

**SUBMISSION BY MARRICKVILLE COUNCIL
ON M5 CORRIDOR TRANSPORT OPTIONS**

April 2011

Summary

In 2009-10, Council expressed its opposition to RTA's *M5 Corridor Expansion Feasibility Study*, largely on the basis of the proposed Southern Sydney Connection link road through Tempe Reserve. Although the Southern Sydney Connection has now been deleted from the proposal, Council at the time also expressed its general opposition to inner-Sydney motorways and a preference for rail freight and public transport solutions over motorway-only solutions. There are currently opportunities for Council to express this position through the Australian Government's *National Land Freight Strategy* discussion paper, the NSW Government's proposed *Airport/Port Access Plan* and the position paper being developed by the M5 Taskforce.

Council's supports a package of rail freight and public transport actions over expansion of the M5 Motorway. The package of actions includes complete removal of the Airport Link station fee, light rail from Dulwich Hill to Coogee via Sydenham, accelerated implementation of the *Sydney Airport Ground Travel Plan*, possible car-train interchange facilities at Kingsgrove and a freight rail link from Maldon to Dombarton associated with an enhanced freight role for Port Kembla. Council believes these actions could mitigate the need to expand the M5 Motorway and create superior sustainable transport outcomes at a lower overall cost.

The RTA *M5 Corridor Expansion Feasibility Study*

In its submission to the RTA in early 2010 on the *M5 Corridor Expansion Feasibility Study*, Council had clearly expressed its opposition to the Southern Sydney Connection link road. The RTA's response has been to delete this link road from its plans, with current plans showing the expanded M5 linking to General Holmes Drive at Kyeemagh, away from the Marrickville LGA, as is presently the case. This is consistent with Council's stated preferred alignment should the project proceed.

In the 2010 submission, Council also clearly expressed a preference for rail freight and public transport solutions over motorway-only solutions to solve M5 Corridor traffic congestion issues. Council was concerned at the time that the motorway expansion plans had been developed by a road building agency (the RTA) prior to the release of the then proposed *Metropolitan Transport Plan*. Given the this plan has now been released, Council would like the NSW Government to re-examine the M5 Corridor Expansion project, taking into account the *Metropolitan Transport Plan* and the full range of transport options, including those discussed below.

In its submission to the RTA, Council had also expressed its concerns about the problem of motorway-only solutions to improving freight movements leading to induced commuter traffic. This would result in congestion problems on an expanded M5 within a short timeframe. It would also lead to problems of traffic growth across the region, a mode shift away from existing public transport and redirection of funding that would otherwise flow to public transport infrastructure improvements.

Council was also concerned that the RTA had not considered the impact of declining global oil supplies, leading to substantially increased petrol prices. Under this scenario, an expanded M5 Motorway would create a major financial burden for households in Sydney's south-west and other car dependent areas. Council is of the view that the public transport alternatives suggested in this

report represent better value for money than an expanded motorway, and are necessary to ensure a sustainable transport future for Sydney – environmentally and financially.

The National Freight Strategy discussion paper

The *National Freight Strategy* discussion paper offers further insights into the abovementioned induced traffic issue. The discussion paper points out that freight traffic (larger trucks) represent around 10% of the traffic stream on Australian urban roads, with around 20% being light commercials (small trucks and vans) and 70% commuter traffic (cars). Duplication of the M5 motorway for the primary purpose of relieving congestion for the 30% of freight and light commercial vehicles would induce new commuter (car) trips that would otherwise be made by public transport, or would not be made at all. This would lead to congestion of the expanded motorway, along with traffic growth and a further reduction in public transport use along the corridor and across the region.

As was argued in Council's submission to the RTA, the problem of commuter traffic growth cannot be addressed by motorway-only solutions to freight congestion, as it is technically difficult, if not impossible, to separate the freight, light freight and commuter traffic streams. Public transport and rail freight solutions offer a more sustainable and cost-effective means of diverting existing and future freight and commuter traffic from the M5 motorway, obviating the need for its expansion. In requesting a re-examination of transport options for the M5 Corridor, Council would like to see serious consideration of the issue of induced commuter traffic.

