



CE12/1780

Mr Sam Haddad
Director General
NSW Department of Planning and Infrastructure
GPO Box 39
SYDNEY NSW 2001

For attention

2/5/2013

Dear Mr ~~Haddad~~ *Sam*

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Newcastle Urban Renewal Strategy.

Roads and Maritime Services (RMS) manages two major State Roads in the "west end" precinct being the north south and east west arterial network along Stewart Avenue and Hannell Street as well as Parry Street and Donald Street respectively. All other roads in the area are controlled by Newcastle City Council.

There are also 27 sets of traffic lights in the vicinity of the study area which are managed by RMS which may be impacted by the strategy. Railway level crossings are managed by RailCorp and two of the three railway level crossings would be removed within the urban renewal area.

The removal of the railway line east of Wickham would improve the traffic flow at Stewart Avenue and Merewether Street crossings. If there are additional road connections across the railway corridor from Hunter Street to the Honeysuckle precinct, this may further improve traffic movements at the Stewart Avenue and Merewether Street intersections on Hunter Street.

The strategy would allow for more effective traffic signal performance on the road network, especially north south coordination along Stewart Avenue and Hannell Street, and improved bus priority measures along Hunter Street due to the elimination of the random delays due to train movements across both Stewart Avenue and Merewether Street.

In regard to the proposed temporary and permanent layout of Hunter Street, RMS has significant road safety and traffic management concerns with the proposal. I would like to offer the RMS Hunter team to provide assistance to your team in developing a mutually acceptable scheme that will improve traffic outcomes for our customers.

When the planning of the interchange at Wickham is further advanced, access to the interchange for all users needs to be integrated into the existing road network in such a way to mitigate the impacts of all road users including pedestrians. I strongly recommend RMS be involved in these planning discussions.

I have attached detailed comments in regard to the strategy (Attachment A) and a map of the study area showing the location of State roads and traffic lights (Attachment B) for your consideration. If you require more information, please contact Mr Joe Krsul, Acting Regional Manager, Hunter on (02) 4924 0218. Thank you again for the opportunity to comment on this significant Government Urban Renewal Strategy.

Yours sincerely

 24.4.2013.
Peter Duncan
Chief Executive

General Information

The study area for the Newcastle Urban Renewal Strategy 2012 is shown in a UBD map (Attachment A).

There are two State Roads located in the "west end" precinct managed by Roads and Maritime Services:

- Stewart Avenue / Hannell Street provide a major north / south traffic flow through the area.
- Parry Street / Donald Street which provides traffic flows in east / west direction from Newcastle CBD.

RMS also manages and maintains about 27 traffic lights sites in the vicinity of the study area.

Within the Urban Renewal area, there are three railway level crossings – Stewart Avenue (State road), Merewether Street (local road) and Railway Street (local road).

Impacts on Railway Crossings

Truncating the railway line will remove two of the crossings: Stewart Avenue and Merewether Street. Removal or covering of rail infrastructure on these roads would have to be included in the removal cost of the railway line.

Removal of the railway line may provide an opportunity for minor road widening to improve capacity at Stewart Avenue. This would be a matter for RMS and is discussed further below. The Merewether Street crossing is discussed below.

The remaining crossing at Railway Street was upgraded by RMS in 2008, with Department of Transport funding, to achieve current safety standards with improved pedestrian facilities. It would not require any further immediate upgrade.

Under the Newcastle Urban Renewal Strategy, in time, the Railway Street crossing will be on the western edge of the "new CBD" and may require upgrading. It will provide a link between the new CBD and Wickham (which itself is subject to a master plan review, with an expected bigger emphasis on residential development). The rail crossing is identified in the Newcastle Urban Renewal Strategy as requiring an "improved connection" in the "more than 8 years" time frame (p 208).

Depending on traffic growth and traffic management planning for the CBD, an at-grade improved connection could involve road widening to provide four lanes, and/or a pedestrian bridge. Both of these would require property acquisition. As Railway Street is a local road, a capacity upgrade or pedestrian access upgrade would normally be a matter for council.

