



Response to NSW Government Rhodes development plan - excessive density without supporting infrastructure

Summary

This submission was in response to the NSW Government's call for submissions to their revised plan for Rhodes. For details of that plan, go to: <https://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/Plans-for-your-area/Priority-Growth-Areas-and-Precincts/Rhodes>

The NSW government plan for Rhodes offers some interesting and useful features for the community. However, contrary to the government's mantra of building infrastructure, the plan falls dramatically short in the areas of transport, schools, hospital services and sporting facilities. The enormous population proposed for Rhodes cannot be supported. Much more space is required for other services.

Background

From the Greater Sydney Commission documents, we know that the NSW Government now sees the future of Rhodes as one of [four central business districts](#)ⁱ across the City of Sydney, eastern suburbs, Inner West and Bayside – larger than Burwood, Campsie, Marrickville or Bondi Junction, and comparable to Randwick and Kogarah. This will create major problems, given that Rhodes is a peninsula with highly constrained access in and out.

In December, the Department of Planning & Environment released a revised plan for development which proposes a further 4,200 dwellings on the western and eastern sides of Rhodes over the next 10 years. The plan includes 600 new dwellings west of Rhodes Station, with an additional six storeys each to three residential towers⁽²⁾ currently under negotiation and 3,600 new dwellings in East Rhodes.

Key concerns

Consequently, this plan will increase the population density of Rhodes by some 75%. There are already over 12,000ⁱⁱ people living in the one square kilometre that comprises the suburb. The Government's plan will add another 10,000 people (approximately), lifting density to almost 22,000 people per sq km, some 30% more than Hong Kong Island with 16,500 people per sq km.

The people in Rhodes to the east of the railway line did not ask for this. Under this plan the NSW government is overriding the right of the local community and Council to make planning decisions in their own area. The NSW Government has given developers a green light to develop their own masterplans with no limitations on maximum height or floor space ratio. Our community will be left to deal with overcrowded trains, roads, schools and hospitals.

Public submissions now ask residents and others to respond to the generality of the government's initial design, without any knowledge of the masterplans or actual developments to be built. They are unable to respond about the process that effectively locks the community and the Council out of the planning process.

The decision to add another 600 dwellings to three towers which had recently received development approvals in West Rhodes makes a mockery of the master plan – the DAs were already above the

master plan, but this is ridiculous. In particular, it is not transparent, nor has the government offered any reason for adding these dwellings, which push the total dwellings number to 4200. As we understand it, the previous total of 3600 dwellings in Rhodes East was set by RMS based on transport limitations, which do not seem to have changed. It just looks like a giveaway to the developer.

Rail infrastructure

It must be remembered that rail infrastructure through the Rhodes Station is used not only by Rhodes residents, but also by residents of Wentworth Point and Concord West. In the same period that the government plans for the population of Rhodes to increase by 75%, it plans for Wentworth Point to increase by nearly 150%ⁱⁱⁱ. Taken together, the population increase planned by the government for Rhodes and Wentworth point will total over 20,000 people, in addition to the 2016 population.

It is of great concern that the NSW government has committed to an enormous expansion of Rhodes and Wentworth point without having a similarly advanced agenda for transport infrastructure. The government's documentation states that:

“the Traffic and Transport Assessment has suggested a range of options for consideration, including:

- timetable adjustments...
- Quadruplication of the Northern Line through Rhodes and north over the Parramatta River rail bridge...
- Mass transit introduction by providing a new station and service at Rhodes or by allowing existing passengers to interchange and connect through to the Sydney or Parramatta and therefore alleviating congestion on the Northern Line...^{iv}

The report then supplements these options by stating additional possible upgrade measures for Rhodes Station itself, which are clearly necessary and well overdue.

