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Sent: Thursday, 14 March 2013 10:23 PM
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Subject: The Future of Newcastle and the Relevance of the Rail
Attachments: RETENTION OF THE RAIL INTO NEWCASTLE CBD 19,12,2012.docx; Submission to the Newcastle Urban Renewal Strategy 2012.docx

Dear Each and Every One of You

I have taken the liberty of using the wonders of an excellent email facility to address all of you simultaneously, so please forgive me that I have not been able to provide a personal salutation.

I have attached two documents, and I hope you will take the time to read both of them and consider their contents. It is difficult to sound detached when the matters under discussion are so important and provoke such differing responses; but let me assure you that I have given the issues much thought - and I have spent much time in personal investigation of the Newcastle railway and its relevance, and thought about the consequences of its removal and the likely alternatives for access to the inner city. You *will* find that i fall heavily on the side of retaining the railway all the way to Newcastle Station; however, I do have what i regard as some solutions to a vexed situation and I would like you to consider them.

It does seem - from all I am currently reading the in local Newcastle media - that the decision to cut the rail at Wickham has been made on *very* flimsy evidence and a near total absence of rational thought or consideration of sound town planning principles and practice. For these reasons it is hard to understand *why* the decision to cut the rail has been made at all! - let alone what benefits will ensue. If you can enlighten me I would appreciate it.

Meanwhile, I would appreciate your reading and considering the contents of my two attached essays. I have tried to make these accessible as possible by presenting them in point form where I could.. Nevertheless, the direction of my thinking will be clear, and my wonderment at the astounding decision to eliminate a social and economic prime asset with no consideration of the costs and inconvenience and the counter-productivity of the 'strategy' will be obvious.

I would appreciate your comments and any assessment - favourable or otherwise - would be appreciated.

Many thanks for your attention and interest.

Yours sincerely

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RETENTION OF THE RAIL INTO NEWCASTLE CBD

Some thoughts by David Blyth

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Three perspectives:

1. Regional
2. Local
3. Personal

1. Regional:

- The currently existing rail service provides the basis for a *regional* network of public transport with a terminus at a favoured destination – at the CBD, near the beach and the harbour, adjacent to theatre and cinema and art venues – and reaching out currently to Maitland, Scone, Dungog, Morrisset and beyond, to Sydney.
- The existing railway line could be used as a basis for a re-established tram/train network into the region to service the abovementioned towns and reconnect Belmont, Toronto, Kurri Kurri and Cessnock, and the soon to be commenced Huntlee township close by Branxton and Rothbury.
- The current heavy rail rolling stock could be curtailed to Sydney only traffic and the regional rolling stock could be replaced by diesel/electric tram/trains. This would require some modification of platforms on the existing network, but this would not be difficult and would be a fraction of the cost of ripping up the city rail link.
- It should be possible to extend the network to include a very necessary rail link through Raymond Terrace and Medowie to the Newcastle Airport at Williamstown. It could also be possible to link Fassifern or Glendale and Hexham and make for a valuable western link servicing places like Edgeworth, Cameron Park and Wallsend. I've not thought about this route much, but I think you can see the possibilities.
- Another possibility – and a much needed one – is to develop a link between a restored service from Adamstown to Belmont with a loop line running from Whitebridge to Charlestown and on to the John Hunter Hospital. The line could then continue down to either Jesmond or Lambton on its own easement. The current shuttle service between the hospital and the football stadium gives a good indication of the possibilities here – and the line could rejoin the main rail link at Broadmeadow. Alternatively, the link could proceed through Jesmond to Wallsend

and on to Sandgate and rejoin either there or at Warabrook - and we're back at the university!

