

Towards a More Sustainable Future



MOVING AROUND THE BLUE MOUNTAINS

A Summary of Trends Issues and Key Ideas

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Introduction

Getting from one place to another (ie connecting with our destinations) has been influenced over time by changes in technology. Milestone inventions such as the wheel have impacted in a major way on transport modes. Generally faster and more convenient public and private transport has been seen as progressive.

Urban structure and transport systems shape each other. The flexibility and convenience of motorised transport, in particular the car, has in turn influenced choices about the way our settlements have grown. Our cities and settlements continue to sprawl as we maintain our preference for the “quarter acre” block. This in turn has led to increased reliance on the car and a decrease in the provision of public transport infrastructure because of distance and cost. Transport planners are now recognising that there are dangers in over dependence on motor vehicles. The motor vehicle is seen to have inherent worth because of its relative speed and absolute flexibility. However it is due to its flexibility that the motor vehicle has some unforeseen and undesirable consequences. Use of motor vehicles helps to support dispersed development and settlement.

Consequent increases in travel length, travel time and traffic congestion can eliminate the advantages of motorised transport and impact on local amenity and the natural environment.

Urban areas dominated by road infrastructure to accommodate high car usage generally suffer poor amenity and congestion. Allowing high dependency on cars often reduces accessibility and significantly impacts on the environment. (DUAP, 2001). Road safety and road trauma is a concern at the national, local and personal level. The impact of increasing car use on our health is also a significant issue. Researchers point out that even though there is a high use of motor cars, a significant proportion of people who have become car dependent would prefer to travel less by car. In addition those without access to a car are increasingly disadvantaged in a car dominated society.

In discussing the relative benefits of different transport modes and the way in which our transport systems work, issues relating to “accessibility” are now increasingly raised.



An emerging theme from the literature is that “mobility” does not necessarily equate with “accessibility”. “Access” is considered to be a key underpinning frame for an “equitable” society. Accessibility includes not only the ability and opportunity to move from one place to another but also the ability to access resources, destinations, (ie places of employment services and facilities including recreation) and other people (ie families and communities).

Planning for accessibility addresses the ability to carry out a range of daily activities with a minimum of travel. Accessibility planning emphasises demand management. It seeks to manage physical space and resources to avoid or minimise motorised travel and encourage travel on environmentally sustainable modes such as public transport, cycling and walking. (DUAP, 2001).

In the Blue Mountains

The ability to move around and access services and facilities is critical to every aspect of life in the Mountains.

Many locations in our area can only be accessed easily by car. Development along spines has increased our reliance on cars.

Many Mountains residents, principally children, young people and the elderly, do not have access to a car and need alternate forms of transport to access shops, schools and recreation areas. In 1996 at least one in ten households in the Mountains had no car. In some parts of the Upper Mountains the figure is one in five households. Pedestrian access, particularly for people with disabilities and parents with prams, is also often constrained through lack of “accessible paths of travel” to services and facilities such as shops and railway stations. Despite the hilly terrain, cycling is a favoured mode of transport for children and adolescents, providing them with low cost mobility.

Public transport services are important particularly for those with no car access. The railway line runs directly through most towns in the city. However, local bus services are more limited with frequency, convenience, reliability and routing identified as major issues.



Public transport services in the Mountains are under utilised during off peak, evening and weekend periods. Were demand to increase, current infrastructure could support a doubling (as occurred with the Olympics) in rail service frequency.

While the Blue Mountains has an under-used rail system it has an over-used road transport corridor. The RTA project to widen the highway from two to four lanes is targeted for completion in 2010. Highway widening has often made "local" travel across villages more difficult. The number of heavy trucks on the great Western Highway carrying freight has increased significantly. Road injuries and fatalities, particularly for pedestrians are of growing concern.

Transport movement issues and access to basic services are of concern for residents of the Blue Mountains. The limited public transport system, the impact of the Transport Corridor, the physical geography of the Mountains and the high numbers of older people, people with disabilities and families with young children combine to make transport issues pivotal to addressing the needs of residents now and in the future.

How can we improve our connectivity with our destinations and each other?



