# NSW 2019 State election: transport infrastructure who is fit?

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*Readers may have followed the transport infrastructure fiasco in NSW under conservative Governments led first by Mr O’Farrell, then Mr Baird and now by one-time Transport Minister and Treasurer, Ms Berejiklian.*

*Several reports last week put an exclamation mark to the debacle and raise questions about the fitness of either side to govern.*

*Given the failure of commentators to identify let alone discuss the issues……*

## 0. Introduction

Somebody will need to start cleaning-up the mess created in the last seven years.

No great faith can be put in an Opposition that continually misses the point – by parroting formulaic ‘where is the money’ criticisms of Government plans - and promoting dumb policy proposals one of which was rightly called the [worst of the election campaign](#_top) – up to then.

The Government’s performance, comprising doubling-down by increasingly stupid ideas to cover up grave misjudgements, hardly suggests they are up to it.

For example, its [Pilate like pretence](#_top) that it can’t stop anything during the ‘caretaker’ period is used as an excuse to allow contractors to knock down a stadium - the Opposition wants retained - several days before the election.

Another example is the crowning of the blight of the Premier’s ‘signature’ light rail project with a [negotiation reputedly involving $600m +](#_top) of your money to settle a lawsuit against the Government - of which we have heard nothing since end January.

Both Government and Opposition are blameworthy re promises of futile-at-best Motorways and cashbacks for motorists, make-believe Metros in the boondocks and incomprehension of problems enveloping the major rail system – Sydney Trains – that are so severe that its taciturn CEO has [hit the press.](#_top) Meanwhile, the inertia on the anti-competitive Newcastle port restriction should be incomprehensible given it is so easy to fix.

But these are mere background noise against three signal matters, which summarise where NSW is at:

1. Metro extension to Bankstown;

2. CBD rail alignments;

3. NSW can ‘have it all’.

## 1. Metro extension to Bankstown

### Background

This was an article in [*the Conversation*](#_top)*.* Its principal suggestion was the Bankstown line is not a good extension of Sydney Metro as it does not have high passenger rail demand or population.

Essential background, Figure 1, is:

* the Bankstown line runs between Sydenham, Lidcombe and Cabramatta via Bankstown;
* the City Circle (Central-Circular Quay-Central) and Sydenham-Central segments, while used by Bankstown trains are not part of the Bankstown infrastructure line;
* currently trains on the City Circle are ‘from’ the Bankstown and Airport lines;
* currently trains on the Sydenham-Central segments are ‘from’ the Bankstown, Illawarra and East Hills lines;
* the Bankstown line segment Sydenham-Bankstown is to be converted to Metro, rendering it unusable by any of Sydney Trains present double-deck fleet.

**Figure 1: Bankstown line**



### Criticisms in error

Several comments on the Conversation’s site took issue with the article and claimed it lacked merit for failure to explicitly take into account rail operations. The argument was:

* conversion of the Bankstown line to Metro would free-up Sydney Trains’ operating capacity on the City Circle – because Bankstown trains would no longer use the latter segments;
* such a result was not achievable by alternative Metro lines.

Implicit in this argument is a dominant objective of Metro is to mitigate a capacity constraint; to free-up Sydney Trains’ operating capacity on the City Circle.

The City Circle is shown in green in Figure 2.

**Figure 2: Sydney CBD rail lines**



While repeated several times and adamantly, the argument is wrong. It confuses a train operating plan and pattern with infrastructure configuration or layout.

This mistake is becoming more widespread. It had been made by Infrastructure NSW and is also made frequently by commentators who claim the Sydney Trains network is ‘tangled’. It is evidence of an infrastructure cult where the answer to any question, even non-question, is: ‘build’.

A train operating plan, or incidents, may create a tangle of trains on the network, but this is not a tangle of the infrastructure network – it does not mean the layout is tangled.

In a network, such as Sydney Trains’, it may not be necessary to alter infrastructure configuration to amend a train operating plan and ‘untangle’ or reduce the probability of a tangle of trains. Infrastructure building may not be an efficient or even effective way of untangling trains.

Converting the Bankstown line to Metro is not a precondition to remove Bankstown trains from the City Circle. Those trains could be re-routed. This could be done today without Metro and without changes to infrastructure configuration. The rerouting could be easily achieved by ‘sending’ Bankstown trains to:

* Bondi Junction via the Eastern Suburbs line (Figure 2 blue line);
* North Sydney via the harbour bridge (Figure 2 red line);
* terminate at, or somewhere between, Sydenham and Central.