- The retention of the rail would also enable a direct tram/train service to be developed between the University's campus at Callaghan and the soon to be developed campus close by Civic Station. This would be much better and far quicker and more comfortable than a bus service caught in heavy traffic.
- In addition, the rail would allow students and staff from all over the region to kiss- or park-and-ride at local stations and ride the rail to either of the two campuses: much faster, easier, cheaper, and more comfortable than the current traffic mess and parking problems and costs.
- Money allocated to ripping up the city section of the rail would be far better spent on an interchange at Glendale, which is getting to be the crucial transport node in western Newcastle/Lake Macquarie.
- A cheaper and potentially very useful interchange between the rail and bus transport goes begging as we speak: Broadmeadow Station is nearly cheek by jowl with the Nine Ways, and every bus that travels through the Nine Ways should be diverted to pass alongside Broadmeadow Station. Passengers would not even have to cross the road! And this already happens whenever there is track work, so arguments that it can't be done are clearly nonsense. And while this would be *no substitute* for the existing interchanges at Hamilton and Newcastle as it does not service the Hunter Line it certainly would be an improvement on the so-called service that is currently available for train travellers who would like to catch a bus but cannot, due to walking transit difficulties between the buses and the trains – particularly at night!
- Bus services in the suburbs and the region should connect with the rail network at 'park and ride' and 'kiss and ride' nodes.
- While the new Hunter Expressway will assist in traffic movements it will not solve the transport problems of the region – particularly so as we know that projections for population growth in the Lower Hunter can only mean more cars and more overstretched bitumen assets.

2. Local:

- The current rail corridor *is* an eyesore that should be dealt with. Some simple and cheap solutions might include better lighting to reduce the incidence of graffiti tagging. Buildings rarely face the rail easement anywhere, but some care and attention to the *rear* of buildings *by their owners* – would assist in removing some of the eyesore problem. This would be relatively cheap, and it would discourage graffiti scribblers.
- The fences enclosing the rail should be removed. Clearly, they stop no-one with intention from entering the corridor: this is evident from the amount of the graffiti on the walls of rail corridor abutting buildings. It makes some sense to continue to enclose the Newcastle railway station precinct, but beyond there the existing easement and adjacent buildings provide more than adequate definition of the line.
- Opportunities to cross the rail corridor *at ground level* should be provided at reasonably close intervals. Once the rail leaves Newcastle it converges into *just two* through lines by the time it reaches the end of the Hunter Street Mall at Perkins Street. Given the example set by cities around the world it is unlikely that a properly built crossing at that site would be a pedestrian hazard. If we banned all zebra crossings across bitumen because there are road fatalities it would be reasonable to ban ground level rail crossings. We are not about to ban cars, though their track record with pedestrian deaths is not good.
- Also, before we attempt to cut the rail at Wickham we should reopen the two existing crossings at Worth Place and Steel Street and assess the consequences of access to and from the harbour through them. That way, we can ascertain how much of a problem the rail really is. Also, there was a ground level pedestrian access point across the line at Market Street in the past. Perhaps, with improved technology since the 1970's, this access could be reintroduced.
- There are *five* sets of traffic lights around the rail just to the west of Wickham Station. *Four* of these sets deal with road traffic and *only one* with rail traffic, yet it is the rail set and the passengers on the trains that attract abuse for delays. The lights at Throsby Street and Honeysuckle Drive are made necessary by the bad development of the Honeysuckle precinct; King Street and Hunter Street traffic lights are close together and seldom in synch; so why does the rail set get the blame? And considering the overwhelming number of road vehicles that carry only their driver, it seems odd to blame the rail commuters.
- What is more, *only one* of these five lights that so upset drivers would be eliminated by an overpass. We would have a Hamilton overpass situation with *two* sets of lights at the bottom of the overpass in *both* directions. At least we can see out fate with

the current rail crossing at Stewart/Hannell Streets. The overpass would make us no better off.

