



The Sydney Station Stories article series looks at active railway stations around the Sydney region – their history, placement, design, precincts and current services.

Somehow Epping Station has found itself at the centre of multiple crossroads, for not only does it sit at the confluence of Epping, Carlingford, Beecroft and Blaxland Roads, but since 2009 this Main North location has also become a junction station thanks to the opening of the new underground Epping-Chatswood Rail Link (ECRL). Of course, since 2019, the ECRL has been absorbed into the new Northwest Metro from Tallawong, which will shortly be extended from Chatswood through the Sydney CBD to Sydenham. Which is to say that from modest beginnings, Epping has evolved into a modern transport hub served by train, metro and bus services..

The original station was originally named Field of Mars (a name retained today by a public reserve down nearer Ryde) on 17 September 1886 but was renamed Carlingford less than a year later. At that stage, the station was located near the western end of what is now Surrey Street, a little north of the current location. The station was shifted to its current location during late 1899 and renamed Epping early the following year. By this time, the Main Northern railway on which the station sat had been joined through to the Newcastle system, enabling travel between Sydney and the Hunter region via Epping.

During the 1920s an overhead booking office/concourse was constructed while a new centre track – oddly enough, with platforms either side (one side was eventually fenced off) – was established as part of a longer-term plan to construct a St Leonards-Epping branch. Today's Epping Road follows much of that alignment. Obviously that plan never came to fruition, although the later ECRL would achieve a similar result, this was just the beginning of some intriguing and unusual track arrangements through and at Epping.

During the 1970s and 80s, as the route grew more and more busy, the line from West Ryde through to a point just south of Epping Station was quadruplicated, which translated as four tracks becoming three into the platforms before becoming two to the immediate north. This was further complicated with the opening of the ECRL in 2009, for which a two-track dive was created for trains entering (or exiting) the new line on the north side of the station. Epping received a second 'new station' as part of this project, with underground ECRL platforms 5 and 6 connected to the upper levels via a series of escalators. A new turn back siding was established adjacent to this dive at the same time, enabling trains from Eastwood and points south to terminate, while trains from the ECRL would service stations Cheltenham to Hornsby. In effect these services operated a giant loop from Epping to Strathfield, Sydney, Chatswood, back to Epping and on to Hornsby – and then back again. Central Coast and Newcastle trains could also, when required, run via the ECRL if the need arose.

In 2016, the Northern Sydney Freight line was opened between Epping and Thornleigh, with the new track connecting directly out of Epping's platform 3 for Down trains. Because this new line was electrified, it could be used by certain express passenger services as well as the freight, coal and grain trains, for which it was designed. By this time, Epping had been rolled up into what was now Sydney Train's T9 route, running between North Sydney and Hornsby in a smaller loop to that described earlier, for the ECRL had by this time been integrated with western (Penrith/Richmond) line services.

Two years later on 29 September 2018, the ECRL was closed for works to enable it to be absorbed into the new Northwest Metro, which had been built west and underground from Epping's platforms 5 and 6 (the station doesn't have a platform 4) to Cherrybrook and on to Tallawong. The new 'driverless' metro was deemed incompatible with the above ground Sydney Trains network, and so the still-new dive tracks were made obsolete. With metro services now using the line between Chatswood, Epping and Tallawong, Sydney Train's altered its T9 route to operate between Hornsby and Berowra via Strathfield and City CBD – a full loop once again.



Left (page 34): The ticket gate area of the upper concourse, Friday 10 February 2023.

Above: Six-car Mariyung set D103 departs platform 2 at Epping as Down run A631 after a test station stop, while an A Set Waratah takes on passengers alongside platform 1 with a T9 service from Hornsby to Berowra via Strathfield, Thursday 17 September 2020 – which just happens to be exactly 134 years since the original Field of Mars station opened about 300 metres behind the photographer.

Below: Southern Shorthaul Railroad's CA14 coal train from Clarence to Kooragang Island, crests the grade from Eastwood with CEYs 001, 002 and 006 leading the train on Friday 10 February 2023. Here at Epping, the train will pass through platform 3 and then switch over to the Down Relief, that was constructed as the North Sydney Freight line during 2015/16, and which parallels the two-track Main North as far as Thornleigh. All Down freight movements, as well as many northbound express passenger services and specials now use this line.



These developments have, as mentioned, left Epping with not only an interestingly 'chaotic' jumble of trackage, but also a mix of architecture. Let's say you arrive via metro into Epping, you move from a distinctively modern underground station, about which curves and ovals are a dominant design motif, up a series of escalators that share this style, to an overhead concourse that feels a little like the spirit of the 90s lives on, before descending to Sydney Trains' platforms 1 and 2, which still host the 1899 station building in a reasonably well preserved state.

Traditionally, even before the opening of the line from Chatswood, Epping has been a common stop for Central Coast and Newcastle services, and this continues today. There have been on-and-off-again plans to construct a line between Epping and Parramatta, often involving the former Carlingford branch, but these have obviously come to nought. With the Carlingford Line about to reopen as part of the Parramatta light rail network, it would seem any line between Epping and Sydney's 'second city' would have to involve an underground line, and even then, it seems very unlikely.

In terms of connecting to nearby suburbs, bus services radiating out from Epping include runs to Parramatta, Blacktown, Eastwood, Hornsby, Macquarie Park and the City. Of those, route 550 to/from Parramatta offers the most direct connection from Epping and along Pennant Hills Road to the soon-to-open light rail stop on the site of the former Carlingford Station. Just how the opening of the light rail may influence bus services was unknown at the time of writing.

