

Making MetroLink a success

Submission to the NSW Government on the proposed North West Metro line by
Urban Taskforce Australia, 28 April 2008

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The **Urban Taskforce** is an industry organisation representing Australia's most prominent property developers and equity financiers. Our membership also includes key infrastructure providers, economists, planners, architects and lawyers involved in property development. We provide a forum for people involved in the development and planning of the urban environment to engage in constructive dialogue with both government and the community.

Executive Summary

This submission on the MetroLink project is made by the Urban Taskforce and is based on publicly available information provided by the NSW Government to date.

The Urban Taskforce strongly supports government investment in public transport infrastructure and is excited by the opportunities that such investment provides. The opportunity to create viable mixed-use centres connected by rapid mass transit is an exciting possibility for those suburbs to be serviced by the metro line.

The North West Metro is a \$12 billion investment into major infrastructure by the NSW State Government. Investment in infrastructure on the scale suggested will inspire confidence and further encourage private sector investment in urban renewal projects along the metro route.

The ability to attract and retain viable levels of patronage is essential to the success of this project and the Urban Taskforce believes that this does not only rely upon the quality of the infrastructure. Patronage of the metro system will also be influenced by the type of urban development that is encouraged in the vicinity of metro stations. We are of the firm belief that compact, mixed-use development encouraged and supported by flexible statutory State and local environment plans will be critical to the success of this transport project.

State and local planning authorities need to consult closely at this early stage of project development to ensure an integration of land use and transport planning. In this regard, the NSW Government and all those local governments that will be directly impacted upon by the proposed metro line must move to prepare significant changes to local plans, in tandem, with the metro line planning process.

As locations for new metro stations are identified, the existing local planning regulations need to be reviewed and amended to ensure that future local development:

- will provide the necessary population necessities to make the metro line viable; and
- broaden metropolitan objectives for active, compact and mixed -use centres.

When the government exhibits plans proposing new locations for train stations, it should also simultaneously exhibit revised local environment plans, providing for new compact, pedestrian-friendly, neighbourhoods (featuring homes, retail opportunities, restaurants/cafes and workplaces) around the new metro stations.

While it will be tempting to defer planning changes until after the metro line has been completed, such a deferral would (if past experience is a guide) mean that the changes never happen. This will weaken the patronage of the metro line when it eventually opens. The low patronage levels of the Liverpool-to-Parramatta Transit Way are a clear sign of what can occur when the urban planning is not adjusted in parallel with the transport planning.

1. Introduction

The Urban Taskforce is pleased to make this submission in response to the NSW Government's request for feedback on the MetroLink proposal as presented in the community information brochure *SydneyLink the Future of Sydney's transport*, dated March 2008. The comments provided in this document should be treated as preliminary, as they are based only on early, general community information provided by the NSW Government via their web-site (accessed, 7th April, 2008).

The Urban Taskforce supports the provision of increased public transport within the Sydney metropolitan region as a means of meeting transport and access deficiencies experienced in some areas of Sydney, particularly in the North West Sector, an area where growth has been planned and encouraged to meet our residential housing needs into the future.

In addition to the obvious transport benefits, the provision of world-class mass transit provides other opportunities. If we get the planning right, exciting opportunities are provided in the North West region of Sydney, particularly in the immediate vicinity of the proposed metro stations.

The Urban Taskforce considers the metro project as a vitally important opportunity to encourage transit-oriented development (TOD) and urges careful consideration of these early comments as a way of initiating meaningful dialogue on issues including:

- appropriate development patterns;
- potential for developer, community and government partnerships;
- the urgent need for state and local governmental co-ordination; and,
- development of State environmental planning policies and local environment plans that will support the viability of the metro line.

2. The project

The Urban Taskforce understands that this project essentially involves the provision of a fast, high frequency and high capacity rail service primarily meeting the transport needs of a growing population on the northwestern outskirts of Sydney.

When complete (2017), the North West Metro Line will finally link outer suburbs such as Rouse Hill and Kellyville to the Sydney CBD. If population predictions are correct, in addition to the existing residential development, approximately 140,000 new homes will be needed in the northwest growth area of Sydney to accommodate predicted population growth. It is argued that such growth in the residential sector cannot properly occur without the provision of vital transport infrastructure.

