

SUBMISSION

to

NSW Government Department of Planning and Infrastructure

on

Newcastle Urban Renewal Strategy 2012

Preface

Just watched the TV with a raging debate about how Sydney needs a larger and more efficient rail network. Newcastle is the 2nd largest city in NSW. By removing the existing rail line, Newcastle City will be plunged into the Dark Ages and become a 2nd class city.

When will the NSW Government stop treating Newcastle as a 2nd rate city?

I do not like how Government politicians and developers, who are not at all familiar with the city of Newcastle, storm into our city, with their big nose, selfish ideas, and bully us by demanding what we must have, without any community consultation whatsoever. They do not live in our City, or stay only a short time, do not understand the psyche, history and background of Newcastle and the Hunter Valley and their long standing communities. These politicians' decisions have been made with advice from some business people and developers, who rarely use public transport and who refuse to take any notice of the people who have to use it. In fact these 3 groups of people, have at times, have shown disrespect to the members of the public by their comments, brushing the people aside.

The Hunter Valley and Newcastle have been the coal mining ship building and manufacturing city used and discarded at will, but - oh - with some crumbs from contracts. This is the background of generations of Novocastrians the poor country cousin to Sydneyites and Canberrians, nothing on a silver plate, but the hard working servant that produces the riches for the Capitals. So hopefully the all level of Governments can understand that if Newcastle wants things to happen, they have to fight tooth and nail, starting with the ballot box.

No one can blame the people of the Hunter Valley who feel continually down trodden, used and discarded. Even the Charlestown By-Pass, mooted in 1960's, started in late 1980's is still far from complete by 2013, the important 2nd part of the road, to service John Hunter Hospital from the north and south, could take at least another 25 years.

I have the suspicion that there has been a deal or ulterior motive made as to why a developer, originally in the first place, did not demand the rail line to be closed and then suddenly changed their mind? Why did a politician support the rail line and then change her mind? (She subsequently lost her seat in parliament) Why did the leader of the then Opposition support the rail line and then one of his first cabinet decisions when elected to NSW Government was to remove the rail line without any consultation with those members of the public, who do use the rail line, telling them the decision will not be reversed. To me this is tyrannical, despotic and a selfish act. By the way the party now in Opposition having lost this electorate for the first time in the history of this City has now changed its mind again wanting to keep the rail line. Why is this so? Will they do anything to get their seat back in Parliament? Why didn't the present Govt confer with the community? No wonder the electors are suspicious of politicians. The rail line problem has been a political football for over 30 years! Novocastrians are sick of it. Strangers and politicians enforcing their flawed ideas on our unique culture. Another fight on our hands.

Novocastrians have to fight and or volunteer for any worth - while project in the city. These projects can take up to 60 even more years and eventually if they do succeed the volunteers are not appreciated. Any suggestions or ideas are very often treated with disdain For example Community Information Session 2pm -4pm 20 February 2013 The

opening directive the Community assembled was told - quote" NSW Government Cabinet has made a decision on the rail way line and this will not be changed." No community consultation what so ever!

I'm sure the Newcastle City Council would eventually be able to complete their projects in this plan as the money becomes available but this may take another 60 or so years, in time for my great grandchildren. Thank heavens for Novocastrians like Marcus Westbury, who have fought tooth and nail to bring their innovative ideas to shape this city. At least NCC supported his initiatives to use creative Novocastrians to re-new the CBD..

So to the Submission

Congratulations to the NSW Government Department of Planning & Infrastructure and Marcus Westbury for their creative input into the revitalising the City of Newcastle with this Newcastle Urban Strategy 2012, updating previous published brochures. Newcastle and the Hunter Valley have always been unique in more ways than one.

There are excellent ideas on the Victoria Theatre and improvements to the Ocean Baths to name a few. However looking back over the last 35 years, to make any REAL progress, in any renewal strategy, 2 very large problems need to be solved before the NSW Government should carry out their plans. **Disunity** within the community over the removal of a vital transport rail line and the **high government costs** to unnecessarily remove a rail line.

