Submission No 80

INQUIRY INTO SYDENHAM-BANKSTOWN LINE CONVERSION

Organisation: The Cooks River Valley Association

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Ms Abigail Boyd, MLC
Chair
Inquiry into the Sydenham-Bankstown Line conversion
PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE NO. 6 – TRANSPORT AND CUSTOMER SERVICE
portfoliocommittee6@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Dear Chair and Committee Members

RE: Impact on the Environment – Sydenham Bankstown Metro Conversion

The Cooks River Valley Association (CRVA) is the leading community voice for the Cooks River and surrounding parklands. We welcome the Inquiry into the Sydenham to Bankstown line conversion and in particular the Committee's inquiry and report into **f) the impact on the environment**, because, based on public information to date, Metro Southwest will have a significant and negative environmental impact.

At present Metro Southwest plans propose a loss of vegetation inside the project area with additional uncertainty around the landscaping being considered during the detailed design process that is currently underway. Particular concerns the CRVA draws the Committee's attention to include:

- Missed opportunity to establish a biodiversity corridor and impact of fencing.
- Environmental assessment of Metro Southwest.
- Project footprint includes Council land.
- Replacement trees and landscaping in the corridor.
- Development impacts on the Cooks River and surrounding land.

The CRVA also proposes that Metro Southwest's environmental impact could be positive with the following headline actions consistent with existing NSW Government policy:

- Commit to improving the biodiversity value of the landscaped rail corridor that links with the existing Greenway and is consistent with the Office of Environment and Heritage conservation management notes on Corridors and Connectivity[1].
- Ensure that any vegetation removed or disturbed in the rail corridor be replaced by native vegetation consistent with the Sydney Trains Vegetation Management Guide that demonstrates that value of replacing weeds and exotic vegetation with natives[2].
- Commit to re-designing (or re-considering the need for) the 2.4 to 2.7m high fine mesh security fencing along the 13.5km rail corridor consistent with Transport for NSW Boundary Fences Standard to ensure that wildlife is able to move between the corridor and neighbouring back yards and green space[3].

[1] https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/-/media/OEH/Corporate-Site/Documents/Animals-and-plants/Conservation-management-notes/corridors-connectivity-conservation-management-notes-110657.pdf
[2] https://railsafe.org.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0007/31696/EMS-06-GD-0067-Vegetation-Management-in-the-Corridor.pdf
[3] Transport for NSW Boundary Fences Standard (T HR CI 12160 ST) states at Section 6 that considerations relating to boundary fences include protection or enhancement of biodiversity and visual impact or amenity

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Missed opportunity to establish a biodiversity corridor and impact of fencing

The Metro Southwest landscaping process is a major opportunity to create a landscape scale and low maintenance biodiversity corridor linked to the existing Greenway. Instead the Metro Preferred Infrastructure Report (PIR) considers and rejects improving disturbed areas of the rail corridor to improve biodiversity:

> "With the retaining of vegetation and revegetation proposed as part of the preferred project, the use of the rail corridor as a biodiversity corridor is considered to be maintained to a level which is consistent with the existing corridor." (5.145).

This lack of vision is especially frustrating as the Greater Sydney Commission (GSC) South District plan intends to 'protect and enhance biodiversity by supporting landscape scale biodiversity conservation and the restoration of bushland corridors' (p89)[4]. Given that the overall Metro Southwest project footprint is identified in Technical Paper 9 as 69 hectares with 39 hectares of vegetation cleared there is a major opportunity to make a contribution to biodiversity at scale.

Landscape scale biodiversity conservation is an approach that the GSC is actively supporting in Western Sydney with the Badgerys Creek Airport where Greening Australia's grassy groundcover restoration work[5] is written into the project as part of the environmental requirements. Greening Australia is successfully advocating for the novel application of complex groundcover in areas such as road, rail, water and utilities corridors. If it's already happening in Western Sydney then why is it not also under consideration as part of the Metro?

A similar process could be followed along the rail corridor without comprising access, safety or sight lines that would also link with the Greenway[6] which is promoted for its contribution to biodiversity in a highly urbanised area. The GSC has already identified the Greenway as the no. 1 priority Green Grid project in the Eastern Sydney District Plan.

Fencing

A related and significant biodiversity loss is the proposed 2.4 to 2.7m high fine mesh security fencing being installed along the 13.5 km length of the Sydenham to Bankstown corridor. The fine mesh will impede the movement of native animals by creating a permanent barrier for small birds, reptiles, marsupials and frogs. This impact has not been considered in Metro Southwest plans and makes the PIR statement that biodiversity will at least be maintained impossible to achieve without modifying the fence design. Metro Southwest should commit to using the Transport for NSW Boundary Fences Standard (T HR CI 12160 ST) which states at Section 6 that considerations relating to boundary fences include protection or enhancement of biodiversity and visual impact or amenity.

The CRVA also points out that if the Metro trains had drivers then the new second fence would not be required as the existing boundary fencing meets safety requirements. In order to remove drivers from trains Metro Southwest will stop the movement of wildlife. Meanwhile Metro Southwest prefers to spend on slashing, whipper snipping and spraying exotic vegetation instead of planting suitable low maintenance native plants along the corridor in keeping with its own policy guidelines.

