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Submission on the Development of a National Aviation Policy Statement Issues Paper

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute my view on some of the issues raised in the Development of a National Aviation Policy Statement Issues Paper (“the Paper”). I intend to specifically address the following questions posed by the Paper:

How can we better integrate investment on airports with the funding and construction of improved road and rail links to and from our airports?

What are the current and future pressure points in relation to airport capacity?

Can the growing use by civil aviation of joint user or Defence owned airports be safely and effectively accommodated?

My submission will look at these questions with the proposal of a high speed rail link between Sydney and Canberra and using Canberra Airport as the second Sydney airport - a proposal similar to the Canberra Business Council and Canberra Airport.

How can we better integrate investment on airports with the funding and construction of improved road and rail links to and from our airports?

Intermodal transport is one of the great challenges of our time. As fuel becomes a scarce commodity (or rather, continues its inexorable rise in price), the ability to achieve and maximise efficiencies and find viable and competitive alternative transport solutions becomes more and more important. This issue can be seen through the proposal for a high speed rail link between Sydney and Canberra that happened in the late 1990s and is now returning to the agenda.

A short history of the Canberra-Sydney high speed train

The Speedrail project was a joint venture proposal by Leighton Holdings and Alstom to construct a high speed rail line between Sydney and Canberra that gained traction in August 1998 when the previous government selected the venture as the preferred bidder for the Very High Speed Rail (VHSR) project. Despite studies reportedly confirming the soundness of the patronage, revenue

forecasts and technical aspects of the proposals, the project was abandoned by the government in December 2000 after it was reported that the cost to the taxpayer could have ended up more than 10 times the original amount. In the meantime, the Department of Transport and Regional Services had commissioned a scoping study into the feasibility of an eastern coast high speed rail network, but this was also scrapped in March 2002.

Today

Currently, the Canberra ↔ Sydney route is serviced daily by rail on the CountryLink Southern network's Canberra Explorer. The journey is approximately 4 hours and 20 minutes, incorporating 11 stops. Road distance between the two cities is 288km – approximately a 3 hour journey by private car or by coach. There are 66 flights per week day to and from Sydney and Canberra operated by Virgin Blue and Qantas. The flights are for a duration of 50-55 minutes.

The construction and operation of a high speed rail service between Canberra and Sydney has the potential to streamline current air services between Sydney and Canberra as well as reduce the number of cars travelling between the two. It would appeal to the environmentally aware public servant and would fit well into the current government's policy platform of reducing greenhouse gas. The service could run between Canberra Airport and the Sydney CBD, with stops in the Canberra CBD and at Mascot, or between Canberra CBD and Sydney CBD with a stop at Mascot. Furthermore, given the speeds of today's high speed trains, it is not unreasonable to think that the journey could be completed in 90 minutes or less.

To gain some background on high speed rail and to determine not only the potential viability but plausibility of we can examine a number of city pairs that have similar geographic, demographic or political characteristics to Sydney and Canberra. The city pairs I have chosen to look at are those consisting of a capital city/largest city combination and pairs by use of existing high speed rail services between the cities.

City pairs by capital city-largest city

Washington ↔ New York

In the northeast corridor of the United States rail is used as a transport option more than any other part of the country. The distance between the capital of the United States and its largest city is approximately 350km and is served by road transport, air transport (with the services offered commonly known as 'shuttles') and rail. The high speed ACELA Express run by Amtrak began operation in 2000 and meant the journey between Union Station in Washington and Penn Station in New York was able to be completed in under three hours (2 hours and 45 minutes). This compares to the 64 to 85 minute flight on a US Airways or Delta shuttle – not including check-in, baggage collection and additional transport times from the airport terminal.

Auckland ↔ Wellington

The distance between New Zealand's largest city and its capital is approximately 640km. In the absence of high speed rail across New Zealand, a large proportion of travel between these two cities is done by air. The flight lasts approximately one hour.

Toronto ↔ Ottawa

Toronto to and from Ottawa is currently serviced by air, standard speed rail and road transport including buses. The distance between the two cities is approximately 400km.

As can be seen, the comparative advantage of air travel (in terms of time and cost) is gradually lost over shorter distances. For example, a flight between Auckland and Wellington in New Zealand (a distance of approximately 640 kilometres) takes 60 minutes. Currently, a flight between Sydney and Canberra (an approximate distance of 290km) takes from 50 to 55 minutes. Times have increased in recent years with longer check-in and baggage claim times, increased security measures and in flight fuel-saving measures on the part of the airlines.

