



Action for Public Transport (N.S.W.) Inc.

APT NSW

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9719 Greater Macarthur 2040: Interim Plan

Submission

Who we are

Action for Public Transport (NSW) is a transport advocacy group active in Sydney since 1974. We promote the interests of beneficiaries of public transport - both of passengers and the wider community.

Introduction and key points

This submission is made in response to the Greater Macarthur 2040 Interim Plan (November 2018). The strategy for this region has two main parts: "Urban renewal" around the existing rail corridor from Glenfield to Macarthur, and a new release area extending south of Campbelltown to Appin (the main parts are designated Gilead, North Appin and Appin.)

We broadly support the first of these strategic directions but strongly oppose the second. The priority for landuse policy within the Macarthur region should be the development of transit-oriented urban corridors across the Macarthur region and the rejuvenation of the Campbelltown CBD.

Urban growth should better utilise existing infrastructure, open spaces, parks and mobility corridors. Greenfield development should form extensions of multi-modal urban corridors of protected cycling lanes, sheltered pedestrian paths and high-frequency transit services, similar to the Sydney tram network a century ago, or Canberra Metro today.

The region has been damaged by decades of investment on the fringe and the erosion of the urban core. Public transport investment has lagged well behind residential rezonings. The services available to the residents of the outer areas of Sydney are woefully inadequate [reference Infrastructure Australia Outer Area Public Transport document]. Unless and until that is remedied, the rezoning of land to permit the settlement of new communities on Sydney's fringe should be firmly resisted.

Urban renewal around existing rail stations

The Strategy here is basically to allow medium to high density residential development around existing railway stations, with the exception of Menangle and Douglas Park (described as "village precincts") whose existing character is to be maintained. We broadly support this aspect of the Strategy, subject to the capacity of existing line to city via Liverpool or East Hills which could be restricted.

The aim of utilising existing public transport networks and building patronage should not however be seen as an argument for excessive development of residential towers outside CBDs. This misapprehension can provoke opposition to the extension of public transport links (as in the case of the proposed extension of bus rapid transit to Newport).

There is no need to rezone the areas around existing railway stations to the extent proposed, for example, at Waterloo. Good public transport does not require high rise living. If the housing density of Western Sydney merely reflected the housing densities of desirable and liveable suburbs like Lane Cove, Willoughby and Mosman, (40-60 dwellings per hectare), Western Sydney would be able to accommodate an additional 400,000 dwellings and 1,000,000 residents without any further greenfield development.

The existing neighbourhoods of the Macarthur region are in critical need of investment and renewal. Urban development should be incremental, prioritising investment into the renewal and maintenance of existing centres and suburbs.

If the pattern of mainly low-density housing is altered to a mix of low-medium-high densities along a high-capacity, high-frequency transport corridor, there should be no need for any greenfield development for decades.

New release areas

The strategy proposed for the new release areas is to rezone [rural, koala habitat] land away from the rail corridor to accommodate an estimated 40,000 dwellings "based on current assumptions around the provision of traditional transport - road-based, heavy rail and intermediate and local public transport" (p 52).

It proposes "A mix of low to medium density homes" but in reality this seems to mean low density sprawling suburban housing - with the "demand for smaller higher-density dwellings expected to increase over time" (p.50).

The "Wilton New Town" seems to have been progressed separately and given priority despite its lack of a rail connection and its complete reliance on car travel.

The outcome is conceded to be that "any trips in the Growth Area will primarily be taken by road unless public transport alternatives are provided in the early stages of development" (p 68). All that is provided in terms of public transport alternatives is a purely road-based "Indicative transport corridor" that provides a spine linking Campbelltown / Macarthur with Douglas Park / Picton (p 70-72). The "Transport Corridor" identified as the spine of the new release area is simply a main road with a bus route along it. Presumably it is based on trunk bus / BRT route along this corridor with feeders from centres to suburbs. And presumably light rail could be built along the centre lanes if this was later decided on, but this would forego all the advantages of early planning for a separate mode.

The strategy is vague as to actual bus routes beyond this corridor. It would probably be necessary to provide local services connecting at centres to the peripheries of the low-density areas, which are up to 3km from the central route. This would therefore need two bus journeys to get to any railway station. One aim of planning even with low-density housing is clearly to provide stops at no more than 10 minutes' walk from all dwellings (p.71). In practice in existing suburbs, this has often meant buses following long, convoluted routes to cover the maximum of territory - which makes public transport journeys unattractive and fuels car dependence.

Rail transport for the proposed new release areas is only mentioned in the context of augmenting services (brief mention of electrification) along existing line Campbelltown-Douglas Park and beyond. The inter-city rail corridor is entirely inadequate for local mobility needs. Access to shops, health services, education and local jobs should be accommodated through high-frequency local transit services with a more regular stopping pattern, complementing the local pedestrian and cycling networks.

