

Submission

No 57

INQUIRY INTO THE UTILISATION OF RAIL CORRIDORS

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Date Received: 6/03/2012

Inquiry into utilisation of rail corridors, air space above and land adjacent to rail corridors.

Submitted by : Joan Dawson,

This submission refers to local requirements relating to rail corridors in the Hunter Valley.

The rail lines currently being used for passenger transport are:

- The Newcastle – Sydney electric train service
- The Hunter Line – a) Newcastle to Dungog service
b) Newcastle to Scone (including Singleton, Muswellbrook)
- Main North Coast Rail – XPT trains -via Broadmeadow – Maitland – Dungog- Casino

It is vital to retain current train services on all rail lines and where possible to restore services to lines that have been discontinued. Rail is considered to be the most ecologically sustainable transport for the future and therefore investment in current rail infrastructure and planning for future needs is imperative.

In consideration of the Terms of Reference:

1. Providing opportunities for mixed use property development.

A. Newcastle Station .

- a) Full utilisation of the upper and lower sections of Newcastle Station would provide retail and commercial opportunities.
- b) The XPT (Countrylink) trains previously diverted to Newcastle Station, which is central to a growing tourist market. It is recommended that these services be returned to Newcastle, in conjunction with providing accommodation and other services at this heritage venue, close to the Harbour and Stockton Ferry service
- c) New buildings of a sympathetic nature could be built in the adjacent areas of the station, with a variety of possibilities for use, including restaurant, fast food kiosk / café, quality office space or accommodation.

B. Hamilton Station

Hamilton is the connection point for passengers travelling from the Hunter Lines (Dungog and Muswellbrook to Sydney).

It has no facility for refreshments. A kiosk/café would be a great advantage to those who have travelled in from the Valley towns, already more than an hour, and who are connecting with the Sydney train. There is a large amount of rail land adjacent to Hamilton, which could be used for facilities for better passenger comfort. When you drive to Sydney by car there are large centres, such as at Warnervale to provide for traveller amenity. If the State targets are to be met, such provisions need to be made at rail stations.

2. Generating income for funding future infrastructure projects.

Many rail stations have not been developed to their full potential, with building above as at Chatswood, arcades below as below Town Hall station which connects to Queen Victoria building and beyond to shopping centres etc. Retail opportunities at stations could help in providing the funding for improved transport services, including greater frequency and additional rolling stock. These are needed on the Hunter Line and the Sydney line.

Services for passengers could be increased for better comfort during the journey, with on train sales of such items as toiletries, toothbrushes, inflatable cushions, internet connections, newspapers and refreshments on all intercity trains.

Journey times between Newcastle and Sydney are in excess of 2 hours; from Dungog to Sydney takes 4 hours. It is reasonable to expect to be able to buy comfort items en route.

At major stations, especially interchange stations there could be : dry cleaning agency, nail beautician, additional coffee shops and refreshment provision, internet café. These are the sorts of services commuters would appreciate and be prepared to pay for. Franchises or direct Government enterprise could guarantee a revenue stream for continued upgrading of the rail services, which would attract increased patronage

3. Facilitating sustainable urban renewal and development.

- People will be attracted to live in communities that have cafes, bars and restaurants, but that are safe at night.

The best way to engender a safe environment is not through the provision of more police, but through the “passive surveillance” of having many people engaged in leisure pursuits. This means the sorts of developments that have people living and working there during the night as well as the day.

All night Chemists, all night gymnasiums, and 24 hour car service stations, cinemas and theatres can all help to provide the active overnight CBD that would be safer.

Rail services are important to move people safely in and out of the living city.

- Newcastle City Council has a levy imposed on the CBD, so that it is cheaper to operate a business in Hamilton than in inner Newcastle. This is a disincentive to development. This levy should be removed if there is to be encouragement to invest.
- The NSW Government is currently paying people a special bonus if they move from a city to a country location. This is a negative program for Newcastle city centre, which needs a

critical mass of people living and working there, for any chance of the much discussed revitalisation.

- Sufficient rolling stock and facilities are needed to provide frequent train services to the outer areas of the entire Hunter area. Currently many are unable to come into the Newcastle CBD by train as there are not train services back at night. (e.g. the last train to Dungog leaves Newcastle at 5.30 p.m.) Students needing night lectures, workers with late meetings and pleasure seekers are all limited in their ability to access night activities in Newcastle. This in turn is a limiting factor in the urban renewal of Newcastle, the “capital” of the Hunter.

