



RESPONSE TO THE REVIEW OF BUS SERVICES IN NEW SOUTH WALES - INTERIM REPORT

1. Introduction

SHOROC welcomes an integrated approach to regional transport planning and commends the Chair of the Review, Mr Unsworth, for undertaking broad consultation and providing a detailed summary of the issues raised during the preparation of the Interim Report.

While we acknowledge the positive recommendations in this Report, we still have a number of concerns about the way transport infrastructure in NSW is being planned and financed. It concerns us that decisions relating to major road and rail projects are being considered in isolation and that this is impacting on local communities. The apparent lack of strategic transport planning does nothing to support a positive investment environment.

Access is an issue for everyone and public transport is central to the social, economic and environmental lifestyle of our community. It would be irresponsible for government to view spending on transport infrastructure as an expense rather than as an investment in our future.

Local Government should be consulted in all State transport planning processes, as it is already responsible for planning and delivering supportive infrastructure such as bus stops and shelters, footpaths and street lighting. Local Councils have a greater understanding of their transport requirements based on community need.

The Terms of Reference for the Review of Bus Services in NSW was to take into account the findings of the Public Transport Funding Inquiry being undertaken by Dr Tom Parry. Our concern with the Parry Report is that it was a cost efficiency exercise and did not articulate a vision for the future direction of public transport planning in this State. SHOROC would support further examination of the interplay between the findings and recommendations of these two reports.

Recognising that pollution from motor vehicles has become the most recognised air quality issue, we believe that people need to be encouraged to use public transport or share cars wherever possible. Unfortunately, the benefits of using public transport have not been fully considered or communicated and more work should be undertaken in this area.

While the SHOROC response does not address all of the Report recommendations in detail, we have commented on those issues that most affect our region.

2. Background

The Shore Regional Organisation of Councils (SHOROC) represents the four Councils of Mosman, Manly, Pittwater and Warringah located on Sydney's Northern Beaches Peninsula.

The Peninsula has major transport shortcomings in comparison to other parts of the Sydney region in so far as it is physically separated by topographical constraints and waterways, has no rail transport system and relies exclusively on three roads linking the region with the remainder of Sydney.

The (only) three access points are at the Spit Bridge (Manly Road), Roseville Bridge (Warringah Road) and from St Ives (Mona Vale Road). The Spit and Roseville Bridge routes and to a lesser extent Mona Vale Road have a long history of capacity problems resulting in traffic delays and congestion, particularly during the peak periods.

Whilst traffic delays and congestion are increasingly common to many areas of Sydney, it should be noted that the Northern Beaches Peninsula remains uniquely disadvantaged as:

- Unlike the rest of Sydney which has relatively convenient access to mass rail transport and a number of road options to access that system, the nearest railway stations are located outside the NBP and can only be accessed by travelling through the constrained entry/exit points identified above.
- There is limited scope to increase the capacity of the three existing entry/exit points. The current RTA proposal to widen the Spit Bridge has been totally rejected by the SHOROC Councils as a band-aid approach that will not improve the flow of traffic in this area, but in fact increase travelling times (a finding of an independent Consultant's report on the development proposal).

- The Northern Beaches Peninsula relies on bus and ferry services as the only means of public transport.
- Bus transport also competes for space on the same constrained road system.

In the face of increased use of private motor vehicles within and into the region, our challenge for the future is to provide equitable and efficient transport options that will encourage people to use public transport.

However, our focus on transport is not only the major transport corridors. Local community transport needs are also an issue and we are considering the needs of a range of user groups, particularly in relation to 'access for all' and 'equity of services'.

SHOROC has developed a Regional Transport Policy and a *Sustainable* Regional Transport Solutions Working Paper. We are currently working with the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources in order to implement some of the transport solutions we have identified in this working paper.

SHOROC is also working closely with our neighbouring NSROC to develop an Integrated Transport Plan for the Northern Sydney Region.

3. Specific Responses to the Recommendations

3.1 Metropolitan Network & Service Planning

Strategic Corridors: While the *Strategic Bus Corridor 16* recognises the Mona Vale to City connection, there should be recognition of the strategic importance of the Palm Beach to Mona Vale connection, not only for commuters travelling outside the region, but also for residents and visitors wishing to access destinations within the region. Increasingly, residents living on the more affordable Central Coast are travelling by ferry from Ettalong to Palm Beach, with connecting bus to work locations within the region. This is meeting the demand to fill unskilled and lower paying professional jobs in the region.

Therefore, SHOROC recommends further fine-tuning of route selection and consultation with Councils and communities in our region. The needs of local businesses and resident parking requirements should also be considered.

SHOROC would welcome an expanded *Bus Priority Program*, ensuring fast, convenient, safe and comfortable travel, which would encourage more commuters to travel by bus. Unfortunately, in the SHOROC region, bus routes and services are not independent of congestion that exists on our road system.

The SHOROC Regional Transport Policy supports the need for greater priority for buses on the road system. The Policy identifies the need to give consideration to provision of bus-only lanes over a greater portion of the network than at present, particularly for peak hour traffic times. It is also considered that Transit ways should be policed and the hours extended.

The Government will need to invest in associated infrastructure, particularly new buses, to encourage greater patronage by reinforcing passenger safety and comfort. Improved schedules and more frequent connections would also indicate the need to increase the size of our bus fleet.

SHOROC is supportive of the introduction by Sydney Buses of new low floor accessible buses; however, in order to accommodate these buses, Councils will be required to undertake essential modifications to the horizontal and vertical alignment of existing roads. This imposes significant responsibility on local government to fund new infrastructure and we believe the Commonwealth and/or State Government should be prepared to subsidise these expenses.

