

Submission
No 13

**INQUIRY INTO ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
IN CENTRAL WESTERN NEW SOUTH WALES**

Organisation: Bells Line Expressway Group

Date received: 24/08/2011



24 August 2011

The Director
Standing Committee on State Development
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Sir/Madam

Inquiry into Economic and Social Development in Central Western New South Wales

The Bells Line Expressway Group submit the **enclosed** information for strong consideration for the Inquiry into Economic and Social development in central western New South Wales.

Your terms of reference indicate the below areas of interest that will all be addressed by laying the transport foundations of an Expressway to cross the Blue Mountains and open up access to Central West and Western New South Wales:

- a) the provision of health, education and cultural facilities,
- b) the reasons for population decline or growth in different areas,
- c) the adequacy of transport and road infrastructure,
- d) ways to encourage development of local enterprises and the potential of the region overall,
- e) the comparative level of government business activity located within the region,
- f) methodologies for local government to collectively cooperate to achieve increased infrastructure funding and economic growth,
- g) any other factor restricting economic and social development in central western New South Wales.

For more than ten years, the Bells Line Express Group has prepared economic, social and environmental reviews and feasibility studies for a Bells Line Expressway with Charles Sturt University, Sinclair Knight and Sinclair Knight Mertz that clearly demonstrate the opportunity and opportunity lost by an Expressway being delayed.

Current (and projected) works on the Great Western Highway are just bringing the road up to par to cope with the now increased local and tourist traffic as Sydney begins to expand into the Blue Mountains – the planning is no where nearly adequate for access to the rest of the state.

We would be happy to contribute or participate in any way with your consultation process to improve the social, economic and environmental benefits for regional New South Wales through the construction of a Bells Line Expressway.

Yours faithfully

I Armstrong
CHAIRMAN



**Inquiry into economic and social
development in
central western New South Wales**

**Bells Line Expressway Group
(BLEG) Submission**

19 August 2011

IMPROVE ROAD SAFETY FOR ALL ROAD USERS

BLEG believes that road safety is and should be the number one concern when addressing any issues in the Central West of NSW.

The current Bells Line of Road (BloR) and the Great Western Highway (GWH) are considered the most dangerous highways in the state per kilometre of road (NRMA) – see table below

The Bells Line Expressway will provide a much safer road than the either a BloR upgrade or the GWH as a result of:-

- Decreased driver fatigue as a result of travel time reduction.
- Reduction in the number and sharpness of bends.
- The provision of four lanes rather than two, allowing safe overtaking opportunities.
- Reduced congestion and road gradients meaning faster traffic flow with fewer off ramps.
- Greatly reduced number of speed variations.

2000-2002 Accident Rates NSW Major Routes
per 100MVKT

	Crashes	Casualties
Bells Line Road	65.5	39.0
Great Western Hwy	51.3	30.8
Pacific Highway	26.9	19.2
Princes Highway	37.0	23.5
Hume Highway	18.3	10.9
Sturt Highway	17.9	14.4
Mitchell Highway	21.7	13.5
Mid-Western Hwy	18.7	11.5
F3 Freeway	23.9	10.8

Source:
NRMA Route Performance Reports and website



PROVIDE AN EFFICIENT ROAD CORRIDOR FOR MOVING PEOPLE AND GOODS.

BLEG believes that it is critical to have an efficient road between Sydney and Inland NSW. Currently neither the BLoR or the GWH provide an acceptable safe corridor for moving either people or freight.

There are over 50 speed variations required by motorists and over 30 sets of traffic lights in only 70 kms of the GWH and over 20 across the BLoR (75kms) Blue Mountains.

The GWH has traffic movements that exceed its classification.

BLoR provides a dangerous and slow journey

Neither roads allow B-doubles

The only alternative is an Expressway.

RESPOND TO PRESENT AND FUTURE LAND USES AND THE NEEDS OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES.

BLEG argues that an upgrade to the Bells Line of Road would not meet current or future land use requirements nor will it meet the needs of local communities in Western Sydney, the Blue Mountains nor the Central West.

Land use

The need to accommodate increasing population in Sydney is placing strain on land use requirements. An Expressway will help relieve the pressure on the Sydney Agricultural Basin which is under continual threat from redevelopment. More than 50 percent of Sydney's identified vegetable growing enterprises are in the proposed Southern and North West Growth Centres which are areas earmarked for subdivision. (Malcolm and Fahd, 2005) These will inevitably be integrated for housing and urbanisation in the very near future.

