

urbanrenewal - Submission re the Exhibition of Newcastle Urban Renewal Strategy

From: "Jan Davis" <jandavis@swiftdsl.com.au>
To: <urbanrenewal@planning.nsw.gov.au>
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Subject: Submission re the Exhibition of Newcastle Urban Renewal Strategy

Hunter Environment Lobby Inc would like to make a submission about the Newcastle Urban Renewal Strategy, and also asks that we may put in a further submission at a later date if that is possible?

Hunter Environment Lobby Inc. (HEL) is a regionally based community organisation which is concerned about the cumulative effects on community, environment and sustainability of natural systems by development, industry and infrastructure.

HEL has been active in the Hunter for well over fifteen years by promoting sustainable options to development issues, organising forums and being invited to sit on committees and working groups that aim to work with government agencies and the community to reach decisions concerning important landmark uses of resources and infrastructure.

We thank the Department of Planning in being able to make a comment on this important issue which will have far reaching impacts on the quality of life of Hunter residents for decades to come. This submission focuses on the issue of transport planning in particular which forms the basis of how decisions are made to implement where future development may happen in the Valley.

Issues of planning are complex and have far reaching effects on the quality of life for future and present residents in the Hunter Valley, none more so than our transport networks. We presently have a heavy rail network which is part of the City Rail network, and links the capital of New South Wales, Sydney, to the capital of the Hunter, Newcastle.

Newcastle is, we believe, Australia's sixth largest city, and has an ever increasing population, which has had planning guidelines in the past which could at best be described as hazy. We instance the recent Lower Hunter Planning Strategy as an example of this hazy planning, where we saw the last two choices of development of residential land, coming ninety first and ninety second out of a total of ninety two options, but still being implemented ahead of more sustainable ones. These were the developments of Catherine Hill Bay and Huntlee New Town near Branxton.

We use these examples to show that even the choices put forward by the regional Departments of Planning and Infrastructure can contradict their own guidelines. We believe that the decision made by the NSW Minister for Planning and Infrastructure recently about cutting the city rail network rail line before it reaches the station of Newcastle is another such decision which contradicts this Departments guidelines for liveable cities and transport options.

The residents of the Hunter have seen the demise of the heavy rail service over the last forty five years, in particular the cutting of the rail line to Cessnock and Kurri Kurri, the cutting of more regular services from Toronto, Muswellbrook, Scone and Singleton, but despite these imposts have made increasing use of this valuable service all the way into the Newcastle railway station.

The figures on passenger use in the Hunter have shown increasing use of this service over the last few years, despite the CBD of Newcastle holding fewer attractions for passengers from the nether regions of our valley. The importance of this destination for rail passengers has declined over the last thirty years with shopping malls being built in urban areas, the Newcastle Hospital closure, and we see the forecast of the Law Courts demise to follow in the future.

To balance this though, we have more people not wanting to drive because of difficulty in finding a suitable parking place and climate change concerns, we have a revitalised Fore Shore area that attracts people wanting to have a recreational experience, and we have the world class beaches of

Newcastle and Nobby's attracting more and more travellers. We also still have a strong enclave of health professionals in the top end of town near the Newcastle Station.

We believe that to cut these services is short-sighted in the extreme and deprives people now and into the future a choice on transport use to maximise the experience of being able to access the area of Newcastle that really needs the community's presence to help keep the businesses and services viable, and to help offset climate change effects by using fossil fuels more wisely.

We would like to expand on these themes at a further time if that is acceptable, and thank you for the opportunity to submit our position.

Yours Sincerely,

Jan Davis
President Hunter Environment Lobby Inc.