



Submission from Regional Development Australia *Illawarra*

Feasibility Study – High Speed Rail Network

Prepared by:

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Introduction

The Illawarra region is located approximately one hour south of Sydney and spans an area of 1,124 square kilometres. It is situated on a narrow coastal strip from Helensburgh in the north to Gerroa in the south. It encapsulates three local government areas of Wollongong, Shellharbour and Kiama and enjoys a mixed terrain of coastal, rural and urban environments.

Wollongong is the third largest city in New South Wales and the tenth largest city in Australia.

The Illawarra has a population of over 280,000 (2007) and a growth rate of 2.9 per cent (2006). The projected population for the region is 339,000 people by 2036.

The region is connected via three main road transport links being the F6 to Sydney, Picton Road to the west and the Princes Highway to the South Coast and beyond. A rail link extends from Bomaderry in the Shoalhaven to Kiama right through to Wollongong and the Sydney CBD.

The region has a strong industry base of manufacturing, mining, engineering, finance and business services, tertiary education, tourism and retail. The area also has one of Australia's most important deepwater ports, the Port of Port Kembla located 80 kilometres south of Sydney's CBD.

About RDA Illawarra

Regional Development Australia (RDA) Illawarra is the peak regional development consultative organisation for the Illawarra region (Wollongong, Shellharbour and Kiama). It is a locally based, not-for-profit, incorporated association.

RDA Illawarra is governed by an apolitical board of community members and business people, appointed by the Commonwealth and NSW Governments, who volunteer their time to promote the sustainable development of the Illawarra region. A small team of regional development practitioners (Chief Executive Officer, Project Manager, Green Jobs Illawarra Project Manager and Administration Officer) is employed by the RDA Illawarra Board, which receives operational funding from the Commonwealth and NSW Governments.

In broad terms the RDA's role is to be a link between the community, business and Government:

- Advising Government about needs and opportunities in the Illawarra;
- Providing whole-of-Government responses to opportunities and needs in the region; and
- Leading the implementation of economic development projects.

Our Aspirations

The Regional Development Australia Illawarra vision is for a sustainable region with cities and regional centres that offer higher quality of life, socially, economically, and environmentally, through high levels of employment with a highly skilled, adaptable, productive and inclusive community operating in a diverse, vibrant and growing economy.

Background to this submission

Following the announcement by the Minister for Infrastructure and Transport, the Hon Anthony Albanese MP, of the feasibility study to determine the economic benefits and financial viability of a High Speed Rail network along the Australian east coast, Federal Labor Members of Parliament, Sharon Bird MP and Stephen Jones MP, requested Regional Development Australia Illawarra explore how the Illawarra could be part of such a network.

A Working Group was established by RDA Illawarra to gather evidence for a strategic direction on how the Illawarra could be part of a High Speed Rail network between Brisbane and Melbourne.

The Working Group consulted with key organisations in the Illawarra, and with the local community to determine the level of need for, and local support for, the inclusion of the Illawarra in a High Speed Rail network. One of the key tools used to collate the information for this submission was an online survey instrument. A summary of the nearly 200 responses to this survey is available on request.

Regional Support

There is overwhelming support from key Illawarra organisations, and from the community, for a High Speed Rail link connecting the region to Sydney and to the other major centres along the Australian east coast.

The traffic corridor between Wollongong and Sydney is one of the most travelled pieces of road infrastructure in Australia and is used both for commuter travel, and for freight transport. With the projected increase in population in the Illawarra, the demands on this already strained piece of road infrastructure will intensify.

Approximately 97% of survey respondents were in favour of the inclusion of the Illawarra in a High Speed Rail network between Brisbane and Melbourne. The main reasons given for supporting the High Speed Rail link were:

- **Economic:** High Speed Rail access would attract business investment, and much-needed jobs to the area. Tourism to the region would be boosted, and it would also improve access to the region's highly-esteemed tertiary education institutions.
- **Environmental:** Reducing the more than 25,000 cars travelling daily to Sydney will reduce greenhouse gas emissions, ease fuel demands, and reduce air, water and noise pollution.
- **Connectivity:** Connectivity to other public transport options would be improved, Sydney residents would be attracted to the region for business, recreational and leisure activities, and connectivity to friends and relatives in other areas would be improved ; and
- **Social:** Quality of life would be improved for the region's thousands of commuters, as current travel time eats into quality family or personal time. Access would also be improved to health, education, entertainment and employment opportunities. Another significant advantage would be the reduction in loss of life and injury through traffic accidents.

