

Metropolitan Strategy – Sydney Greater Metropolitan Region

Ecotransit Submission on Discussion Paper

1. Introduction

Ecotransit Sydney is proud to contribute to the development of a strategy for the future development of the Sydney Greater Metropolitan Region (GMR). We applaud the recognition by government of the need to manage and focus growth within resource constraints. This may be contrasted to the ad hoc development that has occurred in Sydney in the past without overarching planning mechanisms and inadequate attention to broader systems. Strategic management of change and provision of adequate infrastructure are essential for the future of our city.

Ecotransit Sydney is a not-for-profit community organization that advocates for environmentally and socially sustainable transport in the greater Sydney region.

2. Policy

Underpinning the Metropolitan Strategy are different policies including ‘Centres Policy’ and a focus on renewal of existing corridors. Ecotransit believes that these are necessary policies; however we believe that it needs to be explicitly recognised that current systems, including transport, are at capacity and inadequate for existing and future challenges. This includes recent ‘greenfields’ developments that are grossly underserved by existing infrastructure and where substantial improvements to existing systems are necessary.

The Metropolitan Strategy also relies on, inter alia, the need to manage future growth within resource constraints. Ecotransit is pleased that the government has recognised the unsustainability of the manner in which new projects, including housing, are currently undertaken. There is a dramatic need for substantial infrastructure to accompany new ‘greenfields’ developments, and elsewhere, and for this infrastructure to be integrated into existing systems. In terms of transport we believe that there needs to be a substantial commitment to, and expansion of, existing systems. The piecemeal enhancements to transport systems must end; in addition to a ‘growth’ strategy there needs to be a ‘transport vision.’

3. Key Issues Facing Sydney

The Discussion Paper identifies several key issues for response through the Metropolitan Strategy. These include managing urban growth, providing services locally to new land developments on Sydney’s fringe, and providing jobs on good transport routes. Water and energy strategies need to be developed to lessen our ‘ecological footprint’ and air quality needs to be addressed by reducing car dependence in the city.

The Discussion Paper correctly states that we need to make better use of existing infrastructure. It also refers to novel methods of funding infrastructure, and this is discussed below.

Dealing with the 'heavy dependence on cars' is central to the transport challenges facing Sydney. The present imbalance in transport spending is addressed below. Whilst Ecotransit acknowledges current projects underway, the State government needs to be more proactive in terms of identifying, and funding, public transport need. Transport is also the central question when it comes to 'linking' the city and regions.

4. Current Projects

Current projects underway are inadequate to deal with the many challenges that Sydney will face over the next 30 years. This submission will focus on transport projects whilst acknowledging the many difficult problems across the spectrum of infrastructure needs of the city.

Ecotransit believes that there remains a dramatic imbalance between spending on road systems and inadequate funding for the expansion and upgrading of the existing CityRail network in NSW. The Rail Clearways project is an essential first step in this direction yet only a first step. There needs to be a commitment to further substantial improvements to the rail network. The question of balance is specifically addressed in the Discussion Paper ('Getting the Balance Right') yet there is little recognition that the balance struck in previous years, in terms of funding for public transport infrastructure as against private vehicle use, has been wholly inadequate.

The bus reforms, to provide an integrated city wide network, are also necessary. What is not recognised, however, is that there are underfunded train services in certain of these corridors, and if rail services were upgraded so that they provided a fast, frequent and reliable alternative (similar to other global cities of comparable development) then they would be used.

5. Further Necessary Projects

The proposal to connect Parramatta to St Leonards/Chatswood by rail is entirely consistent with the principles espoused by the Metropolitan Strategy. This includes connecting centres in Sydney by good public transport. It is extremely disappointing that the opportunity to substantially enhance the Sydney rail network was missed through the decision to truncate the new line to run only from Epping. This proposal has network-wide implications for alleviating the pressure on other lines. Also disappointing is that the station at UTS Kuringai, a major trip-generator, was omitted.

Ecotransit calls for the Parramatta to Epping rail link to be reinstated. The implications of this project, for not only effectiveness of the CityRail system but also for social equity and access, mandate that it be built. Other substantial improvements are necessary for the existing rail network and many of these, including flyovers, turnbacks and track

duplication, were identified in the Christie Report (2001). Only limited action appears to have been taken on these proposals.

