PO Box 40
Moonah TAS 7009
0438 243 533
mj.em.hangan@gmaill.com
18th September 2019

To the Legislative Council Committee inquiring into and reporting upon *the scope, causes, strategic planning processes and future initiatives to address traffic congestion in the Greater Hobart area.*

Please accept our formal and open submission into the causes and future initiatives to address traffic congestion in greater Hobart.

The Hobart Northern Suburbs Rail Action Group

The Hobart Northern Suburbs Rail Action group is a community group (est. 2010) working to promote the re-opening of passenger rail services along the disused railway between Hobart's Macquarie Point and Brighton (through Hobart's northern suburbs).

An *integrated* transport network is the key to addressing traffic congestion and rail is typically the centrepiece of any such network. The reliance on passenger rail to this end is manifest in growing and prosperous urban environments around Australia and overseas, particularly in addressing peak hour congestion. Hundreds of millions of dollars-worth of new rail projects and network extensions are currently underway across several Australian cities[1] - where the failure of road networks in alleviating congestion is inescapable (and where Federal and State Governments have entered funding arrangements to provide solutions). Hobart is in desperate need of a similar State and Federal response with results on the ground. In the latter decades of last century - with a stagnant population (& economy), Hobart's roads and highways were adequate in serving commuters. The same cannot be said today. Where there is an obvious solution - such as the northern rail corridor - it should be seized on.

In the current economic and population upswing, renewal of passenger rail is a once in a generation opportunity. Aside from sparking new housing construction along a dedicated transport corridor, the core benefit is a speedy efficient public transport service - outside public buses - which themselves exacerbate and suffer from traffic congestion at peak hours. Experience shows that over time, road builders rarely build a way out of traffic congestion. In a colourful simile it's been said that - fixing the problem by building more roads is akin to *'an overweight individual letting their belt out - one notch at*

[1] Adelaide, Brisbane, Canberra, Gold Coast, Melbourne, Newcastle, Perth, Sydney

a time'. There is no better example of this than Hobart's Brooker Highway and Main Road - the busiest and most congested of all Tasmania's traffic routes.

Running north - south parallel to the unused railway, the Brooker is Tasmania's key commuter and freight link in and out of its capital - and to all points north and west. With the closure of port freight services by rail in 2014 - the Brooker has taken an unbearable traffic load. Almost a decade ago it was assessed as carrying 50 thousand vehicles a day and approx. two million tonnes of freight per annum.[2] It's been widened and improved in parts - at staggering cost, but remains more congested at peak times than at any time in its past. The Brooker now approximates not so much a highway or freeway, as a multi-laned main road - having to serve major freight and trade vehicles into the capital, public, private and tourist buses, increased tourism traffic - on top of conveying tens of thousands residents daily. A series of traffic lights along its major intersections and a reduction in speed limits has simply accelerated its demise as Tasmania's most important highway. At morning peak times - the Elwick Rd/Racecourse intersection regularly sees cars backed up several kilometers north to Berriedale - yet there is little or no room to expand or by-pass it, because of the obvious constraints alongside its route into the city. Tasmania's major tourism drawcard - MONA - sits along the highway and has plans for major expansion, as well as new subdivisions which are planned for Glenorchy, Claremont and the Austin Ferry areas. The Highway is sure to get even less efficient in time.

Topographical barriers severely limit the planning of alternative road routes - particularly along the old Main Road heading north/south which is often congested with convoys of public buses dropping students off at several large primary and high schools at peak times. Smaller suburban alternatives - include the Lenah Valley, West Hobart single lane 'rat-run' via Augusta Road, which is inefficient and cannot be improved upon. Hobart's congestion and traffic times are beginning to weigh down its economic efficiency and act as a handbrake on aspects of its economy. 'Blue-sky thinking' which proposes to invest billions of public dollars on a tunnel to by-pass pinch points around Hobart, we contend is excessive - financially (and politically) unviable. More efficient public transport is the answer - but not necessarily more stop-start passenger vehicles on the same overstretched roads.