Land Corridors

The land corridor options for the Illawarra spine can be broadly separated into two clear routes – a coastal route and an inland option. There is also an opportunity to consider a 'Park and Ride' option.

Suggested land corridors include:

- Modify the existing Wollongong – Moss Vale rail link, allowing integration of the network via current infrastructure;
- Modify the existing rail link through Wollongong's northern suburbs;
- Inland along the Hume Highway and then linking with Maldon-Dombarton rail link (although a feasibility study into the possible completion of the Maldon-Dombarton rail link has this line dedicated to freight use only);
- Inland or coastal to the Illawarra then through to Nowra, following Main Road 92 corridor to Canberra;

- Construct a High Speed Rail station on the highlands or Southern Sydney, with long-stay car park providing park and ride option.

Patronage

Current

Survey respondents report high levels of regular travel to Sydney, with approximately 47% travelling daily or weekly; and a further 49% travelling monthly to the city. The majority of travel (75%) was for work purposes, but results indicate that Illawarra residents regularly travel for recreational purposes (61%), and to visit friends and relatives (43%). Commuters also travel regularly for medical attention and to visit educational institutions. Currently, the most popular form of transport to Sydney is private motor vehicle, with nearly 80% of respondents opting to drive.

Travel to Melbourne and to Brisbane was generally an annual option, with 63% and 72% of respondents respectively indicating they travel by plane to these cities, primarily for recreational purposes or to visit family or friends.

Respondents reported they are also travelling regularly to:

- Canberra;
- South Coast;
- Southern Highlands;
- Newcastle; and
- Central Coast.

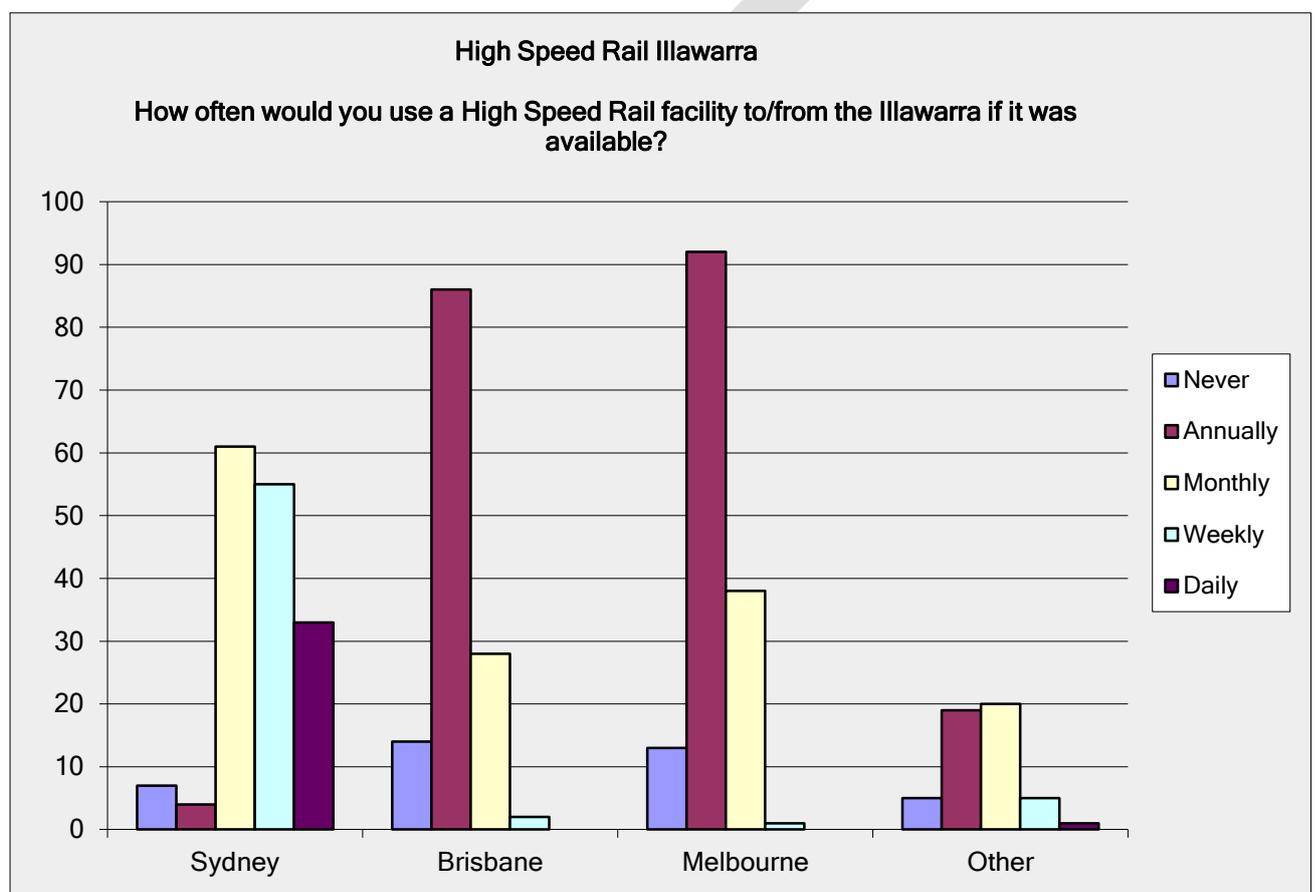
With a current population of over 280,000 (2007) and a growth rate of 2.9 per cent (2006), the projected population for the Illawarra region is 339,000 people by 2036. This increase in population will add to the consumer demand for a high speed connection to Melbourne and Brisbane from this region.

