Fact Sheet 1: South East Light Rail

The purpose of light rail and why it is needed for UNSW

This is the first in a series of three fact sheets prepared by UNSW to help students and staff better understand our involvement in the planning and construction of the South East Light Rail. This fact sheet details the purpose of light rail and why it is needed for UNSW.

South East Light Rail: A vital transport link for UNSW

An artist’s impression of the South East Light Rail

UNSW is a key destination on the South East Light Rail route, which will extend from Circular Quay, through Sydney’s CBD and on to UNSW via Central Station.

The route map outlines two corridors that run to the Kensington campus, which is a vital component of the light rail project and makes it essential to involve UNSW in planning and construction.

The NSW Government has recognised UNSW as a lead partner through a Memorandum of Understanding with Transport for NSW. Randwick City Council, the Australian Turf Club, Centennial Park and Moore Park Trust, and the City of Sydney Council have also entered into similar agreements to work with Transport for NSW to ensure the light rail takes its first passengers in 2019/2020.
Why is light rail vital for the future of UNSW?

Over 50,000 students and staff travel to UNSW - more than the seating capacity of the Sydney Cricket Ground. Anyone who has changed at Central for one of the hundreds of buses that travel to campus each day has witnessed the significant management that goes into getting students and staff to and from campus.

The public transport system is designed to provide links to key centres, such as the Randwick Education and Health precinct focussed around the UNSW Kensington campus. As we have grown, we have outgrown the public transport solution that has been provided. The number of buses driving from Eddy Avenue at Central Station to the Kensington campus is unsustainable.

The wrong public transport solution creates barriers to its use, which could reduce the appeal of UNSW to prospective students. A factor in selecting a university is the ease of getting to and from campus.

In 2013 UNSW was ranked on the Times Higher Education World University Reputation Ranking as one of the top 100 universities in the world. UNSW has also justly earned its reputation of one of Australia’s leading research and teaching universities.

However, unlike other important universities across the world, UNSW is relatively poorly served by public transport.

Removing the barriers to the use of public transport and reducing overall travel time, by lowering queuing and wait times, will allow UNSW to continue its upward trajectory as a university of choice.

Light rail will not only benefit UNSW. Our closest neighbours – NIDA, Royal Randwick Racecourse, the Prince of Wales Hospital, the Royal Hospital for Women and Sydney Children’s Hospital – add an enormous number of people to the local bus network. They too are growing, placing greater demand on an already stretched bus network. There is also an expected increase in the number of people living in the Randwick local government area in the coming years, which would add an additional burden to the bus network.

This is why UNSW is working with the NSW Government to ensure our unique and important needs are taken into account during all stages of design, planning and construction.
Light rail benefits for students and staff

Buses and trains will remain important modes of public transport. Light rail will not remove the need for some students and staff to travel by bus for part, or all, of their journey. Light rail will replace the current express bus services, providing a more direct and higher capacity link to UNSW from the CBD and Central Station.

Each light rail vehicle carries around five times the number people of a bus. This increase in capacity and the additional number of vehicle entry and exit points will result in faster boarding times. Sydney’s new integrated ticketing system, Opal, has also been designed to speed up boarding times and create easier interchange between services.

Each day, students and staff travel from their homes in metropolitan and outer metropolitan Sydney to the Kensington campus. Those who travel by public transport often need to change between trains and buses. The time it takes to change between modes of transport is another barrier to public transport use.

UNSW has highlighted the need for the new light rail to be built with key interchange facilities and fully integrated across transport modes to help speed up the time spent travelling between modes of transport.

Transport for NSW has identified some additional benefits of the South East Light Rail, such as increased reliability and opportunities for urban renewal.

Have your say

UNSW is providing clear, coordinated input into the planning process. Unlike other public transport customers, we are in a unique position of influence because we have the capability to provide robust transport and planning data analysis through our Facilities Management team, which includes transport planners and analysts.

We expect to make a significant contribution to the planning process, with the help of students and staff, to get the best public transport outcome for UNSW.

Getting the best outcome means using one internal channel for input and feedback. This ensures the planners at Transport for NSW remain very clear about our needs during planning and construction of the South East Light Rail.

We welcome your comments and encourage you to have your say about this vital project. The University will collate all comments and pass them back to Transport for NSW. You can also send comments directly to Transport for NSW by emailing Projects@transport.nsw.gov