'Buses are caught-up in the same congestion as all other vehicles'

The only public transport option Hobart currently has is buses. While buses obviously provide a key role, as the sole provider they also pose a unique irony for planners; *' the more successful our public transport into Hobart becomes - the slower peak transport times in and out of the city might be'*. The Hobart Northern Suburbs Rail Action Group contends that those services in fact contribute to peak hour road congestion and slower travel times. So long as large and articulated buses - stopping and

[2] State Government 2010 Southern Integrated Transport Plan

starting at multiple bus stops - are relied on solely to reduce traffic congestion, no real gains can be made. Only an alternative transport method such as passenger rail - can lighten road congestion (in the northern routes to the city) by taking as many commuters off the roads as possible. As evident elsewhere in Australia where tram and rail have their own dedicated transport corridors - more modern, comfortable alternatives draw thousands of daily users away from using cars. Our group also contends that sluggish road travel times particularly at peak hour, is acting as a deterrent to large numbers of commuters who would switch to public transport if a better, faster, more comfortable option existed.

To succeed, the rail operation must be properly integrated with other modes including bus, ferry, park'n'ride, cycling, and walking. In addition, valuable real estate around station locations should be re-zoned for higher density residential and commercial purposes. A more efficient use of buses at peak times would be for a percentage to integrate with passenger rail stations along the northern corridor - to service the local area around those stations - possibly operating on one public transport ticket. This would act to lighten the numbers of buses moving smaller numbers of people in and out of the city along two congested arterials (to & from the northern suburbs) at peak times. Park and ride parking provided around Rail Stations would also encourage drivers to park their cars at stations along the rail corridor to Granton and Bridgewater and take rail into the heart of Hobart and its waterfront. Not only would it reduce road congestion it would allow many commuters to arrive into the city faster than the alternative. It's predicted a rail trip (making allowance for several stops along the way) would save anywhere between 10 and 20 minutes each way on a trip from Glenorchy to Hobart at peak times. It might also lead to more people cycling to stations and taking the train into the city, or taking a bicycle on a dedicated section of a train.

'Rail, the best option for the northern sections of greater Hobart'

While restoring rail services is often criticised as being too expensive, Hobart has been gifted with a dedicated corridor currently lying unused amid some of Hobart's most populated suburbs. The Hobart Northern Suburbs Rail Action group joins with a huge number of northern suburbs residents who believe this is nothing short of Government neglect. There are now too few excuses- not to proceed with a 5 year plan to restore rail to Hobart's public transport mix. Despite the single track railway, strategically located passing loops would allow movement of 1,000 people on each train in each direction every 12 minutes.

Much of the expense of establishing a service has already been spared. With the corridor already in place, the capital cost for enabling works at new station precincts, new trains, refurbished track, new stations, power supply, signal and level crossing upgrades ranges from $80m to $200m depending on route length, number and type of rail vehicles. While critics have suggested a dispersed population

makes such a service ‘unfeasible’, the last report by Infrastructure Tasmania failed to find evidence of any significant operating losses. The last modelling on the topic[3] suggested six million rides per annum on rail services between Hobart and Glenorchy. With operating costs then predicted at around 2.5 million dollars per annum as stated in the Government’s 2013 report, even fares as low as $1 would cover the annual operating costs.

The proposal has many key benefits for wider Hobart including access to renewed land and housing development along the current (To date, the project has been assessed in a rationalist passenger transport only approach without considering the wider benefits from land use improvements and economies of agglomeration). Importantly this will work to reduce future traffic congestion as the capital and northern suburbs continue to grow. Maintaining the rail link between Hobart and Bridgewater should also be considered strategically by maintaining the rail freight link to the working port of Hobart and the Risdon industrial precinct - as at present road freight is the sole means.

