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# Granville Waratah Soccer Football Club Inc.

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*Submission on the Parramatta Light Rail EIS.*

Granville Waratah Soccer Football Club Inc.

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The club makes this submission on the Parramatta Light Rail EIS, in particular, on the area around Robin Thomas Reserve, Parramatta.

Submitted by the Management Committee of the Granville Waratah Soccer club on behalf of the club membership.

Tony Farrell, Secretary,

Noel Dona, President

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## Executive Summary

The Granville Waratah Soccer Football Club is a small club based at the beautiful and historic Robin Thomas reserve. We have a long history with this reserve and the surrounding area. Whilst the club is strong supporter of the Light Rail project, we submit that the proposed path through Robin Thomas has been poorly thought out, in particular, not giving sufficient attention to potential to use a small amount of land form an adjoining block intended for major redevelopment. When this is considered, an option that dramatically reduces the impact of the project on Robin Thomas reserve (and with it, the environmental, archaeological, safety and political risks to the project) is apparent.

## Introduction

Granville Waratah Soccer Football Club (“The Club”) is a small community soccer club operating out of Robin Thomas Reserve. The Club is the oldest club in western Sydney, with a history traced back to 1898. The Club moved from Brunton Park, Granville (now the location of the Granville RSL club) to Robin Thomas Reserve in about 1965, so has been at Robin Thomas Reserve for more than 50 years.

In recent years, the Club has been dominantly a youth based club, with about 200 members in about 15 teams. The Club is culturally representative of the local area, typically with about 25 cultural backgrounds across our membership. For many in the recent-migrant-dominated local community, their experience as members of the Waratahs is their first experience (outside work and school) of membership of an Australian community group and broader Australian culture, society and camaraderie.

## Robin Thomas Reserve

Robin Thomas Reserve is in a significant location both historically and for the future of Parramatta. It contains two soccer fields, one full-size and one slightly smaller but still usable for adult games. Centred between the fields is a concrete cricket pitch covered with artificial grass. During the winter seasons, the Club configures Field 1 (nearer Harris Street) for youth (12 years and up) and adult games. We configure Field 2 for younger children’s games (5 years to 11 years of age) but it can also be configured for adult games if needed. The Club prefers to keep the younger children on Field 2 to ensure they don’t chase balls onto Harris Street.

There are Aboriginal and European archaeological sites at Robin Thomas. The fields cover parts a large sand body deposited as a terrace 4-6m above normal water level by Parramatta River over time during floods, with Aboriginal artefacts known to be present. It is also the location of an early military site and a Heritage listed property (153 George Street) is on the bounds of the property.

Today, Robin Thomas - at its best - is a beautiful inner-city sports field. It is the only sports field close to the Parramatta CBD. It is close to a large amount of housing (Rosehill, Harris Park, Parramatta CBD, North Parramatta), with many large new housing developments in the area over the last few years and many more expected into the next 10 years.

Formally, the field is used by: our Club; Arthur Phillip High School; Maronite College of the Holy Family; Auburn Public School Sports Association; The Big Issue Community Soccer Program; Northern Districts Cricket Association; and NSW Churches Cricket Association.

Of particular note is that the NSW Department of Education has publically indicated<sup>1</sup> that the field would be used by Arthur Phillip High School (approx. 1,500 students) and Parramatta Public School (approx. 900. students) as a replacement for their lost school-based sporting fields, as part of their high rise redevelopments currently underway.

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<sup>1</sup> Mentioned in newspaper articles including for example <http://tinyurl.com/ya5eur6j>

Informal use of Robin Thomas by the local community is also very frequent. Over summer daylight-savings evenings, the field is typically covered with small groups playing various sports – often more than 50 people. In winter, the field is used every weekday by fitness groups, schools and small groups playing ad-hoc games, soccer and otherwise. Many businesses are using the field for either informal lunch-time sport or more formal fitness/team-building activities. On any weekend day when not used for formal games, the field is normally in use for impromptu community cricket games and/or parent and child training sessions.

All of the above use can only increase in coming years as thousands of units are built within easy walking distance of Robin Thomas. It is the only sports field in walking distance of those units.

