



Cr. Therese Doyle Greens Councillor NEWCASTLE CITY COUNCIL

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Urban Renewal Team
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Submission on Newcastle Urban Renewal Strategy

Dear Sir/Madam

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Newcastle Urban Renewal Strategy.
The Draft Strategy:

- i) Includes no funding commitment for infrastructure necessary to the success of the strategy
- ii) Failed to take into account the increased need for a railway line to the city centre should urban renewal succeed, especially given the large university campus planned for the Civic precinct.
- iii) Failed to actively promote environmental sustainability practices or to include energy and water conservation strategies for the city.
- iv) Failed to provide a viable plan for conservation of the city's unique heritage
- v) Failed to include ongoing community consultation.

A detailed submission is attached.

Yours faithfully,



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Submission on draft Newcastle Urban Renewal Strategy.

Concerns with the Draft Strategy are presented under 3 headings:

- 1. Finances**
- 2. Planning Controls**
- 3. Public Transport**

1. Finances

One of the most disturbing features of the proposed Urban Renewal Strategy is that it is unfunded, placing an intolerable burden of cost on the people of Newcastle. While the Port of Newcastle is responsible for the passage of billions of dollars worth of wealth-generating products and exports, the City of Newcastle languishes. Last year almost 130 million tonnes of product was shipped through our port, mostly on behalf of multinational companies.

Newcastle deserves a share in the bounty that passes through our city's port. The State Government should establish a community trust funded by a levy on all goods passing through the port. This port levy would help to fund the infrastructure needed to revitalise our City. A \$1 per tonne levy on the goods that passed through our port last year would have yielded \$130 million.

The State Government has made no commitments to financially support the delivery of this renewal strategy except insofar as it will pay for the removal of a key element of transport infrastructure, the railway line to the city centre. It is also understood that *UrbanGrowth* (ex-Landcom) will continue its partnership with GPT to develop its currently held properties. There is nothing in the strategy to suggest plans for the Post Office, either in collaboration with the Awabakal Land Council (if the Land Rights claim should be successful) or independent of it. There is also no commitment from the State government to commit funds to improvements of state significance for the city of Newcastle, including:

- The Art Gallery
- Restoration of the City Hall
- Restoration of the Newcastle Ocean Baths

The projected increase of 6,000 additional dwellings for the city is not supported by the PDA economic study on which the strategy is based. The PDA study predicts a maximum of 2,100 dwellings in its most optimistic forecast of residential growth in the city (see Appendix 2, Economic Assessment Hill PDA 2012, p10).

With the withdrawal of State government funding to TAFE in Hunter St and the downsizing of Department of Health facilities in the city, as well as other State government departments in Bull St, the State government is doing little to encourage population movement into the city.

Mine subsidence is identified as a key inhibitor to the development of the central and Eastern parts of the city centre by the Economic Assessment study (See

Appendix 2 p18) yet there is no systematic and cost effective remedy offered either in the study or in the draft strategy. The State government should identify key areas to be developed and carry out remediation works/grouting before recovering that cost equitably from developers.

All the works outlined for public domain improvements are to come from Council's budget. While some of these are already in Council's forward planning, most are reliant on future Section 94A payments and the payment of Section 94A payments that are due and that have not yet been paid. There are three major obstacles to Council being in a position to fulfil these public domain improvements:

- Council has reduced the Section 94A charges from 3% to 2%, thus significantly limiting the funds available to these projects
- The Draft Strategy recommends delaying the collection of the Section 94A contributions from the time of issue of the Construction Certificate to the time of issue of the Occupation Certificate. This delay will much more seriously impact on Council's ability to carry out these projects in a timely manner.
- Many Section 94A contributions from 2009 onwards are still outstanding.

2. Planning

A major concern is the extent to which the draft strategy will remove real control over the type and scale of development from the elected Council. Planning rights for Newcastle City Council over the type and scale of developments need to be guaranteed.

Revitalising our city centre should build on its strengths. Newcastle is a diverse multicultural city with a lively artistic and cultural life set against a backdrop of classic heritage buildings and natural features.

Development should respect, restore and reuse our heritage buildings, deliver human-scale public spaces and provide for housing affordability and social mix in the city.

A University of Newcastle city campus located right in the city centre makes good educational, social and economic sense, and would become a key driver for Newcastle's revitalisation. Obviously this plan only makes sense with access to a railway in the city centre.

Height and bulk

It is vital that the human scale character of Newcastle city centre is preserved in order for the city to retain its reputation as a people and heritage-friendly city.

- The suggested 90m heights around the Store at Wickham are excessive.
 - The height and bulk allowable immediately adjacent to Cathedral Park will destroy both the character of the area and the amenity of the park – view will be destroyed if these allowances are taken up. Height and bulk must be restricted in the area bounded by King, Perkins, Newcomen and Hunter Sts.
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- The block of buildings opposite the current Police Station and Law Court in Church St is a historic precinct comprising a row of terrace houses. These need to be earmarked for conservations and the character of the entire area bound by Hunter, Watt, Church and Newcomen St, height and bulk restricted

Heritage

Heritage is recognised as an important feature of Newcastle City Centre that needs to be preserved to preserve the city's character in the draft Strategy. However, it lacks a cohesive plan to ensure that the city's unique character is respected.