- The Hunter's roads are becoming clogged! I ride by train to work in Maitland and constantly witness the slow-moving parking lot that is Maitland Road. This happens morning and night. I also witness the 7.50am train that leaves from Maitland for Newcastle. That train is full by the time it gets to Beresfield – and the passengers don't all get off at Hamilton, by any means!
- Hamilton will be severely affected if the rail is cut. It appears that the level crossings at Beaumont Street and Railway Street at Wickham will need to be closed to bitumen traffic due to the increased number of train movements to and from the Wickham terminal, which has no stabling or lay-by sidings. For bitumen traffic this means that the 12 000 vehicles that currently use the Beaumont Street crossing will have to deviate to either Clyde Street or Stewart Avenue. It's not hard to imagine the additional traffic stress at either or both places. Alternatively, there is the Maitland Road overpass – and this option would put even more stress on an already overworked and traffic light ridden stretch of road.
- Additional to the above, Islington will be *permanently* separated from Hamilton to the detriment of both suburbs and the businesses around the northern end of Beaumont Street. Cutting the rail at Wickham simply destroys a very enjoyable café and popular cultural precinct.
- Passengers transhipping at Hamilton to or from the Hunter line to or from the Sydney line will have to climb the stairs to cross the line – at least until a lift is installed. Meanwhile, elderly folk, those in wheelchairs, or injured, or pregnant, or with baby carriages, or incapacitated in some way will certainly need to leave on an earlier Hunter Line train to ensure an appropriate connection. And, of course, there is the physical and mental strain of using the overhead bridge. If pedestrian ground crossing is allowed to overcome this problem at Hamilton, perhaps the same solution could be used on the existing line into Newcastle and we wouldn't have to get rid of the line into Newcastle at all!
- And since there are no train 'parking lots' at Wickham new stabling lines may be necessary to the west of Hamilton Station. Pity those who live in Fern Street and Islington. Hudson Street on the southern side of the line will also be affected. And this effect might be felt even as far as Broadmeadow as trains are perhaps stabled in the rail yards there: mixing these trains with main line passenger and, more likely, increased goods and coal traffic, would be a scheduler's nightmare and a commuter's frequent distress.
- It would be good to get rid of much of the overhead furniture associated with the rail. Most of the overhead crossings could be eliminated with thoughtful and safe ground level crossings such as you find in most modern cities such as Los Angeles,

Minneapolis St Paul, New Orleans, Teheran and Beijing – to mention just a few. Likewise the steelwork holding up the power cables. If Central Asian cities like Tashkent and Samarkand can erect slender, attractive alloy poles that hold aloft the power cables for very fast trains, it should not be beyond this first world country to be able to do the same or similar.

- Most modern cities are *installing* rail and extending their networks. Minneapolis St Paul has a tram/train that runs from the Nicolette Mall in the centre of Minneapolis city through both the International and the Domestic terminals of Lindburgh Airport and then on to Bloomington and the Mall of America – a mall much larger than the one being suggested by GPT for Newcastle. The rail makes the Bloomington mall possible and profitable. Whoever told GPT and Landcom (or UrbanGrowth NSW) that the rail would make its mall ambitions uneconomic is a very misguided adviser indeed! And so successful is the Minneapolis rail system that it is being extended to link that city with St Paul, across the Mississippi River!
- But you don't have to go overseas to see excellent rail and tram/train systems. Melbourne is a joy because of its trams; Adelaide inner city has a tram/train system that terminates at Glenelg; Fremantle has a heavy rail system that has freight and passenger use in its tourist district. And, overseas again, so does New Orleans.
- On a narrowing peninsula like the one on which Newcastle's CBD is situated parking will always be a problem. This means more bitumen traffic congestion. 'Park and ride' and 'kiss and ride' solutions make much more sense than wider roads, more parking meters, higher and more numerous parking stations and hold-ups at traffic bottlenecks.
- The rail is an integral part of the character of Newcastle's CBD. We have a wealth of attractive heritage buildings that have been mistreated and left to decay while preference is given to concrete, steel and glass modernistic monoliths which give no one a reason to stop, enjoy and spend. The key to a successful CBD is *doors*! The more doors you have the more choice there is and the more people will be attracted to the CBD. Once you leave the bar and restaurant strip near the waterfront at Civic Station and head west on Honeysuckle Drive there is very little reason to stop and enjoy: there are no shop fronts, no cafés; just concrete podiums with steps leading up to the occasional door, and with car parks in their bellies. Not much fun there!
- Why is it that the cruise ship terminal seems to be slated for Dyke Point? The obvious place is on the southern shore of the harbour. Queens Wharf or thereabouts seems like the ideal place to put it, but anywhere west from the old tug berths to Wickham would do. And if the passengers could alight and make an easy transition to a tram/train to take them to 'the old town' or out to Maitland or Cessnock to link up with a tour of the vineyards or the horse studs! Well, think what an exciting tourist experience this would be. Other world cities do this. And it's not a matter of copying others; rather, it's a matter of *learning* from them.

