

Committee for North Sydney

info@committeefornorthsydney.org.au

North
Sydney
city
centre

A
place
for
people

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What, exactly, is Sydney Metro?

The public initially understood Sydney Metro to be a benign state transport infrastructure agency.

It is described on its website as:

Sydney Metro is an operating agency owned by the NSW Government and is part of the NSW Transport cluster, operating similar to Sydney Trains.

When the NSW Government through the Sydney Metro Delivery Office began telling community meetings about what was proposed for Crows Nest, this is how it looked.

The Government has even posted that image on the hoardings around the Crows Nest Metro Station site, a pleasant 4-5 storey building well set back with the blue sky of Crows Nest preserving the established amenity.



BUT SYDNEY METRO HAS SUDDENLY BECOME A MASSIVE PROPERTY DEVELOPER

Sydney Metro is no longer 'similar to Sydney Trains'. This is now what the Government as Sydney Metro wants to do to Crows Nest.



And this is what Sydney Metro wants for the North Sydney Victoria Cross Station, a massive building filling up the very heart of the CBD, more massive than anything ever built in North Sydney.

How was the Sydney Metro Delivery Office, an operating transport agency, completely changed?

By the Transport Administration Amendment (Sydney Metro) Act 2018 in which the Government turned it into a developer to operate commercially with *objectives*:

- to deliver safe and reliable metro passenger services in an efficient, effective and financially responsible manner,
- to facilitate and carry out the orderly and efficient development of land in the locality of metro stations,
- to be a successful business and, to that end:
- to operate at least as efficiently as any comparable business, and
- to maximise the net worth of the State's investment in the metro.

And here are the *functions* conferred on Sydney Metro by the Act for it to achieve those commercial objectives:

- design, construct, develop and operate a metro...
- assist the relevant planning and transport authorities in the preparation of strategic and other plans for the development of land in the locality of metro stations,
- conduct any business (whether or not related to its functions) that it considers will further its objectives,
- operate other transport services, including bus services, whether or not in connection with its metro passenger services,
- build, modify, hold, manage, maintain, finance and establish transport assets,
- acquire, build, modify, hold, manage, maintain, finance and establish metro assets,
- acquire, build, modify, manage, maintain and establish transport assets... owned by another public transport agency...
- acquire any land, and develop, sell, lease or otherwise dispose of any of its land.

That is, almost anything, including taking over any existing state transport agency! Sydney Metro is under the ultimate control and direction of the Minister for Transport, but it is clear from the Act that it is intended to operate independently. The Chair of the Board is in charge and the CEO is solely accountable to the Board.

You can almost hear what the Minister will say when asked about the priorities and actions of Sydney Metro:

'They're a commercial entity, and I must let them run as a business.'

And what does Sydney Metro say?

- It intends to maximise returns from the land compulsorily acquired, including sites in Crows Nest and in North Sydney – the latter being significantly bigger than needed for the construction and operation of the station.
- It says on its website that it will 'help grow the state's economy' and 'help create vibrant places and communities'. Translated, that actually means 'help grow the urban development economy' and 'help maximise office and residential densities at the stations'.
- It says that like many transport organisations around the world it must operate to ensure new rail systems can be 'integrated with the communities and places around them'.

But what does 'integration' mean to Sydney Metro and what does it seem to be ignoring?

The other *objectives* for Sydney Metro in the Act are

- to exhibit a sense of social responsibility by having regard to the interests of the community in which it operates,
- where its activities affect the environment, to conduct its operations in compliance with the principles of ecologically sustainable development contained in section 6 (2) of the Protection of the Environment Administration Act 1991.

However these admirable objectives are being lost in Sydney Metro's pursuit of its concept of the magic term 'Integration' which it deploys a lot, to give it powers and privileges other agencies do not have.

'**Integrated**' is used to suggest that the station and the over station development (private office and apartment towers) must be designed at the same time as one project.

This has remarkable benefits for Sydney Metro now that the objective of *developing land in the locality of metro stations* has precedence over *exhibiting a sense of social responsibility*.

'Integrated' is used to mean

- the private office and apartment towers can be passed off as state significant development, avoiding the normal planning assessment and approval processes for this kind of development;
- approval and commitment of the private office and apartment towers becomes super urgent – there's no time for consultation, no time to 'integrate with the communities and places around them', not enough time even to submit a development application before asking tenderers to spend major amounts on designing and pitching their proposals;
- the proposals are subject to commercial contracts and cannot be changed without generating massive compensation claims;
- everything is commercial in confidence – it might be state significant development, 'integrated' with a public facility on public land but, sorry, we'd like to but we can't tell you what it is, who is bidding, why it takes this form, what impacts it will have, or how it contributes to (or impairs) the surroundings.

In this way Sydney Metro seems to want to lock in the private office and apartment towers, even though we have been told that no construction of over station development will begin before 2020 (and does not need to be completed before the trains arrive in 2024).

What is being attempted is an unprecedented assault by the executive government on some of the community's most significant public places.

And the vehicle for this is Sydney Metro.....so that is what Sydney Metro is!