

## urbanrenewal - Newcastle Revitalisation Plan

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**Subject:** Newcastle Revitalisation Plan

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To whom it may concern,

I am writing this submission in response to the Newcastle Urban Renewal Strategy 2012.

After reading the submission I would like to make the following points

- For such a key strategy for the revitalisation of Newcastle why were no independent studies by recognised urban renewal experts such as Prof Graeme Currie or Prof Peter Newman included?
- Why was such a key plan put on display over Christmas with such a short consultation period. This period needs to be extended to allow proper investigation of the plan.
- Why does the plan not rule out the selling off of the rail corridor to private enterprise as this has been a key aspect of selling the idea to the public and the plan in the current form may be misleading
- Why does the plan not concentrate on strengthening public transport into the city (via rail) not removing the rail with no definite plans to replace the trains with buses or any other means.
- The current plan weakens public transport into the CBD for no net gain for the public. The AECOMM plan states that removing the train line will have little effect on the revitalisation of the CBD, so why is it such a core part of the plan?
- The rail line needs to be retained and improved upon via
  - Increased frequency of services
  - Decreased journey time to Sydney
  - Increased numbers of level crossings
  - Skinking or raising the line at Stewart Ave to relieve current traffic congestion
  - Light rail services from Newcastle station to other city destinations, Newcastle Airport and John Hunter Hospital
  - Decreased fares for local journeys in Newcastle
  - Moving Kotara train station 1.5km towards Newcastle so that it is adjacent to Westfield Kotara - making it easy to access this shopping centre via rail and thus encouraging more people to use rail services
- Consider sinking the line from Wickham - resulting in a win-win where developers can get some access to the land and the people retain valuable transport infrastructure
- Newcastle has many valuable heritage buildings being left in a decrepit state - these should be restored and will act as a major drawcard to bring people back into the city.
- Current plan seems to unduly favour developers, who are in large part responsible for the lack of development of key sites they already control
- NSW government needs to restore Post Office and redevelop it as a keystone project that will encourage further restoration of the CBD
- NSW government needs to assist in restoring heritage buildings and grouting of undermined sites (as the state benefited from the coal removed). This can be funded via a temporary levee on coal leaving the Port of Newcastle

Please find further ideas regarding the cutting of the rail line, below.

The idea of cutting the rail line has been bandied around for many years, promulgated by various developer lobby groups, claiming that it 'divides the city in two' and its removal will spark a renaissance of the city. No evidence has been given for why removing rail from the CBD will be beneficial, just remarks about its appearance. These include remarks by former premier Nick Greiner likening Newcastle to Beirut on a bad Friday night.

The causes of Newcastle's malaise are legion, however, salient points include:

- The Newcastle Earthquake in 1989. It destroyed or damaged many inner city buildings, many of which still lie derelict over 20 years later.
- Developer intransigence on many key CBD sites including the Luck Country Hotel (owned by the current Lord Mayor) and the state significant Victoria Theatre.
- The state government decided to remove the main employer in the CBD, the Royal Newcastle Hospital.
- Relocating it to a site over 15 km away (John Hunter Hospital) and selling the prime water front land on which it stood for apartments.
- BHP close the Newcastle Steel Works in 1995.
- Development of large suburban shopping complexes at Charlestown and Kotara
- State government reluctance to fund any projects or infrastructure outside of Sydney
- Mine subsidence adding to the cost of projects- this has recently halted work on the Honeysuckle Central project
- **The rail-line is not responsible for these problems**

The city has engaged public transport experts such as Prof. Graeme Currie from Monash University and Prof Peter Newman from Curtin University who have both backed the retention of the rail line from both a public transport and urban renewal perspective. Prof Currie described the Hunter Development Corporation reports supporting the line's removal as - biased, flawed and misrepresented.

Removal of rail in Newcastle is in stark contrast to your government's policy of building many new light rail and heavy rail links in Sydney. **Why should Newcastle have its rail line removed for no public transport benefit and be forced onto buses, while new train lines are constructed for those in Sydney at great expense?** It is obscene that money gained from the potential sale of the Newcastle rail corridor, which has not been ruled out by the Minister for the Hunter, would go to building new rail lines in Sydney. It is unacceptable in this day and age to be removing rail infrastructure from the state's second largest city for no public benefit. The plan is to move all current train passengers onto buses for the last 2km of their journey adding many more buses to the main street of Newcastle which is proposed to be cut from two to one lane to cope with all the traffic, increasing road congestion.

Some specific examples that highlight the folly of this proposal, include:

1. The state government proposal to build a new court house opposite the current Civic railway station. This large new development has gained exemption from providing parking due to its proximity to rail station. If the current plan proceeds, the site will be over a 1km from the proposed new terminus. This folly is compounded by the plans to relocate a faculty of the University of Newcastle to this same site, leaving over 3000 students and staff without parking and moving the current immediate rail access over a km to the west.

2. Newcastle's bid to host the 2030 commonwealth games. Usually games bids require good public transport access to the city and event sites. The current rail line accesses the heart of the city and beaches which would no doubt host some events. Is this rail link to be rebuilt after its removal as per the Gold Coast's example, at the cost of billions? Or is the bid likely to be lost to an obscure city in Kazakhstan such as the recent expo, embarrassing both the city and the state?

**There are no public transport arguments that support removing the current train line** and your absence from making announcements regarding the plan suggest that you agree and are distancing yourself from it. The urban renewal benefits of this plan are nebulous to say the least, with the Minister's assurances that the site will remain a green corridor, shaky at best. The stated point of removing the rail is to spark development, which must involve some rail otherwise why wouldn't the plan be proceeding with the rail line intact? At the recent announcement of the plan Minister Hazzard later reneged on his promise to keep the site a green corridor, saying he would consider any proposals from the private sector. Developers' wish to build on the site can be the only reason for the decision and if so the merits of such a plan should be openly

discussed not swept under the carpet. I suspect that such a plan wouldn't meet state government targets of public transport use or withstand the scrutiny of urban renewal experts such as Prof Newman who has already dismissed this scenario as not meeting urban renewal objectives and being detrimental to the city.

**The cutting of the rail is clearly a decision to benefit developers as it was announced by the Planning Minister not the Transport Minister, who herself has chosen not to comment.**

Decisions to close rail lines occurred in less enlightened times during the 60s, 70s and 80s. Don't stain the reputation of your government and the state of NSW by being a part of a developer inspired retrograde decision to diminish the public transport service to the second largest city in NSW - a population of over 500,000 people. **I urge you to reconsider this decision and invest money in expanding Newcastle's rail network with light rail and support development in the CBD by measures such as subsidising mine subsidence grouting, not by removing vital rail infrastructure.**

Yours faithfully,

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