

EcoTransit – ACF 9 point transport plan – A sustainable alternative to expanding the M5 Motorway

Introduction

Twelve years have passed since the Carr Government's 1998 "Action for Transport 2010" blueprint, which promised a slew of new public transport and motorway infrastructure. While only a fraction of the promised rail and bus projects were delivered, the Roads and Traffic Authority built all of its roads, plus others that weren't in the plan. And yet road congestion costs have continued to escalate.

Sydney needs a better approach, but the RTA is pushing to duplicate the M5 motorway with a \$4.5 billion price tag that would prohibit any other significant infrastructure being simultaneously constructed. If their plan goes ahead the North-West and Parramatta–Epping rail links would have to be put off for a decade.

The time has come to dump the failed motorway experiment. Far better to invest in public transport solutions that are cheaper to build, reduce our fuel import bill and slash congestion for the benefit of those who really do have no option but to be on the road. And better public transport options will mean families can get rid of one of their cars, saving money that could be better used for other purposes.

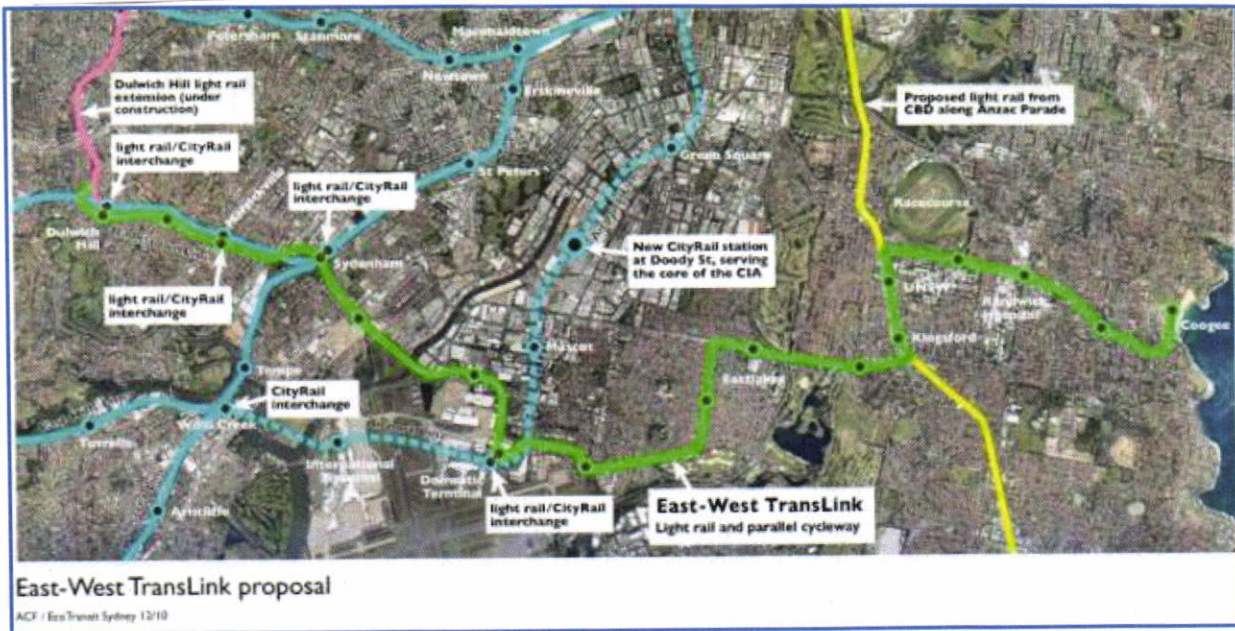
If, now, the Federal and State governments cave in to the RTA's M5 plan, the result will be monumental waste. Why? Well because private car use has been static in Sydney for five years. World oil production is sliding inexorably from a bumpy plateau into accelerating decline.

Until recently, the problem with building motorways has been that the extra road created led, initially, to faster trip times for motorists. This rapidly encouraged more drivers onto the road (typically causing a decline in public transport use). This 'induced traffic' quickly negated any benefits of the road expansion project and clogged local road systems that could never be widened to accommodate the increased traffic spilling onto them. The overall result was a continual fall in average network road speeds.

