Contents

[Quid est, in adversitatibus nostris adiutorium fieri? 2](#_Toc507957251)

[1. Introduction 2](#_Toc507957252)

[2. In purgatory? 2](#_Toc507957253)

[2.1 Safety 2](#_Toc507957254)

[2.2 Speculation? 2](#_Toc507957255)

[2.3 Fire one! 3](#_Toc507957256)

[2.4 Fire two! 3](#_Toc507957257)

[2.5 Strike 3](#_Toc507957258)

[2.6 Brewing trouble 4](#_Toc507957259)

[3. Escape from purgatory? 4](#_Toc507957260)

[4. The empire gets back to us 5](#_Toc507957261)

[5. The final judgement? 6](#_Toc507957262)

# Quid est, in adversitatibus nostris adiutorium fieri?

***Purgatory: a place or state of suffering inhabited by the souls of sinners who are expiating their sins before going to heaven.***

This is a promised article to follow Sydney impedimenta Deo contraria (God opposing Sydney trains); about operational meltdowns in Sydney’s rail network.[[1]](#endnote-1)

## 1. Introduction

Sydney 10 January 2018. The NSW Minister for Transport ordered the heads of Sydney Trains and Transport for NSW to:

*‘report back to me within the next fortnight on their recommendations which will be made public’.*

That would be by 24 January.

It was delivered mid-February.[[2]](#endnote-2)

It says a meltdown can happen again. So we remain in a transport purgatory. Why not look around at what else is happening there?

## 2. In purgatory?

Does purgatory take the gloss off big-talk about staring down the unions and driverless trains? Of implying sick leave infects Sydney’s rail system? Or blaming God? You could be excused for thinking so given recent events.

### 2.1 Safety

Top of the event list was a train accident at Richmond. Several people were injured when a train ran into a ‘buffer stop’. Three (!) investigations are underway.[[3]](#endnote-3)

There is nothing quite like a train crash to take the fun out of big-talk.

Safety and operations are two sides of the same coin. System break downs – like in Sydney – have some safety risks. Richmond raises a question as to whether the meltdowns, even if caused by God, indicated risks need better control.

Neither Sydney Trains nor Transport for NSW get to write safety investigation reports. Which will be published. Their overdue report on the meltdown was a bit more thorough than some people expected. Carefully worded too. No harm in that.

### 2.2 Speculation?

Further down the list was expert commentary straying from the Metro-is-good script.

Sydney’s leading transport academic, Professor David Hensher, placed an article in the Conversation which placed some blame for the meltdown on government planning.[[4]](#endnote-4)

The subsequent month long on-line conversation focussed on matters like immigration (yawn) and whether royalties are taxes. Perhaps some thought it lucky there was no discussion about Metro, rail operations or governance.

### 2.3 Fire one!

If so their luck ran out when Dr Dick Day sent torpedoes at the ship of rail policy in NSW. In an article published just hours before the Richmond accident.[[5]](#endnote-5)

The first torpedo was an observation the timetable, then a probable root cause of the meltdowns, was done in the Department and not the railways. Dr Day, like many experts, views this as bad practice.

It puts the Government in the frame. There will be a single point of accountability; but it cannot be Sydney Trains as they did not write the timetable. It probably isn’t the Department since they don’t run the trains. Therefore those who decided on this system of divided command are responsible for outcomes.

As previously noted, the beagle would love to see the safety case for the timetable.[[6]](#endnote-6)

### 2.4 Fire two!

The second torpedo was Dr Day’s comments that Sydney’s Metro plan had created an awful mess in the existing railway. Linking problems besetting commuters to Government policy.

Dr Day is eminently qualified to comment on these matters. He had long been in charge of timetabling and long-term planning. His views are not speculative.

However, he omitted some facts that would have added to the impact of the warheads.

One was the opening of a junction in Hornsby, said to be the most complex in Australia – a need created by Metro. Dr Day did not refer to the near panic about what might happen when it opened. Nor did he reflect on why the timetable was introduced before it opened – instead of what would seem less risky behaviour.[[7]](#endnote-7)

Another omission by Dr Day was the Minister’s response to a report of a driver claiming to be fatigued by excessive overtime. The retort - new drivers would arrive in February and the complainant need not apply for overtime then - implied the timetable was introduced before adequate staff resources were available. The Minister’s apparent detailed knowledge of Sydney Trains’ manning means he should have a few questions to answer yet.[[8]](#endnote-8)

For the record: investigations should consider whether train driver fatigue was a contributing factor to the Richmond crash.

