



RACQ SUBMISSION ON

DRAFT

BRISBANE CITY COUNCIL

TRANSPORT PLAN FOR BRISBANE

2006 - 2026

The Royal Automobile Club of Queensland Limited

18 April 2008

Introduction

The Royal Automobile Club of Queensland (RACQ) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the draft Brisbane City Council Transport Plan for Brisbane 2006 – 2026. Given the nature of some of the detailed policy issues raised in this submission, the RACQ also proposes some meetings to explore the issues in greater depth.

The RACQ congratulates the Lord Mayor on the extent to which traffic and transport have been made key priorities, and the attempts to improve the levels of transport planning and investment.

The RACQ notes that more recent figures are available from BTRE on the cost of congestion in Brisbane and other capital cities. Although the new figures have been revised down substantially, the revision was based on improved methodology, and the costs remain unacceptably high.

With the high cost of infrastructure provision and the high costs of unsustainable travel, it is important that sound policy and project decisions are made. These need to move beyond the current debate between roads and public transport, toward a long term vision of a sustainable and resilient transport system that meets all future needs.

‘The Issues’ section of the plan raises the importance of considering future employment dispersal but unfortunately considers these a fait accompli. Trip distance is a fundamental driver of greenhouse emissions and Councils have significant power to influence employment location decisions in concert with state government. This influence is probably your strongest lever on long term transport emissions, so it should not be ignored. Employment growth should be focussed in several nodes with high levels of road and rail access to intercept a portion of commuters from surrounding areas. In addition to reducing the proportion of long commutes, this will result in higher flows travelling in the reverse peak direction, thereby improving the productivity of the infrastructure.

The RACQ is pleased to read that BCC is opening a dialogue on transport issues with the community. The RACQ is keen to participate in a broad range of discussions with BCC and other community stakeholders.

The RACQ broadly agrees with the six strategic objectives. More detailed comments are contained under each objective below.

Strategic Objective 1 Quality Public Transport

1. Enhancing Priority

The RACQ agrees with the need to improve public transport so that more people have a reasonable alternative to using their cars when accessing major centres.

However, we are concerned with the extent of attention being placed on radial busway provision.

Brisbane's transport system should be designed and built to provide the highest level of service feasible for all modes (walking, cycling, public transport and cars) so that people have real choices. Transport corridors are important public spaces, so upgrades should also incorporate local amenity improvements (shade tree plantings, noise amelioration, quality urban design and public spaces).

In some constrained corridors that provide access to major centres it is reasonable for buses to be prioritised over cars. This, however, needs to be recognised as an inferior option to a high level of service for all modes.

Where a series of intersection improvements and at-grade queue jump facilities cannot provide sufficient bus capacity, an additional lane should be considered. It is only when an additional lane is not possible, that a segregated busway should be considered.

The RACQ believes better transport and urban planning outcomes are often available through road expansions that provide additional space for all modes. The amenity and safety of the corridor can often be improved through the provision of additional green space and further separation of pedestrians, cyclists and vehicle traffic. Even where substantial resumptions are required, this option will be cheaper than a new corridor built underground.

Most renowned roads in urban areas around the world are wide corridors, often with high traffic levels, but with sufficient space and quality urban design to separate vehicular traffic from cyclists, with attractive surrounds for pedestrians. At much greater expense, tunnels (for busways or roads) will only ever provide a utility function and will remain a management problem. In the current context of uncertain futures, broad at-grade corridors provide a much more resilient system able to adapt to changing environments.

The Eastern Busway is a useful case study to demonstrate some points. It appears a decision has been made to build a grade separated 'gold-plated' facility from the South East Busway to Bennetts Road at a cost in the order of \$1 billion. The RACQ is yet to see a Benefit Cost Assessment to analyse whether the benefits to public transport and road users warrant this outlay. More importantly at this early stage, the RACQ has not seen a reasonable array of alternative proposals. These would range from at grade bus priority to intersection upgrades to road capacity expansions to underground facilities for through traffic in order to make space at the surface for improved bus services.

