



STEP Inc. Newsletter

Community Based Environmental Conservation Since 1978. No.100 March 2000

COMING EVENTS

Autumn Bushwalk -- Sunday 2nd April, 2000.

With STEP about to publish its new map, which extends down to the Lower Lane Cove Valley, it seems an appropriate time to walk some of the tracks in this area.

The Friends of Lane Cove National Park and NPWS have recently received a Federation grant for work in the Fiddens Wharf to LCNP headquarters area. It involves track work, interpretive signage and bush regeneration. This area has historical significance, since it was the site of the old Government Sawing Establishment and where Joseph Fiddens built a wharf to load timber for transport to Sydney in the early days of settlement.

It was also the site of a military camp during the Second World War.

Bush regeneration works have been carried out, both by contractors and by volunteers in recent times.

Bill Jones will lead the walk, which will follow the Great North Walk track along the river, starting at Fiddens Wharf and going South.

The route eventually goes through some of the picnic areas to the NPWS headquarters at Fullers Bridge.

Near the entrance to the Lane Cove National Park the newly constructed fish ladder would be of interest, and it will be possible to view the area which would be affected by the proposed Parramatta Rail Link bridge at College Creek. It is an easy walk, but would take 3 hours.

We will meet at Fiddens Wharf, West Killara, at 1.00 pm and return there by approximately 4.30 pm, when tea and biscuits will round off the day.

RESEARCH GRANTS FROM THE PAM MORSE FUND

STEP Inc. is pleased to announce that funding up to the value of \$400 will be available through the Pam Morse Fund to students engaged in the study of any aspect of urban bushland, including flora and fauna studies, biodiversity and management issues such as chemical pollution, weed invasion, erosion control and control burning. It is expected that such studies will allow better understanding and management of Ku-ring-gai's urban bushland, although the study area will not be limited to Ku-ring-gai.

Eligible students will be engaged in research at honours or postgraduate level.

Applications close on April 30th and funds will be available from June 1st, 2000.

For further information contact Dr. Michelle Leishman, ph. 9850 8194 or 9489 8972, email mleishma@rma.bio.mq.edu.au.

Lions Services Awards

The Lions Club of Ku-ring-gai makes an annual award for services to the community, based on nominations from the community.

This year STEP has nominated Janet Fairlie-Cunninghame for Services To The Environment.

The awards will be announced and presented at a dinner on

Wednesday, 27th April, 2000.

Dr. Brendan Nelson, MP, will be guest speaker at the dinner.

Tickets for the dinner will be available from the Lions Club (contact John King ph 9416 5057)

(Due to lack of space the text of STEP's nomination will appear in the next issue of the STEP Newsletter)

Parramatta Rail Link

The Parramatta Rail Link proposal is the currently most important environmental issue to affect the North Shore and the Northwestern suburbs of Sydney.

These regions will benefit from the project and also suffer the adverse effects which may occur.

The remainder of the Sydney metropolitan area will reap only benefits resulting from the reduction, or at least minimisation, of the passenger car traffic blight. The proposal will have impact on the future of the Southern and Southwestern precincts of Ku-ring-gai Municipality, which can be beneficial or adverse, whereas its impact on Chatswood, Artarmon and St. Leonards is overwhelmingly advantageous.

Opinions and feelings in the community are widely divided on the detail, but generally supportive of the principle.

The devil is in the detail.

1. Preliminary Reaction

STEP has taken a keen interest in the proposal, and in the first instance received a briefing from the EIS Project Manager during the preparation of the EIS.

After that preliminary discussion the committee stated its position to the consultants as follows:

"STEP strongly supports the development of public transport in the Sydney region and hence supports the general principle of a rail link connecting Parramatta to the North Shore rail line. However

our primary concern is to ensure that any areas of urban bushland or National Park are not degraded by the construction of such a link, and to encourage the assessment of alternative options, which do not involve degradation of natural bushland areas.

Our major area of concern
...is the crossing of the Lane Cove River.