Whilst some areas of Robin Thomas (for example the amenities building) are dated and in need of repair/replacement (as Council was planning to do before the light rail was announced – see their *2014 Master Plan*<sup>2</sup>), the field is easily one of the best and prettiest sporting fields in Western Sydney. The enormous fig trees on three sides of the field, the adjoining James Ruse reserve and Queen's Wharf Reserve culminate to create a beautiful, peaceful green space sanctuary within the bounds of Parramatta, a modern major Australian city.

Robin Thomas is a pristine and crucial resource for the residents of Parramatta, many of whom live in high density residences. It is common knowledge that (a) adult and child obesity and (b) diabetes are increasing public health problems facing Australian health policy-makers over the next 50 years and Robin Thomas is the only playground/green space many local families have. As Parramatta's population (particularly high-density residential population) increases, we respectfully submit that Robin Thomas will only become more vital to the public health of our community.

Further, Robin Thomas' location in the geographic centre of Sydney make it an attractive option for state wide competition games, and saw us hosting three Football NSW State Cup matches this year. We look forward to hosting more of these important matches involving feeder-clubs to the A-League in later seasons.

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<sup>2</sup> Section 7of: <http://tinyurl.com/y9dnrc7k>



**Figure 1. Aerial view of Robin Thomas taken from councils 2014 masterplan.**

**This picture was taken before many of the buildings to the west of Harris Street were removed**

## Robin Thomas and the Light Rail.

Section 3.6.5 of the EIS (Alignment between Macquarie Street and George Street) addresses the area around Robin Thomas Reserve. Seven options were considered. Option 7 (straight through Robin Thomas) was clearly not a serious consideration. Options 3 to 6 all have the problem of seriously disrupting the vehicular traffic flow on George Street and around the Gasworks Bridge. The table in figure 3.20 marks option 2 lower than option 1 for a couple of reasons. All further discussions in the EIS presume option 1 is selected.

From the EIS 'Technical Paper 12, Landscape and Character impact assessment', page 98:

*"The size of this reserve would be reduced as the project would extend into the reserve along the northern and western perimeter of the park adjacent to Harris and George Streets. Additional trees would be planted within the reserve but would not reinstate the shade and amenity of the mature figs, nor maintain the symmetry of the existing park design. The field would be reduced in size and reconfiguration of the fields may be appropriate"*



**Figure 2. The western boundary of Robin Thomas showing some of the fig trees to be removed (picture taken from the EIS documentation)**

And from section 6.12.1 of the EIS, it is intended to use part of Robin Thomas as a construction site. This is likely to seriously impact the use of the field for three or more years which, with the greatest respect, is a matter of great concern to the Club and its members.

From communications with Light Rail Project and Council staff, it is our understanding that it is expected the final layout of Robin Thomas will support what we currently have in terms of football fields. We are led to believe that the current intention is to move both fields and the cricket pitch several metres to the east, which we see as viable if a drainage ditch down the eastern boundary is enclosed.

### Problems with Option 1

The Club sees a number of issues with option 1.

- a) *The impact of construction on our ability to use the field.* We would lose at least a quarter of field 1 to a construction base and a strip several metres wide from the rest of the western boundary under the current plan. During such time, field 1 could not be used for full field games (12 years and up) and these games would have to move to field 2, rendering field 1 suitable for young children's games only. We would struggle to have as much space as we needed in 2017, which is to say nothing about the expected extra demand as thousands of residential units are added to our local area.

Of particular concern here is that we would have to move the younger children closer to the construction site and busy Harris Street, something we could not accept from a safety viewpoint. The field would also be unusable for adult cricket matches during this period, although youth cricket games might remain viable – we don't know how much of the field they need or how much would be available.

- b) *Having the Light rail along the side of field 1 in the final solution is dangerous and unacceptable on safety grounds.* The risk of children chasing balls on to the track is significant, palpable and

extremely difficult to prevent. Currently, the Club keeps younger children away from Harris Street on game day and we rely on the combination of the fence and fig trees to reduce the flow of balls onto Harris Street.