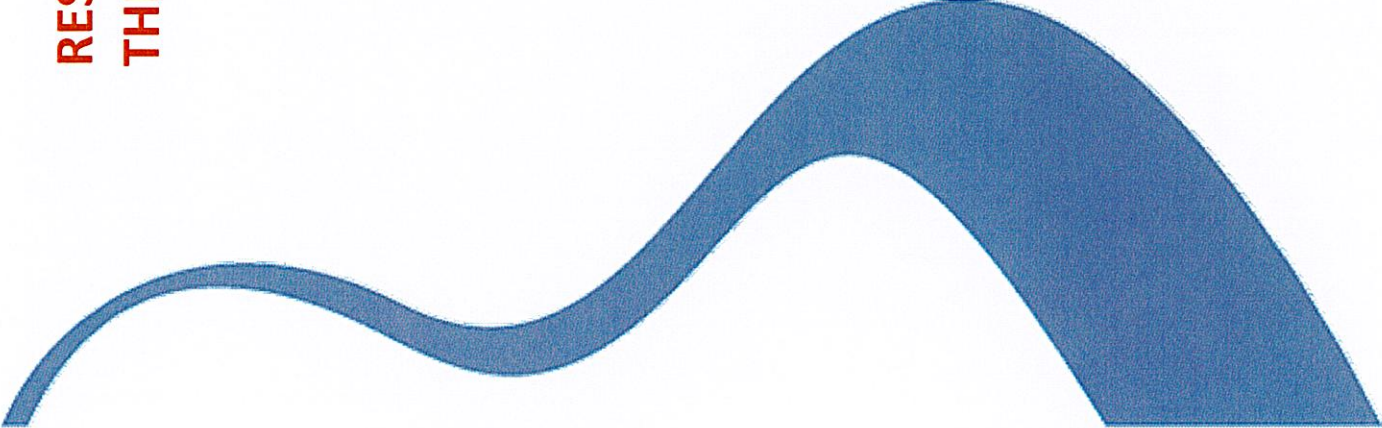
Building an Expressway (not an upgrade to the existing BLoR) would encourage a greater migration of people and businesses from Sydney to regional centres where the demand for land is less.

RESPOND TO PRESENT AND FUTURE LAND USES AND THE NEEDS OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES. (CONTD.)

Local communities

The GWH is a mixed function road providing both access and mobility. Currently the traffic volumes on the GWH exceed the design which is unsatisfactory to the local community of the Blue Mountains as well as the communities at either end of the GWH. Building an Expressway would relieve the pressure on the GWH and return to the road to a more palatable access road.

The BLoR may currently meet the needs of the local communities situated along the road, however it does not meet the needs of the local communities at either end, nor the drivers travelling along the road. An Expressway would provide the communities in Inland NSW with an acceptable transport link to their capital city.



UPGRADE OR A NEW ROAD?

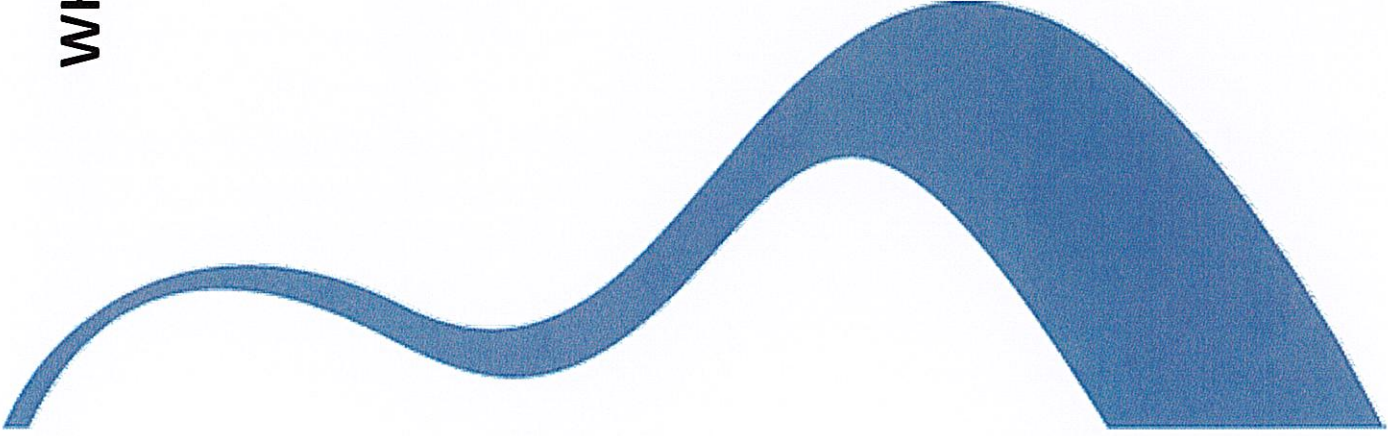
BLEG argues that the BLoR should not be upgraded. Both of the current roads across the Blue Mountains are not acceptable. **An upgrade of the BLoR will result in 2 commuter roads rather than a dedicated transport corridor.**

