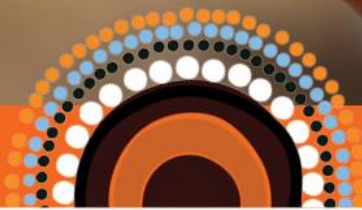


Illawarra Shoalhaven
Strategic Regional Integrated
Transport Plan

SUBMISSION

VOICE / INFLUENCE / LEADERSHIP

 **community**
INDUSTRY GROUP



ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF COUNTRY

Community Industry Group acknowledges the traditional custodians of this land, and their Elders past, present and future. We acknowledge and respect their continuing culture, the world's oldest living culture, and the contribution they make to the life of this region and our country. We acknowledge that we live and work on Aboriginal land and recognise the strength, resilience and capacity of Aboriginal people.



About Community Industry Group

Community Industry Group (CI Group) is the peak body working for community services and organisations in southern NSW. We support community organisations, promote expertise and innovation in community development, foster industry development and advocate for social justice.

For over 30 years, CI Group has taken a leadership role in the local community services sector. We regularly engage with those organisations, services, and individuals who work with individuals, families, and communities experiencing disadvantage and vulnerability. We also advocate on behalf of community organisations and vulnerable communities to raise awareness of the issues which are impacting service delivery and affecting the lives and outcomes of individuals, families and communities experiencing disadvantage.

Our members include not for profit (NFP) service providers who deliver:

- Homelessness Supports
- Women's and Domestic Violence Support Services
- Child and Family Services
- Youth Services
- Aged Care
- Disability Services
- Generalist Community / Neighbourhood Centres

Introduction

The development of Transport for NSW's 2025 Strategic Regional Integrated Transport Plan is essential to ensure the sustainable growth and connectivity of our communities.

The Illawarra Shoalhaven region is forecast to have an additional 100,000 people by 2041 taking the regional population to over half a million residents. The need for efficient safe and reliable travel within the region and connectivity between the Illawarra Shoalhaven and neighbouring regions, including the rapidly expanding Western Sydney region, will therefore continue to grow.

The private motor vehicle remains the dominant mode of transport across the region driven largely by lack of access to public transport. The focus for the Plan must be to shift the modal choice options for residents over the coming years to ensure a more sustainable and connected future transport network for the region.

Community Industry Group's submission aims to assist Transport for NSW to build on the 2021 Illawarra Shoalhaven Regional Transport Plan¹ and takes a particular interest in progressing the goals outlined within that plan that focus on social justice and addressing social disadvantage. We seek to progress a transport system that meets the needs of *all members of our community* (not only those who are able to or who can afford to drive a private motor vehicle).

The most relevant goals from the 2021 plan are:

- one in every five (20%) trips will be made by walking, cycling or public transport across the region by 2041.
- increased population within a 30 minute public transport trip of a regionally significant centre – Metro Wollongong, Shellharbour City Centre, Kiama, Nowra-Bomaderry, Milton-Ulladulla.
- improved connectivity between the Illawarra-Shoalhaven and Greater Sydney, with a particular focus on the connection with Western Sydney.
- greater use of technology to support a safer, more efficient, and accessible transport network.

¹ Illawarra Shoalhaven Regional Transport Plan 2021, https://www.future.transport.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-06/illawarra_shoalhaven_regional_transport_plan.pdf

Enaction of the recommendations in this submission will furthermore progress the NSW Government's stated goal of achieving "zero fatalities and serious injuries on our roads by 2056" through reduction of private vehicle usage as a result of mode shifts to safer public and active transport options.

It is essential that the focus shifts with this plan to a whole of community approach, building on the region's public transportation system and related active transport connections. This strategic focus will result in more people moving easily and cheaply across the region, reduced congestion, emissions and pollution, increased efficiency and connectivity, and support for the transition to a low-emissions future.

