

COMMENTS ON THE PROPOSED B-LINE RAPID BUS SERVICE AND ITS PLANNING FOR MONA VALE & PITTWATER

by Mark Horton

The Northern Beaches Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) was first announced as a Pre-Feasibility Study undertaken between June 2011 and March 2012. The Study provided an assessment of the transport challenges, identifies needs and briefly investigated a wide range of options for Bus Rapid Transit on the Northern Beaches.

The NSW 2014-15 budget included a transport package to “develop a Northern Beaches Bus Rapid Transit network to reduce congestion and cut daily travel times on major bus routes to and from the Northern Beaches”. From a range of options, the NSW Government chose a system which was supposed to set aside a kerbside priority bus lane from Mona Vale to Neutral Bay. Widening or addition of extra lanes on the Narrabeen and Spit Bridges was also to be part of this plan. On 9 November 2015 the NSW Premier Mike Baird and Minister for Transport and Infrastructure Andrew Constance announced the model of service which would be provided including the title being called the B-Line rapid bus transit service.

The following was announced as part of the project:

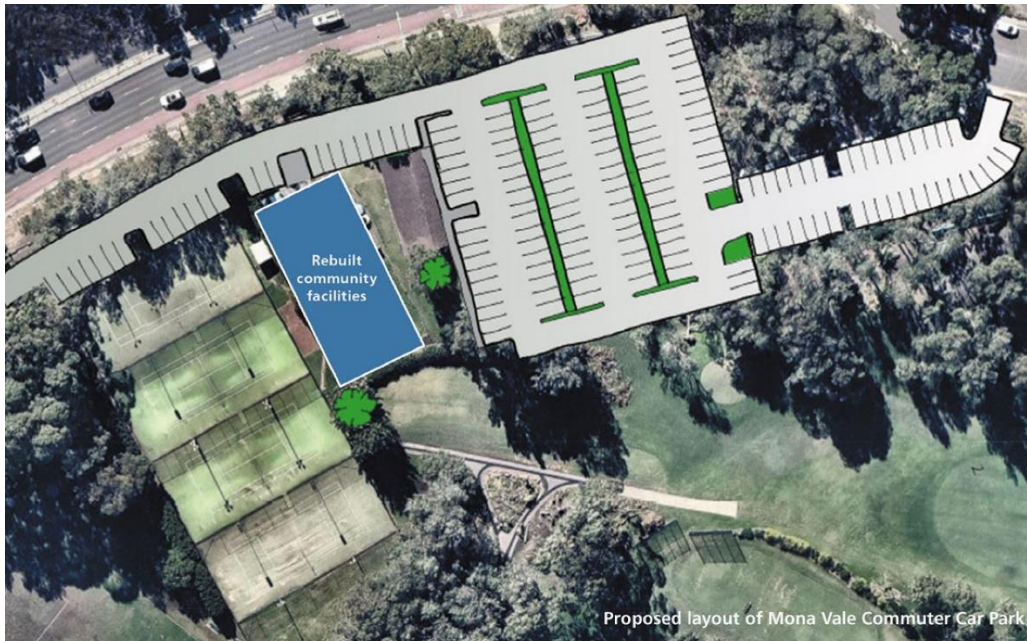
- Nine modern B-Line stops at Mona Vale, Warriewood, Narrabeen, Collaroy, Dee Why, Brookvale, Manly Vale, Spit Junction (Mosman) and Neutral Bay with real-time information.
- Six new commuter car parks at Mona Vale, Warriewood, Narrabeen, Dee Why, Brookvale and Manly Vale providing about 900 spaces.
- New double decker buses with improved on-board capacity and comfort.
- Roadworks including new bus lanes, bus bays, minor lane widening and other road improvements to support bus services.
- Improved pedestrian and bicycle links to connect customers with B-Line stops.



The B-Line was supposed “be up and running by late 2017”. Bus services on the “new 27-kilometre bus rapid transit network will include a fleet of double decker buses to run at least every 10 minutes during the day from new bus stops between Mona Vale and the CBD”. Other public statements announce that the new service will have frequency of every five minutes in the peak direction during the weekday AM and PM peak periods and that service will run at a base frequency of 10 minutes in the off peak and on weekends. It seems that the B-Line may not now be 24-hour service as the latest (online <http://yoursay.b-line.transport.nsw.gov.au/mona-vale>) statements indicate that “The B-Line service will run until 12.30am every day, with services every 10 minutes in the late night up to 11pm.” Clearly there is no detail decided on by Transport for NSW as the deckchairs keep changing.

