

PARRAMATTA ROAD

New vision for 'noisy, grubby' corridor

Andrew Taylor

A radical proposal to extend light rail along Parramatta and Victoria roads, demolish decaying buildings and turn used car yards into medium-density dwellings has been put forward to address Sydney's housing affordability crisis.

A light rail route from Parramatta Road to Central would transform the traffic-choked, neglected precincts and would spark significant housing investment and population growth, according to the *Three Roads: A Solution to Sydney's Perfect Housing Storm* report.

The report, by Business Sydney, Business Western Sydney and the Housing Industry Association, proposes bulldozing the decaying buildings, closed shops and used car yards of Parramatta Road in a "George Street-like urban renewal" and building 75,000 homes in mostly medium-density developments.

But it warns impediments to transforming Sydney's arterial roads include the years-long planning approval process and local councils, which should be "encouraged to take a pro-development stance".

Business Sydney executive director Paul Nicolaou said light rail and housing development would revive shopping strips on Parramatta Road by attracting pedestrians and provide homes close to jobs and existing infrastructure.

"At the moment, no one walks on [Parramatta Road]," he said.

"It's too noisy. It's grubby. It doesn't have any life."

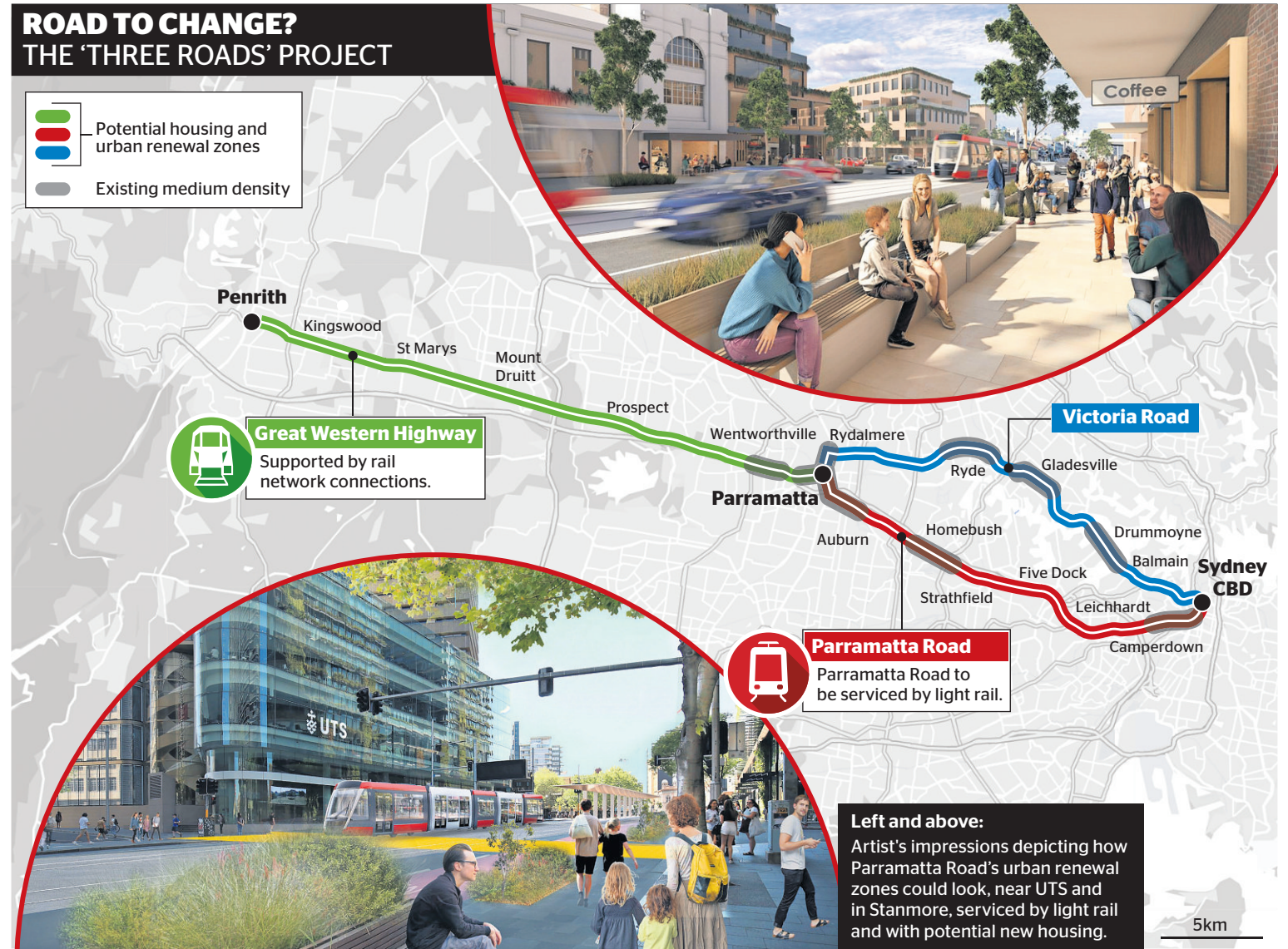
He called on the Minns government to strip planning powers from local councils and create an agency, similar to the now-defunct Redfern-Waterloo Authority, to guide development along the roads within the next five years.

