

3 October 2012

Infrastructure NSW recommends major CBD bus and light rail improvements

The State Infrastructure Strategy has called for the introduction of an underground Bus Rapid Transit system and two major interchanges to revolutionise the Sydney CBD among eight key recommendations for bus and light rail released today.

The 20-year Strategy, prepared by Infrastructure NSW for the NSW Government, focuses on both the Sydney CBD and suburban areas where bus services are the only available public transport option and are being adversely affected by traffic conditions.

Infrastructure NSW Chief Executive Paul Broad said addressing congestion in Sydney's CBD was a major objective of the Strategy, which sought to put NSW in the best position possible for economic success.

"We need to decongest our global city if we are to increase productivity and grow the economy. What the Sydney CBD needs is transformation through a mixture of operational reforms and capital investment in public transport," Mr Broad said.

Key bus and light rail recommendations are:

- A **CBD Transit Improvement Plan** that involves construction of a **Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) bypass tunnel for CBD bus services** to take most peak buses off congested streets, delivering better travel times for passengers. It would also involve providing bus/rail underground interchanges at **redeveloped Wynyard and Town Hall stations**.
- The estimated cost of this project is \$2 billion and will yield significant benefits for both rail and bus passengers. This will also enable part of George Street to become pedestrian-only without the disruption associated with light rail proposals.
- A \$500 million **extension of light rail** from Central through the Moore Park precinct to the University of NSW.
- **Operational bus reforms in the Sydney CBD** to further improve running times and reduce congestion, in line with the Long Term Transport Master Plan.
- **Additional Sydney Airport bus services** implemented within the next five years.
- **Fare reform** including better off-peak rail incentives at CBD stations. Infrastructure NSW also recommends reducing the funding transport agencies receive from public subsidies to levels determined efficient by IPART.

Mr Broad said the Strategy was based on the principle that value for money demanded a more prudent approach to infrastructure planning including greater use and optimisation of existing assets before embarking on new projects. This had the merit of being less expensive and often quicker to achieve benefits for public transport passengers.

“Much can be achieved through incremental and operational bus improvements, many of which have been identified in the Long Term Transport Master Plan,” he said.

Infrastructure NSW was strongly focused on addressing pinch points of which the greatest is the Sydney CBD.

“We concluded that the best approach for the Sydney CBD is to make the most of existing, under-optimised transport modes before introducing additional modes such as light rail,” he said.

“The CBD Transit Improvement Plan is an exciting opportunity to transform the quality, capacity and speed of public transport services and is the result of an extended consideration of the available options.

“BRT has been successfully implemented in Brisbane where buses travel in a dedicated corridor separated from general traffic to provide a congestion-free trip.

“BRT is capable of getting the vast majority of bus services off the city’s streets using a purpose-built tunnel that links with the rail network.

“As well as reducing travel times and congestion, it would also ultimately be less intrusive in its impact on road traffic than light rail.

“There is no doubt that the Sydney CBD more so than anywhere else is complex and trying to get the transport mix right is a big challenge.

“Whatever option you take, fixing the CBD will be challenging and will cause some disruption and require careful planning. The Strategy will help guide future Government decision making as it addresses this issue so critical to NSW’s economic future.”

Mr Broad said there was a good case for developing a light rail line through the Moore Park area to the University of NSW and this should be advanced within the next five years.

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Summary of bus and light rail recommendations

- CBD Transit Improvement Program worth an estimated \$2 billion comprising:
 - A Bus Rapid Transit tunnel from the Harbour Bridge to the Town Hall, taking all peak Broadway buses, 75 per cent of peak Harbour Bridge buses and some Anzac Bridge buses out of the CBD traffic mix and speeding up services significantly. Options include reusing old tram tunnels as well as construction of new sections.
 - Underground bus/rail interchanges linking to modernised stations at Wynyard and Town Hall.
 - Pedestrianise the central part of George St.
- Develop and construct Anzac Parade Light Rail from Central to Moore Park and the University of NSW at an estimated cost of \$500 million based on the Gold Coast Light Rail. The project is proposed to be advanced in the next five years.
- Bus priority program comprising:
 - Northern Beaches bus corridor improvement plan to be delivered within five to 10 years at an estimated cost of \$200 million. The program would include augmentation of Spit Bridge to improve bus access and speeds and priority lanes. Options for considerations include a “clip on” lane to be added to the existing Spit Bridge and measures to make six lanes of traffic available on Military Road including property acquisition and reduced parking.
 - Incremental bus priority measures to improve bus travel around Parramatta, Victoria Road and other strategic corridors as identified in the Long Term Transport Master Plan. This would cost an estimated \$200 million and would be delivered within five to 10 years.
 - After year 10 of the Strategy, development and construction of a transitway linking Parramatta and the Macquarie Park area. This is estimated to cost around \$400 million.
- Reform CBD bus routing to reduce congestion – completed within five years through operational reforms with no capital costs.
- A package of cost-neutral operational improvements to public transport services for Sydney Airport, including additional bus services within the next five years.

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