

Submission

No 56

INQUIRY INTO THE UTILISATION OF RAIL CORRIDORS

Organisation: Planning Institute Australia New South Wales Division

Name: Mr Greg Woodhams

Position: NSW Policy Convener

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The Chair
Committee on Transport and Infrastructure
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Email: transportinfrastructure@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Dear Sir / Madam

**Planning Institute of Australia (NSW Division)
Submission - Inquiry into the Utilisation of Rail Corridors**

The NSW Division of the Planning Institute of Australia (PIA NSW) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Inquiry into the Utilisation of Rail Corridors.

The Planning Institute of Australia is the peak body representing professionals involved in planning Australian cities, towns and regions. The Institute has around 4,500 members nationally and around 1,200 members in New South Wales. PIA NSW plays key roles in promoting and supporting the planning profession within NSW and advocating key planning and public policy issues.

This submission has been prepared on behalf of PIA NSW by Members of the Institute.

Should you wish to discuss any of the issues raised within the submission please contact the NSW Executive Officer, Robyn Vincin, on telephone number (02) 8904 1011 or email nswmanager@planning.org.au.

Yours sincerely,



Greg Woodhams FPIA CPP
NSW Policy Convener

Planning Institute of Australia (NSW Division) Submission: Inquiry into the Utilisation of Rail Corridors

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Introduction

The Planning Institute of Australia (NSW Division) is pleased to be invited to make a submission to the Inquiry on the Utilisation of Rail Corridors.

To enable rail corridors to achieve their potential the following issues are raised in this submission:

- The role of 'Transit Orientated Development'
- Development Incentives
- Environment and Health Impacts
- Compatibility of Active Transport Uses within Rail Corridors

The high cost of housing, declining household size and lifestyle preferences, increasing commuter costs, vulnerability to peak oil, and growing traffic congestion are just some of the major challenges for Sydney over the next 25 years. Within this context the rail network has the potential to play a major role in freeing-up Sydney from the burden of car dependency and congestion. The unimpeded ability of rail transport to move large populations and freight within cities and via high speed links between cities is enhanced by its ability to give greater certainty and predictability to land use activity along its corridors and is vital for long term economic growth, stability and social prosperity.

The Role of Transit Orientated Development

Transit Orientated Development (TOD) is widely used in the US and Europe, where over the past 20 to 30 years it has been a primary means to urban renewal, concentrating mixed use, employment and residential development around transport nodes and linking centres along rail corridors. The compact urban form of TOD enables the majority of work and non work trips to be made using active and public transport. Active transport includes travel by foot, bicycle and other non-motorised transport.

The objective of the Sydney Metropolitan Plan 2036 to create a more compact, networked city with improved accessibility, capable of supporting more jobs, homes and lifestyle opportunities within the existing urban footprint is consistent with the principles of TOD. However, its potential effectiveness is constrained by its failure to give any weight to the need for mixed commercial/retail uses, residential development and a transport typology for its centres.

The importance of this is reflected in the US where experience with TOD has shown that without appropriate land use controls and policies to maintain mixed use development, centres can be vulnerable to gentrification and specialised activity that leads to the displacement of lower income residents, reduced access to jobs and increased labour costs. This can lead to a concentration of wealth and activity that supports increased car ownership levels and car trips by residents that need to access a broader range of goods and services - all contrary to the intention of TOD.

As noted above, centres situated along rail corridors need to maintain not only mixed uses and residential development but also reflect a transport typology. Incorporated into policy and strategic planning objectives, the application of a transport / land use typology for centres would define the transport function of centres to best reflect their primary purpose – i.e. ranging from major regional public transport hubs to local centres that primarily have a park and ride function. A defined typology similar to the NSW Department of Transport Guidelines for Development of Public Transport Interchange Facilities (2008) should be applied through a strategic planning instrument / plan that would ensure a consistent land use / transport outcome. This would cover matters such as airspace development, the location and provision of commuter car parking; bus / rail / taxi interchange facilities, public domain works, and active transport access. Most importantly the typology would enable a coordinated whole of government response and achieve an integrated land use and transport outcome.

