

**Submission
No 51**

**INQUIRY INTO CURRENT AND FUTURE PUBLIC
TRANSPORT NEEDS IN WESTERN SYDNEY**

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To the Upper House Transport and Arts Committee,

I am a concerned citizen of Sydney writing a submission to your Inquiry into the Current and Future Public Transport Needs in Western Sydney. My views on the public transport network have evolved over years of following the issue of expanding public transport out of a keen interest.

This Inquiry is welcome. I have long felt that western Sydney's transport needs have not been adequately met, because of both political cowardice and misguided political plans. As such, the Inquiry provides an opportunity to look at issues which have long been overlooked in public discussion and debate, and I hope that the Committee will act on these.

My submission is broken into three sections. These are for relatively simple improvements, for a challenge regarding light rail links, and for the future of Sydney's metro lines.

1) RELATIVELY SIMPLE IMPROVEMENTS

While governments frequently get paranoid over the cost of public transport projects, particularly on a large scale, I feel that there are smaller projects that should be pursued. These might not cost as much as others, but I feel that they could make an enormous difference.

a) A Y-link from Casula to Holsworthy

I feel that a simple Y-link from Casula to Holsworthy, thereby directly connecting the T8 Airport Line with the T5 Cumberland and T1 Western lines, would make a huge difference, especially for people needing to travel to Sydney Airport at Mascot. It would enable more trains to run directly to and from the airport, and remove the need for passengers to change trains during their journey.

Presently, only passengers from as far as the Campbelltown and Glenfield regions, as well as the CBD, can take direct trains to the airport. This is woefully inadequate.

A Y-link from Casula to Holsworthy, around where the T8 joins another line north of Glenfield, would directly connect the airport to countless stations in western Sydney. Such a link would enable passengers from places including Liverpool, Cabramatta, Fairfield, Merrylands, Parramatta, Westmead, Seven Hills, and Blacktown to travel straight to Mascot, without needing to change trains. I suspect that many passengers cite the need to switch trains as an inconvenience which makes them think twice about taking a train to the airport. If more of Sydney's railway network could be directly connected to the T8, it would therefore entice many passengers to leave their cars at home, and thereby reduce road traffic congestion around Mascot. For sure, lots of people simply

must drive to and from the airport, and demand for air travel might well reduce in years to come, but if we reduce the number of cars going to and from the airport, traffic congestion will be reduced more quickly than demand for air travel - and the environmental benefits of this cannot be overstated!

You might point to the construction of a new airport at Badgerys Creek - which I see as nothing more than a vanity project of the previous State Government and something that western Sydney does not need. But even with this monstrosity at Badgerys Creek, the existing airport at Mascot will still continue to serve Sydney for years to come, and it might remain beneficial to those who, at least in theory, might live closer to Badgerys Creek than to Mascot. And building a Y-link from Casula to Holsworthy will take less time than the Badgerys Creek airport, so it makes sense.

In summary, a Y-link from Casula to Holsworthy, thereby connecting the T8 to the T5 and T1 lines, would be immensely beneficial to passenger travel convenience - as well as to Sydney's environment. And it should cost very little. It is a no-brainer.

b) Removing the Fairfield level crossing

It is inexplicable that parts of Sydney's busy railway network still have archaic - and potentially lethal - level crossings. For sure, level crossings used to be everywhere, but governments over previous decades got rid of them. And where you see roads suddenly rising to go over railways or sinking to go under them, you can almost certainly tell that there were crossings in those spots in the past.

It only takes one accident at a level crossing to shut down an entire railway - thereby forcing passengers onto replacement buses. An accident at the Fairfield crossing might theoretically shut down the line between Cabramatta and Granville, but you can bet that this would impact on other sections of the network.

As such, removing the Fairfield level crossing should be prioritised.

c) Duplicating and upgrading the line from Schofields to Windsor

The T1 Richmond line is woefully inadequate, especially as it runs through a fast-growing area in terms of Sydney's sprawling suburbs. To my knowledge, it was duplicated from about Blacktown to Schofields not much more than a decade ago at most, with the Schofields railway station relocated in the process. Beyond Schofields, trains run largely along a single track, with second tracks only appearing at stations at Riverstone and Mulgrave, where trains must sit and wait, regardless of direction, until trains pull in from the opposite direction.