Although the community has been consulted on some issues, they have not been offered a broad range of solutions and have not been asked to weigh the trade offs of options with significantly higher costs. In this context, communities will always seek to maximise the level of public investment in their local area while minimising any negative local impacts. Community choices, especially when not provided a broad range of options with evaluations, will generally be based on perceived socially desirable responses such as supporting public transport, even where this provides limited benefit at high cost. This is not a process that leads to optimal or sustainable community outcomes.

Despite the major focus on busways, most buses will continue to provide most services primarily on the general use road network. The concentration of resources on the limited busway network will lead to neglect of the road network with increases in congestion for cars and buses. A return to a focus on transport projects with the greatest social welfare benefit would be preferable.

2. Improving service integration

This section discusses the need for more seamless integration between public transport modes and a greater focus on cross-town suburban travel. This is agreed by RACQ but, unfortunately, is contrary to the radial focus of the planned busways. As funding is limited, the busways must be reducing investment at existing rail stations and other suburban interchanges.

The old tram stops, more recent shopping centres and some 130 train stations clearly provide ample opportunities for high quality urban design and public transport integration to develop strong local centres. Many of these could be vastly improved if the funding were not so heavily focused on radial busway expansions.

The second CBD rail river crossing and CBD rail loop supported by Council are major investments in rail to substantially increase line haul and distribution capacity of rail for the CBD. Queensland should seek to gain maximum advantage from either of these major investments in rail if they proceed. This should prevent the provision of additional radial busway capacity to the CBD so as not to reduce patronage on the rail services and in acknowledgement of the limited total funds available.

What proportion of the transport budget is intended for the outer urban areas, where the people most vulnerable to increasing petrol prices live?

Strategic Objective 2 Managed Travel Demand

The RACQ supports the need for managing travel demand where this is achieved by reducing the need to travel long distances, or through education, encouragement and improvements to walking, cycling and public transport.

However, we do not support economically inefficient transport infrastructure projects, which would impose additional congestion and costs on motor vehicle users.

Strategic Objective 3 Coordinated Transport & Land Use

The RACQ supports the desired land use outcomes and initiatives to improve integration between land use and transport planning.

We would prefer the issue of future employment dispersal to be more thoroughly addressed. For a range of reasons, it is more important that employment, rather than residential dwellings, is located adjacent to high volume road and public transport nodes.

Many people are willing to drive in the morning to a train station with Park and Ride facilities in order to catch the train to work, and return at night. This is possible when housing is distant from rail as long as the jobs are near a train station. When jobs are distant from rail, however, very few will be able to utilise public transport even if they live near a train station.

There is a greater range of employment intensities than residential densities with regard to physical space in our society. This provides a greater return from better targeting of employment types at nodes and provides positive feedback through the additional services required by the employees during the day.

Co-location of employment among different facilities, such as sporting and cultural activities, adjacent to road and public transport nodes will also distribute traffic loads across time and improve infrastructure productivity.

Rather than primarily in the CBD, employment growth should be focussed in several nodes with high levels of road and rail access. If a few strong centres are developed distant from the CBD, more people will be able to commute in the reverse peak direction, thereby improving the productivity of the infrastructure. A reduced proportion of jobs in the CBD will reduce the need for very expensive radial infrastructure upgrades in the inner city and facilitate improvements in outer urban areas.

Strategic Objective 4 A Safe & Efficient Road Network

The RACQ supports the desired outcomes from the road network and the need to continue to upgrade the road network to cater for population growth, even with the efforts to increase walking, cycling and public transport use.

TransApex

The RACQ supports the broad TransApex strategy and commends BCC on progress to establish several major new road links in the inner city. The RACQ understands that BCC has committed substantial ratepayer funds to the North South Bypass Tunnel to ensure its completion and expects the Queensland government to commit the funds required to complete the Airport Link as a tolled road.