3. Personal

- Inconvenience will be caused to many if the line is cut at Wickham. For instance, if you live at Stockton and work at Beresfield or similar (and I know of several people who do, so there must be more) along with all those who might like to travel to, say, Cardiff, or Sydney, there will be *three* stages of the journey: ferry to Queens Wharf, bus to Wickham, and train or tram/train for the rest of the journey. And while it would be a good idea to extend the ferry service to Wickham, it would be a serious mistake to eliminate a stop at Queens Wharf.
- Imagine, now, that you are walking with a stick, or a frame, or in a wheelchair, or wheeling a baby carriage, or shepherding several small children. Perhaps you are carrying a surfboard, or travelling with a pushbike. You might simply be elderly, or a little wobbly on your feet for some reason. This is a seriously difficult and complicated trip. Even if we eliminate the Stockton leg it is *still* a difficult journey since there are at least two legs rather than one. There is certainly *more than one* needed in the best circumstance – and that best circumstance lies in the retention of the rail to Newcastle Station and the CBD.
- With the growing inner-city population it makes sense to encourage that population to *leave the car in the garage* and take the rail (that is, if they have a garage to leave a car in!) be it the retained heavy rail to Sydney (this is *my* vision) or the regional tram/train to suburban and regional destinations.
- Level crossing fatalities make great headlines, but there are far, far more deaths of passengers in cars on bitumen and at car/pedestrian crossings than there are with rail services. If we dedicate ourselves to ridding ourselves of these fatalities we will have to get rid of cars and heavier bitumen using vehicles. As the old slogan goes: 'The Railway is the Safe Way'.
- It *is* time that we tamed the car: the more we use chicanes and speed humps and angle parking to thwart the rapid rush of bitumen based traffic the more we will encourage pedestrians – and the more we do that, the more we will have a revived retail/CBD precinct. And if we combined that with more attractive rolling stock and better security on the rail network, the more we are likely to have a *vibrant* city.

I leave it with you.

David Blyth

Submission to the Newcastle Urban Renewal Strategy 2012

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It is certainly difficult to get one's head around the changes mooted for Newcastle in the *Newcastle Urban Renewal Strategy 2012* document starting, as they do, with the severing of one of the two major arteries into the heart of the city several kilometres from its destination. If ever there was a non-rational, non-scientific approach to town planning and urban renewal in favour of a mediaeval and shamanistic approach, this document would have to be it!

I attended the second of the two public meetings held on Wednesday 20th February 2013 held to explain the Newcastle Urban Renewal Strategy 2012. The chair immediately made it known that discussion of the rail and its termination at Wickham was not to be discussed as 'the Cabinet has made its decision concerning the rail' – and that was it: no further discussion allowed. However, this was not the way the majority of the audience saw it and the overwhelming majority of the questions put to the panel were about the rail and expressed concern for the decision to cut it. This is not surprising as the rail – or its elimination – is crucial to the success of any plan to renew inner city Newcastle, but no evidence has been provided to support Cabinet's decision and the chair continually delivered the mantra that 'Cabinet's decision is that the rail is to be cut' in a futile attempt to stifle dissent.

Why is it that we are provided with evidence for every other aspect of the renewal plan, but not given any substantial reason for the cutting of the rail decision? And why is it that the rail issue is treated solely as a *local* Newcastle issue when it has serious ramifications for transport in the entire region, and may well have serious repercussions for passengers of the rail travelling to and from Sydney and other distant destinations north, south and west!

It seems that the railway line into Newcastle is the scapegoat for all of the ills that have befallen Newcastle over the past sixty years. Whatever the difficulty, whatever the failure, 'the railway done it'!! This might have been a 'sensible' approach in the time of Abraham and his son, or when witches were burned or drowned, but those times have long gone and such approaches need to be replaced with insights and understandings more in touch with present day reality

Why do town planners and civic heavyweights conveniently forget some of the following trends and events that have caused Newcastle City to fall into disrepair and neglect and – sad to say – downright shabbiness. Here is a list of some of these:

