



## **RESPONSE TO REGIONAL ACTION PLAN COMMUNITY DISCUSSION PAPER: WESTERN SYDNEY**

The Western Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils (WSROC) Ltd welcomes the Government's commitment to developing short term regional action plans as an important step towards the implementation of the longer term NSW 2021 Plan. Too often long term plans remain as mission statements without implementation strategies.

However, greater clarity is needed in showing the connections between the Regional Action Plans, NSW2021 and the Sydney Metropolitan Plan (if any) and the Long Term Transport Master Plan. The other issue of process which arises relates to the frequency of consultation. As the Regional Action Plans are two year plans, it is hoped that the process of consultation will be repeated biennially, both to gauge progress and to develop subsequent two year plans.

One specific concern of WSROC in the development of these plans is the separation of Western Sydney into Western and South Western regions. While it is true that differences exist across Greater Western Sydney, there is greater commonality of issues and interconnectedness between Western Sydney communities than is suggested by any artificial division.

WSROC also welcomes the process of community engagement by way of community meetings with Ministers and government officials across the State and the opportunity for direct community feedback via the "haveyoursay" website. However, the process seems to lack the opportunity for more robust discussion of priorities with key stakeholders such as WSROC, local councils, and UWS. For this reason, WSROC offers the following comments on the Community Discussion Paper.

### **VISION FOR WESTERN SYDNEY**

Greater Western Sydney is home to 1.9 million people and contributes \$85billion annually to the NSW economy, more than Sydney's CBD. Its population is projected to grow by a further million over the next twenty five years, accounting for almost 60% of Sydney's population growth during that time. As well as the vast opportunities this brings, it also brings challenges which must be addressed, not only for the benefit of the region, but because of the impacts on the rest of Sydney and the State as a whole.

WSROC supports the Discussion Paper's stated vision for Western Sydney: "... to strengthen its regional economy through the development of additional employment land, extensive unique parklands, modern housing options, first class educational facilities and new transport linkages, while maintaining its unique urban and rural residential lifestyles."

WSROC further supports the seven listed "Local Priorities". However, the real test for the Regional Action Plans will be the prioritisation of legislation and the budget allocations needed to achieve these objectives. The comments below relate to each of those stated priorities and their associated "Priority Actions".

### **LOCAL PRIORITIES**

#### **1 Grow the economy of Western Sydney**

WSROC accepts the importance of the region as Australia's largest manufacturing region but strongly supports the priority "to support economic diversification".

Manufacturing (13.9%) and Retail Trade (11.1%) are the region's two largest employers but Information, Media and Telecommunications (2.0%), Financial and Insurance Services (4.9%) and Professional, Scientific and Technical Services (5.2%) are under-represented compared to the whole of Sydney (3.0%, 6.4% and 8.9% respectively). The growing pressures on Australia's manufacturing sector make Western Sydney more vulnerable than most other areas, so it is imperative that our economic and employment base is diversified. This is also vital to match the rapidly growing number of graduates in Western Sydney with commensurate growth in tertiary level professional jobs.

WSROC supports the Regional Action Plan's stated priority actions, especially:

- the development of 10 Year Industry Action Plans for five key sectors particularly in Professional Services, International Education and Research and the Digital Economy.
- the establishment of a Greater Western Sydney Economic Development Taskforce, to remove obstacles to, and encourage business investment in the region
- the development of a Western Sydney Regional Business Park

WSROC also urges the government to:

- support health research and education by facilitating the proposed UWS/Penrith Business Alliance Health and Education Precinct and supporting the Westmead bio-medical/bio-technology cluster
- promptly service and release key employment lands including the Western Sydney Employment Lands Investigation Area
- develop a South-Western Sydney Business Park to replicate the Norwest Business Park
- lead by example by expediting the decentralisation of some of its own key agencies to key regional cities such as Parramatta, Blacktown, Liverpool and Penrith.

## **2. Improve access to jobs and facilitate employment growth, particularly for young people**

Unemployment rates in western Sydney are on average around 1.5% higher than the national figure, with some pockets double the national number. The situation for youth unemployment is no better with figures of over 20% in some areas.

