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Date: 3/11/2013 2:54 pm
Subject: Rail line closure - Newcastle Urban Renewal Strategy

Attention: Manager, Centres and Urban Renewal, DPI.

We are totally opposed to the proposal to close the heavy rail link to Newcastle Station which is recommended in the Newcastle Urban Renewal Strategy (NURS).

No credible, objective data have been advanced to support the heavy rail line closure. In fact, it is clear both that there is no evidence such a move will help revitalize the centre of Newcastle, and that there is every possibility it will have the reverse of the intended effect on the CBD.

Our specific arguments against this short-sighted proposal are:

1. The heavy rail link has existed in Newcastle for many decades in periods of boom and decline. There is no evidence that the heavy rail line contributed to the CBD decline. Factors involved in the decline include: the rise in importance of suburban shopping complexes, the creation of alternative office space in the Honeysuckle Area, and the closure of Royal Newcastle Hospital. The corollary of this observation is that there is no reason to assume that closing the rail link will help revitalize the CBD.
2. None of the other significant elements of the NURS are contingent on the rail line closure.
3. The closure would downgrade the importance of the traditional CBD by creating another empty heritage building, namely Newcastle Railway Station. This would join the already decaying Newcastle Post Office and the soon-to-be empty Newcastle Courthouse. Having multiple, disused heritage buildings would make it more difficult to identify the heart of Newcastle. Cities without a true heart are in danger of becoming soulless.
4. The only view corridor to the Harbour from the city, once past the Foreshore Park, is in Scott/Hunter Street area across the rail line near Newcastle Station. Other views from city roads are gradually being eliminated by the Honeysuckle Development. The rail closure would put this remaining view corridor at considerable risk from building developments.
5. Discontinuities should, as far as possible, be avoided in public transport systems. Any discontinuity makes travel more onerous and of longer duration. Replacing the rail link with buses to Civic and Newcastle will have both these effects even in the ideal circumstances that the transfer from trains to buses is a totally seamless one. More likely, optimum transfer times are unlikely to be achieved let alone maintained in the long-term.
6. In 2011, when the Lonely Planet Guide rated Newcastle in the top 10 world cities for tourists, the Guide stressed the city's easy accessibility by road and rail. Inevitably, the rail closure would reduce this accessibility, making it more difficult for tourists travelling by rail with luggage to reach hotels/hostels near Civic and Newcastle Stations.
7. Hunter Councils such as Lake Macquarie, Cessnock and Maitland remain opposed to the closure because they can see the obvious drawbacks for their residents in terms of ease of access to the CBD and longer travel times.
8. The closure will have the most deleterious effects on vulnerable groups such as the elderly, especially those attending medical services in the inner city, and on regional youth visiting places such as Newcastle and Nobbys Beaches from towns like Singleton. This latter group who often travel long distances by rail with bikes and/or surfboards will probably be refused entry onto buses.
9. The State Government has no mandate for the closure in particular because, till quite recently, Tim Owen, MLA, had been adamant that the installation of light rail was a "bottom line" precondition for the removal of heavy rail into Newcastle.

In summary, it is logical to maintain a heavy rail link to Newcastle and Civic Stations with their many

hotels and backpacker hostels, plus restaurants, museums, beaches, Newcastle Court House, Newcastle Art Gallery, medical services and so on. It is difficult to imagine any tangible benefits the city will obtain from the heavy rail closure especially in an era when motor vehicles are becoming more environmentally problematic and more difficult to park. The State Government could achieve very beneficial results by increasing the frequency of rail services from the Hunter Valley, by reducing train travel times to Sydney in line with commuters' post-1960 expectations, and by improving bus services to outer Newcastle suburbs. All these would be clearly valuable contributions in comparison with the irrational decision to cut the heavy rail link.

Yours sincerely,
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