

urbanrenewal - Newcastle plan submission

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Subject: Newcastle plan submission

attention of:

Manager, Centres and Urban Renewal:

Department of Planning & Infrastructure

GPO Box 39, SYDNEY NSW 2001

Comment on an urban renewal strategy for Newcastle prepared under State Environmental Planning Policy (Urban Renewal) 2010.

Firstly, regarding the Community Information Forum 6pm 20/2/2013

I attended the Community information forums held to speak with departmental and council planners at the Newcastle City Hall. I found it deeply puzzling that the Department was inviting comment on the plan but was refusing to discuss the central recommendation of the plan. This was despite that being the main concern of most of the public who managed to get to the microphone

It was also disturbing that the Chair of that meeting appeared to be biased in his comments. He was accused of this by one questioner. However, despite apologising for this, he then made further biased comments towards the end of the session when 2 or 3 people made supportive comments regarding the plan. Because they were clapped by some, he said that there was clearly a lot of support for the plan and encouraged those people specifically to make submissions. This did not appear even handed as he had not made similar comments when other questioners of a contrary view had received much louder ovations.

Introduction

One central issue in this plan is the appearance that it is based on a number of plans that were written prior to the rail decision being made. (eg those in Appendix 1, Appendix 2, Appendix 3, Appendix 4 and Appendix 5) This was acknowledged at the Community information forum. This compromises the plan because those previous plans made assumptions in relation to transport issues and planning which are no longer tenable. For example, the map showing the Hubs come from the 2012 AECOM report (App 3 p28) and these hubs are based on existing railway stations. This is standard urban planning. Taking the railway station away removes the reason for the hub.

Surely it is flawed to put forward a plan based entirely on other plans done with different assumptions. At the very least these plans should be revamped with the new transport decision.

Another danger in the plan is the lack of synchronization of different government plans and regulations. This starts at the basic contradiction of 2 of the 4 Urban Renewal Strategy key principles. It extends through a failure to look closely at the flood planning, subsidence maps, sea level inundation maps and reaches its climax in the transport planning of car restriction and train removal with no alternative provided except buses after a scoping study. There has not even been any

preliminary planning to see whether the transport options can work. The rosy projections of inhabitants, students, workers, jobs and business activity are based on the premise that modern city transport options are available. But these have not been described or investigated.

This failure to integrate the various planning documents about the fundamental premise of removing the rail flaws the document.

A The good bits

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Promotion of Cycling

Pedestrianisation

Encouragement of population concentration

Hubs based on public transport

Conservation of heritage areas, particularly in East End

Attraction of increased presence of University into the city

B The bad bits

1. Contravention of State and Local Planning guidelines

Part 1 details how the plan is subject to ***The State Environmental Planning Policy (Urban Renewal) 2010*** which includes 4 key principles – two of which are

- Integrate land use planning with **existing or planned infrastructure**
- **Provide greater access to public transport**

The proposed plan violates 2 of the 4 key planning principles.

The plan is supposed to fit **States planning goals for 2021**, one of which is “ Growing patronage on public transport by making it an attractive choice”. With closing a rail line the plan is going against this goal.

The city centre vision includes..“Strengthening public transport”. Once again the plan does the opposite.

2. Failure to adequately address Flooding and Sea Level Rises

The plan is flawed by the discrepancy over flood data. The new CBD and transport interchange in the West End and Wickham are either on, or significantly traversed by, flood affected land. The plan itself acknowledged this

3.5 *“Unlike the east end, Civic and the west end are largely built on the Hunter River and Cottage Creek floodplain”*

Flood events are warned against on the NSW govt own web site http://www.newcastle.nsw.gov.au/___data/assets/pdf_file/0017/5273/potential_flood_areas_fs.pdf

So it puzzles me why the plan and the consultation were so reassuring about the issue. I suggest try fig 6.10 and zoom in on the new West end CBD at

http://www.newcastle.nsw.gov.au/___data/assets/pdf_file/0004/204682/Newcastle_City-wide_Floodplain_Risk_Management_Study_and_Plan.pdf

From Pages 139 on detail proposals to alter development in line with flooding risk, and the map seems to indicate that both the Wickham transport interchange and the parts of the proposed Commercial core of the West end would be affected. Incidentally, this makes any plans for an alternate new transport hub at Broadmeadow also impossible. (see Figure 6.13 of the Floodplain risk Management study) By my reading, any increased land use near Broadmeadow rail would be inside the 1% AEP floodway.

