



South West Rail Link Corridor Protection



Submission from the
Rail, Tram and Bus Union
(RTBU)

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Introduction

The Rail, Tram and Bus Union (RTBU) welcomes this opportunity to provide feedback on the State Government's proposed transport corridor to the new Western Sydney airport at Badgerys Creek.

The new airport will make air travel and air freight more convenient for people and businesses in Western Sydney. The full benefits of the new airport, however, will only be realised if there are high-quality, fast and direct transport links to the site. Heavy rail will need to be a critical part of the transport mix, as heavy rail is by far the most efficient way to transport a large number of people, and because heavy rail offers the best option for reducing traffic congestion on local roads.

The current proposal for transport connections to the new airport exclude heavy rail. Indeed, the State Government invitation for feedback has been restricted to comments about the alignment of a future rail corridor, rather than for feedback on the overall transport plan for the site. The RTBU believes this omission is an attempt to stifle an important public debate, hence our submission canvasses broader issues pertaining to the provision of transport access to the new airport.

This submission argues that:

1. Transport activity to the airport region will not be limited to air passengers – it will include airport workers, workers in the Broader Western Sydney Employment Area, workers at the "specialised centre" attached to the new airport, and residents of the South West Growth Centre;
2. The experiences of other cities demonstrate the risks associated with developing major urban growth centres, such as airports, without appropriate public transport infrastructure to cater for future transport demand; and
3. The experiences of other cities, and past experience in Sydney, demonstrate that transport access to airports must be frequent, accessible and affordable; and
4. Failure to provide a rail link to the airport will force an unacceptable amount of traffic onto local roads, including fuel tankers.

This submission therefore argues that the State Government's intention to service the new airport with a combination of "road upgrades, park and ride facilities and new bus services" is insufficient. Moreover, this approach will lead to an increase in both traffic congestion and car dependency in Western Sydney.

The RTBU therefore calls on the NSW Government to commit to a genuine and practical timetable for the construction of a heavy rail link to the new airport at Badgerys Creek.

This submission also argues that the construction timetable for a rail link to the new airport should commence from the **northern end of the proposed corridor**, to provide the most efficient and direct service for the airport's catchment area of passengers and workers.

Potential Patronage

According to the State Government's plans, the area around the new airport will support much of Sydney's future urban growth. Indeed, the NSW Government's own discussion paper states that 495,000 new residents will be living in the South West Growth Centre and Camden by 2031, while an additional 200,000 jobs will be created in the Broader Western Sydney employment area.¹

It is clear that the proposed transport corridor will be more than just a route to the new airport – it will be a critical transport route for a huge number of people living and working in Western Sydney.

Comparison to Other Airports

The NSW Government has used the transport access arrangements at other Australian airports to justify its decision to exclude a heavy rail link from the airport project. Information presented at the public consultation meetings for the South West Rail Link Extension stated that:

The Preliminary estimates prepared for the Australian Government indicate that demand at Badgerys Creek could be around 3 million annual passengers initially – comparable with Canberra and Hobart and well below the annual passenger figures of Perth (13 million) and Melbourne International Airport (30 million).²

These comparisons, however, are misleading and wrong. Melbourne International Airport, for example, has long suffered due to its inadequate public transport links. Melbourne is the second-largest airport in the country by passenger movements, yet most passengers either drive (and park in one of Melbourne's huge long-term car park facilities), or use the SkyBus service connecting with Southern Cross Station. The airport is a significant contributor to traffic congestion on the Tullamarine Freeway and CityLink motorway during peak hours. A limited number of public buses provide a more cost-effective public transport link to surrounding suburbs, and to the heavy rail network, however it is understood that contractual obligations to the operator of SkyBus prevent the State Government from contracting any other competing direct bus services to the city.

¹ Transport for NSW. *South West Rail Link - Public transport corridor protection discussion paper*, April 2014, p9.

² NSW Government presentation to SW Rail Link Extension public consultation meetings, <http://www.transport.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/b2b/projects/swrl-extension-information-boards-0514.pdf>, accessed 31 May 2030.



