

Northern Beaches Bus Rapid Transit pre-feasibility study SHOROC response and proposed next steps

November 2012

Background & introduction

SHOROC is a partnership of Manly, Mosman, Pittwater & Warringah councils led by a Board of the council Mayors and General Managers. We collectively represent a population of 280,000 residents who contribute over \$20 billion annually to the NSW economy and an area of approximately 288km².

Transport and traffic congestion are the number one issue for our residents and numerous studies have shown we have the slowest and most congested major roads in Sydney, if not Australia. Forty –three per cent of the working population, or 55,000 residents, travel outside of the region for work via one of the three road corridors that connect the region with the rest of Sydney. Private car travel is the mode of choice and the main form of public transport is a slow and unreliable bus network.

Shaping Our Future – the regional strategy for transport, health, housing and jobs

The councils have been working to address the traffic congestion issues for many years and have conducted significant analysis of the options and constraints for improvement.

In 2010 the councils through SHOROC developed and all formally adopted *Shaping Our Future* to take the lead on integrated regional land-use and infrastructure planning by bringing together major directions for housing, employment, transport and health.

Shaping Our Future links council planning for future housing and employment growth together with major infrastructure planning, focussing on hospital planning and the major transport infrastructure priorities for our region.

It was developed through an evidence-based spatial analysis and planning process conducted by experienced council staff in partnership with expert planning consultants. Based on this analysis of options and opportunities as well as decades of on-the-ground experience and studies, *Shaping Our Future* outlines practical, affordable and achievable transport solutions for the SHOROC region.

Regional transport planning including Northern Beaches Bus Rapid Transit Pre-feasibility study

The NSW Government has in the past two years increased its efforts to identify solutions to the transport issues of the SHOROC region.

The NSW Liberal & Nationals Coalition committed in the lead up to the March 2011 NSW Election to “urgently seek expressions of interest to establish a NBBRT (Northern Beaches Bus Rapid Transit system)”. Following its election, the new NSW Government allocated \$3 million to studies into a bus rapid transit system for the northern beaches. The first stage of these studies has been conducted and the NSW Government has released a Northern Beaches Bus Rapid Transit Pre-feasibility study report.

Strategic Transport Assessments have been conducted as part of the planning for construction of the Northern Beaches Hospital at Frenchs Forest, which is due to commence in 2013/14.

Transport improvements for the region in the short, medium and long term have also been included in the Draft NSW Long Term Transport Master Plan, including a Northern Beaches Bus Rapid Transit system in the medium-term (5-10 years), subject to feasibility.

In addition, Infrastructure NSW’s State Infrastructure Strategy included a proposed \$200 million for a Northern Beaches bus corridor improvement plan incorporating Spit Bridge augmentation and priority lanes, as well as outlining a potential north-south road tunnel called a Northern Beaches link.

Responding to the NSW Government BRT pre-feasibility report

SHOROC welcomes the Northern Beaches Bus Rapid Transit Pre-feasibility study report, its confirmation of the feasibility of constructing and delivering a package of BRT measures for the northern beaches, and the opportunity to respond to the options presented.

This response has been prepared based on the analysis and studies conducted to date, the strong understanding of transport issues and opportunities across the region by the councils and SHOROC, and the options presented in the Northern Beaches Bus Rapid Transit Pre-feasibility study report, Draft NSW Long Term Transport Master Plan and Infrastructure NSW's State Infrastructure Strategy.

It includes four sections:

1. Why we need action now
2. An integrated system needs an integrated solution
3. The solutions in the short-term and medium-to-long-term
4. Next steps to make it happen

1. Why we need action now

Our region needs action and an integrated solution for the major corridors now, not in the medium to long term. Proposals and options have been considered for decades. There is a need to move beyond feasibility studies and options assessment to bring forward detailed planning and delivery of the major proposals for our area.

