

COMMENT:

THE NSW GOVERNMENT'S PROPOSAL FOR A 'CITY RELIEF' RAIL STUB LINE TO WYNYARD

The February 2010 *Metropolitan Transport Plan*'s commitment to a "Western Express" CityRail line from Emu Plains and Richmond to Wynyard, including a new \$4.53 billion underground "City Relief" stub railway line from Eveleigh to Wynyard under Kent and Sussex Streets along the western fringe of the CBD, provides a classic illustration of the dictum **"Ask the wrong question and you'll get the wrong answer."**

The "City Relief Line" concept first emerged in the December 2009 *Transport Blueprint*, copies of which were leaked to the Inquiry and the mass media around the time of its planned but suddenly cancelled public release by the former Premier, Mr Nathan Rees.

The preparation of this *Transport Blueprint* was heavily constrained by prior (and very public) NSW government commitments to the "CBD Metro" and "West Metro", and also by other core assumptions adopted by the State's transport bureaucracies (as revealed in a document leaked by RailCorp and/or the Department of Transport and Infrastructure shortly after the Inquiry's *Preliminary Report* was released), including dictates that:

- These and other specified new metro lines should simply be assumed to be operational by specified dates (in other words, these projects were not to be challenged)
- Specified new and augmented motorways should likewise be assumed to be operational by specified dates, and
- Concepts for future CityRail services should be based on there being no "second Harbour rail crossing" until after 2036–2041.

With these as "givens", it is not surprising the government's heavy rail planners, seemingly desperate for something new, came up with the "City Relief Line" concept—an idea which was first raised at least 30 years ago.

And now, ironically, under the February 2010 *Metropolitan Transport Plan* all of the "metro" projects and most of the new motorway projects the planners were told to assume would be definitely be built have now been cancelled unless "additional funding becomes available"—and the government has locked itself into spending almost two-thirds of its entire ten-year expenditure on "new" transport infrastructure and services on a project which:

- Was borne out of these now-discarded core "metro" and motorway assumptions
- Had not been compared on a fair and equal basis with options involving a second Harbour crossing (i.e. using consistent train operational and travel time assumptions, instead of much more favourable assumptions for modelling of the "City Relief Line"), and
- Had not been thoroughly tested or comprehensively and fairly compared with other options under other heavy rail, "metro" and motorway assumptions.

WHAT IS PROPOSED?

The "Western Express" concept involves:

- The allegedly dedicated use of two of the four and then six tracks on the Western Line from St Marys to Eveleigh for new



"Western Express" CityRail services. (The track diagrams in the *Transport Blueprint* and *Metropolitan Transport Plan* actually show Blue Mountains and Newcastle intercity services to and from the "country" platforms at Sydney Terminal (Central) as using these tracks as well.)

- A new twin-track underground railway, the "City Relief Line", solely for "Western Express" services, branching off these tracks at Eveleigh, with new underground stations claimed to be at Redfern, "Central" (actually under Railway Square, some 350 m west of the suburban CityRail platforms), "Town Hall" (actually under Sussex and Kent Streets, up to 250 m west of the existing platforms) and Wynyard (at an undisclosed location).
- A massive and very expensive reorganisation of other CityRail services onto other tracks and lines in order to accommodate these changes, as shown (without costings!) in the *Transport Blueprint* and as obliquely referred to (but again without any costings, and also without any funding commitments) in the *Metropolitan Transport Plan*. These changes are summarised in the diagram on page 207 and discussed in more detail below.

A *Metropolitan Transport Plan* diagram, reproduced above, shows the "Western Expresses" would stop at all stations west of Mt Druitt, or all stations on the Richmond Line, and then only at Blacktown, Seven Hills, Westmead, Parramatta and Redfern to Wynyard. They would not stop at Granville, Lidcombe or Strathfield.

THE CLAIMED BENEFITS

The *Metropolitan Transport Plan* claims the "Western Express"/City Relief Line project will:

- "Ultimately" deliver more than 5,000 extra train seats from Parramatta to the CBD in the morning peak hour (i.e. in total, and by who knows when, the equivalent of about 5½ eight-car double deck trains or 4½ ten-car double deck trains).

*But there are many other ways this or much greater increases in capacity could be provided, none of them acknowledged in the Metropolitan Transport Plan (see the **Thought Provokers** at the end of this chapter).*

- Produce travel time savings of (if you believe the *Metropolitan Transport Plan*) 5 minutes from Parramatta to Wynyard and 10 minutes from Penrith or Richmond to Wynyard, or (if you believe the Premier's accompanying media release) 6 minutes from Parramatta, 9 minutes from Penrith and 15 minutes from Richmond.



As with previous claims about “metro” travel speeds, many of these claims are frankly unbelievable, especially for the longer distance services with multiple stops to pick up passengers. The more realistic of the claimed travel time savings could largely be achieved simply by restoring the timetable patterns that applied before CityRail trains were all deliberately slowed down in 2005, without spending \$4.53 billion.

The extra time required by large numbers of passengers for interchanging at Wynyard to and from services across the Harbour has been conveniently ignored. (These interchanges are not required at present, because all Western Line services currently continue on to the North Shore and vice versa.)