The lack of affordable public transport options to Melbourne Airport is considered to be a significant drawback for airport users, and has been a hot political issue in Melbourne for many years. Indeed, the Victorian Liberal Government made the construction of a rail link to the airport a central election pledge in 2010, and included construction of the project in its recent 2014 State Budget. A rail link is now planned to be delivered by 2020. Furthermore, the Victorian Liberal Government has also committed to building a rail link to Melbourne's second airport at Avalon, near Geelong.

Canberra Airport has significant transport problems, largely due to its reliance on taxis to move people efficiently to and from the CBD. Canberra is a relatively small airport, however it is increasingly a hub for commercial and retail activity. The amount of traffic travelling to and from the airport precinct has become problematic, with regular traffic bottlenecks delaying travellers. In fact, Canberra Airport Corporation is actively campaigning to address these problems through the construction of a light rail link to the city.³

Hobart Airport, on the other hand, has comparatively little commercial or retail activity on the airport precinct. While there are plans to increase the amount of activity at the airport, there is little need for a major public transit link to the site at this point. In this sense, Hobart Airport bears little similarity to the planned Western Sydney Airport.

The value of mass transit links has been recognised at other major Australian airports. For example, the Western Australian Government is planning both light rail and heavy rail links to Perth Airport, and the Queensland Government is planning to extend the Gold Coast light rail project to the Gold Coast Airport at Coolangatta.

Car Dependence

Experience has shown that failure to provide adequate public transport infrastructure for new residential areas and employment hubs tends to 'lock-in' car dependency and reinforce travel behaviours that can be difficult to change. Moreover, car dependence has been shown to have a clear relationship with urban density and amenity. This has clear implications for the design of new urban residential and commercial areas, and for the need to provide public transport access early in the development of new residential areas and employment hubs.

As Newman and Kenworthy state:

urban amenity is enhanced if there is sufficient intensity of urban activity. However there is a "Catch 22." If some urban amenities are provided first, they can attract increased urban development. Density creates amenities, but also amenities

attract density. This is particularly obvious when the amenities are associated with a public transport node.⁴

In other words, investing in amenities such as public transport can provide the impetus needed for the development of residential and commercial densities, and therefore for the development of successful connected communities. By neglecting to provide adequate public transport link to the Western Sydney Airport, however, and surrounding growth areas, the NSW Government therefore risks creating a new generation of car-dependent commuters. This will add further pressure to the road network, leading to increased traffic congestion, increased transport-related greenhouse gas emissions, and increased levels of social isolation for people who are unable or unwilling to drive.

As the Federal Government's own TravelSmart website states,

Increasingly, the day-to-day operations of Australian urban road systems are becoming a concern to city administrators and residents. Their concerns relate to many different issues: traffic cutting through neighborhood roads, congestion and delays on local roads, main roads and motorways, and poor air quality because of vehicle exhausts.

Underlying this problem is that many of our communities have experienced tremendous growth over the past several decades. Much of this growth has occurred in suburban areas where alternatives to the car are not well established, causing a corresponding increase in the number of vehicles using the roads.⁵

Planning to build a new airport and major activity centres in Western Sydney without access to passenger services is, effectively, planning to fail.

Affordability

The RTBU is also concerned that the NSW Government may seek to replicate the unsuccessful public-private partnership model previously used to fund the construction of the rail link to Kingsford Smith Airport. Travel on the current airport line is prohibitively expensive for many users – indeed for small groups travelling to or from the CBD it is cheaper to take a taxi than a train. As organisations such as Sydney Alliance have pointed out, the cost of rail travel to Kingsford Smith Airport places a particularly heavy burden on workers at the airport and in the airport precinct. The situation at Kingsford Smith is, in this respect, similar to the situation at Melbourne, where the private operator of the SkyBus service has a government-mandated monopoly on public transport trips between the city and the airport.

3. See Canberra Airport Website - <http://www.canberraairport.com.au/2013/09/linking-the-heart-of-canberra-by-light-rail/>, accessed 31 May 2014.

4. Peter Newman and Jeffrey Kenworthy, "Urban Design to Reduce Automobile Dependence", in *Opolis: An International Journal of Suburban and Metropolitan Studies*, Vol 2 Issue 1, 2006, p47.

5. www.travelsmart.gov.au/about.html#infrastructure. Accessed 31 May 2014.



