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RESPONSE TO NEWCASTLE URBAN RENEWAL STRATEGY 2012

In all discussion on this subject I detect overlapping streams of thought from the narrow to the wide:

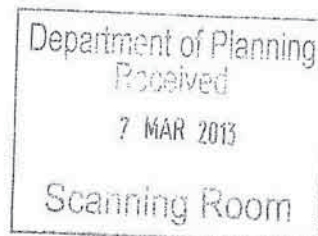
"...on 22 August, 2008 the NSW Govt., announced the formulation of a Newcastle CBD Taskforce to oversee the preparation of a strategy to stimulate private sector investment and economic growth in the Newcastle CBD." (Hunter Dev. Corp. Feb, 2019)

"... The NSW Govt. will make a decision in the best interests of the community at large. Any decision in relation to the rail line will be made in the context of the need for continued urban renewal in Newcastle and the need to stimulate private sector investment." (Brad Hazzard, M.P. May, 2012)

"I strongly believe we need to work together for an outcome that gives Newcastle the best possible integrated transport system – one that provides connectivity between the different city precincts, our suburbs and the wider region to best cater for the needs of commuters, shoppers, tourists and workers. Such a system would help give certainty for investors and residents, and underpin continued growth of tourism, business and recreational activities in the City." (Sharon Grierson, M.P. Jan, 2009)

In my judgement your document falls into the more local, narrow, less holistic stream. May I put it to you that yours is simply a program to redevelop the southern peninsula of Newcastle for medium to high density residential, with concomitant commercial development? It is hardly worthy of the title Urban Newcastle. The area specified is, of course, a highly desirable place to live: a superb climate, wonderful natural amenity, some historical interest, and an adequate infrastructure. From the higher points (a few storeys up?), one is overwhelmed by the varieties of vistas. A 25 year strategy will condemn the place to being a maze of development sites for a long time to come with concomitant problems of access (dare I say "connectivity"). What I imagine, vehicles of all sorts, hardly matches the images shown in the strategy document.

A scan of the document and previous govt statements indicate that any urban renewal program is dependent on private sector involvement which is in turn dependent on the closure of the railway line. I can't understand the arguments: (a) that all is dependent on the closure of the railway line, (the document says that 'there is no single answer' (Introduction)), and (b) urban development of Newcastle is only concerned with an area from 1 km of the southern shoreline edge of Newcastle by about 3kms of shoreline. This can't possibly be a vision for Urban Newcastle for the next 20 years!



Specifically:

Your strategy can be praised for:

- 1) Moving commercial activity West (consistent with NCC planning), though in my vision of Newcastle (see Appendix A), it is not far enough West.
- 2) Using the concept of transit oriented development (T.O.D.), (again consistent with NCC planning), though it may be more successful with train stations.
- 3) The open discussion on flood planning, though the solutions to residential problems (p. 100) ("access ramp designs ...") are extraordinary.

Your strategy can be criticised for:

- 1) As alluded to above, its narrow base: a builders' document with foci on concepts of Floor Space Ratio (F.S.R), solar access, lines of sight, delaying Section 94A payments 'not a major disincentive' (p.118) to 'stimulate new development' (p.118). There is an almost ideological commitment to private investment.
- 2) Use of words such as investigate, promote (pp.64, 102) esp. modal shift. As stated above the area has been researched for many years yet you propose further research. It seems a way of mentioning something without intention to act. The 'End-of-trip' Bicycling Facility for Employees idea falls into this category especially when it suggests that the NCC sets the example!
- 3) I assume that 'the quality and attractiveness of the public domain' (p.202) could refer to the railway area. Railway lines don't have to look ugly.
- 4) Using of just buses on the rail corridor (p.2). Why not cars and the ubiquitous cyclists? Or maybe not? See p.129: "an alternative form of transport be pursued along the rail corridor in the longer term..." Where is the City Centre? What is the CBD? (See my analysis of this issue in Appendix B)
- 5) Using Birdwood Park and "incremental acquisition and improvement of public space" (p.129) as provision for public space in the Wickham area is hardly an adequate solution to providing sufficient public space amenity for this precinct.
- 6) It is not clear as to whether the alignment: 'proposed lane/Beresford lane' (pp185-187) encroaches on the railway easement.
- 7) Is it not possible to forecast 25 years of building site activity with half road closures and cross street traffic problems, if the strategy is going to depend on catalyst projects for its impetus?
- 8) The proposal for Wickham Station has limited explanation for the management of trains.

Conclusion: There have been many variations (mostly iterations) of the theme of Newcastle Urban renewal this century and last. Many of them in my judgment have been less than enlightening. This is one which lightens a path for property developers with tunnel vision. It seems to me that the mentality that conceives of this project would also see residential high-rise south along the Bar Beach, Dixon Park and Merewether axis, then on the north side, a few towers at Stockton in the interests of consolidation and economic growth. I suppose the Gold Coast has outgrown Newcastle in the last twenty Years, but as Appendix B indicates, Newcastle has much more going for it.

Appendix A: An alternative CBD Proposal: The Precinct of: District Park, Old Gas Works, Hamilton North, the Showground and Broadmeadow, seems to me to have great development potential as a CBD. It is more centrally located, not undermined, less flood affected, potentially well serviced, easy to transit and easy to bypass. A Central water feature could be an artificial lake, re-exposing the old swamp, connected by ferry to the harbour via a rejuvenated Throsby Creek. Land swaps could be done with developers who claim they are disadvantaged by the proscribing of excessive development on the Peninsula. By 2100 there may need to be a new city development at Glendale. I would advise the establishment of easements now.

Appendix B: What (Where) is the CBD? I would assert that the Hunter Region is economically self-sufficient and that Newcastle is a regional port that adds worth through trade to the products of the region. It is the trading centre to the North-west. In this context Newcastle's future depends on the port and the coordination of road, rail, sea and air transport. The functioning economic areas are in Northern Newcastle. The area that the strategy refers to is a product of the 19th century. The closure of the southern wharves, local mines, the hospital, and the car ferry and tram services emaciated the area economically. So the area is hardly the CBD any more. Let me call it the East End Historic Precinct. I would envisage it as a boutique commercial-residential, educational & recreational Precinct. It is a precinct that is of great public interest and should be easily accessible to all. *It is perhaps in this that I have the greatest objection to the Strategy proposed.* The Port Corporation jealously defend their easements to the Port as an essential amenity. In the same vein, the citizens of the Hunter Region would desire appropriate and sympathetic easements to the amenity of Newcastle East not only for themselves but for everyone.

Gary Townsend
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