

the light rail solution for the Botany Bay Region

Bay Light Express

ECO-TRANSIT SYDNEY



NEWS UPDATE, November 2000

The Bay Light Express proposal was launched on 11 October 2000 at Parliament House.

Successful Launch!

MS CLOVER MOORE, the Independent Member for Bligh, hosted the launch and outlined problems with inner city bus services—chiefly not enough capacity to meet the high demand.

MLC Lee Rhianon and Sutherland Shire Environment Centre Chairman Bob Walshe stressed the need to improve public transport generally and reintroduce light rail to Sydney.

Details of the Bay Light Plan were outlined by EcoTransit President Michelle Zeibots. A general discussion followed chaired by Phil Smith of SSEC, with 80 people participating.

Since its launch, the Bay Light plan has attracted enthusiastic media attention and interest from the community. Maps of the proposal were printed in both the *Daily Telegraph* and *Sydney Morning Herald*. The *Herald* printed the map twice, the second time to accompany letters sent in support of the plan. *Shire Life*—the local monthly paper delivered to 60,000 homes and businesses in the Sutherland Shire—devoted the front page of its October edition to the Bay Light Express.

Interest from community groups has been strong, with a series of presentations to resident groups and political party branches

scheduled for the new year.

The EcoTransit Sydney website continues to be a much visited source of information for people. Its busiest day saw just over 170 visitors to the site and it is currently averaging around 2,000 visits per month.

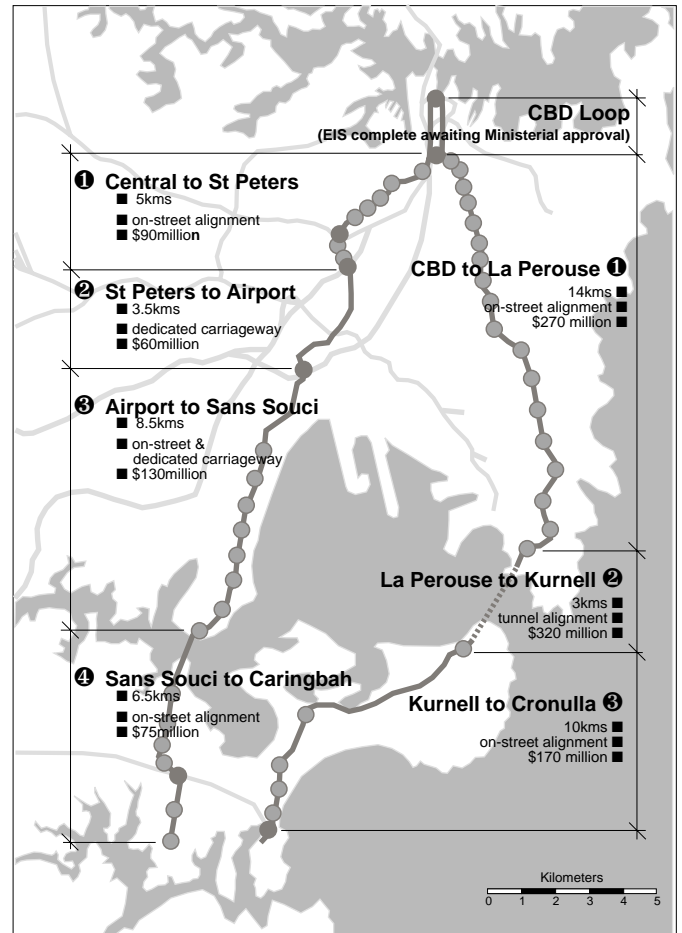
Local Government

The Bay Light passes through six local government areas—Sydney City, South Sydney, Marrickville, Rockdale, Randwick and Sutherland Shire. Information kits have been sent to all Councillors and key members of staff at South Sydney, Marrickville, Rockdale, Randwick and Sutherland Shire.

Presentations of the Bay Light Plan will be made at Sutherland Shire Council on 6 and 7 December 2000. Discussions with Marrickville will take place next year. Meetings with other Councils will follow.

State Government

EcoTransit representatives have met with staff from the South Sydney Development Corporation—a State Government unit formed to oversee development of medium density housing around Green Square at Alexandria and Zetland. The area could see an additional 30,000 inner city residents. While planning for building development is well advanced, little has been done on transport. The area is serviced by heavy rail now



▲ Estimates for Stage 3 of the Bay Light East—the tunnel section from La Perouse to Kurnell—could differ by more than 10 per cent owing to difficulties with site conditions.

that the Airport Rail Link has opened, however many other destinations are not easily accessed by public transport. The Bay Light has implications for this area as the western arm passes the Alexandria Canal. It might be possible to develop a cross city light rail link between the northern heads of the Bay Light West and Bay Light East which would pass through this highly dense area. As the new residents move into the neighbourhood the problem of grossly overcrowded bus services will result.

