

OPINION 19

Keeping Sydney off road to nowhere

Paul Nicolaou



Amid so many competing agendas, it's a brave minister who takes on the job of updating legislation that governs the state's road network and how it is used.

Transport Minister John Graham and Minister for Regional Transport and Roads Jenny Aitchison, have accepted the unenviable mission.

They are leading a review of the NSW Roads Act, legislation enacted in 1993 when regulating the road system was simple. There were state roads and local roads and the aim was to keep traffic moving.

Fast forward more than 30 years and there are vested interests and pressure groups who want their stamp on how our road system operates – everything from bike lanes to traffic calming.

Since everyone uses our roads, we all have an interest in the two ministers getting the balance right. Some would use our road system to promote their own pet causes. We don't want new laws that continue the demonisation of motor vehicles.

That already happens to a disturbing extent with high parking charges that act as a de facto congestion tax.

We must also ensure regulation of Sydney's roads is consistent across the city.

It's too easy for councils to change road rules, parking conditions or access arrangements, sometimes on the whim of individual councillors, or in response to short-term political pressures.

This creates uncertainty for residents, commuters and businesses alike, which wouldn't happen with a consistent statewide framework providing fairness, certainty and long-term planning confidence.

Councils would still be involved in road management but without the power to make arbitrary changes that disrupt the flow of the city.

We must not end up with legislation and regulations that can stifle the economic life of our city. Road governing legislation has to be a springboard for genuine road safety measures and innovation such as new modes of transport including trackless trams.

Public transport innovation could mesh perfectly with Premier Chris Minns's ambitious home building targets. Let's have road laws that drive us to an economy building destination..

Paul Nicolaou is executive director of Business Sydney