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By Email to

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Dear Manager.

### **NEWCASTLE URBAN RENEWAL STRATEGY**

Currently, most talk is about cutting the heavy rail system into central Newcastle and its tourist / recreation destinations without any logical or compelling proposal for imminent, satisfactory alternatives. This rail removal proposal is even more ludicrous now that funding has been received from the Federal Government for the location of part of the Newcastle University Campus in the Civic precinct of the CBD – students need efficient transport to and between each campus.

Unfortunately, in observing the statements of our local State member on the issue, it seems that his preference is to cut this existing transport route which, it seems, satisfies a powerful developer / commercial (but minority) group whose interest in and use of public transport is minimal. The opinion of the majority of lower Hunter constituents appears to be lost in the noise created by this interest group assisted by a print media captured by the advertising stream emanating from the developer / commercial lobby who relate to those behind the push for removal.

I believe it is inarguable that the health, amenity and prosperity of a region and city is directly and profoundly affected by the efficiency of its public transport system. An efficient public transport network provides an environment with less pollution, less congestion, lower stress, safer pedestrian paths – all matters relating to improved physical and mental health of a community. Many lower costs to the public also flow from provision of an efficient public transport system. Lower hospital emissions, lower medical costs generally, less road and infrastructure augmentation costs are just some savings. By way of comment on the alleged poor participation in public transport usage, it is a fact that the public is so quick to assess the efficiency of a public transport system and will walk away from a system that fails to serve its needs. Typically, governments and public transport



authorities react to falling patronage by reducing or cutting non-lucrative services rather than discovering their failings and following strategies to make services more attractive to public use. This present negativity in State Government transport planning in this region must stop.

The existing rail line into Newcastle is the future of this City, its commercial facilities and its recreational destinations. Every day in the summer one can see the visitors walking up Scott St after arriving by train from the Central Coast and inland Hunter. The argument that the trains are not used to satisfactory capacity is fatuous. If the same argument is applied to private motor vehicles (1.05 persons per vehicle in Newcastle)) one could consider it justifiable to tear up the roads. Train use will be increasingly embraced when journey times match and improve upon 1940 levels, when comfortable seating is provided, when safe and convenient park and ride facilities are available and when 21<sup>st</sup> century ticketing technology is introduced to public transport. The myopic, blinkered and biased vision of the removal brigade must be ignored.

The rail removal brigade continues to trot out the fatuous argument that the presence of the rail line has reduced the viability of Newcastle's CBD. This of course is untrue. The major, over-riding reason for the CBD stagnation is the appalling urban planning "strategies" displayed by the State Government in reclaiming land outside the traditional statutory commercial / retail zoning boundaries of the CBD and releasing that land for CBD uses to short sighted, profit-only driven developers. Honeysuckle has been a disaster for the viability of Newcastle's CBD in that redevelopment pressure which was building in the CBD in the 1960's and 70's was drained away from the city to green-fields sites in Honeysuckle. A green-fields site is much more attractive to a developer as heritage, architectural and compatibility issues are low on agenda and, therefore, end profits are greater. The development of Honeysuckle ignored long standing principles of the Regional Environmental plans which were gazetted in the 1960's and later and which were enforced by the State planning authorities on the private sector and guided the development of CBD and neighbourhood retail / commercial development over the ensuing years. When the government needed funds, however, all the objectives of the regional plans were trashed so Honeysuckle could generate maximum returns despite maximum damage to the CBD's future and to those who had invested there with the promise (a false promise it seems) of durable zoning boundaries.



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The rail removal group know all the above but divert the attention of Newcastle city residents by calling the rail line derogatory names like “the dingo fence” and similar. This infantile tactic, combined with misinformation, convinces some Newcastle constituents to their view as south eastern and western suburbs of Newcastle are not located conveniently to rail services and, therefore, those residents have no experience with rail transport as they have no choice but to rely on private motor transport. Residents of Maitland and the Central Coast do rely on the train into the CBD, beaches and recreational areas and their needs must be considered by people elected to represent them.

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 is vital that the representatives of the people are totally aware of the facts of this matter before a decision is taken. Vocal and short term sectional interests must not prevail over the public interest in this most important regional decision.

A decision to remove the rail line into Newcastle will be recorded in history as short-sighted and foolish in urban planning terms. Those taking such a decision will have their names recorded on the debit side of the honour roll of city, region and nation builders in the archives of Government

It should be carefully noted that the wider community of the Hunter and Central Coast of NSW is of the strong view that rail transport into and out of the City of Newcastle is crucial to the successful commercial, residential and tourism future of the region and is crucial to the well-being of present and future constituents. These region residents and a large number of residents of Newcastle who are conveniently domiciled to rail services, all of who the State Government is elected to serve, demand that the rail line into the city's east is retained.

Yours sincerely

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