

**Submission
No 59**

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

Organisation: Two More Trains for Singleton

Date received: 14/10/2014



Two More Trains For Singleton

Campaign for two additional daily passenger rail services from Newcastle to Singleton

The Director
Select Committee on the Planning Process in Newcastle and the Broader Hunter Region
Parliament House
Macquarie St
Sydney NSW 2000
newcastleplanning@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Submission – Inquiry on the planning process in Newcastle and the broader Hunter region

Background

Two More Trains for Singleton is a community group based in Singleton in the Upper Hunter Valley and has strong community links. The group represents a large number of Upper Hunter residents and travelers who travel to inner Newcastle and Sydney.

The group has made submissions to the NSW Government over the last 5 years seeking additional passenger rail services to connect Singleton with Maitland, Newcastle and Sydney. Concern is also expressed about the proposed closure of the train line into Newcastle and the failure to replace this with acceptable public transport.

This submission identifies serious concerns with planning for public transport in Newcastle, and the significant implications of this for future regional accessibility and urban growth. Key issues relate to the proposed closure of the train line to Newcastle as follows and explained in more detail below:

1. A failure to consider the broader regional context and urban accessibility needs.
2. Lack of economic analysis of the proposed Newcastle rail line closure.
3. The Wickham station proposal is a wrongly located dead end, not an interchange.
4. Planning for inner Newcastle is creating a transport problem, and not a solution.
5. The transport planning process in the Hunter Region has been inadequate.

1 Failure to consider regional context and accessibility

Newcastle City is a regional transport hub, yet the needs of Hunter Region travelers, such as those from Singleton are ignored in the planning and assessment documentation for Newcastle's inner city. In particular, significant long term decisions are being made in the absence of any comprehensive Hunter Regional Transport Plan or Strategy.



Two More Trains For Singleton

Campaign for two additional daily passenger rail services from Newcastle to Singleton

The failure to consider the regional planning context is demonstrated by the poor quality of the Wickham Interchange Review of Environmental Factors (REF) which shows that it has been prepared in the absence of any transport planning for Newcastle, with a lack of appreciation of the consequences of the proposal for both public and private transport and accessibility within the city. Costs of modal change of transport, especially for aged, disabled and children are so high that they are likely to avoid trips. Train trips to Newcastle Beach will be prevented, and regional accessibility and amenity will be reduced.

The transport needs of rail passengers, especially travelers from the Upper Hunter, Dungog and elsewhere in the Hunter Region is barely addressed in either the Wickham REF or any regional land use or transport plan. In particular, closure of the Newcastle rail line is proposed without any effective alternative arrangements in place.

2 No economic analysis of Newcastle rail line closure

No economic analysis of the proposal to close the Newcastle rail line has been undertaken. However, it is clearly a significant waste of public money to replace functional transport infrastructure with a new railway station that is poorly located, does not link with anything, and causes significant user inconvenience and traffic congestion.

No economic evaluation has been undertaken or presented to review the full costs and benefits of the proposal. It appears to represent a significant net cost, both to the NSW Government and to individual public transport users rather than a benefit.

The rail line closure is a proposal which will cause a transport problem and disadvantage Newcastle's long term economic development. No serious justification for the project or its public benefit is provided.

3 Wickham station is poorly located and not suitable for an interchange

Publicly exhibited documents represent a concept, rather than a final proposal, and are inadequate for serious comment. In particular, the description of the Wickham proposal as an interchange is incorrect. The project is a rail terminus not an interchange, with no information on how the new railway station will connect with buses, ferries, bicycle routes, pedestrian traffic or the foreshadowed light rail.

The chosen location and design mean that the project will not work as an interchange, and is not integrated into the functionality of the Newcastle centre. If it is to form a key location for interchange with a metropolitan light rail system for Newcastle, then this should be allowed for in the design. There is no such provision. The breathtaking short sightedness of this expensive removal of infrastructure and its replacement with a temporary dead end is



Two More Trains For Singleton

Campaign for two additional daily passenger rail services from Newcastle to Singleton

contrary to good public policy and should be reversed. In no other major city in the world would such folly be tolerated in an era where rail systems to city centres are being expanded not removed.

4 Planning for Newcastle is creating a transport problem

The Wickham transport proposal is a dead end, and will create a transport problem and a long term liability for Newcastle's economic growth and development. It should not proceed.

The effect of the Newcastle line closure will be to increase road traffic and congestion in inner Newcastle at the same time as taking away an effective alternative. With major traffic generating uses such as the law courts and university being developed nearby with no parking facilities, public transport is the only realistic alternative, and metropolitan rail systems underpin effective public transport networks in congested urban areas.

As outlined above, no consideration has been given to regional public transport accessibility and connectivity in the transport planning decisions that have been made for Newcastle.

5 Inadequate transport planning process for the Hunter Region

This proposal has a significant impact and requires an environmental impact statement, not simply a cursory review of environmental factors. The process of preparing and approving this proposal is flawed, given its immense consequences for the future of Newcastle and the Hunter Region.

While the Wickham REF describes the proposed "transport interchange" as follows:

- 1 constructing and operating a new station at Wickham, and a transport interchange for heavy rail, local buses, taxis and private vehicles (short term parking for passenger pick up and drop off) to the west of Stewart Avenue
- 2 ceasing train services between Wickham and Newcastle stations
- 3 providing for the future introduction of light rail."

the REF does not consider or review the impact of the two final components of the proposal which must all proceed together. The Wickham REF also has not seriously considered any alternatives, and fails to comply with relevant legislative requirements. It is the result of a flawed development decision not a justifiable transport decision. Relevant options have not been considered, and there is no comprehensive regional transport plan to support the proposal.

Therefore, the Wickham REF and proposal appears to be legally incorrect and indicates a flawed approval process.



Two More Trains For Singleton

Campaign for two additional daily passenger rail services from Newcastle to Singleton

Conclusion

The following criteria need to be applied if the transport needs of Newcastle and the Hunter Region are to be satisfactorily addressed:

1. Replacement arrangements for rail must be more accessible and quicker than the existing facilities.
2. A regional transport solution must be provided, as well as a local one.
3. The rail system must effectively integrate with other transport modes, especially buses, cycle routes and pedestrian access.
4. Rail transport arrangements must be attractive to use, and be a realistic alternative to cars on roads to other centres in the region.

None of the four criteria outlined above are satisfied by the decisions that have been made. Significant concerns exist with lack of detail, the planning context in which government decisions have been made, and the lack of understanding of the impacts of the proposal.

Closure of the Newcastle railway line and associated development would result in very significant disadvantage to regional train users and reduce accessibility to essential services in Newcastle. The proposal should not proceed or be deferred for a full environmental impact statement and independent review. In particular, the lack of economic justification to support the proposal, and the failure to consider alternatives are major flaws.

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission. For more information contact Two More Trains for Singleton by email –

or Facebook at www.facebook.com/pages/Two-More-Trains-for-Singleton

Two More Trains for Singleton

15 October 2014