

**INQUIRY INTO SYDENHAM-BANKSTOWN LINE
CONVERSION**

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

Submission in response to Parliamentary Inquiry in relation to Sydenham-Bankstown (Metro) Line conversion

Declaration

Introduction

Greater Sydney Transport Planning

In 2011, the then Labor government issued the Metropolitan Plan for Sydney 2036¹. At the time, the projected forecast for Sydney's population growth was 56,000 a year. The associated Metropolitan Transport Plan did not envisage the conversion of the line nor its extension to Liverpool or beyond. Nor was urban renewal at the time proposed along the line.

In 2018, the Greater Sydney Commission released its District Plans, with a projected population growth for Sydney of about 100,000 people a year. Much of this growth is proposed for the Sydenham to Bankstown corridor. While not well understood, the projected population forecasts are a conservative estimate based on 2011 ABS Census. Moreover, traditionally population forecasts have been underestimated².

In comparison with other global cities, Sydney's growth is relatively high, with the projected population forecast to grow by another 1 Million people over the coming decade, and to 8 Million by 2050. Much of the growth will be in Sydney's South West e.g. the City of Camden (council) is projected to grow 5% each and every year. This has major implications for transport planning.

Readily accessible public transport is a key challenge for Sydney's South West which has traditionally has a high motor vehicle dependency. To this end, the addition of 200,000 jobs for Sydney's West is forecast. However, given the high population growth and the opening of Western Sydney International Airport (WSA) by 2026 anticipated to service 10 Million passengers within 5 years of its opening, readily accessible mass transport with fast links to Sydney's CBD and Greater Parramatta is essential.

¹ <https://apo.org.au/system/files/93911/apo-nid93911-262151.pdf>

² Esteemed urban planner, Bob Meyer's presentation at Parliament House, February 2016

Future planning shows the Metro line will be subsequently be extended from Bankstown to Liverpool, with upgrades for the South Rail line and T8 the preferred option put forward in the Federal Government's Western Sydney's Rail Needs Scoping Study³ for travel to WSA.

This would see an all-stops Metro line to Liverpool that is largely standing room only, with the potential conversion of the Airport Line to Metro, whereas internationally Metros are typically designed for shorter distances. Instead upgrades for heavy rail to Liverpool and beyond is appropriate.

Notably too, the Scoping Study indicates if no action is taken, the most pressing priorities in terms of the morning and afternoon peak hour relief are the Western and Illawarra lines.

The Sydenham to Bankstown (S2B) Metro Business Case

From a community perspective, the business case for the S2B has never been well understood other than a great deal of speculation about the role of MTR and the government's urban renewal plans.

About late 2017, I attended a number of community information sessions across Greater Sydney, held in response to the release of the revised draft District Plans by the Greater Sydney Commission.

At the community information session for the South District, the former Premier, Morris Iemma, in his capacity as Greater Sydney Commission's District Commissioner, spoke passionately about the bigger picture for Sydney, and the rationale for key planning decisions.

Following the session, I asked the Commissioner about the rationale for the S2B Metro business case. Indicating it was necessary to offset the costs for the line north of the harbour, it may be relevant for the former Premier to share his knowledge with the Committee if this is not already the case.

The MTR Business Model

Over recent years, there has been considerable press about the MTR and its business model. In the case of the S2B Metro, the conversion of the line appears to rely in part on a similar business model 'where property development near and above train stations funds the construction of new lines'⁴.

The model has attracted criticism, with experts that the suburban cellulite", being clusters of towers designed to give maximum patronage to private railways and retailers, are now being regretted by Chinese planners⁵ and others such as Jeremy Dawkins questioning why replace 'a rail service, fully integrated into Sydney's regional rail system with a single, smaller (if more frequent) Metro line'⁶. Notably questions are now also being raised as to the frequency of services.

Unlike Sydney Trains, Sydney Metro as an agency has considerable powers given the Transport Administration Amendment (Sydney Metro) Act 2018. This includes the ability to act as a full-on

³ <https://www.transport.nsw.gov.au/projects/current-projects/western-sydney-rail-needs-scoping-study>

⁴ <https://www.smh.com.au/national/hong-kong-metro-system-operators-mtr-spread-value-capture-message-to-australia-20151215-glo0wq.html>

⁵ <https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/high-rise-living-at-train-stations-suburban-cellulite-warns-healthy-cities-expert-20151106-gkt23c.html>

⁶ <https://committeefornorthsydney.org.au/wp/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Dawkins-in-2019-MUDD-Yearbook-01.pdf>

developer and fast-track development. These changes have prompted considerable community concern.

Housing Affordability

The decision to convert the line to Bankstown and beyond appears to rely on the introduction of a high density corridor along the line as shown in the District Plan.

As such, the transition from what are essentially lower density suburbs to a high density corridor would follow, rather than options for more balanced development under low to medium rise development designed for middle ring suburbs.

Consequently this would see the loss of more affordable and traditional housing for families who have the benefit of strong community and multicultural support, with ready access to jobs in Sydney's CBD and the inner city nominally less than 15 km in distance. This is contrary to industry representations which are often perpetuated suggesting high density precincts provide more affordable housing. Rather, density and land values are linked to urban renewal areas which are seeing substantive increases in rentals and the cost of homes, with increased risk of 'housing stress'.

For example, Chippendale today has one of the highest densities in Australia. This follows the introduction of Central Park, an urban renewal precinct. Here, the cost of rental accommodation has skyrocketed; typically \$500 plus a week for a self-contained room c 15 – 20 sqm (a dwelling). At the same time, the average income has fallen, evidenced by the ABS 2016 census which shows more than 50% of residents in Chippendale live in a studio (single room) or 1 BR apartment, with 47% of the suburb's c. 8,600 residents experiencing 'housing stress'.

Heritage Impact

The National Trust has long recommended the listing of interwar homes in suburbs such as Lakemba and Belmore. Yet evidence before ICAC (Operation Dasher) prompts questions around the former Canterbury Council's governance and perceived failure to instigate heritage conservation areas, with only one listing under the former council's 2012 LEP.

Consequently the protection of interwar homes and streets in suburbs such as Belmore and Lakemba that would otherwise been listed as heritage conservation areas become prime streets for high-rise redevelopment rather than retained in the public interest. To this end, the introduction of heritage conservation areas in suburbs such as Belmore and Lakemba is urgently recommended.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the conversion of the Sydenham to Bankstown line raises a number of key concerns in relation to Greater Sydney's transport and city planning, which have not been addressed.

I would be happy to appear before the Committee if it would assist.

13 October, 2019