

Nature Conservation Council of NSW

Sustainable Transport Policy

(As endorsed by the Annual Conference, October 2002)

Introduction

In 1999 substantial work was undertaken to draft an NCC Sustainable Transport policy by Ted Floyd and Naomi Wolfe. Input from member groups was sought at the time, in addition to input from political parties/politicians from both sides of government. The NCC Annual Conference accepted in principle the resulting draft policy in 1999, subject to reformulation and amendments before achieving official ratification. Since then Christine Laurence also commenced substantial work on the formulation of a policy. STEP Inc. instigated that work be done on the previous documents so that a Policy might be put to the 2002 conference for ratification.

Air pollution is frequently named by urban residents in NSW as the environmental issue that they rate of most concern. Traffic, congestion and urban sprawl are also issues that have an enormous impact on residents. Current development practices, including the recent spate of urban freeway construction is increasing our car dependence, and further exacerbating the sprawl which is causing our urban centres to encroach on natural habitat surrounding them.

The NCC has a clear role to play in calling for transport planning and funding allocations which make our travel patterns more sustainable and reduce the environmental impact of our travel needs.

Preamble

New South Wales needs a new approach to transport that prioritises sustainability and accessibility as guiding principles. Our urban and regional centres currently suffer environmentally and economically from motor vehicle congestion and pollution.

Environmentally damaging urban sprawl and development patterns stemming from car dependence are condemning more and more residents to isolation in outlying suburbs, and increasing the distances that we have to travel for daily tasks. A poorly integrated transport system is also reducing employment opportunities and access to essential city services.

Our cities and regional centres would benefit from a refocusing of priorities towards liveable cities, public transport, other forms of transport (bicycles and walking), urban village concepts, cleaner fuels and fewer roads, particularly freeways. This will require reform of the institutional cultures governing our transport and land use planning, financial structures, and infrastructure funding decisions.

This policy seeks to increase the use of sustainable modes, and would see a reduction in air and noise pollution, curb development sprawl and see the enhancement of public space in our cities and regional centres.

Objectives

The primary objectives of this Policy are to:

- Reduce vehicle kilometres travelled,
- Improve air, water and ecosystem quality,
- Reduce greenhouse gas emissions,
- Improve social equity of transport,
- Improve economic efficiency,
- Reduce unnecessary goods and passenger movement,
- Reduce transport-related injury and other health impacts,
- Improve visual amenity and reduce noise pollution, and
- Limit transport infrastructure that results in urban sprawl.

POLICY

1. Institutional Structures and Regulations

1.1 Commonwealth Government commitment to funding integrated transport

- 1.1.1 The Commonwealth Government must develop a National Transport Strategy that combines road and rail funding and planning and sets out its role in urban public transport planning.
- 1.1.2 The Commonwealth Government must merge all national transport funding programmes into the Australian Land Transport Reserve and dedicate a minimum of 20% for urban public transport and 2% for cycling and pedestrian facilities, out of the national transport budget.

1.2 Creation of an Urban Land Use and Transport Commission

- 1.2.1 Mode agencies should not undertake planning or develop their own projects in association with the private sector. Rather an Urban Land Use and Transport Commission should be established, investigating the appropriate modes first, and then developing projects to be undertaken by mode construction agencies and/or the private sector.
- 1.2.2 The Commission would establish and administer a single Transport Fund that breaks down barriers between road and rail funding.
- 1.2.3 The Commission would include environmental criteria in their integrated transport planning so that all proposals compete on the basis of greenhouse and other environmental criteria and include an assessment of environmental impacts and alternative transport solutions.
- 1.2.4 The Commission would assess all freeway and public transport infrastructure projects against the stated government policy of reducing private motor vehicle kilometres driven. Infrastructure that leads the State away from this policy goal would not be approved.

1.3 Restructuring of local government traffic committees

- 1.3.1 To incorporate integrated transport thinking at local government level, local councils must restructure their traffic committees as transport committees.

2 Urban Planning and Land Use

- 2.1 Development of higher population densities close to shopping centres and public transport must be encouraged through mechanisms such as zoning.
- 2.2 The approval processes for new or ‘infill’ residential developments must include accessibility to or provision of public transport and basic services. On this basis, the Nature Conservation Council strongly encourages and advocates the adoption of State Environmental Planning Policy (SEPP) 66 by the NSW Government.
- 2.3 Urban forms such as urban villages must be a priority in land use planning, so that people and jobs are located together in areas well-serviced by public transport. To this end the government must develop targets for self-containment levels in urban planning; that is, measures of the degree to which jobs, retailing and local services are located within residential developments.
- 2.4 Developers and businesses that create transport demand in new fringe development areas must pay a levy to help pay for additional transport services needed.

