

Submission  
No 40

## INQUIRY INTO SYDENHAM-BANKSTOWN LINE CONVERSION

**Organisation:** Canterbury Greens

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Submission to the NSW Legislative Council Transport & Customer Service  
Committee Inquiry on  
**Sydenham-Bankstown Line Conversion**

From the Canterbury Greens

Dear Committee

Thank you for the opportunity to submit our concerns about the conversion of the Sydenham-Bankstown line from heavy rail to metro.

In our submission, we will address your terms of reference 1(a), 1(b), 1(d), 1(e), 1(j), 1(k) and 1(l).

**1(a) the adequacy of the business case and the viability of the metro**

The NSW Government has failed to release the full business case despite billions in public money being spent. Both the State Auditor and Productivity Commission, in 2014, have been critical of this secrecy and the lack of governance.

The cost-benefit ratio, as originally analysed, must be questioned. Does it consider the cost of temporary transport arrangements, the revised heritage assessments and protections, for example? Are social values and community costs such as heritage losses and the loss of local character due to development factored into this equation? Also, how does the cost-benefit ratio change if there are additional costs (as occurred with the City East light rail)?

If the business case is based on its transport benefits, why have so many experts, such as former rail executives, disagreed, and why did the Government's own blueprint document *Sydney's Rail Future* (2012, p24) state that a dedicated metro "would deliver few benefits in terms of service enhancement, capacity improvements or better operating efficiency on the existing rail network"?

**1(b) the consideration of alternatives for improving capacity and reducing congestion**

It makes more sense to improve the Bankstown line with digital signalling than to replace the existing heavy rail double-deck line with a single-deck metro. It would cost far less and years of disruption would be avoided.

One of the stated justifications for the conversion of the T3 Bankstown line to a metro has been the need to increase the capacity of the Bankstown line, and the promise has been “a metro train every four minutes in the peak” (see, for example, page 5 of the Preferred Infrastructure Report [https://www.sydneymetro.info/sites/default/files/document-library/Sydenham\\_to\\_Bankstown\\_PREFERRED\\_Infrastructure\\_Report\\_Overview.pdf](https://www.sydneymetro.info/sites/default/files/document-library/Sydenham_to_Bankstown_PREFERRED_Infrastructure_Report_Overview.pdf) ).

However, Mr Howard Collins, the Chief Executive of Sydney Trains, was quoted in the Sydney Morning Herald of 13 March 2019 as saying that the digital upgrade of the signalling system at a cost of about \$3 billion would be the “biggest improvement we can make to the capacity of this city in a very short space of time,” that digital signalling would prove to be a “great return on relatively cheap investment” because it would boost the rail network’s capacity by 30 to 40 per cent by allowing more frequent services, and that “a train every three minutes through the core of our railway – through Circular Quay, T4 and the T1 Parramatta – would probably be the realistic outcome that we’d get using double-deck technology.”

#### **1(d) whether metro is a suitable means of transport over long distances**

In other cities of the world where metro systems are in use, they are used for short journeys. They are designed for commuters walking on, standing for a short time and then walking off.

They are, in effect, ‘horizontal elevators’. But in Sydney the routes are long and without adequate seating and hand-grips, the metro experience for the less mobile, for the elderly, for short people, and for children is inconvenient, uncomfortable, tiring and sometimes dangerous especially as the intention is to have the metros driverless.

There have been at least 30 reports of significant incidents such as door malfunctions along the North West metro since it opened recently. In addition, at least 10 incidents of small children being separated from their parents by the automated doors or screens have occurred (<https://www.northweststar.com.au/story/6356240/sydney-metro-separates-kids-and-parents/>).

For commuters from stations west of Bankstown there will be a much longer journey, first by heavy rail and then by metro. Many people from west of Bankstown will have to break their journeys three times, when they don't have to do it at all now.

#### **1(e) the consultation process undertaken with, and the adequacy of information given to, community, experts and other stakeholders**

The service on the T3 line was intentionally made inferior before and during the consultation period to distort the public’s perception of the adequacy of the existing heavy rail service.