This may seem trite in the light of such options causing inconvenience to some passengers, as well as possible displacement of some trains presently operating on the Eastern suburbs or North Sydney lines. However:

* it is a logical refutation of the argument; and more importantly
* identifies the relevant constraint – and therefore appropriate capacity objective – to be the combination of all Sydney Trains lines in the CBD – red, blue and green, not just the City Circle.

The best – more effective, most efficient, most sure and least risky - way of dealing with such a constraint is by re-allocation or augmentation of Sydney Trains infrastructure network capacity in the relevantly constrained area. Most likely starting where the three coloured ‘lines’ are near each other - at (the approaches to) Town Hall.

### Sydney Metro as capacity augmentation?

However, if it is to be assumed the only way of dealing with such a constraint is by creation of a new isolated infrastructure system, Metro, the question arises where a Metro line might go. Such a line’s effectiveness depends on its ability to reduce demands for Sydney Trains services which are satisfied by the latter’s train operations.

The ability of Metro to reduce such demand is associated with its supposedly greater total line carrying capacity. This supposition has been shown elsewhere to be false, but for the sake of demonstration here it is assumed to be true.[[1]](#endnote-1)

Metro’s supposed greater carrying capacity would suggest it be used to mitigate Sydney Trains demand on those line segments carrying the highest number of passengers. This would maximise the number of present Sydney Trains services which could be ‘removed’ from the constrained area.

The point made by the article was that the Bankstown line carries a low number of passengers. The Main North, Western, Illawarra and Airport etc. lines, carry far more passengers.

For the purpose of analysis, passenger numbers for the Main North and Western lines should be combined as they use a track-pair in the CBD. This pair is by far the highest capacity augmentation priority. This is the reason the only expert opinion provided to the NSW Government that is in the public domain recommended if there was to be a Metro crossing of the harbour it should extend to Strathfield.

### Conclusion: article’s proposition supported

This point indicates that, for an objective of capacity augmentation, against operational criteria, the Bankstown line is not an appropriate candidate for replacement by – conversion to - Metro. The fact the Conversation article did not deal with operational matters is irrelevant to this result.

The current harbour crossing is operationally allocated to the Main North and Western lines e.g. northbound trains on its track-pair in the CBD have passed through Parramatta or North Ryde. The new harbour crossing is being fixed to a much less significant line – Bankstown – with no possibility of re-allocation at present. That is a strategic blunder no amount of train operating or infrastructure fiddling can overcome.

The above implies selection of the Bankstown line for conversion to Metro is a result of:

* faulty analysis were the objectives to include augmentation of rail capacity; and/or
* primary objectives other than rail capacity augmentation.

## 2. CBD rail alignments

### Background

The Conversation article included:

 *‘In 2012, the city’s first transport priority was another north-south harbour crossing. However, it was decided instead to build the Sydney Metro under the harbour and then take both of the CBD’s north-south heavy-rail corridors….*

The first sentence needs careful interpretation. Some may consider the city’s first rail transport priority to then have been another north-south harbour crossing. Others may consider introduction of automation into Sydney Trains’ capacity constrained area was more pressing or a precondition for another harbour crossing.

However, the Government’s priority, stemming from a promise made in the 2011 State election, was for a North West Rail Link, to extend the newly opened Chatswood-Epping segment.

At the time, despite commentary arguing another harbour crossing was essential to the effectiveness of a North West Rail Link, there was no public suggestion of building a Sydney Metro under the harbour. The public documentation suggested another crossing would be a heavy-rail link i.e. Sydney Trains.

Hence during the two terms of the current conservative Government there was no public suggestion of Metro taking both of the CBD’s north-south heavy-rail corridors. In fact, there has been no public suggestion of this since – until the Conversation’s article.

One interesting aside is that there was such a suggestion in the previous Labor administration. It was a hitherto publicly unknown matter drawn to attention in Mr Christie’s public inquiry and 2010 report. Then [Premier Keneally](#_top) stopped that Metro scheme.

### The unanswered questions

The statement in the Conversation seemingly points to an answer about a key question for which [John Menadue](#_top) and I have called for a public inquiry: does Sydney Metro eliminate forever the potential of another commuter rail line through the centre of Sydney? The reason for this question arising was the issue identified (above) in Mr Christie’s report.

