

## **INQUIRY INTO SYDENHAM-BANKSTOWN LINE CONVERSION**

**Organisation:** Hurlstone Park Association

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**Hurlstone Park Association (HPA) Inc. 141095**

**November 2019**

**Supplementary Submission to**

**Portfolio Committee No 6 - Transport and Customer Service -Inquiry into  
the Sydenham-Bankstown Line Conversion**

Prepared by Dr Marie Healy, on behalf of the HPA, subsequent to evidence presented by Dr Healy, as a witness, on Wed 6<sup>th</sup> November 2019 to the Portfolio Committee.

I thank the committee for allowing me to provide further information which I hope will clarify some of the concerns expressed by committee and community members during the recent hearings, and to add to the information available for this important inquiry. I will also specifically address some of the misconceptions and biases I observed during the hearings.

**1. Legitimacy of community groups and academics/experts**

The legitimacy of community groups/representatives opposed to the metro conversion of the T3 line was continuously questioned, along with their motives, political leanings and evidence. This occurred with Eco-transit and Action for Public Transport representatives on Thurs 7 Nov, with the Hon Natalie Ward suggesting their evidence was misleading (p20, transcript 7 Nov ) and repeatedly incorrectly insisting that Mr Donovan had mentioned double-decker trains in his submission. The Hon Wes Fang also stated that the Eco-transit submissions were “one conspiracy theory after another” (p23, transcript, 7 Nov).

It did appear, though, that The Hon Wes Fang had conspiracy theories of his own, with multiple questions relating to the relationships of various experts to the community groups, and even questioned Mr Housnell’s honesty when he denied knowledge of a so-called “Basta” campaign (p15, Transcript , 7 Nov).

Representatives from the *Save T3 Bankstown Line* (Mr Roydon Ng) and the *Sydenham to Bankstown Alliance* (SBA) (Mr Peter Olive) were questioned at length about their legitimacy,

motives and political activities by the Hon Wes Fang, who even suggested they misrepresented their support base (15, transcript, 6 Nov).

This was in stark contrast to the attitude displayed, by both the Hon Wes Fang and the Hon Shayne Mallard towards the pro-metro representatives of the *Canterbury Bankstown Chamber of Commerce and Locals for Southwest Metro* (refer to pages 26, 27, 28 of the transcript 6 Nov), whose motivations and evidence, which was sparse, were accepted without question, until challenged by the Chair (and indeed found to be wanting, at least in the case of the *Locals for Southwest Metro*). Indeed, the comments and questions by the Hon Wes Fang and the Hon Shayne Mallard suggested these two pro-metro groups had greater legitimacy than (the multitude) of groups opposed to the project and unfair and biased comparisons and assumptions were made about how much support they had in the community. (p27, transcript, 6 Nov).

It is important that evidence, rather than misleading opinion, and ideology, informs the committee:

A) The HPA is an incorporated entity registered under Fair Trading. It is one several community groups that enjoys a high level of support across the Sydenham-Bankstown corridor, and is one of the representative groups of the *Sydenham to Bankstown Alliance*.

B) "Meetings" are different to "community forums" or "events" and the comparison made by the Hon Wes Fang lacked validity and common sense - community group meetings would never work with hundreds of participants. Indeed, Mr Peter Olive pointed out that key representatives from member groups would attend meetings, a concept that appeared lost on The Hon Wes Fang - this was not neighbours discussing speculative property gains to be had from the Metro, but volunteers working for communities in the absence of good public policy. There have been plenty of community forums and events opposing both the T3 Metro conversion and the NSW government's planning policies for the corridor which have attracted hundreds of residents, for example (to name but a few):-

-the Fix Transport NSW Rally - with a turnout of about 1,000 in Feb 2018

-an SBA forum in Marrickville about metro concerns with more than 250 in July 2017, and another more recently at Campsie.

