

Submission: M4-M5 Link Modification Proposal

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused massive change in Australian society. Physical distancing is now mandatory and cycling is one means of transport that incorporates this practice. It would be appropriate to reflect upon the likelihood that active transport will be much more commonly exercised in the future for inner city travel. This modification as part of the Bays Precinct provides an opportunity for excellence in design of active transport ahead of the change rather than attempt to catch up in the future.

NSW Planning Context



(Image from 2015 Transformation Plan– the Bays Precinct Sydney)

<http://infrastructure.nsw.gov.au/media/2197/2015-transformation-plan.pdf>

The above photo shows the Bays Precinct prior to commencement of works by TfNSW. The loss of green space due to WestConnex is to be noted. The proposed Modification will further impact the natural environment without providing any improvements to the natural and built environments.

The proposed modification must be rejected in its current form and improvements made consistent with the principles and expressed Government policies provided in the 2015 Transformation Plan. The Transformation Plan lists the following principles:

1. “The Bays Precinct to be a place where you have many more options than a car.”

The modification report proposes the “greenway” to be largely hidden from view by its placement within a maze of roadways. The “greenway” is little more than an afterthought.

2. “Places will be linked by safe walking and cycling links.”

Safe walking and cycling pathways are constrained by roadway designs. The ramps and traffic light road crossing is unsafe.

3. “Transparent communication and genuine stakeholder engagement are fundamental to successful urban transformation.”

The proponent has not based the proposal on community comments. The proposed design is inconsistent with pedestrian and cycling groups.

4. “Ensure that the built environment achieves leading-edge sustainability standards, drawing on viable technologies to create well designed, inviting and safe mixed-use spaces.”

The proposed design is ugly and focussed on roadway construction for motor vehicles. There is nothing “leading-edge” in the design of the “greenway.”

The Transformation Plan provides a whole of Government approach to planning for the Bays Precinct. A priority of Urban Growth NSW is to enable public access along the entire foreshore of Blackwattle Bay. Locating the Greenway on or immediately adjacent to the foreshore is consistent with this objective. The proposal developed in the modification plan is inconsistent with the Transformation Plan.

Questions that must be addressed by the proponent are:

Why doesn’t the modification reflect the Urban Growth planning document? What authority enables TfNSW to ignore the 2015 Transformation Plan?

The Transformation Plan sets out multiple objectives for the Bays Precinct.



The Bays Waterfront Promenade has the objective of connecting all areas from Balmain through to Pyrmont. The Pedestrian/Bicycle Greenway provides an opportunity to be part of this plan. The current proposal made by TfNSW is a lost opportunity. By being located on the foreshore, the Greenway would:

- Unlock public access to the Harbour's edge and water ways along the entire coastline (Principle 5) – this is **immediate priority page 14**
- Establish a whole-of-precinct transport infrastructure plan early, based on connectivity, accessibility and active transport (Principle 7)
- Ensure the land use and associated development is diverse, beautifully designed and creates great places and great spaces (Principle 10)
- Build the capacity for the Bays Precinct to be a place that contributes to healthy, prosperous and resilient lifestyles (Principle 11)

The Transformation Plan also establishes an objective of improving water quality. The proponent has not identified any works to achieve water quality improvement in the proposed works. The proponent has not taken the opportunity to lessen the impact of its extensive earth works on Whites Creek by introducing sympathetic water quality improvements in its design. By building parts of the greenway as a boardwalk, the proponent would be able to demonstrate that it has “introduced environmental and ecological systems to improve water quality.” The location of the “greenway” could be designed to deliver water quality improvement works. This would show that TfNSW took managing its environmental impact sympathetically.

Project variation justification

The proposed Modification documents reveal no additional justification for the deletion of the approved tunnel design. The unsupported claim is that the Contractor has identified “a number of design and constructability improvements.” Maybe a different Contractor would have identified a totally different set of issues. TfNSW has made no attempt to justify the reasons for the variation. The justification must be provided to the public as specified in the Transformation Plan principles.

Greenway Design

The design options for the greenway proposed by TfNSW are very limited and do not exhibit “leading-edge” sustainability principles not aesthetic appeal. The proponent has not more broadly assessed better alternatives to the revised proposal. The proposal looks like it was “designed” by a person or persons with a vendetta against pedestrians or cyclists. It is most unappealing to persons to use. It is certainly not “beautifully” designed. Why should such a bad design be approved in 2020?