The application of TOD along rail corridors would greatly assist in supporting the ‘City of Cities’ objective of the Sydney Metropolitan Plan as well as strengthening the function of Sydney’s Global Economic Corridor. Land use planning for centres and infrastructure investment along new rail corridors would also benefit from the greater certainty derived.

The Institute however would not endorse a program of ad hoc rail corridor air space development (for example for residential projects to be built in isolation over rail way lines) that would merely see the rail corridor being used as another land supply option. The Institute is advocating that significant rail corridor development should only occur where there is an existing or proposed centre consistent with the typology and that the project is supported by access to the rail service, that the surrounding road system has the capacity to accommodate the percentage of private vehicle use that would occur and that the community and other social infrastructure to serve the needs of the residents and /or employees is, or will be, available within a reasonable time and in close proximity.

The cost of development over a rail corridor will inevitably be high and result in high density development. The scale of such projects is likely to be transformative to the surrounding area unless placed in an existing high density context. The identification of appropriate sites should therefore follow a strategic examination of suitable centres, station facilities, population patterns and trends, infrastructure availability and access.

The work undertaken by the Queensland Government on Transit Oriented Development (TOD)¹ should be considered. The following principles are taken from the Queensland Government’s work and relate to social planning principles of TODs, as follows:

¹ <http://www.dlgp.qld.gov.au/local-area-planning/transit-oriented-development-guide.html>

Principle 1: Diversity and inclusion

TOD communities strive for a social mix and create an environment which is inclusive and sociable, where all members feel a strong sense of belonging and cultural relevance. Physical and social connectivity is achieved with adjoining communities.

Principle 2: Housing choice and equity

TOD communities offer high-amenity, affordable housing across the spectrum of households and housing that is well designed to meet the diverse and changing needs of residents.

Principle 3: Accessibility

TOD communities are supported with convenient access to the employment, services and facilities required to support their daily needs, including commercial and retail services, jobs, social services and facilities and open space.

Principle 4: Vibrancy and a healthy lifestyle

TOD communities enjoy a high level of amenity that supports a healthy, vibrant and active lifestyle, and an appreciation for sustainable living. The public domain is a major lifestyle feature that connects people with the place, each other and nature.

Principle 5: Participatory and collaborative processes

To achieve multiple beneficial outcomes, TOD precincts are developed with a long-term commitment to collaboration with key stakeholders, consultation with affected communities and empowerment of residents. This commitment extends to the planning, design, implementation, monitoring and review phases of development.

TOD schemes also need to consider how people access the station and this should not just be limited to pedestrian and bicycle traffic. Connections to alternative modes of transport such as bus or private vehicle should be considered.

Recommendation:

- **That the core principles of Transit Orientated Development that support mixed use and residential development in urban centres be applied to rail corridors in Sydney.**
- **That a centre typology be established that defines the principle transport function and land use activity within a centre and its role within the context of a rail corridor.**
- **That the work undertaken by the Queensland Government on Transit Oriented Development (TOD) should be considered, particularly in relation to social planning.**

Development Incentives

Using a typology for centres linked to urban renewal / TOD strategies could be used as a means for State and Local Government to levy development along rail corridors to fund public realm improvements such as parks, lighting, footpaths and cycle ways. Targeting and levying car parking provisions in centres that have a strong public transport function is an option but will need amendments to the EP&A Act (1979) if s 94 contributions are able to be applied in areas of urban renewal.

To limit the potential displacement of lower socio economic groups from centres undergoing urban renewal, a state legislated ratio of affordable housing in new development could be established. This would be complimented with Floor Space Ratio (FSR) bonuses to ensure that the project is economically viable.

The Institute would also encourage the Committee to consider opportunities for the use of value capture mechanisms so that redevelopment of publicly owned rail corridors leads to a return to the Government as a result of betterment through up-zoning. This method has been used in Portland, Oregon in the United States as a means of funding new rail infrastructure and the growth of new centres to accommodate population increases and new employment.

Recommendation:

- **That the EP&A Act (1979) be amended or new Planning Act to be drafted to enable the application of developer contributions and incentives in centres that are situated along rail corridors and designated for urban renewal.**

Environmental and Health Impacts

Rail activity is a source of noise, vibration and air pollution that can potentially have significant health and environmental impacts on the community; these include anxiety, sleep disturbance, increased risk of heart and airways diseases, stress and hearing impairment. The concentration of residential development within centres on rail nodes and along rail corridors will expose an increasing number of people to these impacts.