These will continue to be sticking point points and political footballs when considering the large number of people against the rail line removal, still going on after 30 years. These people are from Newcastle, its suburbs; Hunter Valley, Port Stephens, Central Coast, Great Lakes electorates as well as tourists. The tourist "Bible" Lonely Planet voted Newcastle, one of the top 10 cities of the world to visit, citing the ease of transport to the city as one of the reasons.

So, if this Newcastle Urban Renewal Strategy 2012 (or any future year) is to be a truly genuine attempt to really succeed, it needs to be presented to NSW Government with these problems solved.

My thoughts are as follows:-

Keep the Railway Line as it is.

There is precedence for this. The Port of Fremantle WA was scheduled to remove their railway line but plans were changed, the result being a thriving business and leisure service, even with many railway crossings.

Benefits for keeping the rail line

Less time to travel to the CBD for commuters, non car owners, student, tourists etc.

Better travel access for members of the public, especially for Lower Hunter residents to surf, attend Foreshore Events, Museums or Restaurants.

Fewer vehicles in city, therefore less traffic congestion.

CBD workers save money have no petrol and parking costs.

According to the Strategy plans in the Civic Precinct, Hunter St will be made narrower, therefore there will be more congestion of cars and buses.

The main part of this Strategy concerns public transport i.e. transport available for members of the public. This service should never be designed to be profitable but rather a tax- payer funded functional service for all members of the community.

These people include pensioners who are blind disabled including wheel chairs, walkers, walking stick, are unable to own or drive a car. Also those, who choose not to drive a car, for health, lack of money or environmental reasons, and who chose to live in units in the CBD including those who like to directly visit their families in Sydney. These numbers will increase as the "Baby Boomers" are continuing to retire. What about the man who lives in Hornsby who chooses to surf at Newcastle Beach with the least amount of time and hassle, the Sydney day trippers, school students, Novocastrian day shopping trips to Sydney the backpackers and tourists with luggage from Stockton, the Hunter, North and Central Coasts, Australia and Overseas, the public members from Gosford Taree Singleton Dungog and Maitland who need to visit the CBD for work, business, health, legal ,theatrical or cultural attractions such as the Newcastle Regional Museum, and Art Gallery etc. Members of the public with strollers, bikes and surfboards. Not forgetting the many Great Event Days at the Foreshore including New Years Eve Australia Day Maritime Festival. City Campus Uni Students quick access from Civic Station to the Callaghan Campus in 10 mins, as well as students, and Sydney lawyers and Judges using the soon to be finished Law Courts at the Civic. Lastly, the most important, the daily Novocastrian commuters to Sydney.

(Note Vision Australia-Newcastle Branch-moved to Beaumont St near Hamilton Station, for easy access for blind people to learn to travel by train which is easier than bus travel. It has even been recorded here in our City how a blind person was trying to board a garbage truck which pulled up at a bus stop, its noise similar to a bus.)

So what about those empty trains seen by those used as evidence to remove the rail line? Recently it has been divulged, that some of the empty rail carriages are those taken to and from Broadmeadow Goods Yard for storage usually overnight, yet no mention of the removal of the empty buses seen travelling around the suburbs taking forever to travel from A to B by a semi - circular route.

However I cannot justify the cost of the removal of the rail line and its electricity nor the continual updating and rehashing of glossy publications and the required govt meetings etc etc. every time a new govt is elected. ie a waste of time and money. There is a massive list of projects that deserve the money, if it is really available. Remember the money required would include my taxes. Money to remove rail line could be spent on building large car parking stations at railway stations or even a culvert type of underpass in Stewart Avenue.