[4] https://www.greater.sydney/draft-south-district-plan
[5] https://www.greeningaustralia.org.au/project/grassy-groundcover-restoration
[6] https://www.greenway.org.au/biodiversity

Environmental assessment of Metro Southwest

The biodiversity assessment[7] of the Metro Southwest corridor contains gaps and lacks the granularity necessary to capture the type and quality of native vegetation. The biodiversity assessment also appears to be internally inconsistent noting that the rail corridor includes 'small isolated patches of remnant or regrowth native vegetation' (p42) while the project area is 'confidently identified as planted, rather than regrowth or remnant vegetation' (p87).

The project area includes existing stations and it is possible to stand at any station along the corridor and spot regrowth, and occasionally remnant vegetation. For example Hurlstone Park station has a small patch of Coral Fern (Gleichenia Dicarpa) clinging to the exposed cliff face while Dulwich Hill station has a stand of heavily pruned She Oaks (Casuarina Glauca). Doug Benson in his 1999 book; Missing Jigsaw Pieces - the Bushplants of the Cooks River Valley, (a work absent from Technical Paper 9 references) identifies and includes photos of remnant Turpentine (Syncarpia Glomulifera) and Blackthorn (Bursaria Spinosa) at Hurlstone Park station (p41)[8]. Looking up and down the rail corridor there are many additional examples of remnant or regrowth vegetation included in the 'exotic grassland' or 'exotic scrub or forest' categories used in the Biodiversity assessment report maps. The CRVA also points out that planted vegetation is still useful habitat that contributes to biodiversity.

Isolated patches of native vegetation are often dismissed as too small to matter yet the CRVA sees them as a vital part of the urban mosaic forming habitat stepping stones[9] in a dense urban environment. The stepping stones concept is also recognized in regional areas through the importance of paddock trees and the contribution they make to the environment[10]. Habitat stepping stones are arguably at least if not more important in urban areas.

Project footprint includes Council land

The PIR proposal contains all of the same construction compounds and worksites both within and outside the rail corridor even though Metro Southwest is no longer proposing to replace the existing rail lines. The CRVA understands from Metro consultations that the construction footprint remains unchanged as Metro Southwest still requires extensive cabling and fencing. This means that Metro Southwest will have a significant impact on council owned vegetation. Examples in Hurlstone Park include the corner of Melford and Canberra St, Warwick Reserve and the Parade (East of Garnet St)[11]: all of which contain mature trees. It is unclear what process Metro is going through to consult with relevant Councils about the impact on council owned trees and vegetation.

Replacement trees and landscaping in the corridor

The Metro City & Southwest Conditions of Approval is silent on the issue of landscaping, stabilisation and revegetation apart from tree replacement. The Metro Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment[12] (see p200-203) states that there will be an overall reduction in landscape

[7] https://majorprojects.accelo.com/public/6c6bc87b845ad1b612204f3b1d14cced/12_%20S2B%20EIS%20Vol%206%20Technical%20paper%209_%20Biodiversity%20assessment.pdf
[8] http://cooksriver.org.au/missing-jigsaw-pieces-bushplants-cooks-river-valley/
[9] http://www.habitatsteppingstones.org.au
[10] http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/resources/research/pt-paddock-trees.pdf
[11] https://www.sydneymetro.info/sites/default/files/document-library/Sydenham%20to%20Bankstown%20Environmental%20Impact%20Statement%20Overview.pdf
[12] https://majorprojects.accelo.com/public/53014ffff37e55f22385dbc5bf1e6674/10_%20S2B%20EIS%20Vol%205%20Technical%20paper%207_%20Landscape%20and%20visual%20impact%20assessment.pdf

quality as trees will not be re-instated within the corridor and turf will replace other vegetation that is removed. Elsewhere Metro Southwest has indicated that trees will be replaced within 500m of the corridor including on council land.

More recent conversations with Metro Southwest indicate that it is yet to contract for the final design and landscaping of the corridor. At this time it remains unclear who will be conducting the detailed design process to confirm what will be replacing vegetation that is removed, when will this process be taking place and what input local residents have to the design process.

Tree replacement

While remnant vegetation will be preserved, some 500 mature trees will be removed (original 900 less 390 reduction) and it looks likely they will be replaced outside of the rail corridor.

The two for one tree replacement specified in the Metro Southwest Conditions of Approval (COA) applies to all trees over 3m tall. A tree is defined by Australian Standard AS 4373-2007 as 'A long lived woody perennial plant growing to greater than (or usually greater than) three metres in height, with one or relatively few main stems or trunks'. While replacement trees will have a minimum pot size of 75 litres this can be varied as agreed with the relevant council. It is also unclear if the 500 mature trees to be removed is the total number of trees currently over 3m tall that will be removed or whether the likely number of trees to be removed is much larger (i.e. including trees over 3m that may not be considered mature).

