

**SUBMISSION ON THE OPTIONS PROPOSED BY THE RTA
FOR THE VICTORIA ROAD UPGRADE**

Prepared by: Eco Transit Sydney

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Authorised by the Executive Committee of Eco Transit Sydney

Submission consists of
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To Whom It May Concern;

Please accept this submission from EcoTransit Sydney regarding the proposed upgrade to Victoria Road.

This submission was prepared and submitted on behalf of the sustainable transport advocacy group, EcoTransit Sydney in response to the RTA request for feedback.

EcoTransit Sydney is a public transport advocacy group operating out of Sydney. We are a not for profit organisation dedicated to the promotion of EcoTransit development.

EcoTransit is transport that supports a sustainable economy and environment. The fewer resources that are used by the transport sector, the more efficient our economy becomes, and less damage is done to the environment.

EcoTransit Sydney's policy can be broadly viewed as attempting to change the expensive and wasteful system of moving *vehicles* to a system that moves *goods* and *people* in the most energy efficient manner possible. Our policy is based on three simple priorities:

- The need to immediately reduce emissions of greenhouse gases
- The long-standing need to improve air quality
- The need to immediately reduce NSW dependence on oil

Public transport, walking and cycling fit these criteria and our response to the proposal for upgrading Victoria Road reflect our concerns that these modes are given as much support as possible

We trust that you will give consideration to our concerns.

Yrs,

Leah Mason
Submission Contact

EcoTransit Sydney

Summary

EcoTransit Sydney raises the following issues arising from the proposal, much of which concerns the major construction proposed around the Iron Cove Bridge.

The Proposal Seems Unlikely to Achieve Its Aim of Improving Bus Services

EcoTransit Sydney believe that the focus on providing extra road infrastructure is counterproductive for the purposes of improving congestion conditions, and that the provision of a '24 hour' bus lane will do very little to improve bus services. There is no conceivable need for such a lane because we do not have 24 hour bus services. A need that *has* been flagged, time and again, is the institution of continuous bus lanes through this corridor and for the implementation of bus priority at lights. In short, RTA risks expenditure of significant public resources on the duplication of the Iron Cove Bridge for little or more likely negative returns. Negligible gains for the private vehicle using public of Sydney will come at the expense of urban and environmental amenity for residents and business in surrounding suburbs.

The Proposal Lacks Sufficient Detail For Informed Consultation

The RTA consultation documents do not provide detailed costing, traffic, noise or air pollution modeling. This failure renders the proposal inadequate for some members of the public and misleading for a great many more.

The Proposal Fails To Meet the Needs of Residents in the Affected Area

Despite the assertion that this upgrade is aimed at improving bus services, the current proposal will actually reduce the number of local bus stops in the Rozelle area, and will also make it more difficult to cross Victoria Road on foot or by bicycle. While the current bridge does need significantly improved access for pedestrians and cyclists, the proposal lacks details for such improvements, making it difficult for the community to assess whether the proposal will actually make a significant difference.

The Proposal Fails To Prioritise Sustainable Transport Solutions

In promoting the elimination of the T3 lane, and failing to provide the community with actual proposals for active transport solutions such as cycling and walking, the RTA runs the risk of being seen to divert resources from viable alternate solutions to the current unsustainable use of private vehicle transport.

The Proposal Fails to Account For Changes to Road Use With Climate Change

Reduction measures for carbon emissions are going to be a fact of life within the next three years, and they will have a large impact on the planning needs for Sydney and surrounding region. Transport contributes a significant figure to NSW GHG emissions and is likely to be one of the areas that changes most. This proposal has been generated on an assumption that road traffic is going to grow along the lines that it has in recent years. This is a very unlikely scenario.

The Proposal Fails to Account For Road Use Changes With Oil Price Increases

As noted with regard to measures to reduce the amount of climate change we are likely to experience, the price of oil is going to effect the extent to which we use the roads for motorized vehicles. It is likely that the changes proposed would be made redundant by falling traffic numbers dictated by prohibitively expensive petrol prices.

The Proposal Fails To Address Safety, Health and Environmental Issues

EcoTransit Sydney rejects the proposal as flawed, increasing health, environmental and urban amenity problems particularly for local residents and businesses.

The Proposal Has Not Been Prepared By The Appropriate Authority

The RTA is not the appropriate body to undertake comprehensive transport planning. The interests of Sydney's residents and travelling public would be best served if road

building was conducted in the context of strategic transport and urban planning undertaken within appropriate departments.

Conclusion: The Victoria Road Upgrade represents a wasted opportunity to increase the efficiency of Sydney's road infrastructure, and an alarming example of why planning cannot usefully be undertaken by an organization whose experience and authority extends to one small aspect of the total transport network. EcoTransit Sydney rejects it as an unnecessary expenditure of funds that could be better spent on increasing the efficiency of the current infrastructure. It represents a serious loss of urban and environmental amenity for local communities and contributes to further traffic chaos. It provides opportunities for a serious drainage of financial and human resources that could otherwise be directed to appropriate transport infrastructure such as uninterrupted bus lanes in this corridor, additional buses, more frequent ferry services and significant improvements to walking and cycling facilities in this area.

