# Sydney Metro: the $60billion dollar questions – Part 1

*Reports on a NSW Government announcement - if believed – destroy even the Government’s own flawed case for Sydney Metro. This is the first of two short articles on that matter. For buffs, a bigger one will follow.*

Readers know my scepticism about the NSW Government’s Sydney Metro theology. However, given the scarcity of facts – the Government only gives us propaganda - I have called for a public inquiry the outcome of which could perhaps change my mind.

John Menadue recently called for a properly constituted inquiry to get to the truth. I could not agree more. <https://johnmenadue.com/john-menadue-sydney-metro-a-forty-billion-dollar-deception/#more-19072>

**The problem with Metro**

Metro has fewer seats per line than the existing Sydney Trains system. This is a problem for commuters – or anybody on a train for more than 20 minutes – who generally want seats.

Another concern is Metro reduces the capacity and jeopardises the future of Sydney Trains. It is taking over key parts of that system – like Epping-Chatswood and the Bankstown line.

These two concerns mean Metro threatens to divide Sydney – it will become very difficult to travel other than short distances. Contrary to the spin of Ms Turnbull’s Greater Sydney Commission - that this part of a ‘three cities’ plan providing jobs in the west - it needlessly reduces the ability of people in Western Sydney to access opportunities elsewhere, is unlikely to add a single job west of say Glebe Point Rd and undermines the prospects of Western Sydney especially at Badgerys Creek airport and the so-called ‘aerotropolis’.

Instead of facing up to these real issues, the public is treated to increasingly outlandish Metro-boosting fantasies like a 20-minute trip from the CBD to Parramatta with 8 or more stops and (the Daily Telegraph, ‘Project Sydney’, 23 May 2018):

*‘it will move 46,000 people an hour with driverless trains showing up every four minutes. The entirety of the current Sydney train network can move just 24,000 people an hour’.*

Who believes there will be an average of 3,067 people on a Metro train, 2,700 of whom will be standing? And how does Sydney Trains manage to move more than a million people a day if it can only carry 24,000 people an hour?

Yet the State Government continues to double down on Metro – (re-re-re) announcing one to Parramatta and supposedly confirming another isolated one in - of all places - the outer west of Sydney - a lay down misere for the Guinness Book of Records’ dumbest misplacement of a transport system.

**Another big problem revealed**

Behind the smokescreen may be gross failures by Governments and advisers – needing investigation.

Apparently neither the NSW Government nor Infrastructure Australia really considered the obvious option of enhancing the Sydney Trains system in giving Metro a premature tick.

Nor apparently did the Commonwealth advisers twig to this in the Western Sydney ‘city deal’.

Recent reports raise a question of whether this is unforgiveable negligence e.g.: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-06-10/nsw-trains-to-get-new-technology-on-the-tracks/9854992>

The above report implies it is possible to enhance the Sydney Trains system to outperform Metro on every criteria, including the only criteria on which Metro supposedly had superiority – the number of trains per line.

The report says with some enhancements Sydney Trains could eventually run more trains (every 90 seconds) than has been claimed possible for Metro (every 120 seconds). The implication – an enhanced Sydney Trains system could handle vastly more passengers than Metro - means even on the Government’s mistaken criteria Metro is wrong for Sydney.

To explain, the NSW Government’s case for Metro rests on a view it can carry substantially more people on its single-deck fleet than double-deck Sydney Trains - albeit most standing - because it can run many more trains.

The usual presentation is 40,000 people on 30 Metro trains but only 24,000 people on 20 Sydney Trains.

Every Government ‘justification’ - believable or not – such as ‘turn up and go’, city shaping, untangling the network etc. hinges on the more trains premise.

In fact, ‘more trains’ – even ‘more people’ - is no justification because it ignores the key matters such as seating, alternatives and cost.