The river provides an important area of natural bushland and aquatic habitat in Sydney and deserves protection.

1. We cannot support the option of a bridge crossing

We believe that this would cause an unacceptable loss of recreational and visual values of the National Park.

2. We oppose any bridge crossing on the basis that it would cause unacceptable damage to urban bushland, including important mangrove habitat.

3. We oppose any cut and cover tunnel construction

This would cause completely unacceptable damage to the aquatic habitat of the river and would compromise much of the work of the past few years of the Lane Cove Catchment Management Committee.

It is STEP's position that any crossing of the Lane Cove River must use either underground shield tunnelling or underground rock tunnelling techniques.

STEP supports two alternative routes

Our first preference is for the second alternative....proposed by the West Roseville/Lindfield Community Group. Thisprovides for a station at Delhi Rd. crossing the river below Fuller's Bridge, proceeding under Lane Cove to the Artarmon Industrial area and joining the North Shore line at St. Leonards.

The advantages of this route are:

1. The line would provide much needed transport to the Corporate Park at Delhi Rd. and to the

industrial areas of Lane Cove and Artarmon.

2. Lane Cove National Park would not be adversely affected.

3. Improved access to the UTS campus ... could be provided via bus services from the Delhi Rd. station.

4. Buses travelling on the M2 tollway could connect to the rail line at Delhi Rd. or Lane Cove stations and thus reduce traffic congestion on Epping Rd. through Lane Cove.

Our second preference is for a route which provides for a station at Delhi Rd. then crosses theriver via a tunnel (...shield or ... rock), joining the North Shore line at Chatswood.

Whichever route is selected, it is essential that tunnelling techniques be used that ensure that Lane Cove National Park is not adversely affected, either during construction or by the rail line itself.

For example visual and noise impacts must be minimised and access shafts must be located away from bushland or residential areas (eg. ideal locations would be where stations are to be constructed).

Finally, while we recognise that the rail line would be associated with additional development, particularly in the areas around the stations, we oppose any further development on the Northern side of Delhi Rd. due to its likely adverse effects on Lane Cove National Park, for example via stormwater runoff".

2. Second Submission

Following the publication of the EIS, the matter was considered further and the Committee took the view that preference for the tunnel option was still correct and worth pursuing, but that it was necessary to present a strong 'log of claims' in case the bridge option was selected. STEP Inc. has also been very conscious of the metropolitan transport problems, not least because they have a habit of impacting negatively on STEP's conservation objectives.

The revised submission to the EIS was therefore couched in the following terms:

"The pressures for further road initiatives as knee-jerk responses to traffic congestion persist in spite of the folly of such enhancements of the road and traffic problems.

Consequently STEP Inc. has been a staunch supporter of development of the metropolitan rail infrastructure to provide a viable alternative to the use of the motor car for journey to work purposes.

The proposed rail link between Parramatta and the North Shore line is a commendable and necessary addition to the rail network in order to allow cross travel outside of the CBD. It would also give access to rail travel for destinations not currently served by the system and provide future connection for a rail line to the Northern Beaches areas. STEP Inc. acknowledges these valuable objectives of the proposal and completely agrees with them and enthusiastically supports the concept of this link.

However there are a number of concerns regarding the details set out in the EIS, which cause STEP Inc. to raise objections.

2. The Basic Position

Based on the principle that a National Park should be protected from any adverse development, STEP prefers a tunnel as the best solution for a crossing of the Lane Cove River, a bored tunnel in the sedimentary rock, rather than a cut and cover tunnel, being the most suitable

A cut and cover tunnel would have such major detrimental effects on the river bed and the embankments as to be unacceptable.

A bored tunnel solution would:

* Avoid loss of bushland near the tunnel portals, especially in the College Creek area.

* Avoid the impairment of the amenity of the Fuller's Bridge area of the Lane Cove National

Park, which would otherwise be disturbed by the visual and noise impact of a rail bridge.