### 2.5 Strike

All this without mentioning industrial action; Sydney train drivers then voted to go on strike over wages. The Government asked the ‘Fair Work Commission’ to stop this; Deputy President Hamberger obliged.[[9]](#endnote-9)

The tone of media reports then seemed to shift; the Premier was praised for stopping imminent chaos but the Minister’s antagonism of the workforce was highlighted. The Premier was asked whether he would be sacked; ‘no’ was the answer.[[10]](#endnote-10)

Away they went to negotiate and eventually a deal was struck making other State Government workers a little jealous. The Government became a bit poorer and the Minister a bit quieter than at the start of the negotiation.[[11]](#endnote-11)

### 2.6 Brewing trouble

Shortly thereafter a former head of NSW railways – in the time of the previous Conservative State Government - Mr John Brew, got stuck in observing that Metro is not addressing any real capacity issue, although capacity issues there are aplenty. Including on the main west line through Parramatta and on the Illawarra line.[[12]](#endnote-12)

He essentially reiterated the points made by Christie et al in 2001 and 2010. Probably not only because they are ‘correct’ but because he is as surprised as anyone that the State Government steadfastly continues to ignore the obvious.

## 3. Escape from purgatory?

Some media began suggesting rail troubles could continue for some time. One line is the problems arise from an opportunistic union approach to industrial relations in the lead up to next year’s State election. According to that logic: after the election, when sins are expiated, we will ascend from the purgatory of Sydney rail chaos to the eternal pleasure offered by driverless Metro trains etc.

There is another possibility. If Dr Day et al are right, policy failures may continue to manifest in operational problems. Unless strategic problems are addressed our time after purgatory might be spent somewhere other than heaven.

Yet addressing such problems could involve reversing policies introduced by the Premier, reinforced by the Minister and praised by the media. Sort of a grand scale version of what Peter Fitzsimons is trying to do about the knock-down-rebuild stadium policy.[[13]](#endnote-13)

Hence the question: what if industrial issues resolve but operational etc. problems persist? A bit more real now that the strike threat has gone.

A possibility perhaps dimly glimpsed in another excuse from the Minister:

‘*What everyone forgets is a driver can give two weeks' notice and they're gone, but it takes 12 months to train up a driver in NSW’.[[14]](#endnote-14)*

Well maybe not everyone. The duration of training has been this – or longer – for a long, long time. Getting the right staffing levels has always been a tactical matter critical to any timetable. Were the people writing the timetable able to forget; did they know this in the first place? A Minister claiming to have been ‘kept in the dark’ about a timetable written in his own Department doesn’t play well. Like in Brisbane last year, excuses from rail bosses suddenly finding out there aren’t enough workers don’t wash.[[15]](#endnote-15)

Were there other glimpses?

The Minister saying that the sick leave allegedly behind the meltdown was bona fide?

Claims that ‘only’ 20 peak services were cancelled?[[16]](#endnote-16)

The late report by Sydney Trains and Transport for NSW was to now be about timetable changes – unlike the terms of reference?[[17]](#endnote-17)

And what, if after this, trouble continues?

## 4. The empire gets back to us

Previous articles noted the propensity of Government Metro announcements/excuses coming at a time of bad news. Promise of a coming golden age offering a distraction from the drudgery of the here and now. And so it came to pass. Again.

The Transport Department penned a sort of defence of the project for a Sydney Morning Herald opinion piece.

Normally a ‘let’s stop arguing’ line is a white flag accompanied by concessions, but in true Metro spirit not here.

The piece led off saying there were many opinions about Metro. Probably wrong; there are really only two. One held by the Government and a different one held by experts who write in.

The article then proceeded to make a series of at best dubious claims:

* capacity statistics that conflicted with previous statements, were internally contradictory, largely irrelevant to commuters and some of which were wrong;[[18]](#endnote-18)
* that Metro was decided on after advice from ‘experts’. Presumably not the ones who conducted the 2010 inquiry etc. Who are these ‘experts’, how were they selected, what were they asked and what did they say?[[19]](#endnote-19)
* about ‘turn up and go’ services - Metro doesn’t offer these because of service frequency but because it is a single line – its trains can’t go elsewhere;
* that Central Coast commuting capacity will increase as a result of Metro taking over a line used by its commuter trains – ex facie nonsense.[[20]](#endnote-20)

It forgot to mention a few things too:

* the independent expert report on public transport planning published in 2010 – by the same newspaper that published the opinion piece - the Herald! The best bit of which is the Herald damning the 2010 Metro proposals as being based on:

‘*a bizarre premise that Sydney needs to create an entirely new public transport system’;* [[21]](#endnote-21)

* the critical transport planning question: does the Metro route – and tunnel dimensions - forever preclude increases in core capacity or reach of Sydney Trains;[[22]](#endnote-22)
* the Greater Sydney Commission and Transport for NSW having conflicting versions of future commuter and Metro rail in Sydney;[[23]](#endnote-23)
* the (half) Metro ‘business case’ not presenting any relevant options – such as new lines for Sydney Trains or Metro extension to Kingsford Smith /to Western Sydney;[[24]](#endnote-24)
* the evaluation of ‘options’ presented in 2012 appeared to rank the Metro now under construction 3rd out of 4 possible choices;[[25]](#endnote-25)
* the most important thing to middle and longer distance commuters – seats. The thing Metro does badly in comparison to Sydney Trains.