We understand that the current proposal contemplates a low fence to be erected between Robin Thomas and the light rail. With respect, such a fence would not stop high soccer balls. On any typical Saturday, 20 to 30 balls would go out in that direction. And again with the greatest respect, a higher fence to stop the balls would be garish and negatively affect the aesthetic of Robin Thomas to a significant (and sad) extent, which we respectfully submit would detrimentally affect our membership numbers and indeed the willingness of fitness-minded Parramatta residents against using the Reserve in such condition.

- c) *The impact on our use of the fields during the “move” of the fields to the East:* We would need such a move to be done over a summer, between late September and early February when we begin training for the upcoming season and are utterly inundated with new members, including a plethora of nervous and skittish parents of five-year olds and their children as they bring those kids to an organised sporting team for the first time.

The move would impact the cricketers over summer; while there is no cricket club based at Robin Thomas, the field is used by two cricket associations to schedule games for teams based elsewhere. At other times, the field is in high demand by young men, who voraciously and fiercely compete with each other in 50-over matches with pads, stumps and umpires, without being formally organised. We commend their games to the committee – you should come down and watch them this summer.

Our Club is also reliant on many walk-in members from the local community. Unfortunately, modern Sydney life means that potential punters don't need more than one reason to change their mind about engaging in sport, themselves and/or their families. We respectfully submit that *any* disruption – minor or otherwise – to our access to Robin Thomas for a winter season could kill our supra 100 year-old club. But even if our access remains unfettered, we are genuinely concerned about the impact of any development on the Reserve on the many other formal and informal users of the field. It is our opinion that such impact would be significant and in solidarity with those users, we would respectfully resist such works as much as we reasonably could.

- d) *The three mature fig trees intended for removal currently work well in the layout of the field and are integral to the Reserve's aesthetic as a sanctuary to its users.* We have outlined the heritage of our Club, the history of Robin Thomas Reserve and its aesthetic attraction to users and potential users above. We restrict our comments here to simply point out that removing those trees will devastate the Reserve's aesthetic (as described in technical paper 12 of the EIS), which we submit is crucial to the public health of Parramatta's residents.
- e) *Duplication of the Gasworks Bridge:* From conversations with Council staff, Council and RMS are concerned that option 1 and option 2 may not allow duplication of the Gasworks Bridge, which we understand is a long-term plan. We believe this would likely occur to the east of the current bridge (there is space on the north of the river for this) but option 1 for the light rail would hinder or, more likely, prevent this, particularly once the developments on the west of Harris Street are advanced – preventing any changes to the west.
- f) *Rowland Hassall School/ Arthur Phillip High School East:* The EIS has made no attempt to incorporate the shutdown of Rowland Hassall School into the design (which has been shut since July 2017, the buildings currently being used by Arthur Phillip High School as temporary accommodation while their multi-storey replacement building is being built). We note local rumours suggesting NSW Education intends to sell the land for development but we submit in earnest, that land provides scope to allow other Light Rail options to be considered.

