

Diane Sarkies - North West Rail Link Residents' Submission - Att: Director-Infrastructure Projects

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Subject: North West Rail Link Residents' Submission - Att: Director-Infrastructure Projects
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Attachments: CHAG_2nd_EIS2_draft.pdf

Attention Director-Infrastructure Projects

Dear Sir/Madam,

On behalf of residents in Castle Hill, I wish to submit the attached document for your consideration. After studying the EIS 2 carefully, several serious issues emerged that are of significant concern to me and no doubt to fellow residents in the Hill area, particularly residents of Ashford Avenue and its precinct.

The most obvious issues that are of extreme importance to residents are:

- Parking arrangements
- Traffic flow
- Pollution
- Security and Safety

In the attached draft submission, we express our concerns and reservations about the project; however, we do that in the spirit of good will and constructive contribution, encouraged by the willingness of planners to communicate with us. I trust you will agree that, when genuine goodwill exists and fostered among all concerned parties, and views of residents are genuinely considered and accommodated, the final outcome will be so much better and far more enduring.

Let me state from the outset that neither I nor the majority of residents in Castle Hill oppose the construction of the Norwest Rail Link. In fact, we were the most ardent proponents and tireless supporters of the Railway Link. It is however, imperative that the Rail Link does not end up being a massive structure that while providing efficient public transport to public outside the Hills Shire, it destroys our fragile eco system, unique environment and one of the last remaining close to nature lifestyles within developed metropolitan precincts. No effort must be spared to preserve this unique environment of cohabitation of people with nature.

With that in mind, and after consulting with residents of Ashford Avenue and with their approval, I have prepared a draft submission that not only details our concerns, but equally as importantly offers a viable solution to the concerns raised. Please find attached document addressing our concerns and a proposal to remedy those concerns.

Warm regards

Igor Palmer
Director



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North West Rail Link Submission



2012

Igor Palmer

Castle Hill Action Group

11/30/2012

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Preamble:

This document is in response to the Environment Impact Statement 2, concerning the proposed North West Rail Link in general, and specifically the Showground Railway Station.

This is a preliminary paper addressing some of the concerns regarding the environmental impact of the proposed railway link in and around Showground station. This paper was written as a result of preliminary discussions held among the concerned residents of Ashford Avenue. Due to limited time afforded to the residents to consider the EIS2, this paper is only the first draft.

The residents of Castle Hill plan to organize several meetings to discuss the EIS and the NWRL proposal. It is our intention to consult and engage Castle Hill residents as widely as possible to ensure that the construction and the delivery of the NWRL is not detrimental to local residents of Castle Hill.

We will continue to support the railway transportation network expansion into the Hills Shire, however only if the construction of the transportation network in the Hills Shire is based on sound ecological principles, preservation of the social fabric of local communities and improvement to local residents' lifestyle.

Executive Summary:

After decades of activism by the local residents and inaction by NSW State politician to fulfil their countless promises to bring a world class railway infrastructure to the Hills, we are delighted to see a serious commitment from the NSW Government, the Premier of NSW Mr. Barry O'Farrell, NSW State MP Mr. Dominic Perrottet and the Federal MP for Mitchel Mr. Alex Hawke. Each of these fine gentlemen lent their strong support to the North West Rail Link construction project.

After studying the EIS 2 document, several matters came to light that are of significant concern to me and other local residents of Castle Hill. To address our concerns we also offer alternative solutions that we are confident will not only mitigate residents' concerns, but will also significantly improve the overall railway infrastructure and commuting experience in Castle Hill. Moreover, we believe that the proposed alternatives may be emulated and implemented in other parts of the North West Rail Link transport corridor, hence resolve similar challenges in other neighbourhoods.

Issues of concerns & solution

1. **Car Parking.** Inadequate provision of parking capacity. We estimate about 20,000 additional transitory commuters will arrive by car to Castle Hill every day, yet only 4,000 car parking spaces have been planned for.
2. **Flow of Traffic.** Significant increase in number of motor vehicles and busses will exacerbate an already critically congested traffic flow along Carrington Rd. Current proposal to manage traffic flow is poorly thought through and inconsiderate towards the local residents, particularly along Carrington Rd, Ashford Avenue and the Middleton Avenue.

In this paper we will outline an alternative solution, we believe is superior to the current one as described in the EIS 2 document.

