

Submission  
No 97

## INQUIRY INTO SYDENHAM-BANKSTOWN LINE CONVERSION

**Organisation:** Western Sydney Leadership Dialogue

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## **Inquiry into the Sydenham-Bankstown Line conversion**

To the Committee Chair

The Western Sydney Leadership Dialogue (the Dialogue) is a not-for-profit community initiative leading a national conversation about Greater Western Sydney. The Dialogue facilitates interaction between key opinion leaders, across industry, government, academia and the community, to inform public policy debate and to advance a Western Sydney regional agenda through research, analysis, advocacy and events.

We appreciate the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry. Our submission includes some general observations on the Bankstown Line project and some more specific issues we believe warrant further discussion and consideration by the NSW Government, albeit perhaps beyond the terms of reference for this Inquiry.

### **General observations on the project and its merit**

Without detailed knowledge of the project business case, it is clear that the metro conversion option will deliver substantial long-term benefits to the entire Sydney Trains network. It is understood that removing Bankstown Line trains from the City Circle will expand the network's capacity from 120 trains per hour to 200 trains per hour. To this end, the project must be considered in the context of the benefits that will be experienced by the entire city.

The movement of large numbers of people by rail is the cornerstone of modern prosperous cities and it must be emphasised to this Committee and opponents of this project that an increase in capacity of some 60% through a project of this kind represents an incredibly cost effective investment in the economic future of Sydney. It will mean more frequent connections to the CBD for customers in places such as Campbelltown, Liverpool, Fairfield, Merrylands and the rapidly expanding south western Sydney suburbs around Leppington and Edmondson Park. Likewise, from Homebush east through Strathfield and the Inner West, higher frequency train services will be enabled. Stakeholders expressing absolute opposition to this project need to weigh up their local concerns against these substantial city-wide benefits – this counterpoint has been missing in the discourse surrounding the project, in our opinion.

The Dialogue believes it is extremely disingenuous for this project's opponents to claim that Bankstown Line customers will somehow have a reduced level of service by not being directly linked to City Circle stations. Sydney Metro stations at Pitt Street, Martin Place and Barangaroo will provide identical or better access to CBD locations, as well as new direct connectivity to Sydney's Lower North Shore, precincts such as Macquarie Park and Macquarie University and the growing Hills District.

While we note there will be a period of inconvenience during construction, we cannot nominate an alternative to this project that can deliver the same network capacity benefit for the same value.

## **Transit oriented development and urban renewal opportunities**

High capacity rapid transit corridors will inevitably attract increased density around station precincts, with the critical mass of people and connections with economic and social opportunity making a dense, compact urban form the most efficient use of land. Over the longer term this densification will occur, however it is understandable that community opposition to rezoning has arisen when decisions have seemingly been made before the project had even commenced.

While it is appropriate to plan for eventual rezoning around station precincts, in the case of this project it is clear that there has been a considerable failure to “bring the community along” in the decision-making process.

The initial attempt at rezoning around station precincts can best be described as “ham-fisted” and it is little surprise that local communities resisted in the manner they did. As mentioned above, the eventual densification of station precincts is inescapable – a fact that a majority of citizens will appreciate and accept – however communities need to be engaged early and respectfully in the conversation.

Further, planners and developers must be investing in a social license to operate within these communities, through undertaking to deliver open spaces, social and affordable housing, essential services and amenity and an overarching commitment to quality placemaking. Sadly, in the most recent development boom across Greater Sydney, this social license and quality focus has been lacking in many cases, fuelling the community pushback against growth and density.

### **Bankstown CBD**

The project provides a once-in-a-generation opportunity to transform the Bankstown CBD by ‘undergrounding’ the metro line approaching Bankstown Station. Bankstown is on-track to become a major downtown hub over coming years, with a new WSU vertical campus and a relocated Bankstown-Lidcombe Hospital currently in planning. Over time it will evolve to become one of Greater Sydney’s thriving secondary CBDs.