The beagle sought, through the Conversation on-line comments section, to understand the provenance and interpretation of the statement. However, that section was closed before the hound’s questions were addressed. The question, complete with its grammatical errors was:

*‘i am intrigued by the following claim: In 2012, the city’s first transport priority was another north-south harbour crossing. However, it was decided instead to build the Sydney Metro under the harbour and then take both of the CBD’s north-south heavy-rail (i presume Sydney Trains) corridors.‘is there a source for this?*

*is it intended to mean there is no longer an opportunity for another 'heavy rail’ north south CBD/harbour crossing, a possibility warned against by Mr Christie in 2010. if so is there a stated reason for this? and how does this match with the 2012 Sydney rail futures which implied another heavy rail harbour crossing?.’*

The sole response was:

*‘And why would a higher capacity rail corridor being built instead of a proposed rail corridor be worse?’*

As that response did not answer the questions, but raised different ones, the beagle replied:

*‘i am not making a judgement and am not interested in a capacity debate. i just want to know. and also whether there is an authoritative source.’*

To which there was no reply.

### An answer to the question put to the beagle

The beagle did not then answer the question it was posed lest it distract from the issue. Now it can, without such distraction:

*The question implies I proposed a negative view of what was claimed about Metro taking two heavy rail corridors e.g. ‘worse’. As I did not, this suggests a defensiveness that may reflect knowledge. The respondent did not attempt to answer any question posed – a failure supporting such suggestion.*

*There is good reason to suspect there are severe problems if what the article claimed is true. The respondent’s implicit assertion is along the lines of the adage: a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush. In this case, the bird in hand may forever prevent gaining the several in the bush, at least one of which was immediately at hand. Moreover, the bird now in hand is smaller than any in the bush – its tunnel dimensions preventing maximisation of capacity either total or (especially) seated on its route as well as being – by definition - a less effective way of increasing capacity of the existing network than direct augmentation.*

*The respondent’s implicit claim that Metro has a higher capacity route than either of the (possibly) alienated corridors is false. Metro has far lower capacity than the two alienated corridors together.*

*Together with its tunnel routing preventing (?) additional capacity on other routes this gives rise to questions such as: Who decided on this course? Who advised on this course? What were the reasons for this decision? Whether this course was necessary? And, of course: Who knows of this? To be accompanied by: Why has the public not been told? Etc.*

*On the face of it, the Metro tunnel dimension and route were not necessary and thus it is substantially worse than alternatives. This highlights the above questions and, in the absence of cogent public explanation, is sufficient grounds for a formal inquiry.*

### More no answers

Just as there was no answer to the beagle’s questions, there has been no answer to virtually identical questions publicly posed by Mr Menadue and myself over several years; despite the many thousands of ‘hits’ on our websites and the obvious importance and implications of the matter.

A reluctance to answer this question may be no surprise.

In my view an affirmative response – that Metro is to alienate the available heavy rail corridors in the CBD - would be equivalent to, say, admitting to the sale or closure of the Harbour Bridge without advising the public. It would be tantamount an admission of unfitness for public office. The only defence would be if advice from all authoritative sources said it was both absolutely necessary and that the public should not be told. Which, of course, is predicated on one possible response to a question rather than a (yet?) established fact.

### Consequence of the possible blunder

There is a question as to whether a north-south orientation is the only reasonable possibility for heavy rail corridors through the CBD. However, if this is so, recent media reports offer hints of enormous adverse consequences if there has been a catastrophic blunder of taking both for a single Sydney Metro line. Again, an ‘if’.

In one, Sydney Morning Herald writers finally twigged to something [Pearls etc. readers have long known -](https://johnmenadue.com/john-austen-inquiry-into-sydney-metro-part-1/)  Sydney Metro is not a metro but a [masquerade](#_top).

Sydney will be the laughing stock of the transport world with commuter trains – Sydney Trains – operating through inner areas like a substandard metro, while Metro operates a low capacity – few seats – low quality commuter railway to outer suburbia. The worst of all worlds, a rail system literally turned upside down and unable to be normalised without tremendous cost.

Another report had Prime Minister and Premier announcing a [$7billion Metro line](#_top) from St Marys to Badgerys Creek airport. While the idea of single-deck trains – like Metro - going to the airport makes sense (cost aside), the plan to isolate the line and have airport trains shuttle from St Marys is idiotic.

It is notable the relevant video shows the Prime Minister referring to a double-deck train, implying approval and that it would be a good thing to have more of them. Apparently he is oblivious to the plan to preclude a connection of the proposed new line with Sydney Trains network.

