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Member for Blue Mountains



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Regional Roads Infrastructure

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The Blue Mountains electorate is often misunderstood by residents of Sydney, bureaucrats and other politicians in this place. It is easy to think of the Blue Mountains as a single community or a contained physical entity. However, stretching over 60 kilometres along a narrow ridgeline, my electorate is the same width as Sydney itself.

My electorate is serviced by a train line and a highway, and life for many people in the Blue Mountains revolves around one or both of these key pieces of infrastructure. We have two big towns, Katoomba and Springwood, which have shopping, retail and dining businesses and bustling town centres. The majority of Blue Mountains residents live in the dozens of smaller villages and towns scattered along the highway, of which some are well-known tourist destinations in their own right, like Wentworth Falls and Leura, while others are towns with no shops at all, like Linden and Bullaburra.

The highway has been upgraded over many years, most recently by the duplication and separation of lanes running east and west, which was initiated by Labor between 2007 and 2011. However, earlier sections of the dual carriageway at places like Falconbridge, Wentworth Falls and Springwood were built to safety standards that have long since been superseded and did not give due consideration for cyclists, pedestrians or emergency services vehicles attending breakdowns or road accidents.

It is not uncommon to see pedestrians walking alongside the highway late at night using the road shoulder as a footpath because of the lack of properly formed footpaths and pedestrian links between the villages and towns across the Blue Mountains. This puts the lives of those road users at risk.

I have been agitating for a new upgrade to the highway between Bellevue Road and Martin Place at Falconbridge. This section of road is a patchwork of broken bitumen with a bad camber that is dangerous in the wet and has no centre barrier and no road shoulders to enable cyclists to stay out of the main traffic. As the highway turns uphill through a left-hand turn, the space between the Armco

barrier and the main traffic lane reduces to a matter of centimetres. This treacherous section of road follows the railway corridor and has a significant amount of room—up to 15 metres in parts—to allow a widening of the highway. But a bureaucratic malaise within the State Government so far has prevented RailCorp from allowing the Roads and Maritime Services to widen the highway to provide adequate space for cyclists, pedestrians and motorists to coexist safely.

In Blackheath and Mount Victoria, residents are being driven spare by so-called safety upgrades of the highway that are being implemented by the Liberal Government in spite of the popularly endorsed 2010 plan by Labor to bypass Mount Victoria altogether and take trucks off the road and out of these quiet, picturesque and historic villages. Instead, residents have seen the nature strips and buffer zones between their front fences and the highway obliterated. Mature and sturdy trees that provided a noise barrier and peace of mind for many people who lived on the highway's edge have been ripped out.

One of my constituents, Jacinta Tobin, has watched her historic miner's cottage deteriorate and subside as a consequence of construction works and excavation for highway safety upgrades that were done within six feet of her front door. She is now seeking fair and proper compensation from the Government after her home was rendered unliveable by those works.

In 2008 Labor set in train a route development consultation process that would eventually lead to a proposal to bypass Mount Victoria altogether by using new roads and a short section of tunnel under the Darling Causeway and Butlers Creek. This would provide a new route to Lithgow and take trucks and the bulk of commuter traffic off the precarious Victoria Pass. In a blow to the hopes of businesses, industry and residents in the Central West towns of Lithgow, Bathurst and Orange, who would have benefitted from this crucial road upgrade, this project was shelved by the Liberals in the early years of their first term of office while the National Party sat quietly and said nothing.

The Blue Mountains and the Central West desperately need an activist government that will build better, safer, more efficient roads in our regional areas. This means building new roads where necessary and the improvement of old roads where possible to ensure motorists, cyclists, pedestrians and emergency services workers are safe and the flow of traffic is quick and efficient.

However, we must also ensure the sanity of local residents living near these major roads is front of mind in the planning and implementation stages.