- Demographic changes – the growth and necessary development of the south and west of Greater Newcastle into Lake Macquarie and towards Maitland
- The decline of inner Newcastle's resident population and its revival
- The rise of the motor car
- The rise of the freeway, the roundabout and the upper hand given to vehicular traffic over pedestrian traffic and public transport
- The rise of the car-dependent suburb
- The rise of the suburban mall: three of these in particular – Kotara, Charlestown and Glendale, but also Belmont, Wallsend, Jesmond, and Waratah; along with expanded suburban shopping precincts. All of these made a 'trip to town' unnecessary and irrelevant.
- The 1989 Earthquake – an event that both consolidated and emphasised the suburban reality of current (I baulk to say 'modern') Newcastle, and propelled even faster the relative decline of the city centre and so gave most people even fewer reasons to visit, and almost none, to live there.
- The elimination of at least three (there may be more, but I don't know of them) ground-level crossings of the railway easement. These were at Market Street, Worth Place and Steel Street; the latter two were available to vehicles as well as pedestrians.
- The remarkably poor town planning that seems to have been the consequence of the 1989 earthquake which has resulted in a near solid wall of buildings cutting the harbour off from its city hinterland. These commence at the eastern end with the two dark glass buildings on the southern side of Wharf Road just to the west of Queens Wharf and then continue on *both* sides with the multi storey car park, but even more impregnable with the Crowne Plaza Hotel on the northern, the harbour, side which even cuts off the view corridor at the end of Merewether Street. How was this gross example of town planning ineptitude ever allowed to happen?
- The development of the Honeysuckle precinct. If ever there was an impassable wall separating the city from the foreshore the steel, glass and concrete megaliths along Honeysuckle Drive from just west of Civic almost to Wickham would have to be it! And it would seem that we are to get more wall on the northern side of Honeysuckle Drive - if preliminary work and mesh fences are anything to go by. The residential, museum and café/bar precinct adjacent to Civic Station is a small respite, but there again one would have to be forgiven for regarding the residential towers as part of the wall for – aside from the promenade that, thankfully, has been provided – these high-rise buildings cast a shadow to their south and dwarf the now neglected city precinct behind them.
- The determination to 'denature' inner Newcastle by removing useful functions from many of its lovely, aged buildings. No longer is there a practical use for the General Post Office, the Law Courts and the T & G building for example. Nor do many of the lovely erstwhile commercial buildings have functions that attract big numbers of pedestrians. The hospital is gone and many of the government offices – both state and federal – are, or have been, or will be, relocated. Some buildings – like the Longworth Institute and the Central Methodist Mission – have found new purposes, but others – like the Victoria Theatre – languish, while the impressive Newcastle Railway Station, is apparently about to be sacrificed to an irrational assessment of the city's ailments and 'appropriate' beauty therapies.

Having given you an outline of the reasons why I believe that it is *not* all the railway's fault, I'd now like to provide you with some ideas about the current dilemma inner Newcastle is faced with.

Here they are:

- We *cannot* relocate the impressive crown that is the Anglican Cathedral from its current location on the brow of The Hill.
- Nor can we relocate the plethora of attractive high heritage buildings that make up the traditional heart of the CBD.
- We cannot relocate the beaches or the breakwater wall; nor can we relocate Nobby's Headland and Lighthouse. This precinct provides the sites for many of Newcastle's biggest events: New Year's Eve, Australia Day and Fat as Butter come immediately to mind, but there are others. To say that these events are 'one-offs' is just wrong: collectively they require frequent servicing by mass transport. It happens from time to time that additional trains are provided to cater for the crowds, and it's *very* hard to see how additional buses can take up the slack – particularly as car traffic on such occasions is increased to near breaking point.
- We will not be seeing the re-entry of a huge medical and hospital facility into the city – and we probably don't want that to happen as it would cause crisis traffic events and it cannot be supplied with sufficient affordable parking or vehicular access for much of the population. Having said that, its replacement with the John Hunter Hospital at Rankin Park typifies the sort of mediaeval thinking that seems to be the hallmark of modern day Newcastle: its location may be central, but being sited on a narrow spur with limited access and away from mass public transport makes it both difficult to get to and expensive to park at. It might, like Toledo in Spain, be easily defensible from ground attack, but it is also difficult to enter. So intractable is the problem that we are now offered parking at the football stadium some kilometres away and a shuttle bus to complete the journey: all right as long as you are not in a hurry, or not late for an appointment, or incapacitated, or not in a wheelchair. Nor is the shuttle connected to Broadmeadow Station; then again, the bus from the Nine Ways to the hospital is only a 300 meter walk away and across a very busy intersection. And not very safe at night.
- Parking will *always* be a problem in inner Newcastle. Being sited on a narrowing peninsula road access will always be limited and residential and commercial parking will become increasingly difficult to find as the city revives. Restrictions for non-residents are already strict, and as more high-rise residential buildings are approved without adequate within building parking spaces the problem is only going to get worse. The alternative *may* be to build additional parking stations, but in the short run this is not feasible – and we know this as the current stock of parking stations languishes from unprofitability due to under use, and is in turn caused by the determination to town plan inner Newcastle out of viability.
- It is good to see the growth of high-rise residential buildings in the East End of inner Newcastle. May there be more of it. Also, may there be more affordable housing for those with lower incomes. Currently, it seems, most of the new housing stock in this precinct has been taken up by well-heeled retirement couples and well-incomed professional and business people. A more varied population would certainly make for a more interesting mix

