



Connecting With Buses

Reducing transport disadvantage by supporting bus services in Western Sydney

WSCF Position Paper
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Western Sydney Community Forum

Western Sydney Community Forum (WSCF) strengthens the work of community organisations across Western Sydney to increase the capacity and resilience of disadvantaged communities. Western Sydney Community Forum is a regional peak organisation that provides regional leadership, facilitates collaborative action and develops resources for community organisations.

WSCF has over 150 members, mainly non-government community service organisations, with government and commercial organisations as associate members. WSCF represents organisations from Auburn, Bankstown, Baulkham Hills, Blacktown, Blue Mountains, Camden, Campbelltown, Fairfield, Hawkesbury, Holroyd, Liverpool, Parramatta, Penrith and Wollondilly local government areas.

Funded by Transport and Infrastructure, WSCF has a long involvement connecting the community sector with transport issues. WSCF currently supports or participates in several local transport forums including the Liverpool Transport Taskforce, the Blue Mountains Integrated Transport Forum and the Western Sydney Public Transport Users umbrella group.

Past research and projects include the production of 'Transport Disadvantage in Western Sydney' a research report with the University of Western Sydney, documenting the impact transport disadvantage has on young unemployed, sole parents, people with disabilities and older women and 'Getting There', a forum on improving accessibility, transport and sustainability with WSROC and NCOSS.

WSCF has also been a regular contributor to State inquiries and reviews including the Unsworth Review, the yearly State Budget, the various IPART reviews, the NSW Metropolitan Strategy, NSW State Plan and the Review of Health Related Transport and participates in the NCOSS Transport Policy Advice Group.

WSCF has been supporting the provision of better bus services in Western Sydney for many years. WSCF identified concerns with the Passenger Transport Act 1990 soon after its implementation and participated in efforts to address the issues brought about by its weaknesses. WSCF's work with local public transport forums, community sector groups and inter-agencies gives the organisation a close appreciation of the daily lived experiences of bus users in Western Sydney, particularly those who are disadvantaged.

Executive Summary

In 2003, a review of bus services in NSW was undertaken by the former Premier of NSW, The Hon Barrie Unsworth. The Review was delivered to the NSW Transport and Infrastructure in February 2004. Soon after, the NSW Transport and Infrastructure responded to the Review and commenced implementing the recommendations, with some qualifications as the Ministry saw fit. Now, in 2009, five years after the Unsworth Review was delivered, WSCF believes it is timely to review how the transformation of bus services in Western Sydney is proceeding.

Transport Disadvantaged in Western Sydney

Improvements to bus services are needed to reduce transport disadvantage in Western Sydney. Transport disadvantage is a term used to describe a situation where disadvantaged populations live in an area where transport and/or other facilities and services are difficult to access or unavailable.

In comparison with the rest of Sydney, Western Sydney has a significantly higher number of socio-economically disadvantaged people living in areas where transport and other services are difficult to access or unavailable.

Poor access to transport is a defining characteristic of poverty and social disadvantage. An inability to access transport either because of cost, availability of services or poor physical accessibility leads to isolation from jobs, education and health facilities, as well as social and recreational activities; a situation now recognised as 'social exclusion'.

Successive governments have permitted retail, business, health, educational and industrial facilities to locate far from public transport, and transport funding, almost exclusively focussed on motorway projects, has facilitated this spread. As a result, people in the west are forced to travel twice as far to access the same services as people in the east.

There is a growing acceptance that the price of petrol will inevitably develop a permanently upward trend as the discovery of new oil fields declines whilst demand for oil increases. A recent CSIRO report predicted petrol would be \$8/litre by 2018. Western Sydney, with its long distances and comparatively poor public transport services has a high concentration of households vulnerable to high oil prices.

Climate change, caused by carbon pollution from burning fossil fuels, has emerged as one of the greatest threats to humanity. Car use in Australia accounts for fourteen percent of carbon pollution, and that percentage is growing. The consequences of climate change, higher temperatures, more severe storms and severe droughts will inevitably fall hardest on the disadvantaged. It is vital that our generation do all within its power to curb carbon pollution. Good public transport and walking and cycling facilities, is an important part of the solution.

Whilst the Unsworth Review has instigated long overdue reform, at the current pace of change, Western Sydney still has many years to go until its services match those of the east.

