

Submission
No 37

INQUIRY INTO SYDENHAM-BANKSTOWN LINE CONVERSION

Name: Ms Marie Healy

Date Received: 1 October 2019

Personal Submission to

Portfolio Committee No 6 Transport and Customer Service

Inquiry into the Sydenham-Bankstown Line Conversion

Thank you for the opportunity to submit my concerns about the planned replacement of the publicly-run Sydenham-Bankstown heavy rail line with a privately-run metro.

My main concerns about the project relate to:

-governance issues

-costs

-ideological issues

-issues related to heritage and planning

-the lack of a a clear public benefit-

a) The adequacy of the business case and the viability of the Metro:

There is ample evidence that the NSW Government is not proceeding with this project for public good and they have failed to convince me, and many people, of its merits this is a good idea:

- multiple experts have questioned the project:

- ex rail executives, Bob O'Loughlin, Ron Christie, Dick Day and John Brew (as reported in the SMH 5/2/2012 and 19/12/2017). Their assessment was it would not ease congestion and that money would be better spent upgrading the existing system.
- Mathew Hounsell, Senior Research Consultant, Institute for Sustainable Futures, University of Technology Sydney (in The Conversation 13/3/2019)-

he points out that a heavy rail system was initially considered for the Hills district but Berejiklian changed the plan to a metro style favoured by Hong Kong rail + property developer MTR (now operating the North West Metro). This complimented their much-criticised Urban Renewal plans for this already dense corridor.

-the government itself reported a metro would not have systemic benefits for the rail system (Sydney's Rail Future, TfNSW, 2012)

-more than 90% of community submissions were opposed to it

-the business case has not been made public, and this, along with this government's "cabinet in confidence" mantra and record of projects proposed for private profit rather than public good (WestConnex being a case in point) fosters mistrust about how they are spending billions in public money

-the government has been criticised by the State Auditor and the Productivity Commission for poor governance and a lack of transparency (2014 reports on infrastructure); this has had little effect on them

-recent transport projects by this government have failed to provide trust in their competence, the calculations of cost:benefit ratios, and their negative impacts on communities:

- The Newcastle light rail project was criticised by the State Auditor when this government planned it without a business case and without public consultation (as reported in the Newcastle Herald 12/12/2018). The project was announced in 2013 when Jeff McCloy was Mayor of Newcastle. He is also a property developer who campaigned for cutting the rail line to Newcastle (source Wikipedia). The people of Newcastle ("Save Our Rail in Hunter") fought against this, and the government "won" against them in court. More recently, more than 50 businesses adversely affected by the project joined in a class action.

- The cost of the Newcastle Light Rail was \$220million per kilometre (ABC on-line 21/9/2017).
- A class action is being planned by many businesses and residents affected by the Sydney City-East light rail, one KPI of which was “an increase in property values”. The 12km project has cost more than \$3billion to date. This does not account for personal and business losses to the public; that is, the human cost, of such poor management.
- The WestConnex, which a senior transport researcher has said will not improve congestion, but is the result of lobbying by private enterprise,(Dr Michelle Zeibots, research director of the UTS Transport Research Centre, as reported on ABC Online 26 Feb 2019) has had multiple negative impacts on individuals and heritage values in the Inner West of Sydney. It proceeded without public support and it is likely the cost of this toxic project and related roads could be \$45 billion according to a City of Sydney study.

-MTR Hong Kong has sought to widen its representation in Australia; this project will benefit their business plan

I submit that this project is not in the public interest. The NSW government has been secretive in the business case and contractual arrangements. Minister Constance has not been so secretive about his desire to get rid of a unionised workforce such as train drivers.

I submit that the real reasons for this project are ideological and are to:

- privatise the operation of the line; the Inner West bus services have already been franchised to a private operator in advance of this project, without consultation and with no demonstrable benefit (punctuality is worse, as reported in SMH 3/6/19; and locals have advised me that buses do not run according to the virtual timetable).

- enforce growth onto a Labor electorate which is already dense; to further enrich developers
- enrich a private operator
- reduce unionised labour in “public” transport

In addition, I believe, given issues with other projects, that this government lacks the requisite skill and commitment to public good to proceed with this project.

I hope that this inquiry results in a brave decision to halt the project in favour of viable and good alternatives.

b) The consideration of alternatives for improving capacity and reducing congestion

On my way home from work on 25th September 2019, I went to my usual platform at Redfern and found myself going to Hurlstone Park via Auburn. A trip that usually takes less than 20 minutes took longer than 1 hour. This was because of a signal failure at Ashfield. Apparently Inner West trains had to be re-routed around the T3 line but station announcements and displays were not accurate.

This government has repeatedly claimed it is playing catch-up because past governments have not invested in infrastructure. Yet after 8 years in government they have failed to upgrade our rail's ageing signalling network. Howard Collins suggested this would cost around \$3billion, and improve capacity across the network by a massive 40% (as reported in the SMH 13/3/2019). They have also failed to adequately upgrade rail stock, including on the inner west light rail, which has been operating at capacity for a significant time.

- A metro conversion of the Bankstown line, costing much more than a network signalling upgrade, will not have network benefits, and will not help

commuters in the inner west or any another line in the event of another signal failure.

