

**Submission  
No 48**

## **INQUIRY INTO SYDENHAM-BANKSTOWN LINE CONVERSION**

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Submission to the Select Committee (Sydenham - Bankstown line conversion )

**Introduction :**

I have been a regular commuter on this line for many years. I am not a transport consultant or involved in any way with public transport other than as a commuter. I am not a member of any lobby group or any other group which has an interest in the outcome of the conversion of this line. I am also a regular commuter on the Eastern Suburbs line and a fairly regular commuter on the (lower) North Shore line and Inner West line. There will be some overlap between the submissions below.

**Terms of Reference.**

**(a) The adequacy of the business case and viability of Metro.**

(a1) Going back to 1994, a good example of a business case is the “Proposed New Southern Railway: Working Paper” (State Rail Authority /Sinclair Knight Merz). The “Southern Railway” is now part of the Airport - south Line (T8). The Paper (copy held) considered and assessed in some detail alternative forms of transport for the project including six heavy rail alternatives , a metro system, light rail and bus services. After a detailed evaluation, the direct heavy rail option (from Central to the airport via a completely new line) was considered to provide the most advantages from an environmental, social and economic point of view. This project was almost brilliant because it used the most direct route practicable to and from the CBD, put rail into locations without rail, created a junction station with the T4 Line at Wollie Creek and resulted in the long term deferral of adding additional tracks to the line.(see a3.3).

Many of the arguments for and against are well known.

(a2) **For:** trains do not run on multiple lines.

It is a separate system which normally would not be affected by dislocations in the heavy rail system (however the Illawarra/Cronulla/ Eastern Suburbs T4 heavy rail line is a separate line even though it is not, strictly speaking, a separate system )

Lower construction costs in tunnel and smaller gauge.

Removal of the “Bankstown bottleneck”. It is claimed that Bankstown line creates a bottleneck for the existing rail network because of the way it merges with other lines close to the CBD. (see a3.3)

More frequent services and new stations with more modern facilities (however the new station advantages would also apply to a new or relatively new heavy rail station, for example Green Square and Mascot or of course a new Metro station on an alternative line.)

Direct access to new Metro stations in the city, two Metro stations on lower north shore and Chatswood to Tallawong (however I have not been able to find estimates of the number or percentage of passengers on the Bankstown line who will want to travel to Metro stations beyond the city.

It is claimed that it will reduce travel time to the city. (however that will also depend on which city station is the destination ; see a3.6.1 and 3.6.2 below) .

**(a3) Against :**

(a3.1) Less seating capacity compared to heavy rail double decker trains, with more passengers standing in peak periods often for a considerable distance

Passengers on heavy rail beyond Bankstown will have to change to the Metro at Bankstown.

Passengers will lose direct access to city circle stations, Redfern , Erskineville and St Peters.

**(a3.2) The most fundamental case against the Metro is that firstly (unlike the Epping to Tallawong sector) the Sydenham to Bankstown sector does not bring rail into areas without rail. It just replaces one existing system with another.**

There is no certainty of any significant increase in patronage between Bankstown and Sydenham other than through population growth, which may occur whether or not the Metro is built. Already there are many drab recently constructed apartment blocks clustered around a number of the existing stations. Unlike the lower north shore section of the Metro which is a new independent line, the Sydenham – Bankstown Metro captures and destroys an existing heavy rail line. Some will see this as an “expropriation” of a publicly owned asset which will largely disadvantage many commuters (see a3,6.1 and a3.6.2 below) and likely increase the profits of the private operator MTR Corporation. (We have already seen a previous example of a line being captured with the capture and destruction of the relatively new heavy rail line between Epping and Chatswood).

Between Sydenham and Bankstown it does not provide any **new** connectivity with other rail lines, something which is still lacking in the Sydney rail system.

(a3.3) “The Bankstown bottleneck” argument (see a2 above) is somewhat misleading as it seems to imply that the Bankstown line is the sole cause of the problem and that removal of this line may be the only way to solve it. There is a bottleneck but it is caused by the Bankstown line **and other lines** merging close to the CBD. Part of the problem was solved when the airport link was built as explained in the Working Paper in (a1) above:-

“ The construction of the new line would mean the long term deferral of the ‘Sydenham Six Tracks’ project which would otherwise have to be considered to meet the urgent need for increased capacity for the East Hills/Glenfield line between Turrella and the CBD. The Sydenham Six Tracks consists of the construction of **two** additional tracks in the existing railway corridor between Sydenham and Erskineville to provide this extra capacity. Construction of the New Southern Railway to the East Hills/Glenfield line will provide the additional capacity for this line and facilitate transport links with the rapidly developing south western suburbs of Sydney.”