-a Marrickville meeting about planning concerns with more than 500 in Feb 2018

-a Better Planning Network (which has more than 4,000 face book followers) forum at Parliament House in 2018 when Michael Daley announced Labor would scrap the Sydenham to Bankstown Metro was met with applause from the whole theatre

C) A quick search of the number of followers for each various *face book* sites on 21 Nov 2019 gives an idea of community support for some of the groups:

*Eco- transit\** - 1509

*Save Marrickville South* - 1284

*Canterbury Bankstown Chamber of Commerce* -1185

*Hurlstone Park Association \** - 1142 (representing more than 20% of the suburb's population - 4596 in the 2016 census; the HPA also has information stalls and events to maintain contact the many aged people in the suburb without internet access)

*Save T3 Bankstown Line\** - 1078

*Save Dully\** - 1056

*Sydenham to Bankstown Alliance* - 693

*Locals for Southwest Metro* - 103

\* groups associated with the SBA, (although it represents other groups not mentioned here).

It is clear that across the corridor there are many thousands of supporters for community groups that oppose this project, on behalf of the residents. In addition, the responsibility for informing residents about the project, and its limitations, has fallen to these representative groups, and the media, in the absence of genuine community consultation by the NSW Government. On numbers alone, it appears that the HPA, the SBA and Eco-transit have far greater legitimacy to speak on behalf of local communities than the couple of pro-metro groups.

During the hearings, coalition members sought to de-legitimise, demonise and ridicule community representatives and experts that mounted coherent arguments against this project while praising the few that support it, regardless of the lack of evidence or cogent argument provided.

## **2. Lack of Support for the Metro**

The HPA does not support the project and this position reflects concerns in our community. It is the smallest suburb across the corridor but it generated the most submissions opposing the project. Indeed, of the 293 submissions to the EIS from the suburb, 291 were opposed and 1 could be described as neutral.

There were some witnesses that testified widespread support for the metro, but we do not believe this is the case. The Chair challenged the figures supplied by *Locals for Southwest Metro*, who appeared to have provided misleading figures (p24, transcript, 6 Nov).

Additionally, *Locals for Southwest Metro* stated that:

Mr WES BROWN..With this in mind, I am bemused and confused as to why a small number of politically motivated people are trying to exclude the residents of my suburb from this exciting opportunity to benefit from twenty-first century infrastructure (p 23, transcript 6 Nov)

The *Canterbury Bankstown Chamber of Commerce* was praised for simply paraphrasing the Government's own propaganda, such as the "increased reliability" of the metro, or its potential to "enhance the prosperity of the region." (p23, transcript, 6 Nov). Unfortunately the businesses in the CBD of Newcastle, and along the route of the Light Rail in Sydney have not found this to be the case.

There are several de-facto measure that could be applied to judge community support, and it is also important that the facts relating to submissions are clarified:

A) The number of followers and "likes" for the community group *face book* sites(as exemplified in point 1) indicates a low level of support for the project.

B) The large number of community groups that has emerged in the last few years in response to the NSW government's transport and planning projects also indicates a high level of community dissatisfaction.

C) Community submissions overwhelmingly opposed the metro:

-out of approximately 530 personal submission to the Environmental Impact Statement for the Sydenham to Bankstown metro conversion, only 15 were totally supportive, with a further 8

showing some support along with significant concerns. Therefore only 4.3% of submitters showed any support for the Metro conversion. Unsurprisingly, the supportive submissions were given prominence of place, occurring early in the 1<sup>st</sup> batch of published submissions.

-again, submissions to the Preferred Infrastructure Project were overwhelmingly opposed - only 17 out of 549 submitters were supportive of the project which equates to = 3%; 489 (89%) were opposed (others neutral/comments only).

I have attached two documents I prepared in 2018 that summarise and analyse the submissions:

1. *"Marie - Summary of personal submissions to the Metro EIS Sydenham to Bankstown"*
2. *"Insights from reading of part B, Submission - report prepared by Marie"*

### **3. Why the metro conversion of the T3 line is opposed**

**Firstly**, to get to the core of the issue, and considering the submissions, **the main issue is that the project lacks merit and is not in the public interest - the government's justifications are not believed** (and have altered over time presumably due to lobbying by private enterprise and those in government with vested interests).