I endorse the 8 crossings which are essential at all costs. These should be completed and built first immediately if possible, connecting the CBD to the Foreshore. (Crossings at Steel St and Worth Place are ready to be completed)

My view on the Wickham Interchange. This maybe essential in 50-100years time, but at this moment in Newcastle's History there is a money shortage in all levels of Govt especially \$7 million from the NSW State Govt for Newcastle's Regional Art Gallery extensions. I feel the Glendale Interchange is more important at this time

Community anger at

NO community involvement before the Cabinet Decision which is said to be irreversible. What does this say about our NSW Government? Tyranny? A pre-meditated deal?

NO consideration of petitions sent to the respective Govts over the last 30 years

Novocastrians have always been and will continue to be fighters

Where to from here?

Front up to people of the Hunter Valley, especially those who have written submissions.

Reconsider the cabinet decision on this rail line problem and listen to all sides, before making a decision.

Build the 8 crossings first, assess these for 12 months and then call a community meeting before doing anything else(i.e. before starting any work on the rail line.)

Build larger multi-storied car parks at railway stations to encourage train travel. (with discounts a possibility)

Improve Sydney to Newcastle Railway Services – see Footnote.

Be upfront, if developers and certain business people have made deals or have placed or will place money into political party coffers.

Just maybe the NSW Government can use all these submissions to show the justification of keeping the rail line as is and justify a decision to the developers and certain business persons that the rail line is to stay.

Questions

Whether the rail line is removed or not, have you addressed the accommodation of the possible increase in the numbers of cars, bikes and motor bikes that could be used by the university students of the City Campus?

This question also applies to those persons soon to be working at the new Law Courts.

Implementation of this strategy, as seen on Pages 210-217, lists who is responsible for the changes to be made. It can be noted that the City of Newcastle (i.e. Council) is listed in a majority of cases. With what money is NCC going to be able to do this?

Is the NSW Government going to rectify this?

Will the State Government trial the closure of the rail line from Wickham Station for at least a week, to show all the rail travellers and the rest of the community, what will happen if the line is permanently closed?

If the rail line and street parking in the Civic Area is removed, how will the extra car and bus traffic be accommodated?

Why did the present Government change its mind on the rail line when it came to power?

Why didn't this Government confer with the Hunter Valley communities before Cabinet made its decision to close the line?

Postscript

To quote the Federal Member for Newcastle Sharon Grierson (2013)

"There is no electorate in Australia quite like Newcastle. Collectively, we are resilient and real, creative and innovative, fair minded and generous. We have the courage to think big, work together and get the job done. We value our lifestyle and have a great connection to our environment, our history and our community."

Non-Novocastrians *"marvel at our ongoing success and our strong identity. By working together, we have achieved good things for Newcastle-a strong and diverse economy, leading in clean energy and medical innovation staying ahead of the nation in manufacturing"*

For my part, I am passionate about this city that has encompassed my life of 74 years.

My grandchildren's ancestors arrived in Hunter Valley Region between 1827 and 1914. My grandchildren are the 7th Generation in 5 families, 6th in another 3 and 5th in the last family to come to Newcastle. Every one of those 33 ancestors was involved in many professions working towards the magnificent development of this great city, Newcastle, and its wonderful community.

We deserve our fair share from our 3 levels of Govt for this City, the 2nd oldest City in Australia. Since our discovery in 1797, 216 years ago, we've truly earned it

Footnote Public transport between Sydney and Newcastle has gone backwards since the change to electric trains from the Newcastle Flyer with regards to Time taken (additional 30mins minimum) cleanliness luggage toilets food and drinks facilities Now the Govt wants to add another 20 mins with a change of transport to the trip for CBD residents. So what does the future hold? Bad luck for those without a car 3hrs to Sydney with poor amenities

Solution "The Seniors Express" the 8.00am from Newcastle becomes the Newcastle Express with XPT carriages, with perhaps booked seats and full amenities. With a return Newcastle Express with similar replacing a timetabled train leaving Sydney around 5pm.

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