

**Submission
No 101**

INQUIRY INTO SYDENHAM-BANKSTOWN LINE CONVERSION

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That Portfolio Committee No. 6 –Transport and Customer Service inquire into and report on aspects of the planned conversion of the Sydenham-Bankstown (S-B) Line from heavy rail to metro, being the southwest part of the Sydney Metro City and Southwest project, including:

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

I am for an underground metro (automated or manned) and retaining the heavy S-B rail line, because that would create a gain in transport services for the line. I am against shutting down a functional heavy rail line and then converting it to an above ground automated metro train.

The conversion of S-B line to metro could possibly go on for many years. The patronage of the S-B train line could be seriously and permanently damaged, as customers are forced to find alternative transport to their destinations during the construction period. Many customers may not return to using the above ground metro once it's opened, they may continue to use the alternatives they were forced to use during conversion.

As a regular customer of the heavy rail line, I have not received nor seen any written communication from the NSW government that explains their business case for shutting down the heavy rail line and converting it to an automated above ground metro. The automated aspect seems to be the main thing the government is implying in its communications as its business case, reducing rail staff needed to run this type of system. That also comes at a cost to the environment, to animals and humans living adjacent to the line, property prices and compromises the safety of metro customers.

The inquiry should thoroughly look at the safety aspect of running an above ground automated metro (without any driver and guard). The automated metro (in northwest Sydney, the City and elsewhere in the world are built underground. I believe this is primarily for securing the line and the sensors that manoeuvre the metro. It is important that the S-B line be treated the same way as City and Northwest areas and also receives an underground metro. A driverless train uses sensors to manoeuvre. Having them exposed above ground, leaves them more vulnerable to damage from weathering and from sabotage. There have already been numerous small problems reported on the current Sydney metro line with sensors failing to work properly. Clearly protecting the sensors is imperative. Thus the NSW government has stated that one of the essential features of an above ground metro, will be a high and fine mesh security fence running along the entire length of the S-B line and across every bridge. This could also involve the use of CCTV cameras. Such a massive and visible ugly feature will have a negative impact (looking like the Berlin wall) on the psychology of metro customers and residents that will have to look at it every day. It will restrict the views of residents and metro customers when looking out their windows. It will impact negatively on property prices near the line, require constant surveillance, regular maintenance for the safety of customers using an automated metro and all the monetary costs associated with that. Other contributors to this inquiry have noted that the fine mesh of the proposed fencing will hinder the

movement of animals (even small ones) that live in the nature strip adjacent to the train line. An environmental impact statement should be requested by the inquiry.

(b)the **consideration of alternatives** for improving capacity and reducing congestion,

Metro lines should be used to complement the heavy rail system through underground interchange stations, and not be used to take away heavy rail services. The Sydney's current double decker heavy rail train service are unique and probably the best train ride in Australia (possibly the world), in terms of carrying capacity, comfortable seating for most customers, quality of the (steady sway-free) ride and a number of other features. It has been reported by others to this inquiry, that the routes with the highest potential ridership are City-Parramatta (underground roughly following Parramatta Road or Victoria Road) extending the current Northwest metro through to Northern beaches. It should be noted that Victoria Road currently has a bus service a long its entire length from the city to Parramatta. Parramatta road does not have a bus service along its entire length and a bus service could and should be set up immediately. Why is Parramatta road treated differently from Victoria road? I can provide more examples where a metro would add services to the current heavy rail system if the inquiry wishes to hear them. The simplest example is to take the metro underground.

S-B heavy rail line currently has a frequency of about a train every 15 minutes from Birrong to the city via Sydenham 7 days a week (higher during peak times). This is (probably) the highest frequency train service that section of the line has ever received. The heavy rail line could accommodate even more frequent services, if train signals were upgraded. Upgrading the signals of the line would improve the efficiency and reduce delays forced by signal failure and probably be cheaper than metro conversion with less disruptions to services. This was not considered in the plans released to the public. Making use of the unused rail corridor between Sydenham-Erskineville-toward Redfern would also allow for an increase in frequency and reduce congestion by separating lines out, if it was finally put into use.

(c)the factors taken into account when **comparing the alternatives** and the robustness of the evidence used in decision-making,

I am not aware of any survey of customers, any comparisons made to other types of trains in any NSW government communications to the public, regarding improvements to the S-B line in recent years. No other options were presented, such as keeping the current heavy rail line or other types of trains looked at. No compensation has ever offered to customers for the train services cut in 2013 (west of Bankstown) who were offered no alternatives. The only option presented was the above ground automated metro. The proposed plan for (above ground automated) metro had so many faults with it, that it should not be accepted in its current form.

