

The Secretary
Department of Transport and Regional Services
GPO Box 594
Canberra ACT 2601
Email: corridorstrategies@dotars.gov.au

16 July 2007

Re: Sydney-Dubbo Corridor Strategy

Dear Sir / Madam,

The Institute of Public Works Engineering Australia (IPWEA) is a not for profit membership based professional organisation representing engineers and others involved in the provision of public works and services predominantly in the local government sphere.

This submission has been prepared by the Institute's NSW Division, IPWEA (NSW), on behalf of its members working in the 152 local councils in this State.

Background

Local Government in NSW has management responsibility for around 80% of the total road network. Councils maintain a total of 141,959 km of regional and local roads having a replacement value of \$30.8 billion.¹

While councils do not control and manage the National or State Road Networks they do have responsibility for management of the regional and local road networks which provide the road links to the transport terminals and local distribution centres.

Local Government is also responsible for land use planning at the local (LEP) and regional (REP) levels. This locally focussed planning is an essential element in making sure that transport routes are both efficient and effective.

IPWEA (NSW) Views

IPWEA (NSW) is fully supportive of the intent of the Sydney – Dubbo Corridor Strategy. Identification of the growth of the transport task and development of strategies to meet this demand are essential for the future sustainability of local communities. The remainder of this submission will briefly outline some of the local issues that need to be addressed in conjunction with this strategy and suggest some avenues for participation by councils in implementing the approach.

¹ IPWEA (NSW) Roads & Transport Directorate *Road Asset Benchmarking Project* September 2006

Rail Connections

Over the past five to ten years councils across NSW have pleaded to have branch and spur lines retained. Despite this ongoing campaign a considerable number of rail lines have been withdrawn from service. This has had a major impact in regional areas in that bulk produce such as wheat and rice which was previously transported by rail is now being transported by road. This has a twofold effect on the local road network. Firstly, an increase in heavy vehicles is adding considerably to total traffic flows and having an adverse impact on local amenity and general road safety. Secondly, the increase in heavy vehicles is substantially increasing axle loadings (Equivalent Standard Axle (ESA)) on local roads resulting in considerably reduced pavement lives.

IPWEA (NSW) fully supports the proposed improvements to the rail corridor, but would like to see an increased emphasis on improving rail capacity in the short to medium term. The upgrading of rail bridges and other rail infrastructure should be given a higher priority than is outlined in the Strategy.

Asset Management

The recent Independent Inquiry into the Financial Sustainability of NSW Local Government (Allan Enquiry) has driven home to Local Government the need for long term financial plans supported by long term asset management plans. The State Auditor General has reached a similar conclusion in relation to the State Road System in NSW. These views are supported by the deficiencies contained in the Strategy.

There are a number of references throughout the Strategy document to pavement condition but there is no definition of the term. It is unclear what data is available and how confident the road managers are of the ability of existing pavements to carry the predicted increase in traffic. If the assessment is based on roughness alone it may not provide a complete picture of structural soundness or otherwise. This is particularly important in assessing the possible implications of the introduction of HML and PBS vehicles on the network.

IPWEA (NSW) fully supports the development of a strategic focus for the corridor and suggests that this approach should include the development of detailed road and rail asset management plans to ensure that adequate funding is available to meet the transport task in future years.

East – West Highway Links

The Corridor Strategy correctly identifies a number of major issues associated with the existing road link across the Blue Mountains. It is our view that these issues are not adequately addressed by the Strategy.

The Strategy does not envisage a B Double connection between the eastern and western sides of the Blue Mountains. It concentrates on the safety and environmental issues associated with the Great Western Highway but does not seriously consider upgrading of the Bells Line of Road as an alternate heavy vehicle route.

By its nature, the Great Western Highway is attempting to meet a number of different functional needs. It must carry local traffic wanting to access shops and schools, it must carry arterial traffic from town to town and to work places at Penrith and Lithgow and it must carry highway traffic from the Central West to Sydney. If priority is given to highway traffic then towns along the Great Western Highway would effectively be cut in half.

Development of the Bells Line of Road would allow these conflicts to be minimised. This strategy could also allow the development of a B Double link between the major production areas of the Central West and Sydney. Such a link would further improve efficiency and reduce transport costs for industry in the Central West. The Strategy suggests development of the Bells Line of Road as a secondary aim which would commence after 2015. This option should be included as an immediate priority.

