



**Pennant Hills District Civic Trust Inc.**

*'Preserving the residential amenity of Pennant Hills and its environs'*

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[www.pennanthillscivictrust.com](http://www.pennanthillscivictrust.com).

November 4, 2012

Director – Infrastructure Projects  
Epping to Thornleigh Third Track Project – SSI 5132  
NSW Department of Planning and Infrastructure  
GPO Box 39,  
Sydney NSW 2001

Dear Sir,

Reference the Epping to Thornleigh Third Track (ETTT) Project EIS.

Further to the EIS Information Session held in the community centre at 8 Warne Street, Pennant Hills and the earlier Community Information session in April this submission is made on behalf our members and the Pennant Hills community in general.

**Introduction**

1. We have been unable to find any specific reference to the project in any of the third party documents referenced in the EIS or elsewhere, other than in a media release, AA148/2009, 26 April, 2009 allocating \$840m to a Northern Sydney Freight Line through ARTC, the Infrastructure Australia December 2008 List of Projects for Further Analysis, being the Northern Sydney Rail Freight Corridor project, submitted by the Government of NSW, value \$4.075m.

The various ARTC Strategy documents, including the 2008-2024 Strategy document and additional investment plans for 2008-2009, 2011, 2012 make no reference to the project and neither have we been able to find any reference to the project in any CityRail or NSW Rail planning documents

More significantly, we question why the strategy for improving North-South freight times and volumes and for minimizing the impacts of freight movement on CityRail passenger services, agreed by ARTC and CityRail in the foregoing documents, being the quadruplication of the line between Strathfield and Epping, was not considered or else discarded.

We also question whether adequate or indeed any consideration has been given to the extension of the existing northbound refuge track between Pennant Hills and Thornleigh beyond Thornleigh, 4.4.2 of the EIS, to provide the requisite passing line, a minimal cost option which would also ensure that stopped freight trains would restart on a relatively straight and level section of track, rather than on the steeply sloped section leading to Pennant Hills, a position, we understand, that could not be achieved by many of the presently used locomotives and certainly not without major additional noise and pollution issues.

The cost and disruption reductions in adopting this solution to the northbound freight line issues would certainly ensure its adoption in any cost benefit study.

We suggest therefore, that the ETTT was essentially predetermined and initiated as a 'shovel ready' project to utilize Federal Government funds on a major project with a relatively short lead time and without the need for significant land acquisitions and other restraints normally associated with significant projects of the type.

2. We are concerned at the lack of any objective, transparent and verifiable financial analysis of the project in the EIS and other documentation, including the cost benefit study, withdrawn from the consultant's report, we are told, as being prejudicial to the NSW Government's commercial interests in the tender process in the belief that the cost benefit study would somehow influence the tenderers' price levels to the detriment of the Government's position.

It is fanciful to suggest that in the tender process that the tenderers would assess their prices to be less than the estimate used in the cost benefit analysis rather than on a competitive and viable basis.

We are also concerned as to why the stated fundamental need for the ETTT, being the slow travel time for the freight trains compared to the City Rail and other passenger services, has been resolved by the proposed ETTT rather than by the requirement that the freight train operators provide current, more powerful and less polluting locomotives, required in any event in the near future, and then obviating the need for the ETTT.

This alternative method of resolving the position should have been considered at some point in the financial and social cost calculations and in the cost benefit analysis.

The lack of detailed consideration of this alternative, if indeed this was the case, again indicates the predetermination of the project.

We have requested a copy of the cost benefit study, its parameters as to financial and social costs on several occasions during the consultation process and have equally been promised a copy of the study on several occasions.

It has not been provided.

We again request, on a confidential basis if so required, a copy of the cost benefit study.

3. We also request clarification and confirmation as to whether the original consultant's study on which the project is based took account of the likely significant impact of the proposed Northwest Rail Link project on the ETTT project, both financial and operational, and whether, as a result of the effective decoupling of the City Rail Hornsby to City via Chatswood trains from the overall scheduling network due to the introduction of the metro rail system through Epping, allows the elimination or significant modification of the ETTT.

It appears from the limited reference to the NWRL project in the EIS that this was not the case, likely invalidating at least to some extent, the conclusions of that study and requiring a further study.

4. It appears that the Federal Government, through ARTC, is prepared to contribute \$840m to a Northern Sydney Freight Corridor project.

We have been unable to this point to establish whether the ETTT project is subject to the Federal Government's recent announcement that future joint State-Federal government infrastructure projects will be funded on a 50:50 basis and if this means that the NSW Government is required to increase its contribution to the project.

Clearly, the cost benefit study would be very significantly affected if this were to be the case.

