

Submission

No 20

INQUIRY INTO THE UTILISATION OF RAIL CORRIDORS

Name: Mr E C Sage

Date Received: 28/02/2012



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REGISTERED MAIL

Legislative Assembly Committee on Transport and Infrastructure
Parliament House of New South Wales
Macquarie Street
Sydney
NSW 2000
AUSTRALIA

Subject: Inquiry into the utilisation of rail corridors

Dear Committee Members,

I write to you in respect of the above subject.

As Railcorp is facing an ever increasing strain on its budget and successive Governments eye with increasing concern the funding that has to be met them, it is probably timely that at least a small area such as this is investigated.

The ten headings supplied on the terms of reference suggest a wide and far-reaching exploration of rail corridors in general. Whilst the first paragraph indicates the Greater Metropolitan Area of Sydney, including the Hunter and the Illawarra, it would be mindful that what findings do come out of this inquiry should be able to be moulded into the entire CityRail/CountryLink system.

The headings are generalised to the point where a humble mortal such as myself can only vaguely guess at what one wants to investigate in this inquiry.

The first heading indicates mixed-use property from which one can only deduce that this enquiry would like to see some retail development within the rail corridor. I strongly suggest to the committee that it examine closely what types of businesses could operate within the rail corridor. For instance newsagent stands and beverage businesses are ideally suited within a station precinct, particularly at major hubs (Hornsby, Epping, Blacktown, Hurstville). I suggest that the rent for these contribute to the running of the station precinct and not be channelled into "general revenue" as has been in the past. In this area station staff should be asked what revenue streams could be added to making the station more financially viable.

The second heading suggests that we are looking for ways to fund the building of car parks in particular. I suggest that a car-parking fee be added to rail tickets whether they be a charge for one day or on a weekly, quarterly or yearly ticket. This can also be an income stream for the station and be included in the stations income stream figures. The fee could not be excessive (particularly on already established car parks) but must also be competitive so as to encourage the use of the car parks by the travelling public.

The third heading is looking at infrastructure in “air space” principally above stations. Whilst this is already in evidence (particularly at Hurstville) the inevitable tendency is to build a monolith that grossly detracts from the ambience of the precinct. A maximum height restriction would need to be imposed on all new structures of this type. Where existing “airspace” has already been built in, the building would stay until such time as a new one on the site is proposed whereupon the maximum height restriction would need to be imposed. Once again competitive rents need to be set otherwise a building without tenants will result or at best a building with partial tenancy will result.

“Rail trails” for cyclists is also a possibility. It is suggested that a separate area for cyclists be fenced off so that they can ride safely instead of taking their chances with main roads etc. Unfortunately whilst this idea has merit it would be more of a liability than an asset with the decision as to who would maintain and construct it. Also there is the problem that a lot of the rail corridor already has perway access included in it and one then has to decide whether to restrict that access in order to build a “rail trail” for the convenience of a select few who will use it.

The fourth heading seems to indicate that the subject title applied to bus interchanges, an important cog in the transport area. Bus interchanges are vital piece at major hubs such as Strathfield, Epping, Hornsby, Gosford, Wyong, Newcastle, Hurstville, Sutherland, Wollongong, Thirroul, Kiama, Bomaderry (Nowra), Parramatta, Blacktown, St Marys, Penrith, Lidcombe, Liverpool, Bankstown and Campbelltown. In the case of minor stations where the relevant point work is in situ a small bus interchange is a must. Minor stations such as Glenbrook, Springwood and Lawson come to mind. Rail access (had it been remembered) to Ropes Creek would have come under this heading as well. As interchanges (particularly on the Main West) are well thought out and constructed. Will the provision of more bus interchanges and amenities be helpful in the form of taking vehicles off the roads? Yes... and no. Unfortunately our modern lifestyles just can't cater for the odd hours we work and it is definitely unadvisable to supply bus every five minutes of the day. This would provide us with a “black hole of Calcutta” scenario. The transport system will never be able to cater to every whim, just some of them.