Initially the government assessed the metro as having:

*"few benefits in terms of service enhancement, capacity improvements or better operating efficiency on the existing rail network" (which would) "not maximise the use of the existing rail assets" (but)" create a separate system that would divert funding away from service improvements on the existing rail network "(Sydney's Rail Future 2015)*

The government's position then changed to asserting almost the opposite:

*"Sydney Metro creates the necessary breathing space to allow our rail system – both metro and suburban - to operate effectively and efficiently".*

*(Transforming Sydney, Sydney Metro City and and Southwest ; Project Overview June 2015 PDF)*

and

*"The Sydney Metro system would improve infrastructure and remove existing bottlenecks, providing faster and more reliable connections .....the upgrade of the T3*

*Bankstown Line would deliver benefits across Sydney's rail network" (Executive Summary, EIS).*

It is not surprising given that this is the same government that intended to proceed with the Newcastle light rail (which replaced the amputated heavy rail line) without developing a business case, and resulted in a negative cost-benefit. Businesses are still closing and struggling, with foot traffic down 30-40% in the Newcastle CBD.

There were multiple concerns in submissions about the business case which is has not been made public. People are concerned about the high cost of this project and, given the government's record on other projects, costs are likely to escalate. Just this week, the public was made aware that the CityEast light rail project's cost has blown out another third to almost \$3billion, with a class action by small businesses negatively impacted still in the making. One would expect that this would have reduced the cost-benefit of this project to a negative state. This leads one to question the competency of the government.

Multiple experts have contradicted the government's justifications for this project, especially in relation to the replacement of the Bankstown line. I will not repeat these as details are in many submissions and news stories. Many excellent witnesses, with transport and rail expertise, addressed the committee on the 7<sup>th</sup> November also. Essentially the "bottleneck" theory appears more spin than fact. Suffice it to say that, overwhelmingly, community members believe the advice of independent experts and do not believe the government's assertions, nor those of its paid experts. In addition, the government has chosen to be secretive about business and contractual arrangements despite allocating billions of public money to the project. Indeed, it would appear that the justifications for the metro are purely ideological and relate to the government's agenda of privatisation of public transport services, value capture for developers and private enterprise, and "urban renewal" for a corridor whose residents already value their well-established places.

**Secondly,** it is apparent from submissions and independent expert opinion that this **government had incorrectly prioritised this project** over more urgent infrastructure and other spending. I raised the issue of low levels of accessibility (for people with mobility issues, for example) across the network (which is about 44%) and the Hon Wes Fang replied that the government could "walk and chew gum at the same time." (p49, transcript, 6 Nov).

Unfortunately the government cannot "walk and chew gum at the same time" for the simple reason that funding is not infinite - public money must be carefully allocated and the

community expects the government to prioritise spending based on need, and public good, (which includes widespread community acceptance and positive cost-benefit projections) not on ideological grounds or vested interests.

Alternatives have not been adequately addressed. Again, multiple experts, and Eco transit, have testified to this. Options such as stopping the Bankstown Line at Redfern, stopping the Metro at Sydenham, investing in signalling and the existing heavy rail network and expanding to new areas.....

It should not be forgotten that this ill-informed project is costing BILLIONS, a huge proportion of the state's total annual revenue - for a project that lacks community support and has, at the best, conflicting justifications and a secretive business case. This dwarfs the funding for TAFE, and the millions allocated for bushfire and drought relief assistance.

**Thirdly,** during the hearing, (and in submissions), **multiple negative effects** were raised by witnesses:

A) INCREASED travel times for a significant number of commuters, such as University of Sydney students and staff, and commuters beyond Bankstown, and loss of direct connections to high-use stations such as Redfern and the City Circle. Unfortunately coalition senators ridiculed these concerns, which translated to an extra 30 minutes return travel for many commuters. The coalition senators mocked that, in rural areas, there was no public transport, and suggested that new destinations such as Barangaroo would more than compensate for this. (p18, transcript , 6 Nov).