Currently under review by Transport NSW is the planning for a new commuter carpark at Mona Vale in Beeby Park. While 75 additional commute car spaces are currently proposed, this will include at least the same number of existing spaces in Beeby Park (150 in total). The concern is that a multi-storey carpark is the ultimate plan. In fact, a multi-storey carpark on this site was included in earlier discussions about the Mona Vale Place Plan. The current proposal is for creation of an additional 75 car spaces achieved through the demolition of the scout and guide halls and tennis club building. The Government has proposed relocating the Scouts, Guides and Tennis Club into a new purpose-built two-storey building on the site of the carpark area directly alongside the tennis courts. Details of the size of the building are not clear at this stage. It is known that the Scouts and Guides would have their outside play area reduced to a combined 75 square metres which is unacceptable for outdoor activities. The new hall would be squeezed in to a smaller footprint with perhaps a lift to the second floor tennis club. There would also be a reconfiguration of existing car parking along the Barrenjoey Road frontage. There is also real concern that control of this new building would be handed over to the Council and not available for exclusive use by the three groups.





Another development planned for Mona Vale to accommodate B-Line services is the establishment of a new larger bus stop or interchange at Village Park. This would mean removal of the existing bus stops at the corner of Waratah Street and Pittwater Road and the stop in front of Mona Vale Hotel on Barrenjoey Road near the corner of Parks Street. Mona Vale's Village Park is in danger with plans to remove all or most of the mounds and trees on the Barrenjoey Road side of the park for this new large bus stop to accommodate the proposed B-Line bus service. Survey pegs are planted right through these mounds and work is imminent. The loss of yet more trees and the buffer that dampens the noise of passing traffic is a serious issue. Village Park is about to lose its peaceful ambience and become a busy pathway and thoroughfare. So much for the Mona Vale Place Plan.



Once this bus stop is built the Waratah Street and Park Street, Barrenjoey Road stops will be closed. McCarrs Creek, Church Point and Bayview commuters will have to alight at Village Park and walk to a bus stop near Bungan Street on Pittwater Road. The move of the Waratah Street bus stop is explained as a safety issue because of the large number of school children who congregate there every afternoon. Locals not happy with these changes should inform MP Rob Stokes before it is too late. Shopkeepers in Waratah Street, especially food outlets, will suffer with the move, but that concern has apparently not been canvassed by Transport for NSW or staff of the former Pittwater Council.



Planning is in place for a new carpark at Warriewood in front of Pittwater Rugby Park. Plans for construction are well on the way to finalisation.



Caption: Warriewood Commuter Car Park visualisation, view from oval



Caption: Warriewood Commuter Car Park visualisation view from street

Over the past month or so there has been some news that consideration is being given to extending the B-Line to Newport possibly because of pressure from local community groups that have questioned why Moan Vale is to be the start and end of the proposed route but also because of the fact that Newport Beaches has approximately 300 car parking spaces that are not fully used in Monday to Friday peak time.

To date there has not been any announcement about extra lanes on either the Narrabeen or Spit Bridges. The authorities have gone quiet on this no doubt because of cost. There has also not been any announce assessment of setting aside 24-hour North or South bound bus priority lanes.

What is of real concern though is that there is very little if any detail available about how the B-Line schedule will operate and nothing about how it will impact on existing services. It is apparently only limited only to the Mona Vale to Sydney CBD route. There is absolutely no detail on what is planned for the existing services running from Palm Beach to Mona Vale.

We currently have Palm Beach, Avalon, Bilgola and Newport services that are well patronised. The Palm Beach to city express was also well patronised decades back but removed around the time of introduction of the bendy buses. It should be reinstated.

- Will the B-Line, for example, replace the L90 and L88 services or will they be retained?
- Will Expresses services still operate from North Avalon, Bilgola Plateau, Newport Beach, McCars Creek Mona Vale, Narrabeen and so on?
- How long will a B-Line bus journey to Wynyard take?
- Will in fact the B-Line terminate at Wynyard or could it travel to Central?

Despite numerous formal written and verbal questioning over the past two years, little information is being divulged to the public. Of major concern is the possibility that the B-Line is just a marketing package developed to bring about the sale of all or part or all of the current public transport bus network. The Newcastle system has already

been sold or contracted out and sale of our public transport service in Sydney is most likely on the cards. First it was a privately run public hospital for the Northern Beaches and now our bus service. A real concern is that a private contractor will ultimately rationalise the local bus service and retain only profitable routes.

When the decision was made about the choice of options for a BRT the plan chosen was for a kerbside arrangement with a designated bus priority lane at the kerb. That being the case there is an issue if Pittwater Road is not widened to three lanes southbound at its intersection with Mona Vale Rd at the traffic lights. If the road is not widened there will only be one southbound through lane along Pittwater Road at peak periods at least. This will result in significant traffic congestion and the slowing of southbound traffic.

As with widening of the Narrabeen and Spit Bridges, there have not been any announcements or State Government undertakings to resolve what are potentially serious traffic congestion problems. The plan is incomplete, not sufficiently forward thinking and lacking any common sense approach or detail on how a BRT will operate along Pittwater Road.



Intersection of Mona Vale and Pittwater Roads – southbound lane to right of picture.

This article is by no means complete as there are so many unanswered questions yet about the BRT, or its fancy concept title B-Line, which are yet to be addressed in forward planning by the NSW Government. So long as we are spoon fed small bits of detail most locals will just assume that all is ok – she'll be right mate. It is what is not being announced that we should really worry about. The devil is most certainly in the detail.