

NSW Strategy for Newcastle, 2013.

To the Department of Planning. 18.4.13
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To whom it concerns, re Newcastle's future.

Thankyou for publishing the Outcomes Report on the community contribution in Newcastle, noting questions and comments, with responses.

I am concerned, over the past 20 years, about the direction being taken for Newcastle.

I say, a good plan evolves delicately from the nature and history, the spirit, of the place itself.

I saw Newcastle in 1990's, with enormous potential residing in its open spaces, its built heritage, its foreshores both changed and unchanged by man, its address to the Ocean and to the Harbour, its unique lighthouse figurehead, its views to the dunes, its very interesting topography, and intriguing shapes on plan as it embraces the sea at different angles and exposures with beaches and cliffs. There is the Fort Scratchley museum, the amazing walk out to Nobbys, the Stockton water access.. there is a very long list.

What was lacking was confidence, and public recognition of the jewel they had.

What is needed now is press freedom, public honesty and integrity, and the reasonably expected government motivation to allow and preserve the good, for the many and for the future.

People still haven't a clue in general. Is it because the Herald actively discourages resistance to the agenda of the HDC, DP and Council, even of the Maritime authorities?

Many folk now think they 'believe' absurd untruths as a result, for example the tale that the railway divides the city from the harbour, or that its absence would somehow 'revitalise' something.

As was often pointed out in your meeting, the benefits put forward are largely quite independent of the destruction of the city's major transport artery, and could go ahead without such destruction.

The '8 connections' need to be compared to existing and possible paths, many of them quite independent of the existing rail. More could be added over a sunken rail; but frankly, the coastal strip is so narrow that extra roads are just not needed, and pedestrian access is easily added anyway, rail or not.

Sadly, a pedestrian stair was actually demolished to emphasise the cutting quality of the rail... sabotage apparently unpunished.

The former, legal, plans for greening the rail corridor have been familiar to the Parks & Playgrounds Association, formed by distinguished Charles Bean nearly a century ago. But its well-researched attempts to present resulting win-win solutions have been ignored consistently, as has been its truthful accounts of the history of this imminent collapse of Newcastle.

Its presentation of the Station with an entry Square to the city within its courtyard, was set aside too. That was initially my concept, so I can answer questions on it.

It is hard to express how obviously retrograde is the notion of actually removing the rail head at Newcastle. Plenty of respondents tried in your meeting, a majority it would seem. Many people have tried for decades to unmask the stupidity of the idea. Does this not penetrate at all? You have to ask yourselves why. Those who really care, care to keep it. The more they know, the more they care to keep it. The most honest polls revealed that all along.

Pretending that a non-used rail corridor would be a lovely pedestrian accessway is dishonest, considering the nature and supposed purpose of the pathway. Mostly hemmed in by new and old buildings, and faced with basement car parks etc, the idea does not stand up. Crime alley; and not needed anyway, considering that parallel paths exist on the foreshore and Hunter St.

It is good only for a rail line, and the greening of it was intended for the eastern end mainly, to enhance the arrival to Newcastle. Fussing around with light rail is a ploy, and quite beside the point unless there is to be a huge new network like the old Sydney tram network, replacing most buses over the metro area. Not on the cards; the efficient system is there already.

European cities would blush with embarrassment. There is no aspect of planning, ESD, transport planning, tourism planning, social planning or commonsense that supports this war on Newcastle. We destroyed central city railheads in Germany, but it was to destroy their war effort.

We are not supposed to do it to ourselves, dear friends. Would you stop city trains at Redfern and tell us that our onward journeys will be ever so smoothed by joining buses at that point?

When a protest is voiced DP often replies “oh, but Newcastle is different”. Not only is it NOT different in principle or fact, the commonsense arguments apply even more to it than to Sydney.

The other reply is “detail later..strategy now”. The detail however, comprises the set of unforeseen consequences all the way down the track. Strategy is only valid if its consequences are understood.

Both at the level of strategy and of detail, good ideas from experienced residents have been submitted to the DP in various forms over decades, and been set aside. They could be revisited.

Data rather than detail is the large proportion of the eastern railtrack which is already enclosed, and which will be unchanged by any change to the rail use. It is critical, it exposes the false argument. State perspectives can't conjure ‘connections’ from nothing, when a huge blockade of flats has blocked any harbour sightlines which still existed between previous development. These flats have made mincemeat of the optimum heritage/urban landscape potential of the shoreside industrial structures in their previous settings.

Not for later ‘detail’ is the development intended for the creek area, blocking, not opening harbour sightlines. Does DP imagine, or pretend perhaps, that demolishing a structure about three inches high (steel rail) will increase or preserve the last open views to the harbour end?

Meanwhile, are the ‘planners’ forgetting another little aspect; the Pacific Ocean? Why not access that? The railway accesses it very well! Sydney ignored its Harbour until later 20th Century.

It is strategy, not detail, that the entire public seaside and historic headland is being neglected while developers are helped to steal the last water glimpses from a string of inland suburbs. Spending on the unique public seaside tourism areas will be set back as a result.

The ‘western hub’ perspective reminds me of what The Rocks could have become, without Jack's help. Save our money please, and let change in the west happen piecemeal on open market with some preservation of existing character and without our funds being lost on a sixties monument. You don't need high rise ghettos for economic success; ask Paris or anywhere in Europe.

Mr Hazzard says he doesn't close the rail lightly. So there must be a serious reason. What is it? It is monstrous, the idea of cutting off the city beachside access from the entire Hunter Valley, from the Central Coast, from Sydney and State wide.

It is the wrong thing to do. , an ungrateful insult to the magnificent, practical heritage we have, and

the future of the eastern sea edge as a tourist and recreational destination like no other.

