

Standing Committee on State Development

**Economic and social
development in central
western New South Wales**

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Terms of reference

That the Standing Committee on State Development inquire into and report on the factors restricting economic and social development in central western New South Wales, and in particular:

1. the provision of health, education and cultural facilities,
2. the reasons for population decline or growth in different areas,
3. the adequacy of transport and road infrastructure,
4. ways to encourage development of local enterprises and the potential of the region overall,
5. the comparative level of government business activity located within the region,
6. methodologies for local government to collectively cooperate to achieve increased infrastructure funding and economic growth,
7. any other factor restricting economic and social development in central western New South Wales.

These terms of reference were referred to the Committee by the Hon Kevin Humphries MP, Minister for Western NSW, and were adopted by the Committee on 7 July 2011.

Committee membership

The Hon Rick Colless MLC	The Nationals	<i>(Chairman)</i>
The Hon Mick Veitch MLC	Australian Labor Party	<i>(Deputy Chairman)</i>
The Hon Paul Green MLC	Christian Democratic Party	
The Hon Charlie Lynn MLC	Liberal Party	
The Hon Dr Peter Phelps MLC	Liberal Party	
The Hon Steve Whan MLC	Australian Labor Party	

*Note on Committee membership

The Hon Steve Whan MLC replaced the Hon Amanda Fazio MLC as a member of the Committee on 7 September 2011.

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Chairman's foreword

In July 2011, the Minister for Western NSW, the Hon Kevin Humphries MP, requested that the Standing Committee on State Development inquire into and report on economic and social development in central western NSW. From the outset of the inquiry, the Committee took a broad view of what constitutes central and western NSW, defining it to mean the area immediately west of the Blue Mountains and extending along the northern boundaries of the Lithgow, Mid Western Regional, Wellington, Dubbo, Narromine, Bogan, Cobar and Central Darling local government areas; the entire Unincorporated Area of NSW; and east along the southern and western boundaries of the Central Darling, Cobar, Lachlan, Bland, Young, Cowra, Bathurst Regional and Oberon local government areas.

In taking this approach, our area of inquiry encompassed a number of towns and communities, each of which contribute to the economy and social fabric of NSW in a unique and important way. Many of these communities are confronting challenges to their continued survival, including the impact of weather conditions such as drought, fluctuating commodity prices, and changes in population demographics. Some communities in central and western NSW have also seen the retraction of government services, which has made it increasingly difficult for people living in the region to access services, and acted as a disincentive for many families contemplating relocation to the region.


Despite these challenges, the people of central and western NSW remain committed to ensuring the viability of the region. The Committee was impressed by the passion and commitment demonstrated by inquiry participants in advocating for the issues important to their families and their communities. We also acknowledge the large number of community led initiatives which seek to encourage the development of the region and to promote the benefits of regional lifestyles. We commend local communities for their commitment to ensuring the viability and sustainability of their towns and of central and western NSW in general.

The Committee has made a series of recommendations which we believe will assist to unlock the economic and social development potential of central and western NSW, and ensure that the region thrives now and into the future. Perhaps the most important of these recommendations is that Transport for NSW must give serious consideration to the construction of a dual lane expressway over the Blue Mountains as part of the NSW Long Term Transport Master Plan. We have also requested that Transport for NSW provide this Committee with a report on the current status of the preservation of a transport corridor over the Blue Mountains. While we recognise the challenges of constructing a dual lane expressway, a safe and efficient path over the Blue Mountains for both passenger and freight traffic is a key factor to allowing central and western NSW to prosper.

A simple examination of the positive social and economic impacts achieved following the construction of dual lane expressways linking coastal communities in the north and south, the Hunter Valley and the Southern Highlands with Sydney, suggests that similar benefits would be derived from an expressway link west over the Blue Mountains to the central and western communities of NSW.

On behalf of the Committee, I would like to take this opportunity to extend my gratitude to all the participants in this inquiry, including those who made written submissions and gave their time to talk to Committee. I also thank Broken Hill City Council, Parkes Shire Council and CENIROC for their assistance and hospitality in facilitating our regional hearings and roundtable discussions.