Reasons given to justify the conversion of the T3 Sydenham to Bankstown heavy line to light rail have included the need to modernise the journey with up-to-the minute metro carriages. The metro carriages were advertised as being air-conditioned (see, for example, page 5 of the Preferred Infrastructure Report [https://www.sydneymetro.info/sites/default/files/document-library/Sydenham\\_to\\_Bankstown Preferred Infrastructure Report Overview.pdf](https://www.sydneymetro.info/sites/default/files/document-library/Sydenham_to_Bankstown_PREFERRED_Infrastructure_Report_Overview.pdf) )

However, it seems that seven months before the *Sydney Metro Southwest: Sydenham to Bankstown Metro Preferred Infrastructure Report* went on exhibition, the proportion of the most modern trains on the T3 Bankstown line was decreased while the proportion of older trains, including those without air conditioning, was increased (see Freedom of Information-informed report by the *Restore Inner West Line* community group <https://restoreinnerwestline.org.au/sites-increased-on-bankstown-line-prior-to-metro-approval/> )

It is hard to avoid the conclusion that additional discomfort was afforded to passengers by increasing the proportion of older trains (without air conditioning) on the T3 line as a deliberate tactic to help persuade passengers of the need for the metro.

A common complaint in submissions to the Environmental Impact Statement and the Preferred Infrastructure Project was the lack of meaningful community consultation. Unfortunately this government sees developers and private enterprise as “stakeholders” and community members as “NIMBYs”.

A key pillar of Green’s principles is grassroots democracy; we value community input as people know their neighbourhoods well.

More than 90% of community submissions have been opposed to this project, and so we argue that it lacks the social licence to proceed.

**1(j) the adequacy of temporary transport arrangements during the conversion process, including for people with a disability**

The conversion of the existing double-decker train line to the single-deck Metro will involve at least five years of line closures. This will be incredibly disruptive to passengers on the Bankstown line.

The NSW government is now admitting that disruption to passengers will consist of the following closures of the line (with buses replacing trains):

- two weeks each summer for five years
- as many as 12 weekends per year for five years
- up to six months in the second half of 2023

- and closures of individual stations for up to two months, with up to three stations shut at any one time. (Sydney Metro City & Southwest Sydenham to Bankstown Upgrade - *Submissions and Preferred Infrastructure Report*, page 5.72, and Sections 2.7.1 & 2.7.2)

That's what the government is admitting to, but if the George St light rail project is anything to go by, the disruption will likely be much worse.

It is commonly accepted that Sydney's peak-hour road traffic is horrendous. Adding the number of buses needed to take all the displaced commuters will make it even worse.

Already, trackwork on weekends causes major inconvenience. Even now many of our members experience what should be 15-minute train journeys from Sydenham to their home stations being turned into hour-long bus odysseys. If train-replacement buses are used during peak hours for extended periods of time, people's ability to get to work will be greatly impaired, affecting their ability to stay employed.

There are about six trains per hour in the main direction during the peak. Replacing each train will require a huge number of buses. These buses will add to the congestion in the roads along the corridor. In peak times, even now Canterbury Road is almost a parking lot and the feed-in roads, such as Geoffrey Street already have queues of almost a kilometre. Because Canterbury Road is so congested, even a three-kilometre trip such as from Earlwood to Canterbury can take 30 minutes. To avoid taking the train-replacement buses, many commuters will drive to stations on the East Hills line and the Inner West line, and that will increase the congestion in the already-full roads in the area.

We are also very concerned about safety issues on congested roads during the rail repossession periods, especially for emergency services.

### **1(k) the impact on the stations west of Bankstown**

Each weekday 19,000 commuters from stations west of Bankstown will have to break their journey to change trains.

As well as the 9 stations west of Bankstown – Yagoona, Birrong, Regents Park, Berala, Sefton, Chester Hill, Leightonfield, Villawood and Carramar – the following stations will also no longer be on the Bankstown line: Redfern, St Peters, Erskineville, Town Hall, Wynyard, Circular Quay, St James, Museum. That means that people traveling from west of Bankstown to Sydney university or to many workplaces in the city will have to break their journey and change trains twice.

They don't have to do this now. A new system should add value by adding capacity, NOT by taking away part of the existing network.

## **1(l) other related matters**

### **(1) A better option for the Metro route**

Building public transport is undoubtedly a good thing, but it should be built where people don't have it already. If the metro is to be extended from Sydenham, it should extend to the east or south-east, possibly along the F6 corridor towards Sans Souci and further south. (Building a heavy rail line into those areas would have been a better option, but given the current stage of development of the metro, this would seem to be the best that can be done.)