3. **Pollution.** The EIS 2 document, besides mentioning superficially that there will be negative impacts on the Castle Hill eco system, the document neither details all the negative impacts, nor offers any scientific baseline against which the negative impacts can be measured. Without such baseline and detailed pollution (noise, dust, vibration, CO₂, exhausts gasses, etc) parameters, we think the probability is high for significant adverse health consequences as well as significant degradation of enjoyment of unique lifestyle currently enjoyed by the Hills residents.
4. **Safety and Security.** With such a massive expansion of transportation infrastructure, it is inevitable that safety and security of our communities will be compromised. The EIS 2 document does not address Safety and Security at all; this is of significant concern to the residents of Castle Hill.
5. **Alternative Solution.** By improving the constant flow of traffic along the Carrington Rd, many concerns mentioned will be alleviated. The basic idea is to construct an underpath spanning section of Carrington Rd from the child care centre until Showground Rd intersection; similar to one at the intersection of Castle Hill Rd and Pennant Hills Rd.

The Submission:

1. Car Parking.

As stated in the EIS2 significant increase of commuters will be using the Showground stations, far in excess of 600 car spaces as provided by the plan. While EIS 2 does acknowledge inadequacy of parking facilities, it does not offer any practical and acceptable alternative solution to accommodate the massive increase in demand for parking. It is plainly obvious that under the current plan, local streets will be choked up by the transitory parking vehicles. Unless clever strategies and sufficient provisions are in place to manage the massive influx of transitory vehicles, residents in the vicinity of Showground station will be adversely affected in terms of comfortable living, safe commuting and security; that in turn will significantly increase people's stress, discomfort and devaluation of properties.

The planned 600 car parking places are less than a drop in a bucket. In EIS2 it is projected that: *“Over coming decades, and extra 200,000 people will move into the North West taking the region's population above 600,000.*

The North West Rail Link will, for the first time, deliver a reliable heavy rail public transport service to this growing region which as the highest car ownership levers per household in Australia.”

It is clear from the above projections and the subsequent statement that the chief and only concern of the Norwest Rail Link planners is to bring more people into this region.

We calculate that if the rail link operates only 10 hours a day and transporting up to 1,300 people every 5 minutes, it means 156,000 commuters would use the trains. Even if we take a conservative figure of only 50% passenger capacity utilization (78,000) and of that number only 25% would use cars to commute to railway access points, it still would mean that close to 20,000 extra cars would come to park in Castle Hills area, all the while the total parking capacity at railway access points is only 4,000. In Castle Hill area, residential streets simply cannot absorb nearly 16,000 vehicles without a drastic negative impact upon the residents. The notion of providing fewer car spaces to encourage people not to use their cars is flawed. There is not a single bit of evidence to even suggest that a huge majority of people would leave their cars at home. One would have to be either utterly naïve or belligerently ignorant to suggest that 95% of all transitory commuters will access railway stations by busses and walking.

After examining the EIS2, we see no concerns shown by planners for the Castle Hill's residents; it's all about bringing more people into the Hills district disregarding the negative impact of such massive influx of traffic on the lifestyle and wellbeing of local residents.

This is especially troubling considering that one of the major traffic and parking junctures is in and around the most ecologically sensitive and unique lifestyle areas; namely Ashford Avenue, Middleton Avenue and Cockayne Reserve.

2. Flow of Traffic:

The original and principal idea of constructing a sophisticated railway transportation system in North West was to reduce significantly the amount of cars on the roads, particularly in the Hills Shire, which has the highest usage of vehicle per capita in Australia. However, looking at the proposed Showground railway access, the new traffic conditions would only exacerbate the already congested Carrington Rd traffic flow. As per current proposal, the Showground railway access will not only bring massive increase in traffic but also create significant congestion due to the proposed traffic management arrangement; namely add extra sets of lights along the Carrington Rd. Carrington Rd is already congested and is bursting at the seams even without the extra massive traffic increase the railway will inevitably bring.

It is impossible to see, how extra sets of lights would make congestion even slightly better. EIS 2 mentions that a more efficient traffic lights management and coordination will improve traffic flow. This is an unsubstantiated statement, and even if there was room for improvement in traffic management efficiency, such improvement would be so insignificant that it would not have any meaningful improvement to congestion to the massive influx of extra vehicles, let alone to the current congestion. Wasn't the original and one of the overriding goals to remove cars off the streets and improve current traffic conditions? What's the point in bringing an infrastructure to the Hills if that infrastructure makes things worst not better?

It is not a matter of whether to have a railway link or not but rather delivering an infrastructure that fulfils the original and overriding goal: remove private vehicles off the road through an integrated public transport network that not only moves commuters between destinations but also improves the Hills residents' living standard. We certainly welcome such public transportation infrastructure. See the Alternative Solution section.

3. Pollution.

We accept that pollution is inevitable during construction project and we are prepared to accept this inevitability to a reasonable extent, but not to the extent of exchanging our lifestyle for a railway link that a) destroys this unique, natural and ecologically sensitive cohabitation between people and the nature and b) turns Ashford Avenue and its precinct into a commuting hub, albeit comfortable for commuters outside of the Hills Shire, is distressing to the local residents. I wish to remind all parties involved in planning and construction of the Showground station that after all, the locals were those who fought long and hard for the North West Rail Link.