Although not a resident of this area, I have taken trains from Windsor to the CBD a few times over many years, and I know of the time lost while waiting at Riverstone and Mulgrave for trains to arrive from the opposite direction.

As well as being largely a single track, the Richmond Line also has many level crossings. These need to go.

While more expensive than a single Y-link or one level crossing removal, upgrading this line would enable faster and safer travel for passengers in this fast-growing area.

Therefore, I call for the upgrading of the Richmond Line from Schofields to Windsor, with duplication of the line between those stations and the removal of all level crossings along the way. This fast-growing area needs, and deserves, a better railway line than what exists there now.

In summary, when it comes to simple improvements, I call for the construction of a Casula-Holsworthy Y-link and the removal of the Fairfield level crossing and the upgrade of the Richmond line from Schofields to Windsor.

2) LIGHT RAIL

When it comes to Sydney's light rail network, I have mixed feelings about the separate light rail network being built in the Parramatta region. I feel that it should be linked to the inner Sydney network.

This is where a challenge comes in - can we link inner Sydney and Parramatta with a connection running through suburbs between them in the inner west?

I actually believe that such a link was previously proposed, and it was the reason why a bridge was built across Homebush Bay, between Rhodes and Wentworth Point, some years ago. This bridge is currently only for buses.

To my knowledge, the Parramatta light rail network has been proposed to run to Wentworth Point. But I firmly believe that we must examine a way to run it right through to Sydney's inner west.

Beyond the question of cost, however, is the vexed issue of running such a link through suburbia, potentially taking away street parking and parts of people's yards - or even people's homes. This is a challenge for any politician!

Can we somehow extend the light rail link to run from Parramatta to the inner west via Wentworth Point and Rhodes and other places? Can we persuade people in Concord, Canada Bay, Five Dock, and Haberfield to give up some land to allow for the construction of a useful public transport link which would also reduce pollution?

For sure, even if people in the inner west could be persuaded to have a light rail link through their suburbs, you might not get passengers actually using the light rail to go right through from Parramatta to inner Sydney. But every passenger using such a light rail link, even for a trip from Canada Bay to Rhodes as an example, means potentially one less car on a congested road - and thereby less traffic and less pollution.

After all, not everybody taking a Parramatta River ferry, especially during peak hours, needs to travel right through from Parramatta to Circular Quay. And having taken such a ferry myself, I know how slow it is! But despite its slowness, it still offers convenient travel for many people, and no sensible person would propose getting rid of it.

Moreover, I even see the potential to transform the North West Transitway, currently used by buses, into a light rail link. This might be an option for the longer term, but it should be considered.

In summary, I call upon the Committee to investigate the possibility of building a light rail link through suburbs from Haberfield to Wentworth Point, in order to enable the light rail networks in Parramatta and inner Sydney to join up.

3) METRO LINES

We need a serious discussion about whether Sydney really needs so-called "metro lines". Like the airport under construction at Badgerys Creek, I feel that this metro stuff is nothing more than a vanity project of the previous State Government, and totally at odds with what Sydney needs.

Nobody has ever explained how these single-deck metros succeed where Sydney's long-serving twin-trains fail.

As such, I feel that it was inexplicable for the previous State Government to build a railway to Sydney's north-west as a single-deck metro line, and to then have to shut down the Epping-

Chatswood line to do a metro retrofit. It also made no sense to commit to completely shutting down the T3 Line from Sydenham to Bankstown for a metro retrofit - an idea which seemed like nothing more than an excuse to justify the questionable commitment to metros. Sadly, unless really firm recommendations are otherwise made, the present Government looks committed to this metro folly.

The T3 Line should be completely left alone, and any discontinued railway services in the greater Bankstown area should be fully restored to what they were before. There is simply no need, and no justification, for a metro retrofit in the Bankstown area.

Moreover, if we abandon the planned Sydenham-Bankstown metro retrofit, we can enable trains to run from Parramatta to Bankstown via an existing Y-link around Lidcombe. Peak hours might be the only times when passenger demand really exists for services to Parramatta from Berala, Regents Park, Birrong, Yagoona, and every other station east of Bankstown. But they would be really beneficial. They might also free up seats on express bus services running between Parramatta and Bankstown.

Naturally, abandoning the planned Sydenham-Bankstown metro retrofit leads to the question of what to do with the metro beyond its current finishing point at Sydenham.

Years ago, amid a public rally against a planned motorway around the Rockdale-Sans Souci stretch, which I attended, a proposal was put up to use the planned motorway route for a metro. I feel that this makes sense.