"This is a perfect opportunity for the government to show leadership in this space," he said.

Planning Minister Paul Scully said Parramatta Road was an extremely well-positioned land corridor and "ripe for revitalisation", but did not respond to a question about creating a government agency to guide development.

"It's complicated as it crosses six different councils, but it's a part of our focus on increasing density in good locations, with already well-established public infrastructure and proximity to jobs, healthcare and schools," he said.

"I will be looking at how we can work with multiple stakeholders to support more density along this corridor in the form of terraces, townhouses and apartment blocks."



SOURCE: BUSINESS SYDNEY, BUSINESS WESTERN SYDNEY AND THE HOUSING INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION REPORT (*THREE ROADS: A SOLUTION TO SYDNEY'S PERFECT HOUSING STORM*).

However, a spokesman for Transport Minister Jo Haylen dismissed the idea of light rail and said the government's focus was on building lines from Parramatta to Sydney Olympic Park.

"There are no plans to extend light rail on Parramatta or Victoria Road," he said.

Inner West Mayor Darcy Byrne rejected the criticism of local councils, saying the state government was an impediment to giving busy thoroughfares such as Parramatta Road a makeover.

"I've lost count of how many times the revitalisation of Parramatta and Victoria roads has been floated and talked about," he said. "None of the ingredients needed to make it happen - kerbside parking, public transport and mixed development - have ever been delivered by state governments."

The Inner West Council in August sought federal and state government support to transform council-owned

parking lots, including sites around Parramatta Road, into affordable housing.

Byrne said the Planning Department "moves at a glacial pace" and provided "little or no assistance or incentives" to councils to expedite rezoning.

He said planning bureaucrats had failed to make any headway on rezoning since 2016 when the Parramatta Road corridor was earmarked by the previous government for increased density.

"In my view, the planning system in Sydney is broken, and we need to start again with a new system that is less arcane and bureaucratic," he said.

Balmain Greens MP Kobi Shetty has campaigned for a revitalised Victoria Road and offered support for extending light rail.

"Increasing the availability of mass transport options is a big part of getting cars off our roads and turning

these high streets into spaces for the community," she said.

Shetty said critical infrastructure such as public transport should be built before new housing.

Shetty, who is also an Inner West councillor, said she was concerned about the push to override local councils and communities. "The voices of local communities are critical to make sure development is done well," she said.

The City of Sydney in July revealed plans to extend light rail along Broadway from Central Station to the University of Sydney campus in a bid to get more cars off the roads and encourage active and public transport.

Meanwhile, the extension of the L1 Dulwich Hill light rail line has failed to boost housing supply, with Taverners Hill light rail station recording just 4960 Opal trips last month - 165 a day - amid community opposition to increased density.