The given ‘reason’ for this line to be ‘Metro’ – which was the reason also given for dropping the far cheaper and better options of joining an airport line to Sydney Trains lines at St Marys or even closer at Leppington – is: single and double-deck trains can’t share tracks. That is: the Sydney Trains network is a ‘double-deck network’. Of course, that is preposterous.

It is as if Metro was the only single-deck train in the world. Which, worse than just being barefaced lies, suggests rail advisory processes for State and Federal Governments are irredeemable.[[2]](#endnote-2)

The likely real reason for a Metro line and therefore a shuttle is fear. Fear of a question which would arise if the new line linked with the Sydney Trains network:

*why can’t single-deck airport trains go to the city?*

The question is feared because the answer may be:

*because the railway in the city lacks capacity which cannot ever be sensibly rectified as Metro is ‘Taking both of the CBD’s north-south heavy-rail corridors’.*

If so, the false reason of single and double-deck trains being unable to share tracks covers-up a fact of Metro limiting expansion or augmentation of Sydney Trains.

There are other problems and transport irregularities regarding rail plans for Badgerys Creek airport which could be ascribed to this same speculative cause.

Hence the consequences of such a blunder as alienating the two heavy rail corridors in the CBD would not be limited to visibly bad economic and social outcomes. They would also be that the advisory process and political statements are open to public ridicule, with consequential significant loss of trust in Government and advisers, including so-called ‘independent’ ones.

## 3. ‘Have it all’

### Background

The final signal matter, at the Premier’s campaign launch, was the diabolically inappropriate claim reported variously: NSW can/could/should/will ['have it all'](#_top):

"*As Premier, I will never ask you to choose between having world-class schools, hospitals, transport, roads, stadiums or cultural facilities because ……. NSW can have it all.*

### The problem with the statement

Given unrealistic community expectations is the biggest infrastructure problem in democracies, this public denunciation of reality is as damaging as a statement from a politician can get. When reality strikes, faith in the NSW system of Government will be undermined.

The only possible mitigation is if the Premier is signalling she doesn’t intend staying on long enough to do such harm.

The Opposition’s ineffectual response - we can’t afford to have it all - achieved as much prominence as pointing to a trivial fault in the Government’s campaign – the printing on the Government’s campaign bus was done by a Queensland company. It was pointless.[[3]](#endnote-3)

## 4. The problem with the reporting

Exacerbating the above is the absence of proper commentary on any aspect – let alone the totality – of the NSW election transport infrastructure farce, apart from a mild indirect rebuke in the Sydney Morning Herald.

Commentators wax about the relevance of economists and the importance of talking about [opportunity cost](#_top). They have not mentioned the above, nor chastised the Premier for this most direct, high profile and blatant denial of opportunity cost.

Commentators also routinely present [dollar-totals of election promises](#_top). At times this can be useful. But it is not in the present circumstances of the NSW election. In fact, by creating a distraction from the above outrageous issues – which have implications far more extensive, enduring and important than the overall infrastructure fiscal call - it is counterproductive.

The above issues have not been ‘called out’, nor the culprits excoriated.

It is almost as if commentators and politicians want us to believe it normal, and that ‘in-depth’ analysis and coverage should be confined to entertainment. It is not normal. It is unacceptable, and we should be concerned if anybody considers it normal.

## 5. Conclusions and suggestions

### Conclusions

Given what has occurred in NSW:

1. neither side of politics has demonstrated its fitness to hold office;
2. rail transport (infrastructure) advice, decisions and explanations are grossly inadequate. They deserve ridicule and condemnation;
3. the media and commentariat, in failing to properly scrutinise performance and inform the public, have not demonstrated their fitness for the essential purpose of the fourth estate.

### Suggestions

Post-election NSW needs all the clandestine bilge offered/underway to be swept aside and replaced by a blueprint for transport developed openly and honestly, with proper public consultation and guided by real experts. Like Ron Christie did in 2010.

Nothing since has remotely matched his [report](#_top) – and most disturbingly, in the absence of such guidance transport ideas in NSW are becoming ever more bizarre and destructive. Such a blueprint should be an essential outcome of the public inquiry called for by John Menadue.

Those who have let the above go unremarked – don’t let this happen again.

21 March 2019

1. https://www.thejadebeagle.com/dogs-breakfast-for-all.html [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. https://www.thejadebeagle.com/western-sydney-rail-response.html [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. <https://print21.com.au/queensland-firm-prints-bus-for-nsw-liberals/168391> [↑](#endnote-ref-3)