

Newcastle Urban Renewal Strategy 2012..

In the NSW Planning department's Overview of it's "Lower Hunter Regional Strategy" in relation to "Housing" it refers to "the effective use of existing infrastructure" & mentions Thornton North (7000) & Branxton-Huntlee(7200) as two of the biggest population growth areas in our region by 2031.

In it's summary of "Job & Employment Centres" "Newcastle city centre is identified as a regional city of national and international importance".

One wonders, then, at the logic in replacing the existing rail services into Newcastle by bus services from Wickham, when we will have an increased demand for efficient public transport from the lower hunter into Newcastle city. We are already experiencing traffic congestion on the New England highway, & other major roads in the lower Hunter & around Newcastle.

At a public forum on this topic recently+, James McIntosh, Transport planner & economist from the Curtin University's "Sustainable Policy Institute", WA, suggested that integrated land use & transport planning should be aimed at reducing the use of cars & increasing the use of public transport, as has been implemented in Perth with free integrated public transport being funded through payment for parking. He also referred to research which indicates that land values increase in close proximity to rail services in particular.

There was general agreement & evidence that bus services are less efficient & less utilised than rail, & aggravate pollution & clogged roads.

Examples of rail transport hubs being integrated with cycling stations & connected to major employment centres in Perth & cities around the world should provide inspiration to planners & developers to work together to provide a vibrant city centre in Newcastle where people congregate to enjoy it's natural & cultural assets without turning it into a clogged concrete jungle.

I would like to make my view clear that removal of the railway services into Newcastle goes against the trend in most other cities ,would be a backward step & an expensive waste of public money.

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