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Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government  
GPO Box 594  
CANBERRA ACT 2601  
Via email to: [aviationstatement@infrastructure.gov.au](mailto:aviationstatement@infrastructure.gov.au)

Dear Sir/Madam,

**Re: Development of a National Aviation Policy Statement Issues Paper**

I would like to congratulate the Department on the initiative to develop a National Aviation Policy, as aviation at all levels has been ignored and allowed to develop in a piecemeal fashion, with vested outside interests exerting a severely damaging influence over the past 25 or so years.

This submission addresses several of the issues raised in the discussion paper: infrastructure, environment and emission reduction, training and general/business aviation.

I make this submission as a transport, freight and logistics professional with over 20 years of experience in the industry, and as an active pilot and aircraft owner.

Please do not hesitate to contact me should you wish to discuss any of the points raised in my submission.

With Best Regards

*Charles Pauka*

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## **Executive summary**

In examining options for the future direction of aviation, it is important to keep a wide focus and also consider other, non-aviation solutions that can have a synergic effect if developed in parallel.

This submission addresses infrastructure, environmental, training and development, and freight issues raised in the discussion paper. The submission focuses on alternative strategies that mitigate the need for a second Sydney international airport, strategies that also significantly lessen aviation emissions, congestion and aviation's impact on residents, while at the same time encouraging training and facilities for general aviation.

Since over 25% of passengers and over 13% of available aircraft movement slots at Sydney Airport are taken up by Sydney-Melbourne or Sydney-Canberra services, the submission recommends that a Very Fast Train (VFT) line be built between Sydney and Melbourne via Canberra, which would be able to take at least 50% of the passengers away from airlines. This would have the dual beneficial effect of reducing airline flights and therefore emissions, and would free up capacity at Sydney Airport.

It is also recommended that a second track be built alongside the VFT and on the same alignment, which would allow fast, double-stacked freight trains as well as fast, multi-stop passenger trains to operate between the three cities.

In the interim it is recommended that Schofields Airport in Sydney's north-west is reopened. As the Commonwealth still owns this facility and its infrastructure is largely undisturbed, the airport could very quickly be returned to operational status for training and business and general aviation, and further developed into a secondary airport servicing major interstate and regional destinations with medium-capacity aircraft.

This would service Sydney's fastest growing area, further reduce congestion at Sydney Airport, and provide a desperately needed general aviation facility in the area.

## **1. Free up capacity at Sydney Airport and cut airline emissions**

### **1.1 Current situation**

According to Sydney Airport statistics, 2.595 million passengers travelled through the airport in May 2008. Of these, 1.815m were domestic and 780,000 international passengers.

According to the Bureau of Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Economics (BITRE), of those passengers 660,660 travelled through Sydney Airport on their way to or from Melbourne or Canberra. This is more than 25% of the total number (domestic and international combined), or more than 36% of the total domestic passenger traffic.

The passengers were carried on 5,662 flights, which took up more than 13% of available slots at the airport. (**Available slots** are calculated taking the maximum number of movements permitted per hour, currently 80, between the curfew hours of 6 am and 11 pm. In May 2008 there were 42,160 available slots.)

Therefore on a daily average basis, more than 21,310 passengers each day travel between Sydney/Melbourne or Sydney/Canberra, on 182 flights each day.

The Sydney-Melbourne trip is listed by airlines as taking 1.5 hours from push-back to disembarkation. Passengers are required to be checked in and present in the departure lounge 30 minutes prior, and checking in, security screening etc. (from personal experience) can take anywhere between 10 and 45 minutes. Therefore it is reasonable to assume that a passenger will spend at least 2.5 hours on the trip, from time of arrival at the departure airport to time of disembarkation at the arrival airport. This scenario does not take into account departure delays or congestion (holding) delays.

### **1.2 The ground-based alternative**

European and Asian countries are increasingly looking to Very Fast Trains (VFT) as an alternative to flying. There is a number of reasons for this, the primary ones being congestion at airports, both in regards to aircraft (airspace, landing slots), and traffic congestion on the roads around the airports; the effect of increased airline traffic on residential amenity and quality of life; and, increasingly, environmental concerns over the heavy per-passenger pollution caused by jet aircraft.

Called TGV in France, the very fast train has been extremely successful and has in fact negated the need for the development of budget airlines in that country. VFT also operate in Germany and the UK, with the London-Paris VFT via the English Channel Tunnel competing successfully with airlines both on price and speed, not to mention comfort and environmental considerations. The Japanese Bullet Train is world famous, and the Chinese Government has also built advanced-technology VFT in that country.

“Following on from the success of the TGV, [French company] Alstom has developed the fourth generation of very high speed trains: the AGV (Automotrice Grande Vitesse). In 2007, Alstom and its partners – RFF and SNCF – set a new world rail speed record of 574.8 km/h.” (Alstom website). The AGV has a commercial operating speed of 350 km/h, which, if the

train followed the current Hume Highway alignment, would cover the Sydney-Melbourne trip in under three hours.