- The preliminary objectives and much of the information in the Community Updates, Long Term Strategic Corridor Plan and Background Summary and Corridor Report, produced as part of the project, solely focus on BLoR.
- Rather than add a new specific objective, BLEG would argue that all discussions, considerations and objectives in this project, ensure that both the BLoR and the GWH are examined together and not be considered in isolation.

WHAT TIME FRAME?

BLEG argues the timeframes should be 0-3 years and 3-10 years.

- 0-3 Years – A transport corridor across the Blue Mountains should be preserved
- 3-10 Years – Build the Bells Line Expressway



IMPORTANT ISSUES TO CONSIDER.....

BLEG would recommend the following investigations:

1. Examine the dual transport routes across the Blue Mountains.

There are two needs to be balanced from the viewpoint of road function. These are:

- Mobility-the movement of people and goods.
- Access-the ability to enter/exit land use adjacent to the road. (RTA)

The GWH is a mixed function road, providing both mobility and access to the major Blue Mountains centres of Blaxland, Springwood, Hazelbrook, Wentworth Falls, Katoomba, Blackheath and Mount Victoria as well a number of smaller centres, before linking up with Lithgow at the western end.

BLoR is much more focused on mobility, with the Central West Statistical Division population of 183,000 far outweighing the population of the small villages along Bells Line, most of which have populations well below 2,500.

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IMPORTANT ISSUES TO CONSIDER.....

When considering road transport between Sydney and western NSW, both the GWH and BLoR need to be considered together. The current RTA policy of upgrading the GWH to provide both access and mobility, on a very heavy traffic road, is flawed and is associated with great expense, but little if any improvement in mobility for western NSW.

Much of the expenditure on the GWH upgrade is devoted to compensating existing property owners or re-engineering the upgrade to preserve heritage buildings and the views of Blue Mountains residents. Moreover the plethora of settlements along the GWH mean that there will always be many access points, so the GWH can never achieve the mobility function that is imperative for the main link between western NSW and Sydney.

Therefore an important investigation is the extent to which a Bells Line Expressway would complement the GWH in terms of safety and the functions of mobility and access

WHAT'S IMPORTANT.....

BLEG has consistently stated that they do not support an upgrade of the BLoR. An Expressway is the only solution to the problems surrounding the BLoR and the GWH. The issues that BLEG value the most are:

1.Safety:

BLoR and the GWH are amongst the most dangerous roads in NSW.

The Bells Line Expressway will provide a much safer road than the either a BLoR upgrade or the GWH as a result of:-

- Decreased driver fatigue as a result of travel time reduction.
- Reduction in the number and sharpness of bends.
- The provision of four lanes rather than two allowing safe overtaking opportunities.
- Reduced congestion and road gradients meaning faster traffic flow with fewer off ramps.
- Greatly reduced number of speed variations.

WHAT'S IMPORTANT.....

2. **Economic growth for Inland NSW:**

The Western region of NSW already makes a significant contribution to the economy of NSW. There are opportunities for further expansion of this contribution, particularly in mineral mining. The Bells Line Expressway will ensure that the workforce required to enlarge these sectors can readily maintain strong links with Sydney. It will also facilitate the dispersion of economic activity outside Sydney, in line with the State plan, by enabling the development of support and spin-off industries.

A number of government policies are already in place encouraging growth in regional areas including the Building Better Regional Cities policy and the Evocities campaign.

The Central West region of NSW is well aware of the importance of adequate transport links with the Bells Line Expressway identified as a high priority area in the Central West component of the NSW State Plan.

In addition, the Sydney Metropolitan Plan acknowledges the need for Sydney to improve transport connections with regional cities.

An Expressway linking Sydney to the Central West region of NSW will build on existing government initiatives, providing a platform for future growth.

WHAT'S IMPORTANT.....

3. **Ensuring Sydney's food supply:**

An Expressway across the Blue Mountains would help ensure Sydney's food supply in 2 ways.