If rail transport was introduced to areas without a train line, it could be a real contributor in reducing road congestion. But replacing the heavy rail T3 line with a metro won't take a single car off the road.

Replacing the existing heavy rail T3 line with a metro (and in the process taking away part of the existing network and making the daily commute much harder for many people) just doesn't make sense in any public-transport-planning sense. The real reason it is being pursued with such vigour is that it will increase the development potential along the Sydenham-Bankstown corridor, providing profits for some developers, but depriving the people of Sydney of the benefits of good planning.

### **(2) Tunnels too narrow**

Building the underground tunnels too narrow to ever take double-deck trains removes for all time any future reconfigurations of Sydney's trains and is transport-planning vandalism.

The narrow tunnels also present a safety issue, in the event that emergency evacuation is needed.

### **3) Privatisation**

The NSW Liberal-National government is ideologically in favour of privatising public assets. It privatises everything it can, from inner-west buses to the lands title registry. But we know from the electricity sector that privatisation means less maintenance, less reliability and higher prices.

The current plan is for the Metro to be operated by a private company. The government says it will retain ownership and 'set the fares and service standards' under which the private company will run the Metro.

But evidence is mounting that the ultimate goal is to sell off the whole of the Metro.

In May 2018 the Liberal-National government amended the Transport Administration (Sydney Metro) Act to establish Sydney Metro as a stand-alone statutory corporation. This is the first step in the ultimate privatisation of the new line, just as the formation of the WestConnex Delivery

Authority was the step taken before selling off 51% of the WestConnex motorway system.

It is no accident that this government, without consultation, privatised Inner West bus services leading up to the metro conversion. In the Hills district, commuters have found their travel times increased in areas where their privately-run bus services have been decreased, especially in unprofitable non-peak hours, since the North-West Metro opened. This has particularly affected those who live further away from metro stations. It would appear that privatisation, and the consequent reduced service provision, are on the agenda for this area as well, to maximise profit for private enterprise.

We submit that public transport must be for the public good – it provides employment, it operates for the benefit of the public rather than profit, and it provides services throughout the day (and night) to contribute to Sydney becoming a global city.

Privatisation of public assets has been a total failure in Australia.

#### **(4) The Metro itself will be a property developer**

Under the legislation last May the Sydney Metro corporation is empowered to be a property developer, able to ‘to carry out, finance, manage and otherwise participate in residential, retail, commercial, industrial, mixed-use development, community, open space and recreational facilities on land in the locality of metro stations, depots and stabling yards.’

That is, the Metro is a property developer, and all indications are that the government intends to privatise it.

#### **(5) The threat of speculative development**

While ever the threat of the metro conversion of our line exists, the risk of speculative development exists. This is a great risk to local character, heritage and green space. This corridor is lagging behind in heritage assessments and protections. It is only recently that Hurlstone Park, the smallest suburb in the corridor, had heritage assessments completed. Ashbury has heritage protections in place, but most other suburbs along the corridor have not had up-to-date assessments. Belmore and Canterbury are cases in point. This has led to reactionary interim heritage orders when previously un-listed heritage-style homes are bought by developers. In short, what communities value about the unique suburbs along the line has been ignored by the government.

In addition, the preferred infrastructure report, while committing an improved approach to railway heritage, has not been specific about what the effects on heritage will be.

It is concerning that promises made to communities affected by the WestConnex, such as a Parramatta Rd upgrade, have not been honoured.

## Recommendations

We recommend that the government:

- release the business case and costings; there should also be transparency about contractual arrangements when public money is used
- either stop the building of the metro at Sydenham or from Sydenham extend it to an area not currently served by rail
- prioritise signalling upgrades to benefit the entire network
- upgrade all stations for accessibility without a metro conversion
- retain all rail heritage items
- retain public operation and do not reduce bus services if the metro proceeds
- address safety concerns such as tunnel evacuations, automated doors and the lack of guards
- scrap the *Sydenham to Bankstown Urban Renewal Corridor Strategy* permanently and begin strategic planning anew with genuine local participation and more emphasis on improving the lives of residents rather than making profits for developers.