

**Submission
No 1**

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

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The Select Committee on the Planning Process in Newcastle and the Broader Hunter Region

Submission.

Summary

The State Government announced the planned closure of the Wickham- Civic Newcastle section of the train line after the previous government had decided to continue the train line. There was no public process for this decision and it had numerous transport and planning implications that had not been thought through.

The Government then began a “planning” process eg the 2013 Urban renewal plan- which sought public input but specifically excluded input about the train line closure decision. I went to these and subsequent “consultations”. It was apparent there was to be no discussion of the negatives. Transport public servants would privately concede at these briefings that this “was not a transport decision”. The unusual nature of the decision was highlighted by the 2003 plan which retained “Hub” developments based on the train stations which were no longer present.

I made a submission to point out that this plan was promoted under the state Urban renewal planning Policy whilst directly contravening that Policy’s key principles.

When the Wickham interchange plan was made public it was with a picture of a train station without light rail. When the University had its development approved it did so with minimal parking. All of these suggest to me that the decision to shut the line was made independent of normal planning processes and ignoring input on transport implications.

The planning contravenes the State planning framework by destroying public infrastructure rather than promoting use of it. It contravenes The Urban renewal framework by discouraging public transport use instead of promoting it. These features directly contravene the principles of NSW 2021 and the Long term Master Plan for the state.

The most important failure in this REF is in transport. It represents a temporary severe increase in travel times and decrease in accessibility. In the longer term it also will result in measurable increases in travel times and decreased accessibility of public transport.

It will specifically disadvantage the disabled, the poor, the elderly, the young and cyclists.

It will cause less streamlined interchange between long distance buses, ferries and

the rail system.

Any true transport interchange will encourage surrounding development, but the surrounding land in Newcastle West is partly on undermined land, surrounded by flood plain.

It is not proposing a sustainable increase in public transport use, but a diminution of it. It fails to take into account its own projections for major growth in public transport use associated with continued development to the East of Wickham- eg University, law Courts precinct, further Honeysuckle development. Despite the probability of tens of thousand more journeys, there is no train and the number of car parking spaces is capped in planning documents previously released. This is despite estimates in AECOM of thousands more places being required. The main transport route (Hunter Street) will be clogged as the designated routes for buses carrying all these extra trips.

The postulated improvement in car transit times at Stewart Avenue are unsubstantiated. There are reasons to suspect that such improvement will be illusory.

Cyclists are completely forgotten – no options for 2 years then no safe way to get to the train.

IN support of the above summary, I submit elaboration.....


SPECIFIC POINTS

1. Strategic Context- Contravention of Four State and Local Policies

THE REF and UR policy make reference to four Government strategies whilst promoting a transport option that directly contradicts them.

A. *NSW 2021 – A Plan to make NSW No 1* (Department of Premier and Cabinet, 2011)the interests of the travelling public are put first.'

The main goals

-  grow patronage on public transport by making it a more attractive choice. “

fails both of those points.

B. *NSW Long Term Transport Master Plan* (Transport for NSW, 2012b)-

13 December 2012.

- planning for and managing strong demand for car travel and solutions for the low levels of public transport use
- providing better public transport connectivity across the city
- increase the proportion of commuter trips on public transport to the Newcastle city centre.

- fails on these three components of the Master Plan by reducing connectivity, increasing car use and decreasing commuter trips on Public transport.

C. The State Environmental Planning Policy (Urban Renewal) 2010 which includes 4 key principles – two of which are

Integrate land use planning with **existing or planned infrastructure**

Provide greater access to public transport

The proposed plan violates 2 of the 4 key planning principles.

D. The city centre vision includes. “Strengthening public transport”. Once again the Proposal does the opposite.

2. DELAY-

there is no proposal to do anything but shuttle buses for at least 2 years. This leaves the Newcastle CBD without a train station for 2 years and is unjustifiable. The further delay before an alternative light rail to the Newcastle centre is unconscionable. This is because both are inferior transport solutions.

