

Submission to Manager, Centres and Urban Renewal:

Department of Planning & Infrastructure

RETAINING THE TRAIN LINE TO NEWCASTLE

From Philip Laird, University of Wollongong, February 2013

This submission will draw on research conducted at the University of Wollongong. However, it does not necessarily reflect the views the University. This submission shall be of a general nature.

The New South Wales Government should retain of the short line from Broadmeadow via Wickham and Civic stations to the Newcastle Heritage station.

Newcastle is home to the nations sixth largest population centre. If this shortsighted decision is taken to facilitate what could be a quick land grab, future generations are likely to take a dim view of this action. Such a decision would also be working against the 2004 Sydney Future Strategy of the NSW Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources. This strategy was released with a view to a more sustainable future for Sydney's Greater Metropolitan Region which includes the Lower Hunter Valley.

The Hunter Region is seen as a major area to alleviate Sydney's growth problems. The Newcastle Statistical Region in 2002 had a population of about 500,000 people, which far exceeds that of either Canberra (about 321,000 in 2002) or Greater Hobart (about 200,000). There is a need to ensure that rail access is maintained to the Newcastle CBD, an important regional centre. This will ensure that future generations have access to environmentally friendly and sustainable transport. The increasing likelihood of higher world oil prices, which peaked in mid 2008, and could again return to this and higher levels, is a further factor in retaining this electrified line.

As noted by NSW Infrastructure in its October 2012 report "Newcastle is booming, with its increased economic footprint underpinned by significant population growth in the Lower Hunter." This report also advocated a faster Newcastle-Sydney train service.

In 2004, concern was expressed by both the Newcastle Division of Engineers Australia and the Newcastle Section of the Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport in Australia about the process followed to date by the New South Wales Government in assessing future options.

In February 2006, Premier Iemma reversed plans of the Carr Government to close the rail line through the centre of Newcastle, after a strident local campaign. It is submitted that this was the correct decision.

Since then, the Newcastle Museum has been opened at Honeysuckle at a location adjacent to Civic Station. Civic Station also serves the Newcastle Conservatorium of Music and is close to each of the Crowne Plaza Hotel and the

Town Hall.

As observed by transport expert and a PhD student at Curtin University with more than 16 years experience in land use and transport system integration, Mr James McIntosh (Maitland Mercury 21 February 2013) "the benefits of the railway line in Newcastle were not being capitalised upon." In addition, he makes a good point that the removal of the rail line meant dire consequences for the planned expansion of Honeysuckle because a substantial amount of land would have to be allocated to car parking.

If the line had to be truncated, it would make more sense to do so at Civic rather than Wickham. But it makes much more sense to continue to use the four platforms at Newcastle Station for starting and stopping trains.

It is requested the New South Wales Government that no decision on the short line should be made until a proper benefit cost assessment has been made within the context of a comprehensive regional transport plan.

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