An argument about passenger trains which doesn’t mention seats wouldn’t even impress gunzels let alone voters when they eventually sit on the white throne.[[26]](#endnote-26)

The opinion piece had another oversight. It forgot to reiterate a previous highlight of Metro public relations; driverless trains. Perhaps in the light of the outcome of the industrial action, rail meltdown and the unions very public and negative comparison of relations with current and former Ministers it was considered a bit tasteless to mention this.[[27]](#endnote-27)

Or perhaps the Department thought such an invocation would summon the wrathful spirit of the last driverless train in Sydney….. the monorail.

The conclusion of the article said much:

*‘its time to end the tired debate about whether Sydney’s established double-deck train system needs a new single deck addition and focus on the transport revolution coming to Sydney’.*

Que?

* the established Sydney system is not double-deck. It can be, has been and is used by double-deck and single-deck trains – unlike Metro;
* Metro detracts from rather than adds to this system – it is taking over some lines; and
* in serious company there is no double v. single deck debate for Sydney. Truly independent expert advice settled it years ago. The only debate is about why the Government ignored the resolution in favour of double-decks.[[28]](#endnote-28)

In any case, in whose world is the concern trains? Surely the Government should be focused on the future of the many people of Sydney.

The sentiment, no doubt (to be) echoed elsewhere, is: ‘lets not nag the Government - just get on with life and as much spending on public transport as possible’.[[29]](#endnote-29)

A neat way of summarising our stay in purgatory.

## 5. The final judgement?

On cue, although four weeks late and with small trumpet, the report into the meltdown was delivered. In full – exceeding expectations that only the recommendations would be published.[[30]](#endnote-30)

It was probably seen as a public relations triumph. Nobody in the media held the Government to blame or called it embattled. There were plenty of mentions of our old nemesis - train drivers, a nod to the bit of a forthcoming tweak of the timetable and a timely if tiresome reminder that Metro is the salvation of us all.

Best of all was universal agreement and great media exposition of the culprit – a fiendishly complicated, ‘tangled’, Sydney Trains network. Which would be all good if true, but it isn’t so it isn’t. And neither thinking nor public relations makes it so.

None in the press twigged that the pattern of operating trains across a network is the timetable. The network isn’t tangled! Rather the timetable tangled trains on the network – which is all too predictable being written by those without responsibility for the network or its operation.

But the media could be excused perhaps, since the tangled network was promulgated by the four-page report by Sydney Trains and the Department. Careful not to point the finger, nonetheless we are told it could – read ‘will’ - happen again.

As they say, there seems to be a bit of a problem. I’d like to think the report was a little too carefully worded. In any event I wouldn’t be following directions on how to get out of purgatory just yet.

Even if they are included in a ‘City Deal’ released this afternoon. That’s the one backed by the *Western Sydney Rail Needs Scoping Study Outcomes Report* (!), where the south west rail link, the cheapest yet still expensive option for a rail connection to Western Sydney airport, almost – but not quite – gets there. More on that later![[31]](#endnote-31)

J Austen

4 March 2018

1. <https://www.thejadebeagle.com/sydney-impediimenta-deo-contraria.html> [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. <http://www.smh.com.au/nsw/report-on-sydney-rail-timetable-changes-to-be-finished-in-next-few-days-20180129-h0pu4t.html>,

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-02-15/disruption-to-sydney-trains-tangled-network-and-lack-of-drivers/9449110>

<https://www.transport.nsw.gov.au/news-and-events/media-releases/report-actions-to-boost-rail-resilience> [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. <http://www.smh.com.au/nsw/people-injured-after-train-crash-at-richmond-station-20180121-h0lzg6.html>