* Avoid the weed infestation and sediment problem, caused by surface works. (see Section 21.2.4, p. 21-14 and Table 21.1 of the EIS)

* Avoid the destruction of the *Darwinia biflora* individual plants near the UTS oval. (see Table 21.1 of the EIS, Construction Impacts) The proposal to remove up to 1m of topsoil from the UTS station concourse site does not seem feasible, since *Darwinia biflora* grows only in lateritic tops of Sydney sandstone, with a preference for moist shallow depressions. The populations of *Darwinia biflora* have already been seriously depleted due to residential developments. Other parts of the study area may not be suitable for this species, because of its specific ecological requirements. (the problem is acknowledged on page 21-15 ... "Clearance of vegetation alone is unlikely to threaten the long term viability of the present flora associations however, without mitigation, it may contribute to the reduced viability..... as a result of clearing, fragmentation and weed invasion.")

* Avoid the changes to the local drainage patterns resulting from construction of portals and bridge supports. Such changes would inevitably affect the specialised habitat required by the Red-Crowned Toadlet, a threatened species identified in the Species Impact Statement (SIS) (Section 3.6.1 and 3.6.4., pp 6.5. and 6.9.)

* Avoid the effect on the Powerful Owl, another threatened species identified in the SIS. The noise and light disturbances, both during construction and in operation, would endanger them directly as well as decrease their ability to forage since their main prey would likely be dispersed. This is acknowledged in the EIS.

STEP is extremely concerned about these effects of a bridge solution,

since in recent infrastructure projects the control of spread and establishment of weeds, and mitigation of other deleterious effects has been poorly handled.

An example of this is the F3 Freeway through the Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park, where little effort has or is being made to control weed infestation.

Construction of the M2 Tollway through the Lane Cove Valley is another case, where in spite of advice given, the efforts and the results are abysmal.

In the Lane Cove National Park hundreds of volunteers have worked to control weeds in disturbed areas, and further disturbance will magnify the problem.

It appears to be very difficult to translate the fine words about mitigation works in the EIS into action on the ground, even during construction and immediately post-construction, much less in terms of the necessary long term follow-up work. The potential damage is in perpetuity, the remedial efforts are too often short term.

STEP appreciates the disadvantages of a tunnel solution, such as:

* the impossibility of a station at UTS. However this may not be such an undesirable feature, as it would encourage the expansion of the UTS campus, or increase commercial or residential development, which would severely impact on the LCNP and the adjacent residential precinct.

* the difficulty of a station at Delhi Rd, or the possible need to locate it differently in order to allow a station at the Delhi Rd. industrial area

* the difficulty of alignment at Chatswood or the possible connection at St. Leonards, although the latter would enable two further stations, at Lane Cove and at Artarmon industrial area, preferable to a UTS station.

3. Proposed Solution.

The integrity of the remaining urban bushland should not be compromised by public or private projects, even in the interests of the public good, since the urban bushland represents a public asset, which cannot be replaced and which has great recreational value as well as intrinsic value.

However in view of the importance of the project to Sydney's future transport system, the imposition of extensive conditions are justified and would make it acceptable without jeopardising the bushland values. Such conditions are aimed at eliminating the permanent adverse impacts of the surface works, which would accompany a bridge solution for the crossing of the Lane Cove River.

STEP Inc. would be able to support a low level bridge solution if the following conditions were imposed:

* The UTS campus to be contained within the currently developed site.

* The remaining bushland within the UTS boundaries to be subject to a Conservation Agreement with NPWS in perpetuity, as negotiated between UTS, Ku-ring-gai Council and Local Residents' Groups.

* A commitment by the State Rail Authority to an indexed funding arrangement for the continued control of weed invasion, the amount to be negotiated with NPWS as dedicated funding, for the areas disturbed by the rail link bridge.

* A commitment by the State Rail Authority to compensation for the intrusion into the Lane Cove National Park, sufficient to fund ongoing weed control and bush regeneration work in other parts of the LCNP, and to improve the public facilities in the visitors areas so as to avoid pressure on the passive recreation areas, eg Visitor Centre, Conference Centre, Cycle ways, and mass plantings to mitigate the visual impact of the

bridge.