Metropolitan Planning

The Unsworth Review examined ways to combat planning issues that prevented bus services from flourishing; the many buses operating within their own small areas, each area's services planned in isolation, buses prevented from picking up or dropping off passengers to nearby local centres, urban development that was impossible to service by bus, and old-fashioned parking policies.

To improve the speed, directness and the economic viability of bus routes, the Unsworth Review proposed 'Strategic Corridors'. Rather than long, winding routes designed to meet inflexible rules, new 'strategic corridors' that directly connect regional centres with other trip generators are being put in place.

This inevitably leaves some people with greater distances to travel to their local bus stop. Processes need to be devised with community transport operators and other stakeholders to identify and provide alternative services to those left stranded by route straightening.

The Unsworth Review aims to reform bus services to create a single network of buses, with strategic corridors, feeder services and local services.

The State Government now oversees planning for the strategic corridors, whilst local operators take responsibility for detailed planning of local routes. The community and local government must be more involved in the planning of services, particularly local services, and at an earlier stage.

Local integrated transport forums, which assist with the coordination of the many stakeholders involved in the system, have proven to be a useful mechanism to improve local transport systems and should be actively supported by the NSW Transport and Infrastructure Regional Transport Coordinators. Given the size of the transport planning and co-ordination tasks, more workers in the field and at the Ministry are needed.

Service planning needs to be more ambitious. Examples such as Vancouver suggest that with the right mix of supportive policies even low density suburbs can have frequent services running eighteen hours a day. WSCF encourages stakeholders in Western Sydney to work together to critique the current service levels and compare them to world's best practice in comparable cities.

'Flexible solutions', where 'dial a bus' type services substitute for regular route services, should not, in general, be seen as a replacement for frequent route bus services. That is not to deny that demand responsive transport has a role to play on the fringes of the city or for those struggling to use regular services.

Community transport services offer door to door transport, mainly for those who find it difficult to use regular services due to disability, age, mobility and health. These service providers are struggling to meet existing demand and must be properly resourced to meet their existing goals. Funding for the Community Transport Program needs to be at-least doubled to enable community transport providers to expand the services beyond their current HACC or medical transport clients. Community transport needs to be seen as a part of an integrated public transport system, not a separate system.

Whilst the Review noted the importance of the Sydney Metropolitan Strategy in supporting the recommendations of the Unsworth Review, there are other partners whose programs have a role to play in supporting bus services.

Foremost amongst strategies that can support bus services are the Commonwealth Government's new funding packages, the Building Australia Fund and the Community Infrastructure Program. Funding is needed to meet the obligations of the Accessible Transport Standards, to construct footpaths and bus shelters, and purchase new, locally manufactured, accessible buses – all of which are 'shovel (or welding) ready'. The Commonwealth Government could transform Western Sydney's services beginning now.

The Commonwealth Government needs to fully understand the impact of transport provision on social exclusion and its vital role addressing this.

Local government support for public transport varies from Council to Council. All Councils need to accept that they have an essential role to play in supporting public transport services in the same way they support, for example, car drivers and sports players. This support includes traffic management to give buses priority, constructing accessible footpaths and signage along public transport access paths, facilitating community input into planning and travel behaviour change programs.

However, in the interests of consistency of infrastructure provision, responsibility for all bus stops needs to be taken over by the State Government with management possibly contracted out to a specialist organisation such as the Transport Infrastructure Development Corporation.

Parking management strategies decrease transport disadvantage by offering genuine alternatives to driving. A Metropolitan Parking Strategy, mooted at least sixteen years ago by the State Government, is yet to see the light of day. Local and State Governments and community organisations need to have a conversation with the public about the need to better manage parking.

Giving buses priority over private vehicles is critical to deliver a fast service that competes with the car. The Unsworth Review noted that there were at least 150 'choke points' on the 43 Strategic Corridors costing \$20 million to remove. Bus priority measures need greater attention and funding. The Public Transport Information and Priority System (PTIPS) is years behind schedule.

Transport interchanges facilitate the smooth flow of passengers from one mode of transport to another. Ownership, planning and funding for interchanges is confused and ambiguous. The Review's recommendation that the Transport Infrastructure Development Corporation's role be expanded to take control of all bus infrastructure and interchanges continues to have merit.

