

The Cheaper, Smarter Alternative to Widening the Roads

Whenever there's a traffic jam, the major parties try to widen the road. For a short time, congestion eases, encouraging more people to drive, until the roads again become clogged. What do the major parties do then? They widen the road again. And then they wonder why our air is so polluted.

We don't have to keep widening roads. There are cheaper, smarter alternatives.

If Sydney's roads are not transporting sufficient people and goods, change the mode of transport on the road. Here is one way in which it could be done. (The Rail Now Campaign has not adopted this as its policy. It is simply a suggestion for heading in the right direction. We welcome other suggestions for getting a better return on the land invested in roads).

1. On 3 lane roads, progressively set aside the kerb side lane for buses, taxis and couriers only.
2. On sections of those 2 lane roads where it is practical, progressively set aside the kerb side lane as bus only or bus priority.
3. Offer new bus routes along the bus-only / bus priority lanes to Government and private operators, with preference being given to operators who already service such areas. (Existing operators are likely to benefit from economies of scale, which will keep costs down).
4. Offer the new routes on short-term, 5 year contracts, with the Government buying the buses, and leasing them to the operators, so that operators do not carry the risk of capital loss if the bus routes fails, and do not demand a fare which covers a return on that capital.
5. In the first contract, provide a Government guarantee to the operator which ensures a minimum payment covering wages, fuel and maintenance costs. This leaves the operators at risk only as to administrative overheads, yet retains their incentive to seek a profit.
6. Initially set the fares at a level which recovers the amount of the Government's minimum payment, plus a profit margin for the operator.
7. As routes become more profitable, the level of subsidy from the Government can be reduced.
8. Require the Roads and Traffic Authority to police compliance with the bus-only / bus priority measures according to published minimum monitoring standards, for which the RTA is held publicly accountable.
9. Pay for all measures by reducing the Sydney roads budget.

The results?

People would be forced out of cars on to public transport as soon as the bus routes commenced, since for many they would offer a better option. (Present policies force people to use cars).

More people per hour would be moved along existing roads - without the expense of

widening them.

The Government would subsidise the capital cost of the buses, instead of subsidising the capital cost of new roads. At present the Government does *not* seek a rate of return from motorists on the land invested in roads. A rate of return should not be sought on the capital invested in the buses until it is sought from the capital invested in roads.

Suggestion from Philip Howell, intended to generate discussion and the development of a more comprehensive proposal for more efficient use of our roads.