My thanks go to my fellow Committee members for their considered contributions. I would also like to thank Rachel Simpson, Cathryn Cummins and Lisa Scheikowski of the Committee secretariat for their efforts in supporting the Committee throughout the inquiry process.



Hon Rick Colless MLC
Chairman

Summary of key issues

In July 2011, the Minister for Western NSW, the Hon Kevin Humphries MP, requested that the Standing Committee on State Development inquire into and report on the economic and social development of central western NSW. In undertaking this inquiry, the Committee has examined a range of factors that influence development, including health, education and cultural facilities, population decline or growth in different areas, and the adequacy of transport and road infrastructure.

The Committee has broadly defined ‘central western NSW’ as the area bordered by the towns of Lithgow, Nyngan, Cobar, Broken Hill, Ivanhoe, West Wyalong and Young. We acknowledge the diverse range of communities that exist within this area, and are acutely aware that the issues and challenges facing these communities will differ. In order to better reflect this diversity, the Committee has referred to the area of inquiry as ‘central and western NSW’ throughout the report.

The Committee received 62 submissions, and held five public hearings in Sydney, Parkes and Broken Hill. While in Parkes, the Committee held a series of roundtable discussions with representatives from the Central NSW Councils Regional Organisation of Councils (CENTROC). Meetings were also held with the Central Western Queensland Remote Area Planning and Development Board (RAPAD) and Regional Development Victoria.

This summary outlines the key issues raised during the inquiry and discussed in this report.

Roads and transport infrastructure

One of the central issues raised throughout the inquiry was the critical role that road and transport infrastructure play in facilitating the economic and social development of central and western NSW.

Communities in central and western NSW face a range of challenges in relation to the management and maintenance of the road network, most notably in regard to the prevalence of unsealed roads and the high costs borne by local councils in maintaining the road network.

We consider that the construction of a new, dual lane expressway over the Blue Mountains would greatly assist in unlocking the economic and social development potential of the region. Accordingly, Recommendation 11 urges Transport for NSW to give serious consideration to the construction of such an expressway as part of the NSW Long Term Transport Master Plan, and requests that Transport for NSW provide this Committee with a report on the current status of the preservation of a transport corridor over the Blue Mountains.

We are particularly concerned that large sections of the Cobb and Silver City Highways are unsealed, resulting in frequent road closures due to rain events. This regular disruption to the road network presents significant challenges to the communities and industries that rely on these highways to transport goods and services. In order to address this issue, the Committee has recommended that the Minister for Roads develop a planning schedule to complete the sealing of these highways as soon as practicable (Recommendation 12).

The Committee further considers that the NSW Long Term Transport Master Plan must identify measures to better meet the funding requirements for the maintenance and improvement of the regional road network. While the regional road network is the responsibility of local government, it is

- Recommendation 11** 67
That Transport for NSW provide a report to this Committee on the current status of the preservation of a transport corridor over the Blue Mountains, and give serious consideration to the construction of a dual lane expressway over the Blue Mountains as part of the NSW Long Term Transport Master Plan.
- Recommendation 12** 71
That the Minister for Roads develop a planning schedule to complete the sealing of the Cobb and Silver City Highways as soon as practicable.
- Recommendation 13** 76
That the NSW Government review the post-flood funding mechanisms for repairs to road infrastructure, with specific regard to allowing reasonable betterment works to be carried out.
- Recommendation 14** 79
That Transport for NSW and Roads and Maritime Services collaborate with Regional Organisations of Councils and key stakeholders in the freight industry to develop a consistent methodology for the assessment and approval of permitted routes for high performance vehicles.
- Recommendation 15** 87
That during the preparation of the Long Term Transport Master Plan, Transport for NSW closely consider ways to improve freight rail infrastructure in central and western NSW in order to facilitate freight access to sea ports, especially the Maldon to Dombarton rail line.
- Recommendation 16** 97
That during the preparation of the NSW Long Term Transport Master Plan, Transport for NSW examine new approaches to the delivery of regional aviation services in NSW, including the subsidisation of targeted air routes, and the establishment of a 'hub and spoke' model to manage access to Sydney Airport.
- Recommendation 17** 104
That the NSW Government undertake an analysis of the potential impact of the listing of the Menindee Lakes under the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, by July 2013, and unless this analysis identifies significant detrimental impacts, that the NSW Government support the listing of the Menindee Lakes under the Convention.
- Recommendation 18** 109
That the NSW Government explore the feasibility of requiring that consideration must be given to the employment of local workers to undertake government contract work in rural and regional areas.
- Recommendation 19** 116
That the NSW Government facilitate locally based purchasing by government businesses in regional areas.
- Recommendation 20** 116
That the Minister for Primary Industries refer to the NSW Legislative Council's Standing Committee on State Development an inquiry into the feasibility of establishing food security precincts in NSW.