Metropolitan Contracting

School buses are exempt from the Accessible Public Transport Standards, and can thus be up to 25 years old. As well as reducing the image of buses, and turning off generations of potential customers, older buses are more polluting, putting the health of children at risk. Reducing the average age of the bus fleet from 25 years will improve air quality,

accessibility and productivity as buses will require less maintenance.

Accessible transport increases access not only for people with mobility constraints, but also for people travelling with prams, luggage, shopping trolleys, bicycles and young children. Progress towards implementation is painfully slow and it is unlikely that compliance timetables are being met. A Review of the implementation of the Standards is overdue as of July 2009. Careful public attention must be given to its recommendations.

Monitoring and reporting of the provision of bus services is still weak. The indicators used to judge whether outcomes are being met are said to be based more on operational requirements than passenger needs. Far more effort is required to determine what the right things are to measure, and then to measure them. In the second half of 2009 the NSW Office of Audit will conduct a performance review of the bus contracting system. Careful public attention must be given to its recommendations.

Metropolitan Funding

It's important that planning for buses is driven by community needs rather than Treasury's desire to keep costs down. Governments are still failing to come to grips with valuing the broad range of externalities of transport with recent studies documenting an alarmingly limited range of matters.

Fringe areas of Western Sydney bear some resemblance to rural and regional NSW – being isolated from major services and with low populations subject to poorly co-ordinated service planning and inflexible funding programs and transport service procurement arrangements. Consequently, some of the recommendations proposed for rural and regional areas could usefully be applied to fringe metropolitan areas. Integrated Regional Transport Plans and Budgets, developed by a range of government stakeholders, could be developed for outer metropolitan regions in the same way as is proposed for rural and regional plans. Three new Regional Transport Co-ordinators should be employed by the NSW Transport and Infrastructure to facilitate this integrated approach.

Statewide Issues

A fundamental role of Government is to reduce social exclusion by facilitating people's access to education, health services and recreational opportunities. Reducing the cost of basic services such as transport, to people on lower incomes by providing concessions is an appropriate way to achieve this.

Whilst some inconsistencies in concession eligibility have been ironed out, concessions are still unevenly available. The Pensioner Excursion Ticket needs to be renamed The Access Ticket, and made available to those who pass an income test, such as low income or part time workers and job seekers.

Whilst, on the face of it, 'paying for the distance you travel' seems fair, it ignores the fact that in Western Sydney public transport services are sparsely provided, and the distance between facilities and services is greater. Western Sydney residents, forced to travel longer distances, are forced to pay higher fares. An integrated zonal, time-based fare structure is needed.

Sydney still awaits one ticket that can be used on all public transport across the metropolis. This must be expedited and implemented at the same time as a change in the fare structure. It is important, however, that the introduction of this ticket is not prevented by considerations about the fare structure. Integrated ticketing must happen, regardless.

The School Student Transport Scheme continues to confound those seeking to move subsidies to those in greatest need. The debate around free travel to school is not as simple as it may seem and attempts to control education policy 'through the back door' by transport policy will not achieve appropriate educational outcomes. Transport services should be thought of as 'enablers' of social policy. Changes to education policy that create greater costs must be negotiated between the relevant departments and their Ministers.

In 2004 the Passenger Transport Act 1990 was amended to facilitate the implementation of the Unsworth Review recommendations. However, the newly amended Act is silent on the matter of community transport services. Given that the Unsworth Review considers community transport should be integrated with other bus services, it is important that this oversight be corrected.

Appendix 1. Recommendations

This is a compilation of all the recommendations made by WSCF in the body of this paper. It does not, however, compile the list of recommendations from the Unsworth Review referred to in the body of this paper. These Unsworth Review recommendations are still relevant and we suggest that the WSCF recommendations, listed below, be read with reference to the Unsworth Review recommendations in the body of this report.

Metropolitan Planning

WSCF Recommendation 1

The implementation of the Bus Network Review and the Strategic Corridors should to be supported and the results independently evaluated.

WSCF Recommendation 2

As part of any bus network review, a process needs to be devised that identifies those disadvantaged by new bus routes and tailors alternative transport options for them. This could include Travel Training or referral to community transport.