Any project regarding rail corridors should include a Social Impact Assessment (SIA) as part of the assessment process. The SIA should ensure that benefits and any disadvantages to the community are considered. The Inquiry needs to differentiate between freight and passenger rail corridors, as these have different impacts on the surrounding community.

In Sydney the vast proportion of rail freight movement is to transport coal. However with increasing traffic congestion on Sydney's roads and development of inter-modal facilities, there is potential for bulk freight and container movements to grow. The majority of freight movements occur on dedicated rail lines or share usage of tracks with passenger trains.

With freight being increasingly transported by rail, greater exposure to fine particulates (PM2.5) from diesel locomotives by residents living adjacent to rail corridors is likely to result. Although pollution reduction programs aim to diminish the impacts from diesel locomotives, EPA licence conditions do not apply retrospectively on older existing locomotives. Impacts from noise are compounded by the limited capacity of rail lines to cater for freight movements during the day, requiring many freight trips to occur during the most noise sensitive times at night.

There are significant traffic and environmental benefits in using rail for freight but measures need to be introduced by State Government to accelerate investment in new quieter locomotives and a commitment to the long term electrification of rail lines used for freight. Where new rail corridors are considered, buffers and noise mitigation measures should be implemented so as to reduce the impacts on the community.

Recommendation:

- **That in conjunction with noise guidelines, noise and vibration contour maps be produced for the rail network in Sydney. The contour maps would incorporate noise metrics that includes the number of events at 40dBA, 50dBA and above 60dBA on an average day. The contour maps would be used to inform communities of the potential impacts associated with noise generated along rail corridors, and where practicable, establish noise buffer zones that can be incorporated into local planning instruments.**
- **That contour maps be produced showing the likely dispersion of particulates PM10 and PM 2.5 along rail corridors utilised by diesel locomotives.**
- **That a long term strategy and funding commitment be undertaken to electrify rail corridors used by freight, complimented with a phasing out of diesel rolling stock.**

Community and Environmental Severance

Rail corridors can physically sever links between communities impacting on their ability to access employment, schools, recreation, health and other services. It is important therefore that when new rail corridors are planned that opportunities to cross are provided for vehicular traffic and also for pedestrian (and cycle) connectivity to key attractors. In urban areas undergoing urban renewal, the construction of rail lines below ground is preferred to elevated structures due to the noise and amenity impacts.

Rail corridors not only sever urban areas but also natural areas such as National Parks and Natural Conservation Areas. Corridors can become a major barrier particularly when they are fenced, restricting the movement of fauna during bushfires, flooding, or seasonal migration.

Recommendation:

- **That in areas of urban renewal the construction of underground rail corridors is preferred over elevated structures where severance and amenity impacts are significant.**
- **That a panel of technical and scientific experts be engaged to determine the environmental impacts associated with the installation of fences adjacent to National Parks and Natural Conservation areas.**

Compatibility of uses on Rail Corridors

The links that rail corridors provide between centres make them attractive for active transport (pedestrians and cyclists). Their direct links to employment, schools and services support the principles of TOD which relies strongly on supporting active transport use to minimise car use and dependency, improved health, community interaction and cohesion. In many areas where they do not conflict with rail safety they are the only opportunity to effectively retrofit cycle ways and footpaths into urban areas.

Recommendations:

- **That RailCorp be required by the NSW Government to include measures that support active transport in its strategic planning of rail corridors ;**
- **That a strategic planning alliance be created between key Government stakeholders to jointly fund and facilitate the incorporation of active transport measures within rail corridors.**

Conclusion

Rail corridors provide an opportunity to revitalise Sydney's land use and transport. Incorporating TOD principles into strategic land use planning is pivotal to effectively retrofitting accessible transport options in Sydney. Measures that better inform the community of the environmental and health impacts need to be implemented. The planning and delivery of actions that make best use of rail corridors must include a whole of government commitment that is coordinated and appropriately funded.