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Forum moves locals

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STATE Rail have failed local residents by offering up a public transport system "on Valium" according to one of the speakers at a fiery public forum held last Thursday.

Organised by Wollongong Climate Action Network, the forum drew around 40 concerned residents to Wollongong's Boat Harbour Motel and highlighted ongoing public indignation over the state of the region's public transport system.

Guest speakers included

University of Wollongong transport infrastructure expert, Professor Philip Laird and founder of the Illawarra "Transition Towns" program, Keely Boom.

Professor Laird said the region's infrastructure was strained to breaking point, largely as a result of inadequate government policy.

"In the 1990s State Rail needed to upgrade the system. Faster trains. More trains. Better services. And what did they do? They put them (the trains) on Valium," Prof Laird said.

"There's a stretch of track from

Mandurah to Perth which is almost exactly the same distance as Thirroul to Wollongong which supports six trains an hour in each direction.

"Our miserly system has two at best."

Prof. Laird said bus systems in the northern suburbs should be linking up with train services to provide a complete public transport system to the region.

He also suggested that the number of trucks travelling between Sydney and Wollongong was a major cause of road safety problems, and

explained that areas which have cut their proportion of road freight have also witnessed sharp declines in road accidents.

The discussion which followed saw two disgruntled commuters leave the meeting abruptly.

Bridget Taylor and Sally Perello, who together have over 15 years of commuting experience, said the forum was out of touch with the realities of commuting.

Keely Boom's Transition Town plan suggested that people should strive to live within four blocks of their place of work, something that

Ms Taylor said was unrealistic.

"Four blocks? What a ridiculous idea. The money isn't here in the Illawarra. I can't earn the income in Wollongong that my firm can pay me in Sydney. Commuting is not fun but the rail system is not viable. It doesn't seem like anyone has an answer," Ms Taylor said.

The forum concluded with a series of three resolutions calling on both State and Federal Governments to divert funding from road expansion towards the improvement of passenger and freight rail infrastructure.