

Chance missed to ease Sydney dockside congestion

By our Railways Writer

A VALUABLE opportunity to ease Sydney's dockside congestion and provide an important transport link as a defence safeguard appears to have been missed by State and Commonwealth planners.

The opportunity exists on the edge of the city proper — along the route of the new Eastern Suburbs underground.

Within a few hundred yards of the exit portal of the new electrified line at Sir John Young Crescent, where it begins the graceful viaduct span to King's Cross, a rail connection could be made to:

- The packed Woolloomooloo wharf complex, presently fed only by motor truck through nightmarish streets, which also serve as a major traffic artery to King's Cross.

The huge Garden Island dockyard — technical and re-victualling headquarters of the Royal Australian Navy, one of the biggest industrial complexes in the nation.

Furnishing rail access to Garden Island should alone be sufficient incentive to inspire Commonwealth planners.

The yard is capable of overhauling some of the biggest naval ships afloat, is equipped with a tremendous range of machine tools and test gear and has an impressive consumption of sheet steel, machine parts, ship stores and other weighty products.

It is also the source of employment for thousands of technicians and assistants, office staff, and naval ratings from ships in port.

Yet the entire naval complex, for both workers and supplies, is fed by road transport through the same jammed approach that serves Woolloomooloo wharves — the same tortuous streets that also wend through the high rise apartment and entertainment area of Kings Cross and lead further to the Eastern Suburbs.

Some supplies may reach Garden Island by water but, in the view of all experts, the overlooking of an opportunity to connect one of Australia's main defence establishments to a national railway system is too bewildering to contemplate.

A "branch" track, junctioning near Sir John Young Crescent and curving by similar viaduct until it reached ground level at

Woolloomooloo Bay, would provide a connection in little more than a mile to the dockyard gates.

By the new transcontinental standard gauge, direct surface transport could be given to dockyard products right to the Indian Ocean — to the proposed base on Cockburn Sound.

Heavy industry in NSW and the capitals of Brisbane, Melbourne and Perth would be accessible by unbroken rail arteries.

Reasons which are just as pressing also exist, according to the viewpoint of rail observers, to join Woolloomooloo wharves to the railway.

An enormous volume of overseas shipping uses the wharves, often requiring a never ending stream of motor trucks to carry cargo to and from the sheds.

Cowper Wharf Road, clogged with heavy trucks waiting to gain dockside access, builds up a traffic hazard of potentially catastrophic proportions. A check made by the railway writer this week revealed that loaded trucks which had lined up in mid-street since morning were still waiting to pass through the wharf gates in the afternoon.

The scene was characteristic of regular weekdays in Woolloomooloo in which incalculable sums are lost in standing time and the various compounded delays.

While a rail connection would encounter some difficulties in negotiating restricted harbourside space, no massive problems exist in locating a sufficient one track right-of-way, especially by use of a linking viaduct.

A single line system, automatically signalled for two-way running, would descend to the wharves from the "branch" viaduct. Beyond the wharf sidings, an extension of the line could run through to Garden Island.

Operation of freight trains away from peak hours, especially in early morning or evening, would allow the necessary flexibility for access by rail.

Use of electric locomotives on the line also promises to avoid any fear of undue noise and — more importantly — air pollution.

Within the boundary of Garden Island, a diesel locomotive could handle shunting duties, instead of requiring extensive catenary structures.

The layout of city underground connections to the new Eastern Suburbs line also offer a relatively direct route for freight trains from the Redfern area,

thus minimising the amount of unnecessary mileage.

No technical barriers exist to running freight trains through the underground.

Indeed, freight traffic could help to offset some of the loss that is inevitable from ESR commuterism.

Some informal consideration is understood to have been given at Commonwealth level to the wisdom of a rail connection to the dock — but obviously a plan has not emerged.

Nor does the State Government appear to have recognised a potential solution to the Woolloomooloo wharf hazard.

Talks are being held however, between City Council, Federal

and State authorities and the Gateway private developer group which plans a dramatic revitalising of the valuable Woolloomooloo real estate, including a suggestion to build an additional station in the area on the ESR route. (The first section of the line, partly underground, partly surfaced, is due to operate to Kings Cross in 1973.)

So far the triple advantages of replacing dangerous street congestion with more efficient transport, forging a link to a vital defence facility, and reducing air pollution, have been insufficient to win the expenditure of a few million dollars for a short but valuable Sydney railway with real national significance.

Maybe there should be designated for passengers in lower segment.

New loco depot for 'streamliners'