We consider it appropriate for the RTA to abandon the current proposal for expanding or duplicating the Iron Cove Bridge as part of the Victoria Road Upgrade. We advise that a far more cost-effective and efficient result can be achieved by providing incentives for people living within ten kilometres of the CBD to use active and public transport as their primary travel option. This would considerably reduce the number of cars on the road and improve congestion in this area. A proposal that embraced cost-effectiveness and efficiency would increase the number of bus lanes, retain the T3 lane and provide priority to buses at intersections. It would also evaluate the contribution that more frequent ferry services could make to the reduction of cars on the roads in this corridor. Finally, it would also involve actual plans for significantly improved conditions for pedestrians and cyclists. The current proposal does not offer any of the above.

1. The Proposal Seems Unlikely to Its Aim of Improving Bus Services

Although the Victoria Road Upgrade is ostensibly aimed at the improvement of bus services in the Victoria Road Corridor, the current proposal appears to have little chance of doing anything other than incrementally increasing the speed of the road network. Indeed, there are a number of indications that local traffic conditions are likely to be made worse for pedestrians, cyclists, motorists and local bus users.

EcoTransit Sydney believe that the focus on providing extra road infrastructure is counterproductive for the purposes of improving congestion conditions, and that the provision of a '24 hour' bus lane will do very little to improve bus services. There is no conceivable need for such a lane because we do not have 24 hour bus services. A need that *has* been flagged, time and again, is the institution of continuous bus lanes through this corridor and for the implementation of bus priority at lights.

Evidence here and in international arenas demonstrates that concentrating resources into additional road infrastructure simply encourages more vehicle use up to a point where even more infrastructure is required or a better solution is needed. Time and again commuters who are attracted by improvements to roads use it in such increased numbers that the value of the improvement is lost. Logically there is a point where capacity will be reached and better solutions than "more roads" are required.

EcoTransit Sydney believes this point has been reached already. In short, RTA risks expenditure of significant public resources on the duplication of the Iron Cove Bridge for what is likely to be a negative return. Negligible gains for the private vehicle-using public of Sydney will come at the expense of urban and environmental amenity for residents and business in surrounding suburbs.

Conclusion: That the current proposal is a poor example of public transport planning and that such plans are best left to departments with the expertise to develop an integrated approach to these issues.

2. The Proposal Lacks Sufficient Detail for Informed Consultation

The RTA consultation documents include some of the current road traffic features and a high level description of the proposed routes. They do not provide detailed costing, traffic, noise or air pollution modeling. They also fail to provide residents the details of proposed improvements to cycling and pedestrian facilities.

Conclusion: That the current consultation process is flawed and misleading and should be abandoned, in favour of a process that better reflects the part that the local community will have to play in resolving these issues.

3. The Proposal Fails To Meet the Needs of Residents in the Affected Area

Despite the assertion that this upgrade is aimed at improving bus services, from even the limited information available it seems clear that the current proposal will actually reduce the number of local bus stops in the Rozelle area. This will have immediate and long-term effects on the viability of bus services in this area, as the elderly and infirm are less able to walk the extra distance to more widely distributed stops. Parents are also less confident about allowing their children to walk on their own to bus stops that are further away.

The proposal to eliminate much of the median strip in the Rozelle section of Victoria Road, and the use of pedestrian barriers in sections of Drummoyne, will also make it more difficult to cross Victoria Road on foot or by bicycle.

While the current Iron Cove Bridge does need significantly improved access for pedestrians and cyclists, however, the proposal lacks details for such improvements, making it difficult for the community to assess whether the proposal will actually make a significant difference.

Conclusion: That the decision to duplicate or significantly expand the Iron Cove Bridge as part of the Victoria Road Upgrade be rejected on the grounds that it fails to meet the needs of residents in the area.

4. The Proposal Fails to Prioritise Sustainable Transport Solutions

There are sustainable alternatives to the Iron Cove Bridge Duplication which have not been considered in proposing a 'solution' to transport problems in the Victoria Road Corridor.

One immediate alternative to the duplication of the Iron Cove Bridge is to trial the use of continuous and dedicated bus lane in the Victoria Road corridor with priority for buses at traffic light controlled intersections.

Another option is to improve local conditions for public and active transport in the Victoria Road Corridor. Iron Cove Bridge incorporates walking and cycling facilities that are well below standard for encouraging greater recreational and commuter use. Significant improvements to these facilities would be a very cost-effective way to reduce the number of vehicles on the road in this section of the corridor.

Further reductions in the number of private vehicles using this corridor could be made. A trial of more frequent ferry services during the peak period from Birkenhead Point to the CBD should be instituted.

