

THE CBD AND SOUTH EAST LIGHT RAIL PROJECT – EIS

RESPONSE FROM THE ROBERTSON RD RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION TO THE DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Introduction

The Robertson Road Residents' Association recognises the CBD and South East Light Rail project's worthy objectives of attracting more people to public transport and reducing traffic congestion along its route.

However, the association has serious concerns about the project as it stands. It wants a much greater effort to remove those aspects of the project which will adversely affect precincts served by the light rail.

The present plans will degrade both the appearance and physical amenity of the areas through which the light rail passes, particularly the Moore Park Precinct.

There needs to be a much greater effort to identify areas at risk and to plan to protect and enhance both the natural environment and the streetscape. The Robertson Rd Residents' Association is disappointed that the EIS pays too little attention to this important issue.

This submission principally addresses Chapter 14 of the EIS, which covers the section of the proposed route closest to Robertson Rd.

The submission is concerned mainly with the *permanent* impact of the proposed light rail, rather than the loss of amenity during the construction phase, though the latter will be considerable. (The EIS gives too little attention to noise, dust and other forms of pollution while the light rail is being built.)

Loss of Parkland

The association's chief concern is the loss of parkland and other problems created by locating the light rail tracks east of the existing bus roadway from Moore Park Rd to Alison Rd.

It believes the light rail should run on the bus roadway, while the remaining bus services move to Anzac Parade.

(The association notes, as an aside, that traffic flow on Anzac Parade could be substantially improved by putting bays for bus stops into the wide footpaths on either side of Anzac Parade so that traffic is not reduced from three lanes to two every time a bus stops.)

There are major advantages to locating the light rail tracks on the bus roadway:

- minimal loss of much-needed parkland and trees
- no further encroachment on the sports fields and training areas used by hundreds of thousands of sports people annually
- no reduction of the Swans' training field
- increased space for light rail stops

An RRRA committee member attending one of Transport for NSW's community information sessions on the EIS was told that the light rail project would require a strip 10 metres wide along the eastern edge of the bus roadway from Moore Park Rd to Alison Rd to accommodate:

- the light rail tracks
- a buffer between the bus roadway and the light rail tracks
- a buffer zone/landscaping on the eastern side of the tracks.

That is in addition to the full width of the existing bus roadway.

That is a very substantial alienation of parkland. Combined with the loss of trees (see below), it makes a powerful argument for confining the light rail to the existing bus roadway from Moore Park Rd to the Alison Rd intersection.

The association rejects claims that tree roots would be damaged by putting the light rail on the existing bus roadway, given the large numbers of buses that currently use the roadway without any adverse effect on the trees.

It is significant to note that the existing bus roadway was originally a dedicated tramline used since the early 1900s. The bus roadway was in fact located on those original tram tracks.

Loss of Trees

The current plan involves the loss of at least 70 established trees from parkland between Moore Park Rd and Alison Rd. This means removing virtually the whole inner corridor along that section. Extraordinarily, the EIS lists the removal of trees as no more than "a moderate adverse landscape impact". The EIS seems to assume trees should be removed if there is even a relatively minor disruption to their roots or canopy. We believe the light rail project

should seek a second opinion on the viability of trees affected to such a small extent.

Where trees must be removed, they should be transplanted or replaced with mature trees. Further, where it is certain trees will be lost, the committee believes that replanting should begin now.

The association would like much more detail about the proposed landscaping along the eastern side of the rail line. For example, we believe it should include acoustic mounding on the eastern side of the light rail tracks along the whole of its length between Lang Rd and Alison Rd. Residents of Robertson Rd would like to be closely consulted about the landscaping *before* it proceeds.

Overhead cabling

One reason given for not putting the light rail on the bus roadway is that falling tree branches would be hazardous to the overhead power lines for the light rail.

This is not credible given that buses have made heavy use of the roadway for many years without any reports of vehicles being struck by falling branches.

If falling branches are truly a hazard, then put the power cables in the ground between the tracks.