- There are no overall guiding principles for the city centre's specific heritage character.
- There is no recognition of existing Heritage Conservation Areas (HCAs) or of the important HCA characteristics that should be considered in any future development. These include the need to retain and adaptively recycle listed heritage items as well as items on non-statutory lists, contributory buildings, maintenance of streetscapes and settings.
- Additionally there is no recognition of the need for development standards and urban design guidelines (Maximum heights and FSRs, setbacks, appropriate materials, etc) to protect the highly significant heritage urban character and guide future development within the HCAs.
- There is no plan or commitment to provide incentives for developers to restore heritage items in a way that will be profitable for them and beautifying for the city.
- Restoration of the Post Office, the City Hall or the Ocean Baths would be a great stimulant for other development in the city. These are state significant heritage items whose restoration is largely a state responsibility. Yet there is no commitment in the plan for these to be supported by State government funding.

Mine Subsidence

Mine subsidence has been identified as a key issue affecting the revitalisation of the Newcastle CBD. Yet the draft Strategy fails to deal with the old mining workings under much of the city centre.

There is no systematic solution proposed to the serious impediment that mine subsidence to future development in the city. Funding needs to be provided to undertake a targeted grouting program that provides a mechanism for cost sharing across development sites.

The viability of both commercial and residential redevelopments in the Newcastle CBD is constrained by this issue. No amount of tweaking height restrictions and floor space ratios will alter the fact that only large developments will be able to absorb the large fixed mobilisation costs of grouting that usually extends well beyond the footprint of the site to be developed.

The lack of an equitable grouting strategy for mine subsidence sites leads to a reduction in housing stock at the lower end of the market within the CBD and a

subsequent reduction in the socio-economic residential mix in CBD. Flow on effects push development away from our CBD, leading to transport issues across the city and an ongoing derelict look of the CBD, including its retail sector. Failure to address mine subsidence will result in lack of diversity in the CBD built environment with only large uniform developments taking place that do not cater for retention and restoration of heritage properties.

The State Government needs to provide additional funds from royalties currently collected from the coal industry for remediation.

Barriers and Linearity

The planned increase and improvement of pedestrian links from Hunter Street to the waterfront is welcome. At present they are cumbersome, not fully integrated with a meaningful public footpath plan and with little or no access for those with special needs. However, this can be achieved while retaining the rail almost as easily with appropriate level crossings.

Social Infrastructure

While demographic projections suggest an increase in population for the city centre, there is no mention of how that future population growth will be provided for with educational facilities like schools.

While The Loft Youth Centre is mentioned, due to stringent budgetary constraints, it is likely that this important facility will close. The Art Gallery extension has been indefinitely delayed by council and serious doubts raised about much of the rest of the projected improvements in social infrastructure.

State funding will be essential for most of the described social infrastructure to proceed. Furthermore there will be an extra burden on current infrastructure to accommodate the influx of students to the city centre with the new university campus.

Environmental Controls

Newcastle City Council has made a number of policy commitments to the importance of environmental sustainability. This is not reflected in the draft strategy.

The *Sustainability* section of the draft strategy is seriously flawed in this respect. The draft strategy for Newcastle fails to acknowledge that we are living in a changing climate where energy will be more expensive and flooding events will become more frequent and more severe.

Our city centre should be a showcase for sustainable building designs that use less energy, with 5-star and 6-star buildings the norm. An urban renewal strategy should be about getting best practice outcomes that future-proofs the city's assets.

Landscaping and Parks

There is very little attention in the draft strategy to landscaping in general.

A landscape review analysis should focus more on improving the urban landscape in general, rather than the overemphasis on water views implied in the strategy.

More emphasis is required on 'greening' areas and street pacification. The plan should look into ways of greening areas while at the same time avoiding high maintenance grassed areas.

There are no further parks envisaged and an overemphasis on the waterfront creates increased need for car travel. More parks would create areas where people can gather and socialise in their own immediate area within walkable distances.

The existing and proposed view corridors could be extended to create breeze paths for cooling of areas in summer and solar access for all buildings.

More street planting throughout the city centre would enhance the cooling and calming effect that trees provide to the urban environment.

The plan to clean up Cottage Creek and open it up to the public is welcome. This area should become a gathering place rather than a place for dumping rubbish

Flooding

The draft strategy should promote more inland water features in general.

There is not enough emphasis on planning for potential flooding particularly with predicted sea level rises and freak storms due to climate change.