of folk on the street and provide income streams for the kind of café precinct your strategy envisages.

- Modern, *rational* town planning encourages the accumulation of high density housing around railway stations. You can see this all over Sydney, for example. While it has not been popular along the Northern Line since the high density housing has often meant the destruction of beautiful old precincts, it has been successful. It has also been a great success around Strathfield and along the Hornsby line at places like Rhodes and Epping and Eastwood – and all those stations in between. Hurstville and Bankstown, Lidcombe and Parramatta are also clear indicators of the good sense of providing high density housing with rail transport. Why, then, are the developers of the current Newcastle Strategy insisting that the rail transport be truncated some three kilometres from the bulk of the high density housing? Why is it that the high density housing around Civic is to be deprived of its current connection with the rail?
- And why is the new inner city university campus being deprived of its best option for access? Please bear with me while I quote you from the *Sun-Herald* of Sunday January 27th 2013. On page 69 there is an article with the byline of Jacob Saulwick entitled: **Public transport is the way to go**. I quote:

When it comes to the accessibility of universities in NSW, it is hard to go past the University of Sydney in Camperdown and the University of Technology, Sydney, in Ultimo.

While parking might be extremely limited (and expensive) at both campuses, students and staff have some of the best transport options in Sydney. The universities' main campuses lie near train stations servicing multiple lines (Redfern for Sydney and Central for UTS, and both are near major bus corridors.

But with road congestion getting worse, it is no surprise that less-than-ideally situated universities are scrambling to try to make it easier for students to get to them.

They are doing this in part by lobbying governments for better road and public transport options, but they are also implementing their own initiatives, such as bike paths and incentives for students and staff to car pool.

*The manager of sustainability at Macquarie University, Hilary Beckman, says.... **The big difference was the opening of the Epping to Chatswood Rail Link in 2009. This delivered Macquarie University Station, the only one in Sydney within a university campus.** (My emphasis)*

The impact has been marked. About 17,000 people a day use the station, making it the most heavily used on the new line.

While we don't expect that number in Newcastle – at least not in the early days of the city campus – it will happen in time *if* we retain the rail. And just try putting all those students and staff on buses!

Further down Saulwick reports:

Beckman says: Parking is everybody's bugbear....

As well as the train line, the university has built new bike paths, lockers and showers, and has started to offer reserved (if not policed) parking spaces for shared cars.

And: If Macquarie University has benefited from a government policy in the form of a new train line, the University of NSW is also due to benefit from a new tram line. (My emphasis)

And again:

Trams will offer similar services to buses, but they should be faster and will be able to carry even more people.

I strongly recommend the whole article to you. It provides substantial support for the retention of the railway and/or the introduction of a tram or tram/train. For the life of me, ***I do not understand why the authors of the Newcastle Strategy 2012 are apparently determined to get rid of their best friend in their crusade to reinvigorate inner Newcastle.*** As I said in my initial paragraph, leeching the city of its life line is mediaeval thinking at its apogee and scapegoating at its most ludicrous.

- Looking at the park-and-ride and kiss-and-ride options suggested in the Strategy document it is difficult to see how they will be of any value whatever. Once in their car commuters are unlikely to disembark and transfer at a fantasy parking station at Lambton, Adamstown Heights or Warabrook only to suffer the same or worse traffic experiences on the road in a bus. Getting out of the car and into a smooth, reliable and quick train does make sense. And closing off the parking options close to the CBD or near the new terminals or eliminating the current free loop bus service will only make things worse.
- *Landcom welcomes urban plan:* This is the heading on an article bylined Michelle Harris in the *Newcastle Herald* dated Saturday December 15 2012. It advises that property developers Landcom and GPT see the new proposals as 'a positive way forward' and that Landcom paid GPT \$20 million to acquire a two thirds stake in GPT's holdings in the Newcastle CBD around the Hunter Street Mall, and to consolidate a site there. GPT will not directly contribute any capital to redevelopment of the site.
- GPT is also on record as saying that it will not proceed with any development unless the rail is cut. So here we have a situation where taxpayer money is being used to support the poor decisions of private companies in a relationship that looks a lot like willing blackmail.
- In the same issue of the *Newcastle Herald* December 15 2012, Michelle Harris bylined an article entitled: *Turn on the light: Grierson*. This article indicated that Federal MP Sharon