The Sydney Airport Ground Travel Plan

A number of worthy transport actions are outlined within Sydney Airport Corporation Limited's (SACL's) 2006 *Sydney Airport Ground Travel Plan*. A key *Sydney Airport Ground Travel Plan* action is removal of the Airport Link station access fee. This action is supported by Marrickville Council, the City of Sydney and a number of other stakeholders. The fee means the fare to Airport Link stations is four times higher than the normal CityRail fare. Removing the fee is considered to be a relatively quick, easy and cost-effective means of reducing traffic and increasing public transport use in and around the airport and M5 corridor.

SACL has estimated that removing the station access fee would result in an immediate increase of 1.5 million rail journeys per year, equivalent to an increase of 26%. 400,000 additional journeys would be made from Green Square and Mascot stations, equivalent to an estimated increase of around 17%. Although in March 2011 the NSW Government removed the fee on Green Square and Mascot stations, it still applies to the Domestic and International Airport stations.

A further key *Sydney Airport Ground Travel Plan* action is improving bus connections to the airport. This involves creation of new routes as well as realigning and augmenting existing routes and services. Improved north-south bus connections will better link the Airport to the CBD and southern suburbs, while improved east-west connections will better link the Airport to rail services at Sydenham Station. Other specific actions include express buses along the M5 East Motorway, introduction of Night Ride buses, extension of the existing M20 service to the airport and route improvements which focus on Strategic Bus Corridors 21 and 30.

Other *Sydney Airport Ground Travel Plan* actions include: improved travel signage and trip planning information; more flexible public transport ticketing arrangements; enhancing walking and cycling networks around and within the airport precinct; end-of-trip cycling facilities at the airport terminals; and various workplace initiatives to encourage a mode shift to public transport, walking and cycling by Airport staff. Several of the above matters have been raised by SACL and Council in various submissions, including those made in relation to the NSW Government's 2010 *Metropolitan Transport Plan*.

Ecotransit/ACF M5 Corridor proposals

In the media in December 2010, public transport and environmental advocacy groups Ecotransit and the Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF) proposed a set of public transport actions, at a total cost of \$1.3B, that could provide a public transport alternative to the proposed \$4B M5 Motorway expansion. This plan has the support of The City of Sydney, SACL, the University of NSW, the Sydney Cricket Ground Trust and Randwick Racecourse.

It has become apparent since Council made its 2010 submission to the RTA that most of the M5 Motorway's commuter traffic stream is generated in car-dependent areas of South-West Sydney and has, as its destination, the major employment precinct comprising the airport, Southern Industrial Area and the Randwick education/health precinct. Public transport options for these trips are currently limited or non-existent, and there is much scope for the provision of new public transport infrastructure, along with service improvements. The Ecotransit/ACF proposals are intended to serve these trips.

There are two main actions within the Ecotransit/ACF plan. The first is removal of the Airport Rail Link station tax, estimated to cost \$100M. The second is construction of a new light rail link from the soon-to-be-constructed Dulwich Hill terminal light rail stop to Coogee via Sydenham Station and Sydney Airport. This link would involve construction of light rail tracks adjacent to the existing Port Botany Freight Line and along existing roadways at an estimated cost of \$1.2B. Such a link is consistent with Council's request to Transport NSW in its 2010 submission to the *Environmental Assessment* for the Inner West Light Rail Extension to consider a future light rail connection from Dulwich Hill Station to Sydenham Station. An interchange at Sydenham Station would allow passengers from the Illawarra and Bankstown train lines to transfer to light rail for direct services to the airport, the Mascot industrial area, the University of NSW, Prince of Wales Hospital, Randwick Racecourse and Moore Park.