The need for action now is supported by the Draft NSW Long Term Transport Master Plan and recent Transport for NSW studies:

- The Master Plan highlights the Pittwater/Spit/Military Road corridor as the most congested in Sydney based on the volume/capacity ratio, and the second slowest morning peak hour commute of all the major corridors. The 28 km bus journey on this route can take an hour and a half to reach the CBD, compared to public transport travel times to the CBD of 51 minutes from the south or 31 minutes from the west. This corridor links the region's major centre with the CBD and should include a mass transit system such as BRT according to the hierarchy in the Draft Master Plan
- The Warringah Road corridor is already beyond capacity through Forestville and the rest of the corridor, particularly the Wakehurst Parkway and Forest Road intersections, will exceed peak demand capacity by 2016 without any action. This corridor is the link between 2 major centres in Dee Why/Brookvale and Chatswood and is used as a major access route for business in the area, making it a key factor in regional economic development and employment. On top of this in the next year we'll see work begin on a major level 5 Hospital at Frenchs Forest, bringing with it additional housing and employment growth where traffic is at its worst.

With little to no major government funding in decades, our ageing transport infrastructure is beyond its limits and congestion is only set to worsen with population growth to increase by 11% over the next 20 years (*NSW Statistical Local Area Population Projection, DoP 2010*).

Congestion is impacting local business operations and large local businesses are considering relocation outside of the region. This will mean a loss of local jobs, impact our ability to meet future employment capacity targets and in turn place even more pressure on the congested transport network.

Priority investment is required from the NSW Government to enhance the major public transport and road infrastructure for better access to, from and within the SHOROC region so that the region can maintain and enhance its contribution to the NSW economy.

Incremental improvements in the bus network will not address these issues and will not be acceptable to the community which has been calling on the NSW Government to deliver solutions for years.

2. An integrated system needs an integrated solution

Higher priority must be given to the Warringah Road corridor in the Master Plan. The Warringah Road and Pittwater/Spit/Military Road corridors are the major parts of an integrated transport system for the Northern Beaches and Mosman that includes only three road access routes for travel to and from the region. The solutions planned and delivered must be an integrated package of measures addressing each of these three corridors and the region as a whole because of the complementary and inter-related roles the corridors play in resident and business movement.

The next stage of planning should focus on integrated regional planning and include a wider and more detailed cost-benefit analysis as travel time savings would have significant economic benefits for NSW through worker productivity improvements.

Higher priority must be given to the Warringah Road corridor

The identification of the Pittwater/Spit/Military Road corridor as highly constrained and the proposal of potential solutions is appropriate, as this assessment meets with our experience of this corridor as one urgently requiring investment.

However the Warringah Road corridor must be given higher priority by the NSW Government, including in the Long Term Transport Master Plan and other associated plans for the region.

This is about more than just commuter travel it's about making this region work. This corridor is used as a major access route for business in the area, making it a key factor in regional economic development and meeting the Metropolitan Strategy employment targets, particularly as the link between 2 major centres in Dee Why/Brookvale and Chatswood and a major link to greater Sydney. Additional pressure will come from new employment and population growth associated with the proposed specialised centre at Frenchs Forest which includes the new Northern Beaches Hospital and Healthcare Precinct.

The lack of due attention to the Warringah Road corridor congestion issues also conflicts with Transport for NSW's own recent studies which indicate that this east-west corridor is at capacity now. The *AECOM Frenchs Forest Specialised Centre reports – Local Transport Assessment and Strategic Transport Assessment* overwhelmingly conclude that the transport network around Frenchs Forest is already at capacity and needs significant investment in road infrastructure and public transport improvements, to accommodate background growth expected over next five years. This investment is imperative given the expected development of a major hospital at Frenchs Forest, a fact supported by the BRT pre-feasibility report which states that there is a fundamental need to redesign the bus network to serve the Frenchs Forest health precinct.

Integration with the Metropolitan Strategy and accommodating future housing and employment

As outlined above, the SHOROC councils have conducted significant analysis of the challenges and opportunities for our region in Sydney's North East as we seek to work together to plan for its future.

