

Southern Sydney's transport crisis

Too many cars, not enough public transport

It's a problem that has an obvious solution and yet everything governments have done in recent years has only made it worse.

The problem is transport—the wrong kind. The problem is too many cars, counter-productive motorway construction and too few public transport alternatives. The problem is governments, of all kinds and persuasions, who have focussed on road building and allowed the public transport system to run down.

Sydney's roads are congested and long delays are an everyday feature. In many inner and eastern suburbs, the bus network is grossly over crowded. Public transport is overwhelmed by its own popularity. Commuters are often left abandoned by the side of the road. Buses go past without stopping, because there's no room on board.

In outer areas like Sutherland Shire, the problem is poor services at low frequencies. Public transport is almost nonexistent in

some areas.

The solution is to build viable alternatives to the car. This means restoring high capacity public transport to Sydney's inner suburbs and building new services to those areas yet to see quality rail access.

Outer districts like Rockdale and Sutherland Shire need to have fixed-track public transport services introduced. Residential development along the Botany Bay foreshore in Rockdale has low levels of public transport use by comparison with districts located along the heavy rail line. Light rail through the centre of this densely populated area would see a massive shift to public transport, removing thousands of cars from the roads.

The Sutherland Shire—which has been grossly neglected when it

comes to public transport—would see direct rail access provided to many new districts for the first time. Many short and medium distance trips, currently undertaken by car, would be shifted to public transport. New light rail would provide a sound foundation for the revitalisation of commercial centres like Caringbah. Light rail could also give high quality public transport access to the beaches of Bate Bay. Many of these spectacular foreshore areas are threatened with the prospect of multi-storey car-parking constructions. Solving accessibility problems by giving people real alternatives to the car will eliminate this threat.

None of this is possible if emphasis remains on freeway building. Comprehensive public transport options should be at the centre of all discussions on regional transport development for Southern Sydney.



A light rail solution for Southern Sydney's transport crisis

The Bay Light Express

All transport solutions start with a line on the map. And the light rail line EcoTransit Sydney has put down on the map is the *Bay Light Express*—a new proposal that would see the reintroduction of modern high capacity trams to the inner regions of Sydney, and

extensions to new areas denied rail access for too long.

The proposal consists of two links—*Bay Light East* and *Bay Light West*. The two would skirt the neighbourhoods of the Botany Bay Region, linking residential districts, universities, retail,

commercial, special event and industrial sites. They would provide a service faster than cars.

Stretching for 27km, *Bay Light East* would provide a fast and frequent service between the CBD and the suburbs of Darlinghurst, Kensington, Randwick, Kingsford, Maroubra, Matraville, Malabar, Chifley, Little Bay and La Perouse. It would provide a much-needed high-capacity link to the University of NSW, Sydney Cricket Ground, Fox Studios and Randwick Racecourse. A tunnel to Kurnell under the heads of Botany Bay would then carry the line direct to Cronulla via Captain Cook Drive and Elouera Road. This section would give unprecedented access between the CBD, the Eastern suburbs and Sutherland Shire. A typical trip from Cronulla to the University of NSW or the big entertainment venues in the Eastern Suburbs

would take just twenty minutes by light rail. The same journeys by car take almost an hour, and they clog General Holmes Drive.

The *Bay Light West* is a 25.5km link beginning at Central Station and following an on-street alignment down Broadway before turning onto City Road and King Street Newtown. From St Peters railway station, the route would pass through disused industrial areas before connecting with the International Airport Terminal. It would then continue through to Rockdale, servicing a large, densely populated residential area—currently without direct rail access—along Crawford Road and Chuter Avenue. The line would then proceed over Captain Cook Bridge, passing light industrial areas along Taren Point Road before feeding into Caringbah's commercial and residential areas.



This is the class of vehicle we could see on the Bay Light Express routes: air conditioned, wheelchair and bicycle accessible, these modern Variotrams provide a comfortable and 'jolt-free' ride.

Need more information?

■ Sutherland Shire Council Lunch-Time Seminar

On 6 December (Wednesday) 12am-1pm, Sutherland Shire Council will be hosting a seminar presentation on the Bay Light Express. This seminar is open to the public!

■ Information night for your street or community group

EcoTransit Sydney is happy to present a slide show and discussion for people in your street or community group. Ring Sutherland Shire Environment Centre on 9545-3077 for more details on .

■ Visit the EcoTransit Sydney website at www.ecotransit.org.au

■ Come on a tour of the M6 motorway corridor

Come and see first hand the hundreds of homes that would be bulldozed. Ring 9545 3077 to book your place.

