

**Submission
No 83**

INQUIRY INTO SYDENHAM-BANKSTOWN LINE CONVERSION

Organisation: Australian Rail Tram and Bus Industry Union, NSW Branch

Date Received: 13 October 2019



Rail, Tram & Bus Union

(NSW Branch)

Inquiry into the Sydenham-Bankstown line conversion

Submission of the Rail, Tram and Bus Union, NSW Branch

Background

The Rail, Tram and Bus Union NSW Branch represents the state's transport workers. As advocates for improved public transport services that put the needs of commuters and workers first, the union is opposed to the conversion of the Sydenham to Bankstown line to a metro system on the basis that the plan is illogical and will be detrimental to commuters.

The RTBU NSW supports improved public transport services that provide commuters with the accessible, safe, reliable and affordable public transport a global city like Sydney deserves. The current plans for the line's conversion to a Metro system do not meet that criteria.

Lack of Consultation

The RTBU has hundreds, if not thousands, of members who will be affected by the closure of the Sydenham to Bankstown.

Before June 2019, representatives of station staff had only heard rumours about what the closure of the line would mean for them. In June 2019, Sydney Trains informed staff of some arrangements that would be put in place when stations were closed. However, the extent of this consultation was a 23 page PowerPoint presentation that was scant on detail. At no time was the RTBU properly consulted on the substantial impact the closure of the Bankstown line will have on its members jobs.

There has been little, if any, consultation with the RTBU on the impact the closure of the line, and the transfer to a private operator, will have on its members who perform work on rail infrastructure. It is envisaged that the private operator will maintain the line itself, resulting in job losses for these members. It is not known what role these workers will have during the transition period.

Signallers are another group of RTBU members affected by the closure and privatisation of the line. Once again, little to no consultation has occurred about the impact that the closure will have on their work or jobs.

Ripping up the current rail line is illogical

The NSW Government's plan to close down the Bankstown rail line and replace it with a privately-run, driverless, single-deck trains that offer an inferior service is illogical.

Australian Rail, Tram & Bus Industry Union (NSW Branch) ABN 55 090 785 801

Level 4, 321 Pitt Street, Sydney NSW 2000 **T** (02) 92642511 **F** (02) 9261 1342 **E** nswwho@rtbu-nsw.asn.au **W** www.rtbu-nsw.asn.au

ORGANISING WORKERS IN THE TRANSPORT INDUSTRY
PROTECTING AND BUILDING RIGHTS AT WORK

The current rail service works well and is relatively new – having only been upgraded in 2006. While overcrowding on the line is an undeniable issue, the line does not suffer from the severe overcrowding some other lines do. The line has unrealised capacity with the addition of further trains on the line an easy fix to any medium terms overcrowding issues. Notably, replacing the existing rail infrastructure with a Metro system with more limited capacity will only further exacerbate crowding issues.

Rather than ripping up the current line, the NSW Government would be much better served by looking at increasing the current services available on the line – a attractive and viable option that could be done quickly and without commuter disruption.

Workers on Sydney's railways have unparalleled expertise in timetabling and related issues. A consultative process with workers would allow the NSW Government to investigate ways in which to increase services on the line for the benefit of commuters.

Impact on commuters – construction

The construction phase of the Metro project will see up to 100,000 commuters forced onto alternate transport.

Not only is this an inconvenience for commuters, but it will also mean significant traffic issues in the surrounding suburbs during the construction phase, with hundreds of buses forced onto already busy streets during peak hour times.

Regardless of the timing (currently slated for Christmas), the construction phase of the Metro project will severely and unnecessarily hinder commuters – not just those who usually use the train service, but also those on surrounding roads, on other rail lines and on other transport services.

Commuters from the closed stations, likely to be from neighbouring or nearby stations, will be forced to use open stations not affected by the closures. Stations that are designed to accommodate commuters in their immediate vicinity will be inundated by commuters from areas around the stations that have been closed. Station infrastructure, some built when Sydney's population was significantly less, will be ill-equipped to deal with such an influx causing safety problems for commuters. Sydney Trains staff will have to deal with disgruntled members of the public arising from such problems.