3. UNCERTAINTY.

The REF is inconsistent, saying the services will terminate at Hamilton for the next two years, but the public display talked of terminating at Broadmeadow.

The REF does not say that a light rail will happen. But then the supporting brochures claim “supporting urban renewal with light rail”. Some of the pictures have light rail on them and some do not.

Its not clear how we will travel in the next two years- from which station,

and then what happens after that is also uncertain.

4. DIMINISHED services- both in terms of accessibility and INCREASED TRAVEL TIMES. E.g The trip from Warabrook to the city is now going to take over half an hour plus a change compared with 11 minutes at present.

There is no transport justification for this.

5. TOURISM and BUSINESS will suffer – Tourists want to go to the Harbour, beaches and restaurants- NOT to Wickham which is down market ex shopping, light industrial and unappealing residential area—get off there and have a look! “Newcastle’s role as a regional recreation centre is facilitated by train services. Travellers from Lake Macquarie, the Central Coast and Maitland often visit the city to enjoy the night time economy, dining, the beach and other entertainment and to utilise professional and government services.”

They are not going to do this if the train stops at Broadmeadow/

SO why are we stopping this and access to special events such as New Years Eve?

6. DISINGENUOUS- calling the rail line to Newcastle city a “branch line” is Orwellian. Are we going to close the branch lines to Melbourne and Brisbane next?- It seems to have escaped notice that the plan now creates a “Wickham branch line”.

Talking about “workshopping” with “key stakeholders” alternatives without saying who these stakeholders were and what the alternatives were, and why they were discarded is unnecessarily secretive. The full reports says that a “do nothing” option seemed to be the only other option considered to “improve connectivity”. A little more transparency should be entertained given recent events before ICAC. There are clearly other options that provide a superior transport outcome. They should all be on the table and not one predetermined behind closed doors for reasons that have not been exposed.

Statements about improved traffic flows are included even though they are based on “provisional” studies with definitive studies yet to come. Just how improved traffic at Stewart Avenue will be is not clear when the traffic from Railway Street, and the light rail, and shuttle buses along with increased pedestrian activity are thrown into the mix. There will be 3,500 rail trips to be done some other way just to maintain current access. If these are done by car the travel times wont be improved. There is no accounting for the

increased traffic with new University, residential, Law courts etc

One of the brochures says “revitalizing Newcastle” includes as a benefit increased traffic for businesses in Hamilton and Broadmeadow. This business increase is presumably at the expense of decreased business around Newcastle and Civic. This is not mentioned. Is this not an admission that it is the opposite of revitalization for Newcastle? How is a business to plan a sustainable future when its trade is dependent on changes that occur for two years and then stop? How can a plan to move the train terminus to one area benefit that area whilst also benefiting the area it is being withdrawn from?

7 Sustainability problems

There is no provision for growth in demand for transport, including rail. The eastern precinct population has experienced population growth of some 20 percent since 2006. Significant further population growth is predicted and indeed current planning suggestions rapid growth in large residential towers of the kind which normally require public transport.

Students are expected to utilise train services to access campuses including proposed new developments e.g Newcastle University Law School in the centre of Newcastle. A far higher proportion of students are expected to use public transport, including trains, as they are less likely to own motor vehicles. SO why are we planning to stop them using the train which currently goes to their destination, and also conveniently links the two campuses?

8. Transport issues

Transport is the key weakness of the interchange proposal. The plan is to increase the population resident in the area, increase the number of people coming to work, study and shop and increase recreational use. This is in an area with geographical and road limitations to transport that have been commented on in numerous previous reports.