3. Public Transport

- 3.1 All rail projects and capacity improvements cited in *Action for Transport 2010* must be brought forward. Construction on the Parramatta to Chatswood, Strathfield to Hurstville and north-west Sydney rail links as well as the Central Coast Railway upgrade and turn around loop at Bondi Junction must begin by 2005.
- 3.2 Fringe benefit taxes relating to transport must include employers providing public transport benefits.
- 3.3 A public transport precinct SEPP must be developed to set standards for public transport precincts.
- 3.4 CBD public transport must be improved by the construction of the CBD light rail extension prior to the cross-city tunnel. The feasibility study of light rail extension to Ashfield must be completed.
- 3.5 Promotion of light rail as transport in other parts of inner Sydney including the Bay Light Express proposal must be a priority over road capacity increases.

4. Cycling

- 4.1 State and Commonwealth government investment must be increased for cycling, starting with demonstration projects around trip generating sites such as TAFEs and universities located on the Central Coast where the public transport service is particularly poor.
- 4.2 To encourage more people to cycle, *Bike Plan 2010* must be updated to increase the coverage and density of the regional network and also to ensure that planned cycle routes are based on current cyclists' preferred routes.
- 4.3 *Action for Air* aimed to triple cycling levels on 1997 figures. State funding for cycling infrastructure and education campaigns must be 5% of the transport budget to facilitate this target being reached.
- 4.5 The Nature Conservation Council supports cycle ways as providing for a sustainable and non-polluting travel mode. These cycle ways should conform to environmental sustainability, nature conservation principles and best planning practice. They should not compromise remnant bushland, riparian or wetland areas.
- 4.6 The level of matched funding provided to local councils by the RTA for cycling initiatives should be increased to match current and expected future demand levels. This is expected to be at least double existing funding levels.

5. Walking

- 5.1 The Commonwealth, State, and local governments must agree on and adopt targets for walking that help to develop sustainable communities and neighbourhoods.
- 5.2 The Commonwealth, State and local governments must develop plans to improve the public realm for walking in accordance with adopted targets, including infrastructure funding.
- 5.3 More pedestrian precincts should be established in place of roadway in Sydney's CBD.

6. Private Motor vehicles

- 6.1 *Action for Transport 2010* committed to halting growth in per capita vehicle kilometres driven by 2011. The government should review its progress toward this target annually. Proposed infrastructure that leads the State away from this target should not be approved.
- 6.2 Tax benefits for the purchase of company cars must be removed, and there must be an increase in import duty on 4-wheel drive vehicles to at least parity with conventional cars.
- 6.3 The NSW Government must introduce 'road pricing' to reflect the true cost of car use and for ingress to the Sydney CBD, and ensure that subsequent revenue is clearly tied to a Sustainable Transport Fund (funding public transport, cycling and pedestrian networks).
- 6.4 Freeways have proven to be as expensive failures in urban areas. They woo people off less environmentally damaging modes such as rail and into unsustainable travel patterns.

They also generate sprawl. The NCC therefore does not support the building of freeways, particularly urban freeways.

- 6.5 There must be mandatory fuel-efficiency labelling of new cars.

7. Freight Transport

- 7.1 The Commonwealth Government must bring the National Rail Track up to National Highway standard by giving it legal status under Section 7 of the Australian Land Transport Development Act 1988.
- 7.2 The Commonwealth Government must immediately invest \$507 million in the National Rail Track and supplement this funding with a further \$2 billion over the next decade as recommended by the 1998 House of Representatives inquiry into the role of rail in the national transport network.
- 7.3 The NSW Government must produce a freight strategy (promised since 1993) that will adequately address the projected doubling of freight by 2020. Such a strategy should aim to remove freight from our roads in favour of less environmentally damaging rail.
- 7.4 There must be an increase in heavy truck registration to reflect the true cost of damage to roads by these vehicles.

8. Community and Education Initiatives

- 8.1 New South Wales must implement education and awareness campaigns similar to Perth's highly successful TravelSmart programme to promote sustainable transport use.
- 8.2 Government and non-government organisations that are significant trip generators must work with local transport providers to reduce the vehicle kilometres that their organisations generate.
- 8.3 The Nature Conservation Council supports the continuation of transport related data collection to ensure that planning has a strong base and progress against targets can be monitored.

BACKGROUND

1. Institutional Structures and Regulations

The Urban Strategy Group, which was appointed by Premier Carr to review current planning structures, wrote a detailed report in 1995 aimed at streamlining decision-making in planning in NSW. It recommended amalgamating the RTA with the Department of Planning, which would be responsible for integrated land use and transport planning policies and guidelines.

The recommendations from this report have never been implemented. We continue to have a bureaucratic structure that is fragmented and allows the RTA to shape and skew the planning agenda for our cities and urban centres.