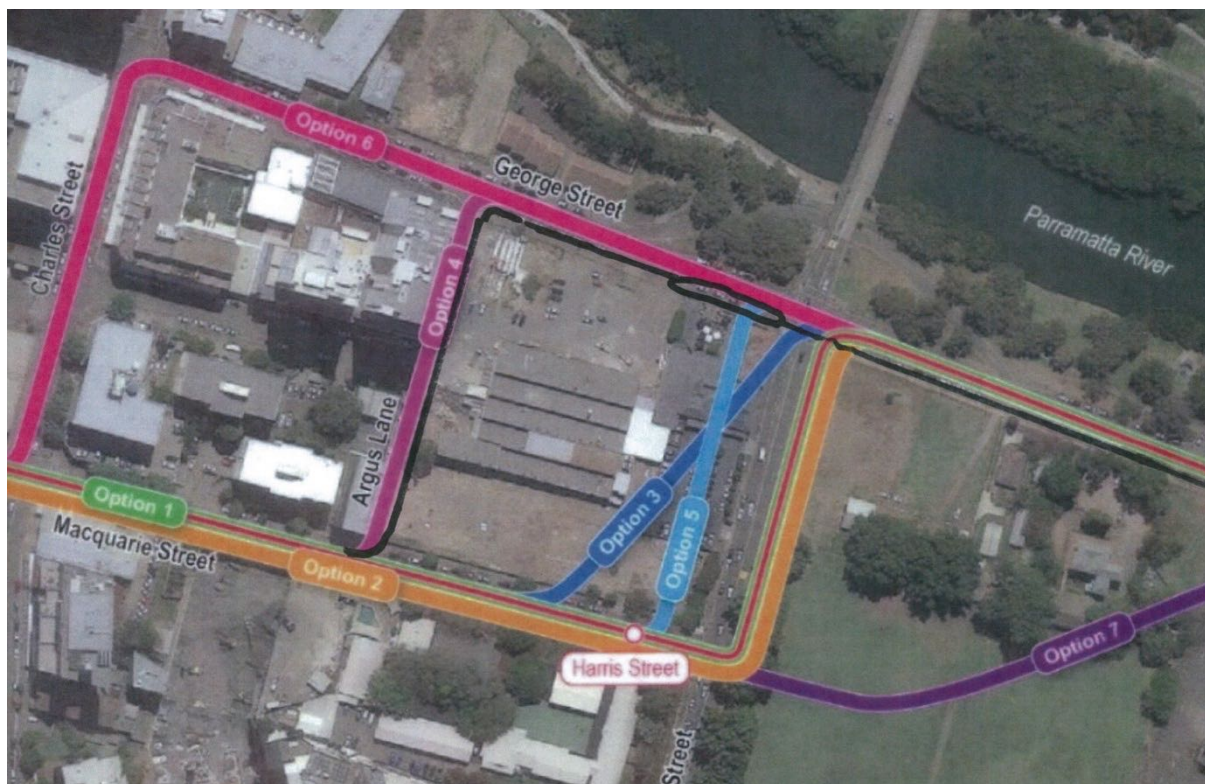
## Another possible route *around* Robin Thomas

The Club proposes that a variation of option 4 is a better alternative to option 1. Option 4 is not well developed in the EIS. Of particular note is that the entire block bounded by Harris Street, Macquarie Street, Argus Lane and George Street is subject to re-development. The only building currently on the block is the Albion Hotel, a site we believe was recently sold for re-development.

Our proposal is for a strip of land along Argus Lane and another along George Street be acquired from the development sites – strips that would be small in the context of a very large block. Argus Lane could then easily support two lanes of traffic with the light rail running alongside it to the east. This layout would address the complaint in the EIS (when discussing option 4) about the substation on the corner of Macquarie and Argus and give better spacing to the east of these developments. On George Street, this would allow the light rail to be beside George Street rather than reducing the size of George Street (the latter having significant traffic impacts). The Harris Street station could be moved to where the Albion Hotel currently is, giving better access to Queen's Wharf reserve, the Charles street ferry wharf (via the riverside path) and prospective residential building on George Street.

The light rail can then cross Harris Street next to George Street and keep on the south of George Street as it heads east from Harris Street. Trains arriving at Harris Street station could control the George Street/Harris Street traffic lights (as buses do at some intersections) to allow the best possible flow of the light rail across Harris Street.

Please see the black line on Figure 3 below for our suggested path.



**Figure 3. Proposed alternative route from the EIS. Granville Waratah proposal is the black addition, very similar to option 4.**

Key benefits of this alternative are:

- a) Robin Thomas is largely left alone (other than access issues and a narrow strip on the North, both of which are not big concerns to the operation of the field or the Club) and can be addressed by updating the council master plan for the site.