The fifth heading is a most important one as the rail corridor wherever it goes divides suburbs and even communities; it is where the saying “grew up on the wrong side of the tracks” originated. Connectivity can be either by footbridge over the rail corridor or a pedestrian tunnel under the rail corridor. Both forms need to consider disabled access. A perfect scenario of how to do this correctly is aptly shown near where I live. Blaxland Station has full access for able bodies and the disabled. Two lifts are provided in the station precinct, one from the footbridge to the platform and one from the platform to the bus stop on the northern side. On the southern side there is a ramp for the disabled to use to gain access to the footbridge. The only problem is there is no disabled access available to the Eastern side of the highway where there is a bus stop. Warrimoo station on the other hand is the epitome of poor planning at its finest. Again the rail corridor divides the community and on the Southern side there is a ramp access as well as stairs to the footbridge. Having crossed over the highway there is disabled access to the Eastern side of the highway, but not to the station or the Northern side. If you are disabled you are required to lengthen your journey by 1.5 kilometres in order to gain access to the northern side.

Pedestrian access via a tunnel is not always possible either due to encroachment by roads leaving no room to construct a downward ramp to gain a subterranean access to the other side. If one can gain access on one side, can one exit from the other side without coming up in the middle of a road.

Both scenarios are expensive but where the need for such infrastructure can be utilised efficiently then the cost becomes a secondary factor.

In relation to the second group of headings, I will comment to each heading.

In relation to the current planning and policy framework it would seem to the travelling public that little of each exists. Whilst the policy framework could be said to be in place, most people would tell you that the policy is one of enacting it long after the structure has been built and basically says, "Our policy was to build you this even if it doesn't fill the needs of the community".

The planning area is naturally hamstrung by the policy area and is basically forced to plan within the policy framework and produce something that has no benefit to the community. Both areas are inflexible.

Regulatory and policy barriers to implementing rail corridor projects; this area is a lot more difficult to change because of the "safety" factor. Whilst many good ideas would make great projects in rail corridors, the safety factor is always going to be the first problem to be hurdled. For some unknown reason mixing trains and humans in the same area always seems to cause problems. Can't think why....

Issues relating to the financing and funding of such projects; if the area is own by Railcorp/Government then funding will definitely need to come from government revenue. If the project is on land that is leased by a private concern i.e. a private railway company but the rail corridor maintenance is Railcorp's responsibility then it would fall to the government to finance the project with an option by the private company to lease the said structure with a clause to purchase the object outright for its own use should it choose to do so at a latter date. If the object were to be built in a rail corridor that is maintained by an entity other than Railcorp, the financing would fall to that company.

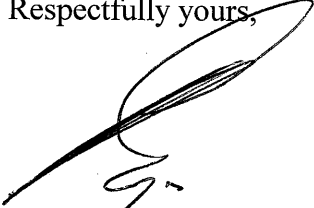
Methods of assessing the compatibility of projects with the local community; whilst this would normally fall in the planning category, it is a vital and necessary part in any project. One only has to look at the RTA/RMS as to how not to deal with the public on projects that will impact the community. Usually two options are offered and after some discussion (sometimes bordering on full and frank) a decision is made and construction gets underway on the third option which the RTA had already decided upon whether the community likes it or not. The RTA/RMS only consulted with the community because it had no choice. Nevertheless it is absolutely vital that consultation with the community is required. This shows two advantages; one the government wants the best outcome for the community; and two the community feels that its input into the decision making process is appreciated. Whilst many of these meetings may have to take place over a single project to make sure the area is utilised to its maximum potential, the end result is beneficial to both parties. It is also advisable to find an important community member who helped in the process from start to finish to be part of the official opening process. Naturally refreshments at the opening are a mandatory item.

Examples of best practice from other jurisdictions; none spring to mind but I have no doubt there are many such examples overseas. Ironically some of the best

collaborations come from private companies or societies who work in partnership with the various respective communities to achieve an outcome that will benefit both parties/organizations into the future.

I thank you for your time and if you require me to appear in front of the committee I would be humbly available for just such an undertaking.

Respectfully yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'E. C. Sage', written over a large, light-colored oval scribble.

Mr E C Sage
Domestic God
ECS

cc: Mr Tim Owen MP
Ms Tania Mihailuk MP
Mr Greg Piper MP
Mr Paul Toole MP