Conclusion: The Iron Cove Bridge duplication proposal is not a viable solution to our transport problems, and EcoTransit Sydney would like the Government to consider the full range of public transport options including additional road space and vehicles for bus services, additional ferry services to Birkenhead Point, as well as infrastructure and programs that will encourage bicycles and pedestrian activity.

5. The Proposal Fails To Address Safety, Health and Environmental Issues

Currently, the number of passengers per vehicle in the Victoria Road Corridor is a tiny 1.2, according to RTA figures obtained at a briefing with Manidis Roberts in January. Given the number of buses that also use the corridor this figure is remarkable and damning.

In failing to address the dismal efficiency of the Victoria Road Corridor, the proposal will make an expensive contribution to the continuing increase of vehicle emissions. Emissions include the greenhouse gas carbon dioxide, and the toxins Benzene –1 and 3, Butadene, Formaldehyde, Acetaldehyde, and Carbon Monoxide, and Nitrous Oxide. Figures from the NSW Department of Health indicate that 1400 people died prematurely from the effects of poor air quality in NSW during 2004-2005.

Other health and safety concerns are being pushed aside by the failure to manage the efficiency of the road network, with the removal of median strips and the imposition of pedestrian barriers increase the difficulty and the dangers of navigating safely across the Rozelle and Drummoyne communities.

Conclusion: That the current proposal for the duplication of Iron Cove Bridge be rejected on the grounds that it fails to implement transport solutions that have low impacts on urban amenity, health and environment.

6. The Proposal Has Not Been Prepared By The Appropriate Authority

The view of EcoTransit Sydney is that infrastructure for our major cities should be developed in the context of an holistic, integrated transport plan for Sydney. The current study further exemplifies a piecemeal approach to transport planning, and is symptomatic of a lack of strategic approach.

This approach arises from the de facto allocation of a major part of our infrastructure planning to an authority with a narrow road construction focus and whose expertise does not include comprehensive transport planning.

It also results in a conflict of interest in that the authority responsible for consultation with the community (the RTA) has a vested interest in seeing its core business continue (i.e. building more roads).

Conclusion: That the interests of Sydney's residents and travelling public would be best served if road building was conducted in the context of urban and transport planning.

7. The Proposal Fails to Account For Road Use Changes With Climate Change

Reduction measures for carbon emissions are going to be a fact of life within the next three years, and they will have a large impact on the planning needs for Sydney and surrounding region. Transport contributes a significant figure to NSW GHG emissions and is likely to be one of the areas that will change most dramatically. This proposal has been generated on an assumption that road traffic is going to grow along the lines that it has in recent years. This is a very unlikely scenario.

Conclusion: That the interests of Sydney's residents and traveling public would be best served if public and active transport options are given a much higher priority in the light of the role they take in reducing the NSW contribution to greenhouse gas emissions. The current proposal for upgrading Victoria Road does not represent a good investment in this area.

The Proposal Fails to Account For Road Use Changes With Oil Price Increases

Recent fluctuations in the price of oil can be seen as an indicator of the type of shifts we are likely to see as this finite resource becomes more scarce, and therefore more expensive. Rising costs for petrol and diesel fuel affect consumers at all levels (including companies moving goods), causing them to reassess their needs and the methods by which they meet these needs.

Conclusion: That the interests of Sydney's residents and traveling public would be best served if road building was conducted in the context of urban and transport planning undertaken by authorities within the Departments of Infrastructure, Planning & Natural Resources, and Transport.

Final Conclusion:

The Victoria Road Upgrade represents a wasted opportunity to increase the efficiency of Sydney's road infrastructure, and an alarming example of why planning cannot usefully be undertaken by an organization whose experience and authority extends to one small aspect of the total transport network.

EcoTransit Sydney rejects it as an unnecessary expenditure of funds that could be better spent on increasing the efficiency of the current infrastructure. It represents a serious loss of urban and environmental amenity for local communities and contributes to further traffic chaos.

It provides opportunities for a serious drainage of financial and human resources that could otherwise be directed to appropriate transport infrastructure such as uninterrupted bus lanes in this corridor, additional buses, more frequent ferry services and significant improvements to walking and cycling facilities in this area.

We consider it appropriate for the RTA to abandon the current proposal for expanding or duplicating the Iron Cove Bridge as part of the Victoria Road Upgrade.

We advise that a far more cost-effective and efficient result can be achieved by providing incentives for people living within 10 kilometres of the CBD to use active and public transport as their primary travel option. This would considerably reduce the number of cars on the road and improve congestion in this area.

A proposal that embraced cost-effectiveness and efficiency would increase the number of bus lanes, retain the T3 lane and provide priority to buses at intersections. It would also evaluate the contribution that more frequent ferry services could make to the reduction of cars on the roads in this corridor. Finally, it would also involve actual plans for significantly improved conditions for pedestrians and cyclists. The current proposal does not offer any of the above.

We hope to see a new proposal that reflects these very important issues in the near future.