Impacts on Traffic Movements

RMS is not aware of traffic studies showing expected network performance with and without the railway line. Some RMS travel time studies conducted in 2010 during a rail line closure indicated that, at that time, travel times were similar with and without disruption from the railway level crossing. However, the coordination of the traffic lights at Stewart Avenue has been significantly altered since 2010 and improved traffic flows could be expected without the random disruptions of the at-grade crossings on both Stewart Avenue and Merewether Street.

a) Near Merewether Street

Truncation of the railway line will improve traffic flow near the Merewether Street crossing on Merewether Street, Hunter Street and Workshop Way. It will allow for improved operation of the Merewether Street / Hunter Street traffic lights, which is currently affected by random crossing closures with minor queuing for left and right turning traffic on Hunter Street entering Merewether Street.

"Improved connections" across the rail corridor are identified in the Newcastle Urban Renewal Strategy, both east and west of Merewether Street. New connections for motor vehicles would further alleviate traffic in this area.

The Newcastle Urban Renewal Strategy identifies bus priority at intersections on Hunter Street. Bus priority (head start signal) could be feasible both eastbound and westbound at the Merewether Street intersection, once the railway line is removed and traffic movements are simplified at this intersection.

b) Near Stewart Avenue

Stewart Avenue / Hannell Street (State Road) is the main north/south road corridor in inner Newcastle. In traffic peaks, traffic flow along Stewart Avenue and Hannell Street between Hamilton East and Carrington is currently poor; the random arrival of trains at the at-grade crossing causes extensive queuing on the network in the vicinity of the crossing (particularly on Hannell and Hunter Streets) and disrupts the systematic north-south co-ordination of nearby traffic lights, resulting in further delay over a two kilometre road length.

Truncation of the railway line should improve traffic flow near the Stewart Avenue crossing and have benefits for the longer road length between Hamilton East and Carrington. Truncation of the railway line should allow better operation of both the Stewart Avenue / Hunter Street and Hannell Street / Honeysuckle Drive traffic lights and allow for much more effective coordination of these two sets of traffic lights, and the Stewart Avenue / King Street traffic lights.

The removal of the railway crossing on Stewart Avenue will provide an opportunity for minor road widening across the rail corridor, which could further improve road capacity in this area by allowing extension of the turning bay northbound into Honeysuckle Drive and a third southbound lane across the rail corridor on the approach to Hunter Street. Removal of some right turning movements at Stewart Avenue / Hunter Street could be considered to further improve capacity if necessary. Bus priority could be considered at Hunter Street / Stewart Avenue intersection.

Another complicating factor is the future layout for Hunter Street proposed in the Newcastle Urban Renewal Strategy. It includes a two-way cycleway on Hunter Street, with a barrier between the cycleway and eastbound traffic, and a two-lane two-way road configuration with a clearway in one direction (p. 76). This would have a big impact on traffic and bus flows and parking in some areas, and an impact on existing bus stops. Eastbound buses would be required to stop in the eastbound clearway. Westbound buses would have bus bays, but would be required to re-enter a single through traffic lane that will carry much denser traffic than the existing two lanes. At bus stops along the northern side, there would be a conflict between bus passengers and cyclists.

At some locations (especially approaches to intersections), the proposed layout might not be feasible at all, without a very big impact on traffic/bus flows.

Practical Implications for the Road Network

For the proposed two way cycleway, the safety of the termination of the barrier, the continuity of the cycleway through traffic lights, and conflicts with pedestrians in areas where there are bus stops would all need to be very carefully considered. It is proposed to implement a temporary clearway in the short term and the spaced out concrete barrier shown as an example in the strategy (p. 78) is not an appropriate use of concrete barrier within a clearway zone. A two-way cycleway on a regional / local road like Hunter Street would normally be funded and built by council. RMS jointly funds some cycle-ways.

Increased pedestrian activity associated with the new railway station could have a negative impact on the Stewart Avenue and Hunter Street intersection. Grade separation of pedestrian movement over Stewart Avenue should be considered as part of traffic generation study for the railway station re-development.

