

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The proposed 'purple' option for the F3 to Orbital Link will, at the very least, continue heavy vehicle traffic problems in the built up areas of Seven Hills and south-east Blacktown and, in all likelihood, increase heavy vehicle traffic problems in Seven Hills and south-east Blacktown by transferring some heavy vehicle traffic from Pennant Hills Rd into our community.

The F3 to M7 Corridor Selection should address more than traffic relief for Pennant Hills Rd. The Selection should endeavour to optimise use of the Orbital and reduce heavy vehicle traffic on local roads across Sydney.

## BACKGROUND

Residents of Blacktown & Seven Hills Against Further Traffic (ROBSHAFT) is a community group formed in 1996 to represent the concerns of residents of Seven Hills and south-east Blacktown with respect to expected increase in traffic volume from the formerly proposed 'Medium Term Solution to the National Highway Route' viz 'The Prospect Arterial'. Part of the concern extended to the then proposed M2 Motorway and inadequate consideration of traffic flow impacts on our community.

In June, 1996, ROBSHAFT obtained an injunction in the Land & Environment Court to prevent the upgrading of Abbott Rd, Seven Hills which was part of the RTA's plan to service M2 Motorway through Seven Hills. The injunction was awarded pending resolution of our concerns about inadequate consideration of environmental impacts of traffic volume. Late in 1996, the Land & Environment Court lifted the injunction, ruling that the RTA had taken all relevant matters into consideration. Completion of the upgrade of Abbott Rd coincided with construction and opening of the M2 Motorway in May, 1997.

Within twelve months of operation of the M2 Motorway and upgrade of Abbott Rd, traffic volume and traffic noise increased substantially in Seven Hills and south-east Blacktown. Traffic volume in the centre of Seven Hills increased from 35,263vpd in 1996 to 49,193vpd in early 1998. This is an increase of 40%. Traffic volume on Abbott Rd had increased from 19,625vpd in 1995 to 37,405vpd in early 1998. This is almost a 100% increase in traffic volume. Morning peak traffic volume on Abbott Rd, Seven Hills had, by March 1998, reached the level predicted by the RTA for year 2001. The RTA had also predicted noise levels at residences along Abbott Rd would not increase by more than 3 dB(A) for ten years after the upgrade of Abbott Rd. However, post upgrade noise testing showed an average of 4 dB(A) increase after twelve months.

The inadequate assessment of impacts necessitated the RTA undertaking post upgrade noise attenuation measures in all residences along Abbott Rd and in most residences along Prospect Hwy some 4km through Seven Hills.

Sadly, noise attenuation measures work best in brick veneer dwellings but many dwellings in Seven Hills are fibro construction. Traffic noise penetrates through fibro and fibro clad walls to the discomfort of residents.

The great hope of residents was construction of the M7 Motorway which had been declared by the NSW Government, in the 'Action for Transport 2010 Strategy', as the means to get heavy vehicles out of built up areas. It was to be the link between the M2 and M4 Motorways.

## THE PRESENT

The M7 Motorway opened in December 2005. A reduction has been noticed in the volume of cars passing through Seven Hills and south-east Blacktown. However, there has not been the reduction in heavy vehicles expected by the government and hoped for by residents.

There appears to be no valid reason for heavy vehicles to continue to use the 7km Seven Hills/south-east Blacktown corridor between the M2 and M4. For example, the trucking company Scott's Refrigerated Transport operates from premises at Prestons alongside the M7. Each day the company undertakes two way journeys between Prestons and Lisarow on the Central Coast. The company's trucks come off the M2 at Seven Hills and proceed through our community until entering upon the M4 only to enter the M7 at Eastern Creek. The same route is taken for the north bound journey. Why the company avoids the M7 between the M2 at Seven Hills and the junction of the M4 and M7 at Eastern Creek is beyond our understanding. But Scott's Refrigerated Transport is far from the only trucking company avoiding the M7 between the M2 at Seven Hills and the M4/M7 junction at Eastern Creek.