State Government MPs

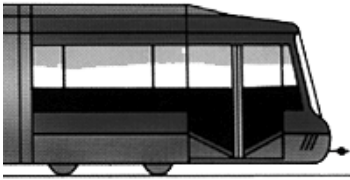
Meetings have taken place with State MPs. Attention has been focused on the Bay Light West route owing to recent discussions about the disputed M6 motorway. The Bay Light Express has been a welcome alternative to more tollway building, gaining support from residents in Rockdale and Miranda. There is a

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NSW Govt. politics and the Bay Light Express

This story was commissioned by *Off the Rails*, a rail trade publication, and will appear in its November 2000 issue. It was written by Michelle Zeibots and Gavin Gatenby.

LIGHT RAIL IS AN ESSENTIAL ELEMENT in the palette of public transport modes needed to service a modern city like Sydney. There are particular tasks that can only be met efficiently by trams because they have a higher capacity than buses. They're faster, less polluting, more comfortable and can be laid on for a fraction of the cost of heavy rail.

With so much going for it, why has light rail been slow to take off in Sydney? The answer has nothing to do with technical details and everything to do with politics. To understand the politics you first have to acknowledge the adversarial nature of government—if you want something, you have to fight for it against well-entrenched incumbents.

The Roads & Traffic Authority fights for the development of motorways and road expansion. The big budgets needed to construct these give the RTA a lot of power. With its smaller budget the State Transit Authority fights for the preservation and extension of its bus routes. Heavy rail is supported by a muddle of agencies that are currently being reunited. A schedule of new works aimed at improving rail safety have been flagged as high priorities for the new look rail champion when it finally emerges. Unfortunately, there is currently no government agency championing light rail.

In the absence of a bureaucratic champion it is surprising light rail has been able to make

the headway that it has. Much of this has come as a result of enthusiastic campaigning from community groups.

In the 1990s the Light Rail Association launched a plan for an extensive network of light rail lines throughout Sydney's inner suburbs. The plan found wide support, but without a government agency to assess and promote it the story ran out of puff. Unlike road lobby groups and the NRMA, the Light Rail Association did not have the resources to sustain a concerted community campaign. In the upshot, of the extensive network proposed, only the Central to Lillyfield line has been built—and this small section has demonstrated that the capabilities of the mode and its patronage are above predicted levels. The proposed CBD loop, still waiting for the go ahead from government, will act as an anchor point to a more extensive network, hopefully in the near future.

More recently EcoTransit Sydney has launched a campaign for the *Bay Light Express*. This proposal has won instant

support from the wider community and has been well received in the popular media. It has a conceptual elegance that makes it easy to sell. It represents a comprehensive solution to the growing transport crisis in Sydney's south by providing an alternative to cars on key routes and increased capacity where bus routes are grossly overcrowded. It feeds patronage into the existing heavy rail network at key interchanges and preserves parkland and heritage features that would be destroyed by motorways.

To firmly re-establish light rail from its tentative beginnings the city needs a breakthrough project. In the absence of a government agency dedicated to light rail development, EcoTransit Sydney is taking the Bay Light Express plan to the community. To the best of our ability we intend to workshop this plan with local residents and businesses, refining the details from their input. To do this, EcoTransit is seeking voluntary assistance and donations to help develop the proposal. We propose to release a plan for public comment in much the same way that an EIS is prepared and presented by a government agency. EcoTransit Sydney will collect the letters of support from the community for the project and present these to the NSW government. ■

From front page

commitment from George Thompson (Rockdale), Barry Collier (Miranda) and Ian McManus (Heathcote), to work with community groups like Sutherland Shire Environment Centre and EcoTransit Sydney, to look for viable alternatives to the M6 motorway.

State MP for Heathcote, Ian McManus said recommendations from the Department of Transport to the Minister's Office said the Bay Light Express would cost four times the construction costs estimated by us.

This is incorrect—another example of the anti-light rail ideology that prevails inside the Department. We have assumed the estimates are based on costings in a report on the viability of light rail in the Eastern suburbs along the Anzac Parade corridor. This report was commissioned as a condition of consent for the Eastern

Distributor. Not surprisingly, the report claimed light rail was not viable, putting cost estimates at \$30 million per kilometre.

To counter these claims, we will commission our own estimates from professionals with actual experience of light rail.

Interviews with Andrew Refshauge (Marrickville) and Cherie Burton (Kogarah) are being sought to discuss the Bay Light plan in addition to regional transport development issues affecting those districts.

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