

**Submission
No 11**

**INQUIRY INTO RAIL INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECT
COSTING IN NSW**

Name: Mr Colin Butcher

Date received: 25/09/2011

INQUIRY INTO RAIL INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECT COSTING IN NSW

COMMENT

A reason for the high cost of building rail infrastructure in NSW is the over inflated scope of works.

There seems to be little rigorous review of the need for some of the grandiose features of some projects.

Public comment is usually limited to the impacts of a project with scant consideration of the need.

The cost effectiveness of some projects seems to have been ignored and the opportunity to obtain a better cost benefit ratio appears to have been lost.

MAJOR WORKS

An example of an over inflated and grandiose scheme is the plan to build a new station on the South Coast line just a short way from the existing station at Dunmore. To put it in perspective the lowest reported cost is about the same as the cost for a completely new station that was recently built for the Melbourne suburb of Coolaroo. At first glance this might seem reasonable but a review of the different circumstances should raise serious questions about the validity of the NSW scheme for Flinders station.

The first point to make is that the new station at Coolaroo is on a section where there is a freight track along one side of the two suburban tracks. Inserting a station required the freight track to be shifted and it was necessary to provide access to the station from both sides. In other words there was a need for a footbridge over three tracks with three sets of stairs and lifts. At the proposed Flinders station the Princes Highway runs parallel to the railway line and access is limited to only one side of the tracks. Why then would the cost be almost the same as the more complicated station in Victoria?

The second point to make about this particular project is that the scope appears to be far greater than necessary. The South Coast line is single track with passing loops but throughout the day between 6am and 10pm no passenger trains pass at Dunmore station. As the new station is very close to the existing station there seems to be no reason why the new station should require a platform on both sides of the line. At present bi-directional operation applies to the line with some stations having a single platform and there does not appear to be any reason why this should not apply to the new station. This would greatly reduce the cost as it would eliminate the need for lifts, stairs and one of the platforms. In addition it would not be necessary to provide overhead power for the passing loop as this would only be used by freight trains. How was the cost of the elaborate double platform station justified?

My third point about Flinders is that the details of the plan are not well defined and cannot be open to proper public scrutiny. What is the extent of the project and what alternatives have been considered to show that the scope is justified and the cost has been kept to a reasonable minimum commensurate with a defined need?

My final point is that the time to build the proposed Flinders station appears to be excessive and this also tends to add to costs. As shown above, Coolaroo station in Victoria was a more complicated project but after shifting the track in December 2008 it took just under 18 months to build the new station. Even though the grandiose plan for Flinders is less complex than the Coolaroo project it is not planned to be complete before 2014 and that is just totally unreasonable. How can this timescale be justified when a much cheaper new station could be completed during 2012?

MINOR PROJECTS

Much of the NSW railway infrastructure is old and in need of replacement but in many instances the opportunity to simultaneously make some improvement is ignored. A typical example is the replacement of track junctions, (turnouts), with modern units that are on concrete sleepers. Many of the old turnouts have sharp curves and the speed limit for trains on the diverging track is of necessity quite low. Most of these are being replaced on a like for like basis so that there is no increase in the speed limit resulting in a lost opportunity to save time and energy.

One particularly good example is at the end of the Illawarra Dive where trains going to and from the main terminal station at Central must slow to a very low speed at the junction. This applies to all of the long distance trains serving the Illawarra and to the two daily country trains that head out along the East Hills line to the South West. A higher speed turnout is longer and more expensive but a major part of the cost of making the change is for the large team to do the work at the site at unsociable hours during a shutdown.

Trains using the low speed junctions normally have to brake to reduce speed that might be as low as 25km/hour and then use power to accelerate back up to speed. This is one reason why the ARTC has used turnouts that allow freight trains to change tracks at 80km/hour but within the CityRail area of operations there are many places where a much lower speed limit applies to the much more frequent passenger trains. It is somewhat ironic that freight trains are being helped to keep moving at a reasonable speed while passenger trains are not. The low speed junctions not only add to the wear and tear of the trains but increase the energy input whilst failing to provide any reduction in travel time.

SUMMARY

Rail infrastructure projects appear to be very expensive because they are somewhat grandiose and have not been subject to rigorous review. Much of the scope appears to be predetermined within the relevant organisation and has not been subject to a critical examination. The investment in many of the so called upgrades merely changes the type of material without taking the opportunity to change the performance of the system. In my opinion this suggests that rail infrastructure projects are not subject to enough questioning to ensure that various alternatives have been fully explored and the cost is fully justified.

There are other instances that could be quoted such as the incredible cost estimate for the light rail extension and the unbelievably high cost of the proposal to separate freight and passenger trains on the northern approach to Sydney.

COLIN F G BUTCHER F.I.E.Aust