted that the Future Transport Strategy 2056 is only proposing to investigate a freight line between Maldon-Dombarton. For the reasons identified above, substantial benefits would be realised from the construction of dual freight and passenger line. A dual passenger and freight line was assessed to have a 1.13 Benefit Cost Ratio (central case). The assessment was deliberately conservative and did not include for example the potential benefits flowing from the construction of Badgerys Creek airport or any land value uplift or associated tax revenue derived from subsequent development.

6. Alignment with investment and initiatives of the Australian Government

In terms of timing, the IBC strongly recommends that further consideration be given to aligning transport investment in NSW to the forecasted commitments of the Australian Government to ensure both alignment and a fair share of funding for NSW.

Programs such as the Australian Government’s $10 billion National Rail Program and the substantial investment at Badgerys Creek are such examples. Further to this, there is a need to consider changes in support chain and logistic movements such as the expected growth in the importation of motor vehicles through Port Kembla and the need to link employment centres with current and projected population centres.

As mentioned in the Transport 2056 Strategy, Port Kembla is identified to become NSW’s second container port. Port Kembla is the largest receiver of vehicles in Australia and the cessation of vehicle manufacturing in Australia is expected to see a substantial increase in vehicle imports, which will place further demand on the existing road network.

For further information on this submission please contact the IBC on (02) 4229 4722 or ed@illawarrabusiness.com.au.