

SUBMISSION ON THE PROPOSED NORTH-WEST METRO LINE

Prepared by: EcoTransit Sydney

Date: 28 April 2008

Authorised by the Executive Committee of EcoTransit Sydney

Submission consists of
5 pages

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Cover Letter

To Whom It May Concern:

Please accept this submission from EcoTransit Sydney regarding the proposal to replace the proposed North West Rail Line (NWRL) with a stand-alone Metro line. This submission was prepared and submitted on behalf of the sustainable transport advocacy group, EcoTransit Sydney in response to the request for feedback.

EcoTransit Sydney is a public transport advocacy group operating out of Sydney. We are a not for profit organisation dedicated to the promotion of EcoTransit development. EcoTransit Sydney's policy can be broadly viewed as attempting to change the expensive and wasteful system of moving *vehicles* to a system that moves *goods* and *people* in the most energy efficient manner possible. Our policy is based on three simple priorities:

- The need to immediately reduce emissions of greenhouse gases
- The long-standing need to improve air quality
- The need to immediately reduce NSW dependence on oil

Public transport, walking and cycling are the best fit for meeting these criteria, and our response to the proposal for a Metro line to the North West reflects our concerns that the decisions made regarding improvements to public and active transport are properly integrated with the development of other infrastructure and initiatives to reduce emissions and oil dependence as quickly as possible.

EcoTransit Sydney would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the NSW Government on making the decision to commit to a significant addition to the current railway network. However, we are concerned about the timing, cost and integration of the proposed Metro line with the rest of the public transport network. We are also inclined to deprecate the abandonment of much-needed adjustments to the rest of the CityRail network that were to be implemented as part of the North West Rail Line. EcoTransit Sydney advises that the proposed Metro line be put aside in favour of the existing proposal to extend the CityRail network, for which comprehensive planning and costing has already been completed, and which can be implemented in tandem with the housing developments in the North West rather than several years afterwards. The existing North West Rail Line can also be implemented much sooner than any stand-alone proposal, with profound benefits not just for the North West region, but the entire CityRail network.

We trust that you will give consideration to our concerns.

Yrs,

Leah Mason
Submission Contact
EcoTransit Sydney

Submission

Definition Issues

Implicit in the choice of a Metro-style line over the North West Rail Line is the recognition that the future of transport in Sydney is going to be mass-transit oriented. We believe that current estimates for population growth and demand for public transport will validate this decision. However, the current proposal does not appear to present the best use of this mode. The function of a metro is to maximise catchment areas along any given line with many stops, around 1 km apart. The current proposal is for a line with only 16 stops on an alignment that should support at least 38.

It must also be noted that rolling stock used on Metro lines, by nature, places a heavy emphasis on crush-load standing passengers, as opposed to seated passengers. This state of affairs is acceptable for relatively short distance lines of not more than 15 kilometres from a CBD or other major point of origin. However, such a situation is unacceptable for a line such as the North West, which is intended to serve communities at least 20 to 30 kilometres from the Sydney CBD. Despite their inherent limitation insofar as efficient ingress and egress, existing CityRail double-deck rolling stock is more suitable for journeys of the length of any proposed lines to the North West.

For these reasons, we believe that the Metro proposal fails to meet the operating definition for a metro-style line and loses a great deal of the value for which it is commended.

Timing Issues

One major point of contention is the projected timing. A projected completion of 2017 will be too late for those who are currently residing, or will be residing in that area by 2012. The timeline particularly has a detrimental impact on residents who purchased homes on the promised completion of a direct rail link to the major CBD's of Sydney, North Sydney and Chatswood. It is also likely that the estimate is optimistic in terms of the availability of the required expertise, funding and human resources. A nine year completion target compares unfavourably with similar additions to the CityRail network, such as the East Hills to Glenfield extension, which was completed and operational within two years from start of construction.

Cost Issues

We are advised that the proposal is largely conceptual, and that no significant research has been done on the placement of stations and associated infrastructure, or the issues surrounding the construction of tunnels. It is, therefore, difficult to understand whether the stated cost of 12 billion dollars is a realistic assessment of the proposal's final cost. However, even at a conceptual level, this figure represents a very significant investment in a comparatively small addition to the capacity of the network.

The major issue of the design, fleet requirement, tendering process, procurement and ongoing maintenance needs of suitable Metro rolling stock

has also not been considered as part of the Metro proposal to date. The estimated delivery time of the projected 626 double-deck suburban cars for CityRail, to be sourced from overseas, by 2012 onwards is a case in point.

Integration Issues

The absence of comprehensive planning or integration for the NW Metro shines a very harsh light on any notion that it represents a change in direction for public transport in the Greater Sydney region. Indeed, it demonstrates the same lack of planning and integration that has been a feature of the majority of transport projects that have been realised over the last twenty years

There is no suggestion that fares and ticketing on the proposed NW Metro will be integrated into current CityRail ticketing system. If an 'access surcharge' is implemented for the privilege of using the Metro, as is the case with Airport Link, this is certain to have a severe detrimental effect on patronage. Commuters will resent having to purchase and carry two levels of ticketing for weekly commuting purposes, and will be disinclined to use any Metro service that allows this state of affairs to occur.

Opportunity Costs

At a time when the existing CityRail network has serious overcrowding issues in the weekday peak periods, the completion of the projected North West heavy rail link will have a positive impact in relieving congestion on the Main Western line. For example, commuters from the north-west will no longer need to join existing Emu Plains and Richmond services to commute to the major business centres of Sydney (CBD), North Sydney, St Leonards or Chatswood.

Furthermore, integration with the Epping to Chatswood line, including completion of the "missing link" between Parramatta and Epping via Carlingford, will significantly lift patronage on the Epping to Chatswood line, which is presently under construction, and for which a significant return on investment by the State Government will be actively sought. In this way, completion of the North West rail link will have a similar positive impact on the CityRail network and the travel patterns of its customers to that of the completion of the East Hills to Glenfield rail link two decades ago, which was also completed with full government funding.

We are concerned about the implications of abandoning the additional infrastructure work that was to be carried out on the rest of the CityRail network as part of the planning for the N/W Rail Line, particularly the underground duplication of the Sydney Harbour crossing. We are not convinced that the benefits of the N/W Metro proposal will outweigh the consequences of delaying significant improvements to the rest of the CityRail network, which needs significant investment to cater for the growing population of the Sydney basin.

Conclusion

For the above reasons, EcoTransit Sydney believes that the N/W Metro proposal should be abandoned in favour of the long-planned heavy rail

proposal. While we support the greater capacity that Metro-style lines allow, it is not clear that the proposal represents a realistic assessment of the transport requirements of the housing developments in the North West. The expanded timeframes, increased expense, lack of integration with the rest of the network and opportunity costs for improving the current network are difficult to justify given the need for a significant expansion of a much larger proportion of the current public transport network. The advanced stage and comprehensiveness of the planning for the North West rail link and associated works makes it a far more cost-effective, necessary and timely addition to the transport network as a whole.