

South West Rail Link Concept Plan and Environmental Assessment

EcoTransit Sydney Submission

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Introduction

1. EcoTransit Sydney is a community-based organisation that is dedicated to promoting ecologically sustainable modes of transport for Sydney.
2. EcoTransit is broadly in agreement with many of the stated objectives of the South West Rail Link (hereinafter 'SWRL') and of the Metropolitan Rail Expansion Programme (hereinafter 'MREP'). In particular the intention to improve the public transport system across metropolitan Sydney is welcomed.
3. A desired outcome of the SWRL project is stated as the facilitation of Transit-Oriented Development ('TOD') in the South West Growth Centre ('SWGK'). Whereas EcoTransit also welcomes this approach, TOD is something that must be extended city-wide across the transport network.
4. EcoTransit would like to highlight the dangers in allowing private vehicle usage to become dominant in the SWGC, and such dominance entrenched, in the event that the SWRL is in any way delayed. This has been the case for the majority of new housing estates in the south-west over the last two decades.

Existing Context

5. In terms of the Transport Context for this project, it is noted that the existing rail network to this area has frequencies described as 'relatively convenient.' [2.3.1] This is patently wrong for users of the network outside peak hours and is not borne out by experience. It is important for planners to realize that Macarthur services to/from the City are practicable for the great majority of train travellers only by the East Hills line. Services via the South line take an additional 20 minutes to the city. Services via East Hills depart twice an hour outside of peak hour and so the train traveller faces a frustrating 30 minute wait for the next service. A substantial attraction of the SWRL is the additional services and options opened up by this project in conjunction with ongoing work on several rail 'Clearways' projects.
6. It is noted that, while the Concept Plan refers to services to the city via East Hills and Liverpool, no mention is made of the Cumberland line. EcoTransit believes that this line should be restored to full functionality and considered as part of the network served by the SWRL. In the absence of such a commitment from the Government then the bus transitway from Liverpool to Parramatta should also

serve parts of the SWGC. As an interim measure the Transitway as extended to Edmondson Park (via Bernera Rd) should also serve Ingleburn Railway Station, with a possible bus-rail interchange facility at Ingleburn (western side).

Pedestrians and Cyclists

7. EcoTransit calls on the NSW government to ensure that all 3 stations on the SWRL are constructed in accordance with the access requirements of wheelchair users.
8. EcoTransit notes the good pedestrian and cyclist linkages at all 3 stations on the SWRL. An exception to this is the current state of Glenfield Road, with inadequate or no bicycle lanes from new residential developments to the north-west of Glenfield Station.
9. In consultation with Bicycle NSW, TIDC and Railcorp must ensure that bicycle storage facilities at the stations are sufficient for future growth in cyclist numbers and in accordance with current Australian standards. Precinct planning for these areas in the SWGC needs to take into account the needs of pedestrians and cyclists.
10. In terms of the existing pedestrian and cycle network in the vicinity of the SWRL it is correctly noted that this network is 'sparse' [2.3.2]. Camden Valley Way is a good example of a road unsuited to cyclists. EcoTransit calls on the State Government to ensure that a safe and effective bicycle network is implemented on roads in this area. This network needs to be in accordance with guidelines for bicycle planning and extend beyond recreational purposes as is the case for some users of the M7 cyclepath.
11. It is noted that the new suburb of Edmondson Park will have a cyclist network, although consideration needs to be given to Edmondson Park to Ingleburn cycle routes. This is feasible using Macdonald Road to Ingleburn Station and returning via Brooks Road, both routes using the pedestrian bridge over Bunbury Curran Creek. The steep gradient of Macdonald Road requires that bicycle lanes are reinstated for the downhill section.
12. The current state of Campbelltown Road, near Edmondson Park and Denham Court, is terrible for cyclists and needs to be addressed. It is noted that an upgrade for Campbelltown Road, between Camden Valley Way and McDonald Road, is planned. EcoTransit calls on the State government to ensure that safe bicycle facilities are provided as part of the upgrade.
13. EcoTransit also notes the intention to provide short [bicycle] trail sections to enhance access from Edmondson Park and Leppington to the Western Sydney Parklands. Insofar as recreational routes are created through the Parklands, planners may wish to consider linking these to the M7 cyclepath.

Bus services

14. The bus services through the SWGC to serve the railway station at Leppington need to originate further south, that is, existing and future residents of Camden, Narellan and Harrington Park may also need to access the Cityrail system at Leppington.
15. In terms of existing transport and access to Glenfield Station, bus access is limited to Railway Parade. EcoTransit does not believe that access should be limited to the eastern side of the railway station, and in particular notes the possibility of bus services to/from new residential developments on Glenfield Road and elsewhere, as well as new employment lands at CrossRoads retail park, utilising the access road to the west of Glenfield Station (adjacent to Hurlstone Agricultural High School).