But the decline in world oil production and the resulting rapid rises in the price of oil and other alternative fuels have changed this situation. According to statistics released by the Commonwealth Bureau of Infrastructure Transport and Regional Economics ([Australian Transport Statistics – Yearbook 2009](#)), total passenger kilometres travelled by passenger cars have been static in Sydney since the rapid rise in world oil prices pre-dating the Global Financial Crisis, while rail and bus travel continued to grow strongly ([BITRE](#), p. 57). If the M5 expansion went ahead it might, realistically, be completed in six years time when it might, just possibly, trigger another round of counter-productive induced traffic growth, leading to more traffic congestion. More plausibly, steadily rising energy prices will already have squeezed traffic into a significant decline.

Why even consider widening the M5 and building another, massively expensive, 4-lane road tunnel, when the following nine-point alternative package of public transport projects and policies can slash traffic congestion on the M5 and elsewhere, improve freight handling efficiency and provide new cross-regional links between the western and south-western suburbs and the jobs in eastern Sydney, and do it quickly and for less than a third of the cost?

1. East-West TransLink



Centrepiece of the traffic reduction package is the [East-West TransLink](#) – a high-capacity double-track light rail service running from Dulwich Hill – using the spare space in the heavy rail corridor along the Bankstown line – to Sydenham station and then proceeding beside the Botany Goods line with stops at Qantas Jet Base and the Domestic Terminal before cutting through Eastlakes and along Gardeners Road to Anzac Parade, UNSW, Randwick Hospital and ideally, for good measure, Coogee Beach. The line would complement one running down Anzac Parade from the CBD, in the historic tram corridor.

A larger diagram illustrating an indicative route of the East-West TransLink proposal is available [here](#).

Commuters from the outer south-west would take the Macarthur/Campbelltown services, mostly going via Sydenham and change there for a fast TransLink tram service to the Randwick education and health precinct. Commuters from the inner south-west (that is, on services from Revesby inwards travelling via the Airport Line) would change to the TransLink at the Airport's Domestic Terminal station. Those coming from the Bankstown line would change to the light rail at Marrickville station (or Sydenham); those from the Illawarra and Cronulla line at Sydenham.

An integral cycleway would take the same route as the light rail, creating, for the first time, a fast, safe way to bypass the tangle of dangerous and busy roads east of Sydenham. The cycleway can be expected to remove, initially, a thousand vehicle movements a day as workers from Leichhardt and Marrickville LGAs abandon their cars for the daily commute.

The TransLink Trams would also function as a convenient way for air travellers coming from the Bankstown line axis to get to the domestic terminal (and, by changing there, the International Terminal) and for punters to reach Randwick Racecourse.

Traffic reduction potential: combined, 20,000 vehicle movements a day (vm/d).

Cost: \$500m, depending on variations.

2. New Airport Line station at Doody Street

Over 90 per cent of Central Industrial Area (CIA) workers travel by car. Although the Airport Line runs directly beneath the CIA and is perfectly located to ensure access for commuters in the areas

served by the M5 Motorway, access is frustrated by the fact that stations are located only at Mascot and Green Square at the southern and northern ends of the zone. Cost-cutting in the original Airport Line Project saw a potential station at Doody Street, right in the centre of the CIA, abandoned.

It's a testament to the ease of rail travel that in spite of this huge hole in rail's coverage, 6000 people – more than two-thirds of all the CIA's public transport commuters – use rail, rather than bus, to get to work.

A new Airport Line station at Doody Street, midway between Mascot and Green Square would cover the core of the area and take thousands of cars, daily, off the M5.

Potential for removing traffic: In combination with fare equalisation (see point 4) at least 6000 vm/d. Short-haul feeder bus services meeting peak period trains, combined with secure bike-parking facilities, would further boost this figure.

Cost: \$75m

3. Increase rail services from the south-west

Two types of services use the Macarthur/Campbelltown/ East Hills line: limited-stops trains running all the way from Macarthur/Campbelltown and all-stations trains originating at Revesby. Currently, operations are complicated, and services slowed down, by the need for the two types of service to share a critical two-track section of the line. However, with track quadruplication to Revesby within months of completion, this problem is close to solution. Faster, more frequent services will become possible, especially for those who live further out in the south-west. Importantly, additional fast services from the outer south-west will be able to run via Sydenham, reducing journey time by six or more minutes.