WSCF Recommendation 3

That any future bus network reviews or route changes recognise, acknowledge and plan for the two complementary but differing objectives:

1. to improve strategic corridors linking key centres
2. to improve local primary routes feeding into these corridors, and local secondary routes serving local centres and lesser railway stations.

Planning for local transport should use improved engagement and consultation processes which foreground the needs and interests of local people through.

WSCF Recommendation 4

That all future bus network reviews incorporate planning for all forms of transport including as community transport, taxis and hire cars.

WSCF Recommendation 5

A State-sponsored, passenger advocacy service needs to be established to promote the interests of public transport users in the planning and delivery of public transport services.

WSCF Recommendation 6

Connectivity and social inclusion indicators be developed and published regularly by an independent authority such as ITSRR or the Auditor General.

WSCF Recommendation 7

The Community Transport Review to:

- recommend \$10m per year funding for NSW Community Transport providers
- explore the role of Community Transport in providing demand responsive services
- recommend options for Community Transport providers to be involved in the

service policy development, planning and implementation for the broader public transport system, particularly with the Bus Network Review

WSCF Recommendation 8

WSCF work with NCOSS, BusNSW and CTO to advocate for the development and trial of a Community Kilometres project specifically targeting transport and disadvantage.

WSCF Recommendation 9

An independent body such as ITSRR or the NSW Office of Audit review the effectiveness of the Network Review, the functioning of the Regional Planning Forums and the community consultation process.

WSCF Recommendation 10 (see recommendation 5)

A State-sponsored, passenger advocacy service needs to be established to promote the interests of public transport users in the planning and delivery of public transport services.

WSCF Recommendation 11 (see Recommendation 45)

Three regional Metropolitan Transport Co-ordinators be employed in the South West, North West and Western regions of Sydney.

WSCF Recommendation 12 (adopting GetUp's and Rapid Active & Affordable Transport Alliance recommendations¹²)

A quarter of the Building Australia Fund to be allocated to public transport and cycling facilities, and at least 1% of GDP per year thereafter. The NSW Government to propose initiatives to support bus services for funding.

WSCF Recommendation 13

The Australian Council of Social Services, the Australian Conservation Council and Local Government should be consulted by the Australian Transport Council as a matter of course.

WSCF Recommendation 14 (modified NCOSS recommendation³)

All Federal bodies and programs dealing with social justice or transport must understand and accept their responsibilities in addressing transport poverty. Firstly this means developing comprehensive planning processes and improving funding for public transport services. It means improving the research that is available on the links between transportation and poverty, and propose strategies to incorporate transport solutions within all government policies and planning.

WSCF Recommendation 15

'Access to a car' should be replaced by 'access to adequate transport' as a measure of wellbeing by the Social Inclusion Board and all other government planning and research.

WSCF Recommendation 16

The Major Cities Unit to consider the role of public transport in the economic development of cities.

¹ Sheikh, S 2008, GetUp Submission to Infrastructure Australia

² http://www.acfonline.org.au/articles/news.asp?news_id=2321 accessed 25 August 2009.

³ NCOSS 2008, Submission to the Garnaut Climate Change Review Issues Paper – Forum 5 Transport, Planning and the Built Environment

WSCF Recommendation 17

All planning for bus services recognise the dire predictions of the Garnaut Review. All planning for new motorways be reviewed to consider the results of the Garnaut Review and the money allocated for new motorways, be diverted to developing the public transport services.

WSCF Recommendation 18

In recognition of the anticipated shift to public transport created by the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme, the Commonwealth fund increased public transport services and infrastructure.

WSCF Recommendation 19 (see Recommendation 56)

The Roads and Traffic Authority fund Public Transport Improvement Officers as they do Road Safety Officers to co-ordinate and support public transport services within Local Government.

WSCF Recommendation 20

Legislation be adopted amending the constitution of Local Government Traffic Committees to enable them to consider broader transport issues. Local public transport and community transport operators be given a mandatory seat on these committees.

WSCF Recommendation 21

Western Sydney Regional Organisation of Council's Transport Officers Committee commission an audit of streets without footpaths in Western Sydney and prepare an estimate of the cost to ensure that every street has a footpath on at least one side of the road.

WSCF Recommendation 22

A study be commissioned to estimate the impacts of different parking policies on Western Sydney residents , particularly those who are transport disadvantaged, and set out a transition program towards better management of parking .

