



A concept illustration of the proposed entrance to the HighLine at Union Street, Waverton.

# What happened to the HighLine?

By Stephanie Aikins

**In 2017, the community was promised 'a high line to rival the great high lines of New York and Paris'. Now, five years on, *North Shore Living* investigates why the widely supported proposal seemingly fell by the wayside.**

**D**espite being surrounded by some of the greenest areas in metropolitan Sydney, North Sydney local government area has some of the least open space per person at more than 500 people per hectare.

With further residential growth expected across the region, following the completion of the Metro and the Western Harbour Tunnel projects, it's an issue the local Council fears could only worsen in coming years.

"No matter what we do, the local population is going to grow, so there's going to be increasing stress on our parklands. We've got to grab every bit of parkland we can," North Sydney Councillor Ian Mutton says.

Councillor Mutton is also the president of the Sydney Harbour HighLine Association (SHHL), a group of local residents campaigning the State Government on a project which, they say, would activate 3.5 hectares of 'magic land' for the public.

"We're saying that the only land available to the government to give to the community is actually the HighLine, so let's go ahead with that."

The concept of a three-kilometre park connecting the northern boundary of Luna Park with Union Street, near Waverton Station has been on the cards since 2016.

The Sydney Harbour HighLine, based on the high line concepts of New York and Paris, was planned as a linear garden spanning the length of the dormant rail corridor between Lavender Bay and Waverton.

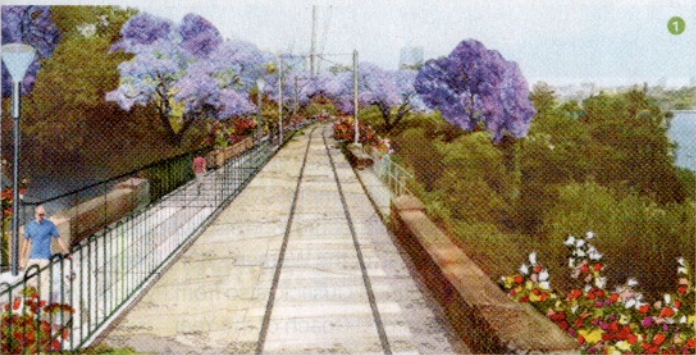
It would wind past Wendy's Secret Garden, Sawmillers Reserve and Waverton Park, showcasing Sydney's rich Indigenous, colonial, and maritime histories.

Following several community meetings with local members of parliament (MPs) in 2016, the concept gained traction the following year with an announcement by the then Premier Gladys Berejiklian.

"I can give an ironclad guarantee that a NSW Liberals and National Government will never sell off the land and ensure it remains a community asset in the event it is not needed for railway use," Premier Berejiklian said at the time.

She also convened a committee, headed by local State MP Felicity Wilson, to 'investigate creating a scenic walking track





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**"The only land available to the government to give the community is actually the HighLine, so let's go ahead with that."**

Councillor Ian Mutton

1. A concept illustration of the proposed John Street Bridge section of the HighLine in McMahon's Point.
2. A concept illustration of Dumbarton Street, McMahon's Point.
3. A concept illustration of the tunnel that will link Quibaree Park and Sawmillers Reserve.

along this unique stretch of land'.

The committee included representatives of Transport for NSW, Destination NSW, the community, and the SHHL, and led to Sydney Trains and the association's consultants developing an initial design plan and cost estimates for the project.

At the request of the then Minister for Transport, Andrew Constance, the work was finalised into a report for the NSW Government in late 2018, including a recommended delivery plan.

And then, radio silence.

Councillor Mutton says other than a meeting with the then Minister for Planning and Public Spaces, Rob Stokes, in 2020, the proposal has 'run into a wall of silence'.

"At various times, we've had Sydney Rail say, 'Yes', we've had the Premier say, 'Yes', we've had support from the two local members, but we can never get the government to actually give us the go ahead," he says.

A spokesperson for Sydney Trains says while the agency 'understands there is a significant level of community interest' in the HighLine, the land is required for operational uses for the 'foreseeable future'.

"The Lavender Bay Sidings will continue to be used for essential Sydney Trains operations, including a train stability facility, allowing for a more reliable network," they told *North Shore Living*.

Meanwhile, local MP Felicity Wilson says while she remains a 'supporter for the future vision of a Lavender Bay HighLine', her backing is dependent on the 'rail line no longer [being] required for the operations of Sydney Trains'.

"I am always looking for ways to return land to the public and create new open space," Ms Wilson says.

Councillor Mutton and the SHHL have disputed these statements, however. The group maintains it received assurance from a Sydney Trains executive that there would be no ongoing need for the land for operational purposes after the year 2024.

It also claims a representative of the then Transport Minister's office in 2017 stated work could begin on the side where the tracks have been removed before the active rail line is closed.

With the lack of progression on the project, Councillor Mutton says he remains concerned the land could be sold off to reduce public debt.

"I think the reality is that the land is so valuable - we're talking about three hectares of harbour fronting land - that the government has paused and we're now back on trying to push for it to go ahead," he says.

Councillor Mutton says the SHHL will continue to advocate for the HighLine concept, especially following the State Government's recent announcement of its plan to return land at Berrys Bay, Waverton to the community following the completion of the harbour tunnel. Berrys Bay would be located at the western end of the HighLine parklands.

"We're headed towards a state election in March of next year. I believe we've got a window of opportunity in the political arena to make the government aware of and more responsive to the needs of our community and deliver on those by giving us the HighLine," he says.

"It's going to become a big issue when we ask the community to decide who they want to elect for the next term. That's the only way we can make this happen." **N**