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March 16, 2013

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RE: Newcastle Urban Renewal Strategy

My submission is in support of most aspects of the Newcastle Urban Renewal Strategy (NURS), except for the location of the new transport interchange and the chosen transport solution in lieu of heavy rail.

Wickham as the preferred location for an interchange was stated in a HDC report (Newcastle CBD Integrated Transport – Identification of Preferred Transport Scheme) that had no input from Rail Corp.¹

Wickham is a compromise that tries to keep some rail connection to the future CBD (Newcastle West), whilst simultaneously allowing to achieve the desirable connectivity across the existing rail corridor from Hannel Street to the east and to eliminate the most unpopular level crossing in the Hunter. It is clear, that Wickham has not been chosen to optimize the public transport situation in Newcastle, but as a solution that allows the urban renewal based around a connection of the city to the water front to take place.

The rail network in Newcastle however does not require a compromise, but a structural change that takes into account other needs than purely the woes of the declining Newcastle CBD. Newcastle requires a 'central station' that connects the region to Sydney with regular, at least hourly, intercity trains that get to Sydney Central in less than 2 hours. This is not asking for 'High Speed Rail', but simply a prioritized use of current infrastructure with gradual future upgrades. (This by itself would arguably provide a bigger boost to Newcastle than most of NURS.) Similarly, the western and northern Hunter regions need to be connected to this service, linked via an interchange that does not purely focus on central Newcastle, but on the City as a whole (including Lake Macquarie). Other than Newcastle CBD, this hub needs to service John Hunter and

¹ Preliminary Assessment of Newcastle Truncation – Wickham Station – AECOM 2010
http://www.transport.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/b2b/publications/newcastle_truncation_wickham_station_1.pdf

Mater Hospitals, regional education facilities and employment centres such as Cardiff, Mayfield and Charlestown. This interchange therefore needs to be located on the main North-South rail line. Broadmeadow would appear to be the most logical location for such an interchange, as this location would also service the Hunter's major centre for sporting events, conventions and entertainment, including the proposed location of a potential future major event, as variously discussed. This would be an improvement of access for people on the Maitland line who would no longer have to change at Hamilton.

From the above follows my first disagreement with the NURS: money spent on a new major transport interchange would be wasted in Wickham, as it would not service the region as a whole, and would not provide for adequate regional interconnections, including an upgrade of the Sydney service.

From the arbitrary mapping of the NURS, with an exclusive view of the Newcastle post code, the Wickham interchange may make sense. If, however, the view is broadened, then further urban renewal and improved connectivity can be achieved west of the Hannel Street crossing. If the rail corridor would be softened, Newcastle West and Hamilton would connect to both Wickham and Islington, creating a major opportunity to achieve the long held renewal and development visions for both Wickham and Wickham Park, while also strengthening the role of Hamilton as an urban centre through improved connections with Islington and Wickham.

This brings me to the chosen transport solution in lieu of heavy rail.

The best use of the transport corridor between Broadmeadow and Newcastle is transport. A vision for a 'green corridor' is flawed, as the corridor is in itself very unattractive and because if cyclists and pedestrians have the choice between the water's edge 50 m to the north or the old rail corridor, they will probably pick the foreshore. If not, the central premise of the NURS of connecting the city with the harbour would be problematic.

The long drawn out shape of the Newcastle city centre, following Hunter and King Streets, Wharf Road and Honeysuckle Drive is often referred to as challenging, to say the least. Incidentally, this perceived negative can be turned into a positive, as this shape allows the city to be interconnected along its entire length using a single light rail line following the existing rail corridor. A light rail line from Newcastle to Broadmeadow would be 5.2 km long. One additional stop between each of the existing stations would provide for station spacing between 800m and 500m, an ideal for light rail in city centres (Please find a map in Annexure A).