At this point in time, the NSW Government has given no indication of whether public transport services to the Western Sydney Airport will be integrated with existing operations in Western Sydney, or if they will be contracted as monopoly stand-alone services which could attract a premium price. The RTBU strongly believes that public transport services to the Western Sydney Airport should be integrated with existing services and should not attract additional costs for passengers.

Jet Fuel Supply Chain

Commercial aircraft require large amounts of jet fuel, and access to competitively priced jet fuel is an important input into airline operations. Development of a safe, reliable and efficient jet fuel supply chain will therefore be vital to the success of the new Western Sydney airport.

There are two likely sources of jet fuel for the new airport – Port Botany / Kurnell (including the Caltex refinery) and the Shell refinery at Clyde. Transporting fuel from these locations to Badgerys Creek by road would see a substantial increase in the number of fuel tankers on Sydney roads and streets, and would create a particular traffic hazard in the precinct around the airport. Not only would fuel tankers create extra traffic, they would create a dangerous safety risk for local communities – as accidents involving fuel on local roads can have catastrophic consequences.

The RTBU strongly believes that jet fuel should be kept off Sydney roads. The early construction of a suitable rail link to the airport would allow jet fuel to be transported by train, thus removing the need for jet fuel tankers on the Sydney road network.

Alignment

The RTBU argues that the proposed corridor should be extended to both the north and the south to facilitate a future orbital rail line extending from Campbelltown to the North West Growth Centre, via Badgerys Creek and St Marys. This corridor would be a rail equivalent to the M7, and would be a catalyst for increased economic growth in the region, particularly in the Broader Western Sydney Employment Area. Failing to link the northern and southern ends of the corridor, however, would effectively leave the southern end of the corridor at Narellan as a dead end, while reserving the “missing link” between St Marys and Marsden Business Park, via ropes Creek, would stimulate further development in that area and provide increased flexibility for rail services.

The RTBU also strongly believes that construction of a rail link to the Western Sydney Airport should commence from the northern end of the corridor (at St Marys) rather than the southern end

(at Leppington). Starting from the north would help to activate the Broader Western Sydney Employment Area. Moreover, starting from the northern end would open a more direct and practical route to the airport for a majority of passengers and airport precinct workers travelling from population centres such as Penrith, Blacktown, Mt Druitt and Parramatta. Conversely, commencing the project from the southern end would force the majority of people to take a circuitous and time consuming route, thus deterring public transport use.

Economic Benefits

Research commissioned by the RTBU and conducted by the National Institute of Economic and Industry Research (NIEIR) found that the multiplier effect associated with transport infrastructure projects effectively makes these projects self-financing over time. This is because investing transport infrastructure and services is an important step to building a more efficient transport system and a more productive economy. In fact, the research found that on an investment of \$100 million in transport infrastructure, it is estimated that the impact of significant multiplier benefits would be equivalent to around \$400-\$700 million increase in GDP, depending on the level of local content used.⁶

The economic stimulus to Western Sydney from including a rail link as part of the new airport project would be significant, and would help make the airport a genuine ‘game changer’ for jobs and employment in the region. Furthermore, the investment required to construct the rail link would deliver long-term economic dividends for the people of NSW.

Conclusion

The RTBU strongly recommends that the NSW Government commit to a timetable for the construction of a heavy rail link to the Western Sydney Airport. A heavy rail connection is not only needed to ensure that the new airport fulfills its economic potential for Western Sydney, it is needed to ensure adequate transport access is provided to the economic and residential growth areas to the north and south of Badgerys Creek.

Simply reserving a corridor is not good enough. A genuine and realistic timetable for the construction of heavy rail along the corridor must be developed now, and both sides of politics must commit to delivering the project. Furthermore, public transport access to the new Western Sydney Airport must be affordable and fair – in contrast to the situation for rail access to Kingsford Smith Airport. This means integrating services to the airport into existing public transport operations, and avoiding ‘special deals’ that confer monopoly pricing arrangements onto preferred private operators.

6. National Institute of Economic and Industrial Research, *Public transport infrastructure investment: An instrument for sustainable debt-financed fiscal policy, 2013, pp iii-iv.*