

**Submission
No 31**

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

Organisation: Parks and Playgrounds Movement Inc

Date received: 8/10/2014



<http://parksandplaygroundsmovement.blogspot.com/>

President : Doug Lithgow

The Parks and Playgrounds Movement is a community organisation established in the early 1930s. Its secretary was C E W Bean, the historian, lawyer and journalist. It was brought to Newcastle in 1952 by R.E. (Tom) Farrell, and continues the work to safeguard our Natural and Cultural Heritage. The Movement's early work included the protection of the openspace provisions of the 1952 Northumberland County District Town and Country Planning Scheme.

The Reverend Fred Nile MLC, Chairman
Select Committee on Planning Process in Newcastle & Hunter Region
Legislative Council, Parliament House,
Macquarie Street Sydney,
NSW 2000.

Dear Reverend Fred,

Interim Submission: Parks & Playgrounds Movement/ planning history/ background to the Planning Problem & why passenger rail services should be retained to Newcastle Station

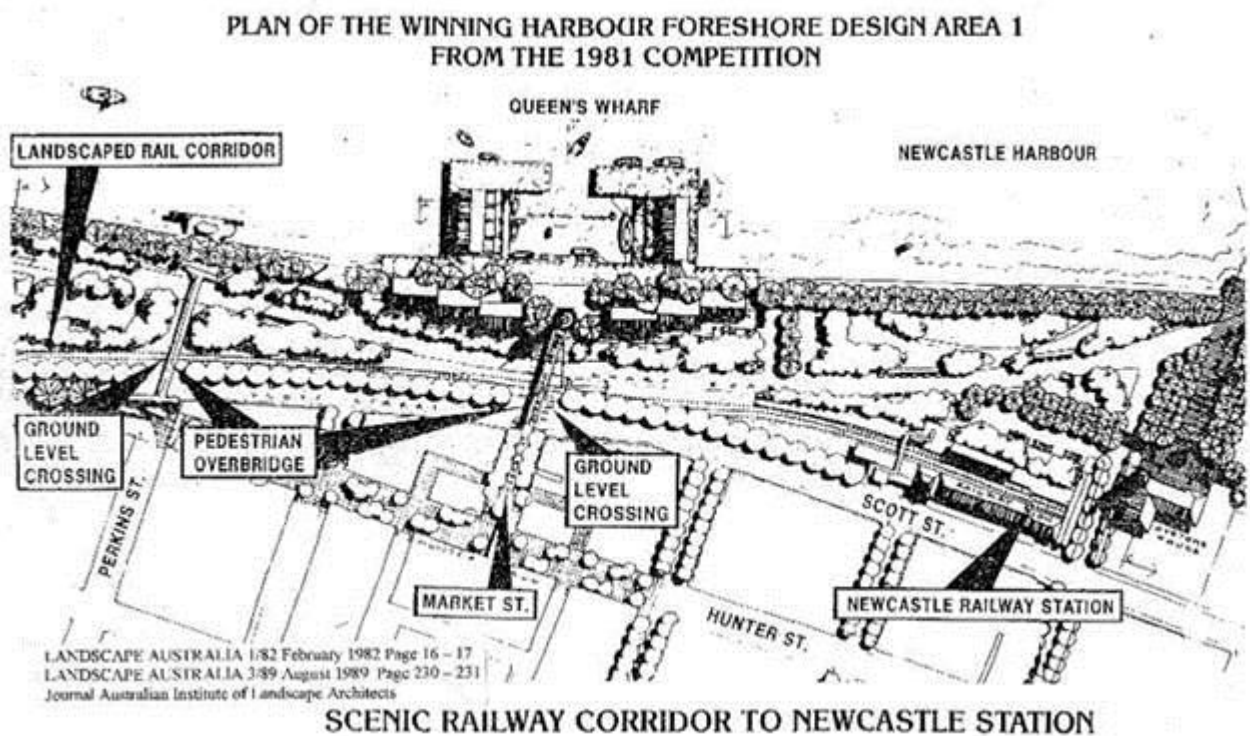
Thank you for your formal invitation of the 30th of September 2014 to make a submission to your Select Committee inquiry. I am pleased to make a submission as President of the Parks and Playgrounds Movement.

The Parks and Playgrounds Movement has been an advocate since its inception in 1930 for town planning and the establishment and protection of parks and open space. The Northern Parks and Playgrounds Movement under the leadership of Joe Richley and Tom Farrell who were members of the Sydney Movement has carried on the tradition started in Sydney with Charles Bean. The Movement dropped the Northern from its title when Incorporated.

The Parks and Playgrounds Movement has watched the development of Town Planning in the Hunter Region since the Northumberland County Council (1948-1964) placed its 1952 Draft Scheme for the County on public exhibition. We believe that the region was a leader and pioneer in Town Planning. Sadly there has been a confusion in the planning process in recent years. This has been exacerbated by the intrusion of political facilitation of vested interest that has corrupted and confused what should have been an open and transparent planning process.

