

Submission to department of Planning

Dear Sir

Having read the Newcastle Urban Renewal Strategy 2012, read a number of timetables and scanned the appendices, I have come to the conclusion that this is a poorly produced document that has been hastily thrown together.

One concern is that the plan is to encourage the use of public transport and reduce the number of private motor vehicles in the city. The same document says that the plan is to build six thousand additional dwellings and create ten thousand additional jobs. However, the same plan calls for Hunter Street to have two cycle lanes, two traffic lanes, one bus lane and a row of trees! This is on top of the centre piece of the plan which is the removal of the railway. Commuters, shoppers and visitors will be forced to change from a train to a bus at Wickham.

On page 48 it says that only 700 people use the trains into Newcastle. How were these numbers arrived at? A concern I have is they were based upon research undertaken in 2006. I have doubts about the accuracy of these figures and I think they are grossly under stated and out dated. More recent research indicates that patronage on trains on the Hunter line has increased substantially since those figures would have been collected. A quick look at a timetable shows that about 40 trains a day leave Newcastle for Sydney, Gosford or Morisset. About 46 trains leave Newcastle for Telarah, Scone or Dungog. A similar number goes into Newcastle. According to an information session held in March about five or six buses are to carry the passengers from the trains at Wickham into the city. It was believed this number would be adequate. It would seem this number was based on "patronage figures". This would be nowhere near enough to carry the passengers from an eight car train, even if it was only half full! Has there been a study to determine the viability of stopping trains at Wickham and making passengers complete their journeys by bus? I have seen no evidence of such a study.

It would seem that a lot more buses will be required to transport commuters from Wickham to the east end. Considering there will only be one bus lane and one traffic lane that will also be shared by commercial vehicles and private vehicles. For commuters who will have to commute from the city to Sydney or Maitland the situation will be worse as only one lane will be available for buses, commercial vehicles and private vehicles. Congestion will be a serious problem.

It has been stated that more buses will be provided, however, in the document, only the 100, the 363 and the 320 will receive additional services, and that will only be during the peak hours. No other services are mentioned.

The plan seems to base the success of the strategy upon improved access between Hunter Street and the harbour. The word connectivity is used a lot. However, while north south access is allegedly improved, east west access is severely restricted. The alleged problem of access between the harbour and the foreshore can easily solved by building additional level crossings or foot bridges with ramps instead of steps. This would be far more cost effective than removing the railway.

Another part of the plan appears to assume that those who will be working and studying in the city will also be living there. The plan does not seem to take into account that many residents living in the city will be working in Sydney or elsewhere. These people will be severely disadvantaged by the

transport arrangements. The plan has the potential to lock out those who are living outside of the city while those living in the city could be locked in!

There seems to be no provision for the disabled. I noticed that in the revised strategy, on page 139 says "The permissible uses have been amended to delete residential flat buildings and seniors housing from the Zone". Does this mean the elderly have been excluded from the city? This plan may contravene the antidiscrimination act.

The document makes considerable reference to various parts of the city with a lot of detail as to what is planned. However, while reference is made to the new station to be built at Wickham, there are no details about the station itself. What facilities are to be provided? Will there be any shelter? Will there be any toilets? What trains will stop there? How will buses arrive and leave? Considering the close proximity to Stuart Avenue, it would seem that congestion will be a major issue, particularly during peak hours.

While part of the plan involves moving the retail sector to Wickham, the plan also involves revitalising the Hunter Street Mall. However, a number of retailers and business owners have already stated that business drops off alarmingly whenever the railway is closed for track work. How will they survive if the line is closed permanently?

The plan makes mention of large new residential developments. What will these buildings look like? The aesthetics of buildings constructed in Honeysuckle and Wharf Road were clearly not a consideration when they were approved. They have damaged the look and character of Newcastle. Will the new buildings do the same?

In the information session that was held in March, it was said that the intention was to Newcastle an experience in itself. If this plan is implemented getting into and out of the city will be an adventure and a frustrating one at that. Public transport will be more difficult to access and parking for private motor vehicles will be a lot more difficult to find and it will be more expensive, particularly when the extent of paid parking is realised.

While there a few points that have merit, the biggest flaw in this plan is the removal of the railway. This will make public transport a lot slower and more difficult to access. Studies have shown that whenever urban railways are closed, use of public transport drops by about thirty percent. Considering that parking for private motor vehicles will be a lot more difficult to find and more expensive, the plan may kill Newcastle rather than revitalise the city.

This plan needs to be completely revised.

Peter Sansom