It was troubling to see this type of exchange occurring throughout the hearings, especially with community group representatives, with both the Hon Shayne Mallard and the Hon Wes Fang, and at times the Hon Catherine Cusack - talking at witnesses instead of seeking information. It also highlights the following issues:

- the Government has consistently shown a lack of regard, or even contempt, for community opinion (unless it is totally supportive, which has been rarely the case with the government's infrastructure projects) and this lack of consultation was a major issue identified in submissions ("The customer is at the centre of everything we do" is just not evident)

- ridiculing concerns about increased travel times for commuters is ironic given the metro is justified on the basis of commuter benefits



-the lack of public transport in rural areas is a failing of the government, not urban community group; indeed community submissions stated the desire for the billions to be spent on projects with merit (which might include making all stations accessible, improving rural transport options, investing in the current network and so on).

-there is no evidence to support the statements that new stations such as Barangaroo will compensate for the loss of ones like Redfern. On the contrary, there is ample evidence (Opal data, University of Sydney analysis) that the MAIN destinations on the line are City Circle and Redfern, which will be lost as direct services.

B) Construction impact concerns were also ridiculed:

The Hon Wes Fang took issue with the Inner West council's concerns over construction and traffic impacts, and their criticisms of the NSW government's infrastructure management and the potential for cost blow-outs. He was at pains to point out all the good their infrastructure was doing, including referencing all the toll-roads they are building (p3, transcript, 6 Nov). Indeed, the Hon Wes Fang had a habit, during the hearing, of suggesting that criticisms about the government or their projects was "subjective" and anything positive said about them or by them was fact.

Again, the opinion of coalition senators should not be a substitute for facts:

-there is ample evidence that the government has not managed infrastructure well - they have been criticised by the State Auditor and the Productivity Commission around governance issues, business cases and cost blow-outs, and the lack of clear public interest. A raft of transport, economic, heritage, environmental and infrastructure experts have also been highly critical of their transport projects, including this project, WestConnex, the Newcastle Light Rail and the City East Light Rail. .

-the government claiming that a project is worthwhile, and paying private consultants to support them, does not reflect best practice (we have already seen that basic heritage principles were ignored in the EIS) and has failed to convince community members and many experts of the merits of their projects; their lack of transparency has reduced public confidence

-the benefits of the toll-roads that the government is building have been overstated - these toll roads lack community support (and to say they do is blatantly false if you look at the number of submissions, protests, community groups and academic articles opposing it ) and lack merit. They have been built at the expense of expanding public transport/new rail and are the result of intensive lobbying by private enterprise. They will have adverse traffic and environmental effects in the long-term.

C) Development impacts.

It is worthwhile noting that the State Government recently announced a “new approach to precinct planning”.

Unfortunately the Department has failed to illustrate they have the credentials for community collaboration, and this announcement is sure to be viewed with great cynicism by the electorate. Naturally, the Canterbury Bankstown area will still be subject to “strategic planning” (ie state-led); The “strategy” appears to involve making plenty of money for developers and value capture so you can privatise the service and afford this costly ill-advised conversion.

D) Heritage and Environmental impacts - which have been addressed in detail in submissions by the HPA, SBA and CRVA. For Hurlstone Park, our small retail strip and surrounding residential streets, will be impacted by an increasing number of commuters parking during the day. This has not been addressed by Metro representatives.

E) Other impacts including safety and comfort concerns and the lack of suitability for a metro in this long urban corridor.

F) The impacts of privatisation of the service

The chair asked me and my fellow panel members whether the metro would be supported if it was public, as opposed to private (p50, transcript, 6 Nov).

Ripping up the heavy rail line and replacing it with a privately run metro is a major problem and I would argue a main driving force of this metro. For all the accusations of coalition senators, and the *Locals for Southwest Metro* about opposition being politically -motivated, it does appear that the project is politically-motivated and appeals to the Berejiklian government agenda of small government. Many of the submissions addressed this issue; it is also obvious that this corridor is essentially a Labor electorate, and therefore it would be natural to assume these communities do not share the government's enthusiasm for union-bashing, privatisation of assets and services, running down of the public service, and lack of concern about having ministers and government agents being involved in property development, for instance.