Perhaps some interstate and long distance carriers would have infrequently need of the M7 Motorway and see no economic reason to incur expense in purchasing an E-Tag. This would be particularly so if they were travelling to and from the Arndell Park and Huntingwood Industrial Estates in south Blacktown or if they were using Wallgrove Rd as an alternative means to access the Wetherill Park Industrial Estate via The Horsley Drive.

As we understand it, the M2 Motorway does not have mandatory E-tag use. A cash toll is acceptable. Alternatively, the M7 Motorway does have mandatory E-tag use. The lack of a mandatory E-tag use on the M2 permits long distance heavy vehicle drivers to avoid purchase of an E-tag and, instead, use our community as a north/south route in lieu of the M7.

Perhaps there is a perceived cost saving in avoiding the toll for part of the M7 journey. At nights there is little local traffic in Seven Hills and south-east Blacktown triggering traffic signals to cause sufficient red lights and thus make for a slower journey for heavy vehicles between the M2 and M4. Perhaps this 'clear' run through our community at nights is an attraction to heavy vehicles. We have asked the RTA to configure the traffic signals to switch to red light without activation from cross traffic. To constantly have to stop at traffic signals would be a deterrent to heavy vehicles in our community at night but the RTA refused to accede to this request. This, of course, would solve only part of the problem because the heavy vehicles still come in daylight hours.

In the Thursday and Friday afternoon peak period traffic congestion often occurs to the frustration of our community and, no doubt, to through traffic drivers. This is due to the number of heavy vehicles which can occupy the space of several cars in the 100 metre segment of Prospect Hwy between the intersections of Wall Park Ave and Federal Rd/Olive St. Federal Rd provides the main access to our community's shopping centre so the Federal Rd/Olive St intersection with Prospect Hwy is busy on Thursday and Friday afternoons. Frequent changing of signals at this intersection combined with the merging of Seven Hills Rd South with Prospect Hwy at the intersection of Wall Park Ave and Prospect Hwy causes delays in all directions and certainly clogs the 100 metre segment of Prospect Hwy between Wall Park Ave and the Federal Rd/Olive St intersection.

### **Well, what has all this to do with the F3 to Orbital Link Study?**

Presently, large numbers of heavy vehicles use the F3/Pennant Hills Rd/James Ruse Dr/Cumberland Hwy route for carriage of goods between north of Sydney and the large Smithfield/Wetherill Park Industrial Estate and locations south and south-west of Sydney. They are avoiding the M2/M7 link.

## FUTURE

Nothing we've seen in the F3 to Sydney Orbital Link Study is sufficient to alter the aforesaid avoidance of the M2/M7 link. **Instead, the preferred option for the F3 to Orbital Link will likely transfer heavy vehicle problems from Pennant Hills Rd to Main Road 644 in Seven Hills and south-east Blacktown.**

More inducement is necessary to get greater numbers of heavy vehicles off local roads and onto dedicated routes such as the Sydney Orbital.

The F3 to Sydney Orbital Link Study recommends construction of a tunnel generally aligned underneath the 9km route of Pennant Hills Rd between the F3 and the M2 Motorway. The proposal provides for direct (no escape) feeding of vehicles from the tunnel onto the M2 Motorway. Drivers of heavy vehicle who currently avoid the M2/M7 link because of lack of an E-tag and/or reluctance to pay tolls will not alter their practice of using the Pennant Hills Rd/James Ruse Dr/Cumberland Hwy route. Drivers of heavy vehicles who currently use Pennant Hills Rd and also the M2 Motorway but who limit toll expense by avoiding the M7 toll and coming through Seven Hills and south-east Blacktown will have to consider an additional toll viz, the tunnel underneath Pennant Hills Rd. These drivers might commit to the additional toll for the tunnel route underneath Pennant Hills Rd and also the M2 Motorway but they will not commit to the toll on the M7 Motorway. Our community's problems will thus continue.