So why would you want to visit Epping? Well, for starters using the train or metro for any commuter journey through the area is likely to be quicker than driving, for the earlier mentioned confluence of main roads at Epping means that the area around the station can bottleneck very easy, particularly during the afternoon peak. But aside from convenience, Epping has a nice collection of cafes and restaurants, perhaps not as large and varied as nearby Eastwood, but there is still something there for everyone. Epping Library is also nearby, but essentially, that exhausts the list of reasons why most people would want to visit.

That said, train fans probably have more reason to stop by Epping Station. Although the T9 service is a fairly homogenised service dominated by A Set Waratahs (although a pair of Tangaras cycle through daily to break up the tedium), Epping is a handy place to see the 'endangered' V Sets, which still work the weekday Newcastle Interchange services, with OSCAR H Sets handling most of the Gosford/Wyong jobs and all of the weekend services. Of course, downstairs you'll find Sydney Metro's Alstom-built *Metropolis* trains coming and going. Epping is one of only four stations that are shared between Sydney Trains and Sydney Metro, the others being Chatswood, and from shortly, Sydney Central and Sydenham.

In the case of longer distance services, there are three XPT services in each direction each day, NT35 to Grafton being an ideal proposition, being

that it passes Epping just before midday. *Xplorers* are also represented with the daily Moree/Armidale service passing each way as well – NP23 on the Down during mid-morning is perhaps your best bet. Saturday often sees *Endeavour* sets used out of Broadmeadow/Newcastle work empty on rotation to and from Eveleigh, the only opportunity you'll normally have to see these trains on the 'short north'.

And of course, there are freight trains a plenty. Currently the Main North through Epping is probably the busiest of all the mainlines out of Sydney in terms of freight traffic, and it is not unusual to see 8-10 freights passing Epping between the morning and afternoon peak periods. The line-up can include Brisbane-Sydney-Melbourne intermodal services operated by SCT, Aurizon and Pacific National (PN), steel trains run by Qube, container and (occasional) log trains under the management of Crawfords/Sydney Rail Services, PN and Qube, and occasional coal and grain trains hauled by Southern Shorthaul Railroad (SSR) and PN power. At present, SSR are still moving Mariyung trains between Kangy Angy, Enfield and Lithgow, as well as the more routine transfer of Waratahs between Auburn and Cardiff, and these movements can operate up to four or five times a week.

It is worth mentioning that in terms of 'appreciating' the passing of trains through Epping, the view of Down traffic (see photograph page 35) is significantly better than that for movements on the Up. Trains on the Down crest the grade at Epping adjacent to a largely disused Down Siding, just before passing beneath Epping Road and entering the station – so they are working quite hard. Furthermore, these are best viewed from the southern end of platform 2. Happy hunting!

Next: East Maitland

Quick facts

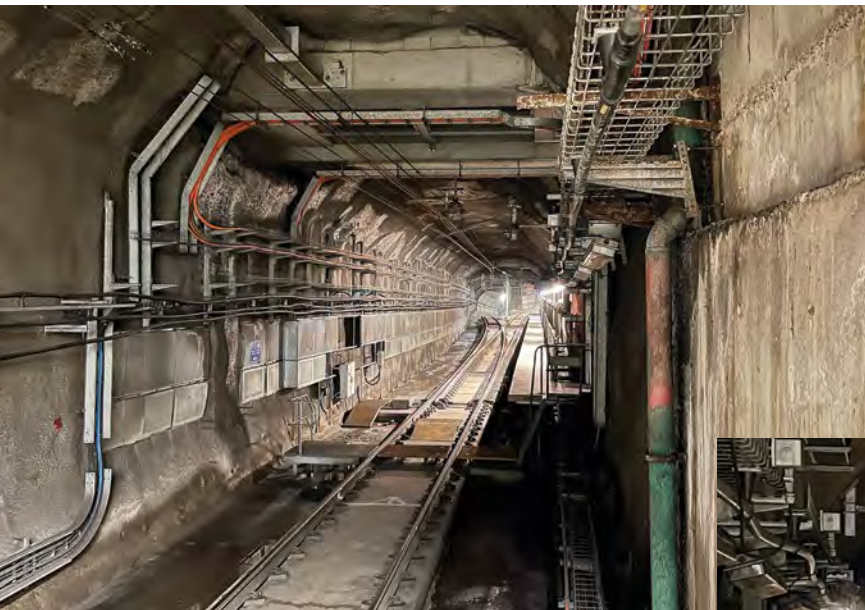
Distance from Sydney Central	21.4 kilometres
Elevation	97 metres above sea level
Opened	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Field of Mars (Epping): 17 September 1886 ECRL platforms: 23 February 2009 Sydney Metro: 26 May 2019
Departures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Weekday Sydney/NSW Trains: 140 Up Weekday Sydney Metro: 177 Up Weekend Sydney/NSW Trains: 117 Up Weekend Sydney Metro: 122 Up

With thanks to John Hoyle for his assistance in preparing this article.





Above: Alstom *Metropolis* set 02, led by car 1202, pauses alongside platform 5 with Run 108-04 from Tallawong to Chatswood, Sunday 16 April 2023.



Left and below: Two views looking west from platforms 5 and 6 at Epping on Thursday 2 February 2023. The downhill tracks are the Metro mainlines to Tallawong, while the tracks angled upgrade together form the now unused dive, leading to the above ground Sydney Trains network. Although the two networks share track gauge and overhead power supply compatibility, the signalling and safe working systems cannot integrate, and so it is unlikely these relatively new rails will ever be used again.



Left (page 36): One of the banks of escalators leading up from Metro platforms 5/6 to the ground level platforms, Friday 10 February 2023.