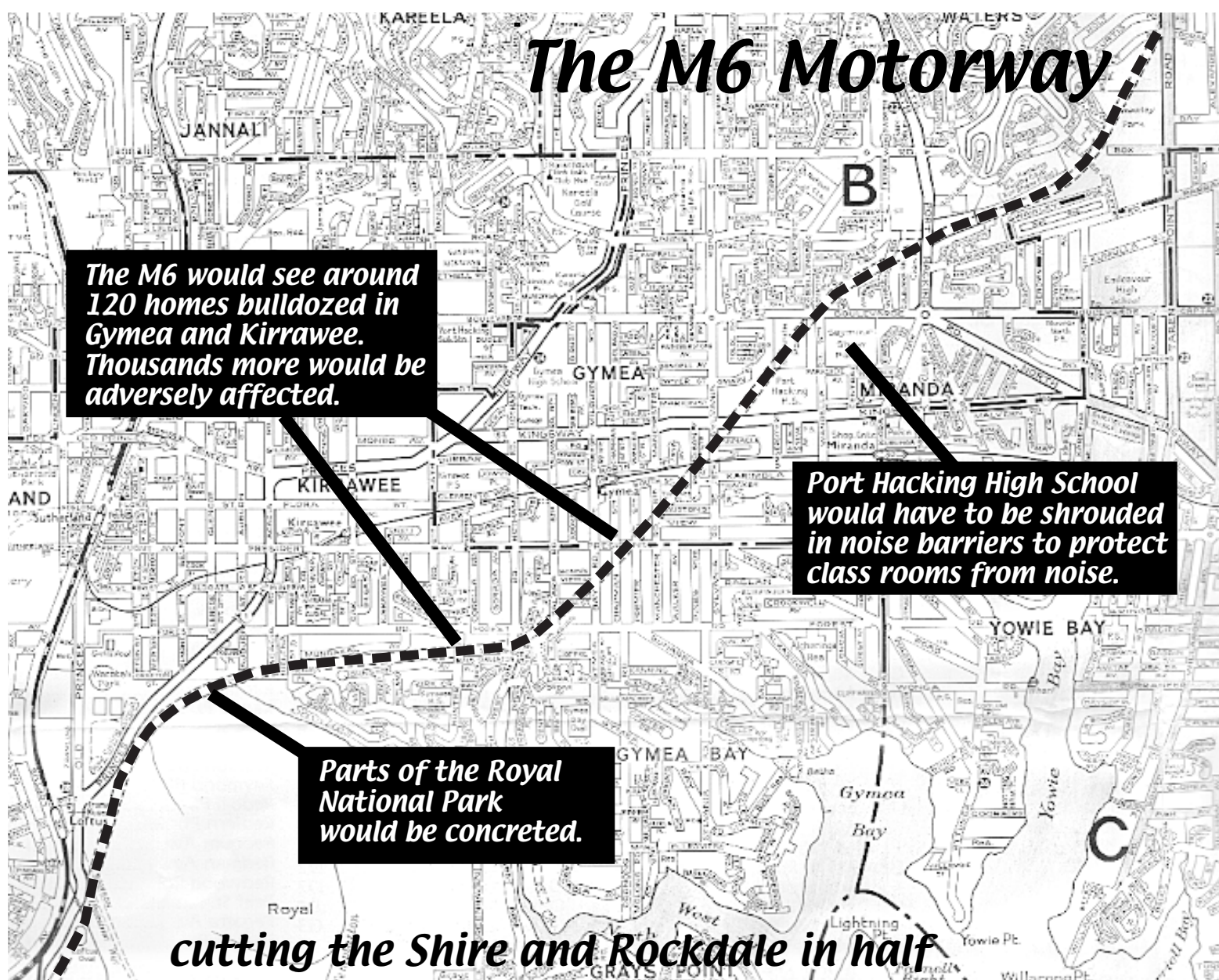
For information on the **M6** Motorway, turn over ➔

We will never see an era of cheap oil again and it's time to begin the conversion of our transport systems to modes like electrically-powered light rail that are independent of it.

The fundamental problem is that the rate of world oil consumption has outpaced the rate at which it can be supplied. This is exacerbated by the fact that world production has peaked and can only decline steadily from now on. Respected oil industry experts accurately predicted the current crisis years ago. The oil now being discovered is in small fields that are expensive to exploit, and world geology is now so well understood that surprise discoveries of large fields are unlikely.

The upshot of this is that the current squeeze in supply is here to stay and the only way to deal with it is to slowly reduce our consumption. If we don't, the global economy faces a future of destructive volatility.

