

**PROJECT SYDNEY – INDEPENDENT INQUIRY INTO TRANSPORT**  
**Speech by NSROC Vice President - Cr Ian Longbottom**  
**Monday 28 September 2009**  
**Macquarie Theatre, Macquarie University**

Good evening: Distinguished guests; Members of Parliament; Fellow Councillors; Mr Ron Christie - Inquiry Chairman: Staff of the Sydney Morning Herald; Ladies and Gentleman

I am delighted to be here and to speak on behalf of NSROC - the Northern Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils. NSROC represents an alliance of seven councils - including its Mayors and Councillors - that stretches across the northern Sydney area. It represents the collective interests of the Councils of Hornsby, Hunters Hill, Ku-ring-gai, Lane Cove, North Sydney, Ryde and Willoughby.

Tonight I speak as Vice President of NSROC and give apologies from our President, Mayor Pat Reilly who is chairing his Willoughby Council meeting and unable to join us. However many of our other Mayors and Councillors are here tonight and you will no doubt hear from them during later discussion.

NSROC would like to congratulate and commend the Sydney Morning Herald for this initiative. The creation of “Project Sydney” and an Independent Inquiry, is an unusual step for a media organisation, but then again, we live in highly unusual times. Transport is the lifeblood of a successful city but in the last 15 years we have seen stagnation and atrophy – if Sydney was a person, it would seize up and pass out. In these extraordinary circumstances it is everyone’s job to stand up, to speak out, and to get Sydney moving again.

NSROC and its Councils face the challenge of inadequate transport everyday and we have been advocating for many years for long-term solutions that connect the city and its regions, and bring real benefits to its residents, to its economy, and to its environment. At times we have been delighted when these solutions have been promised by the State Government but then despair as, one by one, they are abandoned.

I will not dwell on the reasons behind the constant changes in transport plans and policies by the State government - others will speak on this - but suffice to say that there are few times in the political history of this state where a Government has so openly ignored the public interest in favour of its own survival.

Despite these disappointments and the dysfunctional political environment, our region continues to grow and plan for the future and, at local government level, we remain determined to get Sydney moving.

The need for good transport is critical in all areas of Sydney but tonight I will highlight the key issues for transport in the Northern Region. I want to emphasis throughout this talk that the needs of the Northern region are not simply for the benefit of the region - they are requirements for all of Sydney to function effectively and sustainably.

Here are three key things you should know about the NSROC area:

- 1) We are an economic powerhouse – punching well above our weight in terms of job provision and with an international business reputation;
- 2) We are a key corridor for passenger and freight transport movements across Sydney and beyond;
- 3) We have a growing population expected to reach nearly three quarters of a million by 2030 of people living and working in our region.

Let me briefly expand on these points:

The Economy of the NSROC region is vast. For an area of only one per cent of the State, and with only 8 per cent of the population - we produce 16 per cent of Sydney's Gross Product, 11 per cent of NSW Gross State Product and four percent of the National product. That's about \$32 billion a year<sup>1</sup>.

Put another way – 16 cents in every dollar in Sydney; 11 cents in every dollar in NSW; and four cents in every dollar generated in Australia comes from the NSROC region.

In terms of jobs – we employ 250,000 people - primarily in our major commercial areas of North Sydney, Chatswood, North Ryde and Hornsby - but also in key hubs such as Macquarie University and Macquarie Park. Half of our employees live in the region but the other half who work here travel daily from areas such as Blacktown, Parramatta and the Central Coast.

The Corridors: NSROC region is strategically positioned as a corridor to the north of the state and across the Sydney region.

Virtually all north coast and central coast passenger and road freight traffic is channelled through the F3 Freeway then diverted at Hornsby to the south west onto Pennant Hills Road or down along the Pacific Highway towards Sydney City. Adjacent is the Northern Beaches and the North West Hills District. The Hills district is serviced by the M2 but has no rail and the Northern Beaches has only arterial roads providing access to key employment centres of Chatswood and North Sydney. Linking to western Sydney is Ryde, Victoria and Epping Roads, which ultimately link through to the M7. Despite this critical nexus of corridors, no substantial initiatives for improving or augmenting the road system in the NSROC region are currently proposed by the State government.

In terms of rail – we have two northern lines – however there are critical gaps in provision to the North West growth area and incomplete projects such as the Epping to Parramatta rail link. Commuters are continually frustrated with a rail system, which has failed to improve in functionality and timeliness in half a century. As the Herald reported – trains from the Central Coast take 13 minutes longer to get to the city than they did in the 1930s. This is simply staggering.

Bus transport has been the default response to increase public transport in the NSROC region. But additional buses do not solve transport issues because they rely on existing road networks that are already stretched to capacity.