No other town planning issue in Newcastle has been more confusing and subject to flawed planning than the current Railway Truncation proposal which had its beginning within the HDC which is not an open and transparent body. The concept of removing passenger rail from a city may have had some validity in 1952 when trains were smoky and private motor transport was beginning to grow and the need for highway planning was dominating town planning. However in today's Newcastle the future need is clearly for a many sided and more comprehensive integration of traffic and transport planning into the historic City setting.

We believe that this need was clearly in the minds of the Assessment Committee lead by Mr Lawrence Halprin the distinguished Landscape Architect and Urban Designer of San Francisco when selecting the winning entry from the Newcastle 1981 International Landscape and Urban Design Competition.



In September 1979 the Newcastle City Council resolved to hold the international design competition for the Newcastle harbour foreshore and the Lord Mayor Ald. Joy Cummings A.M. noted in the preamble to the competition in 1981 that few cities in the world would have the opportunity to put forward such a scheme. Because this area has remained in

Government ownership, we still have the opportunity to develop what many see as the most exciting development for Newcastle in this century. This was not the first time that the City Council had tried to seek the release of the old marshalling yards at Newcastle East for public parklands but it was significant in that a unified approach was being made for a landscape and urban design project. The winning design was brilliant in its simplicity and scope. It was firmly based on an understanding of the morphology of the city and provided the impetus for a revaluation of the image of the city.

The funding and implementation of a large portion of the project was carried out as part of Newcastle's highly successful contribution to Australia's 1988 bicentennial celebrations.

Features of the winning scheme included the realignment of Wharf Road, the reopening of the Watt Street through to Wharf Rd. and the rationalisation of the rail corridor for passenger rail. These basic traffic articulation and transport features were to be arranged within an attractive landscape and pedestrian flow pattern which emphasised the integration of city, harbour side and parkland.

The landscaped rail corridor as shown above was an essential feature of the foreshore design. The railway easement was to be reduced in width to less than half its present width from Brown Street to Newcastle Station with only two railway tracks operating.

The third track, which was previously used to connect the old marshalling yards at Newcastle East to the Darks ice works siding, was to be removed. This line is now used for the stabling of trains that should be stabled at Newcastle Station or elsewhere.

The land that was to be released by the rationalisation of the rail easement in the Foreshore Scheme was to be used in the design to provide lawns and landscaping and to allow Wharf Road to be aligned in such a way as to reduce the crossing distance at Queens Wharf. The Design also provided for a much needed landscaped parking area and bus standing facility on the northern side of the Newcastle Station for picking up and setting down of rail passengers.

Two ramped overbridges were to be provided to connect the Hunter Street Mall directly with the foreshore and Queens Wharf. A pedestrian concourse was designed to flow from the Mall down Market Street across Scott St. and Wharf Rd to the Harbour Foreshore. One other rail crossing was suggested at the Perkins Street end of the Foreshore Scheme.

The Harbour front Promenade connected Newcastle's historic breakwater with a generous civic scale walkway around the harbour side to the old vehicular ferry wharf. This scenic promenade provided a pleasant physical link between the points of interest on the foreshore.

Queens Wharf was designed to be linked directly by an overhead gantry type crossing from the Mall with an elevated viewing platform on the original Newcastle Town Axis looking up to the Cathedral and across the harbour. The displayed winning design did not show a marina at Queens Wharf and the buildings were to be of a smaller scale than those which have been built. Landscaping was proposed on the southern or city frontage to Wharf Rd.

Shortland Lawn and the proposed amphitheatre on the central axis up to Fort Scratchley were important features of the eastern section of the winning foreshore design. Lawns and landscaping flowed in a generous sward up to the Fort and created a direct physical and visual link with this historic area and vantage point.

Much of the proposed Newcastle Foreshore parkland was in place when the December 1989 Newcastle earthquake struck. The earthquake unfortunately caused not only a physical shock but also effected the orderly development of Newcastle's CBD and its highly acclaimed foreshore parkland plan. The damage bill was reported to be \$4 Billion. Sadly the Newcastle CBD never fully recovered because major commercial investment went to Charlestown and out-of-town shopping centres.

The 1981 Foreshore design competition and the earthquake were important turning points in the history of planning for the CBD area. The foreshore design and parkland was a triumph but the earthquake was calamity. It disrupted the orderly planning of the City by unfairly bringing heritage matters into dispute and providing wrong justification for disregarding planning processes.

The Foreshore Parklands created a fine setting for the city relating directly to its history and natural growth pattern. The winning design identified and incorporated the two most important elements in the Council's adopted Central Area Structure Plan for the City. They were of course the passenger Railway connection to the City and the proposed Wharf Road development. These elements were purposefully embodied in the Winning Foreshore Design and together they created a unique transport spine serving the city and the historic tourist/recreation arc flanking the City Core.

It is absolutely imperative that this unique transport spine be properly identified at this time so that an effective planning strategy can be adopted to incorporate improvements to the Central Honeysuckle Masterplan that ensure the retention of the effective passenger rail system.