The public transport corridor should in any case meet these minimum requirements:

- High frequency service - "turn up and go" in current language - preferably 10 minutes or better
- Dedicated right-of-way for as much of the total route as possible.
- As direct a route as possible. Major traffic generators (shops, schools, hospitals) should be located by the transport route, rather than the latter be distorted to serve diverging points.
- Optimum ride quality - in terms of track or road surface.
- Stops $\frac{1}{2}$ to 1km apart probably give the best balance between accessibility and direct service.
- Information - people should be able to arrive at a stop and see straight away what is coming, to where and when.

The transport corridor should also have the best possible walking and cycling provision. If it is to serve as the spine of the new development area, there is a case for removing the main road component of the Corridor and instead directing traffic to arterial roads at either edge of the development area.

Campbelltown / Macarthur will clearly remain an essential urban (sub-regional) centre for residents of this area - initially while centres of Appin, Gilead etc are under development, and beyond that for higher-level urban functions (p.58).

The Campbelltown CBD and surrounding suburbs are in very poor condition. The Campbelltown CBD, the centre of the Macarthur region, is marred by large roads, chain-link fencing, large surface car parks, and a very poor tree canopy. The city's mobility corridors have been molested by highway-grade traffic sewers that divide neighbourhoods and communities.

There should be several multi-modal transit-oriented urban corridors extending from the centre. The existing rail system gives new residents equal opportunities for access with others in lower-density further out. Investment in this zone would improve opportunities and facilities for both old and new residents. It will also of course give interchange to heavy rail to other Sydney centres, including increased accessibility if a railway is built from Campbelltown / Macarthur to Western Sydney Airport, connecting to Leppington and to St Marys on the Western line.

High capacity public transport: a precondition for land rezoning

There should be no greenfield development until housing densities of 40-60 dwellings per hectare (equivalent to the densities of local government areas like Lane Cove, Willoughby and Mosman) are broadly provided across the region.

We submit that this de facto acceptance of poor public transport outcomes is fundamentally irresponsible. The current new release area strategy is basically a recipe for low-density car-dependent development on a traditional US model (of the past 60-70 years). Residents are likely to face long and infrequent bus trips to reach a subregional centre or rail connection. This is even if bus services are provided from the start of development (as the strategy clearly aims for favours but cannot itself bring about). These areas will possibly require a transfer between buses which would further discourage public transport use.

Residents of new low-density development in this area will face economic disadvantage due to the costs of car ownership, and employment and educational disadvantage if they have to rely on the poor level of public transport that is to be provided. After housing, transport is the second highest cost-of-living for Australian households. Creating car-dependent low-density suburbs only reinforces socio-economic disadvantage in Australian cities. The costs of local transit services, like light rail, are far less than the high cost of private car ownership - more "visible" as an item on public sector budgets, while saving private expenditure. Public transport creates local jobs and frees up significant chunks of household income for spending in the local economy.

The most effective option for avoiding built-in in car dependence is likely to be a light rail line (LRT) along the Transport Corridor.

- An LRT line in a greenfields area such as this would be far easier to build than an inner urban area (considering the trouble the Sydney CSELR project has had with pre-existing services)
- LRT is proof of substantial and continuing investment in, and support of, public transport. [Unlike bus systems] it is a catalyst for investment in urban renewal
- Most people find light rail provides a better quality of ride than a bus and it attracts higher patronage.

Future Transport 2056 also contains some worthwhile proposals, but as we noted in our submission

https://www.aptnsw.org.au/documents/future_transp_strat_2056_submission.html there are no commitments and no committed funding for the bulk of the public transport improvements proposed in the Future Transport suite of "plans".

We contend that the proposed land releases should wait until work is underway on:

- Electrification of the main Southern Railway further south from Macarthur, to the proposed Wilton Town Centre and on to Picton. We note that the Future Transport Strategy proposes the electrification of intercity network to Goulburn (Regional Services and Infrastructure Plan p.42) but there is no funding committed for the project.
- An additional rail line utilising the route via the Western Sydney airport outlined by Transport for NSW between Leppington and Macarthur, linking to St Marys.
- Completion of the long-delayed Maldon to Dombarton freight rail line, to increase passenger rail capacity. Another desirable outcome would be to reduce the number of heavy vehicles on the roads in the Macarthur area and beyond it. There is no funding committed for the project.
- Fast, frequent light rail or bus services focused on acting as feeders to railway stations from a wide catchment. High levels of service throughout the day and on weekends are needed if the patterns of the past are to be broken. It is not acceptable to expect passengers to walk up to 800m to access low frequency bus services in an area where very high summer temperatures are common.

Conclusion

We recommend that urban renewal around existing rail stations in the area be given first priority. We therefore recommend that the new release area be deferred indefinitely, pending the provision of high-frequency, high-capacity public transport along the proposed Transport Corridor.

We thank the Department for the opportunity to comment.

Jim Donovan
Secretary
Action for Public Transport (NSW) Inc.