The recent Warren Centre report *Towards a City of Cities* added to the voices urging structural change with its statement that “the New South Wales Government must integrate the land use planning and transport planning regimes”.

2. Urban Planning and Land Use

Urban planning is fundamental to reducing car use. A well-planned city brings people and services together, reducing the need to travel long distances. Much of our current planning ignores the consequences and complexities of feedback mechanisms affecting our transport system and car use. For example, a number of studies have shown that increasing road provision leads directly and indirectly to increases in traffic (see Newman and Kenworthy *Back on Track*). Poor transport planning and land use decisions are making Sydney an unsustainable city.

3. Public Transport

Inadequate investment in mass transit has meant that Australia has one of the lowest mass transit patronage levels in the world – with 92% of urban passenger travel by car compared with just 5% by rail.

One suburban train carrying 1,000 people keeps 800 cars off the road, substantially reducing pollution. Apart from the air and noise pollution improvements that would be gained by encouraging public transport use, land use would be more efficient. A double track railway requires a land reservation only 25 metres wide compared with a 100 metre wide reservation for a six-lane freeway. A double track railway can carry over 20,000 people per hour in either direction, over four times the capacity of a six-lane freeway.

There is clear community concern about the poor investment levels in our urban rail system. A recent survey of residents in Sydney found that 73% believe that current funding for public transport is inadequate, and that this imbalance needs to be redressed even if this is at the expense of the road budget.

4. Cycling

Cycling is an environmentally sustainable means of private transport. By replacing many car trips, increased cycling would reduce pollution and congestion. Fifty five percent of car trips in

Sydney are under 5km in distance, an easy distance to cover by bike. The first kilometres driven in any car trip are the most polluting, so cycling has the capacity to substantially reduce urban air pollution.

5. Walking

Walking is a non-polluting and healthy mode of getting around. Wider benefits of pedestrianism include improved public safety, commercial and social interaction and a more attractive city. A well-planned local and regional pedestrian network could be a major potential reducer of the number of car trips in Sydney, with a corresponding reduction in air and noise pollution.

6. Private Motor vehicles

Australian cities have amongst the highest per capita car use in the world. These trends are resulting in congested cities, inefficient energy use, and high per capita pollution levels. Greenhouse gases from the transport sector will increase by 42% on 1994 levels by 2015 unless current trends are curbed.

Between 1991 and 1998 Sydney's car use rose by 24% (compared with population growth which rose by 7%). The NSW Roads and Traffic Authority found that unrestrained road demand in Sydney would increase time lost through peak-hour congestion by 600% and urban air pollution by 35% by 2011.

Motor vehicles are the source of more than half the urban air pollutants that we breathe. In Sydney, motor vehicles account for 90% of the carbon dioxide, 82% of nitrous oxides, and 90% of the carbon monoxide in our air.

A major issue currently facing our urban centres is the spate of urban freeway building. As has been shown in the UK's SACTRA report (1994), and outlined in the NSW State of the Environment Report 1997, increases in road capacity lead to unintended increases in traffic. This is because rather than solving traffic congestion, the addition of new roads just feeds the process that creates traffic.

The myth that free flowing traffic reduces pollution compared to congested traffic has been used to justify urban freeway building. However, as shown by Newman and Kenworthy in *Back on Track*, when congestion is reduced and feedback assumptions are included, there is actually more fuel used due to greater car dependence and reduction in use of other transport modes like rail.

7. Freight Transport

Australia has the highest level of road freight, in tonne-kilometres driven per capita in the world. From this already high level, freight transport is set to double in this country by 2020. Road transport causes 14% of total greenhouse gas emissions and 89% of the nation's transport greenhouse gas emissions. Australia now has the third highest rate of greenhouse gas emissions per capita from transport in the world.

Investment in our rail network to move some of this freight onto rail is an urgent priority. Rail freight is three times more energy efficient than trucks per tonne of freight hauled.

A House of Representatives Committee into the role of rail in the national transport network issued a report in 1998 called ‘Tracking Australia’. This report called for substantial track upgrading and urged that failure to upgrade the mainline track could lead to ‘irretrievable’ loss of rail freight. The Neville Committee recommended an urgent investment of \$1 billion, followed by \$2 billion over the next (this) decade. The only provision made for rail capital works since the National Transport Planning Taskforce report was a conditional offer of \$250 million made in 1997, of which only about one half has been spent.

8. Community and Education Initiatives

Community and education initiatives can have significant impacts in making our transport and travel patterns more sustainable. Perth’s TravelSmart programme, piloted in 1999, achieved a 90% increase in cycling, 20% in public transport and a 16% increase in walking trips, resulting in a 10% reduction in car use as driver only trips in its South Perth trial. A year later these travel behaviour changes had largely been sustained.