



Submission to Planning and Infrastructure concerning  
Newcastle Urban Renewal Strategy 2012

*An extension until  
5th April was granted  
for this submission.*

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Although this report presumably claims to deal with a matter which concerns the whole of the city of Newcastle, it effectively concentrates almost entirely on the strip from Newcastle West to the Hunter St mall. Its main thrust - the visual and spatial amelioration of that strip is welcome.

But its plans for a transport network are very inadequate.

There is an apparent "lack of connectivity" between Hunter St and the waterfront.

This is presumably the *raison d'être* for cutting the rail line between Wickham and Newcastle.

Connectivity could be achieved by gently graded pedestrian bridges, like the one that already crosses Scott St and the rail line.

For car traffic (and buses) there is really very little connectivity problem.

However, the Stockton ferry Service (3.8) mentioned as part of the "well established and extensive public transport network" will lose much of its convenience for Stockton residents if it will no longer bring passengers within easy walking distance of the rail line.

The removal of the rail link between Wickham and Newcastle Station will also oblige many travellers/commuters to change to a second transport mode from Wickham. This is hardly the way to encourage more usage of public transport.

It will inevitably add 10 minutes or more to a trip, plus the inconvenience of changing.

There would be no reason why a better planned web of bus routes, with frequent service, could not operate from Newcastle Station, rather than from Wickham.

Further, there is clearly a hope, or a plan, for the re-location of one or more faculties of the University to the present CBD area (4.3)

This, plus increased residential numbers in the east of the city would be better served by the present rail line, rather than its truncation. There is already considerable movement of students between Maitland, Morisset, Hamilton and Warabrook by rail. They will look for seamlessness in the future transport network.

In 3.3 "traffic congestion at peak periods at key approach roads such as Stewart Avenue" is mentioned.

A road flyover to replace that level crossing is highly desirable - it should have been built long ago !

4.3.2 presents the "revitalisation of Hunter St Mall as a catalyst for the east end's renewal".

It is clear that this former centre of commercial activity has lost out to the growth of suburban shopping centres. It was once busy, and this was not hurt by the existence of the rail line. There is no convincing evidence that the removal of the rail line would reverse the influence of the outlying shopping centres.

The report is right to aim at a “mixed use neighbourhood” with “boutique” retail development.

As with other areas – streets and lanes – much could be achieved with good streetscaping, as well as better space for cyclists. This will be particularly so if there is an increased student presence.

Many successful and pleasant cities coexist with rail to and through the centre. San Diego CA and Tacoma WA and Portland OR are outstanding American examples.

“Making the most of the public transport network” (4.5) is the key to this. Not dismantling it, not demolishing valuable infrastructure.

For the cost of closing the rail line and building a new terminal (and it is doubtful whether there really is room for this at Wickham) most of the proposed redesigning of streets, establishment and improvement to public domain could be achieved, and completed to a much faster timetable than is proposed in the report.

Thus, with a few more sections of the rail line better landscaped (trees; public sculpture etc) guiding principle No 6 may be achieved - “maximise access and convenience of public transport to and within the city centre - and a “busy and vibrant city centre” be realised (Principle 6).

The rail line is vital to the connectivity beyond the city centre - with suburbia and the rest of the Hunter. The future of the city of Newcastle cannot usefully be planned without careful consideration of the whole lower Hunter area – much more than is evident in this strategy document. It reads more like a scheme to beautify the city, than a plan to deal with transport for its people.

Apart from very spare references to the position of Newcastle within the region, and the State (pp10 – 12), virtually no attention has been given (or shown) to the questions of connection and linkage of transport infrastructure on a regional scale – and connected questions – the Adamstown rail crossing, to give just one example.

I submit that the whole question of transport and communication for Newcastle and surrounding areas be re-opened, and expert advice from persons and bodies beyond the State Government be sought, before any public moneys be spent on implementing the schemes of this report.

*Philip Thirlwell*  
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