The metro conversion is being used as a legal reason to rezone the suburbs along the S-B line for (a substantial increase in) high density buildings. It has little to do

with transport improvement. It should be noted by the inquiry that the conversion of the line does not extend along the entire length of the current heavy rail line which extends out to both Lidcome and Liverpool (i.e. west of Bankstown). For these areas no written communication from the government has been given to residents, as to what type of transport they will receive after 2019 and how frequent. A few respondents to this inquiry favour the conversion to metro, because of the future prospect of more frequent services to inner city stations and high rise development. They do not consider that an underground metro would add to the current services without disruption to services. The conversion to (above ground automated) metro does not consider the 9 suburbs 'west of Bankstown' who have already seen train services substantially cut and their travel times increase since 2013 (by the same NSW Liberal government). The metro conversion in 2020 will cut that part of the line off from city services and possibly reduce them to a local shuttle service.

At the time of writing (October 2019) the construction of the above ground automated metro is well underway near Sydenham and cabling work has begun at near Marrickville station. By the time this inquiry has concluded in 2020, the S-B heavy rail line will not be operating and construction of the metro will be well underway. The NSW Liberal government is obviously racing ahead of this inquiry to begin as much work as possible on the S-B line, before the inquiry concludes. The government must not be granted the validity of an argument that states 'that it's too late to stop now'. If the current version (above ground automated) metro is found by the inquiry to be unsuitable or discriminatory (not being underground as it is in the north and city), please recommend the metro construction of the S-B line be stopped and plans revised to look at all the alternatives and consider the areas west of Bankstown in those plans.

(d) whether metro is a **suitable** means of transport **over long distances**

Metro trains are built usually underground and have short distances between stations, usually about a few hundred metres to 1.5 km maximum apart. They are usually single decker trains with few seats, mainly standing room for most customers. Lines are short in distance and consequently trips are short for customers, an average trip of about 15 minutes. Metros usually service city centres and primarily inner city areas and perhaps some middle range suburbs. These are usually frequent, all stop services, that provide a train every 10 minutes (maximum wait). The current northwest "metro" does not fit that description at all. The current metro is an unsuitable train type for the outer suburban area it mainly services.

'Long distances' I assume means suburban areas clearly outside the city. An average trip of about 45 minutes. Suburban trains should be all station services or have some express services during peak hours. Train carriages provide seats for most passengers because of the longer trip as people get tired standing.

For the S-B line the Canterbury/Campsie area could be classed as edge of the inner city, beyond that point people require seating as the trips are usually longer to the

city. An underground metro as far as Campsie, while maintaining the heavy rail S-B line would be more suitable overall.

(e)the consultation process undertaken with, and the **adequacy of information** given to, community, experts and other stakeholders

Is consultation defined as telling the community what decision government has made or does it involve two way communication where the community can have some influence over the outcome? I have received no written information from the NSW regarding a genuine two way consultation process. Most of the information I have received to date has come from media groups. What little government information there is, seems simplistic and lacking any real detail.

(f)the impact on the **environment** and **heritage** conservation,

The S-B heavy rail line is one of the oldest heavy rail lines in Sydney. The line is curvy along its entire length as it was designed and built during the steam era (in early 20th Century) and has curvy track / platforms (follow a flat gradient) and have been operating since that time. The line has a unique look to it, that is indicative of that era and unique to NSW. The most of the stations on the line are heritage stations and they should be appreciated, maintained and protected as they currently exist. It should be noted by the inquiry that St Peters and Yagoona stations had heritage buildings demolished in the 1980's by a NSW Liberal government that did not consider these heritage aspects as valuable or worth preserving. An automated metro train is unsuitable for a heritage line. Placing automated barriers on the edge of these platforms will ruin the heritage look of the stations. I believe platforms with curved edges, would need to be altered and straightened to accommodate the automated barrier doors on the edge of platforms. It would be better to run maned trains (with a train driver / guard) on the line that is compatible with the way the line was designed to function and valuing its heritage aspects. What is proposed is ruining a heritage train line, to make it fit an above ground automated metro. A new underground metro line should instead be designed with automated features and with straight platforms.

(g)any lobbying, political donations or other **influence** of the public or private sector in relation to making that **decision**

It has been stated that the company MTR (Hong Kong based), running the current Sydney metro is as much a property developer as a transport company. I don't have anything to add here other than questions. Are MTR planning to turn the suburbs alongside the S-B line into high density construction zones? Has the NSW Liberal government agreed to rezone the suburbs near the MTR managed metro into higher densities? Is the S-B line is being sacrificed to overdevelopment, so that people in other parts of Sydney can keep their backyards?