The costly conversion of the T3 line to metro is not supported, even if it was to remain publicly-run, but privatisation of the service has the potential for multiple negative effects, of which I will list just a few:

1. Getting rid of train drivers and guards.
2. The metro will be run for profit rather than service provision; The very nature of privatisation must result in reduced service provision, as unlike in the public sector, less profitable running times could be lost rather than covered by cross-subsidies.
3. The privatisation of the Inner West bus services (which was not supported by the community) will exacerbate the negative impacts for commuters - in the Hills district, the opening of the metro coincided with rolling back the (private) bus services, so that less profitable routes and services were abandoned.
4. The privatisation of the Inner West bus services has already resulted in reduced reliability.
5. In Newcastle, the privatisation of all transport services apart from the (amputated) heavy rail line, has resulted in less convenience, reduced reliability and struggling businesses. People south of Belmont lost services, many commuters have to catch 2-3 buses instead of 1, and many commute times are longer. Bus drivers in Newcastle have reportedly been underpaid since the private contract was awarded. A report by the NSW auditor-general revealed that on-time performance of Newcastle buses fell from 94 percent 91 percent in the first year in private hands.
6. After Sydney's ferries were privatised in mid-2012, cancellations rose by 50 percent, and fares increased by 25 percent.
7. Heightened levels of secrecy are expected - already issues with not meeting targets on the Northwest metro have been heavily redacted. Contracts will not be publicly available and are likely to reflect poor value for taxpayers and great benefits for multi-national private companies.
8. "Value-capture", with its impacts on local character, heritage, street-scapes and local congestion, and local infrastructure and services such as schools and hospitals, will likely be increasingly used to prop up costly private transport services and is flagged multiple times in the government's transport documents. Additionally, much of this value capture ends up in the bank accounts of large land-owners, such as developers, in urban areas, instead of being distributed, through levies, for local or even regional infrastructure. (I refer you to a report by the University of Sydney, July 2019 "*Value Capture on Urban Road and Rail Projects; Are there too many free rides?*")

9. The privatisation experience elsewhere has not been positive - in Britain, railway privatisation led to increased operating costs. In Melbourne, the franchising out of the city's tram and rail systems has been more costly and not improved service provision.

10. Leaving the metro hardware in public hands and privatising the service really results in the public carrying the fiscal risk while propping up a large corporation's profits.

#### 4. **Lack of positive impacts**

It is disappointing that the government has failed to capitalise on this project for the benefit of the public, even if it was a good idea. They have chosen against Australian manufactured carriages, decided to rid the service of drivers and guards, and have not looked for a local operator or into training the current workforce to do this.

#### **In summary**

The HPA is just one of numerous community groups that opposes the conversion of the T3 line to Metro. Contrary to statements made by the few groups supportive of the metro, we have presented evidence that the project does not enjoy community support. There is something wrong, when the potential customers of a service claiming to improve their commuting experience, is rejected.

Multiple experts have countered the government's claims that it will improve congestion on the network, and indeed the government initially state this also. It is doubtful that there is a "bottleneck problem" that necessitates this conversion, or that this line should be prioritised.

In addition, the multiple negative effects of this project indicate that the government has been misleading, or wrong, in its cost-benefit analysis. Budget over-blows on other projects leads one to extrapolate that there is a high fiscal risk in this project that is based on questionable assumptions.

The NSW Government has created a huge trust deficit between itself and communities, due to issues relating to governance, conflicts of interest, lack of transparency, poor engagement with communities and multiple issues with other projects such as legal issues, delays and cost-blow-outs.

The coalition senators' attempts, during this inquiry, to question the legitimacy of well-informed community members, with a huge support base, or to paint them as NIMBYs and anti-progress, or to ridicule valid concerns about the projects multiple short-comings, highlights the contempt with which this governments views anyone with an alternative position.

In addition, all the coalition senators were blinkered to evidence that did not support their ingrained opinion about “untangling the bottleneck” at Sydenham. It would appear that this blinkered approach is typical of a an ideologically-driven agenda.

I hope that the committee finds the courage to reject the metro’s progression past Sydenham. This would be the only honest outcome given the huge weight of evidence for this option and the community’s desire for this outcome. Billions of public money should not be wasted on an ideologically-based project that lacks vigorous evidence and benefit.