



Sydenham to Bankstown Alliance

Submission to Preferred Infrastructure Report

17/07/2018

The Sydenham to Bankstown Metro Preferred Infrastructure Report (PIR) represents a pared back version of the original Exhibited Project. The Preferred Infrastructure Report underscores the excesses of the Exhibited Project but fails to address one of the community's strongest complaints regarding the Metro: that by converting an existing rail line, rather than building a line to suburbs that don't currently have rail, the government is wasting the opportunity to extend Sydney's rail network.

It is clear from the changes outlined in the Preferred Infrastructure Report that the Exhibited Project was bloated, included options that were wasteful of resources, minimised adaptive re-use and was laden with ancillary works. A key example of this was the Exhibited Project's requirement for work, including demolition, on 23 bridges and underpasses. It is baffling how the Preferred Infrastructure Project has moved from major bridge replacement to no replacement. It is a tribute to the community who raised serious questions regarding the benefits to Sydney of the Metro conversion that the Exhibited Project has been so significantly pared back.

Despite the reduced scale of the Exhibited Project problems remain, both during construction and operation of the Metro.

Rail line closures will still be significant. Analysis of the Preferred Infrastructure Project shows that total line closures have dropped from 71 weeks over the 5 year construction period to 53 weeks in the Preferred Infrastructure Project. However, a new category of Individual Station Closure has been added to the PIR and all stations will now be individually closed for an extra 2 months each. This re-categorisation makes it difficult to make a straight comparison between rail line closures in the EP and PIR. Nonetheless, with the Bankstown line experiencing aggregate closures of over one year out the proposed 5 year construction period, it is clear that disruption to the community will be significant. Given the blowout in construction times for other major transport projects in Sydney the community can have no confidence that rail closures will be limited to the forecast. This was acknowledged in the EP, which said, "The timescales of many of these (cumulative construction impacts) are unknown at this time". This uncertainty remains.

West of Bankstown the following nine stations of Berala, Regents Park, Sefton, Chester Hill, Leightonfield, Villawood, Carramar, Birrong and Yagoona will no longer have any direct train services to the City. Conversion of the Sydenham to Bankstown section of the T3 Line significantly breaks apart a cohesive rail network for the first time since the network was constructed, the number of interchanges and travel times from the nine stations west of Bankstown will increase. Approximately 19,000 commuters will be forced to change trains because of the conversion of the rail line. This will

add additional pressure on Lidcombe and Birrong station, which are already under pressure due to the removal of the Liverpool via Regents Park train service in 2013.

Transport to Sydney University - The PIR Executive Summary says the Metro will deliver “better access to education, with fast, more frequent and direct connections.” The Government’s decision to take the Metro to Waterloo rather than Sydney University belies this claim. Further, students commuting from beyond Bankstown to Sydney University will need to change modes at Bankstown and then change again at Sydenham as the Metro will not stop at Sydney University’s nearest station, Redfern. Similarly, students from Sydenham to Bankstown will have to change modes to access Redfern.

Rail Bottleneck - The Executive Summary claims the Metro project would address one of Sydney’s biggest rail bottlenecks, delivering benefits across Sydney’s rail network. However, former Rail Corp and State Rail executives Ron Christie, Dick Day, Bob O’Loughlin and John Brew wrote to the government in 2015 saying conversion of the Bankstown line to the Metro would remove “the relief valve for the network and will result in the network having no escape route.” They concluded that “Merely replacing one rail system with another when there is so much to be done is wasteful of limited resources””Metro expansion should supplement heavy rail, not replace it.”

Seating - The Preferred Infrastructure Project does nothing to address community concerns regarding reduced seating. The unassailable fact is that seating on the Metro trains will be reduced. Currently each 8 carriage double-decker Waratah train has 896 seats. Each Metro will have 378 per eight carriage train. That is less than half the available seats.

Trees - While there is a proposed reduction in tree loss, about 500 mature trees will be removed along the line as well as at stations (original 900 removals). The proposed removal of mature trees will occur during the construction phase. A large number are on Council owned land and are not within the rail corridor itself. This is an issue right along the rail corridor, not just at the Stations.

Support the productivity of the Global Economic Corridor is given as an objective of the PIR. Yet the need and justification of the Metro was questioned by greater than 34% of respondents to the Exhibited Project. The Greater Sydney Commission lists a “30 minute city” as one of its key visions. Yet the Global Economic Corridor represents a consolidation of Sydney’s “hub and spoke” rail network and, paradoxically, prevents Sydney from becoming “a 30 minute City”.

The Metro construction footprint remains unchanged as the Metro still requires extensive cabling and fencing. Further, there is no change regarding the introduction of Rail System Facilities, Substations, Security Fencing, Intruder Detection Systems, Noise Barriers and the like. These will all contribute to the noise and disturbance that will still keep residents awake at night.

Traffic - The report’s traffic assessment is based on locations outside the project area (Wolli Creek; Clempton Park; Roselands; Lakemba; Narwee; Bankstown.). This area triangulated but is removed from four Bankstown line stations, Sydenham, Marrickville, Dulwich Hill, Hurlstone Park. How can these be used to measure traffic impacts in the project area? At best they are just a guess by the report writer. Traffic impacts are, therefore, unknown and are likely to be significant, especially during rail possession periods.

Heritage - The destruction and diminution of railway heritage items, all locally and some state listed, was a significant concern in the submissions to the Exhibited Project. It is remarkable that the Exhibited Project addressed heritage but provided no new heritage assessments, and the Preferred Infrastructure Report has again fallen short in this regard. The PIR also fails to acknowledge non-statutory heritage listings such as those by the National Trust and former register for the national estate. The PIR contains little detail about station design apart from the intention to follow alternative guidelines and demonstrate there has been community consultation.

Community Consultation - The lack of meaningful community consultation was a recurring theme in the Exhibited Project submissions, and the response has failed to address concerns about the quality and transparency of information available to the public. That only 3% of submissions were supportive of the project reveals a startling lack of engagement. Further, the community consultation period for the PIR is risibly short. The Inner west Council request that the submissions period be extended from four to eight weeks but this was refused. Four weeks to assess and respond to a six hundred page document is not enough.

Conclusion

The Sydenham to Bankstown corridor community is supportive of the positive provision of infrastructure, even when it comes at a significant cost. However, the proposed Metro is wasteful conversion of an existing rail service that misses the opportunity to extend Sydney's rail network. This conversion will include disruption, chaos and heritage loss due the nature and impact of the works. Coupled with the massive proposed overdevelopment promoted by the Sydenham to Bankstown Urban Renewal Corridor Strategy many residents do not think that the pain of this project is worth the gain to the community. There are many areas of Sydney that do not have rail lines. If Sydney is to become a "30 minute city" then our state governments will have to do better than converting existing rail lines.