<https://www.atsb.gov.au/publications/investigation_reports/2018/rair/ro-2018-004/> [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. <https://theconversation.com/this-is-how-sydneys-transport-system-has-gone-off-the-rails-90301> [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. <http://www.smh.com.au/comment/sydney-transport-planners-off-the-rails-with-metro-plans-20180119-h0l2k1.html> [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. <https://www.thejadebeagle.com/paradise-revisited.html> [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-01-15/sydney-train-commuters-prepare-for-more-train-disruptions/9328612> [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-01-16/sydney-train-driver-speaks-out-over-service-debacle/9333128> [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. [http://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-01-25/sydney-train-strike-cannot-go-ahead,-fair-work-commission-rules/9361270](http://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-01-25/sydney-train-strike-cannot-go-ahead%2C-fair-work-commission-rules/9361270) [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. <http://www.smh.com.au/nsw/sydneys-weary-transport-gladiators-retreat-to-their-corners--for-now-20180124-h0nzwj.html> [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/nsw/sydney-trains-new-rail-worker-pay-offer-wont-bust-wage-cap-government-says-20180208-h0vqwo.html> [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. <https://www.smh.com.au/opinion/metro-not-the-answer-to-sydneys-transport-woes-20180202-h0sqm5.html> [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/nsw/peter-fitzsimons-stadium-rebuilds-still-have-a-stink-around-them-and-will-until-i-see-a-business-case-20180207-h0vk6t.html> [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. <http://www.smh.com.au/nsw/theres-a-problem-transport-minister-andrew-constance-admits-rail-network-issues-20180128-h0pp2k.html> [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-11-02/queensland-rail-acting-ceo-neil-scales-in-the-dark-over-services/7986978> [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. <http://www.news.com.au/national/nsw-act/miranda-live-andrew-constance-says-train-drivers-did-not-come-down-with-the-blue-flu/news-story/732f7a8f8c4145137ab0839436eadeff> [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. <http://www.smh.com.au/nsw/report-on-sydney-rail-timetable-changes-to-be-finished-in-next-few-days-20180129-h0pu4t.html> [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. **Conflict with previous statements**:

Metro capacity more than 40,000 people per hour – compare with EIS of a ‘target’ 40,000 per hour;

Metro capacity of more than 40,000 people per hour, at 30 trains per hour – compare with EIS capacity of 51,000 people at 15 trains per hour in 3 hours = 17,000 people per hour, equals 34,000 people per hour at 30 trains per hour;

Sydney trains capacity of 23,000 people per hour – compare with EIS of 24,000 per hour <https://www.sydneymetro.info/sites/default/files/document-library/Sydenham%20to%20Bankstown%20Environmental%20Impact%20Statement%20Overview.pdf>;

**Internally contradictory:**

metro with capacity of more than 40,000 people per hour in each direction can carry more than the (84,000) people who cross harbour in one hour at present;

**Largely irrelevant to commuters**:

does not deal with seating – the EIS estimates only one third of Metro capacity is seating – 17,000 out of 51,000;

**Dubious if not wrong:**

Should compare Metro with alternative ‘investments’ such Sydney trains as in table below

**Table A1: Indicative train capacity comparison, Bankstown line**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Metro** | **Sydney trains** | **Difference** |
| EIS (a)Trains per hourSeats in 3 hoursTotal 3 hr pax. capacity | 1517,00040,500 | 1026,40036,000 | +5-9,400+4,500 |
| Potential (b) Trains per hourSeats in 3 hoursTotal 3 hr pax. capacity (b)Total 3 hr pax. capacity (c) | 1517,00040,50060,750 | 1231,68043,20063,000 | +3-14,680-2,700-2,250 |

	1. From Environmental Impact Statement (EIS above) with 2 people per square metre
	2. From EIS (above) and for Sydney trains text above with 2 people per square metre
	3. From EIS (above) and for Sydney trains text above with 4 people per square metre<https://www.thejadebeagle.com/future-transport.html> [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. <https://johnmenadue.com/john-austen-what-will-it-take-to-kick-off-a-serious-enquiry-into-the-sydney-transport-mess/> [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. At present some Central Coast trains can be (and are) routed from Epping to the CBD via Strathfield or Chatswood. Metro is converting the Epping-Chatswood segment which will no longer be available to Central Coast trains. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. <http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-opinion/its-sensible-to-build-on-cityrails-good-bones-20100212-nxms.html> [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. <https://www.thejadebeagle.com/toucheth-not-the-monorail-metro-summary-business-case.html> [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. <https://www.thejadebeagle.com/future-transport.html> [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. <https://www.thejadebeagle.com/toucheth-not-the-monorail-metro-summary-business-case.html> [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. <https://www.thejadebeagle.com/toucheth-not-the-monorail-western-sydney-rail.html>

 [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. Gunzel: ‘A person who pursues useless and pointless railway enthusiast activities.’

<https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Gunzel> [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/nsw/sydneys-weary-transport-gladiators-retreat-to-their-corners--for-now-20180125-h0nzwj.html> [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-04-11/barry-ofarrell-sydney-trains-claim-doubtful/5371446> [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. <https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/sydney-metro-and-light-rail-will-allow-the-city-to-grow-for-next-40-years-20180209-p4yzth.html> [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
30. https://www.transport.nsw.gov.au/news-and-events/articles/joint-review-on-network-recovery-from-major-incidents [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
31. <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/pm-unveils-multi-billion-dollar-western-sydney-city-deal>;

<https://www.transport.nsw.gov.au/projects/current-projects/western-sydney-rail-needs-scoping-study> [↑](#endnote-ref-31)