Planned Future Development in the South West

16. Insofar as the Commonwealth proposes to dispose of the former Ingleburn Army Camp in its entirety [5.1], it should be noted that elements of the Ingleburn Military Heritage Precinct may be worth preserving as part of the development of Edmondson Park.
17. EcoTransit notes that a major centre is planned for Leppington, adjacent to the new railway station. Planning for this area, including potential TOD in the station precinct, needs to be expedited.
18. TOD is considered as suitable for the new station developments [7.5]. However no mention is made of TOD for Glenfield Station, despite its substantial re-building. EcoTransit calls on the NSW government to examine what TOD options are suitable for Glenfield as part of this project.

Options considered

19. In the development of the SWRL project and the alternatives considered, option 3 for the rail alignment offered the chance for a third railway station at Horningsea Park. EcoTransit is disappointed that this possibility was dismissed as Horningsea Park is not well served by public transport. Good urban design may have minimized disruptions to nearby roads in its operational phase. That Horningsea Park is 2 kilometres from Leppington Station should not be viewed as running counter to the need for a further station. Taking a bus from Horningsea Park to either of the other stations on the SWRL represents a time-costly connection for peak hour commuters. EcoTransit suggests that TIDC take what steps it can to retain the option to retrospectively build a train station at Horningsea Park should the need arise.

20. EcoTransit also welcomes the idea that future extension of the SWRL is not precluded. However EcoTransit understands that any such extension will be to Bringelly only, and is concerned that not all options are under consideration. EcoTransit calls on the NSW government to examine and make public options to extend the line from Leppington through more of the SWGC including to Bringelly and other areas. Preliminary steps such as reservation of transit corridors may be necessary. Whereas the North West Rail Link is proposed to traverse much of that growth centre, the SWRL appears more limited.

The SWRL Project – Infrastructure Issues

21. EcoTransit welcomes the commitment to complete the SWRL by 2012. EcoTransit also hopes that the other elements of the MREP are rapidly completed so as to facilitate the smoother running of the SWRL and the entire CityRail system.
22. EcoTransit welcomes the commitment to build a new stabling facility at Leppington for Sector 2 of the CityRail system.
23. EcoTransit calls on the NSW government and the Department of Planning not to withhold unreasonably approval of the Environmental Assessment for the Southern Sydney Freight Line as proposed by the Australian Rail Track Corporation. This is a key element in the timely completion of the SWRL project and in allowing the freight and commuter rail systems to operate alongside each other.

The SWRL Project – Operational Plans and Issues

24. It is stated [at 8.2.1] that there will be 4 trains per hour from the SWRL to the city via East Hills, and as many via Granville. TIDC and RailCorp need to clarify whether these figures refer to peak hour or off-peak services. As referred to above, a great advantage to the SWRL (together with Clearways) is the perceived doubling of capacity from the South West. It must be ensured that this is in effect the case for both peak and off-peak services.
25. Nowhere in the document are Southern Highlands trains referred to. EcoTransit hopes that the greater efficiency delivered to the city-wide network through this project is also such as to enable an increase in services from the Southern Highlands.
26. EcoTransit also hopes that the State Government and Cityrail will revisit the ‘go-slow’ in operation of the current system (dating from timetable changes in 2004). For the system to remain attractive to commuters, there should be no unnecessary delays in transit and trains should travel at their optimal speed.

27. EcoTransit calls for a public information campaign for commuters in the southwest to communicate the doubling of rail capacity (and hence frequency) in the southwest from Glenfield as an interchange station between the two lines that feed into the East Hills line.
28. EcoTransit would like to underscore the importance of the social benefits that the SWRL will provide the people of Sydney and western Sydney in particular.

Other Environmental Issues

29. Insofar as operational noise is concerned, it is essential that existing residents in the vicinity of the rail corridor are kept up to date with progress and issues arising during the development of the SWRL project.
30. EcoTransit calls on the TIDC to erect substantial noise barriers where these affect existing residents along the SWRL corridor. The TIDC may also wish to consider deepening the cuttings to be used in certain areas along the corridor.
31. EcoTransit believes that hydrology and biodiversity issues must be kept at the forefront of planning for the SWRL.
32. The benefits to be gained in terms of air quality for the residents of western Sydney are very significant, however these may be negated should the larger MREP projects and programme not proceed rapidly. This is because the catchment area for the SWRL lies in a part of the Cumberland Plain that retains significant air pollution, including smog, from elsewhere in Sydney.
33. The air quality benefits of the SWRL may also be negated should major road projects proceed. Of particular concern is the drawing of the SWRL crossing Camden Valley Way in Figure 16-8 at page 254; this road is, predominantly, two lanes at present and to create a six lane highway would only encourage greater motor traffic congestion.

Conclusion

34. EcoTransit welcomes consideration of this project's consistency with principles of ecologically sustainable development. In particular EcoTransit is pleased to see that the Precautionary Principle and Intergenerational Equity are now considered of genuine validity in planning in NSW, together with conservation of biological diversity and ecological integrity.
35. EcoTransit reiterates the conclusion of the SWRL Concept Plan and Environmental Assessment: 'there is no real "do nothing" option.' There is also no 'do it slowly' option.