

urbanrenewal - On Exhibition

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Subject: On Exhibition

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Submission: Newcastle Urban Renewal Strategy

The fundamental premise of the Newcastle Urban Renewal Strategy is the termination of the existing rail line into Newcastle at Wickham and the creation of the new bus/rail interchange at Wickham. The proposal defies logic and logistics, is financially irresponsible and if implemented will preclude forever any possibility of catering for the long term needs of Newcastle City and the East End.

The concept of cutting an existing rail service to the historic centre of a city beggars belief. There is no precedent anywhere in the world for such a short-sighted and retrograde action. If the plan is implemented it will permanently lock Newcastle's east end into a motor vehicle dependent traffic and parking gridlock. Hunter Street Mall is already undergoing spontaneous revitalisation without the need for any bureaucratic interference or overlay. "Planned revitalisation" seldom works, and in this case will contribute little if anything to the more durable, natural revitalisation that is already happening.

Cutting the rail line at Wickham will be entirely counter-productive to the long term development of Newcastle City and the East End. Apart from the stupidity of removing a direct link to those areas for commuters travellers visitors backpackers etc, the proposal will result in increased vehicular traffic congestion (which has already increased markedly over the last decade or so) and will mean that the proposed areas for "renewal" – from the West End, through Civic and Newcastle City up to the East End – will not be effectively serviced by public transport. The two principal areas for revitalisation in the strategy – the East End and Civic – will be the areas most disadvantaged by the proposed changes, particularly if the projected increases in residents, workers and students comes to pass. One need only look at the number of rail passengers – particularly commuters – using Civic and Newcastle stations on a daily basis to gauge the extent of the service the existing rail arrangements provide, and they have the capacity to cater for increased usage with no adverse externalities. Every rail passenger is another person not making a journey by motor vehicle on congested roads into a congested area.

The proposition that the new bus/rail interchange with "connecting" bus services will provide "smoother journeys to the city centre" is preposterous: the proponents obviously have never chugged along Hunter Street in a bus in normal traffic, nor used combined bus/rail services and experienced the inconvenience and delay those arrangements involve to passengers. In many cases the bus/rail combination will double existing travel times and simply force large numbers of rail passengers back onto our already congested roads. Pedestrian access to the Newcastle foreshore is quite adequate as it stands, and more vehicular access is the last thing the foreshore needs. The only North-South link that might be of real benefit would be the provision of a railway overpass at Stewart Avenue that would permit motor vehicle traffic to proceed unimpeded and the rail line to continue to provide services to the existing stations at Wickham, Civic and Newcastle.

On top of these factors is the question of the Government's obligation to citizens of financial responsibility. At a time when the NSW Government is crying poor, selling off public assets for revenue and unable to fund services in such basic areas as health, hospitals, housing and education, there is no possible justification for the expenditure of large sums of money to simply destroy effective functioning infrastructure

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