Urban transport is the hungriest consumer of oil, but it is also the area where we can expect to replace it most easily, and with the greatest economic effect. With the value of the Aussie dollar dropping and global oil prices rising, freeway building will not sustain the future transport needs of our region. Light rail will. It's cheaper to construct, so we get more 'bang for our buck'. This makes good economic sense! ■



What would another freeway achieve?

Urban freeway building is counter-productive and self-perpetuating. As soon as a new freeway is opened, traffic volumes quickly grow to fill the available road space. Bottlenecks and congested choke-points that the original freeway was intended to remove, are simply moved to another part of the network and the process is repeated.

After each turn in the freeway building cycle, the scale of the problems become bigger as more traffic is funnelled onto the road network. Traffic engineers call this 'induced traffic growth' or 'system feedback'*.

This has been the case with many freeway and tollways in Sydney and will certainly be the case with the M5East.

It is no secret that when the M5East is opened a minimum of 60,000 vehicles per day will be dumped on Princes Hwy at Arncliffe and General Holmes Drive. This will be a disaster! General Holmes Drive is already choked with traffic. Widening the road is not possible because of the runway tunnels.

In anticipation, the freeway pundits are out in force talking up the M6—the next freeway, intended to solve all the problems that the M5East freeway will create.

A second option that has been talked about inside the RTA, but not released to the public, is to redirect the northern end of the freeway from Miranda through to Caringbah and onto Captain Cook Drive. It would then enter a tunnel section and go under the heads of Botany Bay before hooking into Anzac Parade at La Perouse, directing traffic from the south and into the CBD via the Eastern Suburbs.

This option has been held in reserve because there will always be problems with the traffic that an M6 would dump in the middle of the Central Industrial Area. The RTA is also frightened of a massive community backlash. In exactly the same way the M5East has created a crisis even before its opening, so too will the M6.

The M6 is not a 'solution' to the transport crisis.

ANALYSIS ANALYSIS ANALYSIS

Removing vehicles from congestion hot spots by providing comprehensive alternatives to the car is the real solution. The Bay Light Express and other public transport upgrades (that are long overdue) do hold out the prospect of real solutions. These solutions would not involve the destruction of entire neighbourhoods as the M6 would.

If built, the M6 will see residents lose their homes as the freeway is bulldozed through Rockdale, Monterey, Sans Souci and Dolls Point. In the Sutherland Shire, parts of Miranda, Gymea, Kirrawee and Grays Point would be utterly devastated. Hundreds of homes would be demolished and thousands more would be left to suffer the traffic noise and exhaust fumes. Sections of the Royal National Park will be lost under asphalt and many of the playing fields in Rockdale will be destroyed. And to what purpose? To shift a bottleneck to a new part of the network?

For several decades, "Let's build another freeway to take the traffic away", has been the standard response of the RTA, but no one believes this anymore. The M4 Motorway is often referred to as a slow moving car park during peak hour. The last round of widenings, which saw the tollway grow from 4 lanes to 6 was meant to free up congestion. The reality is that congestion is still a problem but on a bigger scale of 6 to 8 lanes instead of 4 to 6.

The M2 has not removed heavy traffic volumes from the parallel arterial Epping Road, and entry to the tollbooths is often jammed with traffic. The Eastern Distributor is regularly jammed. Whenever special events at Fox Studios, the Cricket Ground and Randwick Racecourse are scheduled for the same day, the system can't cope.

There have been no less than three commissions of inquiry into Sydney freeways—the F1, F5 and F2. All three inquiries concluded the freeways should not be built and that public transport and rail freight development should be given priority.

The 1980 Kirby Inquiry was ahead of its time when it opposed construction of the F5 (now the M5East), through Wolli Creek. The inquiry concluded:

"The provision of greater capacity within the south-western corridor ... will in our opinion, simply encourage commuter traffic to travel in a direction in which it ought to be discouraged. Very soon the congestion eliminated by the route will re-appear, as traffic seeks to take advantage of the spare capacity within the system. There will be more traffic, more pollution, more noise and less parks, and all for a very short reprieve from congestion which will quickly reappear."

Local residents and businesses who oppose the M6 because they want to save their neighbourhoods, will not be called NIMBYs (Not In My Back Yard). They will be seen as sensible people who were prepared to think outside the square and look for real solutions to the regions transport problems. The public transport options will not destroy people's homes and they will remove cars from our roads.

* For detailed information about *Induced Traffic Growth*, visit the EcoTransit website at www.ecotransit.org.au and check out some of the back issues of *Hell on Wheels*.