Studying carefully the EIS 2, surprisingly, few things are amiss:

1. While environment is mentioned, environmental impacts are not addressed satisfactorily, except using such indifferent narrative as neutral and other meaningless expressions.
2. Significant traffic increase is expected, yet not a single parameter or measure is produced to indicate the impact of CO₂ and other potentially carcinogenic fumes. How can one assess impact on health, comfort and enjoyment of life we have been accustomed over many years without at least some baseline parameters? And if we can't assess the impact, how can we make an informed judgment about the negative aspects of the project, and constructively influence the direction of the project?

For example: a major transportation hub, especially underground, generates significant amount of pollution that needs to be extracted and released into atmosphere at some point. This is achieved via special exhaust stacks. Such stacks release significant amount of concentrated CO₂ and other solid and gas pollutants into the atmosphere. Where are those stacks going to be placed?

Again, most of residents are supportive of the railway link and even of Showground station, but we are concerned that Ashford Avenue and its immediate vicinity will be turned into a massive transit juncture with all its negative features that will destroy our way of life.

4. Safety and Security.

Curiously, no mention about any aspects of safety and security, neither in terms of potentially serious safety / security – (violence, crime, social misbehaviour, drunkenness, trafficking of narcotics, prostitution, break in, burglary, etc.), nor in terms of property damage due to hooliganism and other repugnant behaviours or accidents.

Is it even conceivable that planners have not considered safety and security associated with such massive public infrastructure? We need to know in advance what to expect. Have the planners planned for safety / security? If yes surely we are entitled to see such plans. If no comprehensive safety/security study or plan has not been commissioned, we'd like to know why not?

5. Alternative Solution.

By improving the constant flow of traffic along the Carrington Rd, many concerns mentioned will be alleviated. The basic idea is to construct an underpath spanning section of Carrington Rd from the child care centre until Showground Rd intersection; similar to one at the intersection of Castle Hill Rd and Pennant Hills Rd.

It is worth noting that the Carrington Road's topography is ideal for construction of a suitable underpath. We understand that construction of an underpath is as much an engineering undertaking as traffic planning and budgeting. We are confident that constructing of a suitable underpath would improve the flow of traffic immeasurably, improve safety of pedestrians as well as cyclists. The overpath would become a comfortable and safe passage way for local community who would gladly leave their cars at home. Moreover, there would be no need to install additional traffic lights and change significantly traffic management system. Furthermore, the overpath would allow easy access to the child care centre for parents with prams and with young children. No matter how sophisticated traffic lights, are, they cannot effectively protect young children from running across street while traffic is moving. A street level overpath, if well-constructed with side barriers, overhead protective mesh, etc, will provide safety and pedestrian experience like no other solution could.

Furthermore an underpath could be interconnected with parking stations, thus seamlessly integrating incoming/outgoing traffic further improving the overall traffic flow. If carefully considered an underpath and street level overpath solution also fits well with the overall Showground station's village type social space as well as lends itself well to other solutions and future expandability.

Construction of underpath and street level overpath is neither an unsurmountable engineering challenge nor demands massive injection of funds. In fact, this solution will be a worthwhile long term investment in every respect, including saving significant funds, saving lives and eliminating costly accidents. That original goal of delivering a world class, integrated public transportation grid cannot be achieved if it is based on narrow perspective and myopic vision, disregard for local communities or crude arrangements for sake of political expediency.

The alternative we offer is thoughtful and visionary. We want the Showground station to be not only technologically world class but also be eco sensitive, nature friendly and be world leading social space for local communities and commuting public.

Conclusion:

I wish to remind all, that after all, Castle Hillians fought hard for the railway link, not the majority of beneficiaries of the North West Rail Link (commuters living outside of the Hills Shire.) I am persuaded that at this early stage we, the residents of Castle Hill can and must influence the project's direction for the betterment of commuters as well as local residents. Excluding local residents from the planning process or disregarding their concerns and suggestions, will lead to the North West Rail Link becoming an infrastructure that divides communities and creates conflict between the traveling public and local residents. Such conflicts will lead to serious social dislocations that cannot be undone later and will be a continuous drain on public resource, and in long term will cost far more – both in financial and social terms – than our proposed solutions. It is therefore absolutely critical to get it right from the start; there will be no second chance.

With foresight, imagination and genuine goodwill, we will get things right: preserve and even improve local communities' standard of living, preserve and protect the unique and fragile eco system of the Hills Shire, as well as add value to the overall public transportation experience.