The Local Road Network

The effective operation of the road component of the Sydney – Dubbo corridor requires that access between freight origin / destinations and the corridor be provided over the local / regional road system. As noted in the Strategy Report, the corridor road system passes through a number of townships resulting in a number of unsatisfactory outcomes. These same issues are of greater concern to local councils in relation to the local road network.

In summary, the issues of concern to councils arising from the increasing freight task are:

1. Increased traffic volumes resulting in increased local traffic conflicts and congestion.
2. A higher proportion of heavy vehicles causing increased damage to road pavements.
3. Higher axle loadings causing increased damage to road pavements.
4. Increased noise, vehicle exhaust and traffic congestion together cause a reduction in local amenity.
5. Increased vehicle volumes combined with an increase in heavy vehicles create a range of local safety issues resulting in an increase in accident rates.
6. Local access needs create additional safety issues as traffic volumes increase.

Councils are already being stretched financially and are unable to meet the funding gap for maintenance of their local road networks. The expected increase in the freight task without additional funding being made available for maintenance of the local road network will create a further barrier to the efficiency of the Sydney – Dubbo Corridor.

Pavement Loadings

The need to meet the future increased freight task will lead to an increase on local / regional road pavements resulting in a decrease in the length of pavement life. This will occur irrespective of whether GML loadings are maintained (more trips), HML is introduced (a decrease in dynamic loading compensating for an increase in payload with less trips) or PBS

is introduced (bigger payloads on more axles). There will be a corresponding decrease in pavement life across the local road network. This will occur without any avenue available to councils to meet the increased cost to the local community.

Consideration needs to be given to developing an equitable funding mechanism to meet the increased local road maintenance costs being borne by local government as a result of increased freight movement.

Land Use Planning

A number of the issues identified in the corridor report point to the need for closer links to be established between local and regional land use planning and state and national transport planning. If land use planning at the local level does not take account of national transport proposals then it will be difficult to address the safety and amenity issues of concern to Local Government. In order to achieve this outcome Local Government must become involved in the strategic transport planning process through a comprehensive consultative procedure.

Conclusion

IPWEA (NSW) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Sydney – Dubbo Corridor Strategy and raises the following Local Government issues for consideration:

1. Identification of the growth of the transport task and development of strategies to meet this demand are essential for the future sustainability of local communities
2. IPWEA (NSW) fully supports the proposed improvements to the rail corridor, but would like to see an increased emphasis on improving rail capacity in the short to medium term. The upgrading of rail bridges and other rail infrastructure should be given a higher priority than is outlined in the Strategy.
3. The strategy is deficient in that it does not allow for the development of a B Double link between the major production areas of the Central West and Sydney. Such a link would further improve efficiency and reduce transport costs for industry in the Central West. To achieve this outcome, development of the Bells Line of Road should be included as an immediate priority.
4. IPWEA (NSW) fully supports the development of a strategic focus for the Sydney – Dubbo corridor and suggests that this approach should include the development of detailed road and rail asset management plans to insure that adequate funding is available to meet the transport task in future years.
5. Councils are already being stretched financially and are unable to meet the funding gap for maintenance of their local road networks. The expected increase in the freight task without additional funding being made available for maintenance of the local road network will create a further barrier to the efficiency of the Sydney – Dubbo Corridor.

6. An equitable funding mechanism needs to be developed to meet the increased local road maintenance costs being borne by local government as a result of increased freight movement.
7. Local Government must be engaged in the strategic transport planning function through a comprehensive consultative process.

IPWEA (NSW) would like to thank DoTARS for the opportunity to comment on the Sydney – Adelaide Corridor Strategy. Further information on this submission can be obtained from the principal contacts for this submission:

Mick Savage – Manager IPWEA (NSW) Roads and Transport Directorate

Telephone: 8267 3000

Mobile: 0418 808 085

Fax: 9283 5255

Email: msavage@ipwea.org.au

Mark Turner - Executive Manager IPWEA (NSW)

Telephone: 8267 3011

Mobile: 0418 971 704

Fax: 9283 5255

Email: mturner@ipwea.org.au

For further information in relation to the submission please do not hesitate to contact either Mick or myself

Yours faithfully



Mark Turner
Executive Manager
IPWEA (NSW)