The SHOROC councils are open to meeting appropriate targets for growth in housing and jobs in our region. However current road congestion and lack of fast and reliable public transport doesn't allow it as any growth would impact on communities and place even more pressure on the road network which is already seeing local businesses considering relocation to more accessible areas.

The *Shaping Our Future* strategy identifies practical, affordable and achievable transport solutions for the SHOROC region as outlined further in this response.

In addition, the SHOROC councils all fully support the need for immediate construction of the level 5 Northern Beaches Hospital at Frenchs Forest and appropriate upgrades required to enable the long term complementary role for Mona Vale Hospital.

The NSW Government must include fully-funded commitments to delivering this priority infrastructure in our region in the Long Term Transport Master Plan and Metropolitan Strategy if the councils are to be able to accommodate the Metropolitan Strategy's housing and employment targets.

SHOROC argues that NSW Government planning for this region should be aligned to the regional priorities identified by councils in the *Shaping Our Future* strategy. This is due to the close connection to their communities and responsibilities for land-use management and role in growing the economy, protecting the natural assets and building and maintaining vibrant, connected and safe communities.

Integrated transport and land-use planning for the SHOROC region

The NSW Government should be congratulated for endeavouring to integrate land-use and transport planning under the NSW Long Term Transport Master Plan and Metropolitan Strategy.

The issue is that there is not currently an integrated process in place on a regional or local level. Councils are allocated broad region-wide housing and employment targets however transport planning decisions have already largely been made at a metropolitan level.

Councils then find themselves in a situation where:

- They are unable to meet the allocated housing and employment targets as to do so would mean that local and regional roads cease to function, an issue that Warringah Council has identified for the Dee Why/Brookvale area.
- Congestion impacts business operations, leading to business closure or relocation and loss of local jobs, further impacting councils ability to meet future employment capacity targets and in turn placing even more pressure on the congested transport network.

While corridor-based planning is a good step forward, for regions such as ours which are fairly discrete with only three road access routes to the rest of Sydney, there is a need for more detailed integrated transport and land-use planning to occur on a regional basis through a partnership between Transport, Planning and the councils/SHOROC.

The SHOROC councils have already developed and adopted an over-arching strategy in *Shaping Our Future* that seeks to integrate land-use and transport planning on a regional-basis by identifying the main areas for potential growth and the priorities for transport infrastructure. The objective of this approach is to consolidate the main growth required of this area by the NSW Government's Metropolitan Strategy along the major transport corridors to provide jobs close to home and minimise the need for even more transport infrastructure.

SHOROC would welcome a partnership approach with the NSW Government to conduct detailed regional transport and land-use planning to deliver the priority infrastructure required for the region, to maximise the efficiency of the network and seek to manage demand and promote alternative transport. This could be linked to the Metropolitan Strategy Sub-regional planning process.

It is also considered transport planning could be significantly strengthened by the appointment of a regional coordinator to work in partnership with councils through the ROCs to holistically coordinate all transport planning across a region.

Wider cost-benefit assessment and more detailed analysis of economic viability

There is a need to consider a wider and more detailed cost-benefit analysis including worker productivity improvements when planning for transport improvements such as these.

It is noted the BRT pre-feasibility report's rapid economic appraisal concluded the costs of a BRT are higher than the benefits, but that a more detailed assessment of demand and costs including detailed corridor specific modelling may demonstrate increased economic viability and that incremental implementation of the BRT measures may have a stronger business case.

This detailed assessment should proceed as part of the next phase of planning.

However for a cost-benefit analysis to truly capture the benefits that such infrastructure delivers there is a need to also consider the wider economic benefits that a faster and more reliable public transport system and road network achieve in regard to increased productivity and contribution to the NSW economy. The residents of the SHOROC region contribute \$20 billion annually to the NSW economy and half work outside the region, predominantly in highly productive jobs as professionals and managers, suggesting travel time savings would have significant economic benefits for NSW.