The West end could become the Venice of the Hunter. It seems premature to base a plan for major urban renewal when the current planning document from the relevant government body says “For example, it may be established through the strategic planning review that all significant future development should be prohibited from the mapped 1% AEP floodways,”....Some of these appear to be in the new CBD. And “....a hierarchy of permissible land uses and development controls should be established based on an increasing level of flood risk...”

This is compounded by sea level inundation projections.

http://www.ozcoasts.gov.au/climate/Map_images/CentralCoast/High/jpeg/150dpi/Central_Coast_High_150_Map_8.jpg

3. Minimisation of Mine Subsidence as an issue

A further flaw mentioned, but glossed over, is the recent mapping of Mine Subsidence affected areas. Again a simple overlapping of the maps available with those in the plan reveals a concerning congruence of undermining and proposed 90 metre buildings in the West End CBD. Specifically, areas of the central core on the south side of Hunter Street are Category A undermined, as is the central core extension heading east along Hunter Street on both sides towards Civic.

Ironically, the proposed new transport interchange would appear to be in one of the only non undermined areas in the Newcastle City area –it’s the logical place to build tall buildings- except its flood prone.

http://www.minesub.nsw.gov.au/templates/mine_subsidence_board_maps.aspx?pageID=22189

4.Transport issues

Transport is the key weakness of this strategy. Throughout the document numerous mentions are made of the need to improve transport. This is essential because the plan is to increase the population resident in the area, increase the number of people coming to work, study and shop and increase recreational use. This is in an area with geographical and road limitations to transport that have been commented on in numerous previous reports.

The logical response includes increasing the cost of parking, capping the amount of car parking and increasing public transport. The plan fails in the last point. The public transport plan is to remove a functioning heavy rail line already capable of providing the hubs for the proposed development. This is to be replaced by unspecified bus solutions which will be worked out in the next phase. There is not enough space at Wickham to provide the type of interchange already in place at Newcastle. The proposed area is flood prone. Already there is speculation that the trains from Sydney will have to stop at Broadmeadow and the Hamilton gates will be shut. The “seamless” transport is a mirage as buses will not be able to provide the heavy lifting of people into the hubs. The logical alternative is to keep the rail into Newcastle and provide a bus shuttle around the beaches and Darby Street.

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a. The trains

If the Sydney trains don't come through they lose the connection with the Hunter trains at Hamilton.

Stopping trains from Sydney and west lake Macquarie coming anywhere near the CBD is a major problem. The proposed Glendale interchange, increased stations in the developing lower Hunter and improving bus/train connectivity through the feeder system are all option for handling increased future flow that will be sacrificed.

The AECOM report says 2,500 passenger trips arrive by train daily to Newcastle Station on the train p 10. Why the plan leaves this information out puzzles me. Since rail travel is increasing, and this figure was only to Newcastle station, it suggests a significant number of trips by other forms of transport will be required just to stay where we are in terms of people in town.

b The Roads

Main north south road going through the proposed CBD including an intersection with the main east west route. This is not a good idea. No one planning a modern pedestrianized CBD will intentionally put the main road traffic intersection right in the middle.

Capped parking, and no train- this will strangle the old CBD

The plan says “ *volume and speed of car traffic as well as the amount of space allocated to cars adversely impacting upon the quality of the public realm, particularly Hunter Street*”-

but then proposes that Hunter St becomes the main thoroughfare for public transport and be limited to one lane- carrying all the people who used to be on the train plus the tens of thousand of people the plan predicts will come.

b1 The parking

the plan implies there is plenty of cheap parking and there wont be a problem squeezing this a little, whereas the AECOM report estimates a need for 8,000 extra car spaces by 2031 that could be whittled back to 2,650 be some leap of faith – this is for over 30,000 new people and replacing 3,000 trips by train which currently are supplied. Instead the plan says cap car parking at 11,000.

This will discourage cares, but if there is no attractive alternative, people will just stay away to avoid the gridlock going round and round looking for a park.

c. The people

12,600 extra residents, 10,000 extra workers, 8000 students at the Uni and 1000 staff. This is a great vision for a vibrant future. Trouble is there is no viable plan to be able to move them in or out. If there is no transport they will not come.

d. The buses

Trains “will be coordinated to the bus timetable”- but what happens when the train or the bus is late? --- What happens at Toronto is that the bus leaves empty- it can't wait because it's a continuous through service, or there is no room for a bus to wait. Most buses in the diagrams appear to stay on the normal route along Hunter Street-, which isn't part of the Wickham transport interchange. The other bus is a circular bus running every 10-15 minutes on what appear to be possibly only one direction. Who would catch a bus along honeysuckle- already choked with traffic to Newcastle station and then back down Hunter St? - The loop doesn't go on to Hunter until Civic; the other loop goes out and down King St.