- b) The mature fig trees are left alone. A major environmental, political (and aesthetic, see above) benefit.
- c) The crossing of Harris Street neatly integrates with the George Street intersection (light rail can control the traffic lights to make that work well, as buses do at some intersections).
- d) This path allows duplication of the Gasworks Bridge to the east of the current bridge (that might impact Robin Thomas just on the corner of Harris Street and George Street, but not the fields themselves).
- e) This path avoids two crossings of George Street by the light rail, a complex and complicated one near Harris Street and one near Purchase Street or a bit further east.
- f) The historically sensitive and significant Queens Wharf Reserve is left alone (again, politically advantageous) and the area can be improved by appropriate tree planting to the south of the light rail (in Robin Thomas and the Greek community centre/ex Blacktown Workers Club site) creating a grand riverside environment and buffer against flooding.
- g) The change would dramatically reduce the chance of the project being impacted by archaeological finds by reducing its exposure to Robin Thomas. Again we refer to political issues that may arise in the alternative.
- h) The Harris Street underpass of the Gasworks Bridge, much loved and revered by locals, would no longer be impacted by the light rail.

There are of course a number of potential issues with this path, but we believe that they are significantly less and easier to deal with than current option 1.

While there will be a cost to acquiring strips of the development sites, these sites are just holes in the ground at the moment and have no particular heritage value or political sensitivity. *Now is the ideal time to set this block up for the next 50 years.* The sites themselves will benefit from the larger and better aesthetics of Robin Thomas itself. Additionally, there is the potential to reconfigure the block with land from Macquarie Street to replace some of the lost land. The potential availability of the Rowland Hassall school site could allow a significant reconfiguration of the area for improved development options.

The EIS is concerned about access to these sites with option 4, but the only benefit of option 1 over option 4 in this regard seems to be with access from Argus Lane. We respectfully submit this is narrow in its current configuration, of limited use for heavy trucks during development, and access by large numbers of cars when they are complete. Our proposal would see this lane wider and capable of providing better access to these sites from the west. The frontage of these sites along Argus Lane could be given an aesthetic work-over, taking advantage of the extra space, which would improve the value of units on that side of the properties. There is also the potential for access from Macquarie Street that is not possible with option 1.

Our proposal to keep the rail on the south of George Street does require the acquisition of some land and the removal of trees from the Historic house at 153 George Street – see Figure 4, below. This is a concern but, we submit, not to the level of the mature fig trees on the west of Robin Thomas.

There are three large trees in this group. The dominating tree is a Camphor Laurel (considered by many to be a weed), with a large pine in poor condition and one other large tree being crowded out by the Camphor Laurel. The trees have been damaged by repeated trimming to maintain clearance for the power lines nearby. There are several smaller trees. The property has a large frontage to the house, presently used as a car park. Acquisition of the strip would not significantly impact the heritage of the site and would make views of the house itself more available from the street, while keeping the light rail on that (south) side improves the layout of the street in our opinion.





**Figure 4. Looking west along the fence line of 153 George Street**

Finally, keeping to the south of George Street requires a narrow strip of land from the Greek Community centre (ex Blacktown Workers Club site) on George Street. This strip is from the old bowling greens, which have been in disrepair for a very long time and at this time are in very poor shape, as shown in Figure 5 below. They are also unused. From our conversations, we understand the Greek community intends to build a church on this land. We submit there would still be plenty of land available for this.



Figure 5: Looking each from along the Greek club frontage from about 153 George Street.

### Summary of modified option 4 against option 1.

This table considers this modified option 4 against option 1 using the style of the table in Figure 3.20 of the EIS Volume 1A.

Land use and integration	Better
Traffic and transport	Better
Safety	Better
Urban Design	Better
Environmental design	Better
Property	Worse
Stakeholders	The same (some stakeholders better, some worse)
Cost and Program	Worse (cost), better (Program).
Other/operation	The same.

We submit that our modifications to option 4 are better on five of the above points, equal on two and worse on only one or maybe two points.

To summarise the benefits of our proposal, we acknowledge its increased costs but, we submit, the longer-term (50 year) results will be dramatically better for residents, the community and the impacted developments. Indeed, we note the whole point of the Light Rail project is long-term community benefit and we submit that the additional expenditure we propose is incidental to the costs of the entire project, especially given our proposal would cause a negligible but sustainable effect to our Club and its members – men, women and children who need unfettered access to attractive open spaces for their own health and wellbeing.

## If Option 1 is still seen as the only possibility

We respectfully submit that our alternate proposal yields much greater positive social, health, heritage and political outcomes for very little higher expenditure, which, we argue would be economically returned to the City and the NSW Government via the greater health and happiness of Parramatta residents over the short, medium and long term. Parramatta is a nice place to live precisely because its residents enjoy unfettered access to open spaces like Robin Thomas Reserve, protected and lined by old trees, although there are few others of Robin Thomas' calibre.