* A commitment by the State Rail Authority to employ world's best practice for noise mitigation.

* Funding for a research programme into the threatened species, which were identified by the EIS, eg. Powerful Owl, Red-Crowned Toadlet, *Darwinia biflora*., in order to define future conservation measures.

If these conditions are met and carried through the long term, the project would be seen as a major benefit to the Sydney transport system, achieved without deterioration of the basic public asset of the bushland.

Adventist Land

The application for a SEPP 5 development in Mt Pleasant Ave., Thornleigh has raised some concerns in various parts of the community. STEP's concern about it is the consequent loss of natural bushland in the head waters of the Lane Cove River, and the effects on the remaining bushland.

STEP has made representations to the owners some years ago to have a comprehensive flora and fauna study carried out before making any development decisions. This suggestion was not taken up and leaves a question mark over the current proposal.

STEP therefore decided to make a submission to Council as follows:

"We acknowledge the contribution which has been made to the wellbeing of the community by the owner/applicant over many years, and the owner/applicant's right to derive beneficial use of its property within the ambit of Government planning regulations and we do not dispute that the proposed use will bring benefit to the community. However, the development will result in a large area (approx. 8-10 ha) of ridgetop bushland, in the headwaters of the Lane Cove National Park, being destroyed, which we cannot allow to occur without comment and protest.

This bushland has intrinsic value in preserving the fauna and flora of the region and provides crucial breathing space for the urban area. Once alienated for development the bushland cannot be replaced or recreated and is lost forever. Consequently we oppose the application on principle, and list some of the reasons for our opposition and suggest possible changes which would, we believe, add public benefit:

*** Reasons for Objection:**

1 The loss of 10 ha of urban bushland is a major loss of natural ridgetop bushland, which is now becoming rare in the Sydney metropolitan area.

2 The site is located at the headwaters of the Lane Cove River and development will inevitably increase levels of nutrient, sediment and pollution reaching the downslope bushland remnants and the river, especially during the construction phase.

3 The construction of hard surfaces and the creation of fire reduction zones will alter natural drainage patterns and negatively impact on the down-slope bushland, in spite of the best endeavours through engineering schemes. The introduction of non-native landscaping vegetation will also inevitably cause infiltration of exotic vegetation into the bushland.

4 The Draft Plan of Management prepared in 1998 for the Private Reserve did not include the land subject of this application, and there is no recent independent survey of fauna and flora available.

*** Suggested Changes:**

1 The owner/applicant has large areas of land already cleared in the Fox Valley location, which we believe would be far more suitable for development, as no loss of bushland need occur.

2 An independent survey of fauna and flora should be prepared before the application is

considered for approval.

3 If the development were to be considered, the owner/applicant should be required to set aside the remaining bushland on the site, especially that adjacent to the Lane Cove River, as a private reserve under a Conservation Agreement, or deed it to NPWS to join the adjacent National Park. This would at least ensure that no further bushland is alienated in future.

4 We draw attention to the 9 proposed independent dwellings on the Northwest perimeter of the proposed development area, which are below the 156 m contour, located near the top of a steep slope which would be severely fire-threatened. We suggest that it would be prudent to eliminate these 9 dwellings if the development is approved.

While we are keenly aware of the importance of this application to the owner/applicant and the potential benefits to the community, we are deeply concerned at the loss of such a large area of unspoilt urban bushland should this development proceed.

We urge Council to negotiate with the owner/applicant to find a better solution, considering the already cleared land available and to, at least, ensure that any remaining bushland owned by the applicant is protected under a Conservation Agreement".

Clean Up Australia Day

Step again manned a Clean Up post at the corner of Vernon St. and Kissing Point Rd. on Sunday 5th March 2000. Jennifer Schwarz organised this year's effort assisted by John Martyn. 52 volunteers signed up and collected over 30 bags of rubbish from various locations in the South Turramurra area.

That is a very good effort. Thanks to Jennifer and John and all the volunteers.