- **4. Facilitation of transit oriented development schemes around railway stations.**

Investment in rail and provision of more frequent services to the country towns throughout NSW would be an encouragement for business opportunities near railway stations.

In past times the railway station was a hub of activity for the community, as trains were the way to connect with the outside world. Before the predominance of car travel the rail system linked the state and gave people the ability to move around. The rail system in NSW was world class. The power of the oil lobby and the development of the automotive industry has caused it to be relegated to a lower status, and sadly many of the rail lines have been closed and even removed. With the realisation that oil is a finite resource and that its continued supply is not guaranteed there is a need to again look to rail as the transport mode of the future. It will be increasingly important to again invest in it, for passenger and freight transport.

Many of the smaller towns in the Hunter could become important rail centres, with parking stations adjacent to them, and with better and more frequent services houses would again cluster around the rail way stations.

- **5. Connectivity of communities either side of the railway lines.**

Some railway stations in the city of Maitland are very poorly linked from one side to the other. There is this notion that crossings are a bad thing along rail lines. It is far more dangerous to have such an inconvenient means of access over a line that people often attempt to cross at inappropriate parts of the line. This has occurred with fatal results at one of the Maitland stations. It is important to ensure that level pedestrian crossings are provided, which have automatically operated gates. This way such accidents would be avoided.

- **6. Current planning and policy framework**

The targets as outlined in the NSW 2021 document indicate the clear intention to consult with the community, notably in Goals 31 and 32. This is very promising as such consultation has not been evident in recent years. It will be important that in order to implement these goals, the ordinary members of the community are able to have the information needed to fully participate in planning. Unfortunately the first round of consultation meetings seems not to have fitted the bill in this regard. Very few people heard of the meetings held at the

Newcastle City Hall and the Maitland Town Hall on 28th and 29th February 2012. I attended the Newcastle meeting, which I heard about by chance and took the trouble to apply to attend. Many people have expressed publicly that they did not know the meetings were on . These are community members, keen to have a say in future planning. There was no similar meeting planned for the Upper Hunter area.

I recommend to the NSW Government that a further round of consultative processes be undertaken, with adequate publicity, and a workshop format that allows interaction and reporting back of every table or group present. That these workshops be held in every part of the Hunter area – not just 2 places in the Lower Hunter.

- **7.Regulatory and policy barriers to implementing rail corridor projects.**

As mentioned previously there is a reluctance to install level crossings in NSW. This creates connectivity problems in many communities, and can be overcome easily and cheaply. Pedestrian level crossings are cheap and simple, electronically operated gates can ensure safety. Such installations would be of enormous benefit to many divided communities, assisting with the revival of town centres and providing certainty for business operators and investors. Just being able to walk between the amenities and shops on both sides of the tracks would bring unity and investment opportunities to communities. There is no reason that a rail line should be any more of a barrier than a street or road – both carry machines that can kill – the trick is to make them available for access between the movement of either cars or trains.

- **8. Issues relating to the financing and funding of such projects.**

Private/ public partnerships have often failed. It is therefore preferable to retain public transport projects in public hands and to creatively set up funding mechanisms that can assure an income generated from within the project itself. Sure fire retail items, the things people always need, such as food and drinks are a fairly safe bet for travel centres. Current day needs can be for internet connections or gadget replenishment – recharging, phone credit supply and similar services could also be fairly safe enterprises.

Both state and Federal governments need to ensure that there is a high level of investment of funds in public transport, otherwise irreversible deterioration of services occurs, such as the current lag in NSW public transport provision. Earlier governments put in place massive projects, such as the building of rail lines throughout the state, the Sydney harbour Bridge, the building of the Hawkesbury River Bridge, electrification of rail to Newcastle, etc. Since WW2 the automotive demands have sapped the life out of the rail transport system. Expressways have taken all of the funding and the rail lines have been neglected, some being closed. Trains between Newcastle and Sydney are slower than when steam trains, operated on this line. Passengers use the Sydney suburban rail system because it gives them the convenience of fast transport. The patronage in regional areas needs to be increased and this can only occur when the service improves with better times for the long haul and more frequent services within the regional cities and between the outer communities and their regional centres.