The CRVA also suggests that the tree replacement ratio could be much higher given the many years it will take for them to grow to 3m or higher at maturity and recent NSW Government recognition of the importance of urban trees[13].

De-vegetation and Corridor Management until 2024

Sydney Trains currently manages the rail corridor, including operations and maintenance of rail infrastructure, corridor and assets. Handover of the corridor to Sydney Metro will not happen until closer to final conversion works prior to Sydney Metro City & Southwest services beginning in 2024.

During this four-year period there is a significant grey area where trees removed by Sydney Trains do not need to be replaced yet those removed by Metro do. For example in September 2019 Metro Southwest will be undertaking 'De-vegetation and tree clearing as required' (September Metro Upgrade notification to residents) while Sydney Trains will continue to undertake 'vegetation maintenance' (Sydney Trains Sydenham to Campsie notification of track maintenance 28-30 September 2019).

This overlap or gap in accountability will make it difficult to assess whether any trees removed over the next four years are being replaced or not.

Landscaping

While the Metro Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment lacks a commitment to improving biodiversity, Metro Southwest has more recently indicated it will landscape the corridor in accordance with relevant standards and guidelines. Metro Southwest has not yet indicated which standards and guidelines it considers relevant.

[13] https://www.smh.com.au/politics/nsw/sydney-to-be-cooled-by-an-extra-five-million-trees-by-2030-20180411-p4z8x7.html

Relevant standards and guidelines Metro Southwest should look to include the Office of Environment and Heritage conservation management notes on Corridors and Connectivity[14], and the Sydney Trains Guide to Vegetation Management in the Rail Corridor[15]. The Sydney Trains Vegetation Management Guide is particularly useful as it spells out the value of replacing weeds and exotic vegetation with natives as the natives are easier and cheaper to maintain while also being aesthetically pleasing.

The CRVA also notes the Minister for Planning's Conditions of Approval for Sydenham to Bankstown already includes the use of local indigenous species for revegetation activities at Station Precincts[16]. If native landscaping for all vegetation is mandated at stations then is can also take place elsewhere along the corridor where vegetation is disturbed or removed.

Development impacts on the Cooks River and surrounding land

Storm water and sewerage are the major sources of pollution in the Cooks River, and ageing Sydney Water infrastructure needs replacing and upgrading to cope with current developments. The Cooks River Alliance produced a report in 2016 analysing storm water management controls within the catchment and found that some of the poorest controls were in the pre-amalgamation Canterbury Council[17]. Without a clear NSW Government and local council commitment to implementing Water Sensitive Urban Design (WSUD) principles anything, like the Metro Southwest, that enables further development in the Cooks River valley will make pollution in the Cooks River worse than it already is.

<u>Open space and Canterbury Racecourse</u>

With development also comes a need for community infrastructure including open space. Local development to date has not included any new passive or active green space in an area with an acknowledged shortage. For example the previous Canterbury Council's S94A policy review indicated Council had the resources to purchase less than two hectares of land when the identified need for new open space is over 30 hectares[18] in that area alone. Proposed linear and pocket parks won't make a significant difference.

The one remaining site that could, at scale, address many community open space needs, including playing fields, is the 35 hectare Canterbury Racecourse. Yet NSW Government planning documents indicate that even this site is at risk of future development.

The Australian Turf Club has tried for several years to classify portions of Canterbury Racecourse as a surplus that can be developed, even going so far as to partner with Mirvac prior to any rezoning or planning approvals[19]. If any Metro Southwest influenced amendment to the Canterbury Racecourse site is to be considered this should be to rezone it RE1 Public Recreation with a view to government acquisition creating much needed regional open space.

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[14] https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/-/media/OEH/Corporate-Site/Documents/Animals-and-plants/Conservation-management-notes/corridors-connectivity-conservation-management-notes-110657.pdf
[15] https://railsafe.org.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0007/31696/EMS-06-GD-0067-Vegetation-Management-in-the-Corridor.pdf
[16] See E57c: https://majorprojects.accelo.com/public/4bea4c8a912bf2e24cd9e566d16138ee/Sydney%20Metro%20-%20Sydenham%20to%20Bankstown%20-%20Signed%20Instrument%20of%20Approval.pdf
[17] http://cooksriver.org.au/publications/capacity-building-stage-1-report/
[18] http://www.canterbury.nsw.gov.au/files/43a9c870-3ac2-4dbb-9a7c-a2620119a122/contrib-plan.pdf
[19] https://www.afr.com/property/residential/mirvac-wins-right-to-develop--australian-turf-clubs-canterbury-park-racecourse-land-20170816-gxx78i

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Greenway South West

While supporting active transport the CRVA acknowledges the removal of the Greenway South West active transport proposal inside the rail corridor in favour of walking and cycling links outside the corridor. The Greenway South West was one of the more poorly thought through aspects of Metro Southwest and, assuming any land was available inside the rail corridor, would have involved removing green space by pouring three hectares of concrete pathway.

In conclusion the CRVA thanks you for holding this Inquiry and would welcome the opportunity to speak to any aspect of this submission.

Yours sincerely

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