

Submission to the Newcastle Urban Renewal Strategy

The Newcastle Urban Renewal Strategy, if implemented, will become a historic turning point in Newcastle. The timing is right for Newcastle to become a vibrant, sustainable and liveable city based on the modern principles of urban renewal.

The creation of a liveable, walkable and sustainable city by creating better linkages between the harbour and the old CBD along with high quality public domain are fundamental to the success of the strategy. The very shape of the city, two long and narrow tracts of land, results in many people funnelling into and out of the city to their destinations and no further. The effect of this is little of the pedestrian movement at street level that is required to activate the city. It is hardly surprising that the two areas of the city where north-south pedestrian movements are not blocked by the railway, Darby Street and Newcastle East, are also the most vibrant parts of the city. It is therefore critical that the city becomes a place where pedestrians have easy, attractive, safe and direct access around the CBD. It is also important so that people can access transport nodes. Having half the CBD isolated from the frequent bus network in Hunter Street by the railway barrier is one of the biggest impediments to public transport usage and needs to be changed.

The future of Newcastle cannot be compromised any longer by attempting to retain the heavy railway and thereby ignoring good urban design principles. Novocastrians have tired of accepting mediocrity and failed plans due to the attack by loud minority groups in particular as it relates to the retention of the heavy railway.

The effect of creating a vibrant city will also have a positive effect on the surrounding suburbs such as Merewether, The Junction, Hamilton, Islington and Carrington. Whilst most trips to the CBD are already made from within 5km of the CBD, the increased activity in the city will further decrease the need for those residents to travel outside of the areas to access key services and entertainment. It seems ironic that opponents to the NURS support relatively long distance commuting to the CBD by heavy rail and ignore the fact that a vital part of modern planning for sustainable cities is to discourage longer journeys. Newcastle is fortunate in already having relatively short travel distances already. The NURS supports this concept and will reduce the unsustainable reliance on urban sprawl for future growth. When considering funding for the NURS, I urge the Government to take into account the high financial and social cost of the alternative, being urban sprawl.

The removal of the railway from the CBD as early as possible will be the key to the success of the strategy. I urge the government to consider all options for an early removal of the railway including options such as a temporary terminus at Broadmeadow or Hamilton whilst the Wickham Interchange is constructed. Not only will this bring forward private sector investment, but will considerably reduce the cost and time required to build the new interchange at Newcastle West.

A total revamp of the current bus network into a Bus Rapid Transit system is required to make buses the preferred transport to and around the CBD. This should include extending a frequent and free bus network into suburbs surrounding the CBD to capitalise of the large number of trips that originate within 5km of the CBD. I would

suggest that this network should be de-coupled from the current Newcastle Buses network and provided by a private sector operator. Frequent inner city services cannot be provided by the same buses that provide long distance services. Attempting to run a bus network that is all things to all people, as history shows, will leave a system that is inadequate for all people. A private operator could also be responsible for the financing and provision of high quality bus stops, real time running information and be able to partially recover costs through advertising. Such a model would provide an incentive for the operator to increase patronage through improved quality of service.

The free bus network should also integrate into park and ride opportunities (new and existing) around the inner suburbs.

Consideration should be given to funding the free bus network from CBD parking revenue or contributions from developers as an offset to the reduction of parking requirements within developments. This provides a sustainable model and is not unlike the funding of public transport in London by Congestion Charging.

It is encouraging to see that the NURS proposes to reduce the space available for general road traffic in favour of increased public space and cycleways. It is clear that the combined space currently used by road and rail transport corridors is excessive and can be significantly rationalised for use as public domain. Consideration should be given the use of “shared spaces” which are now gaining great support in Europe. As was the case with the recent reopening of the Hunter Street Mall, this strategy will require strong leadership to change the attitudes of risk adverse road authorities.



Exhibition Road, London – a Shared Space that was previously an unattractive 4 lane street similar to Hunter Street.

Just as the Berlin Wall was built in 1961 to stop the youngest and brightest residents of the east from fleeing to the prosperity and bright lights of the west, Newcastle needs action to stop our youth leaving Newcastle for Sydney for the same reasons. Whilst the city retains an “earthy” feel about it that is attractive for some, it does not have the vibrancy that younger people are seeking in the city, nor the high quality employment opportunities. Unfortunately Newcastle is considered by many as being “provincial” in nature and attitude. Nowhere is this more obvious than walking along an empty Hunter Street, the heart of the state’s second city, after 6pm. The NURS needs to change Newcastle in a way that will retain our youngest and brightest.

The strong support for the NURS by the NSW Government is encouraging and needs to be maintained if Newcastle is to fulfil its potential as a uniquely sustainable and vibrant city.

I commend the NSW Government for the Newcastle Urban Renewal Strategy and look forward to its timely implementation.

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