

Executive Summary

Opportunity

A minor variation to the SELR appears to offer greatly improved performance, lower cost, shorter project time and higher patronage.

Background

We are strongly in favour of light rail and wish to see it succeed. The Government's willingness to engage with the community has led to an opportunity to brief the Minister who in turn has referred us to the Project Team who are now considering it.

We understand the objectives of the CSELR project include:

- Provide a fast direct route from Central to Moore Park and beyond.
- Maximise patronage to minimise risk to the taxpayer.
- Minimise project and operational costs.
- Allow for future growth: provide a spine for the SELR Network.

Proposal

We are asking that the project team consider a variation to the Surry Hills portion of the route and if it passes a feasibility review then have it included as part of the EIS process.

The variation offers:

- Improved capacity, speed and safety.
- Less costly to build.
- More attractive as a PPP model: higher patronage, fewer project risks.

Solution Highlights

The variant uses a sub-surface path with three tracks to provide passing loops. It is based on “cut and cover” technology- we are not advocating a tunnel.

The major elements of the proposal are:

- By adopting a subsurface route issues with the gradient can be overcome and Foveaux Street becomes the logical route.
- A third rail adds little to project cost but adds great flexibility to the route and allows express journeys at peak periods including during major events.
- Given that the road surface of any route will need to be dug up to move utility services, the additional digging adds surprisingly little to the overall cost.
- These increases are more than offset by not having to acquire and knock down property and that it solves the challenge of traversing South Dowling-ED-Moore Park West without an expensive bridge; overall it is cheaper to build.
- Provides a self-funding covered station in Surry Hills which we presume building owners will be very happy to accommodate, as it will increase the value of these commercial properties.

Sub-surface v above ground

- Whilst there may be arguments in favour of a light rail system being above ground we believe that the benefits of cut and cover far outweigh them.
- Even if the light rail system is given favourable treatment in the traffic light system the higher exposure to traffic will reduce reliability towards that of a bus route. Favouring one mode of transport in SCATS/PTIPS is likely to have a detrimental effect on other modes of transport, including public buses.
- The creation of 2 or 3 extra subsurface corridors gives rise to many possibilities to improve traffic flow, pedestrian access and even cycleways.
- Subsurface will always be safer.
- We believe that residents, motorists and bus users would prefer underground LR and that LR passengers themselves will prefer the resulting superior service.

Operation

- Ongoing Operation costs are much more economic.
- Increased capacity means lower per passenger cost.
- Faster service will drive higher patronage

Other important considerations include:

- We understand this same technology is already part of the “base case” to avoid disfiguring Moore Park.
- Will reduce road congestion at critical places such as driver's Triangle, Eddy Avenue and Foveaux/Elizabeth
- Provides an integrated solution for pedestrian access to the Sporting venues from Central
- Simplifies the issues of bus/rail/tram interchange at Central
- Improves benefits for key stakeholders such as UNSW, EQ and Randwick Racecourse
- Stronger support from the Communities in Randwick, Kensington and Surry Hills

Future

Several possible future benefits which will be enabled by this variant include;

- Provision for “park and ride” and networked venue parking to increase patronage
- An opportunity to increase capacity of the George St section
- Provides for future growth including the capacity to feed an expansion line down Elizabeth Street or Hyde Park.

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