

Waiting for the train



BY ROSLYN ALDERTON

A EUROPEAN-STYLE UNDERGROUND EXPRESS TRAIN FROM THE CITY TO SYDNEY'S NORTH-WESTERN SUBURBS SEEMS AN IDEAL TRANSPORT SOLUTION FOR RESIDENTS OF THIS FAST-GROWING DISTRICT – IF THE RAIL LINE EVER GETS BUILT.

The recent announcement by the NSW Government of a \$12.5 billion Metro train line from the city to Rouse Hill almost seems too good to be true.

For years residents in Castle Hill, Kellyville and Rouse Hill have been crying out for better access to public transport. While road access has improved dramatically since the opening of the M2 motorway and the upgrade of Windsor Road, it hasn't been enough.

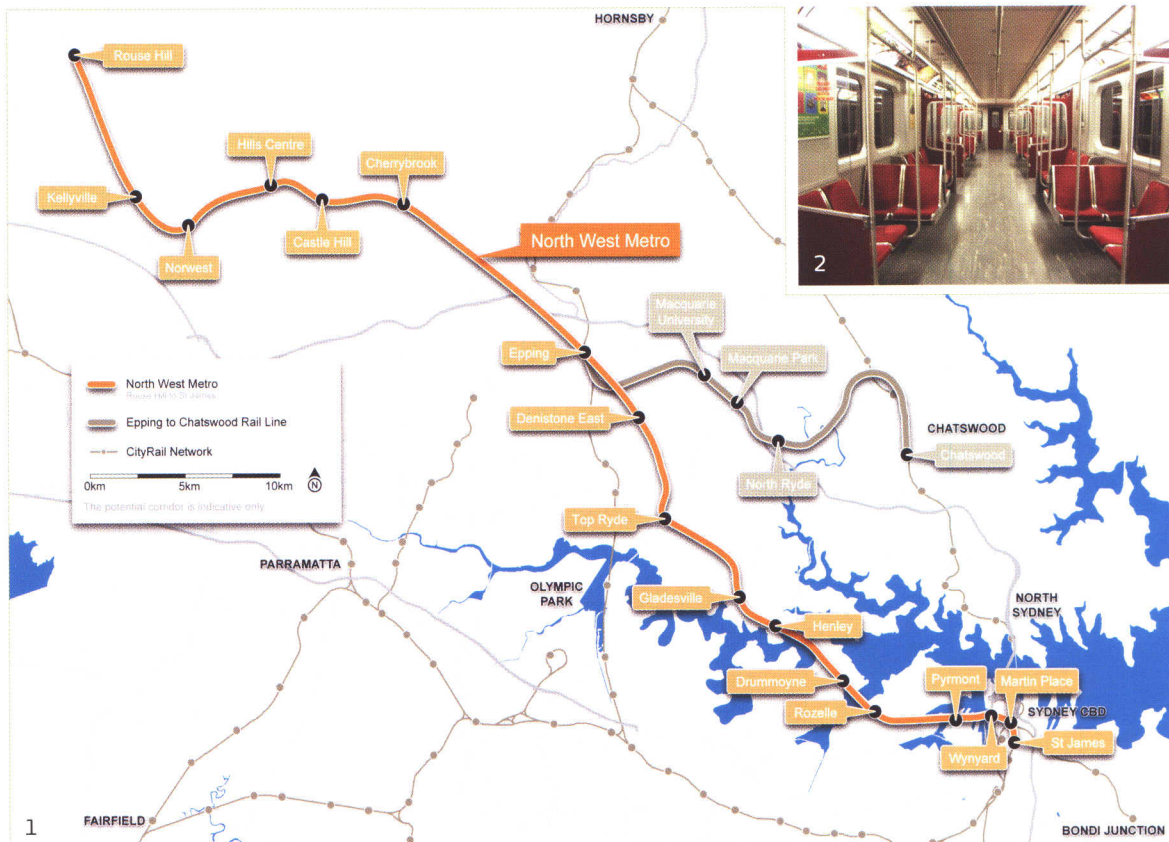
"The Hills district desperately needs something," said Shawn Crockford, Licensee-in-Charge at LJ Hooker Kellyville. "What they have done with our roads has been a vast improvement, there's no doubt about that. But we still don't have any real access to public transport."

Shawn described the M2 bus service from Castle Hill to the city as a "stop-gap measure". "It doesn't satisfy mass transit," he said.

Now the lemma Government has announced plans for a 38km rail line from the city, with 32km of that line going underground. It would be serviced by a single-deck, multi-door train, similar to the trains used in London's Tube system. Trains would arrive every few minutes and could transport up to 60,000 people an hour.

The rail line would have 17 stations and would be built in two stages, with the line to Castle Hill expected to be completed by 2015 and then extended above ground to Rouse Hill by 2017.

The Metro will not connect to any of the existing CityRail lines, with NSW Premier Morris Iemma describing it



1. NORTH WEST METRO LINE PROPOSED ROUTE
2. THE METRO TRAIN WILL BE A SINGLE DECK TRAIN WITH MULTIPLE DOORS.

as a move to "break free" from the CityRail system.

This is a departure from a previous plan for a North West Rail Link that would service similar suburbs but would be connected to the CityRail network at Epping. That plan – which was also expected to have opened by 2015 – has now been scrapped.

"IT WILL DEFINITELY BRING A LOT MORE INTEREST TO PARTICULAR SUBURBS THAT HAVE SUFFERED FROM TRANSPORT ISSUES IN THE PAST."

"To me, it's almost like a delaying tactic," said Shawn. "It almost seems like an excuse for doing more surveys and studies. If you change your plan, it buys you another five years."

Grant Beaumont, Manager at Norwest Commercial & Industrial Real Estate, is also skeptical.

"It's all rather surprising," he said of the Metro announcement. "For a lot of people, it's come out of thin air."

However Grant believes a Metro train would be a great benefit to the Norwest business park, which would receive its own station under the plan.

"Baulkham Hills Shire Council has one of the highest ratios of car parking to office floor plans in the country and yet we still have problems with car parking, particularly in strata buildings," he said.

"You would expect that the rail link would allow a lot more people to travel in by train."

Gemma Purnell, Marketing Manager at Snowden Parkes Real Estate Agents in Ryde, believes a Metro Line would make Top Ryde – where one of the new stations would be built – more attractive and is likely to translate into higher property prices for the area.

"From a marketing point of view, it will definitely bring a lot more interest to particular suburbs that have suffered from transport issues in the past," Gemma said. "It will

rejuvenate the area and give it a fresher, new outlook."

The region is already benefiting from an upswing of interest, with the expansion of the Macquarie Park business district – where businesses such as Optus have relocated their headquarters – and the anticipated opening of the Chatswood to Epping CityRail line later this year.

However traffic congestion remains a key challenge for the Ryde area, and Gemma believes another train line would help to reduce the problem.

"We very much look forward to the possibility of having it up and running," she said.

The NSW Government says the North West Metro would be the first in a number of Metro lines, including a line west to Parramatta and a line South East to Malabar, while the possibility of a second harbour crossing remains open.

With the current government's track record of 'planning for more planning', residents in those areas – like those in the North West – probably won't believe it until they see it. ♦