3. The solutions in the short-term and medium-to-long-term

Manly, Mosman, Pittwater and Warringah councils (SHOROC) consider the integrated package of priority transport improvements for the short-term and the medium-to-long-term for the SHOROC region to be as follows:

Short-term (0-5 years) package of measures

- A fast Bus Rapid Transit system on the north-south corridor from Mona Vale to the CBD, via a median bus lane using tidal flow arrangements in peak hour. Establishing this BRT would incorporate Spit Bridge augmentation as recommended by Infrastructure NSW and the median bus lane may come into operation only south of Manly Vale or even the Spit where no further stops are required to minimise operational issues.
- Grade separation at the intersections of Warringah Road with Wakehurst Parkway and Forest Way and upgrades to Wakehurst Parkway to provide flood-free access, critical to the construction of the Northern Beaches Hospital at Frenchs Forest.
- Fast public transport links from Dee Why to Chatswood, with an initial focus on the provision of frequent and direct Express Bus services and bus priority measures as outlined in the BRT pre-feasibility report including works to address the capacity issues at the Forest Way/Warringah Rd intersection. These bus priority measures could potentially include a T3 lane rather than a 24hr bus lane on the road corridor to reduce the impact on car traffic.
- Construction of targeted park & rides to maximise patronage of public transport.
- Detailed regional transport planning in partnership with the councils to maximise the efficiency of the network and seek to manage demand and promote alternative transport.
- Implementation of the proposed bus network rationalisation including the new tiered network structure and associated frequency improvements. This new network structure should cover the entire region and integrate the bus network of the Warringah Rd and Mona Vale Road corridors with the Pittwater/Spit/Military Road corridor into a single public transport network.
- Mona Vale Road upgrade to a divided dual-lane carriageway for its full length through to Mona Vale to improve safety and efficiency, and enable Warriewood/Ingleside growth.

Medium-long term (5-20 years) package of measures

- Upgrading of the public transport links from Dee Why to Chatswood from Express Buses to a segregated BRT and potentially light rail or other greater capacity transport in future years as needed. It is noted that implementation of a median or kerbside BRT is proposed as the next stage in implementation of bus priority works on this corridor.
- The proposed Northern Beaches Link, from the Gore Hill Freeway to the Burnt Bridge Creek Deviation via a tunnel under Mosman and a new bridge over the Spit, combined with the BRT from the Northern Beaches to the CBD. This Link could be fast-tracked with private sector involvement and SHOROC welcomes the work of Infrastructure NSW in engaging with the private sector on the feasibility of its acceleration.
- A new underground Neutral Bay interchange for the Spit/Military Road BRT line to also serve buses from Sydney's North West, linking to a metro-style rapid transit service to Wynyard that travel across the Harbour Bridge and under Wynyard using the redundant tram tunnels.

Bus Rapid Transit as a regional public transport network

As outlined above planning for the Northern Beaches and Mosman should be on a region-wide basis and SHOROC considers the BRT delivered for this area should focus on an integrated network for the Pittwater/Spit/Military Road and Warringah Road corridors.

Its implementation should include bus network rationalisation as proposed in the BRT pre-feasibility report, the introduction of integrated ticketing, strong branding and promotion, an advanced fleet and stations.

The solution should also be one that delivers the optimal transport system for both public and private transport by focussing on a fast and reliable public transport system as well as targeted road upgrades.

A major public communications and education strategy will be critical to the community embracing it as a new public transport system rather than an incremental improvement, and to achieving the desired modal shift from private car travel.

A key objective should be a modal shift to public transport for both commuter travel and other trips, which would also ease traffic congestion for those that need to use their car for work or other purposes. The significant benefits of BRT are identified in the BRT pre-feasibility report which states that the potential passenger throughput with a BRT could be three to four times that for a lane used for general traffic, highlighting the positive impact on traffic congestion of a BRT.

