

SE OpEd
HD **Why Rome Sydney wasn't built in a day**
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NSW infrastructure projects are held back by bureaucracy and nimbyism

I turned 40 this year, which led me to wonder how old I will be when some of the state's much vaunted transport infrastructure projects see the light of day.

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I'll be 45 before almost all of them. In fact, when it comes to the completion of the West Connex I'll be pushing 50 — and that's if there is no time blowout.

For the North West Rail and the light rail project through the city and out to the southeast, the projects will be up and running, hopefully, by 2019. Then there is a second harbour rail crossing — should the poles and wires **sale** get through the next election and the upper house.

Rome wasn't built in a day, they say, but why the hell does it always have to take so long in this state?

I also sometimes wonder, considering how many construction projects are due to start before the 2015 election or be finished around the 2019 election, how many of the deadlines were set for political reasons by former NSW premier Barry O'Farrell.

When it came to the Olympics in Sydney, by contrast, we seemed to just get things built. Everything was on a tight deadline, with some planning approvals fast-tracked.

David Richmond, the former head of the Olympic Co-ordination Authority, former co-ordinator general under the Iemma government and recently a consultant on the North West Rail project, defends the pace of the projects but admits Sydney does have its challenges.

"You have certainly got a two to three-year **lead** time on any project," Richmond says — that is, before construction even starts.

He says construction on the \$8 **billion** North West Rail project is well under way.

Delays on projects can be loosely hung on three things — bureaucratic or process delays, delays caused by the process of awarding contracts and nimbyism.

As an example of nimbyism Mr Richmond uses a Mosman street in which a number of development **company** directors live.

"They have fought against every suggested development in the street," he says. That made me laugh.

"This is not a communist economy. It's not Eastern Europe or **China**, it's a robust democracy," Mr Richmond argues. "Don't forget that with each project large numbers of people are affected," he adds.

"If the project were . . . [to move too fast] you guys would be out there fanning community complaints like 'outrageous, no consultation'." Where the media's project-killing narrative has changed in the past few

years is through The Daily Telegraph under the editorship of Paul Whittaker, with the paper campaigning for a Badgerys Creek airport, a West Connex motorway and the **sale** of electricity poles and wires to pay for more infrastructure. The paper's position has been a big driver for governments, state and federal.

The Telegraph has captured the public mood and influenced it. Sydney is fed up with the inertia and wants things built and the city improved. Poll figures show that more than three quarters of Sydneysiders supported a second airport after our campaign.

There could be even more done, it seems to me, but delays are being caused by government fears of the March 2015 election.

A reminder of the sort of obstacles governments face, even from within, was on display at the weekend.

David Elliott, the Baulkham Hills Liberal MP, went public to say he opposed an unfiltered stack for the tunnel on the North Connex project — the F3-M2 — which will be one of the first projects built under this government.

Perhaps he should have just spoken to the minister and premier before going public.

The lost moment in all of this debate, it seems, was when former Labor premier Morris Iemma failed to get his caucus to support the **sale** of electricity generators in 2008, the proceeds of which he was going to use to build an underground metro system in Sydney, including a link to the northwest, and an M4 East.

Iemma and I used to talk at functions over a beer about his desire to build a network of underground metro systems around the city to bust the congestion problem once and for all. Back then, I was 34.

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