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15 March 2013

The Manager
Centres and Urban Renewal
Department of Planning & Infrastructure
GPO Box 39, Sydney NSW 2001

Dear Sir/Madam,

Re: Aurecon submission regarding the Newcastle Urban Renewal Strategy

Aurecon is pleased to present the attached submission regarding the Urban Renewal Strategy for Newcastle. We believe that the strategy is an exciting development for Newcastle which will ensure its place as the second city in NSW and the centre of the 7th largest urban area in Australia.

Aurecon fully supports the State Government's initiative and our submission is designed to facilitate and assist the proposed developments. We believe that the strategy represents a once in a generation opportunity to develop a vibrant exciting city which will be valued and appreciated by current and future generations.

Aurecon welcomes the Department's comments on our submission and looks forward to being involved in this exciting development.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Neil Naismith", is enclosed in a rectangular box.

Neil Naismith
Office Manager Newcastle

Newcastle Urban Renewal Strategy

Aurecon, as an International and local engineering and consulting firm, has a strong interest in seeing the sort of integrated transport and land use outcomes that the Newcastle Urban Renewal Strategy is designed to achieve. Through the experience gained from our HUB-iD approach, Aurecon believes that a people-focused perspective to transport infrastructure, land use planning and traffic management for Newcastle's CBD is required.

Removal of the rail line through the CBD core will improve pedestrian and cycle access in the CBD and ease traffic congestion associated with rail level crossings, but will also have an impact on public transport accessibility – at present Newcastle has heavy rail access to its CBD, beaches and nightlife.

The potential urban revitalisation benefits of curtailing this link to the outskirts of the CBD core (assuming Wickham is the station where this will occur) will need to be supported by an integrated customer-focused public transport access strategy; and an appreciation of the economic elements of transport and land use decisions.

The implications on transport and access of the truncated rail line are not yet included in the supporting Newcastle City Centre Connectivity and Accessibility Study or the JMD Hunter Street Revitalisation drawings. The changes associated with the rail truncation can be expected to have major implications for built form at Wickham; and access to and through the City. Aurecon recommends preparation of a transport interchange scoping study to document user requirements, access provisions and design standards, as well as a revised transport strategy for the city centre, with a detailed examination of commuter mode choice, origins and destinations within the city centre; and forecasting of patronage by access mode.

In our view, the greatest challenge facing the City is to achieve these improvements while also enhancing and maintaining the City's economic viability.

While Aurecon supports conclusions in the strategy documents that improved public transport services are needed for a sustainable city future, we feel some issues should be given greater prominence in an integrated Urban Renewal Strategy for the City. These include:

- Long-term patronage declines for public transport in Newcastle are partly driven by poor services, infrastructure, fare and ticketing products; and public transport fleet, compared with Sydney (it is noted that declines in public transport use in Newcastle run counter to increases in Sydney and other centres); but the availability and supply of free car parking in and close to the CBD is, in our view, a much more important factor. Newcastle has high and growing levels of car use and the data in the Newcastle City Centre Connectivity and Accessibility Study also shows many people driving cars less than 5km to the city centre. For a long time, public transport patronage in Newcastle has been largely the province of the transport disadvantaged, and those with free or highly discounted fares. To grow public transport patronage, we believe there must be a fully-featured, coordinated strategy of delivering public transport service and infrastructure improvements at the same time as disincentives to private car use. Both carrots and sticks are needed to get the best outcome, and ensure that the investment in an improved CBD environment achieves the best return.
- The Strategy documents provide good incentives for sustainable transport modes through removal of the barrier to the waterfront, and streetscape improvements, the most effective of the disincentives is likely to be car parking supply and availability. We believe that measures such as introduction of more parking time restrictions and reductions in car parking supply should be introduced at the same time, or very soon after public transport and streetscape improvements, rather than being a separate longer-term action. As well, a key strategic direction for the Newcastle City Centre Connectivity and Accessibility Study – “Improve the

efficiency of the local road network for all users” can be problematic, as reducing traffic congestion for cars by removing level crossings and improving key intersections, may work against measures to encourage walking, cycling and public transport. We recommend this strategic direction be reworked to give a higher priority to improving the efficiency of the local road network for sustainable transport modes;