It is understood that the North West Metro Line will be an underground system that will be separate from the existing road and rail network. Travel time to the Sydney CBD from the most distant metro station is predicted to be 42 minutes.

The Urban Taskforce is of the view that if we get the planning "right", the benefits that this project brings are significant. Benefits to local economies and the ability to leverage development cannot be underestimated. The opportunity to create viable mixed-use centres connected by rapid mass transit will give rise to a dramatic change in Sydney's geography.

People are drawn to the many benefits provided by living in and around the Sydney metropolitan area. This has resulted in a steady and sustained population growth over a number of years and as identified in Sydney's Metropolitan Strategy, this growth is expected to continue for at least the next twenty-five years.

The North West Metro is a \$12 billion investment into major infrastructure by the NSW State Government and it is in everyone's interest to support its use and ultimate success. Experience with the Liverpool to Parramatta Bus Transit Way has shown that merely investing and building infrastructure does not in anyway guarantee acceptable levels of patronage. The NSW Government invested \$346 million into the Bus Transit Way project and since opening in February 2003, has been continually plagued with poor patronage.

It is considered essential that major investment into public transport, such as a metro system occur. However, the NSW Government must be conscious of the fact that the ability to attract and retain viable levels of patronage depends not only on the quality of the infrastructure provided, but what occurs in the vicinity of metro stations as that which will have the most dramatic influence on patronage and ultimately project success.

3. The benefits

Other than the obvious benefits to the travelling public, the MetroLink project provides one of the most significant ingredients for the creation of lively, interesting and functioning centres. Furthermore, provided we get the urban planning right, MetroLink may well provide a real alternative to the private motorcar as the primary form of transport for many trips. The potential for those living in suburban areas of growth to be connected to employment and other social opportunities through the use of rapid, high quality mass transit will be a first for NSW.

Investment in infrastructure on the scale suggested in this project will also inspire confidence for further investment into the centres serviced by the metro, which may well achieve some of the NSW Government's desire to encourage urban renewal.

4. Getting the urban planning right

If the NSW Government is to invest \$12 billion in major public transport infrastructure such as the North West Metro Line, the Urban Taskforce considers it essential that state and local council planning departments work together to ensure an integration of land use and transport planning. In the most basic terms, if we want people to use the metro, then we need to provide more than the metro. That is, actions need to be taken to encourage the usage of the metro. What occurs in the vicinity of the metro will have a measurable impact on usage. Conversely, the metro will influence development activity in its vicinity.

It is now well understood that "land use patterns have a significant influence on how well public transport services can be delivered and utilised".¹ By introducing more land use flexibility in the vicinity of new transport infrastructure, the infrastructure itself benefits in terms of patronage, and therefore viability. Development in the vicinity of transport nodes depends on private investment for its construction and in this regard, land use controls must recognise market realities if there is any likelihood of encouraging beneficial development.²

It's crucial that State environmental planning policies and local environment plans be amended to ensure that, at each new metro rail station, all the land uses that are necessary for a viable, attractive and desirable town centre are permissible. Fundamentally, plans need to be developed that reflects diversity.

Such a plan should include elements and/or policies that:

- promote diversity of use;

¹ Alford, G., 2006, Integrating Public Transport and Land use Planning – Perspectives from Victoria. *Australian Planner*, Vol. 43, No. 3, pp. 6-7.

² Freestone, R., 2008, Better Planning and Research for Mixed-Use Developments. *Australian Planner*, Vol. 45, No. 1, pp. 14-15.

- emphasise compactness;
- foster intensity;
- provide for accessibility; and,
- create functional linkages.³

However, diversity should not simply be seen as another way to say “density”. It is accepted that diversity seems to be encouraged by density, but successful places include a mix of uses, including jobs, retail and hospitality services, apartments and other attractions all coexisting within a definable location working together to make a centre attractive and successful.⁴

The importance of density and land use mix to the success of a centre must be emphasised. If the densities are not sufficiently high, train stations will not attract enough passengers.⁵ Moreover, without an appropriate mix of complementary land uses, people will be less inclined to use the metro line, as their ability to access a variety of destinations will be limited.⁶

