

**NOTE: Please keep my contact details confidential**

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## Submission

### **Sydenham to Bankstown Preferred Infrastructure Report (Application No SSI 17\_8256)**

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this project.

#### Statement:

I am **ABSOLUTELY OPPOSED** to the planned replacement of the Sydenham-Bankstown heavy rail line with the proposed Metro. It's insane!

I have many concerns about this project, which in my opinion should **NEVER** go ahead. To begin with, *it is totally unnecessary*. There is a perfectly good railway line built many years ago at public expense which has a good many stops and can carry a large amount of passengers in seated comfort on double decker trains, already paid for and in very successful use for many years. How on earth can a Metro rail line with smaller carriages and less stops be a better solution to public transport in this area, given that there are plans to massively densify this corridor with a great many residential high-rise buildings? **It makes no sense whatsoever**. Therefore the driver of the project must be other than real need, efficiency or cost: I suspect Union-busting ideology and using public money to build private infrastructure, which is another bankrupt ideology of the right-wing economic rationalists in the NSW Government at present.

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#### Discussion:

##### No-one wants a Metro here:

The community do not want this project to go ahead, as witnesses by their submissions in the Report (Part B, pages 14-15). There has been no transparency with regard to the decision-making process or the business case. Indeed, independent rail experts have stated that a Metro System will NOT deliver benefits of better service, more capacity or better efficiency than the perfectly good system we have now.<sup>1</sup> A simple upgrade of the signalling and timetabling would suffice to iron out any difficulties in the current rail service. As I understand it, the proposed Metro is similar to other Metros around the world, which are systems designed for short distance journeys with

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<sup>1</sup> Sydney's Rail Future, 2012, page 24.

many stops, with most passengers standing. The proposed system will cut out a great many of the existing stops, and cut the capacity of each train, *even though* most people will be required to stand, because the carriages have a smaller capacity than the current double-deckers. How on earth is that an improvement? It makes no sense whatsoever, and is a retrograde step.

### **A Metro will make the transport system worse!**

The stops of St Peters, Erskineville, Redfern and City Circle will be lost! How is that a “better service” for people who live or work along this corridor? So much for the much-vaunted aim of the “30-minute city” for everyone, a key concept in the vision of the Greater Sydney Commission. Those who commute from west of Bankstown to the city will be facing a much longer commute than they do now, having to change trains. They will incidentally have to pay more too, because the Metro operator will be wanting profit. And the Metro carriages will be extremely crowded, especially as developers are getting their way (yet again) by using the building of a Metro train as an excuse to lobby for rezoning along its corridor so that high-rise apartments will be constructed, and mega-profits reaped. All this at the expense of many heritage and characterful suburbs and housing; all this destruction and construction will mean that the Metro trains will be totally unable to service the population from Day One of its operation. This is lunacy.

The claim that Hurlstone Park will be better serviced by a Metro must be viewed in light of the fact that over the last 5 years, many of the train services to Hurlstone Park have been cut out. It is a well-known trick of right-wing ideologues to starve public services of funds, personnel and resources so that they become or look inefficient and ineffective, users become disgruntled, and then the Government uses these reasons as an excuse to privatise, declaring that the private sector will provide better and more efficient service. It is in fact a cover so that public money can be transferred to private hands, who then extract profit from a service for the next few decades. It is also a good way to bust unions, and replace unionised workers with cheaper non-unionised casual workers with no benefits or work security, possibly overseas workers, who are keen for work of any sort and won’t organise or make demands. From this warped perspective, the proposed Metro rail makes perfect sense. From any other perspective, eg, that of the residents, the workers, the financial cost to the public purse, *it is an insane proposal*.

### **Accessibility:**

Many heavy rail stations have had accessibility upgrades over the years, and this can and should be done at all other stations. Lack of accessible stations should not be a part of any justification to trash one perfectly good publicly-built railway line and build another at public expense to be run by a private company for profit.

### **Over-development:**

There is no doubt whatsoever that the construction of a Metro rail along this corridor will be used as a green light to massive over-development. This phenomenon can be witnessed in Kingsford and Kensington (Sydney’s Eastern Suburbs) with the construction of the unwanted Light Rail along Anzac Parade: Developers have rushed to the area, and ceaselessly lobbied State Government to have the maximum height restrictions doubled, so that they can make squillions of dollars in profit. This is despite the projections of carrying capacity of the Light Rail being based on the needs of the population when the project was first thought of many years ago. The result will be that *on Day One of operation, the Light Rail will be at capacity*. This will happen on the proposed Metro too, if it goes ahead.

Sydney will end up with multiple examples of really bad planning – transport and development – so that academics around the world will come here to study for decades to come what went wrong and why. I contend that the basis of the “need” for both the Light Rail and the Metro is pure and simple greed, and the ideology of the market disguised as “private sector efficiency” of those in power and those who would make money from associated over-development, and has absolutely nothing to do with how the public want to live and travel, what their opinions are or what the outcomes will likely be, which of course are obvious: increased overcrowding, transport chaos, long waiting times, long and uncomfortable commutes, and the inevitable creation of future slum areas. This government could not have proposed a worse set of projects for the future of Sydney if it tried.

### **The total loss of public trust in government:**

It seems that the State Government has learned *nothing* from the debacle that is the Light Rail in the Eastern Suburbs!

