

**Submission
No 31**

OPTIONS FOR ESSENTIAL WORKER HOUSING IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: ALTRAC Light Rail

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NSW Legislative Assembly
Select Committee on Essential Worker Housing
Via Website Submission

11 September 2024

Dear Select Committee,

Re: Inquiry into Essential Worker Housing

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission in response to the inquiry of the Legislative Assembly Select Committee on Essential Worker Housing into essential worker housing in New South Wales. ALTRAC Light Rail welcomes this important inquiry.

By way of brief introduction, ALTRAC Light Rail designed, built, financed and now operates the Sydney Light Rail network on behalf of the NSW Government. There is a very powerful nexus between essential workers, housing, communities, the urban realm and public transport (especially light rail).

There are at least three important elements to addressing the challenge of essential worker housing:

1. **Appropriate Housing Stock:** Ensuring that there is sufficient stock of available, appropriate and affordable housing for essential workers;
2. **Places Where People Want to Live:** Ensuring that the available housing stock is situated in communities and urban settings where essential workers and their families actually want to live; and
3. **Well Connected:** Ensuring that the housing is well-connected to the places of essential work and other facilities that essential workers and their families need to attend.

Each of these elements is related in some way to public transport, with light rail being a particularly impactful public transport mode in this respect. As part of its deliberations, we urge the Committee to consider the important role of public transport in solving the challenge of essential worker housing.

Public Transport Attracts Housing Investment

Public transport will, in conjunction with complementary planning laws and appropriate housing policies, attract investment in essential worker housing. This connection between housing and public transport is well-established.

Different modes of public transport will have a significant effect upon the type, size and location of associated housing investment. In this respect:

1. Rail modes of public transport – light rail, heavy rail and metro – offer the greatest potential for attracting housing investment. ‘Tracks in the ground’ provide housing investors with confidence that the public transport connection will remain in place for generations to come; and
2. Generally speaking, heavy rail and metro lend themselves to very high-density developments around stations which may be located kilometres apart. Light rail, in contrast, is suited to continuous mixed-typology housing investment along the entirety of its corridor.

It is *not* the case that one form of public transport is ‘good’ and another is ‘bad.’ Instead, it’s important to place the appropriate modes of public transport in the right locations to optimise housing investment (including essential worker housing).

Crucially, a NSW Government commitment to deliver rail modes of public transport will attract housing investment from the time of that commitment i.e. housing investment will not await a line’s opening, but will occur from the point that a commitment is made to build the line. This is highly relevant to addressing the pressing need to build housing as soon as possible.

Public Transport Can Facilitate Desirable Urban Settings

It is not sufficient to simply provide housing stock for essential workers. That housing stock needs to facilitate communities and be situated in spaces where essential workers and their families actually want to live.

Well-designed public transport can have a significantly positive bearing upon the public realm and in creating safe, vibrant precincts. It can achieve this directly through the high-quality design of the public transport network itself. It can also prompt complementary investments by third parties in the surrounding public realm.

There is perhaps no better example of public transport enabling a vastly improved urban realm than the effect light rail has had upon George Street in Sydney. Light rail in this precinct has served as a catalyst for substantial urban renewal. In turn, there has been a clear enhancement of George Street as a place where people actually want to live, work and play.

Public Transport Connects Essential Workers to Their Place of Work

Self-evidently, situating essential worker housing in places disconnected to essential worker workplaces will not solve the problem. It is imperative that essential worker housing is actually connected to jobs.

Where essential worker housing is provided in conjunction with integrated, attractive public transport options, this will provide benefits which include:

- Affordable and convenient transport options for essential workers and their families;
- Avoided traffic congestion (noting that without public transport, new essential worker housing will place even more pressure on the roads network);
- Reduced travel time for workers; and
- Environmental benefits.

It is useful to consider public transport connections in both a spatial and a temporal sense. In other words, essential worker housing should be considered not only in the sense of distance from the workplace, but also in terms of the total journey time to get between work and home.

Case Study – Parramatta Road to Green Square and Beyond

In its deliberations, the Commission may wish to consider specific potential locations for more essential worker housing. The Parramatta Road to Green Square corridor (and potentially to Rosebury and beyond) is well-primed for such consideration provided it is supported by appropriate public transport. We believe that light rail is eminently suited to that corridor.

ALTRAC Light Rail has proposed that the next stage of Sydney's successful light rail network be delivered in the Parramatta Road to Green Square corridor, noting that opportunity exists for it to extend to Rosebury and beyond. Housing and essential workers underpin the compelling case for this line.

We do not repeat all of the features and benefits of the proposed line in this submission. However, certain aspects of the potential new light rail line bear mentioning:

- **Essential Workplaces:** The Parramatta Road to Green Square corridor itself is replete with workplaces attended by essential workers, including a major hospital, universities, retail hubs and other employment nodes.
- **Well Located:** The corridor is exceptionally well-located both in proximity to the City and its potential connection at Central Station and other interchanges to the broader public transport network. Parramatta Road is underutilised from a housing perspective given its location.

- **Housing Potential:** There is clearly significant potential for housing uplift along Parramatta Road alone. A recent analysis conservatively suggested that over 56,000 additional dwellings could be realised in the Parramatta Road corridor between Burwood and the University of Sydney alone. There needs, however, to be a catalyst for this housing investment to be unlocked. In our view, that catalyst is light rail. As noted above, housing investment will come from the time of commitment to the line, rather than waiting until the line is operational.
- **Connection:** Green Square is among the most densely populated areas in Australia with further development still to come online. It's connections to employment nodes in the City and Parramatta Road corridor are, however, limited. Light rail would solve this connection problem for essential workers living in this precinct and their families. Further connections to Rosebury and beyond would also support essential worker, housing and transport objectives.
- **Transport Capacity:** Converting one lane of traffic in either direction to light rail will enhance the overall carrying capacity of Parramatta Road. Light rail could carry over 14,500 people in the morning peak. This additional transport capacity will be essential as new homes are delivered in the corridor.

Thank you again for the opportunity to make this submission in response to the Committee's inquiry into essential worker housing. We trust that this submission is of some assistance to the Committee.

Yours sincerely



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CEO