

**Submission  
No 199**

## **INQUIRY INTO CROWN LAND IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

**Organisation:** Keep Rail on The Corridor

**Date received:** 25 July 2016

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## PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY INTO CROWN LAND:

### Submission from *Keep Rail On The Corridor*,

Keep Rail on the Corridor is an alliance of the following Hunter Valley and Newcastle Community Groups:

- Hunter Concerned Citizens
- Save Our Rail
- Access Newcastle Foreshore

Keep Rail On the Corridor – KROC – supports improved legislation, governance and management of Crown Lands in accordance with the following principles.

1. Crown Land is managed for the benefit of all people.
2. Legal safeguards should privilege long-term, social, environmental and economic benefits over short-term financial benefits
3. Any change in use or ownership of Crown Land occurs only when a thorough assessment of its environmental and social value supports the efficacy of such a change.
4. Good management of Crown Lands requires public accountability, pro-active community engagement, transparent processes, and genuine public participation in management and decision-making.
5. Priority consideration is given to on-going protection of Aboriginal cultural heritage.
6. Priority consideration is given to on-going protection of European cultural heritage.
7. Management of Crown Land use includes thorough monitoring, enforcement, auditing, and reporting.
8. The legal and other status of Crown Lands must be governed by clearly defined legal instruments in a time when there may be a transfer of such lands to local councils while these councils are under the threat of amalgamation

Crown land is publicly-owned land that should be kept for the use of all people. Only compelling reasons, based on clear evidence should allow the alienation of Crown Land.

KROC objects to the proposed privatisation and alienation from public transport use of sections of the existing Newcastle rail corridor from Wickham Station to Newcastle Station.

### **Newcastle Rail Corridor Land**

The publicly owned land between Wickham and Newcastle Stations, formerly occupied by the intercity rail services to Newcastle from Sydney and The Hunter, has become a central focus of community concern to safeguard essential public amenity for Newcastle and the region surrounding it.

The public debate around the future of this corridor have centred around the following points:

## **1. Lack of Public Consultation**

- The public of Newcastle and the Hunter has never been consulted about the truncation of the intercity rail line into Newcastle.
- This is despite several years of community activism, petitions to State Parliament and other activities by the public to oppose the suggested closure of this key element of the Hunter's transport infrastructure.
- The consultations carried out by UrbanGrowth and Transport for NSW over the past year have been wholly inadequate, since both consultation processes actively discouraged and disallowed discussion centred around the maintenance of the rail corridor in public hands for public transport purposes.
- Notwithstanding the lack of any mechanism for considering community opinion regarding the proposed rail route for the city, more than 70% of submissions to UrbanGrowth's 2015 consultation stated that rail, whether heavy or light, should remain in the entire length of the rail corridor
- Transport for NSW has refused to make public the submissions made in response to their consultation. However, based on evidence available, it is clear that most respondents expressed a preference for rail to be kept on the rail corridor.

## **2. Connectivity:**

- **North-South**

The most frequently cited justification for removing the rail line between Wickham and Civic stations has been to allow 'connectivity' between Newcastle city and the harbour foreshore. That is, to improve North-South Connectivity between two parts of the city-centre, a key piece of public transport infrastructure had to be sacrificed.

North-South connectivity will be severely hampered by the proposed development of multi-storeyed buildings along the rail corridor as proposed by UrbanGrowth

- **East-West**

While passages have been opened up across the corridor since the rail truncation, that truncation has produced a more serious decrease in connectivity from East to West for travellers into the city centre of Newcastle.

The rail journeys between Sydney and Newcastle and between Maitland and Newcastle are no longer "seamless". Multiple mode changes are now required for most passengers when travelling by public transport into the city.

- **Mobility limited passengers**

Passengers who are mobility limited, such as elderly, visually impaired and disabled people, have been significantly affected by the truncation.

These passengers will be further negatively impacted if the new light rail travels along Hunter and Scott Sts because of the hazards associated with alighting in the centre of a road.

### 3. Transport Design Considerations

- **Development in Corridor**

UrbanGrowth's proposed model for development of the rail corridor will alienate the land for use for public transport forever.

Seamless connectivity between Wickham and the city will be lost and serious traffic and transport hindrances will be created because a major East-West transport artery will be permanently blocked.

- **Access to Significant Destinations**

The new courthouse and the new University of Newcastle campus at Civic have clientele that rely on public transport to reach these destinations. This large number of passengers will be delivered to these destinations much more efficiently if their transport is travelling along the rail corridor than if it is along the already congested Hunter Street.

- **Current Businesses on Hunter and Scott Sts**

Existing businesses in Hunter and Scott Sts have reported significant reduction in patronage for their businesses since the truncation of the rail line.

They hold real fears of further patronage loss during projected construction of a light rail line along Hunter and Scott Sts.

- **Parking**

Running the light rail along Hunter Streets and Scott streets, instead of along the existing rail corridor will result in the loss of approximately 1500 car- parking spaces.

