

On 5 March 2007 "10,000 Friends of Greater Sydney" (10,000 FROGS) launched the Sydney Integrated Transport Strategy (SITS), offered as "the alternative metro strategy for Sydney".

The claim is that SITS is a more effective way of spending public money on Sydney's transport than the way the State Government is planning to spend it under its current metro strategy, although it would cost no more.

SITS has been developed by transport planner Chris Stapleton..

In a pre-election week when the Opposition declined to release an integrated transport policy on the grounds that "transport was not number one priority", followed a day later by Sydney's transport systems grinding to a halt for four hours starting in the evening peak because of a mechanical failure of a train on the Harbour Bridge, the amount that can be accomplished by a single highly motivated person was highlighted, (as was pointed out in last month's Cityscape editorial).

Part of the reason why the transport worked so well during the Olympic .Games – for which Chris Stapleton designed the bus system – was, I believe, not just the excellent planning but the resources and powers given to ORTA - the Olympic Roads and Transport Authority - to allow the plans to be implemented. But that would form part of the implementation plan once the strategy was accepted – it is a "how to do it" issue, not a "what to do".one. (ORTA was disbanded after the Olympics were over and the city's transport returned to its usual state.)

The following table lists the essential transport elements of the current Metro Strategy, and compares these with the elements of SITS.

It can be seen that the Metro Strategy is a mixture of infrastructure projects already well advanced (eg the Clearways program) and the vaguely aspirational (eg "improve transport decision-making") and hardly deserves being called a strategy. An Action Plan is notably missing – there is no accountability. By implication the use of most existing transport services and infrastructure, other than those mentioned below, continues more or less as now. More of the same will bring about a future we will all recognize.

The Metro Strategy cannot be criticized for doing the wrong things (although no alternatives are analysed), but it can be criticised for not doing the right things with sufficient urgency.

Metro Strategy	SITS
<i>Improve transport between Sydney's centres</i> Build the NW-SW Rail Link Implement "Unsworth" strategic bus routes	<i>MetroWeb</i> – a new network of buses, using the same concept as the Sydney 2000 Olympic bus system, to be delivered within 10 years
<i>Improve the existing transport system</i> Complete Rail Clearways program Improve operational management Roll out TCard	<i>A mix of rail types – including Metro rail, separated from other lines by a Clearways program, express rail and freight rail.</i> The new metro system would operate within 15 km of the CBD and comprises six existing and 14 new lines, and in the first ten years of SITS would involve two new lines, conversion of the Airport Rail Line to Metro operation, and two new light rail lines. The existing double deckers would supply Express Rail services for all stations beyond 15 km from the CBD to reduce travel time below road time. Separate express lines
<i>Influence travel choices to encourage more sustainable transport</i> Improve walking & cycling conditions Implement metropolitan parking policy Continue Travelsmart program & similar	
<i>Improve transport decision-making: planning, evaluation and funding</i>	
<i>Ensure sufficient port capacity is available to serve Sydney</i>	

Metro Strategy	SITS
Expand Port Botany Transfer some import functions from Port Jackson to to Newcastle or Wollongong Maximise rail share of port-related freight	would be run independently from the Metro lines. Freight Rail would be provided with 24-hour access to Sydney: this is aligned to current rail freight plans for the City.
<i>Improve efficiency of all types of freight movement in Sydney</i> Develop strategies for freight types other than Port Botany containers	<i>An integral uncongested road network.</i> Includes six new routes, with free flow maintained all day through a 10 cents per km road congestion charge – in first 10 years, applied to congested sections of the M4, M5, F3.
<i>Connect the regions and economic gateways within the Metropolitan Region</i> Investigate capacity of Sydney Road Network to cater for forecast road freight Enhance rail freight movement between Sydney and Newcastle	<i>Enhanced ferries, cycleways and pedestrian ways</i> (no detail provided, but by implication all three modes are to encourage a healthier lifestyle).
Plan for higher rail freight mode share	<i>Identification of redevelopment opportunities in Sydney CBD.</i>
<i>Minimize the adverse impacts of freight</i> Protect potential rail freight corridors in W Sydney “Develop strategies” to reduce air impact of road freight “Develop strategies” to reduce noise impact of rail freight Increase amount of freight carried by rail	

Sources: Metro Strategy: Dec 05 brochure from Department of Planning ; SITS : March 07 hand-out from 10,000 Friends of Greater Sydney

Unless a change of government direction occurs quickly, it is unlikely that the past investment sunk in the infrastructure projects, including in the planning for those still to come (like the NW Rail Link) will be abandoned so it is not realistic to include such money in the costs that SITS offers an alternative way of deploying.

It is important for these strategic issues to be resolved speedily, for time is not on our side.

I recognize that there is more to SITS than could be described in the 10,000 FROGS brochure – there are ideas about how the development of the system could be funded through the income stream generated from the congestion charge, and allocation of all of Sydney’s growth to specific areas, for instance.

Mr Stapleton did not have access to those analytical tools enjoyed by those who developed the Metro Strategy, and some of the quantitative assertions may be challengable. Is it too much to hope that some serious modelling will be devoted to this “alternative metro strategy” in the near future, instead of us being asked to accept the Metro Strategy because it is the only strategy there is?

This applies particularly to the final diagram in the SITS brochure, showing the cumulative impact of all the SITS elements on CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. This is certainly something that should be compared with a (non-existent) equivalent for the Metro Strategy, in view of current concerns about climate change and the imminence of peak oil, with the basis of the calculation transparent.

Indeed, the Metro Strategy does not recognize the existence of the peak oil risk, and arguably the drive for regionalisation implicit in “The City of Cities” would be strengthened if it did. SITS, like much of the Metro Strategy, tries to uphold the productivity of “the golden arc” of global Sydney and does not recognise major non-CBD regional centres other than Parramatta.

It may be that when the effects of peak oil start to bite within a very few years, the lack of action to implement any transport strategy will jeopardise Sydney's status as a global city. This should be considered.