Research consistently shows that density has a significant impact on the use of public transport. For instance, it was found that every 10-percent increase in population density was associated with about a 6-percent increase in boardings at train stations.⁷ Furthermore, most urban services cannot be provided unless there are a certain number of people that can make them viable.⁸

In addition to being compact, it is widely agreed that urban centres supported by mass transit should be diverse in their land-use compositions. Furthermore, mixed use can be an effective revitalisation tool. For example, a plan that provides the opportunity to build medium rise apartment blocks with non-residential uses at ground level, in the right location, supported by good quality mass transit is an attractive development opportunity for a developer. However, prescription of ground level uses must be avoided. For instance, if the uses permitted at ground level are found to not be viable at a certain point in time, tight regulation limiting the ground floor use may prevent a much-needed development from proceeding.

When seeking to determine the right land use mix, state and local planning authorities must consider the place and make place specific policies. Consideration must be given to those that will be relied upon to make the development happen including financiers and developers.⁹

The provision of transport increases accessibility and land value. It is sensible and necessary for new transport infrastructure to be leveraged to create or maximise development potential.¹⁰ Developers should be encouraged to make the most of this opportunity, not just for their return on investment, but for the wider benefits to the community from the creation of urban centres.

³ Glass, G., 2005, Honey I sunk the railway line. Do you want me to tidy up the rest of the town?. Paper presented at the Transit Oriented Development Conference, Fremantle, Western Australia 5-8 July 2005. [<http://www.patrec.org/conferences/TODJuly2005/papers/Glass.G.pdf>, accessed 7 April, 2008].

⁴ Newman, P., 2004, *Metropolitan Strategy*. Paper presented at the Sydney Futures Forum, Sydney 19 May, 2004.

⁵ Pushkarev and Zupan 1977, in Cervero, R., Ferrell, C., and Murphy, S. 2002, Transit-Oriented development and Joint Development in the United States: A Literature Review. Transit Cooperative Research Program. Research results digest. October 2002—Number 52 [http://onlinepubs.trb.org/Onlinepubs/tcrp/tcrp_rrd_52.pdf, accessed 7 April, 2008].

⁶ Cervero, R., Ferrell, C., and Murphy, S. 2002, Transit-Oriented development and Joint Development in the United States: A Literature Review. Transit Cooperative Research Program. Research results digest. October 2002—Number 52 [http://onlinepubs.trb.org/Onlinepubs/tcrp/tcrp_rrd_52.pdf, accessed 7 April, 2008].

⁷ Parsons, Brinckerhoff, Quade and Douglas et al. 1995 in Cervero, R., Ferrell, C., and Murphy, S. 2002, Transit-Oriented development and Joint Development in the United States: A Literature Review. Transit Cooperative Research Program. Research results digest. October 2002—Number 52 [http://onlinepubs.trb.org/Onlinepubs/tcrp/tcrp_rrd_52.pdf, accessed 7 April, 2008].

⁸ Newman, P., 2005., Transit Oriented Development: An Australian Overview. Paper presented at the Transit Oriented Development Conference, Fremantle, Western Australia 5-8 July 2005. [<http://www.patrec.org/conferences/TODJuly2005/papers/Newman%20paper%20REV.pdf>, accessed 7 April, 2008].

⁹ Freestone, R., 2008, Better Planning and Research for Mixed-Use Developments. *Australian Planner*, Vol. 45, No. 1, pp. 14-15.

¹⁰ Tivendale, K. & Keys, E., 2008, Transport....the catalyst for economic development – Melbourne Docklands. *Australian Planner*, Vol. 45, No. 1.

The extra dwelling made possible by new compact pedestrian-friendly neighbourhoods will help the State meet its dwelling targets under the metropolitan strategy.