Community Transport Services: As a major priority, SHOROC supports the need to develop innovative solutions to ensure access to local transport services (including bus and ferry services) and better integration of community transport services. We need to achieve a seamless interchange between modes wherever possible.

Manly Council has previously expressed concern about the potential reduction in direct services to Manly. Many bus commuters living north of Dee Why might be disadvantaged by the proposed re-routing or discontinuation of direct services to Manly. Express bus services are also a concern, particularly in relation to how they cater to people wishing to travel within the region.

Integrated planning for strategic and local bus services should be an inclusive process and not just restricted to State government planners and transport operators. The needs of local communities must be taken into account; they are the customers after all. Local government can provide valuable input to this process as they have an understanding of their local transport needs and also the diverse range of user groups, unique to each sub-region.

Consideration of travel demand issues, particularly relating to more flexible and frequent bus services along strategic corridors and important local routes will be critical to building customer support.

The SHOROC councils are committed to planning strategies that reduce reliance on the car, including co-locating residential housing near public transport and reducing average trip distances to major activities such as work.

The issue relating to the *State Environmental Planning Policy No. 64* has been raised previously. The Policy restricts advertising within conservation areas and through residential zones (including, by reference to the Environmental Planning and Assessment Model Provisions, any unzoned land adjacent to these areas), resulting in the prohibition of most forms of advertising in the road reserve.

The improvement of bus services generally includes the provision of clean and attractive bus shelters and associated infrastructure. The funding of new and improved shelters is often beyond the financial capacity of local government and funding has historically been provided through the sale of advertising space on shelters in strategic locations.

Local Government has been requesting the urgent review of the Policy to address this issue and a number of inconsistencies. It is recommended that the SEPP be included in the current review of Policies being carried out by DIPNR with a view to an amendment regarding advertising that would assist in the provision of additional bus shelters.

The opportunities and implications relating to the ability of local councils to implement local planning policies under which developers contribute to public transport costs needs to be considered by the Section 94 Contributions and Development Levies Taskforce, currently operating within DIPNR.

SHOROC Councils would support an enhanced Section 94 model that separates those elements to be provided by the developer as a basis of material public benefit (MPB), as follows:

1. A basic level of public infrastructure specific to the development site (such as roads, guttering, footpaths, pavements, street trees, street lighting) and delivered by conditions of development consent for the subdivision).

2. A broader measure of public infrastructure (open space, major drainage, community facilities, traffic and transport) that is of a community, district or regional nature.

We believe, there should be flexibility built into the model where the funds collected against the plans are banked and internal borrowings from the plans allow delivery of the development in a timely manner. The linking of plans to timeframes needs to be balanced against rate of development.

In delivering infrastructure under item 2 above, there should be a number of options. While one consideration is the cost, the other is the negotiation of the MPB and, consideration of the benefits to the developer of having the development further enhanced. If there is land to be considered under a plan, it needs to be acquired or dedicated. Councils could collect funds and acquire the land, or negotiate with developers to dedicate the land as a MPB, where possible.

3.2 Metropolitan Contracting

SHOROC would support the reduction in the number of contract regions but only if this supports co-operative arrangements between relevant operators, whereby operators may pick up and drop off passengers within different contract areas if demand dictates. This arrangement is closely linked with the need for an equitable pricing structure.

A typical example of this in the SHOROC region is between the two operators, Forest Coach Lines and Sydney Buses. Sydney Buses has services that cross Forest Coach Lines contract area but they are not able to pick up passengers in this area and vice-versa. This ultimately results in a reduced service for passengers.

SHOROC supports a competitive tendering process as current contracts expire and the recommendation to comprehensively benchmark service standards and to implement some quality assurance measures.

3.3 Metropolitan Funding

The recommended net cost model is broadly supported where:

- Operator retains fare revenue
- SSTS is paid on actual travel

- Government reimburses operators for concession travel and, where necessary
- Makes fixed subsidy payment to ensure provision of fixed service levels, for example to provide better services in established areas or start-up services in new release areas.

However, the value of Government providing economic incentives, including a payment for the environmental and social benefits derived from attracting people to use buses, should be further explored.

Other subsidy considerations that should be explored include the provision of new buses (with commuter safety and comfort in mind) and investment in corridor infrastructure, as previously referred to.

3.4 State-wide Fares, Ticketing & Concessions

SHOROC supports the provision of equitable transport services in our region. The report's recommendation regarding the introduction of a consistent fare scale does not consider that bus travel is the only means of public transport in this region, unlike other regions, which also benefit from fast rail services.

Any increase in bus fares may impact adversely, particularly if there is no corresponding improvement in bus services and infrastructure (including the standard of buses).

The introduction of integrated ticketing should be a high priority, and SHOROC would actively support integrated ticketing between bus and ferry services.

3.5 State-wide Governance Arrangements

SHOROC supports the recommendation for the establishment of a Passenger Services Division within the Ministry of Transport in the interim followed by the establishment of a NSW Passenger Transport Authority in the longer term.

Councils should have an opportunity to provide input to both the Passenger Transport Authority and the Transport Ministry. Local Government should be represented on both bodies.

4. Contact Details

This submission has been prepared by the SHOROC Executive Officer on behalf of the SHOROC Management Committee, comprising the General Managers of Mosman, Manly, Pittwater and Warringah Councils.

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SHOROC Member Councils

Manly Council	www.manly.nsw.gov.au
Mosman Municipal Council	www.mosman.nsw.gov.au
Pittwater Council	www.pittwaterlga.com.au
Warringah Council	www.warringah.nsw.gov.au