

RE: Newcastle Urban Renewal Strategy

Thank you for the opportunity to express my views about this important topic. As a life long Novocastrian I was happy to hear that the NSW Government had released a strategy to bring back life the centre of Newcastle. A clear strategy is long overdue.

After reading the executive summary of the draft report, I attended the public evening meeting at Newcastle City Hall on 20 February to hear first hand what the vision is for revitalising Newcastle. The meeting was interesting in that:

- It was made clear from the start that discussion on the railway would not be necessary as the decision to cut the rail at Wickham was final;
- The majority of the audience wanted to discuss the rail closure
- Neither the Lord Mayor or the State Member for Newcastle turned up at the meeting.

My thoughts from these observations were that:

- Neither the State Government nor the Council elected politicians wanted to listen to the public about the plan;
- That the way the rail closure is being handled has the potential to dramatically lower public support for the NSW Government and the Lord Mayor.

That said, my concerns on the proposed strategy are as follows:

- I have been fortunate to travel to many of the world's major cities. Visionary leaders in cities such as London and New York saw the value of creating great urban parks. The city leaders preserved large areas for public parks which since have proven very popular for residents and tourists like me. Looking locally Newcastle leaders had the vision more than a generation ago to create Civic Park – removing industrial buildings and creating a great urban park. I believe the strategy would be greatly enhanced if there was a park connecting Fig Tree park to the Lee Wharf apartments. The current car parks and fenced off land is an eyesore and waste of waterfront property. New multistorey car parks could be built in vacant land south of the Lee Wharf apartments and on vacant land south of the intersection of Honeysuckle Dive with Hannel St. If the Government wants more people to live, work and study in the CBD it needs quality open space. The proposed pocket parks and an 8m open space strip along the foreshore is not good enough. It demonstrates maximising asset sales of State Government land at the expense of lifestyle for Novocastrians, especially Honeysuckle residents and employees. Extensive open space was created from State Government land in Newcastle East and it has become a great public asset. A beautiful public park could be established by the creation of a western harbour foreshore park. A large park would be a vote winner and be a catalyst to drive development on its fringes.
- There is no public primary school proposed. With a plan to create 6000 new residences, where will the children go to school? Newcastle East is full and The Junction Public School is large enough.
- I think most people agree that the current railway situation in Newcastle does impact on the quality of lives for people who live and work in Newcastle. The rail line does separate Hunter St to the Harbour. Is removing the rail line however the best solution? I personally

don't think so. Changing over to buses will add at least 10 minutes to travel up to Watt St. Removal of the rail line will make it more difficult for workers, residents and tourists to visit Newcastle East. The eastern end of Newcastle already has the cheapest commercial rent in Newcastle. Why? Because its hard to get to and there is no free parking. This decision will make it harder to get to Newcastle centre and encourage existing users to relocate. It could therefore stop redevelopment rather than encourage it. Will the NSW Government release any studies which look at the feasibility of the alternative options? My view is that Newcastle needs a new Newcastle Station – one that connects rail, buses and cars. The logical place is Woodville junction, the junction of the Valley and Sydney rail lines, with ample space for car parking and a bus/rail interchange. From there a light rail could run into Newcastle using existing infrastructure. Sure it might cost more but it would create a valuable asset for generations to come – a real vote winner.

Thank you for reading my submission.

Regards

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