3. Public Transport

Removal of the rail line into the city centre will potentially reduce the number of public transport users by almost half according to the strategy's figures (see page 48: total rail transport users to arrive in city = 700 out of a total of 1600 public transport users).

Public transport is a key component of a sustainable, fair and liveable city. Improvements to the public transport system are long overdue and the State Government's plan for Newcastle fails to make any improvements. Some obvious improvements are:

- upgrading all bus stops and train stations to ensure they meet national disability standards,
- installing new signalling to address delays at railway level crossings such as Stewart Avenue,
- replacing previous level crossings between Wickham and Newcastle stations, and
- rail crossings in conjunction with built development adjacent to the existing rail line.

Similarly, cycleways, park-and-ride facilities, public domain improvements, health and education facilities as well as the mine-workings grouting program should be funded upfront, with part of the cost recouped from levies on future developments (eg Section 94/94A).

While the Draft Strategy makes many statements about reducing the reliance on

cars and vehicles in the city centre and the importance of public transport there are no definite proposals for improvement to the current public transport system. Those proposals that are made contain some serious inaccuracies or are nebulous. The major concerns I have with public transport aspects of the study include:

Rail

The proposed truncation of the railway line at Wickham Station will have the following flow-on effects:

- Cost: the only thorough analysis of the costs of cutting the rail line at Wickham is the AECOM 2010 study, which predicts the cheapest price for cutting the line at about \$340 million. This money could be far better used to make train travel into the city compatible with more crossings through such measures as signalling upgrades and improvements to the rail corridor.
- Since all rail passengers will now have to transfer from one mode of transport to another in order to reach the city centre, their journeys will not be "seamless"
- Closure of the Beaumont St and Railway St level crossings will result in significant disruption to traffic, to bus travel and, more seriously, to business viability in the Hamilton shopping precinct.
- The alternative to cutting the rail at Wickham is to cut the trains from Central at Broadmeadow and thus allow Beaumont St crossing to remain open.. This will seriously hamper those who wish to travel conveniently to Sydney and will result in considerably increased car use.
- Truncation of the rail line at Wickham will mean that there will not be an easily accessible railway station for the students travelling to the proposed new inner city campus of UoN at Civic, or to people travelling to the legal and civic precinct.

The effects of the rail closure on other forms of transport are described below.

Ferry

Ferry passengers will be affected in a number of ways by the transport proposals.

- There will be a loss of direct access to the rail line from the Stockton ferry.
 - Loss of bus stops (Scott St at Market St intersection) creates walk for the bus interchange which is the same distance as current direct rail access at Newcastle Station
 - Ferry passengers accessing rail will be forced to 'compete' for a place on the bus with bus passengers & displaced train passengers
 - Ferry passengers currently interchanging to bus for travel to/from western areas will be forced to 'compete' for a place on the bus with bus passengers & displaced train passengers
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- There are no proposals to enhance services or infrastructure, such as increase Park 'n' Ride capacity or provide kiosk type services at Stockton wharf, or improve bus services & connections at Stockton.
- There will be additional bus fares for any on-travel outside the hours of the Free Fare Zone (7.30am - 6.00pm)

For ferry passengers 'interchanging' there will be slower bus running times, increased travel time and reduction in reliability.

Bus

Although improvements in bus frequencies are promised and more direct routes from key locations such as Charlestown, Glendale and the University, overall there will be slower bus running times & reduced reliability on affected routes due to congestion caused by road closures (Railway St & Beaumont St) and narrowing of Hunter St. Changes to the bus system have a number of other issues.

- Slower running times due to increased boardings by displaced train & ferry passengers.
- Buses not suitable for carrying typical train passenger luggage, will see aisle cluttered reducing on bus access.
- Many buses will run 'at capacity' resulting in an inability to 'pick up' more passengers.
- Loss of easy access for the pedestrian component of journey at Hamilton due to closure of Beaumont St level crossing(affecting Routes 100, 104, 111, 201, 235 & 555)

The draft strategy proposes that bus services will be coordinated to meet trains. This is not supported by any concrete plans or commitments to provide more buses to Newcastle

For bus passengers there may well be slower running times, increased travel time, reduction in reliability, reduction in customer satisfaction, loss of patronage, unless there are some serious commitment to speedily introduce OPAL ticketing system and to provide a significant number of extra buses

Park 'n' Ride

Proposed Park 'n' Ride facilities are proposed to reduce car use in the city centre. However, there is little detail either in the strategy or in its background studies that provides any confidence that these have been planned to any serious extent. The Park'n'Ride facilities are not just treated superficially, but in terms of proposed 'links' to higher frequency 'peak' bus services are not demonstrated or accounted for.

For example, the proposed facility at Northcott Dr/Pacific Hwy (Highfields) is supposed to 'support growth' on Route 320. However the 320 doesn't go to that location as it runs via Maddison Av / Pacific Hwy (approx 1km south of Northcott/Hwy) and only 'crosses' Northcott at Park Ave approx 1km north of Northcott/Hwy).