THE PEAK BODY FOR WALKING IN GREATER SYDNEY

Secretary   2025-08-04
Transport for NSW
Level 31, 320 Pitt Street
Sydney NSW 2000

josh.murray@transport.nsw.gov.au

cc. Howard Collins (howard.collins@transport.nsw.gov.au)

Subject: Request for Public Access of SCATS Signal Phasing Data across one weekday for all NSW signals

Dear Secretary Murray,

We are writing on behalf of WalkSydney to request Transport for NSW (TfNSW) make Sydney Coordinated Adaptive Traffic System (SCATS) signal phasing data publicly available. This transparency is essential to demonstrate how the NSW Government is progressing towards its commitments to Vision Zero and strategic policy frameworks.

We are requesting TfNSW:

1. Publicly release signal phasing data for *just one weekday* for signalised intersections across NSW.
   a. Specifically, we are requesting the cycle time of each intersection, for each cycle that runs, and the time allocated to each signal phase
   b. This is the format of data released by WA Main Roads - who publish this data for *every* day on a monthly basis
2. Engage meaningfully with advocacy and access groups to improve signal design for people walking - which is, in reality, almost everyone

The RUSAP states signals are in scope for temporal allocation and TfNSW *must consider pedestrians first* when "allocating physical and temporal road user space". SCATS plays a critical role in how people travel, yet there is no transparency or roadmap for how timing is decided – especially regarding outcomes for people walking and on bikes. Planning decisions "…*are not simply technical decisions* but have environmental, social and redistributive effects which require not only technical and engineering analysis but also the broader type of policy analysis…" (Wilenski, 1978).

Asking the community to simply 'trust us' is not possible when outcomes fall far short of international best practice. We were told at a recent meeting with TfNSW officers signal cycle times have been reduced to 90 seconds in the CBD (and in high streets in

Campsie, Belmore, and Burwood - which is not public knowledge). While we welcome this progress, it is a far cry from the 30-45 second maximum wait times considered standard in walkable, people-friendly global cities. The public cannot verify improvements or assess fair time allocation across transport modes without open data. NSW currently relies on a 'trust us' approach while WA publishes ~1.7GB of timing data for ~1,200 signals every month and Victoria even publishes traffic volumes. Their examples show open data access is feasible and beneficial. We do not accept secrecy results in better outcomes.

We made the same request in our 16 April 2025 and 14 May 2025 letters. In response Brenda Hoang (TfNSW) stated *"Transport does not publish the specific data requested as a matter of policy"*.

At our recent meeting, officers advised TfNSW offers no open platform for signal timing data and that data access is governed by a cost-recovery model policy - yet were unable to produce this policy when asked. If such a policy exists, it contradicts the Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009 (GIPA Act) - which has *the* objective:

> "...to maintain and advance a system of responsible and representative democratic Government that is open, accountable, fair and effective."

- and the NSW Open Data Policy (2020), which states in the publishing guidelines:

> "The release of open data supports government transparency and accountability, provides a platform for innovation, and generates new insights to inform better public policy and services and deliver better outcomes for the community."

Officers express concern for confusion if raw data were released (the cost-recovery is for effort to 'cleanse' or interpret data - exporting raw data is automatic). WalkSydney notes data accuracy is not a valid reason for withholding access under the GIPA Act (s14). TfNSW already publish datasets on the NSW Open Data Portal with standard disclaimers acknowledging potential errors.

This is an opportunity for TfNSW to demonstrate alignment with its own *excellent* open data and planning policy and support a city backed by evidence where walking is safe and attractive.

We believe the case for greater transparency is strong:

- 38% of people in NSW do not hold a driver's licence, and more than that do not drive. *(BITRE Yearbook 2023, pp. 47 & 150)*
- 19% of all trips in NSW are made on foot, more than the total made via public transport.
- Pedestrian wait times in Sydney are <u>up to three times longer</u> than in comparable cities internationally.
- Pedestrians are significantly more likely to cross unsafely when wait times exceed 30 seconds *(<u>Martin, A. 2006. TRL Report PPR241</u>). "Any delays in excess of this [30] are not just inconvenient; they are hazardous"* (<u>*Whitfield, A. (2025). Pedestrian Wait-Time Reduction: A Vast Improvement to the Pedestrian Experience on a Shoestring Budget. Presented at the Transport Planning and Modelling (TPM) Conference, Transport for Greater Manchester (TfGM). Awarded 'Best Paper at Conference'*</u>).

Yours sincerely,
Jake Coppinger
on behalf of WalkSydney

Jointly signed by:
- Tegan Mitchell, President of <u>WalkSydney</u>
- Sara Stace, President of <u>Better Streets</u>

Note:
To avoid misinterpretation (as <u>faced previously),</u> we are not requesting:

- Traffic volume data
- Interpretations or analysis of the data
- Guarantees of data accuracy
- Internal decision-making rationale
- Algorithmic details or communication protocols
- Technical drawings of physical infrastructure

We do not believe this request is time consuming or technically challenging. It can be automated. Instructions for exporting signal timing data from SCATS are explained by the New Jersey DOT in a step-by-step guide here (pg. 64). WA Main Roads have offered to assist TfNSW and stated "There is nothing particularly tricky happening here" (WA

Network Operations Analysis Manager, personal correspondence, 2025-06-06). Their regular data publication includes:

- Configuring SCATS to save historic data files for each site/region
- Setting up a (daily) scheduled process to decode binary files to plain text according to SCATS documentation
- Setting up a (monthly) scheduled process to copy the decoded files to a public OneDrive area

WalkSydney is the peak body advocating for walking in the Greater Sydney Region.

WalkSydney's vision is for walking to be the first choice for short trips around Sydney.

WalkSydney has three key asks:
- *30 km/hr urban default speed*
- *streets that are safe and easy to cross*
- *pedestrian priority over cars*

WalkSydney is a member of the **Better Streets** coalition, a collection of hundreds of community organisations advocating for better streets in Australia