

**Submission
No 46**

INQUIRY INTO SYDENHAM-BANKSTOWN LINE CONVERSION

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Date Received: 2 October 2019

My submission is mainly concerned with Reference paragraphs—

(a) the adequacy of the business case and viability of Metro

- *by examining the business case of the Bankstown Metro based on the experience of the North West Metro. Much money is being spent but who is better off?*

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

- *by contending that “capacity” is a function of the supply of and demand for a service. Capacity can be improved by reducing the latter as much as increasing the former. This is the misguided justification for the conversion.*

But in the meantime, significant events have occurred. Since the Sydney Olympics a brief two decades ago—

- (a) the iPhone was released in 2007, leading to a worldwide explosion in the deployment of portable smart devices;
- (b) digitisation of information has continued and broadband speeds and capacity are being increased;
- (c) Wi-Fi emerged from the laboratory; and
- (d) Atlassian, which develops collaboration software for tens of thousands of customers and which began in 2002 with a \$10,000 credit card financing, was valued at \$26.6 billion in March this year.

These events and others like them point to the fact that “good jobs” no longer require a CBD address.

Consequently, *“Australia’s 3 largest cities are forecast to be the fastest growing cities in the developed world between 2025 and 2030. For this reason, metro office markets will play a pivotal role in accommodating the growth in white collar workforces over the long term. Industry sectors co-locating in metro markets is also having an impact on demand and is helping to reduce vacancy rates in many key metro markets.”* <https://is.gd/UOdnQl>

It seems the Sydney Olympics were only yesterday

Since—

- (a) office rents are always likely to be less by a significant margin below those in the CBD;
- (b) the CBD is becoming increasingly remote from where the majority of people can afford to live; and
- (c) company data can be accessed from the Cloud

there are incentives for the businesses which employ large numbers of office workers to consider how they can maintain branch offices closer to where their employees live.

Despite this, transport and land use planning and projections for dealing with the continually under-estimated population growth in Sydney continue to be developed as if none of these technologies had become available.

But there is ignored scope for dealing with congestion problems by permitting businesses to find accommodation at distributed transport hubs.

Unfortunately, it has been myopic government policy to mandate residential zoning around stations, including those better placed to serve residential and commercial uses.

After the experience of the Epping Urban Activation Precinct and the North West Metro, the Inquiry into the Sydenham-Bankstown Line conversion is particularly welcome.

Both of those projects were imposed on residents and commuters, accompanied by pious undertakings about openness and community consultation, much, if not all, of which was ignored and continues to be so.

In the case of the Epping Activation Precinct forced rezoning, predictions about the pace of development have been wildly under-estimated, with projections for 2026 exceeded already. Despite residents’ objections, Landcom has a proposal before the Planning Department for a development of over 400 apartments within walking distance of Epping station, thus denying this land for commercial uses.

Census information about the habits of Epping residents, who have had access to excellent public transport services at least since 2009, show only about 25% of residents use public transport for their commuting.

Despite this, the suburb is being turned into a residential monoculture, former local white-collar employers have been banished

and the remaining local businesses suffer from the daily exodus of potential customers.

Reasons to come to Epping for work or services have been reduced if not eliminated and those who might have found local work and not added to the transport load, must now travel elsewhere.

Sydney has been exceptionally well served by the 100-year vision of John Bradfield. His foresight was amply realised when an earlier round of increased traffic on the suburban rail system was easily catered for by the progressive introduction of double-deck carriages. With metros running on parts of the existing network, the folly of the Albury break of gauge is being wantonly repeated.

It requires a very good case and a comprehensive long term vision about how and, especially where, the city should grow and how travel demand might best be managed before any steps are taken to unravel Bradfield's good work.

This should include an open, discussion with the community, including people with better and wider experience than that of current politicians. Just as with the NBN, many of these crucial decision-makers are mainly concerned with distinguishing their solutions from those of their political opponents.

The more open this consultation, the more immune it is from the influence of those with hidden self-interest or other agendas.

Are metros superior for Sydney transport customers?

That case has not been made and, in fact, when attempted, it is fraught with misleading information and doubtful benefits.

By their number, regular peak hour commuters place the greatest strain on the train network. As it should be, they generate the most revenue. In private car-addicted Sydney, the network would probably not exist without their custom.

For this reason, their interests should be paramount, but it appears they were not considered when the decision was made to introduce metros, as peak hour commuters are the ones most likely to be required to stand for much of their journey.

This state of affairs is all the more egregious because, during the election campaign that preceded the critical decisions, Barry O'Farrell promised a double-deck service. The reversal of that promise was compounded by the decision, for which there was no mandate, to restrict the size of the tunnels to prevent forever their use by double-deck rolling stock.

The folly of the break of gauge between the States should never be allowed to happen again. The judgment of any government which perpetuated that folly must be seriously questioned.

In the days, weeks and months before the

metro service began, the government was a constant source of what could only be described as spin, telling the community the service was "world-class", "fast", "modern" and "Australia's biggest public transport project", despite being unsuited for Sydney's concentrated business district, surrounded by ever-sprawling and more distant residential habitation, with its long distances between stops and the hub and spoke design of the network.