In regard to the Hale Street Link, the RACQ expects the Queensland government to not approve tolling powers for any project that contemplates delaying large traffic

volumes for a possible 50 minutes each way for a period of years. Delays of this magnitude to motorists from construction projects are not acceptable in a modern economy. This raises broader issues with construction techniques and how these are considered in assessment and design of projects.

Negative impacts of construction to already congested traffic flows should be transparently included in all infrastructure project assessments. As travel time impacts generally form the major benefit component of road upgrades, the construction delays should be costed against anticipated benefits. This may result in innovation in design and construction methods or advantage a proposal that reduces inconvenience to the local area and traffic during construction.

The RACQ has concerns with construction of the Hale Street Bridge without the necessary upgrade of the Coronation Drive intersection. The RACQ is aware that intersections usually constrain the capacity of road links in urban areas and has not received any traffic modelling outputs to establish the value of the bridge in isolation.

It is also a concern that any intersection improvement has been based on completion of the Northern Link, which has not yet been approved or funded as a preferred solution to the transport needs of west Brisbane.

Tolling of new road links

The RACQ acknowledges that BCC does not have sufficient funding to meet all the road priorities of Brisbane and must rely partially on other funding sources. The preferred solution is always for the Queensland Government to meet its share of the road funding costs of its capital city. The recent trend toward Public Private Partnerships and tolling is unfortunate, as it will diminish the value of transport and economic outcomes of new projects in favour of financial outcomes for the proponents. The RACQ acknowledges that BCC has attempted to minimise this negative impact to date by providing a substantial subsidy to the NSBT.

A toll on the Hale Street Bridge particularly, with a dysfunctional intersection on the northern end, will likely result in low traffic volumes on the new bridge and relatively little congestion relief on the William Jolly Bridge and other local links. The high levels of diversion likely because of the adjacent road links will mean that the economic and transport outcomes for Brisbane are minor. A toll-free link would create far better outcomes for inner Brisbane.

For all toll road projects, traffic diversions created by the toll will result in under-use of the new high quality infrastructure and limit any congestion relief. In acknowledgement of the need for another funding source for major infrastructure to replace the proposed tolls, BCC should research and consider an inner city congestion pricing scheme. Unlike tolls, this methodology has been demonstrated as successful in reducing congestion while also generating revenue. The RACQ would support investigation of preferred options of such a scheme to help maximise benefits and minimise costs and equity concerns.

Western Bypass

BCC again recommends that a Western Bypass be constructed west of the BCC boundary. BCC has the traffic engineering expertise to understand that such a proposal does not result in any substantial traffic improvements. A bypass significantly west of existing urban areas would cater for small traffic flows and have minor, if any, beneficial impact on congestion in western suburbs of Brisbane.

The RACQ urges BCC to engage properly in the discussion of western Brisbane transport needs to help identify and prioritise a real solution to the lack of adequate road links to serve north-south, ring and bypass functions to the west of the inner city.

The Northern Link is a potential solution that serves some of these functions as well as providing some radial capacity to relieve congestion on Milton Road and Coronation Drive. It should, however, be assessed for priority against other options such as a more north-south oriented tunnel that links the Western Freeway to Stafford Road and the preserved Trouts Road corridor.

Congestion Bottlenecks

The RACQ supports a program to review and address key bottlenecks across the city, including open-level rail crossings and key intersections.

The RACQ commends BCC on recent agreements with the Department of Main Roads to integrate traffic management systems and add functionality to the Brisbane Metropolitan Transport Management Centre. Further adoption of Intelligent Transport Systems and improved access management and incident responses are encouraged as relatively low cost and fast implementation measures to address congestion.

The most effective way to reduce 'rat-running' is to maintain efficient traffic flows on the higher order roads, thereby eliminating incentives to utilise alternative routes to get past bottlenecks. Expensive traffic calming interventions on local streets should be considered only once all options to upgrade the higher order road have been explored or when a safety problem related to speeding is identified.

