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Nature Conservation Saves for Tomorrow

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SUBMISSION BY BLUE MOUNTAINS CONSERVATION SOCIETY INC. ON BMCC'S DRAFT INTEGRATED TRANSPORT STRATEGIC PLAN 2035

Introduction – Blue Mountains Conservation Society Inc.

The Blue Mountains Conservation Society is a 55 year old community organisation, drawing many of its approximately 800 members from the Blue Mountains Local Government Area. The Society's objectives include to promote the need for ecological sustainability, protect the natural environment and repair the adverse effects of human activities upon the environment.

1. Introduction to Submission

A city within a National Park and World Heritage Area needs appropriate points within the guiding principles for an Integrated Transport Plan.

- Reduction and containment of the footprint of transport usage and infrastructure in spite of increased population and visitor numbers should be a guiding principle of the plan.
- It should be a guiding principle to alter the modal split in favour of public transport, walking and cycling in a manner that recognises the natural area experiences and traditional village experiences favoured in the Blue Mountains. This principle of the “specialness” of the Mountains needs also to incorporate the demographics and mobility restrictions of people travelling within the Mountains.
- It should be a guiding principle in dealing with new technologies and innovations to identify how these opportunities can serve the overall strategy for the Mountains.

Reduction and Containment of the Transport Footprint

-General

Transport impinges on the natural area and traditional village experiences in the Blue Mountains through creating airborne and water-borne pollutants through noise and through requiring corridors that truncate local movements and compromise the sense of personal safety as well the incremental destruction of natural habitat, vegetation, land forms, soils and hydrology because of ever expanding infrastructure.

2. Reduction and Containment of the Transport Footprint - Corridor Infrastructure.

When a local authority considers transport, it needs to keep all of these effects in mind as well as constantly communicating to relevant Federal, State and private entities the need to reduce and contain this footprint. Blue Mountains Council needs to engage with State Government about the impacts of transforming the rail corridor between Springwood and Lithgow to allow passenger trains with a wider loading gauge.

The draft plan lacks detail on what degree of highway upgrading Council might persuade State authorities to commit to. Currently, there are grade separations for motor traffic at Lapstone, Glenbrook, Warrimoo, Springwood, Linden, Woodford and Leura. More traffic signals are proposed which could add to the need for storage lanes and increase fuel consumption and noise. Additional grade separations sympathetic to existing topography could help contain the transport footprint.

Reduction and Containment of the Transport Footprint Local Roads & Parking Infrastructure

It is of particular concern that parking at major tourist attractions is spilling into residential streets and creating community dissatisfaction. Solutions could be better enumerated at various points within the draft plan. However, construction of new car parks that impinge on natural vegetation and hydrology should be avoided.

Opportunities to seal remaining unsealed local roads and reduce siltation at adjacent natural areas as well as environmentally damaging runoff need to be vigorously pursued.

3. Modal Choices Compatible with Natural Area and Village Experiences. -Rail

Passenger carriage interiors and the ambience of most Mountains railway stations have contributed to the sense of specialness of travel to and within the Mountains for many years. Elements of the State Government's proposals including overly generic carriages, fixed direction seating and revamped stations threaten this specialness. All parties should advocate for the retention of features appropriate to the Mountains, including maximising retention of vegetated spaces around stations and the rail corridor.

Modal Choices Compatible with Natural Areas and Village Experiences - Explorer Buses

Explorer buses connecting with trains present a hospitable experience to visitors and reduce parking demand and congestion. Currently, only Katoomba and Leura have good services. Wentworth Falls and Blackheath seem to be future prospects for service expansion.

Modal Choices Compatible with Natural Area and Village Experiences -Walking and Cycling

The draft plan contains some irrelevant assumptions about the trip lengths suited to these modes. Walking will not be used up to 2km nor cycling up to 5 km if special infrastructure is not provided for steep grades, if sealed footways and cycle ways are

lacking or if poor sightlines for vehicle drivers, poor lighting and other elements of pedestrian and cyclist security are not addressed. Even so, as pointed out elsewhere visitors and some residents may be willing to undertake larger walking and cycling trips.

The extension of the walking and cycling network needs to be accelerated including completion of the Grand Cliff Top Walk and the Great Blue Mountains Cycle Trail already underway. New emphasis needs to be placed on walking routes between tourist attractions and rail stations or bus stops in order to limit the need to increase the footprint of parking areas adjacent to natural vegetation or escarpments – the draft plan should specifically refer to this.

Some pedestrian paths through parks and naturally vegetated Council land are effectively part of the transport network and need special budget allocations to prevent erosion and pathway braiding encroaching on environmentally sensitive areas.

The provision of a safe off-highway cycling route between the new pedestrian-cycle bridge at Emu Plains and Glenbrook should be a high priority.

Where the highway is acting as the pedestrian-cycle link between local streets and a town-centre, priority should be given to providing a sealed corridor for pedestrians and cyclists independent of the highway carriageway.

Where controversy exists on the precise route of a path or trail section it is important to provide some safe and usable continuous route, even if on a temporary basis. Residents and visitors should be given the impression that the link exists and that they can use it.

New Technologies and Innovations

The draft plan is very short of details about the roles of new technologies and innovations.

It should be an objective to involve the community in discussions about which existing problems could be ameliorated over the next few years by new technologies rather than disruptive costly solutions.

Specific opportunities should be identified to promote motor vehicle and rail vehicle innovations that would reduce noise, automotive emissions and the deposition of coal dust and other airborne pollutants into the environment adjacent to transport corridors.

Public Education About Technological Change.

There needs to be a period of patience that avoids over-engineered infrastructure expansion and more greatly values the protection of natural areas from interference. Robotic control of vehicles could mean that, in the not too distant future, all parking will be “valet parking”. Opportunities afforded could include

* Minimising disruption of areas near tourist attractions for parking.

*Avoiding interference with swamps and other areas near town centres for coach parking (as, for example, recently considered at Leura).

- Removing the need for multi-storey or underground car parks in town centres.
- Allowing generally more compact town centres with a more beneficial intensity of pedestrian interactions.

Motor Vehicle Speed Limits

The sense of natural living and village atmosphere is affected by motor vehicle speeds both on the highway and other streets, especially in those towns where the highway passes through the commercial centre.

It should be an objective of the Integrated Transport Strategic Plan to convince State Government to post a 50km/h speed limit on sections of highway passing through town centres, as occurs in some other town centres on “A” classified highways in New South Wales.

Future Blue Mountains Conservation Society Input to BMCC Transport Policy

It is noted that it is identified as a medium priority to reconvene the Integrated Transport Forum and include community group representation. BMCS considers our group is suitable for representation as a community group on the Forum.

Conclusion

The Blue Mountains Conservation Society welcomes the creation of the document “Integrated Transport Strategic Plan 2035”. Our submission seeks a sharper focussing of parts of the document, especially in the spheres of “Reduction and Containment of the Transport Footprint”, “Altering the Modal Split in favour of public transport, walking and cycling” and “New Technologies and Innovations”.

Our Society would welcome the chance for further interaction with Council on transport topics.

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If you have queries in regard to the issues raised in this letter please contact me

Yours sincerely

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