The track for the VFT would need to be built 'from scratch' and would allow for optimum alignment. Routed via Canberra, a reasonable estimate of the cost to build it is around the \$10-12 billion mark at today's prices. Considering the cost of building a brand new international airport for Sydney and associated infrastructure (e.g. a VFT of its own if it is to be built outside of the Sydney basin), plus the environmental benefits the train would bring in comparison to yet more aircraft, this cost is reasonable.

As there have been numerous proposals put forward in the 1980s and '90s, several studies on the route have been done and a 'flying start' could be made. In contrast, the site of a new airport for Sydney is still highly controversial and uncertain, and would meet with severe resident opposition no matter where it would be located. It would cost billions of dollars, affect the amenity and quality of life of a large number of residents, and devalue existing and potential residential land.

If the VFT were to take 50% of the current airline traffic, that would free up more than 90 slots at Sydney Airport each day, mostly in the peak demand periods. It would also cut the emissions of more than 90 twin-jet aircraft, saving a large amount of high-altitude emissions from the atmosphere.

### **1.3 Synergies will alleviate the cost**

Currently, it is conservatively estimated that more than 7,000 heavy trucks travel between Sydney and Melbourne each day, with rail freight taking care of approximately only 7% of the total volume of freight that moves between the two cities. Hampered by 19<sup>th</sup> century rail alignment, lack of investment and outdated equipment, rail operators struggle to compete with road transport, where, in contrast to minimal investment in the rail track, billions of dollars have been spent on the Hume Highway.

The Federal Government, via the Australian Rail Track Corporation (ARTC) has committed millions of dollars to fixing some of the worst spots through AusLink. This money, however, could be transferred towards a totally new track, to be built alongside the VFT track.

If built utilising the same alignment as the VFT, government and private funding, together with existing AusLink funding, could construct a dual line between Sydney and Melbourne at a fraction of the cost of two individual lines. Whilst one line would be dedicated to the VFT, the other line would carry (up to 2.4 km) long, double-stacked freight trains, travelling at up to 160 km/h.

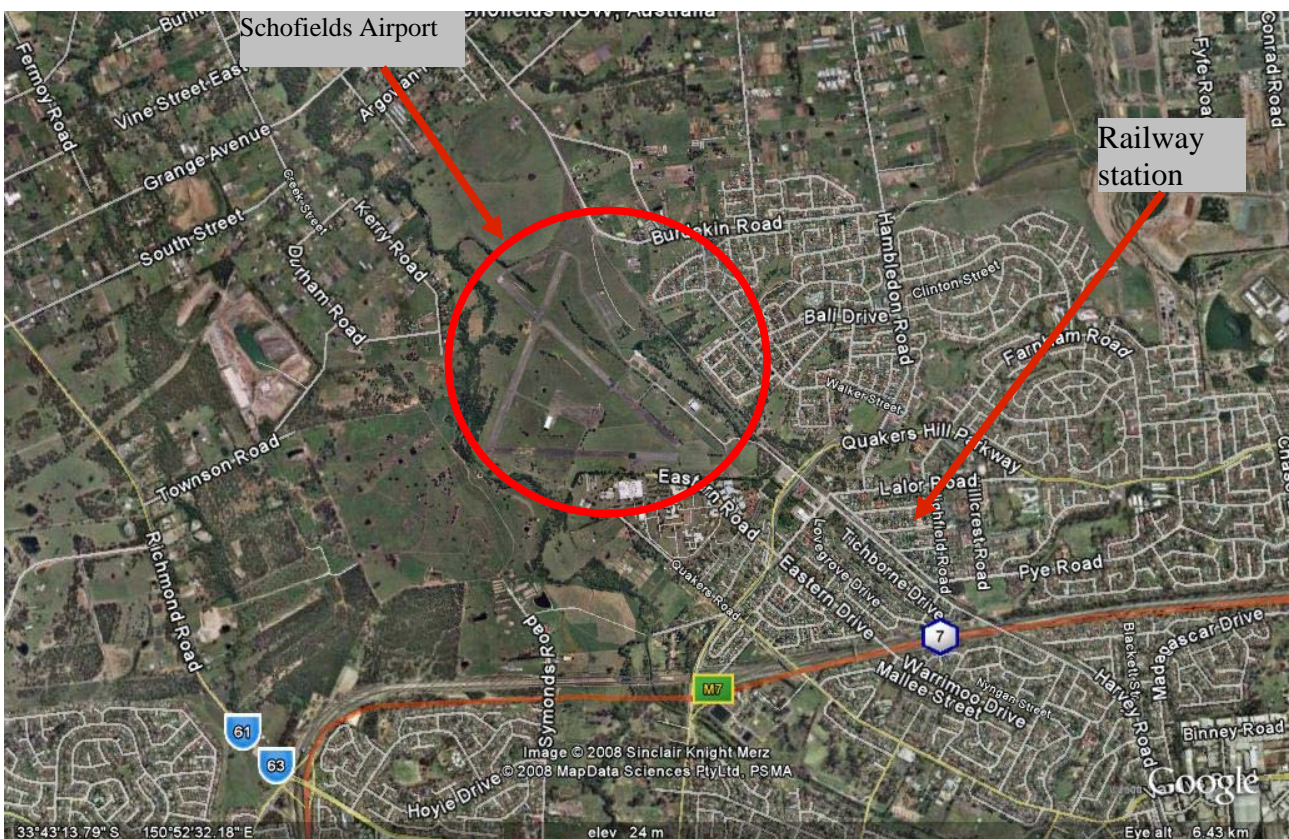
Each freight train could displace close to 200 trucks from the highway, at a great speed- and cost advantage. Once again, the train would also be saving large amounts of carbon emissions by displacing the heavy truck traffic.