Chapter 5 Roads and transport

Safe and accessible transport is critical for the social and economic development of central and western NSW. As one inquiry participant noted, road and transport infrastructure ‘provides the backbone for the movement of people and goods to where they need to go’.²¹⁰

This chapter explores the issues raised by inquiry participants in relation to the transport needs of central and western NSW. The chapter begins with a brief overview of two key NSW Government bodies: Infrastructure NSW and Transport for NSW. The chapter then examines issues pertaining to the road network, including the possible construction of a new expressway over the Blue Mountains and concerns relating to highways, the regional road network, and the increasing presence of high performance vehicles such as B-Double trucks in the region. The role of freight rail is then examined, including concerns over access to sea ports and the need to enhance the rail network in central and western NSW. The chapter then briefly discusses the provision of public transport in the region, before concluding with an examination of regional aviation services.

Key NSW government bodies

- 5.1 There are two key bodies that oversee the management and provision of transport infrastructure in NSW: Infrastructure NSW and Transport for NSW. The NSW Government advised that the establishment of Infrastructure NSW would allow ‘...for a more considered and strategic approach to infrastructure provision’²¹¹, and described the functions of the authority:

The creation of Transport for NSW as an integrated transport authority will improve transport service planning and delivery across NSW. The establishment of a Freight and Regional Development Division within Transport for NSW will provide a one-stop shop for industry and other government agencies and provide resourcing to support better freight and transport outcomes. The Freight and Regional Development Division will be the central point of coordination for the NSW Government’s role in freight transport, distribution and servicing in NSW, with a particular focus on improving outcomes in regional NSW.²¹²

- 5.2 Transport for NSW is the second authority established by the O’Farrell Government. Mr Tim Reardon, Deputy Director General, Policy and Regulation, Transport for NSW, described its role as being to ‘...improve transport planning and delivery across all modes of transport and roads’.²¹³
- 5.3 In order to improve the quality and integration of the transport network throughout NSW, including in central and western NSW, Mr Reardon told the Committee that Transport for NSW is developing a Long Term Transport Master Plan which will include regional areas:

²¹⁰ Mr Raymond Longfellow, Mayor, Central Darling Council, Evidence, 4 November 2011, p 28.

²¹¹ Submission 52, NSW Government, p 11.

²¹² Submission 52, p 11.

²¹³ Mr Tim Reardon, Deputy Director General, Policy and Regulation, Transport for NSW, Evidence, 9 March 2012, p 2.

[The Master Plan] will involve unprecedented collaboration with those whose livelihoods depend on the quality of the transport network ... As part of this planning process a regional transport plan for the Central West is being developed as well as a statewide freight strategy. Those two developments, a refocusing of our transport administration to include dedicated resources and a long-term transport planning process that extends beyond the Sydney metropolitan area, and which will include specific transport planning for the Central West, provide a strong framework from which to build existing transport arrangements and address the challenges of the Central West.²¹⁴

- 5.4 It is anticipated that the draft plan will be released in mid-2012, with the final Long Term Transport Master Plan to be released in November 2012. Following the release of the State-wide plan, Transport for NSW will also prepare detailed regional transport plans.²¹⁵
- 5.5 Inquiry participants outlined a range of issues that will need to be considered by Transport for NSW in the preparation of the Long Term Transport Master Plan, in relation to the road network, the rail network, and the regional aviation sector. The remainder of this chapter explores the concerns of inquiry participants in these regards.

The road network

- 5.6 Inquiry participants advocated for a number of improvements to the road network, particularly in relation to highways and the regional road network. Perhaps most notably, inquiry participants argued for the construction of a new expressway over the Blue Mountains, to enhance access to central and western NSW for both passenger and freight traffic.