We submit our proposal for consideration in earnest and we note that Robin Thomas Reserve is a much loved open space for the local community and changes to it will not be easily tolerated by those people.

We have already been approached by local, politically-active community groups expressing their concern about how the Light Rail proposal might affect Robin Thomas Reserve. We are a Football Club and we eschew politics to the greatest possible extent. However, it would be negligent for us to not report such approaches and naïve to consider such approaches as impotent or mere puff.

However, we submit with much consternation that if option 1 is still seen as the only possibility after close and proper consideration of our alternate proposal, more thought is required on the management of Robin Thomas Reserve. Please note we offer the following suggestions without prejudice to any current or future legal or equitable rights or claims we might hold or which may arise.

### Reconfiguration of the field must happen first, not last.

The reconfiguration of the field to move it to the east should happen in the next summer season, before work on the Light Rail commences. It should start no earlier or later than late September 2018 so new turf can be planted by November and can grow through summer. We believe this will probably involve reworking the drainage ditch on the east of the field and closing it over. Moving the soccer goal bases, the cricket pitch and western light poles east will also be required by at least February 2019 to coincide with the beginning of the next season. Council and the Light Rail project must be ready by then or we would argue the work should be delayed for another 12 months.

### Fencing of the new western boundary

This is difficult, but serious thought must be put into how to fence the new western boundary in a way that is attractive but prevents high soccer balls, and lower cricket balls getting onto the light rail, both in the construction phase (where it does not need to be as attractive) and in the long term. We submit there is no option more effective than leaving the trees where they are.

### Pedestrian access to Robin Thomas

There is currently a large flow of people from the Harris Park area into Robin Thomas, using crossings of Harris Street around Macquarie Street. The development plans must allow for this flow, again both in construction and the final design.

### Relocation of the construction site.

No part of Robin Thomas field 1 need be used as a construction base. Two other locations are easily available. The best site, if it is big enough, is 155 George Street, an empty block of land (we believe owned by Council) between the historic house and the Greek community centre. This was being used as a construction base for renovations of the Gasworks Bridge in 2016. A second possibility is the area on the river side of the amenities building. This was added to the park only last year, before which it was housing. Whilst an attractive block, its temporally closure would not be as significant as the losing part of Robin Thomas field 1.

## Summary

The design of the light rail must be oriented to the Parramatta community's future.

Granville Waratah Soccer Football Club considers itself an important voice among the Parramatta community, partially – but not solely – because our custodianship of Robin Thomas Reserve and as a beacon of health, fitness, fun and passionate physical activity to the men, women and children who live in Parramatta.

The fact that the large development site to the west of Harris Street is currently bare provides an ideal opportunity to reconfigure the block in a way which will probably never again be possible and allows for the Light Rail to not impact, or negligibly impact, the pristine Robin Thomas Reserve.

Robin Thomas Reserve is the singular sporting field close to the centre of the residentially booming Parramatta CBD and if anything, ought to be expanded, not compacted.

For the future of our Club and the people of Parramatta in the medium and long term, the aesthetics of the Robin Thomas Reserve and its boundary of gorgeous old fig trees must be preserved.

Granville Waratah supports the Light Rail in principle. However, any proposed route that affects Robin Thomas Reserve to the west or south is unacceptable to us, our members and, we submit the wider Parramatta community.

We have proposed a viable alternative in this document and we commend it to you in earnest.

We assume that the Administrative Decisions Tribunal and the NSW Judiciary will find that the consultation process surrounding this EIS has been real and in our case, if our alternate proposal is not considered viable, that substantial and considered written reasons will be made available to the people of Parramatta who love Robin Thomas as it is.

It is the view of our Club that Parramatta ought to be preparing for the next 50 years rather than choosing a path for the Light Rail that ploughs through desperately-needed community space to avoid comparatively minor expenditure.

We would welcome the opportunity to further discuss our ideas with any interested parties.