This light rail option would provide a true alternative to the private car for professionals and students living and working along this high density commercial and residential corridor, while providing a backbone to all public transport users. Being light rail, any

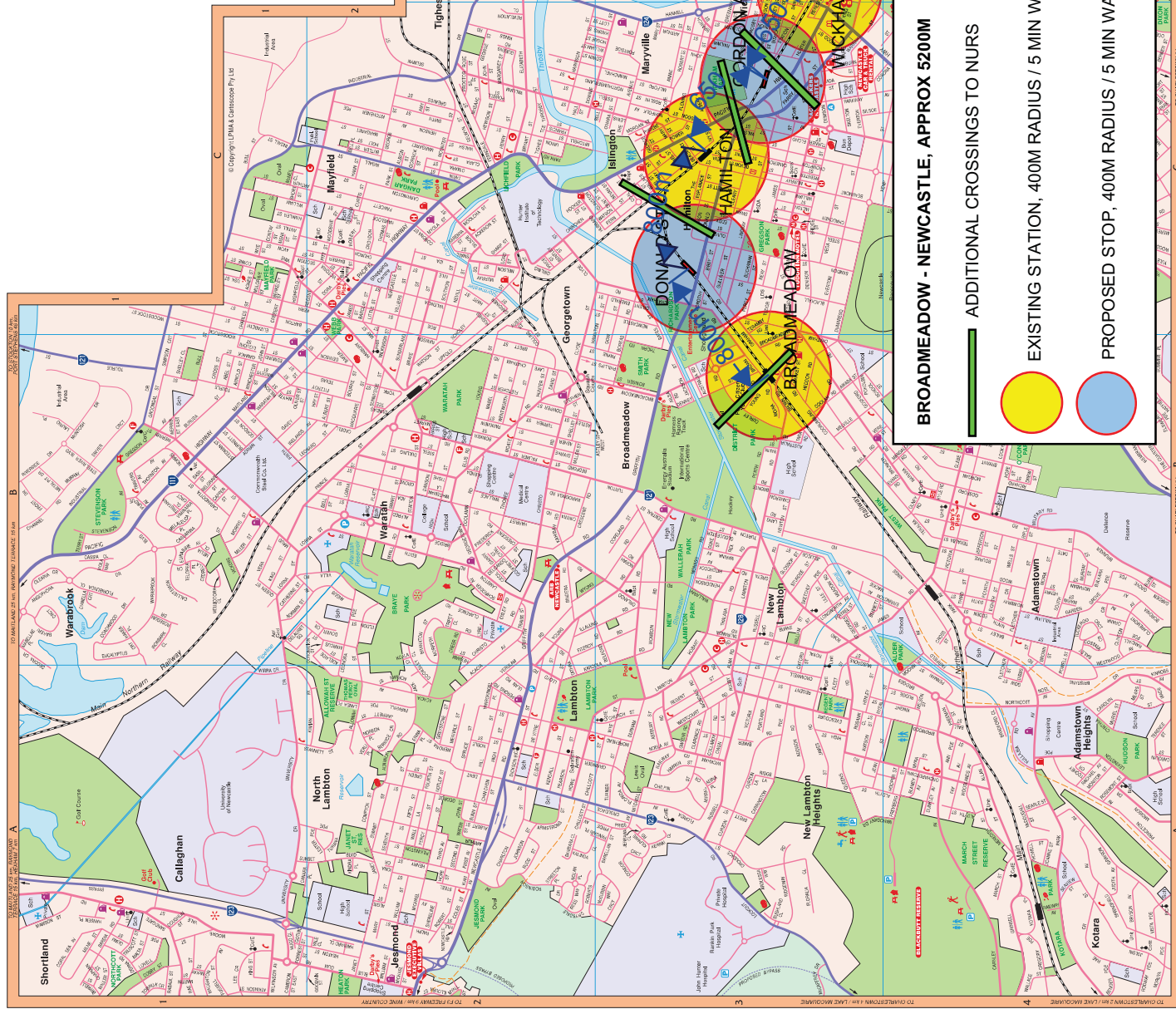
future expansions can happen, once they become viable. In the interim, and to make the NURS a true urban strategy for the future of Newcastle, light rail on the rail corridor needs to be included now, and not just referred to as a future option to provide a bit of lip service, whilst, by building a terminal Wickham, ensuring that this future option never becomes a reality.

Light Rail for Newcastle is popular, provides all the benefits and more that cutting heavy rail would have and may provide an acceptable consensus for the public transport advocates as well as the business interests.

Sincerely,

Lukas Junker

Annexure A: Map of proposed light rail line 1



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