An expressway over the Blue Mountains

- 5.7 The majority of inquiry participants advocated for the construction of a new expressway over the Blue Mountains to central and western NSW. It was argued that the current crossings over the Blue Mountains, the Bells Line of Road and the Great Western Highway, are inadequate, largely due to limitations on the type of vehicles that can use these roads. It was also argued that the current crossings have an adverse impact on the economic and social development potential of the region.²¹⁶
- 5.8 Cowra Shire Council articulated the concerns of many inquiry participants in regard to the current crossings:

The current road crossings over the Blue Mountains have, for some time, been seen as an impediment to the economic and social development of the Central West. The

²¹⁴ Mr Reardon, Evidence, 9 March 2012, p 2.

²¹⁵ Transport for NSW, *NSW Long Term Transport Master Plan – frequently asked questions*, accessed 14 May 2012, <<http://haveyoursay.nsw.gov.au/faq/index/21#88> >

²¹⁶ A number of inquiry participants expressed these views. See for example Submission 2, Mr Spencer Ferrier, pp 1-3; Submission 16, Lachlan Shire Council, p 4; Submission 40, Orana Regional Organisation of Councils, p 7; Submission 59, Year 11 students, Red Bend Catholic College, p 1; and Legislative Council Standing Committee on State Development, *CENTROC roundtable sessions report*, March 2012, p 1.

Great Western Highway passes through a number of residential areas and has, as a result, large sections where the maximum speed limited is restricted. The alternate route, via the Bells Line of Road, is narrow, has numerous speed restrictions, is a limited B-double route and is generally seen as being incapable of meeting the demands of heavy road transport.²¹⁷

5.9 Blayney Shire Council similarly expressed concerns regarding the current crossings:

Neither the Great Western Highway nor the Bells Line of Road can accommodate efficient freight vehicles such as B-Doubles and the rail system is accurately described as 19th century. Increasing the truck proportion on already high-risk roads will increase the risk to motorists. Ecological sustainability requires efficiency, which cannot be achieved on the current routes.²¹⁸

5.10 The Bells Line Expressway Group (BLEG) suggested that '[c]urrently neither the Bells Line of Road or the Great Western Highway provide an acceptable safe corridor for moving either people or freight'. BLEG argued that upgrades to either of these roads would not meet the current or future needs of communities in the area and as such, a new expressway should be constructed.²¹⁹ Lachlan Shire Council went so far as to describe the current roads between the region and Sydney as a 'second class transport system'.²²⁰

5.11 The Western Research Institute, on behalf of BLEG, has completed several projects that outline the importance of the proposed expressway. Some of the Institute's findings in regard to the proposed expressway include that:

- a new, preferably class 6R, road over Bells Line would improve safety on the most dangerous transport corridor in NSW and provide the same standard of mobility to the west that is currently enjoyed to the north, south west and south of Sydney
- the Bells Line Expressway transport corridor 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
- an expressway would ease pressure on important agricultural lands in the Sydney Basin and provide an efficient access route to agricultural precincts close to Sydney.²²¹

5.12 Blayney Shire Council argued that the construction of the expressway would reduce the impact of traffic for communities in the Blue Mountains, and encourage population growth in central and western NSW:

Sydney as a global city continues to struggle with urban sprawl and the provision of a safe and efficient route to the Central West, will provide for the Central West what the F3 did for the Central Coast/Newcastle Region, and ultimately reduce the impact of increased traffic on communities along the Great Western Highway over the Blue

²¹⁷ Submission 51, Cowra Shire Council, pp 1-2.

²¹⁸ Submission 38, Blayney Shire Council, p 5.

²¹⁹ Submission 13, Bells Line Expressway Group, pp 5-6.

²²⁰ Submission 16, p 4.

²²¹ Submission 41, Western Research Institute, pp 3-4.