Where we are now

What you said in surveys focus groups and workshops

- You want improvements to public transport including better coordination of train and bus services
- There are new trains and better timetables but track work is still a major disruption and concern
- There is a need to better promote and inform people of available public transport services
- There is increased air and noise pollution from traffic
- You want fewer heavy trucks on the highway
- You are concerned about the widening of the Great Western Highway and its impact on local access and village life
- You are concerned about the safety of the Great Western Highway
- You want to see the Transport Corridor managed as a whole including more resources for upgrading railway stations, access and bus stops
- Cycling and walking should be promoted more
- Many facilities and venues are still not accessible
- You want improved pedestrian paths around towns (wheelchairs and prams)
- Services should be centralised to improve ability of people to access them

What other research is telling us

- In 1996 the most commonly used means of transport to work was the car either as driver or passenger with 75% of people travelling this way (ABS, 1996)
- The form of transport most used by domestic and international visitors to the Blue Mountains region was a motor vehicle (Tourism Profile, 2000)
- With our increasing use of cars adults are walking less and children are being driven more because of concerns about personal and road safety (Jones and Cunningham, 1999)



- The transport sector is the third largest contributor to Australia's greenhouse emissions representing about 17% of national emissions and 24% of all energy emissions (NSW State of the Environment, 2000)
- A large proportion of the Blue Mountains population lives in close proximity to the Transport Corridor and is subject to noise and air emissions from cars, heavy vehicles and trains (BMCC State of the Environment, 2000)
- Planning for automobility rather than accessibility has resulted in car dependence (Curtis, 2001)
- Just over one in ten households in the Blue Mountains have no car and in the Upper Mountains one in five (ABS, 1996)
- Since 1995 more than \$210 million has been invested upgrading roads in the Blue Mountains and the Central West .
- The market share of non-bulk freight carried on the inter state rail network is steadily falling with more freight being carried on roads - road efficiency improvements have contributed to this (Interstate Rail Network Audit, 2001)
- The shift of freight haulage from rail to road has increased truck traffic on the Great Western Highway
- Heavy vehicles were involved in 53% of fatal crashes on the Great Western Highway but were deemed to be the cause in only 16% (NRMA, 1997)
- Vehicle crashes on the highway decreased from 520 in 1986 to 400 in 1994 and have since increased to 450 in 1996 (NRMA, 1997)



Where we are heading

What the research is telling us

- The Great Western Highway will be upgraded to 4 lanes by 2010 (BMCC, 2001)
- The growing proportion of older people will place different demands on the transport system. This may mean a further increase in the proportion of leisure and recreation trips and a decrease in the proportion of trips occurring during peak times (Curtis, 2001)
- The increasing proportion of older people with dependence on car use who may no longer be fit to drive in the future will have a profound effect on their accessibility if they have always travelled by car (Curtis, 2001)
- 56% of Australian adults are overweight or obese. By adults walking only 30 minutes a day the result would be a 30% reduction in cardiovascular disease, 30—50% reduction in diabetes, cancer prevention, injury prevention and a reduction in mental health illness (stress and depression) (Shilton, 2001)
- The RTA's *Road Transport Future Directions* paints the following stark picture of what life in Sydney will be like in the year 2016 if the increasing dependency on cars continues unabated:
 - * A 67% increase in road travel demand (more than double the expected population increase)
 - * A 600% increase in time lost due to traffic congestion during the morning peak period
 - * A 23% increase in vehicle air pollutants which form over 60% of Sydney's air pollution
 - * A 68% increase in real terms in road accident costs
 - * A \$1.35 billion increase in the annual running cost of running NSW transport systems (WSROC, 1995)



Where do we want to be?

What the people of the Blue Mountains are saying

- A transport system which is safe, effective, convenient, reliable and affordable
- A reduction in the reliance on private vehicles for transport
- Frequent, reliable, safe and affordable train and bus services
- Coordinated bus and train services
- Improved cycleways and footpaths facilitating walking and use of bikes
- Better access across villages (overpasses etc)
- Better access between villages -alternative routes to highway
- A reduction in freight and through traffic in the Blue Mountains
- Dual carriageways the length of the highway
- The Transport Corridor managed as a whole
- Quality and safe roads
- More local jobs and less commuting



Challenges and Opportunities

Challenges

- The Transport Corridor through the Blue Mountains provides a major link between eastern and western New South Wales
- Blue Mountains towns and villages are split by the road and rail transport corridor
- Various policies funding arrangements and taxing regimes favour road over rail freight transport
- Funding priorities favour the development of road infrastructure at the expense of public transport infrastructure
- Development along ridges strains resources and isolates those without access to a car
- The relatively small size of the Blue Mountains population reduces the priority of the State Rail Authority to allocate additional resources to increase train services in the area
- The rugged Blue Mountains terrain makes it difficult for people to move around

Opportunities

- The urban forms that have developed within the Blue Mountains are conducive to collective modes of transportation. The spinal corridor that the GWH and railway provides increases the proximity and level of connection that residents have to transport services.
- Better integration of our land uses and transport planning – for example more local work will reduce commuting and number of cars on highway with benefits to environment and improved accessibility to services
- The location of the urban areas atop the water supply catchment areas for Sydney increases the imperative for Blue Mountains residents to reduce reliance on fossil fuels and use more sustainable forms of transport