The imbalance needs to be addressed, with an injection into freight and passenger rail lines, rolling stock provision and a determination to separate the two types of rail line, which would be beneficial to both passenger and freight operations.

Public transport investment does not yield an immediate profit, however the long term benefits will eventuate, in such matters as less cost for roads, environmental protections, such as air quality and in certainty for investors. The Perth system is an example of this.

9. Communities are more than ever aware of the disadvantages that can result from unsuitable developments. Therefore Governments need to ensure they really have an accurate picture of the community attitude when undertaking opinion surveys. Micky Mouse surveys using trick questions and computers will not cut it with today's awareness of environmental concerns, of privatisation of public spaces and removal of icons for immediate developer profit. When "Bang the Table" was employed to gauge public opinion a few years ago in Newcastle, the result was derided and the mass of public opinion resulted in the MP being thrown out at the next election. Government needs to institute consultation that will stand up – both sides of any proposal need to be fully explained so that people are not duped. Anger will result when they find they have been gulled into thinking black is white.

- **Examples of best practice from other jurisdictions.**

I have travelled extensively and therefore I have seen many examples of successful transport systems in operation.

In USA I travelled from Las Vegas to San Diego on a diesel train, a similar distance to the Newcastle to Sydney trip. The train was comfortable, clean and safe and I saw no graffiti. It reminded me of the trip from Dungog to Newcastle on our Hunter Car sets. On reaching San Diego the line ran parallel to a light rail system, with passengers able to cross readily from one to the other at stations. There were no fences or barriers, and the rail seemed no different from a road in this regard.

In Russia I travelled from Moscow to Lake Baikal on the Trans Siberian rail line. Before leaving Moscow I experienced the Metro – which was a superior underground system. Giant escalators moved the passengers to the lower level, where there were magnificent art works – sculptures and paintings on the very clean, well lit stations – and trains arriving at less than 2 minute intervals. The Trans Siberian trains are comfortable, with clean bedding handed out by an attendant responsible for each carriage, and who spent some of her time washing down every part of her carriage, walls, floors, the lot. Each carriage had constant hot water supplied from a boiler, a samovar – which meant tea and coffee whenever you needed it. As well there was a dining car with flowers on the tables and attractive curtains and a la carte meals. Russia has electric trains running its entire length, for passenger and freight transport. When other amenities in Russia have gone into disrepair the rail system has been maintained.

In Auckland I spent some time in the magnificent Brit-o-mat station adjacent to the Westfield shopping centre, in which displays of the rail time table in real time are featured. The station is a heritage building with beautiful stained glass windows. It has at ground level

the items you expect, such as ticket sales plus various food outlets and shops with tourist items and other goods. The escalators lead to the underground stations with frequent train services. The rail lines in Auckland were closed down, but later re-built at great expense.

I have travelled as well, on trains in Denmark (Copenhagen), Norway, France, (Paris), England and Ireland, where in all cases there has been evidence of investment in rail, even despite the rise of the car. In other Australian states I have travelled in trains and have seen rail progress – in Perth, Melbourne and Adelaide and Queensland. Only in NSW have I seen rail lines falling into disuse and being removed.

CONCLUSIONS:

Rail lines need to be retained for their primary transport use and heavy rail is needed to ensure cities remain connected with a sustainable mass transit option, for passenger and freight movement.

Rail services are important to move people in and out of major cities, day and night. This means there needs to be sufficient rolling stock to provide the frequent services needed for a vibrant city.

Methods of access across rail lines needs to be properly investigated, with research into ways to overcome questions of safety while providing user friendly crossings over rail lines, especially for pedestrians in populated areas.

RAIL SERVICES ARE IMPORTANT TO MOVE PEOPLE SAFELY IN AND OUT OF THE LIVING CITY , DAY AND NIGHT. THIS MEANS THERE NEEDS TO BE SUFFICIENT ROLLING STOCK ON THE RAIL CORRIDOR TO PROVIDE FREQUENT SERVICES, NOT ONLY WITHIN NEWCASTLE, BUT TO THE HUNTER VALLEY TOWNS, WHICH CURRENTLY DO NOT HAVE NIGHT RAIL SERVICES. (THE LAST TRAIN TO DUNGOG LEAVES NEWCASTLE AT 5.30 P.M. THEREFORE STUDENTS/ WORKERS/ LEISURE SEEKERS ARE REDUCED IN ACCESS TO NIGHT ACTIVITIES.)