WSCF Recommendation 23

Bus operators to liaise with Local Government to identify and prioritise local chokepoints. Local Government to prioritise these when developing Capital Works programs. The Commonwealth to provide funding.

WSCF Recommendation 24

Toilets be installed for bus passengers at all level 1 - 4 interchanges and major strategic corridor stops.

WSCF Recommendation 25 (adoption of NSW Audit Office recommendation)

The NSW Transport and Infrastructure

- establish a coordinating and oversight entity to assess interchange standards, monitor interchange performance, plan access to the public transport system, and plan whole of network development
- establish clear responsibilities for interchange 'ownership', operation and maintenance

- Develop a more strategic approach
- set performance objectives for interchanges such as demand levels, connectivity offered and cost-effectiveness achieved
- develop multi-modal transport plans to improve interchange planning and overall effectiveness
- further develop the 'quality gap' assessment using facility inspections against a set of specific standards and risk assessments
- develop and publish a ten year rolling plan for interchanges

Develop and promote Best Practice

- develop and issue Best Practice Guidelines for different categories of interchanges, including arrangements for integrated emergency and security response
- carry out a review against Best Practice Guidelines to assess the quality of the present interchange arrangements
- work in partnership with local stakeholders to identify ways of ensuring good quality multi-modal interchanges, particularly those where quality falls short of the Guidelines.

Provide better information

- provide better information to the public, such as by including on the Transport Infoline 131500 website details of interchange layouts, transport services, kiss and ride facilities, park and ride facilities, taxi ranks and amenities
- enhance the Transport Infoline 131500 website journey planner such as by adding an ability to plan part of the journey by taxi or car, as a means of encouraging a change in travel behaviour
- develop a strategy to assess and, if necessary, improve brand awareness of the service
- establish and maintain an accurate inventory of existing facilities, site ownership by facility, transport services provided, capital amenities provided, identification of access attributes, capacity, utilisation and costs
- link the facilities inventory to a map including existing and planned bus, rail and ferry routes and services to develop a context for placing new facilities or expanding those already in existence

Systematically evaluate performance

- establish an evaluation process framework with performance objectives, performance monitoring and post evaluation to establish the impact of the interchange facilities on public transport
- establish a means of systematically reviewing the frequency and character of transport service provided at individual facilities to ensure that it is adequate for the purpose

- Address the need for long term funding
- forecast long term funding requirements for development, operations,

maintenance and security

- clearly state funding objectives and options for interchanges such as minimising the cost to commuters, minimising the cost to public agencies or promoting joint development
- promote joint development of interchanges using a more market-oriented approach
- continue to improve transparency in how *Parking Space Levy* funds are allocated to infrastructure projects by the use of criteria (including extent of achievement of the object of the PSL legislation) and evaluation of the relative merits of alternatives
- identify and assess the adequacy of funding sources for interchanges, including for operations, maintenance and security
- identify, secure and leverage further funding sources as necessary to address any shortfalls.

WSCF Recommendation 25

Subject to assessment of the Parramatta and Sydney CBD services, consideration be given to extending free buses to Blacktown, Penrith, Liverpool, Fairfield and Campbelltown.

WSCF Recommendation 26

Transport Infrastructure Development Corporation's responsibilities be extended to include planning, building, managing and maintaining all bus stops and interchanges. The Parking Space Levy be invested in installing and maintaining facilities appropriate to each bus stop in Western Sydney.

Metropolitan Contracting

WSCF Recommendation 27

Community stakeholders be consulted on the Operational Performance Regime.

WSCF Recommendation 28

NSW Transport and Infrastructure investigate the possibility of contracting other providers who want to offer unsubsidised route services outside of the hours that the existing contracted provider is operating.

WSCF Recommendation 29

The NSW Government seek funding from the Commonwealth Government to accelerate the purchase of new buses to replace the most polluting buses. The Average Age of the Fleet requirement be amended to an appropriately lower figure.

WSCF Recommendation 30

WSCF enquire if the Government's Accessible Transport Consultative Committee is working and consider establishing an Accessible Public Transport Watch Project to monitor the outcomes of the Review of the Act. If required, advocate for Commonwealth funding to implement the requirements of the Standards.

