

Submission in response to the Revitalising Newcastle Urban Renewal Strategy

I am a long-time resident of Newcastle East who for the past four years has commuted to work in Sydney. Commuting this large distance has only been possible because of the proximity of Newcastle Railway Station to my home. I am able to walk to the station, board the 6.12 am Flyer (as have generations of Novocastrians who have needed to arrive in Sydney for various reasons by 9 am) and arrive at my workplace in a single journey. If, as proposed, the rail line is cut at Wickham, I will need to leave home earlier, and catch two modes of transport, a bus and train, to work. I do not see how, as the Revitalising Newcastle Urban Renewal Strategy contends, that this will make my journey either “smoother” or “more seamless”.

My personal situation is of relevance to this discussion given that the Revitalising Newcastle Urban Renewal Strategy situates the elimination of the rail line into Newcastle as a core element of its vision, while at the same time foreseeing an increase of 12, 600 residents in the inner-city by 2036. Closure of the rail line into Newcastle will seriously limit the attractiveness of inner-city living for the increasing number of people, who like myself, will need to commute significant distances to work.

In addition, the Strategy seeks to make the inner-city the main location in Newcastle for commercial offices, with some 10, 000 extra workers by 2036. It also notes the current construction of a university campus that will attract some 1,000 staff and 8,000 students to the inner-city. In the case of the university campus, Civic Station is perfectly situated to allow for the movement of these additional thousands of people in and out of the inner-city daily, as is Newcastle Station for office workers. These stations’ closures, as foreseen by the Strategy, will mean that these many thousands of people will be inclined to use their own transport to get to their destinations, rather than to endure the inconvenience of waiting for and boarding a bus at Wickham for the last part of their journey.

Increased bus traffic along Hunter Street from rail buses and the private transport of the much greater number of people in the inner-city will cause significant congestion into the peninsula that Newcastle’s inner-city is geographically, as well as increase carbon dioxide emissions. The issues of lack of available parking and frequently impeded access to their properties that current inner-city residents already face, will also be exacerbated.

The Revitalising Newcastle Urban Renewal Strategy incorrectly links the elimination of the rail line with opening up connectivity between Hunter Street and the waterfront area, and claims that “eight new north-south links”, that is, overpasses will be constructed over the “superseded” rail line. The construction of overpasses should not rely on the closure of the rail line. There is currently a very well-used pedestrian overpass at Civic Station over the functioning rail line which links Wheeler Place on Hunter Street and the Newcastle Regional and Maritime Museums, and other attractions of the waterfront. This model could be replicated elsewhere, such as at Worth Place and Steel Street, over a functioning rail line between Wickham and Newcastle Stations.

The contradictions inherent in the Revitalising Newcastle Urban Renewal Strategy, outlined above, call the feasibility of the Newcastle rail closure into serious doubt. The Strategy’s content, in fact, supports the maintenance and indeed, upgrading, rather than closure, of the rail line into Newcastle.

The rail line into Newcastle Station must be maintained.

I thank you for the opportunity to make this submission.

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