

STEP Inc

Community-based Environmental Conservation since 1978

The General Manager
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Dear Sir

Draft Integrated Transport Strategy, S08355

This is a brave undertaking in the context of most of the variables to transport being in the hands of the State Government while the behaviour of adjacent LGAs and their residents is largely out of the control of Ku-ring-gai. Further changes to the planning regime are likely now that there is a new State Government and thus some of the assumptions will become invalid. Nevertheless, there are some worthwhile recommendations coming out of the report. We comment as follows.

1. Sustainability

'Sustainability' refers to a situation where the proposed actions don't downgrade the opportunities or environment for future generations. There is nothing sustainable covered in this report as Ku-ring-gai heads towards an over-populated and over-crowded future.

2. Managing congestion

Various methods of reducing congestion are discussed. For instance building the F3 to M2 connection, restricting parking, better public transport, improving intersections and pinch-spots and so on. The reality is, however, that for Ku-ring-gai it will never be possible to build enough roads to ease congestion. Any happening such as the F3 to M2 connection will simply allow more people to drive instead of catching the train, to decide to live further from work and to leave later in the morning, until the congestion again reaches the point when the reverse decisions are made.

The huge increases in population planned for Ku-ring-gai and, more importantly, for surrounding suburbs including the Central Coast will ensure that any improvements in road capacity are short-lived. That notwithstanding, many of the proposed improvements will improve safety and accessibility outside peak periods and thus are worthwhile.

One factor that would reduce congestion is cost. Significant increases in the cost of fuel might well lead to different transport choices and demographic changes. Similarly, congestion pricing on roads will, if severe enough, also reduce congestion. Despite these possibilities being outside the direct control of Council it is nevertheless appropriate that Council understand them, be prepared for them and to lobby for or against them. Real reduced congestion would of course allow buses to replace cars with huge consequent benefits in cost and greenhouse gas production.

The *NSROC Sustainability Plan* highlights that the use of private cars is trending upwards, despite increased road congestion. Given the goals of the *NSROC Plan*, Ku-ring-gai Council should consider including in the ITS a proposal for the introduction of an urban based levy on the owners of private cars which travel more than a set distance each calendar year. This would serve as a de facto cost increase for local commuters who choose not to use the public transport system.

3. Trains and buses

The North Shore line is already congested and has limited additional peak capacity. Buses will mostly have to battle through narrow roads with other traffic. It is difficult to understand how these modes will be of much help as population inexorably increases.

4. Community transport services – an out of the box solution?

The ITS also identifies a heavy reliance by Ku-ring-gai residents on private vehicles, together with a high level of vehicle ownership and a high proportion of residents who either work from home or are no longer working. It also points out that only 25% of residents live within walking distance of a rail station. These factors happen to combine to provide the basis for a potential solution for residents to enjoy safe and convenient access to and from their nearest rail station. This could occur via an innovative "community taxi" system using local resident's private vehicles to provide access to local and intra-regional bus and railroad systems. Participating home based residents with vehicles in Ku-ring-gai could reach paid pooling agreements with neighbours and local residents, so as to pick them up from home and to drop them off at local transport destinations, both in the morning and the afternoon. This idea is based on successful "privateer" systems which operate in some overseas cities. It would clearly

need State Government legislative support to become operational, but its attractions lie in its use of existing resources to fill many of the needs identified in the draft ITS.

5. Bikeways

The proposal to extend the cycling network is to be applauded. It should be noted, however, that a narrow strip on the side of a narrow road with car parking allowed along it will not attract many users; they are simply too dangerous. It is therefore better to build no bicycle routes than to build dangerous ones.

It should be noted that the proposals for mountain bike trails have almost nothing to do with road cycling and that reference in the report is inappropriate.

6. Major developments

No reference is made to the congestion that will be added to the system from the huge development planned at and around the Adventist Hospital, the UTS site at Lindfield and the sporting complexes and further residential development proposed at the end of Bobbin Head Road at Turrumurra. In the first instance the hundreds of additional dwellings, the doubling of the hospital and the construction of a K-12 school on Fox Valley Road will throw that area into chaos that no amount of fiddling with intersections will fix. In the second, the hundreds of additional dwellings having only one exit at Eton Road will cause difficulties there and Bobbin Head Road is at risk of having traffic snarls to rival those that occur on Saturdays at Canoon Road.

7. Time frame

In our view the time frames of 5 years for short-term and 10 for long-term are far too short. 5, 10 and 25-year horizons would be more appropriate. Even if Sydney grows more slowly than the rest of Australia at, say, 1.2% p.a., it will be 33% bigger in 25 years. Some of that will be loaded into Ku-ring-gai but, disastrously for traffic, much will be located to the West and North as well as in the immediately surrounding suburbs. It behoves us to consider the implications of that.

8. Aging

There is discussion in the report on the age demographics. It's true enough that there is a larger aged cohort coming along. It would be a mistake, however, to assume that will be the case forever. One of the great difficulties we have is breaking free from the assumption that social or financial trends are permanent. They never are. For example, 20 years ago the Greiner Government wanted to sell half of Warrawee Public School because enrolments had almost halved in the preceding years. They claimed that the decline would continue because no young people could afford to live in Ku-ring-gai; presumably the houses were to remain empty as the older people moved on. The community argued that that was simply a demographic bubble and that numbers would rebound and won the day and, indeed, the numbers have rebounded. So it will be with the need for aged care; it will reach a peak and then decline and fluctuate.

9. The environment

Most every report that is produced talks about protecting the environment. Every time we add another thousand people to Ku-ring-gai we lose part of our built heritage and natural ecosystems as trees are displaced and bushland appropriated. Transport needs will inevitably produce demands for roads and rail through bushland as well as for other infrastructure. Polluted stormwater runoff will increasingly degrade our streams and their surrounds. The concept that the environment will be protected in these circumstances is risible, and claims that it will all be sustainable are clearly nonsense.

10. Lobbying

The report refers to the need for Council to lobby the State Government and elsewhere regarding needs outside Council's control. We submit that all too often Council has been too compliant in this respect and should be much more outspoken on the very real threats to the quality of life in Ku-ring-gai, so many of which are reflected in the future for transport. There is nothing sustainable about unlimited growth and we face a very unsustainable future.

11. In summary

We recommend that the matters raised above be considered in finalising the Draft Strategy.

Yours faithfully

Barry Tomkinson
President