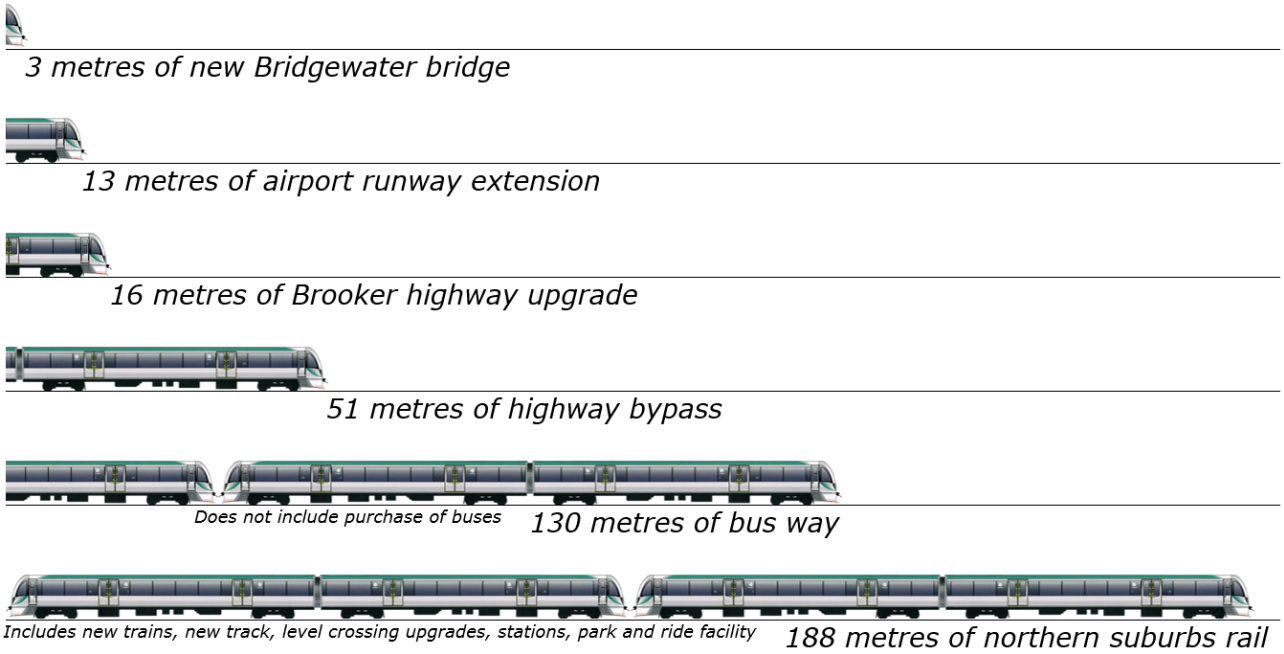
The Northern Suburbs Rail proposal has assumed Hobart wishes to be a livable, resilient, and sustainable place to live with the capacity for growth.

There are numerous solutions to Hobart’s traffic and housing challenges (growing pains), however restoring passenger rail on the existing railway delivers by far the best bang for buck. The time for talk has passed and it’s time for action!

[3] Stage 1 Light Rail Business Case - Hobart to Glenorchy, May 2013 (page 40)

HOBART
NORTHERN SUBURBS RAIL

What does $1 million get you in greater Hobart?



We urge committee members less familiar with the northern sections of greater Hobart, to visit sections of the rail corridor lying idle through New Town, Moonah, Glenorchy, Claremont and Austin's Ferry to fully appreciate the opportunity it presents. Depending on which sections are inspected, members will recognise the enormous future housing potential (from under-used sites) near-by or within close range of its route and how this would help alleviate future congestion through the north. As population continues to grow in Hobart, greater Glenorchy and further north, commuters must be tempted out of their cars (and off over-loaded roads) and into a modern, efficient, and environmentally sensible peak hour alternative. The Hobart Northern Suburbs Rail Action group and many in the community appreciate that this is by far the smartest option. With Hobart's topographical constraints restoring passenger rail is by far the best , most viable alternative for the northern section of city.

Michael Hangan,
President

HOBART
NORTHERN SUBURBS RAIL

Hobart Rail
www.hobartrail.com
The Hobart Northern Suburbs Railway is a once in a generation opportunity to renew Hobart and provide a catalyst for economic growth by utilising existing rail corridors to connect Hobart's suburbs.

The Hobart Northern Suburbs Rail Action Group

Hobart Rail

www.hobartrail.com

The Hobart Northern Suburbs Railway is a once in a generation opportunity to renew Hobart and provide a catalyst for economic growth by utilising existing rail corridors to connect Hobart's suburbs.