If the power cables must be suspended, then it should be from a central T-Bar rather than from poles on each side of the tracks. (The central T-Bar is being used on the light rail currently under construction on the Gold Coast, Queensland.) Central T-Bars will be less intrusive visually.

The EIS acknowledges the adverse visual impact caused by tree removal, wires and poles, fencing, substations and other developments yet it fails to say how such aesthetic problems will be addressed, particularly as they affect the Robertson Rd-Martin Rd precinct.

The EIS largely underplays the adverse negative visual impact as the overhead wires cross the western end of Lang Rd (at Anzac Parade) and pass in front of the formal western entrance to Centennial Park's Grand Drive.

The association believes trees could be saved and the negative visual impact of overhead wires eliminated by having the light rail carriages switch to battery power as they travel through parkland from the SCG/SFS stop to Alison Rd. This would be particularly valuable in eliminating visual pollution as the carriages

cross Lang Rd and in front of the formal western entrance to Centennial Park's Grand Drive.

The association understands that existing technology exists which would allow the light rail to carry rechargeable batteries as a secondary power source.

Light Rail Stops

The stop planned to serve the Sydney Football Stadium (SFS) and Sydney Cricket Ground (SCG) is too far from the Entertainment Quarter (EQ) and its well-used concert and exhibition venues, the Hordern Pavilion and the Hall of Industries.

The committee strongly believes the light rail service should include a stop at the intersection of Lang Rd and Anzac Parade to service the Entertainment Quarter and Centennial Park. This stop should be on the large plaza outside the formal entrance to Centennial Park, at the Lang Rd/Anzac Parade Intersection.

The convenience of the light rail service will be more important than journey times in attracting passengers. Accordingly, the project should be ready to include more stops even if it extends travel times

Moving further south towards Kingsford, the stop at Carlton St does not serve the ES Marks field and would be better further north.

Impact on local amenities

The section of the EIS on key characteristics of the precinct makes only a passing reference to the Moore Park playing fields which are heavily used seven days a week by many schools and sporting associations for netball, tennis, basketball, softball, grade cricket and school childrens' exercise and recreation. It totally fails to mention the equestrian facility.

It is not clear to what extent the play areas on the so-called "sporting triangle" of Moore Park – bounded by Lang Rd, Robertson Rd, and Anzac Parade – will be compromised by loss of land to the light rail.

If the tennis court loses parking to the light rail, it should be replaced at another site.

Will the two existing facilities blocks servicing the netball and tennis courts be affected?

Impact on homes

The EIS also understates the likely adverse effect of the light rail on the amenity of homes at the Anzac Parade end of Robertson Rd and Martin Rd, dismissing it as merely “minor”.

Yet the amenity of residents will be affected not only by the removal of trees and other greenery but, on a continuing basis, by the operation of the light rail so close to their homes.

It is essential the tram runs at the bus road level and that the noise abatement mounds at the Anzac Parade end of Martin and Robertson Roads are at least retained if not increased.

The Route

Once the light rail tracks pass the Robertson Rd-Anzac Parade intersection, *both* the Randwick line as well as the Kingsford line should enter Anzac Parade, instead of having the Randwick line turn immediately into Alison Rd.

The Randwick line should then turn left from Anzac Parade into Abbotford St towards the racecourse. Abbotford St offers direct entry to the racecourse and still has a very wide grassed central section running its full length which once carried trams to the racecourse.

Then the light rail can run along the Alison Rd boundary of the racecourse to Wansey Rd.

More generally, the success of the light rail will depend significantly on how well it connects with bus services at the end of the lines in Randwick and Kingsford. On what has been published so far, it is impossible to judge just how successful such interfaces will be.

Conclusion

The Robertson Rd Residents Association wants the Light Rail project to be a resounding success. This means it must become the preferred mode of transport for those living along its route. It must be reliable, frequent, punctual clean, reasonably priced and convenient – and it must stop where people need it to stop

If the light rail is successful in attracting passengers, it will markedly reduce traffic congestion and pollution. If increasing the number of stops means a slightly longer travel time then it is worth it because people will use it.