We were and continue to be told or led to believe—

- (a) that the service would "revolutionise the way Australia's biggest city travels", when the level of comfort or the ability to work or study while travelling has been compromised;
- (b) that double-deck trains were incapable of 2-minute headways, despite that being the long-established achievement on other parts of the existing network;
- (c) that the contested claim that a single-deck metro service could carry more people than a double-deck service;
- (d) that double-deck trains based on those pioneered in Sydney were not in use or favour in overseas capitals coping with larger passenger numbers than projected for Sydney, despite their use in those overseas places being expanded;

- (e) that platform edge doors made such a significant difference to journey times, despite dwell time being an issue only in a few city stations and then its being a function of the number of people on the platforms and not necessarily the number of doors in the carriages;
- (f) that the 15-minute service on the Epping to Chatswood segment could not be improved, due to the limitations of double-deck trains themselves, when in fact the constraint was lack of available slots on the Chatswood to CBD section;
- (g) the dubious outstanding benefits of a turn up and go service, when connecting (bus) services are far less frequent;
- (h) that a single deck metro with an extra door per car was a great advantage on the Sydney network. This is despite the larger distances between stations and the fewer occasions of connections to another line to complete a typical journey than is customary in overseas capitals' more distributed suburban networks, such as the Paris Metro, the London Tube or the Berlin S or U Bahn.

Travellers on the Sydney network enjoy less benefit by turn up and go than is the case with real metros overseas. This is because the habits of regular commuters, the ones who pay the higher prices and use the service

everyday, plan their journeys by considering—

- (a) when they are required to arrive at their destination; and
- (b) if driving to their station, when—
 - (i) local parking is no longer likely to be available; or
 - (ii) their connecting bus service arrives.

The Sydney Trains network is centralised so as to deliver the majority of daily commuters to a common area from Redfern to Circular Quay. Consequently, passengers' journeys are less likely to involve a change from one line to another, as is the case on more comprehensive, real metro services in more densely settled cities. Redfern, the busy interchange station, has no disabled access, while money is being spent on the T3 conversion.

From the point of view of the majority of customers on Metro North West, we have seen billions of dollars spent to deliver an inferior service. This is money that could have been spent on the overdue upgrading of the signal system for the whole network to increase its capacity.

With the abandonment of the preferred double-deck trains in favour of a different, smaller type of train and small bore tunnels, then, as with the NBN's multiple technologies, the level of inter-operability has

been lost, possibly forever. And now the proposal is to scale up the disadvantage to T3.

Except that, apart from many passengers being required to change trains when no change was previously needed—

- (a) this new metro line is not intended to service additional stations to benefit new areas;
- (b) the conversion of the existing line requires an even longer period during which the current service will not be available than was the case between Epping and Chatswood; and
- (c) a larger number of regular customers will be affected.

Reducing congestion – prevention is better than cure

Since the dawn of the twenty-first century, we have been spending and committing untold amounts of money on two networks—

- (a) the NBN — *moving data*;
- (b) road and rail projects — *moving goods and people*.

Expressed this way, one begins to realise how complementary these activities are. As the world of work continues to change, even more people will be involved in processing (digitised) data. This type of work is unique in that, to a large extent, it can be done anywhere.

This realisation should give rise to new thinking about distributing workplaces more widely across the metropolitan area and beyond even the Three Cities.

Instead, the justification for the T3 conversion is the metro's disputed claim that it is the only way to carry more people. Presumably this means to a common destination and presumably that means the CBD, on the basis that highly valued work will continue to take place where it has always occurred: the CBD and development controls will be adjusted to suit.

This is despite the fact that new generations of workers are destined to live further from the CBD. This means longer

journeys and greater subsidies to facilitate them. Increasingly, people work in teams but there is no wide-spread need for all the teams to cluster in the same place. Investigating the possibilities for locating them in branches closer to residential areas, much like banks were organised before they too could provide their services at greater distances from their customers.

In some cases, these teams could move into the premises vacated by the banks! Locating such branch offices near transport hubs reduces the need for private transport and can lead to a contraflow of public transport users.

The NBN has not been universally upgraded with the latest technology. But, if such were needed, upgrading the communications infrastructure between strategically located combined business/transport hubs would be highly cost-effective and less expensive than upgrading transport resources.

Developing these hubs for employment rather than residential uses, as is being mandated now in many cases by government fiat, would render more likely the holy grail of the 30-minute commute. More importantly, it would be much cheaper for government and improve citizens' quality of life.

If the capacity of each train carriage is reduced, it would follow that, far from reducing congestion in each one, it will be increased. More trains to cope with the same

number of customers would also add unnecessary congestion to the line itself.

In coming years, white collar working is where the most growth is expected to occur and brings with it two types of avoidable congestion—

- (a) private transport use; and
- (b) the number of people to be accommodated.

Type (a) congestion is seen in business parks like Macquarie Park, where there is excessive provision for private car parking in those areas within walkable distance of the stations.

Type (b) congestion is seen in the CBD, where the area is too small and the streets too narrow to cope comfortably, even with pedestrian traffic and access to sunlight.

Both these issues should be dealt with by development controls, conscious of the fact that digitisation has delivered new solutions to old requirements for businesses to be close together.

Reducing congestion is a worthy aim. Spending money to compensate for it while ignoring its causes has no merit.