In addition other improvements to the public transport system in Sydney are necessary.

This includes substantial enhancement and development of Sydney's light rail system. There are plans to reinstate tram lines in the city, from Central to Circular Quay; this must be pursued at the earliest possible opportunity. Further light rail possibilities in the CBD, including use of the Pyrmont Bridge, require investigation. The existing Central-Lilyfield line needs extension to areas such as Leichhardt, Balmain and Haberfield. There is potential for light rail in the Eastern suburbs (serving the University of NSW) and in the City-Airport 'global' corridor.

The system of freight rail goods distribution needs to be vastly enhanced. The Federal government has responsibility for much of the freight system, including initiatives announced as part of the AUSLINK programme such as the Macarthur-Chullora freight link. Improvements to the freight rail system at Port Botany need to be addressed. The State government has important responsibilities in this area. The effective denial to Patrick Corporation of permission to construct a freight distribution centre at Ingleburn was disappointing. This decision should be reassessed in light of the priorities of the Metropolitan Strategy.

Finally, although frequently a responsibility of local government, a clear policy direction from the State Government is required so that there can be improved cycling infrastructure and facilities throughout the city. The role played by local groups in bicycle advocacy is important.

6. Identified Directions

6.1 Growth within natural resource constraints

Ecotransit would like the question of a 'growth boundary' for Sydney to be explicitly addressed.

6.2 Strengthen the regions

The provision of high-speed transport links is integral to strengthening the relationship between urban centres. The question of regional equity also mandates attention to transport systems.

6.3 Manage growth; Value non-urban areas

Limits on urban sprawl are desirable as is maintenance of non-urban areas.

6.4 Build liveable communities

This requires sophisticated planning. As identified in the Discussion Paper the majority of car trips are short ones and the need for separate short trips must be addressed. Different services must be concentrated. Public transport links to these must be reliable and offer comparative advantage. Cycling and walking links are critical for local communities.

6.5 Renew existing centres and corridors

This is a positive development, although Ecotransit notes that the proposed revitalisation of Parramatta Road should not be dependent on the building of the proposed M4 East.

6.6 Strengthen employment centres and precincts

Ecotransit agrees with the Centres Policy of NSW government and believe that this offers the way forward in urban development. However among the sites identified is 'Major new industrial areas at Huntingwood West and at former Wonderland site'. These developments should not occur without adequate transport links that link into the larger public transport network in Sydney.

6.7 Connect centres with the transport network

This is a necessary priority for the city. Our comments above on various modes of transport apply here as well.

6.8 Target infrastructure

The necessity of using planning instruments to achieve particular land uses needs to take into account world's best practice in sophisticated planning. It is also noted that trip generators and other destinations need to be bundled together to avoid the necessity of numerous short trips.

6.9 Use appropriate funding and governance arrangements

Ecotransit has published work by Matthew Doherty on 'Funding Public Transport through Land Value Capture' which, inter alia, discusses different taxation models and Tax Increment Financing arrangements, drawing on overseas experience. Other mechanisms available include Joint Development.

Public debt financing of significant infrastructure projects needs to be re-examined. The views of Bernie Fraser, former Reserve Bank Governor and now a Sustainability Commissioner for NSW, support this view.

5. Conclusion

Ecotransit values the opportunity to comment on the Metropolitan Strategy – Discussion Paper. The rhetoric and priorities of the Strategy are basically sound. The policy

priorities identified, including centres- and corridor-based policy, are good directions. However we believe that emphasis needs to be placed on certain issues, primarily the central role that transport systems play in providing a city with functioning social and commercial systems.

Ecotransit is concerned that, notwithstanding sound rhetoric, there remains a dramatic imbalance between road- and rail-funding, notwithstanding identified need in Sydney's public transport systems.

There also needs to be recognition that past policy has been negligent in forming directions for shaping our city. There is recognition that new greenfields developments can no longer be built without necessary links into larger public transport systems. The Discussion Paper remains silent over what can be done for the existing greenfields developments on similar issues.