It is unfortunate that while rail transport at Rhodes is now effectively at full capacity (not just resident experience, but also clearly stated on the same page of the same government document) none of the “suggestions” above appear to have progressed beyond the whiteboard stage, been identified as a project, or been given a budget. That is say, the government has a strategy for making Rhodes the most densely packed suburb in Australia, but it has no strategy to provide transport services which are necessary in Rhodes at the present moment. This disastrous state of affairs represents a categorical fail of the current Liberal-National NSW government.

Timetable adjustments and lengthening of current train services may offer improvements, but not of sufficient scale. Quadruplication of the Northern line appears to offer a major increase in capacity. However, the entire increase it offers may be barely enough by the time it is built.

The Government's proposed light rail from Parramatta to Wentworth Point and the Sydney West Metro would still leave Rhodes under pressure, and are not expected to be completed until 2025 at the earliest. In fact, these projects remain uncertain, with the business cases for both of them still to be released. Assuming the Metro is built, passengers must still find their way to Concord West or North Strathfield to join it – mostly via Rhodes Station.

Light rail through Wentworth Point (and by the way, what about extending it to Rhodes?) would be good, but would primarily offer different destinations, and would not reduce passenger numbers at Rhodes Station. Similarly, the ferry wharf would be welcome, but would not substantially take load off the Rhodes station.

Road constraints

The suggestion for mass transit lacks detail, and it is hard to comment on this vague possibility. The government's record in not delivering mass transit promised for Parramatta Road is discouraging.

The plan for mitigation measures on Concord Road is welcome, but local residents do not believe this will significantly improve travel times on Concord Road.

Hospital services

Concord Hospital is intended to serve the Canada Bay local government area, and adjacent areas. However, it is substantially in need of major upgrade.

According to the 2015 stage 1 plan, the Concord Hospital redevelopment was supposed to cope with a projected population increase of 20% in 10 – 15 years based on 2011 census figures. In 2011 the Canada Bay population in was 75,762. With the population of Canada Bay local government area now at around 90,000, the additional capacity added to the hospital is likely to be fully utilised even before stage one completion. Again, this does not consider the larger catchment area of Concord Hospital including Wentworth Point, Burwood, Strathfield, and areas even further afield including the North Shore, Newington and many more.

This growth in population is not an accident. It has been a deliberate policy of the NSW government to insist on increased numbers of new dwellings in each council area. By deliberately creating this high growth, this Liberal-National government has failed to better plan the services required in the future.

Schools

High schools

Rhodes and Wentworth Point fall within the catchment area of Concord High School, which at just over 1200 students stands fairly close to its maximum capability. With an increased population of around 20,000 people expected for the medium-term in Rhodes and Wentworth Point alone, we can categorically state that a new high school will be required. This is the time to identify a site and start planning for it.

Primary schools

The government's revised plan for a new primary school in Rhodes is welcome. Planning for a four story building certainly makes sense. However given the population figures noted above, the question arises as to future schools after the current one is filled up. We urge the government to be open with the community as to its population expectations, and its plans for future schools. The previous primary school in Rhodes was sold off as surplus in 1995 – we are not convinced that the level of planning has improved.

Conclusion

The current Rhodes plan is a recipe for disaster. Insufficient transport infrastructure exists today. Meanwhile hospital and school services are currently at their limit. And the government has proposed almost zero sporting facilities, for example sporting fields or a swimming pool. No doubt some other services will also be inadequate. The entire plan must be withdrawn.

For further information, contact info@canadabaygreens.org or call Charles Jago on 0403 902 613.

Also see <http://canadabaygreens.org>

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ⁱ OUR GREATER SYDNEY 2056: Eastern City District Plan – connecting communities, March 2018, Greater Sydney Commission, March 2018, p7. See <https://gsc-public-1.s3-ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/eastern-district-plan-0618.pdf>

ⁱⁱ Based on 2016 census figures.

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://forecast.id.com.au/parramatta/population-age-structure?WebID=350>

^{iv} Rhodes Planned Precinct: Urban design report, p72