The Metropolitan Strategy estimates Sydney will need an extra 760,000 jobs over the next twenty five years. With Greater Western Sydney projected to account for around 60% of Sydney's population growth in that time, over 400,000 extra jobs will need to be generated in Western Sydney if the region's already substantial job deficit is not to worsen.

WSROC supports the Regional Action Plan's stated priority actions.

WSROC also urges the NSW Government to:

- work with the Federal Government to build more effective school/industry partnerships
- actively support school-based apprenticeship programs and vocational education programs
- increase the level of professional employment opportunities in Western Sydney by relocating more of its own jobs to centres such as Parramatta, Blacktown, Liverpool, and Penrith
- promptly service and release identified employment lands in Western Sydney

### **3. Improve strategic planning to protect valuable agricultural land**

With around 40% of Sydney's prime agricultural land in designated north-west and south-west growth areas, there are serious threats to an industry which generates over \$1billion a year and employs some 12,000, mostly from CALD communities and early school leavers.

WSROC supports the Regional Action Plan's stated priority actions, stressing that strategic land use planning must protect high productivity agricultural land. WSROC also urges the NSW Government to:

- consider incentives for farmers to continue farming peri-urban land rather than selling for development– investigate a system of Transferable Development Rights as used in US
- conduct an audit to identify the most productive peri-urban agricultural lands to raise the level of protection for these areas
- support and promote local farmers markets to provide a variety of options for growers and to allow greater interaction and understanding between producers and consumers
- support activities of the Government's Agriculture Working Group aimed at increasing the productivity and sustainability of Sydney's peri-urban agriculture
- take action to address the agriculture skills shortage through school-based initiatives to reverse the decline in numbers studying agriculture at tertiary level
- further strengthen recently announced measures to curb threats to agriculture by coal seam gas exploration/mining by providing absolute protection for farmlands where risks are reasonably identified

### **4. Provide greater access to affordable housing options**

WSROC supports the Regional Action Plan's stated priority actions aimed at increasing housing supply. However WSROC also makes the following points:

- Any development must be consistent with strategic regional plans and specifically must take into account
  - i) employment needs and opportunities in growth areas
  - ii) provision of infrastructure – both transport and social infrastructure
  - iii) protection of peri-urban agriculture
  - iv) environmental sustainability, conservation of parklands and green space.
- Consideration must also be given to either increasing the flexibility of S94 contributions or providing extra government/ tax-payer resources to ensure adequate funding of local infrastructure without increasing the burden on local councils.
- WSROC also supports measures to increase the supply of affordable housing options, particularly through the provision of increased stocks of public housing.

### **5. Quality transport services – reduce travel times**

Because of the distances involved and the relative paucity of public transport services, residents of Greater Western Sydney are seriously disadvantaged compared to most other Sydney communities. For example, while the total annual VKT for Sydney grew by an average of 2.3% a year over the past two decades, the increase for south-west and outer west of Sydney was 23%, compared with a 10% decrease in inner and eastern Sydney. This can be

attributed largely to strong population growth with increased urban sprawl in outer Western Sydney but it is also partly due to the limited availability of public transport options in those areas.

The long commuting times add to cost of living pressures for Western Sydney households, reduce family time, reduce productivity, add to economic costs (figures from the Bureau of Transport Economics, estimate that the cost of traffic congestion for Sydney will rise from \$4.6 billion a year in 2009 to \$7.8 billion a year by 2020) and add to the region's carbon footprint.

WSROC endorses the priority actions listed in the Regional Action Plan, both in terms of infrastructure projects and improvements to service delivery.

However, WSROC urges consideration of the following points:

- The M2 must be added to the list which shows M4, M5 and M7 as key priorities for reducing congestion
- While the North-West Rail Link will be a tremendous boost to transport services in the north-west, its main shortcoming is the failure to provide an adequate link between the north-west and Parramatta. The plan to "implement priority measures on strategic bus corridors...Parramatta to Castle Hill" will help in the short term, but a longer term solution is needed.  
WSROC argues that there needs to be a rail connection between Parramatta and the NWRL, either through light rail or heavy rail. This could be achieved by linking Parramatta directly either with Rouse Hill, Castle Hill, or Epping.
- Support should be given to a feasibility study on Parramatta Council's proposed light rail network linking key centres in Western Sydney.
- Every effort must be made to complete the south-West rail Link as quickly as possible.
- More attention needs to be given to parking facilities (car and bicycle) and interchanges at rail stations to encourage greater use of rail for at least part of the commute.
- Improved road links with key industrial areas such as the Erskine Park Link Road, need to be expanded to include others (such as Boral Road Greystanes).
- Investigation is needed to identify the most urgent gaps in community transport coverage.
- The short term action plans must not detract from concurrent long term strategic corridor planning (see below).