- “Result in” four extra services (over an unspecified period) from Epping to the CBD via Strathfield, two from Cabramatta via Granville, two from Homebush and two on the Illawarra Line.

Again, there are many other ways these or much greater increases in services could be provided. Several could be provided **immediately** if more trains were acquired (see chapter 5). They do **not** depend on the “Western Express”/City Relief Line concept.

THE UNACKNOWLEDGED CONSEQUENCES

The *Transport Blueprint* and the *Metropolitan Transport Plan* both refer to **major changes in other CityRail services** associated with—and in many cases necessitated by—the “Western Express”/City Relief Line concept, but notably fail to provide details, costings or funding commitments.

As summarised in the diagram on page 207, which reproduces information presented in the December 2009 *Transport Blueprint* (in its “Actions 3.11 and 3.12” and its *Figures 19 and 21*) and the February 2010 *Metropolitan Transport Plan* (on its pages 30–32 and in its accompanying media releases), the government appears to be planning, either deliberately or unwittingly, for these to include:

- **The introduction of “metro style” single deck trains with limited seating, replacing double deck trains, on many lines** (shown in red in the diagram on page 207), with an *assumption*—and nothing more, in the absence to date of serious investigations into other constraints, especially at CBD stations—that this would permit up to 30 trains per hour to use the North Shore line through the CBD during peak periods (although, under the *Blueprint*, there would be as few as six trains per hour at other times, the same minimum as then planned for the “metros”).

As discussed in more detail in *Thought Provokers #2 and #3* at the end of this chapter and in *Appendix 3*, even if it proved possible to operate these trains this frequently, overall **patronage** capacity on the North Shore Line would be unlikely to be increased, because each train would carry fewer passengers.

And to achieve train frequencies of 30 or so trains per hour there would have to be major and expensive changes to signalling and train control systems—which could equally serve to facilitate increased double deck train frequencies, a point seldom acknowledged by advocates of single deck trains—and major and expensive changes to both Town Hall station, which would become even more congested, and Wynyard station, which would become much more congested than at present because of the forced interchanging of all Western Express passengers travelling across the Harbour (see *Thought Provokers #2 and #3*).

The proposed “metro style” single deck trains would force many passengers to stand for long distance trips of an hour or more in

some cases (e.g. Rouse Hill and Berowra via Epping). As discussed in *Thought Provokers #2 and #3* and *Appendix 3*, this would be quite contrary to normal, world-wide “metro” operational practices, under which “metros” are used for relatively short trips.

The reintroduction of a mixed single and double deck CityRail train fleet would make the operation of the CityRail network considerably more complex, as occurred during the transition to a double deck fleet in the 1970s and 1980s, and necessitate major additional train maintenance and train “stabling” (parking) facilities (see *Thought Provoker #3*).

- **A massive reorganisation of almost all suburban CityRail services, both single-deck and double-deck, onto different tracks and lines, necessitating major and very expensive changes to signalling and train control systems, numerous junctions (including grade separations), the complex “dives” and “flyovers” west of Central, several important stations and several major train maintenance and stabling facilities.**

Apart from the changes forming part of the “Western Express”/City Relief Line concept itself, none of these major infrastructure changes has been acknowledged, announced or publicly costed, let alone supported by funding commitments. But without these changes, or equivalents under other possible operating patterns not included in the government’s plans, the “Western Express”/City Relief Line and “metro style” plans developed by the government **cannot** properly work—and in the interim “sectorisation” will largely be destroyed.

The junctions and stations likely to require major changes are shown in the diagram on page 207.

The changes required will be extremely disruptive and inevitably expensive. For example, the proposed “metro style” connection of the Illawarra Line tracks from Hurstville with the North Shore line tracks at Central, on the far side of many other busy tracks, will necessitate new grade separations, dives and flyovers and a major rebuilding of the complex Illawarra Line, Western Line, Inner West Line and South Line trackwork between Erskineville/Macdonaldtown and Central, probably with prolonged closedowns.

And **for all the expense and disruption, these works would not significantly increase CityRail’s overall patronage capacity!** (See *Thought Provoker #3*.) The cost could well exceed that of a second Harbour crossing which **would** greatly increase patronage capacity—an option this scheme has been assiduously designed to avoid.

- **No more Liverpool–CBD services via Bankstown and the termination of all Central Coast (Wyong) services at Chatswood** (the latter services are shown in black in the diagram on page 207).

The termination of these services at Chatswood—and/or St Leonards, following the track quadruplication between Chatswood and St Leonards announced in the *Metropolitan Transport Plan*—would be necessary because there would be insufficient capacity for these trains south of Chatswood/St Leonards, there being no second Harbour crossing under the government’s plans. At present Central Coast services travel right through to the CBD and are heavily patronised both north and south of Chatswood/St Leonards. These passengers would be forced to transfer to North Shore Line and Epping–Chatswood trains that would already be full by the time they reached Chatswood.

And prior to the full implementation of all the unannounced junction, station, signalling and train control upgrades, there would almost certainly also need to be **many terminations of North West Rail Link services at Chatswood and/or St Leonards**.