The Sydney Agricultural Basin is a significant contributor to NSW food production and is under considerable threat from urbanisation. Large tracts of land in the North West and South West of Sydney, which have traditionally been agricultural land, are earmarked for development. An Expressway would encourage a greater migration of people and businesses from Sydney to regional centres over the Blue Mountains. This will reduce the need for residential developments to encroach on the Basin's agricultural lands.

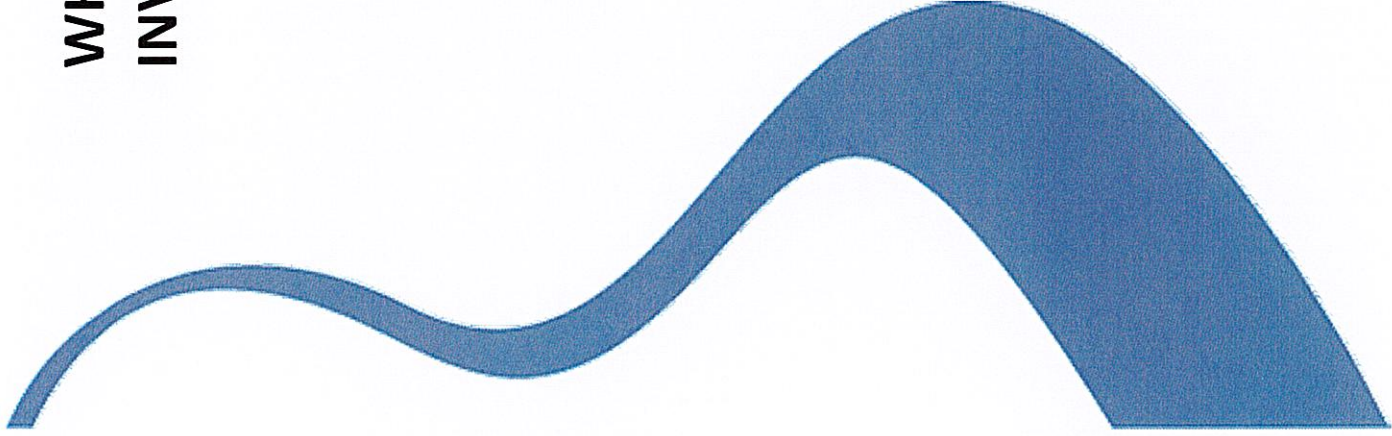
The Central West region is also a significant contributor to food production in NSW. Improving access and transport links to the Central West will enable further development of agricultural precincts beyond the Blue Mountains.

WHAT SHOULD BE AVOIDED OR FURTHER INVESTIGATED?

Further investigation:

BLEG argues that there should be no further investigation on the upgrade of the BLoR.

Further, there should not be any commencement of upgrading the BLoR as it is costly per kilometre and it would not meet the RTA's own policy of one road for access and one for mobility.



WHAT ARE THE OPPORTUNITIES FOR UPGRADING BELLS LINE OF ROAD THAT SHOULD BE CONSIDERED?

BLEG has consistently stated that they do not support an upgrade of the BLoR as this would result in duplicate commuter roads across the Blue Mountains.

However, an Expressway would create a number of opportunities that should be considered as part of this project:

1. Linking Sydney and its regions

The Bells Line Expressway will provide a vital connection between Sydney and the important western region of NSW and;

- enable considerable industry growth and job creation for the Central West region through improved transport links and economic integration (WRI, 2005);
- allow those migrating to the Central West to retain connections to the Sydney region through improved transport links (WRI, 2005); and
- provide access to lower land costs and an increased workforce for Sydney (Metropolitan Plan 2010).

WHAT ARE THE OPPORTUNITIES FOR UPGRADING BELLS LINE OF ROAD THAT SHOULD BE CONSIDERED?

2. Provide access to an Inland Transport Corridor

The Bells Line Expressway will provide a vital link from Sydney and its ports to the inland transport hub at Parkes, providing access to the inland transport corridors running between Melbourne and Brisbane and west to Perth.

The Bells Line Expressway will improve transport linkages in three ways:

- By providing a high capacity transport route from Lithgow to Sydney, the Bells Line Expressway will significantly improve transport times and costs from the Parkes hub and the inland transport corridor.
- By providing a better link to Parkes, the Bells Line Expressway could divert much freight traffic from Australia's East coast between Melbourne and Brisbane to the inland transport corridor. (WRI, 2005)
- Additionally, by incorporating plans for better rail access to Sydney in the Bells Line Expressway, the corridor will be better placed to adapt to future changes in transport needs.
- The Bells Line Expressway transport corridor will provide an efficient link between the inland transport corridor and Sydney, and will play a critical role in integrating the economy and regions of the eastern seaboard.

