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Brad Hazard
Minister for Planning
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
Sydney 2000.

Dear Sir

I note with considerable concern that a decision has been made to close the railway between Wickham and Newcastle with buses replacing the trains. I'm at a loss to understand why such a decision was made, particularly when, despite what the proponents of the removal of the railway have said, the suburban rail services are fast, efficient and effective. Whenever the rail services have been cancelled due to track work, many commuters have found the replacement bus services slow and inefficient. I understand many people stayed out of the city when track work was being carried out, so much so that some retailers reported dramatic falls in business.

My concern about the manner in which the buses will replace the trains is that parking spaces along Hunter Street will be eliminated to make way for bus lanes. This is only going to make Newcastle's parking problems a lot worse. However, before the buses can get into the bus lanes they will have to fight their way onto Hunter Street, this will be particularly slow and difficult during the peak hours when traffic is heavy. Contrary to what was said when the announcement was made to close the line, this will not result in a better transport service. People with Surf boards, bicycles and wheel chairs will be particularly disadvantaged.

If the railway corridor is to remain, why is it necessary to close the railway at all? As I said earlier, the rail services are fast, efficient and effective. The rail services can remain while the city is being redeveloped. The rail services will be vital to the success of revitalisation. This has been shown to be the case in other cities in Australia and overseas. Closing suburban railways does not benefit cities.

A real concern is the lies that have been told to justify the closure of the line. For example, a common story was that the railway was built as a coal hauling railway. Those who say this seem to forget that the first train to run on this line was a passenger train hauled by a mixed

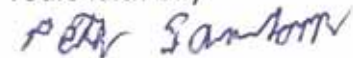
traffic locomotive. Another lie is that the railway is a barrier. The real barrier is the buildings in Honeysuckle and Wharf Road. Those buildings are ugly and they obstruct views of the harbour. If access is an issue then why not build level crossings or bridges? They also say the line doesn't serve the John Hunter Hospital. This is a classic case of poor planning. The hospital was built in the wrong place. The Royal Newcastle Hospital was a few minutes walk from Newcastle Railway Station.

Newcastle's problems are due to poor planning. In a vast majority of cases residents and small retailers have not been consulted or their concerns have been ignored. Many developments that have taken place have been poorly sited and planned. For example the buildings in Honeysuckle should have been built in Hunter Street and King Street with Honeysuckle and Wharf Road being open parkland. The development of large suburban shopping complexes has also had a dramatic impact on retailers in Hunter Street and King Street. No-one seems to have thought about this. Another major problem with Newcastle is the badly run down state of empty shops and buildings. Previously there were industries that brought employment into the city, places like the Royal Newcastle Hospital, the port and the railway yards at Honeysuckle and Newcastle but to name a few. These industries have all gone and insufficient planning took place to deal with their absence.

Then there were the polls and surveys. These were worded and structured so that there would only be one result. However NBN channel 3 has since run at least two surveys and the result is that a vast majority of people in the Hunter region, Lake Macquarie and Newcastle want the rail services to remain.

The decision to close the railway has been based on grossly inaccurate information, misinformation and in some cases, lies. Newcastle, Lake Macquarie and the Hunter Valley will not benefit from this decision to close the railway between Wickham and Newcastle. Please, have a bit of sense and reverse this decision.

Yours faithfully



Peter Sansom