A centre that is dense, compact, with a mix of uses, supported by high quality public transport such as the proposed metro system will also encourage some to travel less by the private motor car. In fact, some may even choose to do without a car altogether. However, it can't be assumed that building a better neighbourhood with a railway station at the core will encourage all people out for their cars. Private motorcars continue to be a necessity in Australia and we believe that it is unrealistic to think that just because you live in the city that you will not need or want a car. Planning needs to consider the car, roads and all other forms of transport and how to improve their integration. Sensible land use and transport planning allows for all modes of transport (cars, transit, walking and cycling) and plans must consider and integrate these.¹¹

Planning must carefully consider car parking requirements and not continue with "across the board" parking requirements. Good access to alternative forms of transport can mean a reduction in car parking, but we should not think that we could do away with car parking all together. Further, if people still want access to cars, the market will require that provision be made for car parking for a development package to be attractive to a prospective buyer. In this regard, planning new urban areas in the vicinity of mass transit should continue to provide car related infrastructure (parking and roads), but at a rate appropriate for the location.¹²

It is unlikely that any of the above would be new to those concerned with urban development and planning. However, achieving the above continues to be a challenge.

Developing vibrant mixed use centres supported by a train station requires a local government willing to be innovative in encouraging and responding to development opportunities.¹³

By nature, local government is closely tied to local issues, which on occasion makes it difficult for this level of government to look at the bigger, regional picture. If implementation is going to be left to local councils to do by themselves there will be much less achieved as projects are generally watered down by local reactions.¹⁴

In this regard, it is considered vital for the NSW Government and all those local governments that will be directly impacted upon by the proposed metro line to have a shared and clearly articulated vision for their area to establish the collective outcomes that are important to the whole community, which include residents, business and visitors.

We strongly urge the government to put in place a process to ensure the appropriate density and range of land uses will occur at the proposed metro station location. This will require amending local environment plans and/or a State environmental planning policy.

Essentially the NSW Government must ensure that their strategic aims for centres supporting, and supported by, the proposed metro line are implemented via a clear statutory planning mechanism that requires appropriate density and land use mix in appropriate locations. This could be achieved in consultation with local councils, but should not be left entirely to local government to implement as invariably, if it is just left to local government the regional perspectives are lost.¹⁵

¹¹ Mackay, M., 2005, Don't think Transit-oriented development, think transport-oriented development. Paper presented at the Transit Oriented Development Conference. Fremantle, Western Australia 5-8 July 2005. [<http://www.patrec.org/conferences/TODJuly2005/papers/Mackay.M.pdf>, accessed 7 April, 2008].

¹² Ker, I., 2005, Common Sense and Opportunism in Transit Oriented Development (or 'life is what happens to you while you're busy making other plans'). Paper presented at the Transit Oriented Development Conference. Fremantle, Western Australia 5-8 July 2005. [<http://www.patrec.org/conferences/TODJuly2005/papers/Ker.I.pdf>, accessed 7 April, 2008].

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Newman, P., 2005., Transit Oriented Development: An Australian Overview. Paper presented at the Transit Oriented Development Conference. Fremantle, Western Australia 5-8 July 2005. [<http://www.patrec.org/conferences/TODJuly2005/papers/Newman%20paper%20REV.pdf>, accessed 7 April, 2008].

¹⁵ Newman, P., 2006, Transport greenhouse gas and Australian Suburbs: What Planners can do. *Australian Planner*, Vol. 43, No. 2, pp. 6-7.

5. Conclusion

This submission is made on the basis of general community information provided in the very early stages of public consultation. For this reason, the Urban Taskforce has only provided general comment focusing on the need to carefully consider land use planning in the vicinity of the proposed metro stations.

The Urban Taskforce sees MetroLink as an exciting and innovative transport project that has the potential to dramatically improve the quality of life for the current and future residents of the northwestern suburbs of Sydney.

MetroLink represents a significant investment into transport infrastructure by the NSW Government and it is essential that careful consideration is given to the strategic and statutory planning systems that will be relied upon to support the implementation of the MetroLink project.

State and local planning authorities need to consult closely at this early stage of project development to ensure an integration of land use and transport planning. In this regard, the NSW Government and all those local governments that will be directly impacted upon by the proposed metro line must move to prepare significant changes to local plans, in tandem, with the metro line planning process.

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The Urban Taskforce looks forward to further opportunities to contribute to this project. In this regard, it is suggested that future public information include at least the following when available:

- project justification;
- mapping information identifying station location with overlays showing exiting land use, land use controls and proposed land use changes if required;
- comments and/or commitments made by local governments; and,
- means or processes used to ensure coordination between state and local government.

7. Further information

The Urban Taskforce is available to further discuss the issues outlined in this submission.

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