The changes subsequently made were unfortunate and mainly forced upon the City Council because it had no power over the various statutory bodies including the non elected Honeysuckle Development Corporation after 1993. Newcastle's Lord Mayor Ald Joy Cummings who had initiated the foreshore competition tragically became very ill and had to stand down. During this vital design stage in early 1984 the Newcastle Council was disbanded and an administrator appointed. For these and other reasons the foreshore scheme was then out of the hands of the people of Newcastle and at the mercy of bureaucrats who did not seem to fully understand the potential of the scheme.

The Development Corporation has never properly or openly reviewed its Honeysuckle Masterplan since it was made as part of the Approved Scheme in 1993. The Scheme obviously should have been made in a way that gave acknowledgment to the 1977 Newcastle Central Area Structure Plan. The structure plan on page 5 identifies the Railway and Hunter Street / Wharf Road as the principal transport elements in the historic CBD area. The winning design from the foreshore competition had incorporated these elements in a comprehensive way. It was a strategic planning error for Newcastle that this structure plan was not properly incorporated into the Honeysuckle Masterplan that was developed after the earthquake. Furthermore the Honeysuckle Development Corporation's incorporation legislation (Growth Centres Act) required the Corporation to implement this faulty Scheme that has been driving the various rail truncation proposals behind the scenes for 20 years.

Shamefully the Corporation never revised its scheme even though it was obliged to by legislation. The Growth Centre was enlarged a number of times giving the Corporation the opportunity to revise its scheme as required by statute. Successive Ministers for Planning failed to advise the Corporation to comply with their legislation in this respect. The Honeysuckle Dev Corp has now been reconstituted as the Hunter Development Corporation and includes all of the Hunter Region's Local Government areas.



The diagram on page 6 was prepared by the Movement to show the **Tourist Heritage Recreation Arc** that flanks the historic city core with its Coal River Precinct (State Heritage Register 1674) which includes Nobbys Headland, Fort Scratchley the Convict built Macquarie Pier the first coal mines in the Southern Hemisphere and the birth site of Newcastle's first settlement 1801.



The historic Newcastle Town Plan was formally established by 1828 between Brown Street in the west and Pacific Street in the east and is a precious Town layout featuring the Christ Church Cathedral and the historic axis from the Cathedral to the harbour front. The Australian Agricultural Company lands were to the west of Brown Street and Government Reserved lands to the east of Pacific Street. The Newcastle township was later flanked with a rail corridor (The Great Northern Railway) to Newcastle Station 1857-8. This corridor is part of the transport spine that is a distinctive characteristic of the City of Newcastle today. The existing passenger rail link to Newcastle Station provides much spare capacity for access to the historic tourist recreation arc that is unparalleled in any other Australian city. This uniquely historic arc backed by the significant city core dominated as it is by the Christ Church Cathedral is destined to become a tourist and recreation destination of great importance in Australia.

The elements of the original city core should be seen as part of a comprehensive whole and all landscape and public facility development should enhance, reveal or develop the historic city structure. The passenger rail corridor and the harbour front tourist and recreation arc are essential features of that structure and their improvement should be an important part of Newcastle's revitalisation.

Whilst the present Queens Wharf development sits well on the foreshore and is an interesting building complex, its scale is much greater than originally planned and it forms an unrelieved

mass on the Wharf Rd. frontage. This is made even worse because Wharf Road was not realigned toward the railway at this point to narrow the railway easement as shown in the winning design. The failure to align the road to comply with the scheme meant that there was insufficient room to landscape the Queens Wharf buildings on the Wharf Rd. frontage. The present buildings are still particularly ugly when approached from the overhead walkway and the views to the harbour that were to be a feature of the walkway are blocked by the buildings which are twice as high as those shown in the winning design.

Furthermore the Government and the Railways made no attempt to construct attractive overhead gantries to carry electrical gear when the line was electrified across this sensitive foreshore area. Had the line been electrified with consideration of the importance of the City and the foreshore in mind, simple overhead wiring could have been used for a section of the corridor similar to those used to carry the overhead wires on the Eastern Suburbs railway. If economy was the chief thought single stanchions between the two sets of lines with the overhead electrical gear hung from each side could have been used. This would have provided a simple, neat, and practical solution over most of the corridor.

Notwithstanding the mistakes of the past the rail corridor still remains the key to the foreshore scheme and should play an important part in the revitalisation of the City. It has the potential to provide for a huge increase in patronage from other centres and provide speedy, comfortable access to what should become an important tourist and recreational destination.

The landscaped rail corridor along the foreshore will enhance the pleasure of arriving at an attractive destination and add positively to the foreshore landscape. The Newcastle Station itself with the occasional visit of a steam locomotive will be an important attraction capable of drawing thousands of people into the area as on the occasion of the visit of the Flying Scotsman or as with the recent long weekend.

The scenic landscaped railway corridor will give Newcastle an attractive transport spine direct into its heart and historic focus. It can be easily accomplished and should be completed as soon as possible.

In the next part of our submission we will concentrate on the distortion of orderly planning that has occurred in the Central Honeysuckle Area to Wickham

Doug Lithgow President Parks and Playgrounds Movement Inc

08 October 2014