- The evidence of a large proportion of commuters accessing the city centre by car for work in the morning peak within 5 km (Figure 1 in the Newcastle City Centre Connectivity and Accessibility Study) suggests that improved pedestrian and cycle access and facilities can be effective at reducing traffic congestion and parking demand in the city by providing a more sustainable mode of access for trips originating close by. Indeed, we would suggest that encouraging walking and cycling to and around the city centre should be the most important objective of the Urban Redevelopment Strategy.
- The Newcastle City Centre Connectivity and Accessibility Study highlights that the supply of car parking in the city is some 40 per cent greater than demand, even with more than 70% of commuters getting to the city by car. In our view, traffic congestion improvements (and an improved walking and cycling environment) will not be achieved unless the supply of car parking is reduced however, sensitive to the needs of current and future retailers in the core. The Newcastle City Centre Connectivity and Accessibility Study recommends a limit on car parking supply, which we support, but that limit is set some 500 car spaces higher than the current supply – even with forecast growth in employment in Newcastle to 32,000 jobs, we believe the strategy can be more aggressive with car parking supply, particularly to support large investment in public transport, walking and cycling improvements. It is difficult to see a substantial improvement in traffic congestion can be achieved with even more parking in the city centre.

Meeting TfNSW targets for public transport use for journey to work in Newcastle will be challenging, particularly as many existing public transport users will not see the removal of the rail line as a benefit; and established factors like resistance to transfer are likely to deter increased train use for travellers bound for locations east of Wickham. Given many existing rail customers may have few alternatives to public transport, curtailing services at Wickham may not result in customers shifting wholesale to private modes such as car. However, from our experience, the inconvenience of a mode transfer so close to the customer’s final destination may see an increase in train customers walking to their final destination in the CBD (east of Wickham) rather than transferring to buses. It will be important to understand existing customers and their likely responses, as well as understanding how new public transport customers will respond to the future public transport network and services and the ‘success factors’ for public transport services and infrastructure that will help to achieve targets.

With respect to bus services and potential interchange at the new rail terminus, we feel it will be most important to provide fast, direct bus services to and through the CBD core. Accordingly, route diversions to serve bus-rail interchange that disadvantage bus customers, should be avoided. As with our comment above, we recommend that transport strategies for the CBD be informed by a detailed assessment of customer needs.

Latest developments in public transport interchange best practice in city centres can help to better integrate a new train terminus and interchange with the city, and achieve better social, economic and environmental outcomes. Aurecon has been instrumental in developing new strategies and guidelines for integrated interchanges in NSW and some of the latest best-practice approaches that can benefit the Newcastle Urban Redevelopment Strategy include:

- Interchange Places – recognising that transport interchanges influence urban form, best practice in transport interchange planning and design now includes greater consideration of placemaking of the broader interchange precinct, than previous interchange projects typically

included. In addition to the needs of interchanging customers, interchange design and function now also focuses on contributing to a safe, efficient urban space which facilitates city centre activities, particularly businesses operating in the interchange precinct. One of the advantages of this approach is the identification of potential funding and operation partners, potentially reducing capital and operating costs to Government;

- Customer focus – TfNSW's new focus on customers, along with a hub focused approach to integrated transport and land use planning, helps to make interchanges places for people rather than facilities for vehicles. This customer focus extends beyond travellers to include greater consideration of other stakeholders, including people who live, work, own property or operate businesses in the interchange precinct;
- High quality passenger facilities – Aurecon's experience from recent developments in transport interchange best practice have highlighted to us that there are ways to provide airport-quality public transport customer waiting facilities which are highly integrated with their surroundings and fit within a Main Street setting. To achieve long term benefits, interchange facilities in Newcastle must improve access to city centre activities, as well as catering for intermodal customers

We hope these contributions are useful.