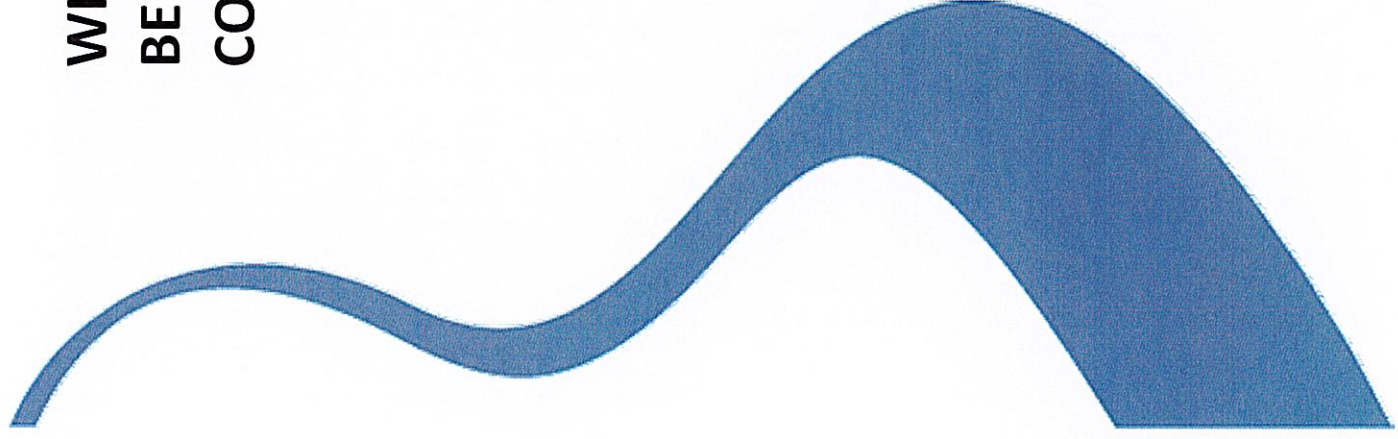
WHAT ARE THE OPPORTUNITIES FOR UPGRADING BELLS LINE OF ROAD THAT SHOULD BE CONSIDERED?

3. **Securing Sydney's Food Supply**

Building the Bells Line Expressway should alleviate pressure on the North West and South West agricultural lands of the Sydney Basin by encouraging a greater migration of people and businesses from Sydney to regional centres over the Blue Mountains. This will reduce the need for residential developments to encroach on the Basin's agricultural lands.

The Bells Line Expressway will make regional centres in the Central West of NSW more attractive as a place to live and do business because it will:

- enhance the Central West region's attractiveness as a tourist destination
- enable considerable industry growth and job creation for the Central West region through improved transport links and economic integration allow those migrating to the Central West to retain connections to the Sydney region through improved transport links (WRI, 2005)





WHAT ARE THE OPPORTUNITIES FOR UPGRADING BELLS LINE OF ROAD THAT SHOULD BE CONSIDERED?

4. **Provide a platform for economic growth in Inland NSW**

The Western region of NSW makes a significant contribution to the State economy. Building the Bells Line Expressway will ensure that this contribution can be enhanced while strengthening links with Sydney.

An Expressway would:

- Increase the opportunities for expansion of the Western region's contribution to the NSW economy, especially in the mining of minerals:
- Ensure that the workforce required to enlarge these sectors can readily maintain strong links with Sydney.
- Facilitate the dispersion of economic activity outside Sydney, in line with the State plan, by enabling the development of support and spinoff industries.

The Western region is an important part of the infrastructure of NSW and therefore must be linked to the State's infrastructure planning, including transport to its capital city.

SUMMARY

In summary, BLEG:

- advocates that no upgrade work be conducted on Bells Line of Road, rather an Expressway should be built;
- argues that an Expressway is the only solution to the current mobility and access problems on the dual roads across the Blue Mountains;
- believes that safety should be the number one objective of any transport project and currently Bells Line of Road and Great Western Highway are amongst the most dangerous major roads in the state;
- supports the preservation of transport corridor across the mountains immediately; and
- is adamant that an Expressway be built.