

## FINAL REPORT CONFIRMS BELLS EXPRESSWAY BENEFITS

**Wednesday 28 February 2007: The positive impact of the Bells Line Expressway on travel times, housing shortages and road safety cannot be ignored in the lead-up to the State and Federal elections, the Expressway Group and NRMA Motoring & Services said today.**

New research commissioned by the Bells Line Expressway Group (BLEG) has found communities by-passed by the new road across the Blue Mountains are likely to prosper in the long term, with stronger economies and improved quality of life.

The report is the third in a series of research projects by the Western Research Institute at Charles Sturt University for the politically bi-partisan Group, which proposes a \$2 billion four lane expressway following the existing Bells Line of Road.

The first two reports highlighted the positive impact the expressway would have in improving transport safety, providing a major economic boost for Sydney and western NSW, and easing the population pressure on the Sydney basin by making housing west of the mountains more accessible to employment in western Sydney.

The project is also supported by the NRMA, which has completed safety audits of the Great Western Highway and the current Bells Line of Road. Each audit has found significant crash and casualty rates on both routes.

Construction could begin in 2008 and be completed by 2013.

The latest report, called "BYPASS: a new lease on life?" examined international research as well as the impact of major highway by-passes on towns like Goulburn, Yass and Bowral.

The report found that while highway by-passes had an initial negative impact, the town's economy usually recovered because of the establishment of niche businesses, those passing through spending more, and growth in tourism. Reduced traffic improved road safety and the environment, and boosted property values.

For example, the report found that while 50 per cent of Goulburn's residents were initially opposed to the by-pass when it was built in 1992, most concerns were not realised, the majority of businesses picked up within 12 months and the city remained a popular stop-off point for travellers.

Bowral, Mittagong and Berrima had similar experiences when they were by-passed.

The report concluded that: "Most of the communities along the Bells Line of Road and Great Western Highway will experience an overall net positive impact if appropriate mitigations are undertaken."

The Chairman of BLEG, Ian Armstrong, MP, said: “This provides further evidence, if it were needed, that this new expressway will not only save lives, provide an economic boost to western Sydney and help to relieve the city’s housing problems, but that communities along the existing road should not be concerned about the impact of being by-passed.”

“This project has support from State and Federal politicians, local government and a wide range of business, industry and community organisations. The next step is for the Federal and NSW Governments to support its construction. Surveys by councils west of the ranges have found that a safe, alternative route across the mountains is second only to water in importance to their communities.”

NRMA Country Director Graham Blight welcomed the report.

“The Expressway would provide a high speed road between Lithgow and Richmond in Sydney’s north-west and could also provide a much needed route for B-double trucks to travel between the west and Sydney,” Mr Blight said.

“It provides an opportunity for towns such as Lithgow and Richmond and communities along the Great Western Highway and Bells Line of Road to benefit from the reduction in through traffic.

“NRMA is keen for the State and Federal governments to announce the next steps in the process of making the Expressway a reality.”

State Labor MP for Bathurst, Gerard Martin said: “The Expressway group has put forward a compelling case, and State and Federal Governments need to give funding a high priority.”

Central West Regional Organisation of Councils Chairman and Mayor of Orange City Council, Cr John Davis said: “The news on the Bells Line Expressway is very exciting.

The new road will save 35 minutes for a car and 25 minutes for a truck heading over the Mountains. It is anticipated that the road will bring an annual growth rate of between 17% and 25% (to western NSW?) and will pay for itself over a 10 year period.

“Given how dangerous the existing roads over the Blue Mountains are, it really makes sense. The time is right to give central and western NSW the same access to Sydney as the northern and southern routes,” he said.

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