For someone wanting to go a few hundred yards up Hunter Street this may add half an hour to their journey.

Buses don't take bikes or surfboards.

And the bus driver said Hunter St is really slow at peak hours already, imagine what it will be like with one lane, bus tales pushing out into it as they bank up picking up people every few hundred metres. Hunter St and Honeysuckle will be a crawlfest.

And what about the ferry connectivity- this drains a large group of potential public transport users who will now have to negotiate a 3rd or 4th interchange to get further afield. Most will just drive, avoiding the city.

5 And Why is the rail going??

This remains the mystery to me. The only reasons given in the plan is to open more road links between Honeysuckle and the rest of the CBD. Since the plan will result in car gridlock for the area as a whole, there will be little benefit apart from more on street parking. The “expansive vistas” will not be provided by removing a ground level railway line. Instead the plan sees more buildings – thus fewer vistas.

There is research evidence that rail lines increase property demand and prices. They encourage hub like intense development as desired in the plan.

I still don't see a reason for removing the rail.

To quote the AECOM report “ Renewal of Newcastle City Centre provides the opportunity to apply Transit Oriented Development principles and locate new developments and increased development densities in places with good access to public transport, for example at Wickham, Civic and Newcastle stations.” And “Increasing the density of development around these stations would provide a 10% increase in train travel, increasing the proportion of public transport travel from 14.1% to 15.2% in 2016, and 15.9% in 2031.”

Still seems a good idea to me. It would comply with the current legislative framework and indeed the noble aims expressed in the Introduction of the plan by-

reducing negative impacts from car travel, contributing to a more comfortable environment and public domain

encouraging use of public and active transport forms, which will contribute to the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions Focusing development on activity hubs at the east end, Civic and west end that are aligned with public transport will result in increased jobs and housing within a more sustainable urban form.

6. Inconsistencies within the report

“build on ideas that have worked elsewhere”- where has removal of public transport infrastructure in a city led to improvement in transport? There are no examples anywhere in the plan and I have heard of none.

One of the key dot points is encourage public transport use and restrict cars- yet the key decision in the plan runs completely counter to this.

- “Actions identified in the strategy are linked to a clear implementation plan by a range of stakeholders for the short, medium and long terms. “

This is clearly not the case in relation to the Wickham interchange- there is no clear implementation plan anywhere . HDC says it will all come out in the “scoping”.

And then they talk about how its an easy walk (400meters) from “public transport nodes” (Part 3) which it describes in the text as bus stops but on the accompanying map the nodes are the train stations that are being destroyed!

Summary

This plan contravenes the State planning framework by destroying public infrastructure rather than promoting use of it. It contravenes The Urban renewal framework by discouraging public transport use instead of promoting it.

It proposes building a new CBD with 90 metre high buildings on the main traffic and public transport intersection. These buildings are partly on undermined land, surrounded by flood plain. The Wickham transport interchange and the probable extra land needed for Broadmeadow trains, (when there isn’t enough room for trains at Wickham), is in flood affected land, much of which is not allowed to be developed under the council/governments own guidelines.

These matters aside, the most important failure in this plan is in transport. It is based on inadequate assessments of the numbers of journeys and how to provide these, both now and in the future. Despite estimates of tens of thousand more journeys, there is no train and the number of car parking spaces are capped, despite estimates in AECOM of thousands more

places being required. The main transport route (Hunter Street will be restricted to one line despite this being the designated routes for buses carrying all these extra trips. The buses have to stop. This will cause chaos, as has been demonstrated by previous examination of this by Newcastle Council. Up to 200 extra bus journeys, not to mention thousand of extra car trips, stuck in a one-lane road with the buses having to stop every few hundred yards.

The interchange around Wickham is in the site of the major transport bottleneck now. Add in a surrounding CBD, trains coming in, buses waiting for late trains- nowhere to park buses or trains. Chaos.

This plan may have some good ideas for planning, but will forever be tainted as the vehicle to announce and support a single decision which is poorly thought through and runs counter to the ideas in the rest of the plan i.e. closing the rail

Thank you for considering this submission

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