Impact on commuters – safety, access, comfort

A move to a Metro system means the safety of commuters and workers will be put at risk. As evidenced by the current Sydney Metro system, Metro systems of the style proposed are designed to be driverless, guard-less and operate with few or no station staff.

Driverless trains are incredibly risky in the NSW context. There is no one at the helm in the event of an emergency. Comparing the NSW terrain to international examples is misleading, and regardless, there are now examples of drivers being put back onto trains overseas following public concerns in an attempt to minimise safety risks.

Removing train guards from our trains also poses a significant safety risk, as train guards play a vital role not just in ensuring the on-time running of trains, but also:

- ensuring passengers get on and off the trains safely;

- that parents and children are not separated by closing doors;
- ensuring the safety and security of passengers onboard the train (in particular more vulnerable passengers such as people with a disability, the less-able, children and women travelling alone at night); and
- assist in the event of an emergency on a train (which is unfortunately not uncommon).

A single-deck Metro system also has far fewer seats than the current fleet of trains, meaning more crowded trains and where commuters will be forced to stand for long periods.

Driverless systems are also very unpopular with the public. A recent poll conducted by Essential Research showed that:

- 68% of the NSW public are concerned about the safety implications of driverless trains;
- Just 31% of people support the introduction of driverless public transport;
- 66% of people are concerned about the impacts driverless public transport will have on jobs;
- 61% believe the introduction of driverless public transport is simply a cost cutting measure by the government; and
- Just 27% believe driverless public transport will improve the quality of the service.

Privatisation doesn't work

The NSW Government's plans for the Sydenham to Bankstown line conversion mean that the line will be privately owned by a Hong Kong-based company.

The NSW Government's fixation with the privatisation of public transport assets has proven to be a dismal failure. There's no doubt that when a private company takes over, commuters pay more (as evidenced by the Airport Line) and the quality of the service commuters receive will be compromised (as evidenced by the privatisation of Region 6 bus services).

Such a drop in service quality is already noticeable in the operation of the North West Metro line. But for a direction from the Office of the National Safety Regulator (ONSA), staff on trains would be reduced to presence on a mere 50% of trains. Commuters attending any station between Chatswood and Tallawong Stations rarely see any customer service staff at all.

The NSW Government's plans to privatise transport in Newcastle has resulted in an inferior service for local commuters, with the heavy rail line that previously ran straight into the heart of the city ripped up, bus stops closed, routes axed and commuters – including the less able and school children – left without an adequate service.

The Region 6 inner-west bus service has also been an example of privatisation resulting in a decreased service for commuters and workers, as has the Sydney Metro service which has been plagued with problems since it first opened.

Privatisation of public transport services is a short-term strategy that puts profits ahead of the needs of the public.

Summary

The NSW Government's plan to tear up the existing, functioning rail line and put in a privately-run Metro system will mean:

- Chaos for commuters who will be left stranded for months while the line is shut down;
- No drivers, guards or station staff – putting the safety of commuters at serious risk;
- Fewer seats for passengers;
- Profits will go to the Hong Kong-based owner of the line, not to the community;
- Less station access for commuters along the line;
- Potential for large-scale development along the line.

The RTBU believes the NSW Government's plans for the Sydenham to Bankstown line conversion are in opposition to the needs of the public and that the project should be abandoned or completely reconsidered.

Further information

The RTBU is happy to provide further information relating to any aspect of this submission and would welcome the opportunity to be part of the inquiry hearings.

Please contact RTBU NSW Secretary, Alex Claassens, via the RTBU office on _____ or _____

Thank you for the opportunity to be part of this important inquiry.

**AUSTRALIAN RAIL TRAM AND BUS INDUSTRY UNION, NSW BRANCH
13 OCTOBER 2019**