- **Traffic Impacts**

No evidence-based traffic analysis has been carried out to show that running light rail anywhere else other than the corridor will be viable

- **Previous Connections**

Before the electrification of the line in 1984 there was connectivity at multiple points between the CBD and West End of Newcastle on the one hand, and Newcastle Harbour on the other.

There were at-grade crossings at Stewart Avenue, Worth Place, Merewether Street, Perkins Street and at the Newcastle Station at Watt Street.

After the earthquake of 1988 all of the crossings between Wickham and the Newcastle Station with the exception of the Merewether Street crossing were closed and all appeals to reopen them were ignored.

On the previous rail network the journey from The University of Newcastle's Callaghan campus to its new inner city campus would take twelve minutes with one unbroken service.

- **Expert Evidence**

The State Government has failed to produce any credible evidence that the existing rail corridor is no longer needed for public transport purposes.

**To develop this rail corridor should require a well-developed and publicly revealed business case and feasibility studies**

The only existing NSW State Government proposals that are backed up by serious evidence-based transport studies recommend putting the new light rail on the existing rail corridor for the entire length of the service. These can be found in

- *Cabinet Minute Copy 71* or
- *REVITALISING NEWCASTLE An integrated transport solution Consultation document December 2013* (obtained under GIPA request)

See these two documents attached

## **4. Heritage**

### **Aboriginal Heritage**

- Since the route of the Newcastle rail corridor follows close to the historic shoreline of the Hunter River, it is certain that a trove of Aboriginal relics, artifacts and other heritage items would be found there if there were a proper archeological investigation carried out on the site.
- The Awabakal Land Council has made a land claim on the site, based on their belief that the site has ongoing cultural significance to their community. Their claim has been rejected out of hand with no apparent consideration having been given to their claims.
- No consultation has occurred with the local Aboriginal community regarding the cultural or archeological significance of the site for them.
- The Awabakal Land Council has expressed their opinion that the corridor should remain for the purposes of public transport.

### **Heritage of the rail line**

A rail connection between Sydney and Newcastle has existed since 1857

In 1984 the Wran Government completed the electrification of the railway lines between Sydney and Newcastle. Such was the value of the line reaching its final destination at the heritage Newcastle Station that a very substantial sum of money was spent to improve the 'connectivity' of the state's two largest cities and cut the time needed to travel between them.

### **Heritage Stations**

**Newcastle Station** is listed on the State Heritage Register as of State Significance, a splendid brick and stone two-storey structure built in 1878. It has gracious wrought iron arches holding up the awnings on Platform 1.

While it is possible to design a new adjunct building that would retain these features it is more worthwhile to retain the building in its current form and with its purpose-built destiny – to be a railway station.

**Civic Station** is an Art Deco masterpiece and should be retained and preserved in place serving its current purpose.

**Wickham Station**, though not of the same calibre as Newcastle or Civic stations is of a similar vintage to Civic and deserves preservation in its current role.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the significant cost involved in destroying an efficient intercity rail service to replace it with a clearly inferior alternative needs to be investigated. It is clear that the current plans to run the light rail system along Hunter and Scott Streets break *every* principle of town planning and is to the detriment of commuters, residents, and visitors. Why is it so that this profoundly inferior system is being adopted? It certainly is *not* in the interests of those in need of public transport. Nor is it to the advantage of car users: the roads in the city are already becoming more congested; and even if more parking stations are built this will only serve to exacerbate an already difficult road transport situation.

The only winners in this apparently political decision to destroy the efficient rail corridor based transport service are UrbanGrowth, the Hunter Development Corporation and undoubtedly the developers who buy the land and build on it.

**So there is currently a situation where two state government owned instrumentalities will benefit financially by the destruction of the most efficient corridor site for public transport into Newcastle at a very great cost to the travelling public, and leaving a legacy of traffic congestion and needless destruction of some of Newcastle's most significant heritage and amenity.**

The railway corridor in Newcastle must be kept in public hands for current and future public transport purposes.

Keep Rail On the Corridor (KROC) appeals to the Committee of Inquiry to consider the following:

- A full and transparent consultation occurs regarding the future of the existing rail corridor into Newcastle.
- A full and transparent consultation with the Aboriginal community is properly facilitated and completed, particular emphasis on the Aboriginal heritage of the rail corridor site and its surroundings.
- The publicly owned land comprising the Newcastle rail corridor from Wickham Station to Newcastle Station remains in public hands for the purposes of public transport until a comprehensive and evidence-based research study proves that it is not needed.

- A thorough traffic and transport study establishes the public transport needs into the future of Newcastle up to 2030.
- A similar study establishes how active transport modes (cycleways and pedestrian walkways) can be incorporated into the city's design.
- A business case study proceeds the installation of any light rail system into the city centre of Newcastle.
- The NSW Government develops comprehensive, evidence-based plans for both public transport and active transport in the Lower Hunter based on achieving Council's current transport targets.