- There has been and still is much public opposition;
- The EIS which stated there was little to be gained and much to be lost from the project was ignored;
- We have suffered the loss of *hundreds* of much-loved mature and large Heritage trees, including those along Anzac Parade's Avenue of Remembrance, under the branches of which the soldiers marched from Randwick barracks to the ships at Woolloomooloo, never to return from Gallipoli;
- We are suffering the unwarranted justification for densifying development along the route;
- The totally unnecessary loss of public park due to a change of route for the Light Rail along Alison Rd, at the behest of the Australian Jockey Club;
- The immense uglification of the route, so that Anzac Parade now resembles Parramatta Road with its empty shops, filth and unbreathable air;
- The loss of character and aesthetics; t
- Businesses have suffered catastrophic loss of customers due to the loss of parking and construction barriers being in place for so very long – this has led to bankruptcies;
- The inconvenience to everyone of 3 years (so far, with another 2 years predicted) of traffic congestion during construction;
- The loss of trust in government processes and fairness;
- The loss of democracy;
- The total waste of public money;
- The cost blow-outs and the expensive lengthy legal proceedings, which no doubt the public will pay for.

In addition to these Light Rail problems, the Metro lines in Melbourne and Newcastle have not been good for anyone. All these things are set to be repeated in the proposed Sydenham-Bankstown Metro line: how can anyone think that this project is a good idea?

### **Other unacceptable aspects of the proposal:**

In addition to the potential or real faults listed above, I have read about the following specific items:

- The Hurlstone Park Association was not consulted, yet as a residents group, they are a major stakeholder;
- Conversely, the Australian Turf Club and the NSW property Council were considered to be stakeholders – why have such organisations got more clout than the people who live in the affected areas?
- There will be greatly increased noise from the increase in train speeds if the Metro is built, and locals have called for dense vegetation plantings, without realising that vegetation does **NOTHING** to attenuate noise; the only thing that stops noise is a solid barrier along the length of the track, but this would add considerable cost to the project, and could be very ugly to look at;
- There was initially an “active green strip” included in the project, now gone. Why?
- Most of the communities along the length of the proposed line and beyond Bankstown are extremely opposed to the project, so why go ahead?
- Many of the suburbs affected by the proposed Metro line have great character – suburbs of characterful old houses with lovely established trees and gardens, and these suburbs are heritage-rich – yet this will all disappear when the Metro line is used as a justification for “up-zoning” and high-rise apartments take the place of these historic and pleasant suburbs.
- “Up-zoning” is tantamount to a free gift from the government, worth millions of dollars to those who are “lucky” enough to own target properties, while those adjacent to this zone cop nothing but aggravation and powerlessness, not to mention a considerable diminution in their property values due to loss of amenity, views, and consequent overshadowing; I predict an area of future slums as the formerly pleasant suburbs become unliveable and ugly.
- As far as I know, there is to be no commensurate increase of green space as high-rise apartments spring up along the Metro rail line, although it has been proven time and again that humans need green space. Yet another factor that will cause the area to slide into slum accommodation in the near future.

- Affordable housing: Sydney is crying out for this, but I am sure that there will be no mandatory provision for affordable housing, or if there is, it will be absolutely minimal, as the Property Council does not like it since it cuts into developers' profits. (But on the up side, maybe when the area becomes a slum, this problem will be fixed?)
- The whole "community consultation" process has been minimal and almost a sham, with the Government response to the very real and valid concerns of residents being inadequate and inappropriate.
- The output of glossy brochures by the government is nothing more or less than propaganda, designed to convince people that something they do not want is going to be good for them, when it certainly is not.
- Meaningful consultation has been absent from this proposal, which does not inspire confidence in Government, processes, procedural fairness, or the state of dwindling democracy in NSW.
- There will be a considerable loss of mature trees along the route, but in particular, around Lakemba, Wiley Park and Punchbowl Stations. This would not happen if this project does not go ahead, and in this day and age of Climate Change, it is madness to contemplate the loss of carbon-sequestering trees, oxygen-making trees, pollution-cleaning trees, canopy shade trees, urban-heat-island-mitigating trees. Mature trees are SO precious, that no project should go ahead if we are going to lose any of them, in my opinion. It takes 50-100 years to replace them, and should be considered to be a very important part of our natural heritage and given priority in any planning. It's time we regarded mature city trees as priceless assets.

### **Conclusion:**

The Sydenham-Bankstown Metro rail project should be dropped, ***immediately!***

The perfectly good railway already in place which consists of large capacity double-decker carriages in which most passengers are able to sit comfortably should be continued. We don't want to travel standing up squished in like sardines, thank you. Neither do we want a railway that is run by a private operator for private profit – public transport should be and remain PUBLIC. If there are problems with timetabling and signalling, these could be fixed, at a fraction of the cost of demolishing a functioning railway and replacing it with a new one. Any stations which are currently not "accessible" should be upgraded. Any station which does not have toilets should have them installed. **The money should be used instead on NEW RAILWAYS where there are currently none.** This is such a no-brainer I am flabbergasted that this proposal ever saw the light of day. It's insane from all angles unless the real reason is to bust the rail unions and to privatise the railways. Then it makes perfect sense from a right-wing ideological viewpoint, but if the people had a real say in this process and were aware of the real reasons behind it, they would reject it outright from the beginning.

**I insist and demand that the whole Sydenham to Bankstown Metro rail project be dropped. *It's insane.***

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Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Yours sincerely,

C Bettington