It may also be reasonably argued that a high speed Rail link would facilitate further population growth in the Illawarra and reduce pressure on the strained Western Sydney area. This accelerated growth in population would undoubtedly increase demand exponentially.

With High Speed Rail Option

Respondents were overwhelmingly supportive of a High Speed Rail option to the Illawarra. During the survey, respondents were asked to outline their projected use of a possible High Speed Rail link.

The following graph indicates projected usage rates.

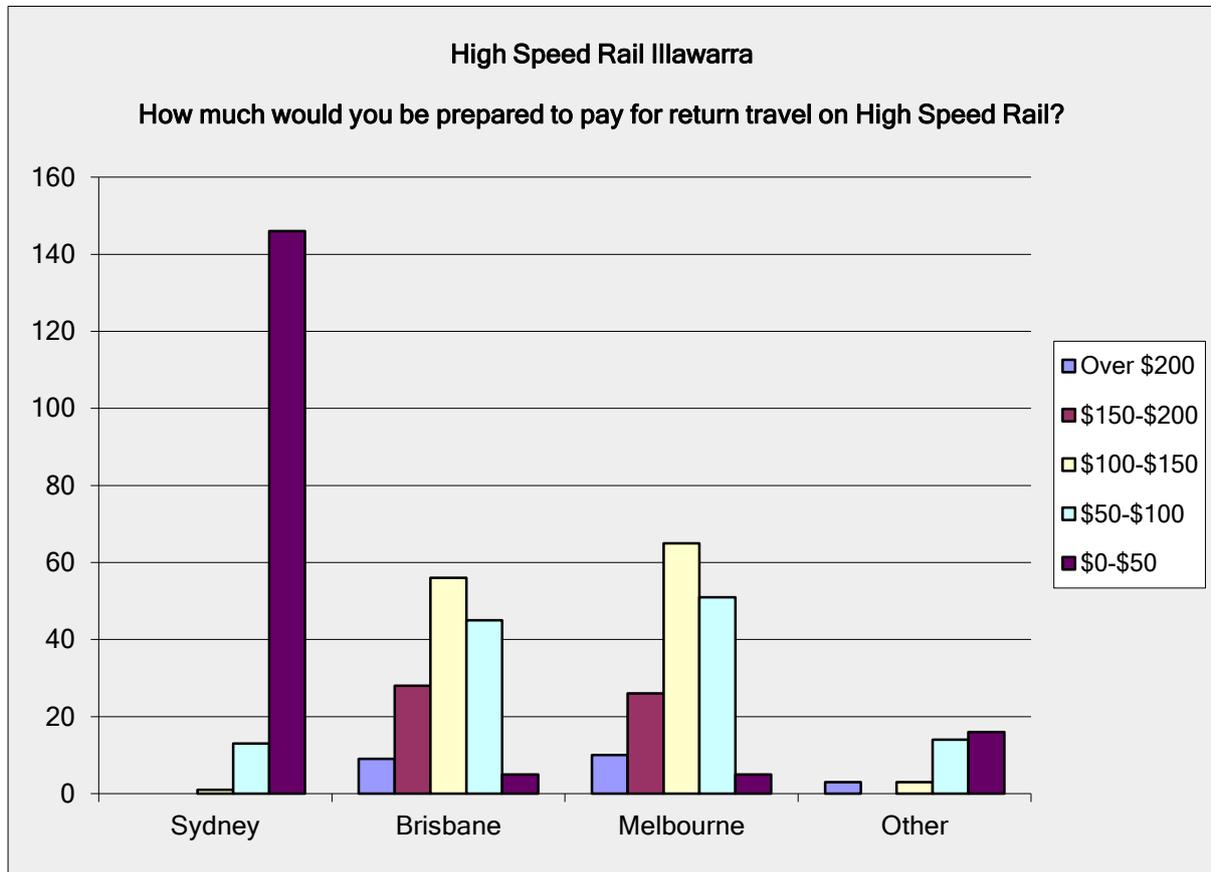


Financial Considerations

Residents of the Illawarra are currently spending considerable sums to drive regularly to Sydney, and to other areas along the Australian east coast.

As part of our research into support for a possible High Speed Rail link, the RDA Illawarra asked what people would be prepared to pay for fast, convenient travel.

A general indication of the fares people would be prepared to pay to travel by High Speed Rail is outlined in the following graph.



Impact of High Speed Rail link to the Illawarra

The consultations conducted by RDA Illawarra and the survey results indicate broad cross-sectoral support for a High Speed Rail link. The impacts for the region are significant, and respondents were asked to identify both advantages and disadvantages for the area. The advantages can be broadly categorised as follows:

Economic

- Increased tourism;
- Improved business attraction;
- Improved employment outcomes;
- Reduced business costs;
- Increased property prices;
- Attraction of more students to the region’s tertiary institutions;

- Growth of the high-tech industry sector in the region, and the retention of highly skilled graduates;
- Encouragement for development;
- Providing better access to business markets;
- The encouragement of professionals, including health professionals to establish practices in the area.

Overall, it is felt that a High Speed Rail link will stimulate the Illawarra economy, assist in the decentralisation of industry, and improve the attractiveness of the area for both tourists and business providers.

Environmental

A High Speed Rail link would provide significant environmental outcomes. These mainly revolve around the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, and the improvement of the region's carbon footprint. By reducing the number of vehicles travelling to Sydney, there would be reduced traffic congestion, less fuel burnt, and less carbon per capita.

Connectivity

There is little doubt that a High Speed Rail link would improve connectivity for residents of the Illawarra. Connectivity would be improved in these main areas:

- Improved access to vital health, educational and employment opportunities;
