

## **SUBMISSION ON PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT: Macarthur-Glenfield Rail Corridor**

This development proposal offers a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to implement a comprehensive and integrated plan for the region's future – based on our history, current growth and strengths, leading us into a future that draws on and enhances the best of what we have, and our potential. The framework for such development is there – especially with the transport corridor as a spine; so let's consider this as providing a structure to grow along. At the same time, the freeway through to Liverpool is growing in significance – so let's consider how we can link the two, and utilize the spaces in between!

In accordance with the priorities of the proposed development, my submission is arranged according to the categories identified. However, because of the historical and cultural significance of this corridor – and the Macarthur region generally – I will start with this.

- 1. Environmental.** The George's river and surrounding areas had a deep significance for the Dharawal people from the earliest times – including as sources for food, cultural practices and meeting places. For early European settlers, the area was also very significant – for food, farming, fishing and industry – sometimes respectfully, sometimes not. For example, many sites of Aboriginal heritage have been lost or damaged or compromised – including waterways - with the loss of native habitat. One recent example of this is the new housing development in Airds, particularly the bushland around the stream, where sites of Aboriginal significance were threatened and koala habitat destroyed. Some interest groups have denied this, but the fact is that since this development, koalas have been increasingly seen in urban areas, where they become lost while seeking food, or trying to find their way back to their feeding and breeding areas, or killed or injured by dogs or cars. So in future, public warnings about such risks need to be heeded. The same goes for the Scenic Hills, which is regularly threatened by some new development proposal!

On the positive side, the initiative to train young Aboriginal people in bushcare, land and water care and cultural awareness through the Department of Land and Environment is to be encouraged and celebrated. Similarly, events such as the annual Macarthur Nature Photography Competition, and the Riverfest celebration, are enjoyed by many as local highlights, and are to be commended. So as we celebrate the positives, let us ensure that we learn something from the negatives, and preserve and enhance what we have, before it's too late.

Our natural corridor provides a spine for essential urban and suburban growth to meet the needs of a growing population – but at the same time we are losing much valuable farmland to urban sprawl. A booming population still needs to eat, and fresh local produce is still the best source for this, for many reasons. The Sydney Basin still produces much of Sydney's food - on average about 50% - including fresh fruit and vegetables, poultry, meat and fish. The land in this area – including along this corridor, as well as the Macarthur region and the greater South-west Sydney more generally, still has economic value and potential, for local agriculture, farmers and related industries. It is a source of employment for many. It has value for tourism and it could have more – including farm trails (i.e. for visits and sales), supplying local restaurants and cafes as a

thriving local industry – and preserving the local culture of the region. All this exists at different scales – ranging from small holdings and orchards through to large-scale producers for the Sydney market. Community gardens are flourishing throughout the region and have a great future, enhancing local communities and local economies. So there are vital lands – along transport corridors, waterways and in-between – that need to be preserved for our future well-being. It's not just about maximising industrial and urban development for profit – it's about maintaining a quality life-style for all to enjoy. It includes local parks, sports grounds, bushland and recreational areas – not just in designated, formal areas but in informal areas as well – where people can enjoy walks, children can play and explore, and we can appreciate our local wildlife and the sounds of birds!

2. **Housing.** Just as we are enriched by having diversity in nature, so we are with social diversity as well. This region does have that, and we should preserve it. There is a need to accommodate different income groups – which includes tradespeople, “essential workers” (like health-care staff, teachers, university staff, administration and retail – as well as different types of business.) All this makes for a healthy community. So the mix has to include adequate affordable housing - - including in any new developments. Further, it's better if this is distributed throughout the community – not just concentrated in some areas, as in the old public housing estates. We have lost a lot of this, with their gradual and ongoing redevelopment. There may be some benefits from this – but it means that the tenants are under growing pressure to find suitable accommodation. The same applies to other needy groups in the community- including students, young workers, migrants and the elderly.

There is a solution to this, which works in many parts of the world, including in some parts of Australia – and that is, to have a designated target for affordable housing (known as “inclusionary zoning”). I have done considerable research on this, including as part of a team at Western Sydney University and also as a member of the Sydney Alliance Affordable housing Team (a civic society network). So I know it works; and this current development proposal presents an ideal opportunity to introduce this. In the Glebe precinct redevelopment, the target is about 2%; that's a start, but it's nowhere near enough! Based on global experience where this applies, it should be at least 15%, and preferably 20-30%. Benefits include enhanced social inclusion and harmony – as well as reduced pressure on local roads, traffic congestion, and more use of public transport. Housing people near where they work improves social cohesion and diversity, as well as benefitting local economies, and gives people a stake in the community where they live.

There is a lot of stigma associated with affordable housing which is unjustified, if it is done according to the principles identified above (well-planned, integrated, diverse etc.). Further, ongoing research indicates that this stigma and fear are not borne out in reality; such areas are pleasant places for live, and overall housing prices don't lose their value! Unfortunately, such discrimination is exploited by some who benefit from it. This contributes to rising housing prices, exclusion of those in need and growing homelessness. This results in social exclusion and a divided community – which is not healthy for anyone. So I would urge planners and developers to address this in an open, transparent and fair-minded manner.

Notes: a). Affordable housing includes a range of housing types – public, social and community – as well as modest rental and home ownership properties. B). Generally the bench-mark for affordable housing is no more than 30% of one's income being spent on housing; this obviously varies according to the circumstances; i.e. it is not a set amount of rent or mortgage repayments.

While housing is a central factor in a person's or family's life, it also has a close connection to other factors – including transport and employment. So I will deal with these next.

3. **Transport** obviously has an important role in tying all these elements together. This corridor has an obvious advantage in being a series of hubs connected by a spine – so maximum use should be made of this in future planning. This is emerging – for example, with the opening of the new train line connecting the East Hills Line with emerging housing development around Leppington and the proposal, still under consideration, to build a new road linking Spring Farm with Campbelltown. These major routes, linking new housing with existing hubs, are essential, and they must be well planned to carry the future density effectively, without being restricted by blockages or difficult access.

Part of the solution for this is to have good local links to these major routes. In planning for the future we shouldn't just depend on roads and cars, which is limited as a long-term strategy. Rather, we need to look more to improving public transport. In other parts of Sydney there are very frequent local buses and trains. As an area of significant population growth, it would be a major disaster, and a disservice to local residents, not to provide this and significantly improve it. People in Western Sydney, especially around Campbelltown, have suffered severely regarding their service requirements compared to other parts of Sydney, and transport is one of them. Now is the right time to rectify this.

4. **Education and Employment:** We are fairly well served in these critical areas, with public and private schools, TAFE colleges and the western Sydney University. The graduates from these institutions make a hugely valuable contribution across a range of essential services – trades, arts, health care, public services, business and technology – and ongoing education for future generations. Unfortunately, this hasn't been maintained as well as it should either (for example, cuts to TAFE programs), which is very short-sighted and we will suffer enormously if this continues.

Education and employment are inextricably linked, and in the future society emerging, this will be even more critical – especially in the field of new technology, and the applications arising from that, as well as the core areas noted above. Not investing in this will short-change us in every way – economically, socially, culturally and as a community – for future generations. On the other hand, we have a great foundation – so let's enhance it! To achieve this, all levels of government have a role to play, working in co-ordination. So this potential gives us the opportunity to work together to do this, and fulfil our potential as a mature, viable and culturally rich home for all our citizens.

For example, new housing developments need the adequate provision of local schools and other essential services – health care, retail, community services and centres, recreation, parks, walkways and cycleways to encourage local activities and social interaction. All this helps build healthy communities for the future.