4. Next steps to make it happen

The next steps to be implemented in the coming year to deliver this integrated package of improvements for the transport system across the SHOROC region are outlined below. SHOROC would welcome a partnership approach between the councils and the NSW Government in the delivery of all these elements.

Proposed next steps to be implemented in partnership with SHOROC

- **To commence immediately detailed planning and concept planning to deliver as a priority the fast Bus Rapid Transit system on the north-south corridor from Mona Vale to the CBD via a median bus lane.**

Serious consideration needs to be given to tidal flow arrangements for this corridor which could potentially come into operation only south of Manly Vale or even the Spit where no further stops are required in order to minimise operational issues. The BRT report noted that limited assessment was made of tidal flow arrangements and that the benefits and impacts could be more confidently predicted through a concept planning process.

The BRT is similar to that proposed as Option 2 in the BRT pre-feasibility report. Bus Network Rationalisation is supported and should be considered as part of this planning.

Establishing this BRT would incorporate Spit Bridge augmentation as recommended by Infrastructure NSW.

This planning should also outline the impact on the retail corridor should the planning determine that the optimal implementation is for the BRT to operate in the kerbside lane. It is noted also that the BRT report options included a proposed 24hr bus but the report also stated that variations could be made by pursuing something less than 24 hr dedication which mitigate the impact on on-street parking but do not compromise travel time and other BRT benefits.

- **To give greater priority to the Warringah Road corridor in the NSW Long Term Transport Master Plan and other NSW Government strategies because of its criticality to the region, impact on economic development, and the increased importance with the construction of the Northern Beaches Hospital and proposed Frenchs Forest health precinct.**
- **To allocate funding and commence detailed planning and design work as a whole-of-government approach in conjunction with NSW Health and Planning to deliver the grade separation at the intersections of Warringah Road with Wakehurst Parkway and Forest Way, as well as upgrades to Wakehurst Parkway to provide flood-free access to the Hospital.**

These works are required as a critical part of the construction of the Northern Beaches Hospital at Frenchs Forest and should be implemented as part of the Hospital design and construction.

- **To commence detailed planning to deliver as a priority optimal fast public transport links from Dee Why to Chatswood.**

SHOROC proposes an initial focus on the provision of frequent and direct Express Bus services and bus priority measures, potentially with a T3 lane rather than a 24hr bus lane on the road corridor to reduce the impact on car traffic. It is noted that the Strategic Transport Assessment for Frenchs Forest stated that a BRT would be well patronised and that the hospital construction is consistent with and adds to the case for the establishment of a BRT on this corridor.

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Proposed next steps to be implemented in partnership with SHOROC (continued)

- To conduct an assessment to identify the optimal location and begin planning for construction of targeted park & rides to maximise patronage of the BRT and bus services.
 - To allocate further funding and commence the next stage of planning and design work to upgrade Mona Vale Road to a divided dual-lane carriageway for its full length through to Mona Vale to improve safety and efficiency, and enable Warriewood/Ingleside growth.
 - To establish a SHOROC regional transport planning committee with General Manager level representatives from councils, Transport for NSW and the Department of Planning & Infrastructure to develop a regional transport plan and oversee the delivery of priority infrastructure, to maximise the efficiency of the network and seek to manage demand and promote alternative transport.
 - To develop an immediate plan to implement over the coming year the potential short term/interim BRT measures described on page 63-66 of BRT pre-feasibility report.
 - To implement the bus network rationalisation proposed in the BRT pre-feasibility report, extended to cover the entire region and integrate the bus network of the Warringah Rd and Mona Vale Road corridors with the Pittwater/Spit/Military Road corridor into a single public transport network.
 - To seek interest from the private sector on the acceleration of the delivery of the proposed Northern Beaches Link, from the Gore Hill Freeway to the Burnt Bridge Creek Deviation via a tunnel under Mosman and a new bridge over the Spit, combined with the BRT from the Northern Beaches to the CBD.
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Further information

For more information visit the SHOROC website www.shoroc.com or contact SHOROC:

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