

**Submission
No 205**

**INQUIRY INTO PLANNING PROCESS IN NEWCASTLE
AND THE BROADER HUNTER REGION**

Name: Mr Graham Mullane

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SUBMISSION TO THE SELECT COMMITTEE OF THE NSW
LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL ON THE PLANNING PROCESS IN
NEWCASTLE AND THE BROADER HUNTER REGION

By Graham Mullane

23/10/2014

1. The decision to close the rail line at Wickham.

- 1.1 There were previous assurances by this and the previous NSW Government that the railway land would be retained as a transport corridor. The Government has announced proposals for tramlines that will not use that land. Hon Prue Goward (Minister for the Hunter) and other members of the Government have now said that some of the land will be sold for development .
- 1.2 There has been no commitment by the government that funds from sale of parts of the corridor will be used for infrastructure in Newcastle and the Hunter. That is consistent with the fact that Newcastle and the Hunter have received only a small fraction of the funds from the 99 year lease of the Newcastle Port and the royalties from coal mined in the Hunter and shipped out of Newcastle.
- 1.3 The supporters of closure of the rail line have argued that this should be done to "open up the city to the harbour". But although acceding to their wish to close the rail line, the government's intention to allow development on the rail corridor will involve obstruction of views and of access to the Harbour.
- 1.4 The Government has not disclosed to the public any detailed plan for the use of the railway corridor.
- 1.5 The Government, although planning to close the line this December, has not disclosed to the public any plan for any part of the corridor to be used for green space.
- 1.6 One obvious possibility would be to close Wharf Road from Watt Street to level with Brown Street and use that section of Wharf Road and the adjacent railway land to extend the Harbour Foreshore Park and provide parking bays on Scott Street. But there is no evidence that the Government has considered such a proposal or any other proposal to provide additional green space.

- 1.7 The Government has not disclosed to the public that it has given any consideration to the use of the rail corridor for any other form of public transport.

2. The proposed tram service

- 2.1 The Government has indicated that the proposed tram service will not be a government enterprise, but will be conducted by a private operator.
- 2.2 There has been no private operator that has publicly expressed interest in providing the service.
- 2.3 The very limited scope of the tram service proposed by the Government suggests there may be no private operator interested unless the service is substantially subsidised by the Government.
- 2.4 There has been, so far as the public are aware, no call for tenders or expressions of interest for the tram service, but the Government is proceeding to close the line and says the tram service will not commence until at least 2 years later.

3. The proposed Wickham transport interchange.

Buses

- 3.1 In its recent announcements about interim arrangements, the Government has said that when the construction of the Wickham transport interchange is completed in about 2 years time, until there is a tram service in place government buses will provide a connection between the Wickham transport interchange and the eastern end of the city.
- 3.2 Adjacent to Newcastle Railway Station is a bus facility that enables the public to catch regional buses (e.g. to Cessnock, Port Stephens, etc.) buses to Newcastle Airport, Government buses to Newcastle suburbs, buses used by community groups and interstate buses such as to North Coast, Brisbane, Cairns etc.
- 3.3 It appears from the government's advertisements for expressions of interest for the design of the Wickham transport interchange that it will not have any facility for any of these buses. The Government has not proposed that the bus facility at Newcastle station be moved to the Wickham transport interchange.
- 3.4 A person arriving by train at the Wickham interchange who wishes to go to the bus facility will need to catch a tram (if such a service is available) or government bus to Newcastle Station and walk to the bus facility.
- 3.5 This is likely to add about 15 minutes to the journey time between Sydney and Newcastle beyond the time the train would have taken.
- 3.6 Steam trains have provided a quicker journey between Newcastle and Sydney than most of the present electric services. The journey time will on many

services (including the bus or tram time and changeover) increase to 3 hours or more.

- 3.7 This will cause most users of the services considerable delay and inconvenience. It will discourage people from using public transport. It becomes quite ridiculous when one considers that, for example, someone going to Newcastle Airport from Cessnock or Morisset will have to make changeovers at Wickham and Newcastle.

Private motor vehicles

- 3.8 The Government's description of the proposed Wickham transport interchange in its call for expressions of interest to design the facility the does not disclose that any provision is to be made for private vehicles to set down or pick up travellers.

Food Services

- 3.9 There is a café at Newcastle Station providing food services, newspapers and other services to travellers. The Government's description of the proposed Wickham transport interchange in its call for expressions of interest to design the facility does not disclose that any provision is to be made for food services.

Showers

- 3.10 One would expect that a transport interchange for the second largest city in the state would include showers for travellers.
- 3.11 The Government's description of the proposed Wickham transport interchange in its call for expressions of interest to design the facility does not disclose that any showers for travellers are to be included.

Tourist Information Office

- 3.12 One would expect that a transport interchange for the second largest city in the state would include a Tourist Information Office.
- 3.13 The Government's description of the proposed Wickham transport interchange in its call for expressions of interest to design the facility the does not disclose that any Tourist Information Office is to be included.

4. Proposal for buses from Hamilton Station for 2 years.

- 4.1 According to the Newcastle Herald of 21 October, the government has announced that the trains will stop at Hamilton or 2 years while the Wickham transport interchange is constructed and buses will convey passengers to the City.
- 4.2 It says that this will add about 15 minutes to the journey time. It appears it will be 25 minutes if the person has to wait 10 minutes for a bus. The travel time by public transport between Newcastle and Sydney will increase to more than 3 hours.
- 4.3 There are only 2 platforms at Hamilton Station. Instead of the more extensive facilities at Newcastle where 4 Trains can be arriving, departing or waiting to depart, with only 2 platforms, there will be no "waiting" trains unless more than one train is queued on the same line. Presumably they will also need to park trains elsewhere. There will be more train movements.
- 4.4 It seems inevitable that the additional train movements to park them elsewhere, will result in more frequent traffic disruptions and train delays from closures of the Beaumont Street railway gates.
- 4.5 It is hard to contemplate how trains from both the Sydney line and the Maitland line will be managed at Hamilton without serious disruption to timetables.
- 4.6 There is also the issue of discomfort to the travellers. The 2 platforms at Hamilton are connected by stairs and an overhead bridge, all of which have no overhead cover.
- 4.7 Platform 1 is the normal Sydney bound platform and adjacent to it there is a parking area where buses can set down passengers, but probably insufficient space for buses to await arrival of passengers.
- 4.8 There is vacant land on the North side of Hamilton Station close and parallel to platform 2 which could accommodate buses waiting to convey passengers into the city. This would require sealing of the area, ramps and other connections to enable passengers to go from platform 2 to the buses.
- 4.9 But there are some problems:
- There is no shelter for passengers waiting there for a bus, getting onto a bus or alighting;
 - Platform 2 has overhead cover for only about the length of one carriage;
 - If it is required, elderly or disabled passengers would find using the overhead bridge between platforms 1 & 2 difficult or impossible;
- and

- Moving between platforms 1 & 2 using the existing ramps is not viable for aged or disabled persons, as it requires the person to cross the railway lines at the level crossing.

5. CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1 The proposal to close the line and the implications have not been properly considered. There has been no adequate development of the proposal and no real consideration of the transport needs of the city and the interests of users of public transport.
- 5.2 There has been no adequate community consultation.
- 5.3 At present there is no convincing case that closing the line will in the long term be of more public benefit than keeping the existing service.
- 5.4 The decision to close the rail line is premature, as there is a need for much more public consultation and research on whether it should be closed and, if so, what should replace it.

Graham Mullane