I have done some internet searching of alternative designs for pedestrian/bicycle access bridges and found that the proposed variation is lacking in creativity and driven by a narrow scope. Other NSW government organisations can display some creativity, why is this not manifested in the design proposed by TfNSW?



Active transport travel times analysis

The TfNSW documents focus on motor vehicle travel times and ignore travel times for active transport options. While this may be convenient for the proponent, it transfers long term travel time costs to cyclists and pedestrians. Victoria Road is a major cycle/pedestrian access route for access to Glebe or the city via Anzac Bridge. The Modification documents do not give equal weight to travel time impacts on pedestrians and cyclists as it does motor vehicles.

The issue has not been addressed of why the “green link” must connect between the exhaust stacks in Lilyfield and the Rozelle Bay light rail station? Why has the exhaust stacks been used as a starting point? Why would cyclists need to travel to the light rail station? This is illogical. The existing horse-shoe overpass at Victoria Road is 0.6km to the north of the proposed “greenlink.” Why do cyclists from Victoria Road have to travel downhill to the exhaust stacks then go uphill to the “greenlink”? The more intelligent option would be for the greenlink to be located further to the north on Lilyfield Road near Victoria Road.

The photo at the beginning of my submission shows that the boat shed is much more distinctive than the existing horse-shoe pedestrian/cycleway over west link at Victoria Road. The greenway should be an elevated cycle/pedestrian bridge over James Craig Road then follow the foreshore around to Bicentennial Park. Such a route would enable a travel time less than 60 seconds whereas

via Lilyfield Road, the ramp, traffic lights on the Crescent etc would make a travel time for cyclists of 6 minutes or more dependent on traffic lights. Why a 600%+ penalty on cycle travel times?

The need for the “Greenway” to provide access to the Rozelle Bay light rail is not justified. Residents in both Lilyfield and Annandale have access to the Catherine Street Light Rail station. The number of residents who use the Rozelle Bay station is not that large. The existing horse-shoe is extensively used by cyclists using Lilyfield Road or Victoria Road. These cyclists have no need to travel to the Rozelle Bay Light Rail station via the discharge stacks. A higher level overpass to the foreshore is the best option for active transport and must be part of the approved modification project.

The foreshore active transport route should utilise boardwalks to provide separation from the roads and rail lines. The Parramatta to Homebush cycleway uses floating boardwalks extensively to work around restricted access sites. It would not be too difficult for the proponent to do likewise in this instance.

The proponent goes to great pains to describe why the “greenway” ramps necessitate restrictions on use by cyclists and pedestrians. Just why the proponent failed to develop other options averting the intensive use of access to the Light Rail station is beyond belief. The proposed access ramp with shared pedestrians and bicycles on the “greenway” is a bad design and should be rejected for safety reasons. I have proposed the “greenway” be relocated to eliminate the ramps and traffic light crossing issue on the “greenway.”

It is disingenuous for the proponent to use the term “greenway” to describe a pedestrian/cycle route with light rail above it and multi-lanes of traffic next to it on the Crescent. There is nothing reflecting “greenway” in such a location. In contrast, if this section of “greenway” was located adjacent to the foreshore or on a boardwalk, it would attract for greater usage for accessibility and environmental harm imposed on its users.

A further reason for relocation of the greenway adjacent to the foreshore is this approach removes the imposition of air and noise pollution from motor vehicles on pedestrians and cyclists. Both noise and air pollution from motor vehicles has scientifically proven health impacts on humans. It is incumbent on the proponent to minimise or not cause harm to the public. The modification report from the proponent ignored any consideration of impacts on users of active transport links. Blissful ignorance is no excuse for this omission. The proponent has taken great care to control NO₂ concentrations imposed on motorists using the motorway tunnels but has shown no concern for its fiduciary responsibility towards members of the public.

Conclusion

The Modification Plan to encompass a new multi-lane road over the Crescent in North Annandale must be refused. The reasons for doing so are multiple. The Proposal is fundamentally inconsistent with the Transformation Plan for the Bays Precinct produced by Urban Growth in 2015 as a whole of Government document. The Modification does not encourage active transport for pedestrians and cyclists. TfNSW has not incorporated water quality improvements in its design. The proposed Modification sets a very poor standard of public infrastructure in direct conflict with the Transformation Plan and must be refused in its current form.