

Maldon- Dombarton Rail Link Feasibility Study Submission

Introduction

This submission outlines the numerous advantages of completing this vital rail link. The Maldon Dombarton rail link will, once completed, ultimately join the Illawarra to the Macarthur / Southern Highlands rail lines and services. While the current cross rail link from Unanderra to Moss Vale similarly links the Illawarra to the Southern Highlands, it has disadvantages in that the grades are continuous long sections of steep winding 1 in 40 track from Unanderra to Robertson and that the direction of the track does not avail for the majority of the potential freight traffic to utilise it. This line is certainly suitable for any southern line bound freight traffic but is quite circuitous in respect to any freight to or from the Illawarra that would need to head in a northerly or westerly direction.

The other rail line in the region is the South Coast rail line. This line transports the majority of the Illawarra generated freight and all of the regions passenger services. Much of the regions freight is coal traffic that is transported from the western coalfields near Wallerawang/Portland. Other current freight traffic is the Manildra bulk grain traffic from the Central West. This is predominantly wheat/grains product for processing at the Manildra plant at Bomaderry. Processed product other than ethanol is then railed to Sydney for distribution or export. Other rail freight traffic is steel products that are either railed to Sydney or Brisbane. (Steel traffic for Melbourne uses the Unanderra - Moss Vale line)

Potential for the Maldon Dombarton rail link

Freight

By far the greatest volume of freight that would utilise the Maldon Dombarton line would be export coal traffic. The majority of this coal traffic is from the west of Wallerawang. Using the new rail corridor this would allow for coal traffic to operate 24 hours a day 365 days a year through to Port Kembla. Export coal from Tahmoor could also utilise this new line. Other significant freight traffic would be

1. Grains traffic for the Manildra plant at Bomaderry.
2. Imported motor vehicles to be transshipped from Port Kembla to holding yards in the Macarthur area – currently transported by road
3. General freight to the Sydney Basin and beyond eg Maldon cement works

Passenger

There would be a number of significant advantages by utilising this line for passenger traffic as well as freight.

1. A new direct link from the Illawarra to the Macarthur/Southern Highlands. This would not only provide direct links but also rail to rail connections from the Illawarra to South line services to and from Canberra, Riverina and Melbourne.
2. Direct CityRail connections from the Illawarra to Moss Vale and to Sydney via Maldon
3. A new Wollongong to Parramatta service could be established to allow the cross flow of urban and interurban traffic to these regions. This would allow people living in these regions much faster travel times to these centres and would improve access to jobs and other services. The time savings for such cross regional services would be in the order of 1 – 1 1/2 hours one way then the current travel times. This would alleviate the need to change trains at Central. This new service would for the first time provide access between the South Coast/Illawarra and the Macarthur/Cumberland/Blue Mountains lines with Campbelltown and Parramatta as the interchange points instead of Sydney Central.
4. This link would also act as a diversionary route when track work is in place on the South Coast line and would alleviate the need for passengers to be inconvenienced in having to transfer to busses as is currently the case.

Other Benefits

In addition to the above direct benefits in opening this line there will be other indirect benefits to the Sydney rail network in freeing up passenger and freight capacity on the South Coast line and other Sydney metropolitan passenger and freight lines.

There are significant problems with current coal traffic from the western line transversing the Sydney metropolitan area and then via the South Coast line route. Coal trains require significant corridor time and can overlap the short sections of electronic signalled track through the Sydney metropolitan area, thus slowing down other train services across the area. Coal trains currently operate via Lithgow to Penrith – Lidcombe- Enfield – Meeks Road – Pot Kembla. This corridor uses valuable pathways on both the western line as far in as Lidcombe and from Sydenham to Wollongong (Coniston) on the South Coast.

CityRail trains can often be slowed up by long and slow moving coal trains on these busy lines. Waterfall for example is one location where passenger trains are often slowed by coal trains crawling into the 'refuge' sidings there. The current situation could be dramatically improved if these coal trains plus other freight trains from the west, such as the Manildra freighters, could use an alternative route through the metropolitan area. Such a move would have a positive impact on busy metropolitan lines and services and would ultimately allow for additional passenger and freight services to operate in the metropolitan area. The Granville to Lidcombe and Sydenham to Wollongong sections of rail corridor would significantly benefit from coal traffic and other freight movements

diverted via Maldon Dombarton as detailed below. The alternate route would be via Penrith to Harris Park – Liverpool – Campbelltown (via new dedicated freight line Cabramatta to Campbelltown) - Maldon – Dombarton - Port Kembla. The Liverpool via Granville line is one of the least busy metropolitan lines and could cope with some, if not all these freight trains rerouted along this corridor. Apart from peak hours there is in the main a CityRail service approximately every 20 – 30 minutes (Granville to Cabramatta). This leaves sufficient pathway timings for freight trains to utilise the underutilised pathway time availability between passenger services (except for peak times)

Track Maintenance Savings

Heavy freight traffic such as long coal trains often weighing up to 3-4000 tonnes pounding tracks have a significant impact on the cost and frequency of track maintenance. Where track wear and tear is most prevalent is on sections that are both steep and winding. The South Coast line is one such line. From Waterfall to Thirroul the track is almost continuous curves and gradients. It is speed restricted in many places due to either track geometry and or the difficult geophysical nature of the terrain. Track curvatures and gradients on the Southern line however are much less restrictive and it is double track from the Sydney Basin to Maldon. Dombarton to Port Kembla is also double track. The limiting factor on this line at it would be the ruling grade of 1 in 30 for the section from Unanderra to Dombarton.

It would therefore be a logical assumption to say that maintenance on the South Coast line would be significantly reduced by diverting coal trains to the South line then to Port Kembla via Maldon - Dombarton. This would therefore benefit local commuter traffic and would require less blocked off time for maintenance and less inconvenience to passengers using South Coast CityRail services. While the South line would in all probability increase track maintenance, due to the fact the line is straighter and has easier gradients the overall net effect should be for less track maintenance overall compared to the South Coast line

Conclusion.

There are several major advantages in completing and opening the Maldon – Dombarton line. In brief

1. It offers a new rail freight link and opportunities to and from the Illawarra.
2. The potential for new passenger services and new interchanges to South and Western lines as well as faster services to other areas in the Sydney Basin other than the CBD
3. Overall reduced track maintenance due to new routings
4. Freeing up train pathways across the Illawarra and Sydney metropolitan areas for both passenger and freight services.

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