Member Feedback – Highlighting Inequity in Access to Transport

Community Industry Group members report that in the Illawarra Shoalhaven car driving is effectively being encouraged and non-car driving citizens are being significantly disadvantaged due to the combination of three interrelated transport equity issues:

1. infrequent, unreliable or, in some cases, non-existent public transport,
2. a lack of secure storage and parking for active transport links to public transport and
3. a lack of accessible, safe, separated infrastructure (footpaths, shared paths and cycle paths).

It is important to note that these issues combined effectively result in the requirement for many Illawarra Shoalhaven residents to take up private car ownership as their only viable option to meet their transport needs.

It is symptomatic of personal vehicle usage that once transport needs are met by car, the 3 issues highlighted above become masked, and their focus, advocacy and interest turns to the suitability of the (high cost) road network to meet their needs.

However, transport inequity remains a latent issue for every resident when or if they become unable to drive in the future. It is a real and present factor for the 25% of the population (1 in 4 people), who do not have a drivers licence and are significantly transport disadvantaged.

Not only does the pressure for private motor vehicle ownership lead to transport inequality, but it also has flow on effects. Fiscal pressures to state

and federal governments of a private car-dominated transport system are significant and varied including:

- People with disability's federal NDIS plans (with the need to fund vehicle transport costs and staff time),
- Cost to the State Health System with “bed block” issues in State Health systems (when people cannot be discharged home after a stroke or brain injury due to no longer being able to drive to or from their place of residence),
- Unnecessary time and resource impacts on the criminal justice system (for example for people facing fines, licence cancellations and other avoidable criminal justice issues due to driving unregistered or unroadworthy vehicles because there are no other transport options where they live),
- Social welfare and other unemployment costs to the federal government, the person and the community (for those who cannot travel to or from work due to not having a licence). Etc.

All of these are real costs which were highlighted by members during our consultations. These suggest the actual cost of our continued focus on the private motor car and the effective underfunding of other modes of transport is a massive drain on the state and federal budgets.

Much of the feedback from CI Group members focused on the need for increased investment in public and active transport infrastructure to provide a multitude of health and economic benefits to individuals, economic stimulus to the communities in which they live and a range of quantifiable cost savings for government. Cost savings which could be directed into programs and services to benefit the community.

We continue to see large and no doubt necessary investment² in roads, but grossly inadequate investment in public and active³ transport. This disparity must be addressed if we hope to see the benefits to individuals, communities and the broader society.

² E.g. <https://www.nsw.gov.au/media-releases/better-roads-and-transport-regional-nsw>

³ E.g. <https://www.transport.nsw.gov.au/projects/programs/get-nsw-active>

Challenges and Opportunities - Feedback Themes

CI Group received a range of feedback from our members, and have grouped this into themes as follows:

Investment

Investment to increase the mode share for active and public transport modes. By increasing the spend (or diverting some of the spend presently devoted to roads) to build on the strengths of the region's public transport networks, it will be possible to significantly increase active and public transport to achieve stated targets for mode shift. This investment will lead to further cost savings with Transport for NSW easing road congestion and wear and tear, and contributing to a healthier community with reduced emissions.

Connectivity

While north to south connectivity particularly in the Wollongong local government area (LGA) and as far south as Kiama is reasonable, members identified that the east to west connectivity, and connectivity extending into the Shoalhaven and to Western Sydney, are poorly served by public transport. This is of most concern to people from lower socio economic backgrounds, older people, and people with disability.

Improved connectivity will be enabled through the identification and resourcing of regional "Transport Hubs". While it is evident from a planning perspective that there are multiple regional strategic transport hubs for bus and train, as well as car-pooling opportunities across the region, these are less well understood by residents. These hubs should be promoted to travellers so they are recognised as central points with feeder suburbs, creating reliable connected public and active transport linkages which can be enhanced over time.