5. We are concerned that the documents publicly distributed as part of the consultation process for the project, particularly the Epping to Thornleigh Third Track document of September, 2012, significantly and materially understate the extent and impacts of the project to the general public, a deficiency not redressed by the subsequent EIS and consultation process and the lack of detailed and objective information provided in that process.

That is, the consultation process is essentially that of repeated unsubstantiated assertions by the project authority.

We again conclude that the outcome of the process was largely predetermined.

6. It appears the net intent and outcome of the ETTT is summarized in 5.9.1, 5.9.2 of the EIS.

An increase in total daily average freight movements from opening in 2016, 28, to a projected possible figure in 2026, 44, of 16 trains per day, that is only 8 additional northbound trains per day by 2026 assuming the then demand exists.

There is no cost benefit study available to justify the project outcome, which itself is a notional projected outcome in 2026, a time frame in which several of the strategic alternatives in the EIS would have overtaken, in a financial and operational sense, the narrow outcomes of the present project.

There is no analysis of the project outcome if only parts of the ETTT were implemented.

There is an admission, 5.9.2 of the EIS, that freight trains '*may need to stop briefly in the proposed third track to allow for overtaking*'. This raises the prospect of multiple stacking of freight trains within the ETTT with the inevitable causation of the issues raised in 1 above.

That is, there is no guarantee that the project outcomes will be achieved.

### **EIS Response**

We have an EIS supporting a predetermined outcome with a 328 pages report plus 7 Technical Papers, presented in 23 PDF files totaling 161.8 MB's that do not satisfy our concerns.

The EIS Executive Summary states that 'the ETTT proposal is considered likely to significantly affect the environment', and this is seen to be demonstrably the case. The EIS is seen as accepting and exaggerating the impacts.

The following comments relate specifically to the Pennant Hills component of the ETTT proposal but in some areas might equally apply to other components.

#### **\* Proposal Descriptions and Design.**

From an impact on the Pennant Hills centre point of view what started as an additional track for freight transport, a significant impact in itself, the EIS expands to include the electrification for 'northbound non-stopping electric and diesel passenger trains', provision for a 'future Down Relief platform' and station building extensions encroaching upon the Yarrara Road public footpath causing a footpath extension onto Yarrara Road right at the junction with Ramsay Road.

Rather than minimizing the impact of the third track the above measures maximize the impact by exaggerating the westward development of the station to the detriment of the Pennant Hills centre in terms of public space and safety, traffic, and visual amenity.

To minimize the impact we need a low profile outcome, potentially through a ramped approach direct to the station concourse level from higher ground south of the station clock tower, along with the preservation of as much space as possible for native tree vegetation along the entire Yarrara Road frontage.

The EIS (5.9.1) states that '*the new Down Relief may also be used for northbound non-stopping electric or diesel passenger trains*'. That is, there is no apparent justification for the major works, cost and disruption resulting from the projected western platform works at Pennant Hills station

We oppose the 'proposal description and design' within the EIS and submit that the relief platform works be excluded from the ETTT.

#### **\* Access, Traffic and Transport**

The roads, traffic and parking situation in and around the Pennant Hills centre is already extreme. To claim an 80 space commuter car park at the Pennant Hills station when none such exists is evidence of the EIS's lack of understanding.

The significance of Yarrara Road is clearly miscalculated. Yarrara Road is one of 4 Regional and State Roads running through or close to central Pennant Hills either to get to / from or avoid Pennant Hills Road. It is a major feeder road to Pennant Hills Road, the National Highway situated immediately adjacent to Pennant Hills Station, and particularly during the extended peak commuter travel periods.

Key intersections were excluded from the Intersection Performance Measures in the EIS including the Yarrara Road intersections with Pennant Hills Road and Ramsay Road, the latter being the major intersection within the Pennant Hills centre immediately at the primary station access.

Both southbound lanes of Yarrara Road in the vicinity of the station are fully utilized and particularly during the extended morning peak period. For the ETTT project to interfere with this traffic flow, whether by the proposed extended footpath area or parking lane closures on Yarrara Road near Pennant Hills station will have an unacceptable impact.

There is another EIS miscalculation in its conclusion that the on-street parking demand during the construction phase will be readily accommodated within a 400m radius of the station. On-street commuter parking is already well beyond this radius.

The EIS passes very lightly over the works associated with the National Highway overbridge, work due to 'the existing bridge piers not meeting current design standards for collision protection and loading requirements' as well as the excavation work required for the third track. The evidence of any true appreciation of the Pennant Hills Road 24/7 traffic flow is lacking, and any prospect of highway traffic being diverted via Yarrara Road would be a nonsense and unacceptable.

The proposed construction compound stretching over 400m along Yarrara Road from Pennant Hills Road, and required for an estimated 3 years and 9 months, represents a major pedestrian access impact. If the minimization of public inconvenience is a high priority in the planning and EIS process then the current proposal is a total failure.

