



RAILROADED OUT:
Use of trains would be primary motive for moving containers out of Port Botany.

Photo: Sydney Ports Corporation

Something out of the box: what

Sydney needs to remove freight trains and have a box terminal built at Newcastle, writes GREG CAMERON*

AND THAT'S because the city needs more public transport for people, which can be provided with more services by devoting all network capacity to passenger trains.

Deloitte Access Economics estimates that "in Sydney, if rail absorbed 30% of the forecast increase in urban travel then congestion, safety and carbon emission costs could be reduced by around \$1bn a year by 2025".

It no longer makes any sense to use precious Sydney rail capacity to carry freight.

A freight rail by-pass through outer western Sydney is New South Wales government policy.

Commencing at Glenfield in Sydney's south west, the line would pass through Badgerys Creek, Eastern Creek and west of the central coast to Hexham, 15km west of Newcastle. There would be a link from Hexham to the port of Newcastle.

Construction would take 10–15 years but the NSW government has no plan to start work because there are no funds.

Sydney will have sufficient freight rail capacity until 2028, as a result of an upgrade of the Main North line, costing \$1.1bn.

However, the NSW government has no funds for increasing freight capacity after 2028, which is estimated to cost \$4.4bn, in present-value terms.

Therefore, the NSW government is unable to fund either of its two options for increasing freight rail capacity by 2028, even though the lead time is 10–15 years.

There is no time to waste. The solution is to build a container terminal at or near

the port of Newcastle and then rail containers directly to an intermodal terminal at Eastern Creek using a freight rail by-pass.

Private enterprise would fund and build the three projects because they are all commercially viable.

Paying for the projects would be possible by replacing trucks with trains for transporting containers for the Sydney market and using rail for all interstate freight entering Sydney.

Port Botany container terminal would continue to operate until the Newcastle-Glenfield freight rail line was completed and then operations could be re-located.

Last year, containers moving through Port Botany terminal numbered 2m teu.

But, by 2030, the number of container movements is forecast by the NSW government to be 7m teu.

To cope with the growth in container movements, the NSW government intends to build an intermodal terminal at Eastern Creek. Such a terminal would be able to handle all of Sydney's container requirements with scope for expansion, to meet demand well into the next century.

Until the freight rail by-pass line was built, all containers would be railed between Port Botany and the Eastern Creek intermodal terminal.

With completion of the South Sydney Freight Line this year, there is now a dedicated freight rail line between Port Botany and Glenfield. Building the section of the freight rail line between Glenfield and Eastern Creek would occur concurrently with building the Eastern Creek intermodal terminal.

Eastern Creek would be the closest intermodal terminal to the main demand areas for

containerised goods in Sydney.

Factories and warehouses currently occupy 5500 hectares of land in inner western Sydney. At present, these factories and warehouses are mainly served by truck from Port Botany.

In 2012, the number of containers moved by truck was 1.7m teu but only 0.3m teu were moved by rail.

There would be great incentive for owners to relocate their inner western factories and warehouses to outer western Sydney, to take full advantage of an Eastern Creek intermodal terminal.

Use of the land for residential development would pay for building new facilities with cash to spare.

Containers could then be railed between Newcastle and Eastern Creek faster than they would be shipped past Newcastle to Port Botany and then railed to Eastern Creek. The cost difference, if there was one, would be trivial.

A future alternative use of the Port Botany container terminal site is for airport purposes.

A key restriction on passenger movements at Sydney Airport is the length of the parallel runway.

At 2438 metres, it is 1524 metres shorter than the main runway. The runway imbalance limits the scope for continued increases in the use of very large aircraft as a key element in the strategy to handle growing traffic within the constraints of the site.

Additionally, ships using Port Botany container terminal constrain aircraft movements. Therefore, it seems that multiple constraints could be overcome by relocating the container terminal to Newcastle.

At Newcastle, the container terminal would be rail-based. Initially, the terminal would serve customers in northern NSW, and would be commercially viable immediately.

An intermodal terminal could be built west of Newcastle to handle northern NSW requirements and a series of intermodal terminals would be

built at major centres in northern NSW.

Removing freight from the Newcastle-Lake Macquarie rail corridor would enable urban revitalisation.

Medium-density residential development using degraded land along the existing heavy rail corridor would fund a light rail system, with extensions to the south, west and north using existing rail easements that were used last century for transporting coal by light rail to the port.

Industry could be encouraged to relocate from Sydney to northern NSW, to take advantage of rail access to the Newcastle container terminal.

Moorebank intermodal terminals are surplus to requirements

Two small intermodal terminals competing with each other are planned for Moorebank in Sydney's south west.

The privately-owned SIMTA consortium proposes a terminal with 1m teu capacity. Next door, the Australian government proposes a terminal with 1.2m teu capacity for import/export and 0.5m teu for interstate transfers.

SIMTA released its draft Environmental Impact Statement on June 3 but the Australian government is yet to release its EIS.

At combined maximum capacity of 2.2m teu, the number of containers moved by truck in and out of Moorebank will be 0.5m teu more than containers moved by truck through Port Botany in 2012.

At issue is the capacity of roads at Moorebank to handle this extraordinary increase in truck movements.

Rail would be used to transport containers between Port Botany and the two new intermodal terminals at Moorebank.

By 2020, an estimated 3.2million teu will move through Port Botany. Of these, 2.2m teu would be railed to Moorebank; 0.3m teu would be railed to intermodal terminals at Enfield and Cooks Hill; and, 0.7m teu would be trucked.

If either of the two Moorebank intermodal terminals did not proceed, the containers would be moved by truck.

If the two Moorebank intermodal terminals are built, there will still be a shortage of intermodal terminal capacity before 2020.

Unless the Eastern Creek intermodal terminal is built, the capacity shortage will increase to around 4.5m teu in 2030.

In the time it takes to build one or two intermodal terminals at Moorebank, the intermodal terminal can be built at Eastern Creek.

An alternative location is Badgerys Creek using buffer zone land already owned by the Federal government for a future second Sydney airport.

Building a freight rail line between Glenfield and Badgerys Creek/Eastern Creek would take about the same time as building the intermodal terminal.

When freight is removed from the metropolitan rail system, Moorebank would enjoy an excellent passenger rail service. However, there would be no freight rail service.

The Liverpool City Council has long advocated that the best use for the two Moorebank intermodal terminal sites is for an employment-generating business park.

NSFC stages 2 and 3 and Western Freight line are not required

Northern Sydney Freight Corridor (NSFC) is the name given to the three-stage project of upgrading the Main North line between Strathfield and Newcastle to carry more freight.

NSFC is not a separate freight line but is, instead, a series of augmentations to the existing shared network which would allow passenger and freight trains to interoperate more freely and would therefore create additional freight train paths.

NSFC would transition towards a dedicated freight line at completion of stage 3, ac-



ALTERNATIVE: Author and consultant, Greg Cameron.