**JOHN AUSTEN. Bill Shorten and Western Sydney Rail.**

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*Mr Shorten has the right intentions about Western Sydney Rail but he needs to read Pearls and Irritations more carefully!*

Federal Opposition Leader the Hon. Bill Shorten MP sought to make a splash about Western Sydney rail. Good on him! Despite being heckled by the State Government.

Undoubtedly his intentions are honourable. As are the Prime Minister’s.

Australia needs proper plans for Western Sydney transport – especially for rail transport.

But we don’t have such plans. We have rubbish which may have the worst motivations and will damage Western Sydney. Dished up by bureaucracies whose efforts are supine and spectacularly incompetent. In a word, a travesty. As would be confirmed by even the most cursory review, let alone a public inquiry such as John Menadue recently called for <https://johnmenadue.com/john-menadue-sydney-metro-a-forty-billion-dollar-deception/#comments>

Earlier this year, the Prime Minister chanced his hand at Western Sydney rail via his ‘city deal’ with the NSW Berejiklian Government.  That deal is a dud not least because of idiotic advice and unbelievably wrongheaded and dishonest State rail policies.

It proposed the wrong type of railways in the wrong places at outrageous cost and without business cases. All the while avoiding the most efficient, effective and economical option to connect rail to the new Badgerys Creek airport.

The only reason given – incredibly – was single deck trains can’t run on normal railway tracks. <https://johnmenadue.com/john-austen-more-on-the-sydney-transport-mess-the-western-sydney-dud-deal/>

Few in Western Sydney think the Prime Minister stupid enough to believe that reason or that the ‘deal’ will ever come to fruition. The saving grace was he didn’t commit big money – just to more studies. The $20bn headlines of praise in the Daily Telegraph disappeared quickly as the bullshit became evident. Disappointing almost all and infuriating many out West.

Mr Shorten has tried to avoid the worst of that fiasco. He picks some of the right places for rail – most notably the Prime Minister’s omission, the best option: linking Sydney Trains from Liverpool/Leppington to Badgery’s Creek.

Also on his list are a line from Macarthur to St Marys, from St Marys to the North West Metro near Schofields, and a ‘fast’ Metro from Parramatta to the CBD. He offers $6bn for the lot, a fair way short of the Minister for Urban Infrastructure’s latest cost estimate of $26bn.

Almost all good. At least Mr Shorten is taking an interest and hasn’t yet lowered himself to offensive drivel such as the Federal and State Coalition Governments’ ‘three cities’ of Sydney which seems purposed for keeping Westies away from harbourside mansion territory.

And any transport heckling Commonwealth representatives get from the Berejiklian Government will eventually be seen as a badge of honour.

Yet there are three ways to improve Bill Shorten’s offering.

The first is to articulate why the Commonwealth should be involved in cities – apart from saying cities are big etc. and we have some (of your) cash to spare. This might reference fundamental principles like obeying the law – the Constitution.

If Mr Shorten knows the answer to this, he is well on the way to also knowing what to do – rather than giving the appearance of thrashing around looking to buy votes – as most Federal leaders since Paul Keating have done out West.

The second way is to get a decent rail plan. A transport/land use or even just transport plan seems a bridge too far for all, but a rail plan might be do-able. It will need a public inquiry. Current ‘plans’ should be thrown out and their origins investigated lest stupidity and possibly malfeasance continue to infect major transport and settlement decisions in Sydney.

The third way is to not commit to projects unless they are supported by a decent plan and unless there is a published, critiqued, credible business case.

It would be desirable to support only those projects that have a positive business case. However, in my view politicians are entitled to propose things for other than economic or commercial grounds provided the public is told the truth – how far short of acceptable economic standards proposals fall and what the (other) motives for the proposals might be.

He should do these three things in that order – articulate a proper, sustainable Commonwealth role; get a decent rail plan; ensure there are published business cases – prior to committing any Commonwealth (your) money.

Mr Shorten’s offering, $6bn, is not a trivial sum. The matters he seeks involvement in – Western Sydney rail – will affect millions for generations.

As John Menadue’s Metro post noted, some very tangible issues must be addressed. For example, Sydney Metro tunnel dimensions must not be used for any new route least of all Parramatta-CBD as they would greatly reduce potential capacity, lead to poor services and further damage inner-Sydney transport.

Generally, any Prime Minister would do well to avoid eternal odium that will come from supporting the State Government’s peculiar Metro ideas – by insisting on proper tunnelling and a public inquiry for example.

Mr Shorten referred to a fast Metro – but the term is an oxymoron.

Commonwealth politicians would be well advised to immediately drop any reference to – and funding offer for – any Metro in Sydney. They do not understand the issues. Or risks.

Mr Shorten’s interest in Western Sydney and rail is to be welcomed, but he should take great care. As should the Prime Minister.

A start would be their reading posts in Pearls and Irritations.

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