City pairs by use of high speed rail (VHSR)

High speed rail between cities has been in existence in Japan since 1964 through the *shinkansen* "bullet train" system running north, west and south-west of Tokyo. They have become increasingly popular in western Europe as an alternative to air travel over certain distances.

Tokyo ↔ Osaka

Travel to and from Japan's two largest cities can be achieved in 2 hours and 20 minutes for the 515km journey. The route is covered by the Tokaido line *shinkansen*.

Taipei ↔ Kaohsiung 335km

The 335km journey between Taiwan's capital and its largest port can now be done by Taiwan High Speed Rail. The network runs along the west coast of Taiwan between the two cities, beginning operation in January 2007. It has reduced rail travel time from 4.5 hours to 90 minutes.

Seoul ↔ Busan

Travel between Seoul and Busan (a distance of approximately 330km) can now be achieved in 2 hours and 40 minutes using the KTX service. The previous generation of trains completed the journey in 4 hours and 10 minutes.

Madrid ↔ Barcelona

Travel between Madrid and Barcelona (a journey of some 621km) on the Spanish AVE high speed rail system can be achieved in 2 hours and 38 minutes. Before the system was built, the journey between the two cities took almost 6 hours and required a change of rail gauge.

London ↔ Paris/London ↔ Brussels

The distance between London and Paris (340km) and London and Brussels (320km) is covered by the Eurostar service in just over 2 hours and just under 2 hours respectively.

While the above does not take into account price and cost issues and passenger load factors involved in the construction and commercial operation of these rail services or any proposed service between Canberra and Sydney, a thorough scoping study should meet those requirements. What the above merely does is to highlight that:

- a rail link (regardless of whether it is high speed capability) between political capitals and population capitals **is necessary**;
- a high speed rail link has been implemented between cities with a **greater distance** between than Sydney and Canberra;
- the **technology increasingly exists** to make high speed rail a viable and competitive alternative to air travel over shorter distances (in this author's opinion anywhere up to 600km), especially in an increasingly climate conscious public arena.

What are the current and future pressure points in relation to airport capacity?

Perth Airport's 'growing pains' are no secret to those in the aviation industry or indeed anyone who has used the airport. The proposed construction of a new terminal and substantial improvement of existing facilities should improve capacity both airside and terminal side.

I understand that the view of the current government is that Sydney Kingsford-Smith Airport at Mascot is, subject to review of the airport's revised master plan, insufficient to accommodate the future needs of Sydney's air traffic. I also understand that as a result, the current government favours the existence of a second Sydney airport outside the Sydney Basin. It is for these reasons and the reasons outlined above that I support Canberra as Sydney's second airport.

Can the growing use by civil aviation of joint user or Defence owned airports be safely and effectively accommodated?

I propose to address the situation of the growing use by civil aviation of joint user or Defence owned airports within the parameters of the second Sydney airport debate. Over the course of the debate, Newcastle Airport (Williamstown) has been mooted as the possible site for the second Sydney airport – along with Badgery's Creek, Bankstown Airport, the RAAF base in Richmond as well as Canberra.

Newcastle is approximately 170km from Sydney and in recent years has been rejuvenated as a primary regional centre in New South Wales. While civilian flight is permitted and has been actively encouraged, Newcastle Airport continues to share its runway with the RAAF Base in Williamstown and the airfield is still

classified as a military airfield. Civilian air travel is permitted under the current lease until 2045.

The RAAF base in Richmond has been discounted and excluded as a potential site for the second Sydney airport on a number of occasions in the last 25 years. The reasons for these are also numerous and have been analysed by countless Federal government research papers.

The experience at Avalon and Newcastle has shown that joint user or Defence owned airports can work quite successfully and in conjunction with LCC services, provide much needed infrastructure and investment into the regional airport and the surrounding regional area.

Conclusion

The long term development of Australia's aviation infrastructure should be determined by taking into account the critical concept of intermodal transport and the role that rail can and should play in that development.

Once again, thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the issues raised in this Issues Paper. I look forward to the outcomes of this initial consultation process and to the opportunity to contribute further to the development of a National Aviation Policy Statement if such an opportunity should arise.

Andrew Harrington
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