The government should be planning, now, to increase services from Macarthur/Campbelltown and to run more of these services via Sydenham.

When combined with fare equalisation on the Airport line, a new Airport line station covering the core of the CIA and the East-West TransLink, giving fast access to the Randwick education and health precinct from either Sydenham or Domestic Terminal stations, we can confidently expect a rapid take-up of additional seats on the Campbelltown/East Hills line, each of which will represent a car taken off the M5.

Potential for removing traffic: Counting only express services to Macarthur/Campbelltown at least 8000 vm/d, with excess capacity to add further CityRail services on both the inner and outer sections of the line, this can be increased as necessary.

Cost: Track quadruplication and station reconstruction already budgeted for. An additional four 8-car train sets would be required at a cost of \$120m. It may be possible to use refurbished older rolling stock, currently due for disposal, at a fraction of this price.

4. Equalise Airport Line fares

The Airport Line's four stations (two serve the airport terminals and two the Central Industrial Area) are privately owned and operated. A 'Station Access Fee' is charged and this is added to the standard CityRail fare prices. The Sydney Airport Corporation's submission to the March 2010 M5 Transport Corridor Study summarises the consequences in this way:

"People wanting to travel by train to or from Sydney Airport now face a price differential in excess of 400%. It is currently cheaper to travel from Central Station to distant regional destinations that

are up to 119 km away such as Kiama (single adult fare \$13.60) than it is to travel the mere 8km to Sydney Airport (single adult fare \$15.40). Similar extreme price differentials exist for other fare products such as weekly, quarterly or yearly tickets. Sydney Airport believes that the magnitude of the existing price discrimination against a person who wants to travel by train to or from Sydney Airport is discouraging them from doing so. Reforming the fare structure for users of the Airport Link stations is not an option considered in the Preliminary Overview Report but should be a high priority because it will help to immediately alleviate existing (and future) traffic congestion in the M5 Corridor and on other roads in the vicinity of Sydney Airport and Port Botany. Importantly, this could be achieved quickly without a long lead time for planning approval, financing or construction as it simply involves the more efficient utilisation of public transport infrastructure that already exists."

The privately-owned Airport Line stations should be immediately bought out and standard CityRail fares applied. A new Airport Line station at Doody Street, serving the heart of the Central Industrial Area, and the cross-regional flexibility provided by the East-West TransLink, will have the effect of multiplying the traffic-reduction benefits of this measure.

Potential for removing traffic: 5000 vm/d, more when combined with the effect of a new CityRail station at Doody Street covering the centre of the Central Industrial Area.

Cost: \$100m or less.

5. Build the South-West Rail link

The long-delayed 13 km South-West Rail Link from Glenfield to Leppington should be built without further delay. Without it, commuters from the new South-West Growth Centre will remain virtually without public transport access to jobs and services and most will be left with no option but to use the M5.

Potential for removing traffic movements: Initially, upwards of 3000 vm/d.

Cost: Recent experience with Perth's Mandurah line (a vastly larger and more complex project) and with other Australian and overseas examples suggest that this project, built to a high standard, should cost no more than \$300m.

6. Expand park-and-ride and bus-and-ride

A program of free commuter car parks designed to "soak off" M5 car traffic should be expedited. In particular, a new "last chance" car park for at least 1500 vehicles should be built adjacent to Kingsgrove station – the point where the M5 comes closest to the Campbelltown/East Hills line – with a new direct link to the platforms. This facility would remove cars from the M5 traffic stream kilometres before the M5E tunnel. It could only be entered from the eastbound lanes of the M5 and exited via the westbound lanes, thus preserving spaces for commuters from the vast swath of suburbs along the M5 which aren't well serviced by either the East Hills or Bankstown lines.

The facility would also act as a last-chance kiss-and-ride point for airport passengers and a drop-off and turn-back point for new express bus services using the M5.