Sending the metro from Sydenham to Sutherland Shire via Sans Souci and the Captain Cook Bridge, instead of sending the metro to Bankstown, would lead to two benefits. Firstly, it would link a part of Sydney where trains currently do not run, and would thereby attract lots of passengers normally stuck in traffic on Rocky Point Road and The Grand Parade and other major roads in that area. Secondly, it would take away the misconceived need to shut down the T3 Line for a metro retrofit. You would therefore be linking one area currently without any trains and avoiding the shutting down of area that already has decent trains.

Sydney desperately needs to expand its railway network to large areas where trains currently do not run. Suburbs east of Rockdale and Kogarah, including Sans Souci and Ramsgate, are in one such area cut off from the railway network. Redirecting the metro to that area, instead of running it to Bankstown, would resolve this issue.

Moreover, running the metro along the route of a long-mooted motorway through the southern suburbs would provide some other benefits. Preventing the construction of a motorway, which

would otherwise attract more cars like bees to a honeypot and shift traffic congestion to more places, makes environmental sense.

I note that some tunnel construction has taken place around the Arncliffe area, as part of a proposed motorway through the southern suburbs - yet another vanity project of the previous State Government. This whole motorway project must be stopped. But if some of it has already been built, in the form of part of a road tunnel, I feel that serious examination should be made as to whether that tunnel can form part of a metro link, so that any construction already complete does not turn out to be wasteful. This could be an example of a bad project being turned into something good. Better still, the best thing would be to alter the tunnels to make them large enough of Sydney's existing twin-deck trains to use.

Meanwhile, I have also heard talk about other metro lines being under construction elsewhere, including in western Sydney, and with tunnels already being drilled for them. Like the existing metro line from Sydney's north-west, these metro lines are just vanity projects, and they should be stopped. However, if tunnel drilling has commenced, the drilling machinery should be taken out at the nearest possible spots, such as any holes dug for future metro stations. They should never have been started in the first place.

Again, I see these metros as questionable in terms of their benefits, because nobody has ever explained how these single-deck metros succeed where Sydney's long-serving twin-deck trains fail.

But if we have tunnels already dug for metro lines which should never have been started, we should look at the possibility of extra drilling to make any such tunnels larger, in order for them to accommodate Sydney's existing twin-deck trains.

As I noted before, we need to expand the railway network to reach places where trains currently do not go - and I refer to Sydney's existing twin-deck trains. I feel that it would make sense to enable twin-deck trains to run in any metro tunnels under construction, and if it means stopping current construction of smaller tunnels and somehow making them larger, then so be it.

We need to completely derail this obsession with metros, and expand our railway network properly, so that Sydney's long-serving twin-deck trains can service more areas of Sydney where they currently do not run.

TOTAL SUMMARY

I offer a total summary of my points in my submission to this Inquiry ...

1) Build a Y-link from Casula to Holsworthy, in order to directly connect the Airport Line to the Cumberland and Western lines

2) Remove the Fairfield level crossing

3) Upgrade the Richmond Line from Schofields to Windsor, by duplicating its single track and removing its level crossings

4) Investigate building a light rail link to connect the light rail networks in Parramatta and inner Sydney, running via suburbs including Rhodes and Concord and Haberfield

5) Abandon the Sydenham-Bankstown metro retrofit, and restore any discontinued railway services in the greater Bankstown area to what they were before

6) Redirect the metro from Sydenham to the southern suburbs via the Rockdale-Sans Souci area, and run it through any completed section of road tunnel made for a mooted motorway project which should be abandoned

7) Stop any new metro tunnel construction in western Sydney, and examine whether any partly-built tunnels can be made larger, so that Sydney's long-serving twin-deck trains can use them and serve areas currently not linked to Sydney's railway network

In writing this submission, I write not as an engineer or a member of any lobby group, but as a citizen who has long been interested in expanding Sydney's public transport network properly, and who has read all sorts of ideas from experts and taken trips on various parts of the transport network in order to understand how services run. I have also been a blogger on transport issues for nearly a decade.

I sincerely hope that this Inquiry will thoroughly examine the points that I have made in my submission. For the sake of Sydney's natural environment and its future, we need to get our public transport system right - and right now we are not on track, if you will pardon the pun, to get it right.

Regards

WARREN GRZIC