

10/11/09

The Manager
Mount Victoria to Lithgow Great Western Highway upgrade,
Roads and Traffic Authority
PO Box 334
PARKES NSW 2870

Dear Sir,

On behalf of the Central West Transport Forum I welcome the opportunity to make this submission to planning for the proposed upgrade of the Great Western Highway (GWH) between Mt Victoria and Lithgow. We feel that the current planning proposals are piecemeal and a holistic approach is essential.

Rationale:

In view of the regional importance of the GWH we believe that any serious consideration of this issue must involve only options that would result in a road of expressway standard.

There have been a number of planning investigations in recent years into aspects of improving access to Sydney from the Central West but advice received from the RTA indicates that a full investigation of this issue has never occurred. We are greatly concerned that the current fragmented planning strategy being applied to the GWH (part of which includes this MtVictoria/Lithgow investigation) is not achieving that objective. We further believe the lack of progress in this matter is directly attributable to basic systemic problems in current road planning processes. If waste is to be avoided, productive planning must, at the early stages, identify problems and set goals for best solutions. Only after agreement on these aims can productive route planning proceed. This has not happened.

The GWH is a major inter-regional connecting road servicing a large area of New South Wales with a range of industries and a substantial population. The terrain constraints and urban congestion across the Blue Mountains have always been obstacles to the development of the GWH. This continues to cause major losses in time, energy and safety and consequently severely disadvantages our region. We believe that the standard of any future road project being considered for the GWH must at least be on an equal footing with the other major roads connecting regional NSW to Sydney.

We also believe that any sound investigation of the issue must include consideration of all feasible options, particularly those that would maximise connection benefits for both western traffic and Blue Mountains road users. For this reason we are seeking an investigation of a new bypass route south of the present GWH as well as a reconsideration of Newnes Plateau options. We believe that without such a holistic approach to planning, productive progress is impossible.

The current proposals:

According to the RTA Road Design Guide relating to 110 k/hr expressway standards, curves should not be less than 600 metres radii and grades should not exceed 5%.

Information supplied by the RTA and from officers at the consultation workshops, suggest that the standards envisaged for the options now being considered fall short of these criteria. This seems to apply particularly to the grades.

While the bypass options for MtVictoria appear to have some merit, there are major problems with the sharp curve in the Forty Bends area and the unavoidable steep grade of the River Lett Hill. These problems are further made worse as all traffic is unavoidably delivered into the urban area of Lithgow. Furthermore, insistence on maintaining the route through the Hartley Valley would result in continued massive energy wastage (the height of the GHW at the junction of the Mudgee road at Marrangaroo is almost the same as that at MtVictoria). On these grounds, and in view of the Newnes Plateau options which we know could easily avoid these problems while at the same time allowing expressway construction standards, we believe that the proposals being offered are simply not viable. There are further considerations of cost and disturbance to properties in the Hartley Valley.

We commend the efforts of the RTA's officers in the way these workshops have been conducted and for compiling the informative instruction materials provided. This applies particularly to the publishing of details of community feedback information. Such information is essential to maintain transparency and give some public reassurance.

We believe however, that much more could have been achieved through wider and more extensive representative public participation. There has been a very obvious absence of industry, local government and road user leadership from the Central West at all these meetings. Reliance on voluntary participation has proved inadequate. As this planning relates to the development of a major inter-regional connection utility, a wider selection of meeting venues may have helped to balance this parochialism problem.

As mentioned in my previous submission to the workshop participants survey dated 11/7/09, I believe the use of standard topographic mapping rather than the "Google pictures" supplied, would enable a better understanding of the subject. Unlike mapping of many other areas in the State, detailed and up-to-date topographic mapping of this area is readily available. This information provides easy identification of details such as levels and scales for grade and curve assessments, existing structures, roads, property boundaries and distances etc.

Summary.

We believe the planning and proposals offered are deficient in the following ways:

- Use of the existing GWH alignment through the Hartley Valley will ensure continued massive energy wastage.
- Curve and grades that would comply with expressway standards are almost certain to be unachievable.
- The proposals do not bypass the urban area of Lithgow nor are any future extension proposals being offered that would achieve this.
- With this planning approach, very substantial resources would be needed to adequately bypass MtVictoria
- There will be some significant disturbance to private property throughout the length of the proposed projects.
- Most, if not all of the above problems are either avoidable or could be substantially reduced by using the alternative Newnes Plateau option.
- Regional consultation throughout this planning process has been almost entirely absent.
- No agreement has been reached on the design standards for this road.

The above criticisms show that deficiencies could have been avoided by applying an holistic approach.

We look forward to receiving further information from the RTA about public feedback to this investigation.

Yours sincerely,

Graham Dun
Central West Transport Forum