

# Australia's oldest road problem: A satisfactory crossing of the Blue Mountains?

## Central West Transport Forum (CWTF)

### Proposed Lithgow/Mount Victoria, Great Western Highway (GWH) upgrade plan, 2012.

Members of the Central West Transport Forum are questioning the wisdom of the allocation of \$250M (July 2012) for the partial redevelopment of the Great Western Highway between Mt. Victoria and Lithgow.

#### Our View

CWTF believes the primary purpose of our highway system is to provide inter-regional connection. Local connection is a secondary function.

Given this definition we believe future planning should ensure all highways are built to enable express traffic flow in corridors fully removed from urban areas but at the same time allowing good connections to those areas. This would require agreement on design criteria. This agreement has never been established for this project.

CWTF also believes that before any meaningful planning can be done on this section of the GWH a research program to include all feasible options for a full express road crossing of the Blue Mountains must be carried out. Advice received from the RTA indicates that this has never been done. The report that should establish this is yet to be released. Present indications suggest that this information will be unlikely to emerge from current investigations.

#### The current proposal's weaknesses include:

- Massive energy wastage caused by the GWH's descent into the Hartley Valley at the 700M level and the need to climb 300M back up to the 1000M level at either end, both Marrangaroo and Mt. Victoria.
- The curve at South Bowenfels is too sharp.
- The shadowing and consequent icing in the Hassan's Walls area appears to be reduced but not removed.
- The project delivers all GWH traffic into the streets of Lithgow. No alternatives are proposed.
- To make this proposal finally fully operational, tunnel construction must be completed; tunnelling cost together with on-going ventilation maintenance would appear to make the project prohibitive.
- Use of tunnels could involve some restrictive conditions on use for hazardous or oversize loads.
- There will be substantial disturbance to private land within the project area.

#### The Alternative.

Most of the above problems could be overcome by using a route from Mt. Victoria along the Darling Causeway through Bell to Clarence then through the ADF Reserve to Marrangaroo. The ADF's objections to such a proposal should be the subject of more open and rigorous public inquiry.

State Planning, under the EP&A Act, has a responsibility to ensure planning processes for infrastructure are relevant and lead to efficient outcomes.

Why is the same scrutiny currently being applied to private building and land development not being applied to highway development?

Public concern is mounting about the passage of highway traffic through most major towns throughout NSW. Why is planning for efficient bypass routes not an essential item in the formulation of Local Environmental Plans?

Local Councils are attempting to address the increasing problem of highway traffic within their streets. This is often done by attempting to solve a number of problems with a single project which usually compromises good outcomes for highway users. Planning these issues needs independent overseeing by State Planning and the RMS to ensure some management of the parochialism that arises from these situations. There are examples of this interference in present GWH planning.

The RMS (RTA) has a monopoly of the planning, construction and regulation of road use but unlike most other major government service providers, has no regional advisory or liaison committees to enable direct and regular regional consultation. While release of information by the RMS has been generally good, a wider spread of consultation venues throughout the region may assist more balanced public participation in these matters. Maintaining good regional service equity in highway development is essential.

Public apathy presents a serious problem for highway development planning. Apart from Local Government, there is a lack of road user advocacy organisations in the Central West. This is indicative of the need for special measures to encourage greater public and industry participation in highway planning. This weakness should also be recognised and addressed by State Planning.

More information: [www.centralwesttransportforum.org](http://www.centralwesttransportforum.org)

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