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Dear Manager

**SUBMISSION REGARDING PUBLIC TRANSPORT IN NEWCASTLE.**

I would believe that many residents of Newcastle and the Hunter region are following with interest and concern the arguments put by both sides regarding the future of the heavy rail line into the City's CBD. Certainly, the gauntlet thrown at the feet of residents of Newcastle and region by the developer's lobbyists has focused many opinions. A recent warning that the matter of the rail closure "is not negotiable" is insulting and arrogant as it precedes the submissions invited by the NEWCASTLE URBAN RENEWAL STRATEGY and indicates a disregard for public opinion.

The following summarises some views on this issue:

- 1. Precedents.** It would appear that the overseas precedents quoted by the private vehicle users lobby and some other supporters of the heavy rail removal have been very selective at best and, in other cases, are quite misleading in their content. Some years ago, I visited some of the cities quoted as examples of successful rail removal from CBD locations and (through Town Planner's eyes) noted that all the rail removals that had been quoted and which I observed were often older port related rail systems (not passenger), or were passenger lines modified rather than removed which, after rationilising, still served their CBD directly. Others were lines which had been already duplicated by improved metro style systems. I cannot recall any modern city removing a rail service into their CBD and tourist / recreation destinations without an improved replacement service in place or, at least, one which is conclusively designed, fully funded and imminent.
- 2. Reports and Studies.** Most studies supporting the removal of the rail and replacing it with buses have been obviously limited in their scope and, in some cases, appear to be biased in favour of the interest of the commissioning body. For example, to try to rely on research which is confined to Newcastle Electoral District surveys is clearly inadequate and lacks competency. The region is affected by this decision as travel into Newcastle from Maitland City and Lake Macquarie City is already a common daily practice and will only grow as s the service is modernized and road congestion continues to increase. Many persons in the Newcastle Electorate are not conveniently domiciled to catch a train and therefore have no personal interest in train travel and no experience in



that field. There appears to be also a lack of detailed research and analysis of traffic flow data in many studies and in existing reports. My own simple research on modal transport use is based on several observations for 1.5 hour periods from 10.30 AM to midday on weekdays at Stewart Avenue gates. While at the gates, I counted (as best I could as trains raced through) the approximate numbers on trains and in cars crossing this at-grade facility. These counts resulted in noting that each train carried from about 15 to approximately 50 persons at each half hour interval. This count was taken in a non peak period. I also noted that delays at this location were not only caused by passing trains but by the traffic signals at Hunter Street / Stewart Avenue and at those north of the gates at Hannell Street / Honeysuckle Drive. Traffic signal sequences at these intersections (especially Hunter / Stewart) are much more frequent than flow interruptions caused by the railway gates. When traffic queues form at both these intersections (whether the gates are down or not) it is easy to mistakenly blame the rail crossing as the cause of the traffic delays.

Observations at Newcastle Station at various hours demonstrate quite strong usage of rail right to its eastern terminus by all classes of passenger (travelers with luggage, shoppers and CBD workers, young people and youth with surf boards, local Hunter tourists etc). On each day of my observations, motor vehicles waiting at the Stewart Avenue gates while trains passed held an average of 1.1 persons (capacity - about 4 persons each vehicle). Casual observation within the CBD generally will reveal a similar occupancy level per vehicle. Low passenger occupancy, so often presented as a reason for removing the rail, can as legitimately be used for the banning of low occupancy cars from the city. In fact, this case was made and sustained in central London in recent years. The case could be extended further to justify the closure of many inner city streets to private traffic as these streets also seriously affect pedestrian "connectivity". I think the moral of this section is that one can massage "statistics" to support any cause including opposing opinions on the same issue.

3. **Alternatives and options.** The strongest logical strategy, in my view, is to retain the heavy rail service and work on rationalizing and maximizing its efficiency in concert with the achievement of the "connectivity" so desired by the "removalist" lobby. This could be achieved by adoption of one or a combination of:
  - a) Funding the design and construction of a Stewart Avenue rail over-bridge predicted in the Northumberland County District Planning Scheme Ordinance over 50 years ago. The current street assemblage allows for approaches and clearances to design standards regarded as tolerable at existing grade separated rail crossings in nearby locations (Donald Street and Broadmeadow).
  - b) Extending the length of the over bridge outlined in a) above by extending the approaches across Hunter Street thus eliminating the



signalized Stewart / Hunter intersection - the major traffic interrupter in the inner city.

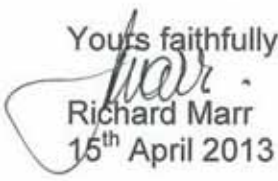
- c) low train speed sections between Wickham and Newcastle allowing for pedestrian movement across sections of the corridor;
- d) grade separated plazas over-arching the existing corridor and integrated with existing and future buildings. Leasing of airspace over transport corridors is common in modern cities;
- e) lowering the permanent way from west of Stewart Avenue to a point just west of Newcastle Terminus.

There has never been a convincing or logical argument put to justify the removal of the rail line into Newcastle. Those proposing the removal appear to be those who have seldom used the rail service into Newcastle having their own private transport and / or living and working in locations not served by the rail option. There is no compelling reason given to support the view that somehow the foreshore is dependant on a shopping public walking from the shopping area with their purchases to Queens Wharf or the CBD being dependant on persons walking from the foreshore. Satisfactory and totally adequate connectivity between the two precincts can be well achieved by implementing options 3 (c), (d) or (e) above. To remove the rail would be a gross over reaction - an act that would have damaging long term effects to the residential amenity of the region and the tourism potential of the Hunter.

It seems so apparent that the Government of NSW and its elected politicians have been seriously misinformed by a vocal and influential minority interest group who is not representative of the majority of Hunter and Central Coast residents who will suffer adversely if this ill informed proposal proceeds.

**It should be carefully noted that the wider community of the Hunter and Central Coast of NSW is of the strong view that the rail transport into and out of the City of Newcastle is crucial to the successful commercial, residential and tourism future of the region and demand that the rail line into the city is retained.**

Yours faithfully,



Richard Marr  
15<sup>th</sup> April 2013