

NSW GOVERNMENT SUBMISSION TO THE REVIEW OF THE F3 TO M7 CORRIDOR SELECTION

1. Overview of NSW submission

The NSW Government welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the independent review of the *F3 to Sydney Orbital Link Study of April 2004* by consultants Sinclair Knight Merz. This submission provides the strategic context for consideration of the F3 to M2/M7 corridor and outlines the NSW Government's role in the 2004 Sinclair Knight Merz study, and the subsequent review undertaken by Masson Wilson Twiney in 2006.

There have been some significant developments since the 2004 study. This submission therefore provides information on policy and demographic changes that are relevant to the review.

2. Strategic context

Investment in urban transport infrastructure is a national priority essential to sustain economic growth and prosperity, not only in Sydney, but more broadly at a national level. The *Sydney Metropolitan Strategy – City of Cities: A Plan for Sydney's Future*, released in December 2005, predicted that Sydney's population would increase from 4.2 million to more than 5 million within 25 years. This growth will put increasing pressure on all infrastructure, including NSW's transport network.

In the 2006/07 financial year, Australian States and Territories will invest some \$32 billion on infrastructure. One third of this total will be spent by the NSW Government alone.

The F3 to Sydney Orbital link is an important part of the AusLink National Network route, connecting Sydney and the Central Coast. The NSW Government welcomes steps toward building this critical transport link, which will assist to ease heavy vehicle traffic congestion on key road arteries, particularly the Pacific Highway and Pennant Hills Road, thereby improving freight efficiency. These benefits are projected to translate to significant economic and social benefits at both the local and national levels, as found in the 2004 study.

As it has with other major road projects of national significance, the NSW Government will work cooperatively with the Commonwealth Government on this major project proposal.

With the completion of the 110 km, \$6 billion Sydney orbital network, the F3 to M2/ M7 link is critical to freight and passenger vehicle transport. The Greater Western Sydney Economic Development Board estimates that Westlink M7 will generate 24,000 jobs and \$3 billion in economic development in the region in the next three years. The M7 provides key benefits for industry, which in turn assists to generate jobs in Western Sydney. The F3 to M2 / M7 link will significantly improve access to and from this part of Sydney.

3. Background to *F3 to Sydney Orbital Link Study of April 2004* and *Interim Report- F3 to Sydney Orbital Corridor*

F3 to Sydney Orbital Link Study of April 2004

The *F3 to Sydney Orbital Link Study of April 2004* by consultants Sinclair Knight Merz was a joint Commonwealth/ NSW Government initiative to investigate potential alignments for a future connection of the F3 Freeway to the M2 Motorway and the proposed Western Sydney Orbital (now known as the Westlink M7).

The 2004 study was funded by the Commonwealth Government and managed by the NSW Roads and Traffic Authority (RTA). In its project management role, the RTA engaged the consultant, provided technical and other support as required, participated in community consultations and commented on draft study reports.

At the time of the study's completion, the RTA was in agreement with the consultants on the validity and reasonableness of the data and assumptions used in assessing route options, and the conclusion that the 'Type A Purple' Option best satisfied the short to medium term road traffic objectives set for the study. The Purple option was accepted and endorsed by the Commonwealth Ministers for Transport and Regional Services and Local Government, Territories and Roads in a joint media statement made on 6 May 2004.

Interim Report- F3 to Sydney Orbital Corridor

Subsequent to the release of the *F3 to Sydney Orbital Link Study of April 2004*, the owners of the M2 Motorway (the Hills Motorway Ltd and later Transurban) made submissions to the Commonwealth Department of Transport and Regional Services and the RTA in September 2005 asserting that the 'Type A Yellow' Option (further to the east) would be preferable to the 'Type A Purple' Option. Hills/Transurban considered that the Yellow option would carry more traffic than the preferred Purple option, be financially more viable and provide similar relief to Pennant Hills Road. However, Hills/Transurban did not disclose the data and assumptions underpinning its findings.

In response to the Hills/ Transurban submissions, and at the request of the Commonwealth Department of Transport and Regional Services, the RTA engaged independent consultant Masson Wilson Twiney to undertake a desktop review of traffic forecasts by Sinclair Knight Merz and Transurban for the F3 to Sydney Orbital Link and to compare route options for the corridor. In its *Interim Report – F3 to Sydney Orbital Corridor Review*, Masson Wilson Twiney concluded that Transurban's use of different data and assumptions, including different (lower) tolling assumptions for motorists using the M2 (resulting in higher traffic forecasts), was most likely to account for discrepancies between the 2004 Study and the Hills/Transurban submissions.

In its study, Sinclair Knight Merz had assumed that the present tolling regime based on the existing concession deed for the M2 would continue. Transurban has since confirmed that if the F3 to M2/M7 project is to be delivered through a competitive Privately Financed Project (PFP) process (not through a joint development arrangement as proposed by Transurban), then the current tolling regime would be sustained.