Grierson will not support a \$120 million overhaul of the city centre focused around the truncation of heavy rail services unless light rail is introduced.

Ending the heavy rail at Wickham and replacing services to Newcastle station with buses would be a waste of money" not worth putting to the federal government, she said. Also reported in this article was the availability of \$7 million of federal money for a two year trial of light rail if the state matched it. However, the offer was rejected through State MP Tim Owen. A simple question arises: *Why???* In the grand scheme of things \$14 million is not much to find out whether the scheme would work or not.

- It might seem that I have spent a lot of time, effort and space on the rail – and I have. My reason is ***that the rail is crucial for the successful functioning of inner Newcastle***. And the rail is essential not only to the development of inner and outer Newcastle, but to the whole Hunter Region as well.
- As to the rest of the Strategy document: most of it seems to be very shallow indeed! There are some very good things in it, like the provision of cycle ways and some improvements to parking and some good ideas about improving access across the railway easement. But for the most part the Strategy is one of smoke and mirrors, or – it might more accurately be said – of planter boxes and paint. The planter boxes will either be removed from the Hunter Street Mall or will be introduced to places west of the Mall to make for a 'more vibrant' environment. Using paint to mark the roadway for box pedestrian crossings and for designated cycle ways is not a bad idea either, but reinvigorating a city needs deeper thought than a few minor cosmetic changes and some marketing.
- It is important to retain the *character* of the inner Newcastle CBD. It is an environment ripe for exploitation as a cultural precinct and a café/bar cum night time economy. It is also a heritage delight in places and certainly an attractive environment for visitors. Imagine the fillip to life and to the city economy if a cruise ship terminal existed somewhere between Queens Wharf and Wickham.
- For this reason it is essential that taller buildings be kept out of this precinct. High rise development – both business and residential – is inevitable in Newcastle, as it has been everywhere else; but we should be careful *and caring* about where we put it. We should *not* allow whole precincts to be open slather to any building development provided it fits into general guidelines. We need to know the effect of *all* proposals and concerns and objections should be handled on a case by case basis even if this causes delays that some regard as unnecessary. We expect our children to be regarded as individuals; so should we expect the individual constituents of our built environment to be considered on their own merits.
- Had I the time I would be pleased to analyse and comment on virtually every aspect of the 2012 Strategy but I am only one person responding to the completed product of a team of full time paid workers with the facilities and the finances to produce a glossy document and a supporting CD. I am just one ratepayer on limited resources, both in time and money. However, I think you will get the gist of my thinking from the above.
- It should be clear to you that I have come to the conclusion that the Strategy 2012 document is *fundamentally flawed*, and that ***the fundamental flaw is the intention to cut the railway***. I am *not* a rail tragic and I am certainly not against progress and development, but changes have to be sensible, intelligent and productive. There is more to life than the

profit motive and it seems to me that if you take care of the little things the big things will generally look after themselves.

- The railway is *no little thing*. But it is a crucial thing in the revival of inner Newcastle. It is a great existing resource and is actually the fulcrum on which the entire project depends. For reasons that I do not understand and that make *no rational sense* the fulcrum has swung away from the rail. It's time we readjusted our thinking and restored the balance. Yes, the rail *does* cause a barrier between Hunter Street and the harbour – but it is by far not the only barrier. Nor is it the major barrier. ***The major barrier – apart from the expanding Great Wall of Moneysuckle - is the mindset of people that precludes the provision of more and better ways of accessing the harbour through the rail easement together with the lack of realization that the rail provides the best public transport option by far into and out of inner Newcastle. All that is needed is some common sense and a refusal to indulge in childish and magical thinking.***

I leave it with you.

David Blyth