WSCF Recommendation 31 (adoption of Bus and Coach Association recommendation)

A Transport Co-ordination Authority market public transport across NSW.

WSCF Recommendation 32

WSCF consult with Adult Migrant English Program trainers who carry out travel training to investigate travel issues for recent arrivals and then progress these issues via the 'Connecting With Buses' project.

WSCF Recommendation 33

WSCF contact BusNSW to investigate the creation of a driver resource like a mini-book or card, similar to the one used by NSW Police, that assists drivers support the use of their service by recent arrivals.

WSCF Recommendation 34

Bus drivers be given appropriate cultural sensitivity training.

WSCF Recommendation 35

The training provided through community transport to recruit and train recent arrivals as volunteer bus drivers to gain a Driver Authority be encouraged and supported and spread to all community transport providers.

WSCF Recommendation 36

More work be done to promote the 131500 Languages Line. Promotional materials such as a pocket-sized card with languages be printed and distributed to culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

WSCF Recommendation 37

NSW Transport and Infrastructure to report on current complaints handling procedures and progress towards a one stop complaints management process.

WSCF Recommendation 38

Independent Transport Safety and Reliability Regulator be invited to comment on performance measures and their value in communicating to the community the level of service being delivered.

WSCF recommendation 39

Driver training programs, run through community transport, be funded.

WSCF Recommendation 40

Environmental Plans to be posted on the NSW Transport and Infrastructure's website. Standards for Environmental Plans be developed by the NSW Department of Environment and Climate Change.

Metropolitan Funding

WSCF Recommendation 41

That the Commonwealth Social Inclusion Board commission research to assist the various state transport departments to develop mechanisms to value the various external benefits of providing public transport and in particular research how social inclusion may be valued as one of those community benefits.

WSCF Recommendation 42

Treasury to fund the provision of bus services so that frequencies, hours of operation and

other service measures match world's best practice in cities that are comparable.

Bus Services in Rural & Regional NSW

WSCF Recommendation 43

That outer metropolitan councils be eligible for the State funding provided to rural councils for bus stop infrastructure.

WSCF Recommendation 44

Integrated Regional Transport Plans and Budgets be developed for outer metropolitan regions in the same way as is proposed for rural and regional areas.

WSCF Recommendation 45

Three new regional Metropolitan Transport Co-ordinators be employed by the NSW Transport and Infrastructure, one each for the South West, Western and North West outer metropolitan areas of Sydney.

WSCF Recommendation 46

NSW Transport and Infrastructure ensure their Local and Community Transport section and their Bus Network Planning section collaborate effectively to ensure that responsive bus ?? service models and Travel Training services are supported, especially for the Bus Network Review consultation periods.

WSCF Recommendation 47

WSCF research the Macquarie Area Health Service's Transport Information Service for applicability in Western Sydney.

Statewide Issues

WSCF Recommendation 48

There be a comprehensive review of fares and ticketing policies in Sydney.

WSCF Recommendation 49 (adoption of APT and BCA recommendations)

Sydney's ticketing system move to a zone and time based system.

WSCF Recommendation 50 (adoption of NCOSS recommendation)

NSW Government establish a Concessions Unit to develop concessions policy applicable across government and monitor performance against social policy objectives.

WSCF Recommendation 51

The Pensioner Excursion Ticket be maintained for travel at all times including during peak hour.

WSCF Recommendation 52

The Pensioner Excursion Ticket be renamed the Access Ticket and be extended to those who satisfy a means test. In the short term a relatively simple solution would be to extend concession benefits in NSW to all holders of Australian Government Health Care Cards.

WSCF Recommendation 53

People on Newstart Benefit be made eligible for public transport concessions until they earn over the maximum income cut-off for Newstart eligibility.

WSCF Recommendation 55

NCOSS and WSCF seek funding to research the impacts of electronic tolling on transport disadvantaged people.

Implementation

WSCF Recommendation 56

The Federal Government investigate the viability of an expansion of the capacity of bus manufacturing in Australia and how it could support and encourage that expansion.

WSCF Recommendation 57

MoT work in cooperation with WSCF to lead the establishment of a Regional Co-ordination Committee in an area on the fringe of the metropolitan region to identify local issues and demonstrate the usefulness of using a Rural and Regional approach in these metropolitan areas.