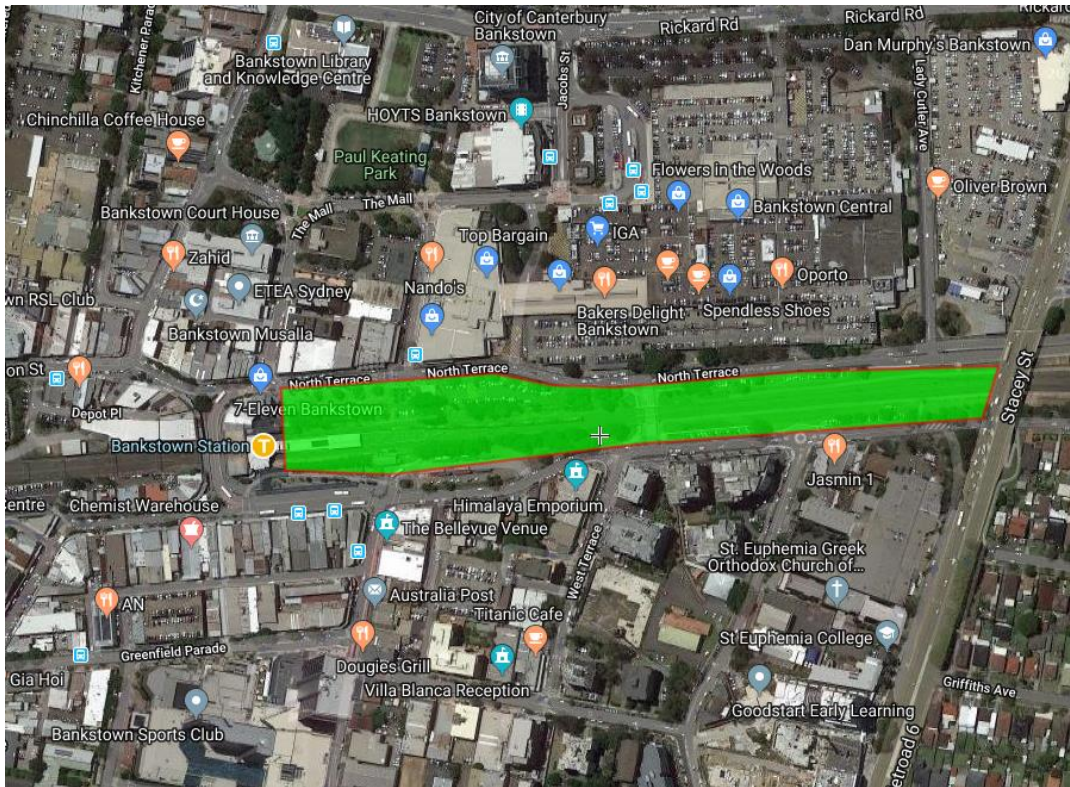
With the conversion and station upgrade work soon going to market for procurement, we are fast-approaching a critical decision point on this aspect of the project, which can unlock tremendous growth for Bankstown’s CBD by removing the barrier created by the 100-year old train line.

While we do not purport to be experts in rail engineering, the Dialogue believes there is merit in separating the approximately 500 metre corridor between Stacey Street and Bankstown Station from the rest of the project to enable further discussion on the options to unlock development and open spaces, and to provide free north-south movement of people across the Bankstown CBD.

A potential underground section, as illustrated below, could be delivered via a shallow cut and cover tunnel, a series of land-bridge connections, or a deeper bored tunnel. The alignment of the future extension of the line to Liverpool should also factor into the planning of the project corridor at Bankstown Station.

All options would invariably incur additional costs and a discussion on meeting this cost through a levy on associated commercial and residential development would be appropriate.

Figure 1: Potential renewal area unlocked by an underground Bankstown Station corridor



For further information on this submission, please contact Luke Turner, Director of Policy on or !