Potential for removing traffic movements: Upwards of 3000 vm/d, more if express bus services are introduced.

Cost: Around \$70m.

7. Get serious about raiing containers from Port Botany

The current government has never pursued seriously its long-held target of transporting 40 per cent of containers out of Port Botany by rail. As noted recently in the [Sydney Morning Herald](#):

"For most of the decade, government policy has professed an aim to transport an increasing share of these goods by rail instead of road. Rail cuts noise and air pollution and, by taking trucks from the streets, makes them safer and less congested for regular drivers. The former transport minister, Craig Knowles, set a 40 per cent target for rail transport in 2004 that is still in place. When Knowles set the target, rail had a market share of 22 per cent. It has since slipped to 18 per cent."

Its failure is symbolised by the fact that three kilometres of constricting single track remains between Port Botany and Sydenham, even though it will cost a pittance to duplicate. This missing link could be completed in weeks, allowing hundreds of container truck movements to be taken off the M5 and local roads.

A prerequisite for the increased use of rail containerisation in urban areas is a legislative initiative that would mandate the use of [electric locomotives](#), or in the case of diesel locomotives, only those that conform to the advanced emission standards coming into effect in the [European Union](#) and the [USA](#).

Potential for removing traffic: If 40 per cent of container volume goes by rail 800 vm/d will be removed from the road network. Higher mode splits would be possible.

Cost: \$25m

8. Apply Cashback funds to public transport improvement

The M4/M5 motorway cashback rebate scheme is currently costing NSW over \$100m a year. Always controversial, the scheme was conceived by the Carr government as a means of placating voters when it discovered that it couldn't remove the tolls on the M4 and M5 motorways as it had promised before the 1995 NSW election. Instead of serving to [subsidise and entrench](#) car-use, the funds would be better deployed in funding long-term, sustainable public transport and active transport projects. It would be a way of [future-proofing](#) communities by [reducing their dependence](#) on a single, and increasingly expensive transport mode.

The funds involved are substantial. Based on figures obtained under freedom of information laws, the [Sydney Morning Herald reported](#) that the cost of the program will balloon to more than \$2.39 billion by the time it ends in 2023.

We strongly suggest that, as key infrastructure elements of this plan come on stream, Cashback be phased out over a three year period with the money saved being put to practical use in further improving public transport services along the M5 corridor. The purchase of four additional 8-car train sets to provide more peak-period train capacity, the construction of the Doody Street station in the CIA and construction of the Kingsgrove 'last chance' park-and-ride station are examples of discreet projects that could be funded by a staged annual reduction of the Cashback scheme.

Potential for removing traffic: depends on use to which the money saved is put. See traffic reduction potential for individual infrastructure projects outlined above.

Cost: Revenue neutral.

9. Reform third party insurance and other vehicle costs

Approximately 75 per cent of costs (excluding parking) for cars driven 15,000 km per annum are standing costs, that is, those are incurred even if the car isn't driven at all. The marginal cost of a

trip by car for these car owners is thus very low compared to using public transport, where the fare is paid at the time of the trip. This is a major financial disincentive to using public transport, even occasionally, once a car is purchased.

More of these costs need to be made to operate as running costs, as close as possible to trip costs, so that the choice between modes is not effectively settled with car purchase. (This would also have the effect of lowering car purchase costs with positive social equity implications.)

There are a number of candidates for such a switch, including the bulk of registration and driver licensing charges, but an easy start could be made with third-party insurance.

We suggest the state government abandon the current inefficient individualised scheme in favour of a universal scheme funded by a levy on fuel collected at the refinery gate. Under this scheme, annual vehicle costs would be reduced but trip costs (via fuel) increased, in an overall cost-neutral way, but redistributing costs from low-distance drivers to high-distance ones (who run the greater insurance risk anyway) and further tilting the field in favour of fuel-efficient vehicles, while ensuring that every driver is covered.

Traffic reduction potential: initially small, but applying across the state, increasing as other costs are moved from a standing basis to a trip basis via increased fuel costs. Strong symbolic importance. Potential social cost savings from simpler scheme.

Cost: Immediate cost saving from simplified, more efficient, administration.

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