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To: <urbanrenewal@planning.nsw.gov.au>
CC: [REDACTED]
Date: 3/13/2013 5:41 pm
Subject: NEWCASTLE RAIL

The Manager,
Centres and Urban Renewal Department,
Department of Planning & Infrastructure,
Dear sir/madam,

I have refrained from commenting on the rail removal plan for Newcastle until this late stage, as I felt that an angry tirade would be counterproductive to my attempt to get sense to prevail. Therefore I have left writing until I have heard, and considered, the many voices raised on this issue. Nothing has changed my mind overall, except perhaps to introduce a little flexibility into my argument.

I am not a luddite, and I do not have any sense of nostalgia for the 'good old days' of busy trains into Newcastle Terminus. I am prepared to consider a modern, rail-based alternative, such as light rail or tram-train, for the line- provided it serves the majority of the lower Hunter region by extending to Fassifern and Maitland, with the bonus of potential expansion to places like Toronto, University/Wallsend, and the new suburbs in the Maitland district. I would be happy to have Sydney trains terminate at a REAL interchange at Islington (Woodville Junction) with direct city connection by lighter rail alternatives- but more on that later. I would even be prepared to TEMPORARILY allow the line to be closed down and 'mothballed' from Woodville Junction to the fine terminus while a longer-term light alternative is chosen. This, incidentally, was the stated position of local member Tim Owen a couple of years ago when I spoke to him- until he started to listen to Wickham developers and, dare I say, your department.

The core to my objections (and, I would suggest, those of the vast majority of residents of the lower Hunter, 90% of whom live west of Broadmeadow) can be summarized in one word- WICKHAM. If ever there was an inappropriate place for a terminus (which it would be) or an interchange (which won't happen for most Hunter residents) it is Wickham. It is too far out of town for a terminus- cutting access to the beaches, a (potentially restorable) shopping mall, the theatre and cultural districts, and a lot of the best restaurants in Newcastle for those without cars, or who believe, as I do, that there is no place for the private car in any modern, progressive city. Most cities small and large around the world (and I keep up with developments) are desperately trying to reverse the short-sighted removal of rail from their CBDs in the 1960s & 70s, either by tunneling (not economical for Newcastle) or light rail. The line isn't being used? Try getting a seat on a Maitland train west of Civic in the peak hour!

As for a Wickham interchange, that is absolutely risible. As many have said, people don't like changing modes of transport, especially close to their destination (Sydney corrected this in the 1930s!!). They will drive, if possible, or just won't come. I can assure you that a rail terminus at Wickham will kill stone dead any rejuvenation of Newcastle's potentially lovely CBD- especially as there is to be a shopping centre at the station. As for interchange with other modes: Country trains? No. Interstate coaches? No. Sydney trains? Not in the latest proposal for terminating them at Broadmeadow (Poor Maitland users- either 3 trains to get to Sydney, or, if the train is to go to

Broadmeadow & reverse, a longer journey to not get to their desired destination anyway). Private cars? By Wickham, drivers will have passed the worst of the congestion, so they'll keep going into the city (if they have a good enough reason to bother).

This is where Islington Junction comes in. It ticks every box for an interchange (or what is sometimes called a 'parkway' station): Loads of degraded ex-gasworks land, with no better use than to be sealed over for parking, 3-way interchangeability between local, Sydney and country trains, space in the center of the triangle to terminate Sydney trains such that a few steps would bring users to waiting trains (or light rail etc) for the CBD and Maitland, plenty of room for interchange with local buses -and space for a good coach terminal close to main arteries without having to negotiate inner-city streets. This would be bliss for everyone except the few who travel from Sydney right into Newcastle- a relatively small number, as we keep being reminded, because most users and residents live (surprise, surprise) west of the railway.

The key to the whole issue I feel is the fundamental disconnect between a small but vocal group of inner-city Newcastle residents (many of whom would not be seen dead on a train) and the 90% or so residents (I don't have accurate figures) who live west and southwest of the city and want convenient access to the employment, shopping, recreational and cultural facilities of inner Newcastle, for which most pay substantial rates. As for the 'Berlin Wall' metaphor used of late: that is absolute rubbish. Promulgators of the 'rail splits the city' argument are the (again very vocal) minority of office workers who work at Honeysuckle and the young people who frequent the cafes, restaurants and nightclubs in the region. Most older people, myself included, have no desire to become engulfed in the concrete jungle that central Honeysuckle has become. Those places that do interest the majority- parks, museums, the riverfront (where you can get to it) and the ferry wharves, have ample access via level crossings or overpasses, especially with light rail, when more crossings can be opened and closure times reduced. No, the 'Berlin Wall' for us majority westerners will be Wickham, blocking access to the acknowledged beauties of central Newcastle for users of both public transport and private car (by increased congestion).

As for the small number of residents who live north of the railway and keep banging on about holdups at the Stewart Avenue level crossing, I'll quote a friend of mine, an ex-Novocastrian and respected Transport Planner: It would be far cheaper and more effective to build a rail (and Hunter St) overpass for Stewart Ave (as proposed years ago) than to go to the trouble and massive inconvenience of closing a main artery for the comfort of a few. Anyway, the latest proposal to close the busy Beaumont St crossing, must increase congestion on Stewart Ave (not to mention the addition of a fleet of buses...) such that any time gained from the absence of the line will be negated. Is it any wonder that a lot of people suspect that this whole plan has been promulgated by developers owning land in the Wickham area? Turf everybody out at our shiny new Wickham shopping centre ("A new CBD!") and disadvantage people trying to reach the competing shopping centres on Beaumont St & in inner Newcastle? It ticks all the boxes. People wanting to go elsewhere can get stuffed!

To sum up, the vast majority of residents of Newcastle and the Lower Hunter are, in my experience, furious at the removal of a world-class facility for our revered city (one we would use far more if it had a

greater reach and if there was actually a good reason to go into the city) for, to us trivial reasons. As a resident of a (somewhat) outlying area, I can honestly say that I have only ever met one person (a young, inner-city resident of course) in favour of removing the line. How about some consideration for the silent (and not-so-silent) vast majority of residents who don't live or work in inner Newcastle, but who want, and are indeed entitled to, the best access possible to the centre of what we call our home?

Regards,

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