- Improved access to the Illawarra for tourists, and for visiting friends and relatives;
- Sydney residents attracted to the region for business, recreational and leisure activities; and
- Improved linkages with other public transport options, including improved access to the Sydney Domestic and International Airports.

Social

Undoubtedly, a High Speed Rail link would improve the quality of life for many residents of the Illawarra. Social outcomes include:

- Reduced injuries and deaths due to traffic accidents;
- More time available to spend with family or in personal pursuits;
- Reduced stress and stress-related illness caused by travel on congested roads and in dangerous weather conditions;
- Reduced travel expenses which would mean a greater disposable income;

- Increased population and diversity as people are induced to move to enjoy the beautiful Illawarra environment;
- Reduction in the region's significant unemployment rate, and all of the associated social disadvantage;
- Attraction of more students to the region's tertiary institutions; and
- Improved access to health, educational and employment opportunities.

Disadvantages

Overall, respondents were at pains to point out that the advantages of a High Speed Rail link vastly out-weighed any disadvantages.

Some of the disadvantages identified included:

- Impact on the environment, particularly during the construction period;
- Well paid workers travelling to Sydney, increasing the divide between rich and poor in the area;
- Reduction in the number of visitor nights in the Illawarra;
- Health and education infrastructure in the region may not sustain the population growth;
- Increased property prices may make homes inaccessible for the region's young people;
- Risk that the region could become a dormitory suburb of Sydney;
- Prohibitive cost of the necessary infrastructure.

Conclusion

Our investigations clearly demonstrate there is strong regional support for the inclusion of the Illawarra in any possible High Speed Rail network along the Australian east coast.

RDA Illawarra concludes that a case can be made for the inclusion of the area with two viable opportunities:

1. Transit point in the Southern Sydney area, with a Park and Ride facility for Illawarra residents; or
2. Upgrade the existing Unanderra - Moss Vale rail link to facilitate a connection to a possible high speed link along the Hume Highway corridor

RDA Illawarra is keen to continue working with you throughout the feasibility study process. Please keep us updated on progress, and continue to liaise with our office about this exciting infrastructure project.

Please also feel free to contact our office if you require any further information.

Tony Green
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