## **6. Deliver appropriate services to disadvantaged and vulnerable members of our community.**

According to the SEIFA rankings, four of Sydney's five most socio-economically disadvantaged local government areas (Fairfield, Auburn, Bankstown and Campbelltown) are in Greater Western Sydney and the other( Canterbury) borders Western Sydney.

WSROC supports the specific priority actions listed in the Regional Action Plan, but also makes the following additional comments:

- Urgent attention is need for expanded preventative health measures aimed at reducing the growing level of chronic disease in Western Sydney. WSROC urges greater funding for collaborative programs between CHIP (the Government's Centre for Health Innovation and Partnerships) and local councils. A significant proportion of

funding available to NSW under the Commonwealth's Healthy Workers Initiatives and Healthy Children's programs should be directed towards these needs.

- Greater focus is needed on active living initiatives aimed at reducing obesity and chronic disease. Consideration should be given to mandating Health Impact Assessments for all proposed developments over a threshold size.
- Some of the stock of public housing needs upgrading and the supply needs to be increased as a matter of urgency. New public housing needs to be integrated with socio-economically mixed communities to avoid concentrations of disadvantage and should be located close to public transport routes and preferably as part of infill consolidation.
- An audit is needed of community transport services to identify gaps with a view to improving services for those most in need.

## **7. Local Environment and Communities**

WSROC supports the stated priority actions, particularly those aimed at managing the health of the Hawkesbury Nepean River System.

In addition to those measures listed to improve river health, WSROC also urges the Government to consider

- measures to reduce nutrient flows into the river including further upgrades of STPs in the catchment
- funding for a weed harvester to help control aquatic weeds in the middle reaches of the river
- on-going support for the work of the Hawkesbury Nepean Catchment Authority
- support for the work of the Hawkesbury Water Keeper
- further support for programs aimed at river bank revegetation and restoration as well as revegetation of other degraded parts of the catchment
- measures to ensure greenfield developments don't further degrade the catchment

## **STRATEGIC ISSUES**

As already stated, WSROC welcomes the development of Regional Action Plans to prioritise the actions needed to move towards the NSW 2021 Plan. However, it is important to emphasise the need for concurrent strategic planning on the longer term region-wide issues.

With the population of Greater Western Sydney projected to grow by another 1 million over the next twenty five years, attention must be given now to the strategic priorities needed to address the challenges this growth will bring, to ensure that it is not only manageable, but that it improves the well-being of the residents of Western Sydney and maximises the region's contribution to the state's economy. The ad hoc, piecemeal approach of the past cannot be allowed to continue.

Long term planning must take an integrated approach which includes land-use planning for housing and employment, transport infrastructure and social infrastructure, as well as considering issues of environmental, social and economic sustainability.

Employment opportunities must be a high priority if Western Sydney's job deficit is not to grow, adding not only to the social disadvantage of Western Sydney households, but adding massive extra burdens to Sydney's already struggling transport system and impacting adversely on the NSW economy.

Investment in infrastructure, especially transport infrastructure in Western Sydney has not kept up with population growth. The rail network in Western Sydney has not been significantly expanded since the 1930s yet the region's population is five times the size it was then. The result is that residential growth has been pushed further and further from rail networks, with an increasing reliance on buses and private cars. Yet bus services, either private or public have not kept up and have not been adequately integrated with rail services. Cross-regional north-south public transport is almost non-existent for most Western Sydney residents and roads systems are, in many cases, grossly inadequate. Inadequate planning for freight transport has added to these pressures.

Long term planning is needed now to identify and quarantine future transport corridors otherwise we face the risk that development in the interim will make some of the required future infrastructure prohibitively expensive.

WSROC recommends that the input of key stakeholders is also sought for the development of longer term strategic regional plans.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit our views on this important issue.

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