Increased connectivity between transport modes by active transport can be encouraged through the installation of walk-in bike lockers which incorporate security and CCTV at all key regional transport hubs and train stations (Thirroul, North Wollongong, Wollongong, Unanderra, Dapto, Albion Park, Warrawong, Shellharbour, Shellharbour Junction, Kiama) as well as bicycle racks fitted to buses on identified bus routes. These investments will make it viable for feeder suburbs to readily connect to public transport hubs, thus enabling people 5 to 10 km away to conveniently travel to them by bicycle, board a bus using the bicycle rack and securely storing their bicycle at train stations.

Public transport use in new suburbs can be established from the start by establishing functioning public transport services in new housing development areas *before* density targets are reached, based on the number of users that will be in the development when it is fully populated. This will ensure that residents do not need to rely on private vehicles from the time they move in. This may require transport contracts to be structured to support this (for example for transport providers to be subsidised until passenger targets are reached).

Improved connectivity to Western Sydney in terms of road, rail and public and active transport is essential for the growth and development of the region moving forward. Public transport services are presently limited, infrequent and inefficient and must be improved now before new residents come to rely on private vehicles as the only viable transport mode to support connectivity between these important regions. Existing services such as the bus service from Campbelltown to Wollongong must be increased and extended on weekends and into the evenings, and new routes need to be established linking residents from these areas.

The Maldon-Dombarton rail line should be completed to alleviate pressure on the road transport network. This line should be funded and operated by the NSW Government to support freight, and ideally passenger, services between Wollongong and Western Sydney.

Accessibility

The current lack of accessible bus stops and vehicles across the region mean that people with disability, mobility impairments or sensory impairments continue to face challenges in accessing public transport. This fact is under-recognised because people with disability often have their transport needs met through higher-cost transport providers or disability specialist services. While there are some excellent quality private transport providers filling some of the gaps for public transport, these tend to be high-cost services due to their focus on disability support as well as transport support service.

We recommend the expansion of community transport eligibility to improve access. At the moment, Community Transport is not available to people on a Home Care Package, in receipt of NDIS funding, or in residential care. For many, Community Transport can seem prohibitive. The rules around access should be eased to enable a greater use of these accessible and supportive services.

Disadvantage

Employment opportunities and outcomes are being compromised due to lack of access to transport for Illawarra Shoalhaven residents. Significant impacts accessing employment, skills and training were noted and the situation worsens further south. Access to jobs, skills and training are particularly limited in areas of the Shoalhaven. There is also a high level of travel by residents out of the region by private vehicle to work. For example, only 1.1% of Shellharbour residents who work outside the region travel by public transport.

Some regions with strong growth and lower socio-economic factors are particularly poorly serviced, such as Warrawong in the Wollongong LGA where there is a heavy reliance on bus services but an inadequate and infrequent service. For example, we heard of people travelling half a day from Warrawong to Wollongong Hospital, meaning time is spent on transport rather than other pursuits, and that health outcomes may be compromised.

There are also reports of social justice impacts, with the lack of access to public transport in some areas contributing to illegal activity such as use of unregistered vehicles, fare evasion, or risking fines in order to meet transport needs.

The 'number 55' Free Wollongong Shuttle Bus Service⁴ was frequently highlighted by members as a success story supporting people from all walks of life access the northern areas of the Wollongong LGA, improving connectivity, reducing parking and congestion problems and improving air quality. However, the inequality was raised and the absence of this free service in the southern Wollongong suburbs (many of which have very low socio-economic indicators) and other LGA's was a point of contention. It is recommended that this model could be replicated by Transport for NSW in southern Wollongong. Nowra and Shellharbour for great benefit to all and particularly people from lower socio economic backgrounds.

Weather also impacts access to public transport, with the lack of suitable shelters, poor reliability and inefficient connectivity causing disruption and further disadvantage during periods of inclement weather. Transport services are frequently disrupted and it is noted for example that playgroups for children from families experiencing disadvantage are much less well attended during these periods resulting in poorer social

⁴ It should be noted this service is only funded until 2027 jointly funded by Wollongong Council, Transport for NSW and University of Wollongong

outcomes. Roads also become more congested with people choosing to drive and impacting on productivity for the entire region.