Mountains, and lower carbon emissions, providing improved health outcomes for Blue Mountain residents.²²²

5.13 In acknowledgement of the potential impact on its community, Blue Mountains City Council said that while the Council ‘broadly supports’ upgrades to existing transport and road infrastructure, ‘... any such upgrades would need to be planned carefully, and in consultation with Council and the Blue Mountains community...’²²³

5.14 Blayney Shire Council suggested that the NSW Government should commit to the following steps to secure an appropriate corridor for the expressway:

- establishment of route options
- selection of a preferred route
- reservation of preserved route option on Local Environmental Plans
- environmental assessment and concept design
- provide advice on time frames.²²⁴

5.15 In respect to timeframes, BLEG proposed that a corridor over the Blue Mountains should be preserved over the next three years, with construction of the expressway occurring over the following three to ten years.²²⁵

5.16 There was mixed support for the inclusion of a rail corridor together with the new expressway route. When asked if the project would include a rail corridor, the Hon Ian Armstrong, Chairperson, Bells Line Expressway Group, noted that the expense of including a rail corridor may be prohibitive:

No, not necessarily. I know that has been suggested, but that would be hugely expensive over the mountains as far as rail is concerned. At this stage of the piece, current demand seems to be reasonably adequate for that rail, but we are suggesting that road is the first requirement ... I am a great rail supporter I must say, very much so, but I just cannot see sufficient population to support a rail infrastructure ...²²⁶

5.17 However, Mr Sandy Morrison, Chair, Regional Development Australia – Central West, expressed support for the inclusion of a rail corridor, arguing that the current inability to double stack containers over the Blue Mountains made consideration of a new rail line necessary:

... it is the Bells Transport Corridor that we support because we see the rail element as being as important as the road. It is one of those things that—it has been lost in the translation but we started off with the corridor. That inability to double stack containers to Sydney, the archaic nature of the line, the simple fact that we cannot get—we do not have to have a fast train; we have to have a train that can go more

²²² Submission 38, p 5.

²²³ Submission 32, Blue Mountains City Council, p 4.

²²⁴ Submission 38, p 5.

²²⁵ Submission 13, p 9.

²²⁶ Hon Ian Armstrong, Chairperson, Bells Line Expressway Group, Evidence, 12 September 2011, pp 34-35.

than walking speed to the city ... passenger rail from centres such as Bathurst or Orange taking two hours to get to Sydney is no technical quantum leap, but if you have a reasonable line you can do it. It takes four or five hours now.²²⁷

- 5.18** The issue of moving freight via rail is discussed later in this chapter, commencing at paragraph 5.73.
- 5.19** The Committee raised the concerns of inquiry participants in relation to an expressway over the Blue Mountains during a hearing with Transport for NSW. In response, Mr Reardon advised that at present, planning was continuing along the Bells Line of Road Corridor, and that the adequacy of the crossings across the Blue Mountains would be considered as part of the development of the Long Term Transport Master Plan:

The Commonwealth and the New South Wales governments are progressing a long-term strategic corridor plan for the Bells Line of Road and joint funding has been committed. Consultation with the industry and the local community has been undertaken and the development of that a plan is currently underway. The routes across the Blue Mountains more generally are also being considered within the Government's long-term transport master plan discussion paper.²²⁸

Committee comment

- 5.20** The Committee notes the challenges faced by residents and businesses in central and western NSW in safely and efficiently crossing the Blue Mountains. While two crossings currently exist, the Bells Line of Road and the Great Western Highway, inquiry participants believe that these crossings do not assist to facilitate economic and social development in central and western NSW, but may act as a barrier to growth.
- 5.21** The Committee considers that the construction of a new, dual lane expressway over the Blue Mountains would greatly assist in unlocking the economic and social development potential of central and western NSW. We strongly encourage Transport for NSW to give serious consideration to the construction of such an expressway as part of the NSW Long Term Transport Master Plan, and ask that Transport for NSW provide a report to this Committee on the current status of the preservation of a transport corridor over the Blue Mountains.

Recommendation 11

That Transport for NSW provide a report to this Committee on the current status of the preservation of a transport corridor over the Blue Mountains, and give serious consideration to the construction of a dual lane expressway over the Blue Mountains as part of the NSW Long Term Transport Master Plan.

²²⁷ Mr Sandy Morrison, Chair, Regional Development Australia – Central West, Evidence, 2 November 2011, p 9.

