**JOHN AUSTEN - Inquiry into Sydney Metro**

*We are told Sydney Metro will overcome capacity constraints on Sydney’s rail network. This is false. Only a public inquiry can reveal the truth and advise on what to do.*

This is the first of two articles following-up John Menadue’s call for a Sydney Metro [inquiry](https://johnmenadue.com/john-menadue-sydney-metro-a-forty-billion-dollar-deception/).

It cites further evidence that Metro is:

1. Inferior to Sydney trains;
2. In the wrong place;
3. Disastrous for Western Sydney.

A later article will deal with why an inquiry into these matters is needed, and what the inquiry should cover.

**Metro is inferior to Sydney trains**

While Sydney Metro is presented as ‘rapid transit’ it is not. Most of its characteristics – 66km length, long distance between stations etc. – are not rapid transit.

Sydney Metro’s only rapid transit characteristic is few seats on trains. This makes it very inferior to Sydney Trains for commuters.

The reasons given to the public for Metro boil down to a claim it can carry more people per line – sitting and standing - than Sydney trains. It supposedly can run 30 trains per hour conveying 40,000 people compared with 20 Sydney Trains carrying 24,000 people. This is said to reflect it’s 3 door single-deck carriages not needing as much station stopping time – dwell-time – as double-deck trains.

However, those claims are false.

Metro has a lower capacity per train which is not offset by its (theoretically) shorter dwell time.

Advice to NSW agencies was Sydney Trains lines today can carry more than 24,000 people per hour. If enhanced as announced by the State Government’s ‘Paris and London’ train control technology, Sydney Trains could run at least 24 trains per hour carrying at least [42,000](http://images.smh.com.au/file/2013/09/23/4770519/trains.pdf) people. Some media reports implied it could run [30 trains](#_top) – which might be able to carry over 52,000 people.

**Metro is in the wrong place**

Rapid transit systems e.g. in London and Paris are usually in central city areas. Short journeys are typical and short distances between stations are what attracts the passengers as they don’t have far to walk to those stations.

Sydney Metro is largely in the suburbs. The routes are therefore longer, and trains on those routes require plenty of seats – more than Metro offers.

Moreover, at least some Metro routes are very problematic.

The North West route requires ‘conversion’ of a vital Sydney Trains line – Epping-Chatswood. This substantially reduces existing network capacity and hamstrings new services to Western Sydney, including to Badgerys Creek airport. Advice to NSW was scathing about the idea of a [North-West Metro](https://www.busaustralia.com/forum/viewtopic.php?f=3&t=33435).

The South West route requires ‘conversion’ of another vital Sydney Trains line – to Bankstown. The route was chosen over better candidates such as to Kingsford Smith Airport and Infrastructure NSW’s recommendation - towards [Parramatta.](http://www.infrastructure.nsw.gov.au/expert-advice/state-infrastructure-strategy/)

The route across the harbour and CBD may be an even bigger problem. In 2010 Sydney’s most respected railwayman, Ron Christie AM, expressed deep concerns about whether the route [undermines the entire rail network.](https://trove.nla.gov.au/work/37406431)

**Disaster for Western Sydney**

The real effects of Metro are neither tunnelling triumphs nor the rail and road chaos coming in the 7-month closure of the Epping-Chatswood line followed by ‘all-out all-change’ at Chatswood for several years.

The effects will hit Western Sydney. The Western Sydney rail ‘plan’, developed by State and Commonwealth officials, argued for at least three different rail networks – for passengers to change between possibly 4 trains to get to Badgerys Creek airport - was a first indication. The ‘City Deal’ which opted for the wrong rail connection to the airport was the next sign.

The NSW Transport Minister’s [rejection of a $3bn gift](https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/andrew-constance-s-3-billion-train-backflip-20180702-p4zp1p.html) for Western Sydney rail was another. His reason - new passengers would ‘overwhelm’ inner parts of the network - confirms Metro is reducing the effectiveness of the existing network (conversion of the Epping-Chatswood line cuts effective capacity on Sydney Trains’ lines near the CBD) and disadvantaging Western Sydney.

Compared with this the high-profile problems of light rail – cost blow-outs, construction delays, litigation against the State by affected businesses and contractors, CBD traffic problems and loan guarantees to keep the project going – are minor!

Can the situation be recovered – say by Metro and other trains sharing infrastructure – as suggested by Infrastructure NSW? It is not obvious how.

As John Menadue said, Sydney Metro tunnels are too small for commuter fleet. This echoes Paris’ 19th century small tunnel policy, the problems of which started to be addressed 60 years ago by [bigger tunnels](http://www.ejrcf.or.jp/jrtr/jrtr23/F36_Sato.html) taking both metro and commuter trains - at tremendous cost.

**Conclusion**

Public evidence is Metro isn’t motivated by transport needs or demands. If lack of capacity on the existing network is a problem, why further reduce that capacity? Why the small tunnels?

An oft repeated view is Sydney ‘needs’ rapid transit – but that is a ‘solution’ looking for a ‘problem’. The evidence is successive NSW Governments searched for a place to start Metro – to ‘play trains’ – in preference to assessing transport needs and ignoring Metro effects.

Sydney’s north-west was a political chance - a rail link to that area was an ironclad election promise. However, it is one of the worst places for Metro’s quasi-rapid transit; a mistake compounded by small tunnel sizes and inappropriate routes for extension.

The Sydney Metro ‘solution’ is exacerbating and creating new transport problems. It will divide Sydney and lead to booming car use especially in the Western suburbs.

The next article will show why a public inquiry is needed to untangle this mess.

*John Austen is a happily retired former official living in Western Sydney.  Details are at thejadebeagle.com.*