And in any case, the presented numbers are not what the experts told NSW – Transport for NSW and Infrastructure NSW separately - at least not the expert reports in the public domain. <https://www.google.com.au/search?q=douglas+dwell+time&rlz=1C1CHBF_enAU754AU754&oq=do&aqs=chrome.1.69i60j69i59j69i60l2j69i57j69i59.2720j0j7&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8>

<http://www.infrastructure.nsw.gov.au/media/1161/interfleet__summary.pdf>

But even leaving these aside, the report implies a worse problem – fewer trains than possible with Sydney Trains.

The detail of all enhancements – to track, signals and trains etc. – for Sydney Trains to offer more services than Metro is not in public view. That needs to be cleared up.

Nonetheless, the NSW Government announced the starting of those enhancements – hardly a sign of lack of faith. The supposed cost -$880m - although likely a substantial underestimate, is nowhere near the $60bn (so far) cost of Metro – roughly $20bn for the projects under construction, $15-20bn for Parramatta-CBD and a further $20-25bn or more for outer Western Sydney.

**The responsible course is to stop Metro projects now**

If the report is remotely true there was never a proper case to convert Epping-Chatswood to Metro.

More importantly, if remotely true the report means there is no case for:

1. a Metro harbour crossing and CBD segment;
2. converting the Bankstown line to Metro;
3. Metro between Parramatta and the CBD;
4. the rail nonsense in the Western Sydney ‘city deal’.

Those ‘initiatives’ must be stopped now.

**What was known?**

The Sydney Trains enhancement mentioned – a train control system used in Europe – was known at the time of relevant Metro decisions. Indeed, there were reports prior to those decisions that the system or at least a precursor was to be trialled – e.g. a pilot installation - on a Sydney Trains’ line. The history goes back nearly a decade and a half to recommendations of the Waterfall crash inquiry. <http://www.railwaygazette.com/news/single-view/view/nsw-awards-first-etcs-contract.html>.

In October 2012 Infrastructure NSW apparently referred to it as:

*‘using technology that is proven in service overseas’.* [*http://www.infrastructure.nsw.gov.au/expert-advice/state-infrastructure-strategy/state-infrastructure-strategy-2012/*](http://www.infrastructure.nsw.gov.au/expert-advice/state-infrastructure-strategy/state-infrastructure-strategy-2012/) at p212.

The Premier reportedly claimed the enhancements are based on ‘Paris and London’ technology. There are indeed reports the technology is to be installed on Paris’ RER – with a target of trains every 108 seconds – better than Sydney Metro. A point: Paris RER, like Sydney Trains, uses double-deckers. <http://www.railwaygazette.com/news/traction-rolling-stock/single-view/view/paris-rer-ng-design-unveiled.html>

However, Sydney Metro – in a seemingly unbelievable act of short-sightedness and against warnings from experts, the public and even rail advocates – reputedly has tunnels too small for double-deck Sydney Trains. Ruling out any real ‘Paris option’? Who knows? <http://www.aptnsw.org.au/documents/nwrl_faq.html>

If the reports are true, I would find the revealed situation unfathomable.

And there is more. The system may not be fully compatible with other trains that use Sydney Trains lines – like freight trains to Brisbane, Port Botany or Port Kembla. That would be a very, very big new problem for Australia as most interstate freight trains are affected by Sydney transits. And as usual with NSW railways, the issue has been known for a long time.

**Flouting history and a specific warning**

The 19th century break of rail gauge was notoriously Australia’s greatest transport failure – it made the colonies a laughing stock.

Metro introduces Sydney’s first real break of gauge – not only against the flow of history, not only undoing John Bradfield’s legacy but in direct conflict with a very specific and loud warning from Sydney’s most respected railwayman in 2010:

*‘the last thing we need is a 21st century version of different gauges’.*

[*https://trove.nla.gov.au/work/37406431*](https://trove.nla.gov.au/work/37406431)*,* at p.200

This Government could be shunting the old colonial break of gauge to a lesser position in the pantheon of infrastructure ignominy.

John Menadue is calling for a properly empowered inquiry – so should others.

J Austen

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