In summary the EIS misrepresents the traffic and access issues as far as Pennant Hills is concerned.

#### \* Visual Amenity

The existing Pennant Hills station and its immediate surrounds are currently seen as a feature of the Pennant Hills centre, and the EIS effectively plans to destroy it.

The dominant feature, as shown in the Viewing Location pictures 8 and 9, is the trees (remnant protected Blue Gum High Forest) and yet their removal is dismissed by the EIS as either of 'negligible' or 'minor' significance.

In the place of the current tree setting we are presented with an unnecessary over-development, an overbearing, out-of-character station extension, a new freight line closer to the busy Pennant Hills commercial centre than necessary and significantly less space for replacement vegetation.

We submit that there are alternatives that will provide lower profile station modifications and greater potential to re-vegetate the area between Yarrara Road and the proposed new freight line, and again suggest that the relief platform works be excluded..

\* Ecology

The Wongala Crescent area of Pennant Hills, part of the Beecroft / Cheltenham Heritage Conservation Area, is also at risk in terms of Blue Gum High Forest loss along the rail corridor.

The abandon with which the EIS accepts the loss of protected species, similar to that in the vicinity of the station, is sincerely deprecated. We trust that in the event of eventual approval the local community will be engaged before any tree clearing takes placed.

\* Air Quality, Noise and Vibration

Each of these subjects are serious issues that could well be the subject of separate submissions.

The Yarrara Road commercial strip will be effectively across the road from the proposed third track. It consists of retail shops, food outlets, professional offices and residences, and as such it supports a significant workforce and attracts a continuous customer flow.

Although in close proximity to major excavation works to accommodate the new track unnecessarily close to Yarrara Road, to increasing numbers of diesel locomotives at the point of maximum drag, to major bridge works, and to a planned 3 year 9 month construction site with access and egress solely via Yarrara Road, this commercial strip did not register as a ‘sensitive receiver’ within the EIS.

For the EIS to conclude that there will there would be no degradation of air quality is considered unreasonable and needs to be explained.

For the EIS to detail the Vibration ‘safe working distances’ of up to 25 metres (for cosmetic damage) and 100 metres (for human response) but fail to specifically focus on the Yarrara Road shopping and business strip in this respect requires reconsideration.

For the EIS to conclude that Noise is a issue for the Library and Community Centre but ignore the Yarrara Road commercial strip is inexplicable.

Furthermore freight train noise has been a long term major issue for Wongala Crescent, Pennant Hills on the Beecroft Bank. The fact that no ‘sensitive receivers’ were located in this area is seen as the EIS seriously failing the affected community. The EIS assertion that it is not within the scope of the EIS to address issues concerning existing levels of noise from train operations is absolutely contrary to the assurances we have been given that both existing and new noise would be addressed as part of the project.

All-in-all we consider that the EIS understates these issues and its mitigation measures reflect little more than a ‘do nothing’ attitude.

**\* Cumulative Impacts.**

The cumulative impacts of the ETTT, the M2 Motorway and the NWRL projects have been considered by the EIS as they affect the Epping component, but there is nothing on the ETTT and F3 / M2 Link projects as affecting the Pennant Hills component. The F3 / M2 Link is included in the NSW Transport Long Term Masterplan and the Infrastructure NSW Strategy. Both reference the unsolicited Transurban proposal to undertake the construction of the 8 km tunnel aligned with Pennant Hills Road without the need for any public funding. Subject to further negotiations Infrastructure NSW indicates F3 / M2 Link completion over the next 5 years, that is, in parallel with the ETTT proposal.

The significance of the F3 / M2 Link project surely suggests that the ETTT project should not proceed until the details of the Link are determined.

**Conclusion**

For all the reasons above we consider that the EIS fails to address the impacts of the ETTT proposal. We see this proposal as a short term solution dubiously justified on the bases of State and Federal benefits and with the communities of Cheltenham, Beecroft and Pennant Hills suffering significant detrimental consequences.

We request your written response to all the foregoing matters.

Yours faithfully,

Ron Hicks  
Acting President

cc. State – Hon Gladys Berejiklian MP, Minister of Transport  
Hon Brad Hazard MP, Minister of Planning and Infrastructure  
Hon Duncan Gay MP, Minister of Roads  
Hon Robyn Parker MP, Minister of Environment and Heritage  
Hon Greg Smith MP, Member for Epping  
Hon Matt Kean MP, Member for Hornsby

Federal – Hon Philip Ruddock MP, Member for Berowra

Council – Cllr Steve Russell, Mayor, Hornsby Shire Council  
Mr Scott Phillips, GM, Hornsby Shire Council