(h)the **tender process** for appointing private operators,

(i)the **contractual arrangements** entered into in respect of the project

(j)the **adequacy of temporary transport arrangements** during the conversion process, including for people with a disability

Any conversion of an existing heavy rail network, will be hugely disruptive, not only for locals to the line being 'converted', but to the whole of Sydney. Former customers of the closed line, will attempt to use any other good public transport options that are available nearby, consequently overcrowding those services and the streets in those areas, if driving. The usage of motor transport will inevitably increase if customers do not have frequent public transport options. I define 'frequent service' as maximum wait of 10 minutes. I believe road traffic on all Sydney roads will be adversely affected with the construction of an above ground automated metro along the S-B line. Train patronage could be permanently damaged by the time an above ground automated metro constructed, as customers continue to use motor transport which they have become accustomed to and relied upon, during the years of conversion to above ground metro.

At the time of writing October 2019, I am not aware of any written information from the NSW government to affected customers, with regard to what temporary transport arrangements they will provide during the conversion process.

I would like the inquiry to consider the following points as temporary transport arrangements for any shutdown of the line for conversion to above ground metro.

- Free train replacement Bus service (conversion affected customers) operating at a 10 minute frequency 7 days week
- Bus companies to upgrade their entire bus fleet to be low floor/easy access, paid by the state
- Create new north-south bus services to connect (where possible) to the East Hills train line and through to Western train lines
- Make all North, Western, East Hills and South line trains, all stop services near the metro conversion affected areas
- Extend bus services from the City along the Hume highway and also along Canterbury road, out to Liverpool operating at a 10 minute frequency 7 days week
- Maintain the train service for the areas west of Bankstown (Yagoona Birrong, Sefton, Regents Park, Berala, Chester Hill, Leightonfield Villawood, Carramar) and extend that service to the city, stops at all major interchange stations

along the way and cease terminating services at the Lidcome turn back. Train frequency of at least one every 15 minutes

(k) the impact on the stations **west of Bankstown**

Property values in the entire area west of Bankstown (Yagoona Birrong, Sefton, Regents Park, Berala, Chester Hill, Leightonfield Villawood, Carramar) will be devalued if there is any loss of direct City train services, regardless if those residents use trains.

These 9 suburbs area have already received substantial cuts to train services in 2013. The areas West of Bankstown lost about 50% of our Bankstown line service which extended 'all stations to the city via Lidcome and Strathfield'. It has lost virtually 99% of the Inner West line service, which is now redirected to servicing Parramatta on weekdays or terminating at Homebush on weekends. The area West of Bankstown, since 2013 has lost over 140 trains a day in the direction of the city via Lidcome and Strathfield. Additional train services to other lines, have mainly come from taking away these train services away from these areas (Yagoona Birrong, Sefton, Regents Park, Berala, Chester Hill, Leightonfield Villawood, Carramar).

Conversion of the S-B line to above ground automated metro is the worst possible option for the area west of Bankstown, because it will cut these are off from having a direct train link to the city via Bankstown. Changing trains at Bankstown will add time to every journey and make train travel more difficult for the less mobile who would have to change platform to continue their journey. How much more time is added is dependent on how frequent services are provided. The inquiry should recommend a maximum wait of 10 minutes 7 days a week should be the standard. Any future timetable should endeavour to have every metro train arriving at Bankstown terminus being met by whatever service is going to be provided for the areas west of Bankstown. The inquiry should request that (former Inner West) regular train services to the city via Regents Park, Lidcome and Strathfield, should be resumed immediately and continued as a regular service after the metro conversion is complete.

(l) any related matter

The existing underground 'metro' in the northwest is an opportunity to look at the real limitations, problems associate with this system. The northwest Metro is advertised as having the potential to operate a train every 4 minutes and being automated, could potentially run 24/7. The reality of a privately run train line is different. Internet information and station indicator boards do not always show accurate information, particularly when there are problems with the metro e.g. indicator boards displaying train is "leaving now", when there is no train at the platform. Maximum wait times is usually longer than 10 minutes. New metro already has trackwork on weekends and

may require more frequent trackwork to maintain an automated system than a manned system. Bus replacements for any metro shutdowns, breakdowns, malfunctions and trackwork the inquiry should look at how frequent are these bus services are at present. Though metro is automated it closes earlier than Sydney Trains system which is manned, particularly from Sunday through to Wednesday. Why is that?

Current metro plans for the city have customers having to walk nearly a kilometre from Martin Place to reach Circular Quay which is ridiculous. Connectivity of the metro needs to be revised. The proposed map of the Metro, shows it passes nearby several heavy rail stations, but no interchange stations are planned there. For example, customers travelling on the metro to Circular Quay, would need to travel to Central before changing to heavy rail in order to travel back to Circular Quay and to access the City Circle. A similar situation occurs at other places along the proposed metro line

The price of ticketing for customers should be kept the same for any metro service as it would be for a heavy rail service.