The freight line could also be utilised for passenger traffic. As the VFT would not be stopping at any point between Sydney and Melbourne and/or Canberra, a high-speed passenger train on the second line would be able to service intermediate towns and centres.

## 1.4 Catering for Sydney's other half

Sydney Airport is situated some 11 km to the south of Sydney CBD. With current traffic congestion problems, residents living more than 20 km away from the airport must allow more than one hour for the journey. Given that Sydney's geographical and population centre is at Parramatta, some 30 km away, and close to two million people living or about to be housed in Sydney's western and north-western regions, the location of Sydney Airport is inconvenient for approximately half of Sydney's population.

An alternative solution to building a brand new, international-standard airport that would be equally inconvenient for most of Sydney's population, would be to reinstate and further develop Schofields Airport in Sydney's north-west.



Located in the North-Western Growth Centre, Schofields Airport is currently in Commonwealth ownership and would therefore not require extensive land acquisition. It is ideally situated on the Richmond train line with an existing railway station nearby, and easy access to the WestLink M7 motorway.

The airport still has its runway infrastructure intact with clear areas to the west and north, allowing for relatively low impact on residents. As it is located within the Richmond Control Zone, joint Air Traffic Control with Richmond RAAF Base would be instituted.

Schofields Airport would ideally be suited as a secondary facility, for training, business and general aviation, and regional and low-volume interstate traffic, catering for up to Airbus A319/Boeing 717/Embraer Regional Jet and Saab 340/Dash 8 aircraft. These would be able to provide a convenient option for around half of Sydney's population to travel by air. With current road congestion, oftentimes Schofields would be a quicker option for people living as far away as North Ryde, for example, using the M2/M7 motorway combination.

Schofields Airport could take around 50 movements a day from Sydney Airport, further easing that airport's congestion problems.

## **2. Training and general/business aviation**

While Sydney's population has been growing exponentially in the last few decades, the city's aviation infrastructure has been going backwards. Not only has there been no new general aviation (GA) airport opened since the second World War, recent closures and privatisation of existing airports have put an enormous pressure on training, business and general aviation.

Since 1996 when Schofields Airport closed, residents in west, north-west and northern Sydney have been forced to travel either to the Central Coast or to Bankstown, Hoxton Park and Camden. On the Central Coast, Cooranbong closed last year and Warnervale is scheduled to close soon. Hoxton Park Airport is closing this October. A small but popular private strip at St Mary's also closed recently, and so has a strip primarily used by gyrocopters at Erskine Park. In addition, Bankstown Airport has closed its north-south runway in recent years.

This leaves Bankstown and Camden airports as training airports, both in the south-west of Sydney and already close to capacity. There is private airstrip outside of Camden, at The Oaks, which is suitable for very light recreational aircraft only and is already operating at capacity, and a club airstrip at Wedderburn, past Campbelltown, which is also operating near capacity and is not suitable for training.

It is clear, then, that there is no landing facility in the west, north-west or north of Sydney. This creates a severe problem for anyone living north of the Parramatta River, and makes budding airline pilots think twice about their chosen profession, when they have to travel a minimum of three hours each day to/from the nearest training airport. Given that young pilots are usually self-financing and work 2-3 jobs to pay for their tuition (a commercial pilot's licence costs upwards of \$30,000), the critical shortage of pilots is bound to continue.

From a safety point of view, the lack of an airport with a refuelling facility in such a large area is a critical hazard. Whether owing to low fuel or weather closing in, a light aircraft would find itself traversing a large area without being able to land. And after the closure of Hoxton Park, there will be no north-south runway available in the Sydney basin should an aircraft be caught out in one of Sydney's famous southerly blusters.

As a final consideration, Australia's great distances could be well overcome by business travellers if they travelled in modern, light business aircraft (from 4-seat propeller ones to bizjets). The development of business flying is severely hampered by a lack of airport infrastructure, and the additional time businessmen have to spend travelling to/from existing airports is seriously effecting their productivity and economic activity.

(ends)