Few have seen or stated that Newcastle Station is unusually blessed, in that its end point is NOT coincident with its greatest passenger exchange, currently. Its greatest passenger exchange is presently attenuated, spread over the whole set of city stations. So it does not have the problems of many central stations world wide. It has space to breathe, and capacity for more. Cutting it off so these problems can descend and concentrate on a new, already cramped terminus zone, creating problems where there now are none, is mindblowingly strange.

Functionally it is a relief-changeover station, but with immense potential for expanded population. It is ready to serve all the growth on the east side, and to keep the old city more for people than for cars. Furthermore it is a grand old Station in a heritage location fit for city ceremony, ideal for crowd gathering. That needs train. No brain. On top of that it is right where the tourists and visitors want to go, and right where the ferry takes people to Stockton. It has a bus station already.

Think again please Mr Hazzard.

Look at Paris or London as a start. Kings Cross London is a huge turnover terminus. Great for London, but a peakhour maelstrom. It is not a problem that Newcastle has; this clearly worries DP so they think the Station should be moved to where they wish to make a maelstrom. A maelstrom is vitality apparently. People want vitality, not peace and space, convenience, amenity and beauty, apparently. Are you all so sure of this? Why do people move from Sydney to Newcastle?

Folk will want to walk rather than wait for a bus in this vital new maelstrom, so development will be encouraged right there.

Ringbarked, the east topples. Who is it, wanting this madness?

Is it a Hotelier after the Station? The irony is enormous.

Commonsense is critical for Newcastle at this point because of the potential of this unique place as a true world city of the future. Its extraordinary natural assets have not been overshadowed by the heaviest of industries. Its location, its climate, its amenity, its history are unique.

******For years now I and others go Scone-Sydney via Newcastle Station in order to break the journey by an easy walk to the beach and an hour or two there. I enjoy the sight of the harbour on the way, and coffee at Sprocket or lunch facing the park. Without the Station's proximity to the beaches, I would not be able to enjoy this. I am not going to get on a bus to do it. What a comedown.

A bus elsewhere would be no easier to get at Wickham than at Newcastle, contrary to DP assertions. The journey is of course much quicker by train. Newcastle already has a spacious working bus station at trackside, and what a pleasant place to wait!

Does DP believe kids with surf boards etc are going to line up for buses to the beach at Wickham, even if the boards fitted in expensive new buses? No; they'll drive, and clog the city, or go elsewhere. Muswellbrook kids now take surfboards on the train. A bus is an impediment; a barrier. There goes clean fun for sadly at-risk and underprivileged youth.

Hundreds of buses through the city for surf festivals??? Do think again. Cancel the festivals then?

It is a strange thing, how the driving and driven Government folk are always ready to take people off comfortable, smooth easy and continuous trains to put them on sick making buses.

A walk from the existing train to most places in the small city of Newcastle is not only possible but a pleasure. A wait for a bus in an ugly, contained suburban street just can't measure up, sorry. Whatever is 'created' anywhere else, DP can't equal the sense of place now experienced by anyone

standing on the Station corner, just arrived from Sydney, surrounded by the harbour, the Customs House, the Convict park, old Hotel, ascending street, with the wonderful Hunter St sandstones waiting around the corner.

Cutting Newcastle's artery would be a fatal insult to the unique beauty of historic eastern Hunter St and the wonderful GPO whose model in the UK was bombed out in the War.

Note:

When planners were extolling the 'sightlines along the residual strip of promenade to Nobby's', it turned out they were in the process of allowing an appalling glass bin of a restaurant to crown the entire rock. Mortifying to be an Australian, sometimes. It took Peter Garrett to undo that one. We may have to appeal to the Federal level again in this case. Newcastle is a National City.

Don't let us go backwards. At least leave the place alone, and leave us to enjoy it. In time the consciousness of heritage and value will sink in to Newcastle. What is left will be rediscovered, protected, appreciated, invested in. Pray God that will include the train to Newcastle Station, the heritage buildings on the east including the beach pavilions and baths, the wonderful Hunter St, the parks.. If 'legislation' has ruled this out, then rule out the legislation. What's more meaningful?

Planning can only 'revitalise' by building on a real vision:

**** keeping shopping 'mauls' and excess predatory development well out of the old eastern centre,***

****giving more attention to keeping the traditional buildings and streetscape,***

****serving the local eastside residents with all the amenities they need, in Hunter St and locally.***

Obviously, increased services will attract more population central-east, and that will require and support the train as long as you don't allow new residents multiple cars each.

****Maybe do the Entry Square within the Station, and ensure shuttlebus access from Hunter St and Station to the hillside homes, elevated parks and beachsides for those who don't walk easily.***

Any favourable parts of the strategy are overshadowed and threatened by the rail destruction idea and the waste of one of the fine stations/old cities of the world.

As said in your meeting, even the USA is putting back rail to city centres, not destroying it.

I always thought we were a bit better than them.. so are we now the most backward in the world?

I did my Thesis on world railway stations back in 1975.

Travelling Europe on a railpass I experienced them as being the living core, the 24 hour beating heart of the cities I entered and left.

We have this potential in Newcastle; but its people lack confidence to defend it to our planners and rail administrators who have let the station's functions, security, ticketing discipline, and morale drop quite unforgiveably and unreasonably. Statistics are false and falsely used, anecdotal and perceived failure is framed up as fact. Real vision sees not the badly run station of now, with its tight corners, it notes the current posters for Cityrail proclaiming Newcastle Station as the exciting destination it really is. That is the most positive and rational thing I have seen lately, that poster.

Real vision sees the ground plan of the Station itself as having amazing potential for a city Entry Square with good security and rational functioning, reusing the original sheds a little further south.

So wake up, Department of Planning. You have an amazing World City waiting for your appreciation and assistance.

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