

Independent Planning Commission
St Leonards South Residential Precinct Planning Proposal
Public Meeting – Monday 20 May 2019
Subsequent Submission – 27 May 2019

SUMMARY

Development decisions for St Leonards South cannot be made with confidence at this time and accordingly should be delayed.

The additional transport capacity provided by the Sydney Metro is the rationale for the extra development in the area. However, anomalies in traffic modelling demonstrate that actual peak hour residual capacity available at both St Leonards and Crows Nest stations cannot be known with sufficient certainty for such important decision making prior to the Metro opening.

Development decisions should accordingly be delayed for St Leonards South until the latter 2020s when the Metro has been operating for a number of years.

As development of the St Leonards South site has so many inter-related issues with the broader redevelopment of St Leonards–Crows Nest, responsibility for planning for the site should be assumed by the Minister.

ISSUE:

It is unclear whether the current proposals to massively increase development in the St Leonards – Crows Nest area can be accommodated by the current road network and enhanced (T1 + Metro) rail network:

The Cardno study reveals that the road network will not be able to handle **existing** projected capacity by 2030 (page 87), with the Pacific Highway at St Leonards station being a key blockage (per Figures 4-3 to 4-5).

Sydney’s Rail Future notes that by 2031 demand will exceed total capacity on large sections of the existing T1 North Shore line between Chatswood and Wynyard (first row in table 1-3 on p.11).

With the Highway and T1 line projected to be exceeding capacity limits on an “as is” basis, only the Sydney Metro could make the massive planning proposals feasible.

The primary purpose of the Sydney Metro has been to provide a link from the north west to the city. Whether the Metro can really accommodate significant additional demand at St Leonards - Crows Nest cannot be known with any certainty at this time.

ISSUE

There are apparent anomalies in the Cardno traffic modelling that warrant further investigation to inform future decision making – whether by the IPC or the Minister.

The challenges of trying to reasonably and robustly forecast demand and available residual capacity for St Leonards-Crows Nest are revealed by some apparent anomalies in Cardno projected data and which warrant further investigation:

- An assumed approximate 35% increase in cars in the AM peak from the low (S0) to high (S3) scenarios (page 87) – yet the high scenario (S3) traffic modelling (page 86) only shows up to a 5% to 7% increase in traffic heading south from St Leonards station along the Pacific Highway and Falcon Street
- The high (S3) scenario has a 35,000 increase in residents but only a 9,000 increase in departing trips by trains in the morning peak (page 90)
- The high (S3) scenario will involve nearly 30% of the stated capacity on two rail lines being used solely for trips from St Leonards / Crows Nest (pages 89 and 90).
- The modelling also indicates that the percentage of peak hour trips will fall markedly as the population grows. This is counter-intuitive as the supposed attraction of the area is its proximity to employment areas in the Sydney CBD, North Sydney and Chatswood.

These need to be addressed before any further decisions are made regarding St Leonards-Crows Nest, including St Leonards South.

ISSUE

The traffic projections would be improved by also including probability scenarios eg P10, P50 and P90 for each population scenario.

Such scenarios are standard practice when forecasting traffic demand, due to the uncertainty that arises in making traffic projections. They must be prepared to inform any future decision making.

ISSUE

When it is proposed to add up to 35,000 people in an area around 1 kilometre square and encourage billions in private investment, it must be known with certainty that the public transport and road network can support such extreme density.

This can only be done by waiting until the second stage of the Metro is open so that peak hour residual capacity available at St Leonards-Crows Nest stations can be known with certainty.

Projections may be able to be improved and made more robust – but only up to a point.

The key issue is what ***residual am peak hour capacity*** will be available for St Leonards–Crows Nest residents, with north west and north shore commuters already being on the trains.

The Sydney Metro can be expected to be very popular with north west and north shore commuters due to its speed, shorter distance to the city and new station locations.

We will only know what actual passenger capacity is available at St Leonards-Crows Nest once the Metro has been opened and operating for at least a few years.