With truncation of the railway line, several locations of "improved connectivity" are identified in the 1-3 year timeframe in the Newcastle Urban Renewal Strategy. It is not specified whether these are road or pedestrian connections. One or more new road connections would help alleviate traffic congestion at Stewart Avenue / Hunter Street and Merewether Street / Hunter Street.

All of the local connections would be local roads, and would normally be funded by council. Road connections into any existing T-intersection traffic lights along Hunter Street would also be a matter for the council (with RMS concurrence required).

The Newcastle Urban Renewal Strategy is meant to revitalise Hunter Street and develop it as the main transport corridor. Presumably this is why there is no proposal for cycleways or bus ways in the railway corridor east of Stewart Avenue. Given the limited road space on Hunter Street, it is not certain that all the competing needs of cyclists, improved bus efficiency, effective bus stops, and improved efficiency of intersections for motorists and pedestrians can be met without making use of the rail corridor.

Impacts near the new Wickham station

RMS is not aware of planning details of the interchange and how the various transport modes will access the existing road network for the new railway station.

A detailed plan needs to be completed in regard to traffic management around the new railway station and how the rail / bus interchange at the new Wickham Railway Station will work. RMS is not aware of any detailed planning for the interchange i.e. where the buses will pick-up passengers; where taxis will pick-up and set down passengers; whether or not there will be a grade separated pedestrian link from the new station to east of Stewart Avenue; what the role of local streets adjacent to the new station will be; whether Dangar Street will need to connect into the Hannell Street / Honeysuckle Drive intersection; and, most importantly from a traffic flow point of view, whether or not new signals from Beresford Street or Station Street will be necessary for access to the new station.

Currently there are major bus stops on Hunter Street near the location of the new railway station site.

Currently, eastbound buses have difficulties in morning peaks re-entering the through traffic lanes after using the existing bus stop, when the rail gates are down on Stewart Avenue and left turning eastbound traffic on Hunter Street queues back to

the bus stop. This problem will be alleviated to a large extent when the railway line is truncated. However, if large amounts of pedestrians cross Stewart Avenue at-grade at the Hunter Street traffic lights to go to and from the new railway station, the problem would be likely to re-emerge (as left turning traffic will not immediately flow with the eastbound through traffic).

In the afternoon peak, westbound buses on Hunter Street (along with other commuter traffic) currently have delays on the approach to the Stewart Avenue traffic lights. This is because right turning traffic from Hunter Street onto Stewart Avenue is frequently disrupted by railway level crossing closures and queues back into through traffic lanes. This will be alleviated by removal of the railway line but heavy traffic would still be expected in this area. It may be further alleviated if there are new road connections across the railway corridor, to the east. Some further parking restrictions and extension of the right turn bay might be required.

With current information it is difficult to see how a two-way bicycle lane or a reduction in travel lanes on Hunter Street in the area between Tudor Street and Stewart Avenue and the new railway station would be feasible at all. This area is currently congested and a reduction in travel lanes will have a further impact on bus and other traffic flows.

Other Comments

If Hunter Street Mall is to remain a "10 km/h shared zone", it will need to comply with the Australian Standard and other relevant technical documents.

The proposed layout for Hunter Street included in the Newcastle Urban Renewal Strategy with reduced through lanes and a two way cycleway might be more feasible east of Darby Street where there is lower traffic and fewer significant intersections, than on other parts of the route.

The Newcastle Urban Renewal Strategy mentions bus 'park and ride' potentially at Northcott Avenue/ Pacific Highway. This doesn't seem feasible given the topography and RMS suggests the report authors may have meant Charlestown Road / Pacific Highway, where there is a large existing car park that could perhaps be further developed.

There has been a focus on Hunter Street as the main corridor into and through Newcastle. King Street (Regional road) is another parallel, adjacent major route into the CBD which should be reviewed. It is understood that the council has proposed changes for this route that could influence current traffic patterns and affect the future plans in the CBD area. Information about this route is very limited in the Strategy.

Further intersection upgrades identified in the Newcastle Urban Renewal Strategy are limited to some local road intersections and Hannell Street / Honeysuckle Drive in the medium term (3-8 years). A thorough analysis of traffic impacts is required to better determine needs.