Other elements of the Ecotransit/ACF plan are: an additional Airport Link station midway between the existing Mascot and Green Square stations to serve the Southern Industrial Area; and a park/ride, kiss/ride and bus turnaround facility at Kingsgrove Station. The extra Airport Link station would serve this rapidly growing employment area, whilst the Kingsgrove facility would allow for an easy car/train interchange, reducing traffic accessing the airport and Southern Industrial area via the M5 East Motorway.

Proposed Airport/Port Access Plan

In April 2010 Transport NSW wrote to Council inviting initial comments for a proposed *Airport/Port Access Plan*. All councils within a 10 kilometre radius of Sydney Airport and Port Botany were invited to make initial comment and to nominate a contact officer to work with Transport NSW on this plan. Council made a submission in May 2010 which listed key traffic and transport issues for Council in relation to Sydney Airport and Port Botany. Most of these issues have been raised previously in various Council policies, reports and resolutions. Key relevant policies, reports and resolutions were attached to the submission.

The main points listed in the submission to Transport NSW were:

- transport and traffic issues associated with Sydney Airport and Port Botany have significant implications for the Marrickville Local Government Area (LGA) – now and into the future;
- the Marrickville LGA suffers significant noise and vibration impacts from air, road and rail traffic, and in some parts of the LGA, these overlap to create significant cumulative impacts;
- Council is pleased that preparation of the *Airport/Port Access Plan* has commenced, and supports the stated objectives of the plan “to integrate local and regional connectivity, facilitate jobs growth, preserve local amenity and improve access.”
- Council is however keen to ensure that these objectives are met in a balanced and sustainable manner, with negative impacts on the Marrickville LGA and region minimised;

- significant road and rail freight traffic passes through the Marrickville LGA, with a fair proportion this traffic generated by Sydney Airport, Port Botany - as such, Council opposes the continued expansion of Sydney Airport and Port Botany;
- whilst Council supports the NSW Government's freight mode shift target toward rail, it remains concerned about freight train noise and vibration impacts from the Port Botany Freight Line, which passes through the Marrickville LGA;
- these concerns are heightened by the significant increase in freight train movements to be generated by the expansion of Port Botany and operation of the new Enfield Intermodal Freight Terminal and the fact that there is no curfew on the operation of the Port Botany Freight Line;
- Council would like to see a serious commitment by the NSW Government to addressing rail freight noise issues on the Port Botany Freight line;
- despite the rail freight mode shift objective, road freight traffic through the Marrickville LGA will also significantly increase as a result of the expansion of Port Botany;
- whilst Council recognises there is a need to address road congestion issues, Council prefers public transport and rail freight solutions to motorway-only solutions such as the M5 Motorway expansion;
- Council is of the view that expansion of road capacity in inner-Sydney is not a stand-alone solution to freight traffic congestion and will create unacceptable induced commuter traffic impacts;
- most of the roads along which semi-trailers travel are lined by traffic-sensitive land uses, such as houses, schools and shopping centres;
- a number of streets across the LGA have 3-tonne weight restrictions, which have been imposed over several years on an as-needs basis, and some of Council's Local Area Traffic Management (LATM) treatments are designed to prevent intrusion into residential streets by semi-trailers;
- in addition to heavy freight, the Marrickville LGA experiences high levels of through commuter and light freight traffic, adding to overall traffic impacts; and
- Council is keen to participate in further development of the *Airport/Port Access Plan*.

The Maldon to Dombarton Freight Rail Link Feasibility Study

Relevant to freight movement along the M5 corridor is the proposed Maldon to Dombarton freight rail link. A pre-feasibility study for this link was completed in 2009, while a feasibility study was developed and publicly exhibited in late 2010. Completion of this study is expected in mid-2011. These studies have been funded by the Australian Government under the Nation Building Program. The studies examine the economic viability of the line in the context of the growth in coal export demand, the growth of Southern Sydney as a freight and business hub and the expansion of Port Kembla, following the transfer of vehicle imports from Port Jackson. The studies also determine the planning and engineering work necessary to obtain firm costings and determine whether this project ultimately proceeds. At this stage, the project is estimated to cost \$0.8B.

