

Unfinished business in the Sydenham to Bankstown Corridor



While the demise of the Sydenham to Bankstown Urban Renewal Strategy in July 2018 was a major community victory, more work needs to be done to save historic suburbs along the corridor from excessive development and poor transport outcomes.

This document articulates four important decisions that need to be made to complete 'unfinished business' in the Sydenham to Bankstown corridor.

The story so far

Between 2015 and 2018, the community mounted a major campaign against the NSW Government's Sydenham to Bankstown Urban Renewal Strategy.

This strategy would have forced some 100,000 new residents into the 13 km long corridor. It prescribed areas for new high-rise development, which would have replaced historic low-density suburbs and important employment and cultural areas with towers up to 35 storeys. Some new precincts were likely to be even denser than Hong Kong.

In July 2018, Planning Minister Anthony Roberts announced that the government, given the community backlash, would no longer pursue this strategy and he was instead allowing local councils to lead strategic planning in the corridor.

For instance, Mr Roberts' letter to Inner West Council said: "The State Government welcomes the opportunity for council to lead the planning for the relevant parts of the corridor as part of

the local environmental plan (LEP) review process as suggested in the council's submission."

Mr Roberts said he had also asked the Department of Planning to complete a 'high-level principles-based strategy' in collaboration with the councils to 'provide a framework for proposed development'.

In addition, across 2017 and 2018, the community had raised concerns about the significant noise, traffic, heritage, vibration and commuter travel impacts caused by the construction of the Sydenham to Bankstown Metro. This led to another major backdown in June 2018, when the government announced that plans to remove existing station platforms and buildings would be scrapped and proposed shutdown periods reduced.

What still needs to be done

While the above announcements are a welcome move, there's still a lot of unfinished business which needs to be addressed before we can truly say the Sydenham to Bankstown corridor has been saved.

You can find this list of unfinished business on the following pages. The implementation of this list will allow Inner West and Canterbury Bankstown councils to be unimpeded in their work to deliver locally-appropriate planning, and to ensure that hasty and inappropriate decisions are not made on the Metro before next year's State election campaign.

This list has been supported by the Save Dully and Save Marrickville Residents' Action Groups and the Sydenham to Bankstown Alliance (which represents a range of resident and community groups along the corridor).

1

Need to remove former urban renewal strategy from Department of Planning website

It is alarming that the Sydenham to Bankstown Urban Renewal strategy remains on the Department's website, with no reference to the government's decision to scrap the strategy. This could represent a view from the planning bureaucracy that the strategy could be revived at a future time, or that in fact the strategy is still a valid and live document.

Under the 'Planning for Local Communities' section of the website, a number of pages continue to be devoted to explaining the strategy, with one page stating that a 'final strategy' will be released in 2018. Separately, under the online Policies and Plans engagement portal the strategy remains listed as being 'Under Consideration'.

The first website location should be deleted entirely and information on the strategy at the second website location should be kept, but the reference to 'Under Consideration' should be changed to 'Refused'.

In addition, documents which are currently available on the website need to be properly archived before being removed. This will allow the community to access these documents upon request in the future.

2

Remove Sydenham to Bankstown as major urban renewal corridor in strategic plans

It is of concern that the Sydenham to Bankstown Corridor continues to be referenced as a major urban renewal corridor in NSW Government strategic planning documents.

For instance, the 2014 Metropolitan Strategy states that the government will undertake detailed structure planning around Sydenham to Bankstown Stations and look to increase housing supply in these areas.¹ The main strategy map shows Sydenham to Bankstown as an "urban renewal corridor".

The concept of an urban renewal corridor from Sydenham to Bankstown was not included in a draft Metropolitan Strategy exhibited in 2013, but then without consultation was added to the final Metropolitan Strategy in 2014.

In addition, the Greater Sydney Commission's Eastern City District Plan also references the fact that the NSW Department of Planning will be leading planning in the corridor. A map in the District Plan shows large circles around Marrickville, Dulwich Hill and Sydenham and the words 'transit-oriented development'.² While the community did have an opportunity to comment on these plans in draft form, and submissions were made on the corridor issue, the community's primary focus at the time was seeking to reject the urban renewal strategy.