At that time the cost of the construction referred to was \$65 million (see 2-4 of the Working Paper).

The bottleneck problem could also be solved (in part) by building the Sydney Metro West, taking some pressure off the number of heavy rail services required. There may also be the option of building the two new tracks referred to in a 3.3 above. A full feasibility study/cost benefit analysis should have been submitted for public examination in respect of the bottleneck issue and city circle congestion, instead of advocating the closing of the Bankstown line as the only apparent answer.

The Bankstown line has a relatively low patronage when compared with for example the T1, T2, and T8 lines, indicating that money may be better spent on other rail projects. At present the “fast trains” from the main stations Bankstown, Lakemba, Campsie and Marrickville travel to and from the city in a competitive time, for example from Campsie to Central in about 23 minutes.

(a3.4) There is a substantial need for rail connection to busy Canterbury Road Bankstown to create a new rail corridor with one or two stations in Canterbury Road (depending on route alignment) roughly mid way between Bankstown and Padstow – Revesby on the T8 line. There is no railway station on busy Canterbury Road (and its extensions Milperra Road and Newbridge Road) between Canterbury and Liverpool, a distance of about 24 km. This is not the fault of the current government. There has been general neglect by governments on both sides. However the government should be looking at options to expand rail in this area.

Compare the Canterbury Road situation to the Pacific Highway where there are heavy rail stations on or adjacent to the highway at a number of locations on both the lower and upper north shore. On top of this the lower north shore gets new (as opposed to replacement) Metro stations at Chatswood, Crows Nest and Victoria Cross. Three for the lower north shore and one (a replacement station at Sydenham) for Canterbury - Bankstown. The existing T1 north Shore line is not disrupted or removed.

(a3.5)

**Metro may be most viable as a link line between existing heavy rail systems which means preferably building Metro in areas where there is no rail and there are many such areas. In fact this may be the most efficient use of Metro, as there is for example little or no disruption to existing systems. Sydney needs high frequency, single deck underground trains running in and to the more densely populated areas preferably over shorter distances. See for example b6 Option 5 below (Green Square, Kingsford and Maroubra Junction option) Sydney needs Metro underground, not in place of an existing heavy overground rail line.**

**( Between Tallawong and Sydenham there are direct links to heavy rail lines at for example, Epping, Chatswood, Martin Place and Central. From Sydenham to Bankstown the existing heavy rail line is captured and destroyed with numerous disadvantages for commuters from all stations. Commuters from any station between Tallawong and the city will face few of these disadvantages. )**

(a3.6) On the viability issue, here is a summary of how passengers will be affected, using different scenarios firstly with the Metro terminating at Bankstown and secondly with it terminating at Sydenham.

**(a3.6.1)** Passengers from the west of Bankstown (and Lidcombe) using the existing heavy rail (10 stations from Liverpool and 3 stations from Lidcombe ) will have to alight at Bankstown and change to the Metro. Under the present system there is no or limited changing involved. (b) Passengers from any station on the Metro from Bankstown to the city who have St Peters, Erskineville, Redfern or the city circle stations Town Hall, Wynyard, Circular Quay, St James and Museum as their destinations will no longer have direct access to these stations. They will have to change at Central or walk further to their destinations from Metro stations, probably cancelling or exceeding time saving (if any) which the Metro may have provided. (c) passengers who are in the situations in both (a) and (b) will have to change **twice** with even further delays involved.

(a 3.6.2) passengers who have to return from the city circle stations (and the others referred to) will face the same delay and inconvenience on their return journey/s.

This means that there is substantial passenger disruption due to lack of connectivity between the Metro and heavy rail stations.

**(a 3.6.3)** With the Metro from the city terminating at Sydenham, passengers going towards the city from Bankstown or other stations who want to travel to a Metro station beyond Sydenham would change at Sydenham. Those travelling to the other heavy rail stations referred to would not have to change. Although this seems to be **a win win situation for passengers there are arguments against this as a preferred option (see b3 Option 1)**

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

(b1) What I have not been able to identify are alternative route options for the Metro in documents that have been released.

Any form of new above ground road transport will tend to increase congestion because of the need to share the roads with other vehicles and cycles .

With new above ground rail there is the obvious disadvantage of having to acquire land and the massive costs involved. Generally the only way to improve capacity and reduce congestion is to go underground as many examples world wide have shown.

Improvements can be made to the existing heavy rail system by modernising signalling, additional tracks and other enhancements instead of replacing the existing system with Metro.

