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To: <urbanrenewal@planning.nsw.gov.au>
Date: 12/18/2012 5:54 pm
Subject: Submission of the Newcastle Urban Renewal Strategy

Manager, Centres and Urban Renewal:
Department of Planning & Infrastructure
GPO Box 39, SYDNEY NSW 2001

Re: Newcastle Urban Renewal Strategy

Proposals for the expenditure of State Government money are properly the concern of all residents of NSW, and particularly when a proposal affects NSW's second largest city. My submission will raise the following issues:

1. Time of release of strategy
2. Public transport issues
3. Housing density
4. Commercial

1. It is with serious concern that I note that the strategy has been released just prior to the summer Christmas season. As a former Local Government Councillor I am well aware that whether individuals are on holidays or not, there is no serious engagement with community matters over the summer period. Release for public comment at this time looks like what it is, an attempt to reduce public engagement and to minimise the opportunity for members of the Newcastle community to engage in a timely process of discussion.

Recommendation: That the public submission process be extended until the 3rd of May 2013.

2. The proposal to remove the railway line into the city is in opposition to every tenant of good town planning. It is very well known that where any change of mode is required the usage of public transport declines. Trip times from Wickham to Newcastle will increase, significantly during morning and evening peaks.

It is worth noting that every medium or large sized city of note in the world has rail transport to the centre of the city, and that where such a system does not exist moves are being undertaken to develop such systems. Indeed it is highly relevant to note that the State Government is properly proposing to return a light rail service from the centre of Sydney to the University of NSW around fifty years after the original tram service was removed. In other words, at great public expense the current State Government is making good on the terrible errors of the past and recognising that rail or light rail is the only way to move significant numbers of people effectively.

The State Government is also seeking to expand the capacity of the Sydney rail network by building another rail crossing of the harbour, and initiative that recognises the central place of rail transport in a modern and growing city.

Removal of the rail system is also an act of negligence by the government in handing over to private developers land that should always be used for public transport.

Recommendation: That the existing rail line to Newcastle be retained.

3. In relation to density, that except where the rail line should be maintained that the current height of buildings along the waterfront not be exceeded in either build or scale. The development of the last decade or so on the former railway yards has been a successful enough experience of urban renewal, and its relatively low rise aspect provides both for a city with a human scale and one which is in context of the nineteenth century architecture of which Newcastle City has many wonderful and worthwhile examples. Together this makes for a cityscape which is both desirable for residents and attractive for visitors.

An increase in the population on the city area must be served by the existing rail line, and to remove the rail line will simply cause a massive increase in traffic, put unsustainable pressure on limited parking and undermine efforts to get people to come to the city for commerce or entertainment.

Recommendation: No increase in bulk and scale beyond what is allowed on the waterfront and protection and harmonisation with Newcastle's architectural heritage. Retain rail line.

4. The issue of providing improved commercial returns is a complex matter, but will not be assisted by removal of the rail line. The key long term issue has been the failure of public transport to be extended and improved in the Hunter region and the growth in car based shopping centres or Westfield style developments.

The Westfield style of shopping is very much a one size fits all development, and it would seem most likely that Newcastle's older commercial centre will only come to life again if it is to focus on bespoke shopping and unique services that other areas in the Hunter do not provide. It seems highly unlikely that people will travel to Newcastle for more of the same.

Recommendation: Use the unique city that Newcastle is to focus on new commercial development based on Newcastle's history targeting both locals and tourists.

In conclusion a modern city must have a rail line to its heart and must differentiate itself from the more pedestrian commercial and residential areas that surround it. No modern city sensibly removes rail infrastructure, and no sensible planning decisions are taken that will increase private motor car use as would occur if the rail line is removed.

Yours sincerely,

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