Where there is uncertainty about the capacity of infrastructure to meet demand, then it is crucial that development is phased until better and more reliable information can be gathered. Such crucial and irreversible decisions need the best possible data to inform them.

Consideration of any further development in this area should wait until after the opening of the Metro. Robust planning decisions can only be made with reliable transport data, as sound planning and transport decisions are intertwined.

Because once approved, the construction of additional residences cannot be undone – especially if the transport projections are not right and transport capacity can't meet the additional demand.

If the projections are wrong, then the result is a planning and residential nightmare.

And the experience at Green Park and Mascot has been that high density does cause significantly increased traffic and rail congestion – especially in the peak.

In the meantime, the area is making a significant contribution to providing additional dwellings through the at least three ultra-high rises approved for the area – all before there is any additional rail passenger capacity and without augmentation of the road network.

Indeed, all the ultra-high rise approved and under construction at St Leonards may well have crowded out the need for additional residential development at St Leonards South for many, many years.

ISSUE

Gridlocking the Pacific Highway around Royal North Shore cannot be allowed – effective emergency ambulance access must be maintained at all times of the day.

It would be ridiculous if even short emergency journeys (say, within 8 kms) required patients to be transported by helicopter because of traffic gridlock on the Pacific Highway.

St Leonards South cannot be considered until there is a complete and robust transport plan for St Leonards-Crows Nest, including one to significantly increase the capacity of the roads.

ISSUE

Further traffic demand that has not been modelled may also arise for the Pacific Highway, depending on the tolling arrangements for the Western Harbour Tunnel and BeachesLink.

Congestion on the Pacific Highway between Artarmon and North Sydney would be even worse if tolls are effectively applied to the Gore Hill and Warringah freeways, due to the new motorways providing additional road capacity.

Tolls on the two freeways and large development in this area are mutually exclusive.

ISSUE

Development decisions cannot be made for St Leonards South without knowing what development is planned for the strip of land between the Pacific Highway and St Leonards South.

The heights of the buildings in this strip are crucial in determining the overshadowing impact on South St Leonards. Accordingly, the whole area bounded by the Pacific Highway, rail line, River Road and Greenwich Road must be considered as one integrated site.

ISSUE

As the location of additional office blocks has not been identified and all approved and proposed development has been nearly all residential, it is not clear how the major employment targets for the area will be met.

Existing employment building, such as Leightons and the IBM building, have been demolished or are planned to be demolished.

The fewer jobs in the area, the fewer people getting off the trains at St Leonards and Crows Nest and the fewer spots available on the trains for residents to get on.

This mitigates towards having a reduced increase in new residences.

ISSUE

Because of uncertainty about travel patterns and to allow for shifts in patterns over time between T1 and Metro, residential development should occur between the two stations.

This will enable residents to readily shift train lines depending on available capacity.

ISSUE

Where is the equivalent of Manhattan's Central Park for St Leonards-Crows Nest?

If the whole St Leonards-Crows Nest precinct is to have up to 50,000 total residents in an area about one kilometre square, this will give it a population greater than Manhattan Island in New York (which has around 28,000 people per square kilometre).

The area needs significant additional active and passive recreation parks, to match the significant increase in population planned.

St Leonards South has no worthwhile contribution to parks to match the additional population and density.

ISSUE

The additional population in St Leonards South will support a number of amateur sporting teams, which will need new home grounds.

Demand for sporting facilities in the Lower North Shore is extremely high, with all playing fields under pressure.

The additional population in South St Leonards (and the broader St Leonards-Crows Nest area) requires the provision of new & additional sporting facilities (eg ovals, netball / basketball / tennis courts and swimming pools).

It would be terrible if families from the area were banned from membership of existing teams for membership in order to manage demand and use of existing facilities.

Alternatively, consideration should be given a requirement that residents in St Leonards South can only join sporting teams in Lane Cove Council. If Council has made the problem, it should have the responsibility to fix it.