(b2) There are alternative options to the full Sydenham – Bankstown line conversion, all of them subject to a full feasibility/ cost benefit study to enable a proper comparison to be made between each of them and between the full Bankstown line conversion and each of them.

(b3) Option 1. The metro from the city terminates at Sydenham. There is a massive saving in costs but it is considered to be one of the least viable options , as apart from a Metro station at Waterloo, it does not bring rail to areas without rail on that side of the city.

(b3) Option .2. The line would **not** be constructed to Sydenham at all and would terminate at Waterloo. There are the same arguments against it as those against Option 1. However the savings would be even greater as it is about 4 km from Sydenham to Waterloo.

(b4) Option 3. Adopt Option 1 and build a second (branch) line underground to Kingsford commencing roughly south of Waterloo to a new metro station at Green Square ( within a short walking distance from the existing heavy rail station ) to Gardiners Road at Eastlakes and Kingsford. It would link up with the Light Rail at a station in Kingsford with a possible future extension to Maroubra Junction/ Malabar. The cost per km would be significantly higher than Sydenham to Bankstown. However the distance involved is roughly one third of the distance from Sydenham to Bankstown. This line and the alternatives below would bring with them significant opportunities for various types of development.

(b5) Option 4. Adopt Option 1 and 3 and build with a more direct alignment from Green Square metro to Kingsford without a station in Gardiners Road at Eastlakes, continuing in a direct alignment from Kingsford to Maroubra Junction where the new station would attract major patronage from the southern part of the eastern suburbs (in a similar way that terminating the T4 Eastern Suburbs Line at Bondi Junction attracts major patronage from surrounding suburbs). Only three stations in total : Green Square Metro), Kingsford Metro and Maroubra Junction Metro.

(b6) Option .5. The line would **not** be constructed to Sydenham **at all** and would proceed from Waterloo to Green Square Metro , Kingsford Metro and Maroubra Junction Metro (as per Option 4) where it would terminate. There would be a huge offset in construction costs as it is about 4 km from Waterloo to Sydenham and about 13km from Sydenham to Bankstown. Passengers from Bankstown line heavy rail stations intending to travel to Waterloo , Green Square, Kingsford or Maroubra Junction would change at Central and would also change at Central for other Metro stations beyond Central . From a cost and rail to areas without rail perspective, this and/or Option 6 would be the preferred option/s. No doubt this option alone would reduce the takings of the operators but there could well be savings in construction costs and the number of trains involved (subject to the outcome of the business case).

(b7) Option 6 . The line would not be constructed to Sydenham at all and would proceed from Waterloo or near to link with T1 Western line and T2 line near Macdonaldtown or Newtown with station/s near Sydney University or Royal Prince Alfred Hospital (subject to route alignment) then linking up with the future Sydney Metro West.

(b8) Option 7. This would be a combination of Options 5 and 6. The line would divide at or near Waterloo. The Maroubra Junction branch would be proceed as per Option 5 and and the “Metro West” branch would link with the T1 and T2 lines as per Option 6 then link with the Metro West.

( c ) no separate submission but see above.

( d ) Whether metro is a suitable form of transport over long distances.

The short answer is no. The signal systems may not be compatible. Rail gauges may be different.

Diesel is used over longer distances . Inferior passenger carrying and luggage capacity with metro.

(e) I am not familiar with the so called “ consultation process” and to the extent (if any) it has been of public benefit. As far as I can see, the “consultation process” has been based on the Metro being built to Bankstown without alternatives being fully considered or considered at all.

(f) Generally the impact on the environment and heritage conservation will be better protected by preserving the existing line and its facilities (apart from plant and equipment that wears out ) and by building Metro underground elsewhere as suggested under the options outlined above.

(g) I am not aware how the decision may have been affected by lobbying and the other matters referred to. It is unlikely that all or any of these matters would have been made public.

(h) I am not aware as to the tender process (if any) which has been followed for appointing private operators and indeed whether the whole of the Metro was put out to competitive public tender.

(I) I am largely unaware of the contractual arrangements entered into in respect of the project.

(J) if the project does not proceed these temporary transport arrangements will not be necessary and alternative arrangements in relation to an underground line elsewhere (see options above) will cause far less disruption.

(k) see 3.6.1 above.

(l) To summarise, the conversion is totally inappropriate taking into account all the circumstances and should not proceed. The funds saved should be spent on one or more of the options referred to in b4 –b8 above and alternative expenditures referred to in this submission should be investigated and implemented if found to be viable.