4. Current NSW Government policy context

The *NSW State Plan*, launched by the NSW Premier on 14 November 2006, sets key transport policy priorities and targets for NSW, including improvements to the efficiency of the road network, road safety, public transport mode share and air quality outcomes. More information on the *NSW State Plan* can be found at www.nsw.gov.au/stateplan/.

The NSW Government has developed a strategic policy and planning framework for infrastructure planning, comprising several complementary strategic documents. This framework provides the context in which the NSW Government is considering, and will consider, future infrastructure (and land use) development along the F3 to M7 corridor. These strategies include:

- the *Sydney Metropolitan Strategy – City of Cities: A Plan for Sydney’s Future*, released in December 2005, which notes the need for assessment and evaluation of proposals to connect the F3 with the M2. It also notes as a short term priority the need to investigate road corridor preservation between the F3 freeway north of the Hawkesbury River and north western Sydney and the M7 Motorway. Please see www.metrostrategy.nsw.gov.au for more information;
- the *State Infrastructure Strategy*, released in mid-2006, which confirms corridor preservation for the M2 to F3 and F3 to M7 towards the end of the decade as a key transport infrastructure priority. More information may be found at www.treasury.nsw.gov.au/sis/sis-2006.htm;
- the *Review of Future Provision of Motorways in NSW (Motorways Review)* which includes recommendations, endorsed by the NSW Premier in December 2005, regarding methods of procurement of future motorways, associated government decision-making processes and requirements for public disclosure and consultation. These recommendations are being implemented. The *Motorways Review* may be accessed via the NSW Premier’s website (www.premiers.nsw.gov.au) and a Premier’s Memorandum issued as a consequence of this review (M2007-01) is also available from this website; and
- the *Urban Transport Statement*, released in November 2006, which commits to an extensive program to ease traffic congestion and increase public transport use, including major enhancement of Sydney’s rail and bus networks, expansion and upgrade of key arterial road routes, and a \$100 million ‘pinch-point’ strategy to address key congestion points in Sydney. The *Urban Transport Statement* may be found at www.nsw.gov.au/urban_transport.asp. As part of commitments under this Statement, the NSW Government has commissioned the NSW Centre for Transport Planning and Product Development to develop a discussion paper by mid 2007 on a possible connection of the F3 to the M2 and/or M7. The discussion paper will canvass a preferred route strategy, broad project concepts, product concepts, and anticipated sequencing of delivery.

NSW Government agencies are currently participating in the development of the *Sydney Urban Corridor Strategy*, which is being coordinated by the Commonwealth Department of Transport and Regional Services. The Strategy is due to be completed by June 2007. The Strategy includes consideration of improvements to north-south freeway connections to the orbital network, including potential motorway links from the Sydney Orbital to the F3 and F6 freeways. In accordance with the AusLink framework, the Sydney Urban Corridor study will inform joint Commonwealth and NSW Government consideration of investment priorities to meet transport needs in the medium term.

In considering changes that have occurred since the 2004 Sinclair Knight Merz study, the Review should have regard to both changes to the NSW Government strategic policy context and the final Sydney Urban Corridor Strategy.

5. Updated Data

In examining future options for the F3 to M2 and/or M7 corridor, the NSW Government will consider updated data and appropriate methodological approaches. Since the time of the 2004 study, there have been a range of transport and land use changes and new data releases. These include:

- the release of the 2001 Census, which includes updated population, employment and journey to work travel trends;
- the release by the NSW Government of Household Travel Survey data from 1999 to 2005-06, containing detailed travel patterns of Sydney residents; and
- the release of the *Metropolitan Strategy* (referred to above), which includes population and employment growth targets for Sydney. The NSW Government's Transport and Population Data Centre has produced an updated set of population and employment projections reflecting the sub-regional distribution of the population targets and Sydney metropolitan control totals for employment in November 2006.

The 2004 study highlighted that air quality issues related to the project should be considered as part of the selection process for the preferred route. NSW Health considers that an assessment of the potential air quality issues would normally include:

- a comprehensive assessment of pollution, including consideration of background emissions and ground level concentrations of stack emissions;
- confirmation that the traffic modelling fully takes account of the potential for traffic induction;
- consideration of alternative stack locations and design for each corridor option; and
- appropriate application of air quality health guidelines.

Should you wish to receive further information, the NSW Transport and Population Data Centre is able to provide updated trip tables for the review reflecting up-to-date information on population and employment growth and distribution. The NSW Government would also be pleased to provide further information on air quality issues.

Concluding comments

In light of updated data, including the new land use data and trip tables issued by the NSW Transport and Population Data Centre, which point to the possibility of higher traffic projections in the F3 to M2/M7 corridor, the NSW Government considers that fresh analysis of the study's conclusions may be warranted. If a reassessment is undertaken, all options could be re-examined to confirm the robustness of the study conclusions.