Skills, Knowledge and Awareness

Skills and knowledge about the availability of public transport require improvement, particularly for young people. Many young people in the region do not have this knowledge imparted to them through their family or network who may be highly car-reliant. Education programs about the availability, frequency and cost of services are required. For example the hourly frequency of the 887 bus to and from Campbelltown to Wollongong was not well known in the consultations conducted.

CI Group also recommends programs to improve skills and knowledge for car drivers about how to interact with and be mindful of pedestrians, active transport and public transport users. The vision of fully separated infrastructure is not going to be completed anytime in the immediate future and so in many locations the sharing of infrastructure will be required for many years to come. Supporting skills, knowledge and attitude in relation to multiple user profiles will support a safe experience for all users.

Recommendations:

Our recommendations emphasize the importance of building on the current strengths of the regional transport network and the critical need to decrease car dependency and promote sustainable, affordable, safe and efficient public and active transport options for an equitable transport future.

1. Lift share of investment in active and public transport projects across the region to an enhanced level (for example 20% of transport budget).
2. Conduct a full review of the Illawarra Shoalhaven bus network and timetables including current routes, frequency, capacity and connections with a view to expand on the existing bus networks, provide more services on existing routes and enhance connections between bus and railway timetables.
3. Identify and communicate the location of active transport hubs in the region as priority investment zones for government.
4. Invest in more dedicated, free-all-day car parking capacity for all transport hubs to encourage mode share.

5. Install secure bicycle storage facilities at all transport hubs (Opal card activated with CCTV monitoring).
6. Trial bike racks on key longer distance bus routes throughout the region to enhance mode share cycling and bus trips.
7. Review planning controls to ensure that active transport infrastructure is including in the design of all new development sites (e.g. West Lake Illawarra and Nowra-Bomaderry) to increase public transport links at design and build stages.
8. Improve public transport connectivity to Western Sydney, including increased bus services on weekends and into the evenings and regular services between Campbelltown and Wollongong, and services to Wilton.
9. Complete the Moldan-Dombarton rail line for freight, and ideally passenger services, to link the region to Western Sydney and ease pressure on the roads for heavy freight coming from the port.
10. Review disability access to public transport hubs, provide fully accessible bus stops throughout the region and prioritise funding to ensure full accessibility which meets all Disability Access requirements for regional transport hubs.
11. Undertake a priority review of potential emerging technologies that can remove barriers to public transport for people with disability (for example bus stops fitted with accessible technology to alert drivers that there is a passenger with a disability wishing to board and the bus number they require access to).
12. Review eligibility requirements and controls on access to use of Community Transport to support greater use of existing community transport services and resources.
13. Ensure ongoing funding for Wollongong's free bus service (the 55 Gong Shuttle Bus) and expand to southern Wollongong suburbs and to the city centres of Shellharbour and Nowra to take more cars off the roads and reduce congestion and pollution in city centres.
14. Invest in improved amenity of bus stops and transport hubs to improve weather protection for passengers.
15. Improve the awareness, skills and knowledge of residents in relation to the reliability, affordability and availability of public transport options in the region.
16. Improve culture and interactions with a focus on sharing the roads and paths. Include training on how to interact with, and be mindful of, pedestrians and active and public transport users to support a safe experience for all users.

Conclusion:

The development of a Strategic Regional Integrated Transport Plan for the Illawarra Shoalhaven is an opportunity to create an equitable, efficient, connected and sustainable transport system. By focusing on reducing car dependency, enhancing public transport, and promoting integrated communities, we can ensure a liveable and prosperous future for the region. We appreciate the opportunity to contribute to this important inquiry and look forward to seeing the positive impact of these recommendations.

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