There are a number of problems with including Sydenham to Bankstown as an urban renewal corridor in the Metropolitan Strategy and the Eastern City District Plan. These are:

- Given the documents refer to the NSW Government as leading planning in the corridor, and this is no longer the case, they are largely redundant and inaccurate – causing confusion for planning in the corridor.

- The designation of Sydenham to Bankstown as a major urban renewal corridor is a bad decision which fails to appreciate the extraordinary difficulty of seeking to impose State significant urban renewal on historic suburbs. The fact that the NSW Government scrapped its urban renewal strategy underlines this point.
- The government could use the ongoing urban renewal designation to force the councils to drive overdevelopment in corridor suburbs and also to influence the Department's proposed 'high-level principles' document.
- The documents could be used by developers to support spot rezoning proposals, at the same time as the councils are updating their LEPs. The council should be allowed to undertake its LEP work without having its resources diverted to investigating developer-led rezoning proposals.

In short, the strategic documents urgently need to be amended to remove the concept of the Sydenham to Bankstown Corridor as an urban renewal zone and to refer to councils instead taking the lead on planning.

¹ See page 74 at https://gsc-public-1.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2014_12_a_plan_for_growing_sydney.pdf

² See Page 21 at https://gsc-public-1.s3-ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/eastern-district-plan-0618_0.pdf

3

Stop any developer-led rezoning reviews in corridor suburbs which rely on strategic plans

Since 2012, developers have had the right to seek to overturn council refusals, or non-decisions, on rezonings proposed by these developers.

Given that the councils have been given the strategic planning lead in the corridor and will be preparing their LEPs in an accelerated timeframe, it is not appropriate for the NSW Government to support any developer-led rezoning reviews in the suburbs along the corridor.

If the NSW Government does not make this decision, there will be nothing stopping a large developer from launching a major proposal to rezone a site for high-density development, before the work of Inner West and Canterbury-Bankstown Council is complete.



Don't sign the contract for the Metro

While the NSW Government in June 2018 made changes to reduce the construction impacts of the Metro line from Sydenham to Bankstown, this doesn't disguise the fact that the Metro is a fundamentally bad idea.

There are significant ongoing problems with the Sydenham to Bankstown Metro, including that:

- The NSW Government will be wasting many billions of dollars to replace one railway line with another railway line, while many under-served parts of Sydney are crying out for transport.
- Former executives of State Rail and Rail Corp have stated that the Metro is not the congestion buster it is claimed to be, but more alarmingly could in fact lead to increased unreliability and worse commuter outcomes right across Sydney's train network.
- Commuters will still be forced to endure significant disruption while the line is shutdown to build the Metro, including a final shutdown of up to six months, Christmas holiday shutdowns of two weeks a year and additional weekend shutdowns.

- Once the Metro is operational, Bankstown line commuters will get less access to key travel destinations in the trip into the CBD, and the CBD itself. Commuters will also lose the ability to travel directly to Lidcombe to change for Western Line and Sydney Olympic Park services.
- As long as the Metro remains in place, there is likely to be speculative development pressure on the corridor.

In April 2018, the NSW Opposition stated it would accelerate the construction of a new metro rail line between Western Sydney and the CBD, rather than proceed with the conversion of the Sydenham to Bankstown rail line to a Metro.

"Ditching the wasteful conversion of the existing 13-kilometre section of rail track to metro lines between Sydenham and Bankstown would free up billions of dollars and allow a Labor government to divert funding to deliver the Metro West years earlier than the Liberals," former Opposition Leader Luke Foley said at the time.

Given the concerns about the Metro, and the position of the Opposition, it is not appropriate for a potential outgoing government to bind a potential incoming government to the Metro so close to the election. Community groups are calling for the government to not sign construction or operational contracts for the Metro before the State election in March 2019.

Find out more

www.savedully.com

www.savemarrickville.com.au

www.sydbankalliance.com