²²⁸ Mr Reardon, Evidence, 9 March 2012, p 3.

Appendix 6 CENTROC roundtable sessions report

The Standing Committee on State Development conducted a series of roundtable discussions with representatives from the Central NSW Councils (CENTROC) on Thursday 3 November 2011 in Parkes, NSW. These roundtables allowed the Committee to closely examine nine key issues impacting on the economic and social development of central western NSW.

The following report begins with a summary of the central issues that emerged across the sessions, and are considered by CENTROC to be fundamental to encouraging economic and social development of central western NSW. The report then highlights the key conclusions and recommendations of each session, and provides a summary of the issues discussed during each of the roundtable sessions. A list of attendees at the roundtable discussions is provided at the end of this report.

Central issues

- 6.1** A number of central issues reoccurred throughout the roundtable sessions, with many roundtable participants suggesting that addressing these issues will be critical to allow central western NSW to reach its full potential. This section briefly discusses each of these key issues.

Transport

- 6.2** Access to safe, efficient and reliable transport options were viewed as critical to ensuring the economic and social development of central western NSW. Roundtable participants highlighted the need for improvements across a number of forms of transport for both passenger and freight purposes.
- 6.3** In regard to road transportation, participants strongly argued for the construction of the Bells Line Expressway over the Blue Mountains, noting that the central west was the only region that did not have expressway access to Sydney. Participants also highlighted the need to upgrade road surfaces and improve safety features on the Newell highway and local roads due to the increasing amount of freight traffic, and the need to develop a consistent strategy on the permissible movements of high productivity vehicles. Public transport services were also highlighted as being lacking, restricting the ability of people without personal vehicles to move around the region.
- 6.4** Rail was the second area of transport highlighted by round table participants, particularly in regard to the importance of rail for freight movements from the region to port facilities in coastal areas. Participants highlighted the difficulties and costs faced in moving freight over the Blue Mountains, especially as containers cannot be double stacked and congestion on the existing line regularly causes delays. Participants also advocated for the re-opening of the Blayney-Demondrille rail line and construction of the Inland Rail to improve freight movements across and through the region.
- 6.5** Access to regular air passenger transport was also seen as having the potential to unlock the region, largely through the expansion of passenger routes. Participants also highlighted the financial impost for local councils of maintaining and upgrading local airport facilities.

- ‘vital’ to keep the North-South rail line on the Government’s agenda. Some of the line has been built, and funds have been allocated in the 2014 Federal Budget. Must progress land acquisition to move projects forward
- Port Botany is ‘at saturation point’, which increase the necessity of good links to Port Kembla
- passenger rail transport – would like an extension of electric trains/commuter transport to Bathurst, Lithgow and Orange
- Bells Line Expressway
 - the central west is the only area surrounding Sydney not services by an expressway
 - acknowledge that upgrading is being undertaken on the Bells Line of Road, but would prefer work to be progressed on the construction of an Expressway
 - need to identify and quarantine a corridor for the Expressway, especially in the Blue Mountains and at the eastern end near the Hawkesbury/M7
 - Councils acknowledge that this will be unpopular in these areas, and are trying to engage affected areas in consultations
 -
- Newell Highway
 - increasing number of high performance vehicles accessing the Highway, meaning that a substantial upgrade is needed in order to lift the standard of the road. Estimated cost of the upgrade is \$10.5 million/year over five years, but there is some debate over the figures
 - access for high performance vehicles on local road networks is also causing some concern – inconsistencies across shires as to which roads can and can’t be accessed by these vehicles
- Lachlan Valley Way
 - very poor safety standard, especially given the increasing freight and passenger traffic (thoroughfare to/from Canberra and the snow) using the road
 - needs upgrading in terms of passing lanes, road quality etc
- Grain Lines (rail)
 - insufficient number of trains and staff, and problems with restrictions on the line, are causing problems with freighting grains – this will be an increasing problem as harvest improve
 - Grain Corp is increasingly using trucks to move grain because the rail network can’t cope
 - need to better resource Grain Corp
- Logging trucks
 - logging trucks are causing a great deal of damage to roads as the move towards Tumut
 - ForestsNSW don’t pay rates, and therefore don’t contribute to road maintenance costs.