The extension would consist of 15km of new dual standard gauge track from Port Kembla to Dombarton and completion of a partly-completed 35 kilometre section from Dombarton to Maldon, near Picton, to link the south-west of Sydney. The Maldon-Dombarton section was commenced by the NSW government in 1983 to improve access for coal trains to Port Kembla. However, the contract for construction of the Avon tunnel was cancelled by the NSW Government in mid-1988 on the basis that the line was not economically viable.

In December 2010, Council made a submission which expressed support for the project. Support is based on the apparent benefits to the Marrickville LGA of providing an alternative route for coal trains currently travelling from the western coalfields to Port Kembla via the Port Botany Freight Line. The numerous Marrickville-LGA residents living near this line would benefit from reduced movements of coal trains. The submission also points out that the Maldon-Dombarton link offers

the potential to further develop Port Kembla as a port and move freight to south-western Sydney via Picton. This would affect a much smaller number of residents than the existing route from Port Botany to Enfield through the Marrickville LGA. Importantly, the Maldon-Dombarton link would, in general terms, ease road and rail freight traffic pressures on the M5 Corridor.

Alternative M5 Corridor transport actions

When Council had, in its 2010 submission to the RTA, expressed a preference for public transport and rail freight solutions to M5 Corridor congestion, there had been little consideration at that time by any government, business or community stakeholder of the full range of M5 Corridor transport options, as discussed above. Throughout 2010 and into 2011, these options have begun to emerge. Some of these options have been advocated previously, whilst others are new. Until recently, the options had not been presented as a 'package'.

The beginnings of this 'package' of options are within:

- the 2006 SACL *Sydney Airport Ground Travel Plan*;
- plans proposed in 2010 by Ecotransit and the ACF; and
- the Australian Government's 2010 *Maldon to Dombarton Freight Rail Link Feasibility Study*.

In summary, the actions are:

- complete removal of Airport Link station fees;
- light rail link from Dulwich Hill Station to Coogee via Sydenham Station;
- accelerated implementation of a range of actions within the *Sydney Airport Ground Travel Plan*, including bus service improvements;
- possible Kingsgrove Station car-train interchange facilities; and
- freight rail link from Maldon to Dombarton and enhanced port role Port Kembla.

Appropriate plans for consideration of these actions

At the national level, it would appear the most appropriate current policy for consideration of the above actions is the *National Land Freight Strategy* discussion paper. Council would like this strategy to give due consideration to local impacts of regional freight movements, and to assess the full range of M5 corridor rail freight and public transport options for the M5 Corridor – as a priority over expansion of the M5 Motorway. These arguments may also be relevant to the development of the Australian Government's *National Ports Strategy* and *Our Cities* policies.

At the NSW Government level, it would appear the most appropriate current policy for consideration of these options is the proposed *Airport/Port Action Plan*. Although Council was informed in early 2010 that a draft of this plan was to be released for public comment before the end of 2010, it has yet to be released. Council would like the NSW Government to consider the abovementioned package of rail freight and public transport actions in further developing the *Airport/Port Action Plan*. Council would also like to see a draft version of the *Airport/Port Access Plan* released for public comment at the earliest opportunity.

At a local council level, the most appropriate current policy for consideration of these options is the M5 Taskforce position paper. Council would like the Taskforce to give further consideration to rail freight and public transport options in addressing M5 Corridor congestion issues. Such a request is consistent with the Taskforce's stated aim to: "... seek a commitment to wider freight and public transport strategies to complement the M5 expansion ...". Council argues that these wider freight and public transport options be "instead of" rather than "to complement" the expansion of the M5 Motorway.