I hope this committee recommends that this government abandons this expensive plan in favour of investing in our current rail and public transport system:

- Upgrade all stations for accessibility (a metro conversion is not needed for this)
- Digitally upgrade signalling across the network
- Invest in new double-decker trains, and light rail stock, with a focus on Australian manufacturing (In Victoria, the joint venture project to build 65 high-capacity metro trains involves Australian companies in manufacturing, and trains that will run on the existing tracks).
- Invest in rail freight lines
- Invest in new public transport routes and improve the function of existing roads through public transport (for example, make good the promise to activate and beautify Parramatta Road)

(c) the factors taken into account when comparing the alternatives and the robustness of the evidence used in decision-making

I hope this committee insists that all cabinet papers are made public. When billions in public money is spent, there should be zero tolerance of secrecy.

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

The metro trains are highly unsuitable for long distances. They not only lack enough seating, but the standing people have few vertical bars to hold onto. In our current trains you can hold onto the backs of seat; this is not possible on the metro trains. People who are short, or with reduced shoulder mobility, cannot comfortably hang onto the triangle hanging from the ceiling.

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

This government is either dishonest or it is deluded in its claim that it consults well with communities. The "consultation" process has lacked authenticity, been short on facts and big on self-promotion. Glossy pamphlets, misleading advertising and a gigantic EIS to wade through in a minimum amount of time have been the hallmarks of this campaign.

The response to submissions to the EIS was illustrative of the contempt that this government has shown the public - the tone was patronising and dismissive. The response repeated the same justifications throughout as if the public had perhaps not understood the first time around. It also provided a biased analysis of submission; for example form letters were lumped together even though many submitters also added their personal concerns as well. The analysis was also quantitative in the main and ignored the quality of submissions (several very simplistic ones appeared to be from developers). The focus on simplistic quantitative "engagement" ignored the lack of any genuine consultation (ie they proved they'd done their job by listing the number of community sessions they had conducted, for example; these consisted of simplistic diagrams and meaningless slogans in the main, and were staffed by people who lacked in-depth knowledge of the project. At a Hurlstone Park session, nobody knew about proposed heritage losses and I had to show them where to look in the EIS). Conflicts of interest were undeclared, and ignored, such as a brief but glowing submission by an ex-TfNSW employee.

(f) the impact on the environment and heritage conservation

I cannot think of a recent government with a poorer attitude towards our heritage and environment. They have vandalised Haberfield with the multiple demolitions of heritage listed federation homes for the West Connex, bulldozed the much-loved old Randwick figs for the light rail, and they planned to knock down many of our valued rail heritage items. The plans for station entrance

buildings were unbelievably awful - like having new Maccas take-aways in the middle of small vintage retail precincts.

It appeared that massive demolition of rail heritage would occur for no particular reason (except maybe a lack of good taste) but back-tracked in the face of a huge backlash in submissions. Whether they can be trusted to keep their word remains to be seen.

I hope this committee can ensure that the government is not allowed to demolish rail heritage, and that they keep promises made to communities about protections. The public rightly expects that heritage protections are not meaningless, as they have been to date in places like Haberfield.

Of course, the metro is being proposed to assist developers to continue their assault on established suburbs in the inner west and south-west. The Inner West and Canterbury-Bankstown Councils have lagged in heritage assessments and protections; this leaves sturdy attractive vintage homes and street-scapes at risk of losing heritage values to poorly-built towers, the likes of which we've seen in Mascot and Homebush.

With all the enforced growth, the government is not promising any more green space, in a corridor that already falls below the mean in this area.

(g) any lobbying, political donations or other influence of the public and/ or private sector in relation to making that decision

I would like to know about the relationship between Rod Staples and MTR Hong Kong, for example.

(h) the tender process for appointing private operators

Was there a tender process?

(i) the contractual arrangements entered into in respect of the project

It is no longer acceptable that contractual arrangements are kept secret when public money is spent on projects. The public are stakeholders here and should be fully informed about how this money is being spent.

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

I do not trust that the government will do this in a costly and effective way. The disruption is likely to be significant and will not be rewarded with long-term benefits. During rail possession periods roads that are already congested will have a massive increase in buses on the roads.

The construction of this project will have a huge effect on me. I am a GP and I provide home visits to elderly and vulnerable patients; I have done this for about 20 years. Some of these people rarely leave their homes. I see patients with dementia, visual impairment, cancer, and significant chronic diseases. Some are over 90 years old. I keep them out of hospital and out of residential care. Many do not have family support.

Home visits do not pay well and are inconvenient, but I drive to work at least a couple of days a week so I can continue this important service. There are hardly any GPs who do this any more. This metro project will be a further disincentive for me to try to drive to work to provide home visits. I will need to stop visiting and these patients will be left without a doctor. I will be unable to spend increasing time in traffic during rail repossession periods over a prolonged time.

(k) the impact on the stations west of Bankstown

Not only has this government created congestion by reducing services along this line, it has taken services away beyond Bankstown, and cut direct lines. These commuters will have even less direct connections with the metro.

In summary

The conversion of the publicly-run heavy rail line from Sydenham to Bankstown to a privatised Metro is a dishonest project that lacks community support, and takes precious public funds away from real solutions such as updating existing infrastructure for whole of network and public transport benefits (signalling and accessibility upgrades, more buses, more trains and light rail carriages, more freight lines and improved regional rail options).

The rights, desires and hardships of community members affected by projects such as the Newcastle and City-East light rail, and the WestConnex presents the government in a very negative light - as an enemy of the people.

While it is acknowledged that major projects will always face difficulties and some push-back, this project has been widely criticised by a multitude of experts, and the justifications contradicted. Added to this is the secrecy of the business case, and concerns raised by the State Auditor and Productivity Commission. On balance, then, it appears that this project has been incorrectly prioritised, likely for ideological reasons, and it should not proceed.

(References can be provided if required)