The People: NSROC has a current population of 550,000 and is growing at half a percent each year. The region has twice the population density of the Sydney average. Our neighbouring areas of the North West, Northern Beaches, the Central Coast and beyond to Newcastle are also growing. Our employment rate is higher than the Sydney average making it a main attractor for workers.

Most significantly the NSROC area is experiencing unprecedented growth. The State Government's Metro Strategy set growth targets of:

\* 56,000 new households which equals approximately an extra 130,000 residents over the next 25 years. In effect we expect the population of the northern region to grow by nearly 25% from its existing half a million.

\* in addition the strategy also proposes additional employment of 72,000 new jobs in the region – that's nearly 30% increase on our existing workforce of 250,000.

These are serious numbers with serious consequences – and remember - our population density is already twice the Sydney average before we add in these new targets.

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<sup>1</sup> In 2005 calculations

So how is transport operating in the NSROC region now and what are the issues given these economic, transport corridor and population factors? The answer is not pretty - we are looking at a grid-locked, hamstrung future for our region.

\* Traffic congestion has already reached crisis point. Looking at RTA data the NSROC region has almost half of the most congested traffic thoroughfares in Sydney. More congestion has been added as the new M7 tollway has aggravated the existing congestion on Pennant Hills Road and on Epping Rd and the M2. \* Car ownership is up – rising twice as fast as the population growth rate. Around 82 per cent of NSROC households have a car and 32 per cent have two cars. There are around 160,000 cars in the NSROC region today. Based on additional household targets there will be around 250,000 vehicles in the NSROC region by 2030.

\* Public transport use is declining in our area - with only 30 per cent of workers travelling by public transport with around 70 percent travelling by car.

\* Travel time is getting longer - on average, Sydneysiders are spending 81 minutes travelling per weekday compared with 79 minutes a decade ago.

These facts make a compelling case for immediate action and there should be no debate on what needs to happen. Mass public transport must be put in place across the regions where it is most needed if our economies, our communities and our environment are to survive.

If companies cannot get their workers to work and get their products moved efficiently then they will not locate their businesses in Sydney and employment will decline. Moreover, if Sydney continues to be uncertain and inconsistent about how its transport system is going to be expanded, then new businesses will see us as too risky and our international competitiveness will be compromised.

If people are encouraged to build homes in areas not serviced by adequate public transport, as is the case in the North West, then those communities will not be sustainable. We must recognise that an hour and a half of daily commuting costs us, and our communities, dearly and not just in financial and productivity terms – it also leaves less time for family life, for exercise and for community activity.

If people are forced to use their cars because they do not have viable public transport then environmental and health costs will increase - not only in terms of carbon emissions and fossil fuel consumption - but in terms of public health from air and noise pollution.

So what are our options? NSROC has repeatedly put forward a list of key improvements, which we feel are, and must be:

- \* sound,
- \* based on genuine need, and
- \* supported by independent assessment.

Many of these are contained in the proposals put forward by Mr Christie and Dr Glazebrook's reports, which you will hear about later this evening.

In brief, the NSROC priorities include:

- \* the North West Rail or Metro link;
- \* the completion of the Parramatta to Chatswood Rail link;
- \* a second Harbour bridge rail crossing and fast North Shore line;
- \* a bus or light rail link from Chatswood to the Northern beaches;
- \* transport strategies for Military – Spit Corridor, Victoria Road, Pennant Hills Road and the Pacific Highway

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<sup>2</sup> Based on a Sydney average of 1.5 cars per household.

\* completion of M2 - F3 link into the Sydney Orbital and North South Corridor including regional rail links to Central Coast and Newcastle.

In addition, as we know is happening in the most successful cities around the world, we also need:

\* integrated ticketing;

\* single unified transport authority;

\* improvements in existing infrastructure and complementary bicycle and pedestrian networks; and

\* certainty and transparency in the transport planning processes.

As I have said, mass transit - particularly the expansion of rail and metro - is our number one priority.

We must shift from private to public transport and rail is the most effective way to:

\* reduce congestion;

\* lower carbon emissions;

\* and improve the commuting times.

However we recognise that freight transport needs must also be examined in integrated transport strategy. This is why we also suggest the M2-F3 link and regional rail infrastructure must be re-examined.

NSROC has high expectations for this inquiry :

\* we expect a plan that is visionary and creates a transport system that matches other international cities;

\* we expect a process that is transparent and independently governed above party politics;

\* we expect sensible prioritisation of projects that recognises the most urgent needs of the community;

\* we expect a framework for funding that is fair and innovative, tapping into differently levels of government and using incentives and penalties;

\* and, most of all , we expect to see change in our lifetimes.

Thank you