The logical response includes increasing the cost of parking, capping the amount of car parking and increasing public transport. The plan fails in the last point. The public transport plan is to remove a functioning heavy rail line already capable of providing the hubs for the proposed development. This is to be replaced by a shuttle bus

solution. THIS is not SEAMLESS. There is not enough space at Wickham to provide the type of interchange already in place at Newcastle. This is evidenced by the artist drawing showing its absence, and the fact that neither the long distance buses nor the ferries will go there. The “seamless” transport is a mirage as buses will not be able to provide the heavy lifting of people into the hubs. The logical alternative is to keep the rail into Newcastle and provide a bus shuttle around the beaches, Honeysuckle and Darby Street.

a. The trains

a significant number of trips by other forms of transport will be required just to stay where we are in terms of people travelling to Newcastle or Civic (3,600 trips per day).

b The Roads

The Main north south road going through the proposed CBD intersects with the main east west route right next to the train station and bus interchange. This is not a good idea. No one planning a modern pedestrianized CBD would intentionally put the main road traffic intersection right in the middle. Capped parking, and no train- this will strangle the old CBD

A previous plan says “ *volume and speed of car traffic as well as the amount of space allocated to cars adversely impacting upon the quality of the public realm, particularly Hunter Street*”- On this REF, Hunter St becomes the main thoroughfare for public transport, carrying all the people who used to be on the train plus the tens of thousand of extra people predicted will come.

c The parking

There is no extra parking proposed for the extra parking required. In fact, 75 car spaces are deleted. AECOM report estimated a need for 8,000 extra car spaces by 2031 that could be whittled back to 2,650 be some leap of faith – this is for over 30,000 new people and replacing 3,600 trips by train which currently are supplied. This will discourage cars, but if there is no attractive alternative, people will just stay away to avoid the gridlock going round and round looking for a park.

d. The people

12,600 extra residents, 10,000 extra workers, 8000 students at the Uni and 1000 staff. These are not numbers that will be provided for by shuttle buses.. If there is no transport how will not come?

e. The local buses

Trains “will be coordinated to the bus timetable”- but what happens when the train or the bus is late? --- What happens at Toronto is that the bus leaves empty- it can't wait because it's a continuous through service, or there is no room for a bus to wait. Just what is the route of the shuttle bus. Previous drafts have a circular bus running every 10-15 minutes on what appear to be possibly only one direction. For someone wanting to go a few hundred yards up Hunter Street this may add half an hour to their journey.

Buses don't take bikes or surfboards. Trains do.

f. the ferry

And what about the ferry connectivity?- this drains a large group of potential public transport users who will now have to negotiate a 3rd or 4th interchange to get further afield. Most will just drive, avoiding the city.

g. The long distance buses-

are going to keep going to the old Newcastle railway site- Some transport interchange! How do people travelling from elsewhere continue their journey as they can currently at Newcastle station

g. The Cyclists.

Cyclists seem to be completely disregarded- either in terms of getting to the interchange safely, or of accessing trains with their cycles. ...”There are no dedicated cyclist paths in the study area, A narrow, non-separated cyclist lane (about 0.5 metres wide) is provided on Stewart Avenue/Hannell Street near the proposed interchange. However due to its narrow nature and the large traffic volumes on this road, it is not highly utilised. ..A safer option for cyclists is to use the Railway Street level crossing for north–south

... but they are shutting that.....

9. Flooding and Sea Level Rises

The new CBD and transport interchange in the West End and Wickham are either on, or significantly traversed by, flood affected land.

A Previous planning document stated *“Unlike the east end, Civic and the west end are largely built on the Hunter River and Cottage Creek floodplain”*

Flood events are warned against on the NSW govt own web site
http://www.newcastle.nsw.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0017/5273/potential_flood_areas_fs.pdf

So it puzzles me why the new interchange is being built on flood prone land. I suggest try fig 6.10 and zoom in on the new West end CBD at http://www.newcastle.nsw.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0004/204682/Newcastle_City-wide_Floodplain_Risk_Management_Study_and_Plan.pdf

It seems premature to base a plan for major urban renewal when the current planning document from the relevant government body says “For example, it may be established through the strategic planning review that all significant future development should be prohibited from the mapped 1% AEP floodways,”Some of these appear to be surrounding the proposed interchange. i.e.the new CBD.

This is compounded by sea level inundation projections.
http://www.ozcoasts.gov.au/climate/Map_images/CentralCoast/High/jpeg/150dpi/Central_Coast_High_150_Map_8.jpg

Thank you for considering this submission

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