



*NSW ELECTIONS 2007 POLICY*

## **PUBLIC TRANSPORT**

Over the years the proportion of people in New South Wales using public transport has fallen steadily, from over 40% in 1945 to under 10% today.

Now, the public transport system only really gets used to capacity at peak hour. The rest of the time it's used by those who can't afford car travel.

Little wonder that the NSW government has been closing rail lines and neglecting the system to the point that train travel across the state has been getting slower over the past decade! (Over the same period spending on motorways reached \$10 billion.)

In 2006-07, according to the Ministry of Transport, the average subsidy per passenger trip will be \$4.21 on CityRail, 70 cents on Sydney and Newcastle buses, \$2.34 on

Sydney ferries and \$58.28 on CountryLink—the entire system will absorb \$3.4 billion in grants and subsidies.

Here's why the transport authorities and the NSW government wants to keep cutting "loss-making" services like the Broadmeadow-Newcastle link, arguing that some of this money would be better spent upgrading the system where there is still demand (especially in the Sydney region).

*But this way of looking at the issue is dead wrong.* The only way to measure the global cost and benefit of public transport is against the global cost and benefit of the alternative—shifting people and goods by car and truck.

On that scale public transport wins hands down—every 10% switch out of car and truck and into public transport will reduce the costs of air pollution, greenhouse gas emission, car accidents, traffic congestion, motor vehicle waste disposal, noise pollution and road maintenance by an order of \$1.4 billion at least.

That's why the Socialist Alliance calls for a three-month trial of free public transport (see [www.socialist-alliance.org](http://www.socialist-alliance.org))--to test out in practice the gains that could be made for our health and the environment by a radical switch back to public transport.

At the same time the Alliance proposes an all-round upgrading of the public transport system.

### **1. Extend and improve the network**

After years of neglect the Iemma government has finally embraced a plan for increased rail infrastructure in the Sydney region—the Metropolitan Rail Expansion Plan (MREP). But NSW's rail infrastructure is already 20 years behind where it should be and a rapid switch to public transport is needed if there is to be a serious impact on climate change and air pollution.

This requires:

- Implementing the MREP not by 2015 but as soon as possible. This is urgently needed to unclog freight and suburban and interurban rail networks, allowing more trains to run more frequently.
- Committing to a further extension of the heavy rail network in urban centres (Sydney, Newcastle, Illawarra) and investigating the extent to which this should be underground
- Increasing capacity by developing an extensive network of light rail along arterial roads, as well as in between major centres, especially in Sydney's West
- Expanding the rail freight network so as to serve all major industrial clusters and ports
- Upgrading the interstate and country rail network to allow trains to travel more quickly
- Reversing cuts to the country rail network
- Expanding bus priority programs and strategic bus lanes
- Rebuilding public transport staff numbers to ensure safe, comfortable and efficient services
- Upgrading railway stations, light rail and bus stops, ferry wharfs and interchanges to provide adequate seating, shelter, bicycle storage and decent facilities for the disabled.

- Expansion of the cycleway network
- Planned integration of taxis and taxi cooperatives into the system

## 2. Public transport: publicly owned and democratically managed

While public transport in NSW has not experienced Victoria's full-scale privatisation disaster, it has had its share of flops and crises, the most spectacular being the Cross-City Tunnel and the Sydney airport rail link (presently being run as a high-cost monopoly to help the state pay off its debts to the previous owners).

The privatisation of CityRail and CountryLink maintenance work also lies behind the familiar stories of breakdowns and network decay—over the past 20 years short-term savings have been purchased at the price of a longer term decline in standards as well as loss of expertise within the public system.

The Socialist Alliance stands for:

- Public ownership of all transport services and their administration by boards representing users, workers and managers
- Renationalisation of private rail freight companies like Pacific National
- An end to public-private partnerships
- The taking into public ownership of private bus operations (presently subsidised to the tune of \$555 million a year)
- Fully integrated planning of all transport modes. Instead of unplanned competition between private transport, public transport and taxis, a comprehensive plan that specialises each mode where it best fits

## 3. Making transport environmentally sustainable

Given that trains are 40 times and buses 3.5 times more energy efficient than cars, a sustained shift to public transport will hugely benefit our environment. Moreover, even as public transport regains its place as the main transport mode, it can lead the way by incorporating the latest environmentally sustainable technologies (eg, lightweight materials, alternative propulsion systems).

The Socialist Alliance also stands for:

- Replacing semi-trailers and “B-doubles” as the major inter-city freight mode, with workers affected to be retrained on full pay and incorporated into the expanded public transport system
- Electric and hybrid vehicles to replace commercial trucks and vans for the urban transport of freight
- Ending the construction of new motorways
- Ending all tax concessions for company and company-purchased cars
- Developing biofuels only where there is negligible impact on productive agricultural land and biodiversity;
- Free carriage of bicycles on public transport;
- Making all new urban development dependent on the provision of adequate public transport

## 4. Funding

The shift in public transport infrastructure and services proposed here will require a large increase in funding. The Socialist Alliance proposes:

- An increase in state debt to fund large-scale public transport infrastructure
- The imposition of a public transport levy on all CBD employers with more than 10 staff, along the lines of the French *versement de transport*.
- Special levies on developers who gain access to commercially profitable sites close to railway stations and bus interchanges.