The scenario gets worse. The NSW Government is about to approve a proposal from Boral to allow development of its Southern Employment Lands in the quarry site at Greystanes. Part of the development includes construction of an arterial spine road by the year 2009. **The arterial spine road will do something not before experienced in Western Sydney.** It will open up a new, direct north/south route between the large Smithfield/Wetherill Park Industrial Estate and the M2 Motorway via Main Road 644 through south-east Blacktown and Seven Hills. The journey between the Smithfield/Wetherill Park Industrial Estate and the M2 Motorway via Main Road 644 will be 9km and will have, at the most, 18 sets of traffic signals.

This new route has the potential to induce heavy vehicles away from the M7 Motorway and, instead, draw them through our community. The Traffic Study for the Boral development fails to address this. We have appealed to the NSW Government to redress this but we don't expect sympathy because the weight of corporation pressure prevails over the concerns of the general public.

**It is vital that the 'Review of the F3 to M7 Corridor Selection' consider the implications of this new link between the M2 Motorway and the large Smithfield/Wetherill Park Industrial Estate. It will reduce the number of heavy vehicles using both the M2 and M7 in the one journey.**

All past propaganda from all manner of lobbyists for high volume road routes such as the Western Sydney Orbital as well as the many reroutings of National Highway advocated a need to get heavy vehicles out of built up areas. The F3 to Sydney Orbital Link Study also 'mouths' the need to get heavy vehicles away from the built up area alongside the 9km route of Pennant Hills Road between the F3 and the Orbital.

Sadly, the recommended solution will only increase traffic accident risk, noise and air pollution as well as impose loss of amenity to residents of Seven Hills and south-east Blacktown. Heavy vehicles still come through our community when they ought to be using the M7 Motorway. Experience shows a high degree of toll avoidance by heavy vehicle drivers. To construct a tunnel underneath Pennant Hills Road and apply a toll on a route which feeds directly onto another tolled route viz, the M2 will only encourage exiting the tollway at the earliest opportunity viz, Seven Hills, rather than incurring another toll viz the M7, for a south bound journey. The same avoidance will apply on the north bound journey.

Potential exists to recreate the Pennant Hills Rd traffic problems in Seven Hills and south-east Blacktown if the "Purple" Option for the F3 to Sydney Orbital Link is adopted.

To avoid this, heavy vehicle drivers need an incentive to pay tolls associated with each of the major infrastructure routes which were constructed to get heavy vehicles out of built up areas. Perhaps a solution is a discount for the longer journey when using all three of the tunnel under Pennant Hills Rd, the M2 and the M7. Mandatory E-tags for each segment of the F3 to Orbital will also assist.

Probably the surest means of overcoming problems of heavy vehicles in built up areas and on local roads is to opt for a dedicated heavy vehicle route which provides a link between the F3 and the Orbital at Dean Park in Blacktown LGA.

An advantage of this route is that it not only avoids the increase of heavy vehicles in our community that the 'Purple' Option presents but, potentially, reduces heavy vehicle traffic on Pennant Hills Rd as well as in our community. Further, it encourages heavy vehicle drivers on journeys to and from the large Smithfield/Wetherill Park Industrial Estate to use the M7 Motorway via a short access route west of the Estate.

This route poses problems of dislocation of residents in the path of the proposed route as well as loss of habitat for flora and fauna. If it is intended this route will be a long term strategy for Sydney's road network then it should be brought forward and considered more seriously now, while fewer people reside in the path of the link. Bridges and tunnels ought to be employed to provide the highest level of habitat protection for flora and fauna. Again, this is more achievable before population growth accelerates in the area of the route.

We close this submission with an earnest request that the 'Review' seriously consider the circumstances of our community. **The solution to the problems of Pennant Hills Rd should not transfer the problem to Seven Hills and south-east Blacktown.** Ideally, the solution should also solve our community's problems and should fulfill past announcements for major road infrastructure proposals to get heavy vehicles off local roads and out of built up areas.

We don't know the full ramifications of the Dean Park connection but from what we have seen so far, the Dean Park connection is the superior option, provided environmental concerns and resident dislocations are properly addressed.

We leave these thoughts for your careful consideration and we hope for equitable treatment in the final solution.

Yours sincerely,

Wayne Olling

President

Residents of Blacktown & Seven Hills Against Further Traffic