The RACQ supports the proposed upgrades to outer urban roads to address the higher rates of population growth in these areas.

Strategic Objective 5 Delivering the Goods On Time to the Right Place

The RACQ supports the desired freight outcomes and the need to have a well-defined road hierarchy to focus heavy vehicle movements on the most appropriate infrastructure links to the extent feasible.

Map 9 on the Future Freight Hierarchy highlights the absence of any reasonable north-south link through the north west of Brisbane, linking the limited access and grade separated Western Freeway and Gympie Arterial Road. Planning to resolve this

major missing link should progress prior to other new projects that may constrain available resources or corridor options.

The RACQ does not support any consideration for vehicles longer than existing B-doubles as these are not compatible with urban environments and high traffic volumes. Intermodal freight hubs and sufficient capacity rail lines should exist to facilitate efficient road to rail transfers for inter-regional freight movements where rail has fewer greenhouse emissions and can be economically competitive.

Strategic Objective 6 More Clean & Green Personal Transport

The RACQ supports the desired pedestrian and cycling improvements in this objective. Greater segregation between motor vehicles and bicycles through off-road paths and clearly designated on-road paths will reduce the number of incidents and injuries on our roads, provided these are not at the expense of general use lanes.

As the amount of cycling increases, it will become more important to design facilities to promote safe use and to educate cyclists on safe and legal practices. Additional enforcement will be required to minimise instances of riding at night without adequate lighting, running red lights, etc.

The RACQ does not support the provision of further pedestrian and cycling only bridges in the inner city area. The inner city is well catered for by way of cycling infrastructure such as the Goodwill Bridge, Eleanor Schonell Bridge, Normanby cycle path and planned Tank Street Bridge. The focus of attention for cycling infrastructure funding should move to other Activity Centres, schools, etc to facilitate safe cycling across the city, not just for CBD commuters.

Additional inner city bridges should cater for all modes. A bridge with one general use road lane in each direction and generous cycle and shared paths is not dramatically more expensive than a cycling-only bridge but, if well designed and located, can provide much greater levels of connection and economic benefit to the suburbs either side of the river. An example of this is a possible bridge from Sylvan Rd/Land St at Toowong to Victoria St/Montague Rd at West End. Such a facility would provide a valuable pedestrian and cycle network link while also improving traffic bottlenecks at South Brisbane and Hale Street without any substantial negative impacts on the local community.

Transport Plan Implementation

The RACQ seeks greater clarity in statements of government expenditure. Government expenditure should not be claimed when capital is raised through Public Private Partnerships based on toll revenues. Toll roads have only a minor impact on congestion as they divert a large portion of traffic to 'free' routes. The provision of free roads is generally more effective at reducing congestion.

If government funding is not available, a form of congestion or cordon charging has been demonstrated to effectively reduce congestion. BCC should consider an inner

city congestion charging scheme as a potential alternative to further toll roads. A well-designed system (in consultation with the RACQ) would achieve congestion reductions that will not occur through toll roads and will provide funding for road and public transport improvements.

Conclusion

The RACQ congratulates the Lord Mayor and BCC on the extent to which traffic and transport have been made key priorities, and the attempts to improve the levels of transport planning and investment.

This RACQ submission supports many elements of the draft Brisbane City Council Transport Plan for Brisbane 2006 – 2026 and adds value where points of disagreement arise or further detail is required. The RACQ is pleased to read that BCC is opening a dialogue on transport issues with the community. The RACQ is keen to participate in a broad range of discussions with BCC and other community stakeholders.

With the high cost of infrastructure provision and the high costs of unsustainable travel, it is important that sound policy and project decisions are made. These need to move beyond the current debate between roads and public transport, toward a long term vision of a sustainable and resilient transport system that meets all future needs.

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