

SUBMISSION

From: THE HUNTER CONCERNED CITIZENS

To: THE DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND INFRASTRUCTURE

In regard to the DRAFT PLAN FOR GROWING HUNTER CITY

WE ARE PLEASED TO SEE that the NSW Government is committed to

1. creating a high quality natural and built environment
2. delivering quality services to promote liveability in inner Newcastle.

WE WOULD ALSO LIKE TO SEE the same commitment extended to Greater Newcastle – ie, the inner city *plus* the suburbs of Greater Newcastle and the region that this city heads and services.

AS A GENERAL PERSPECTIVE, the Hunter Concerned Citizens regard the Department's current commitment to be both misdirected and under-delivered. While there are some excellent aspects and features to the Draft Plan, there are also some glaring omissions and deficits to the plan.

ALSO, it seems to us that while the plan is rightly regarded as a 'work in progress' there are aspects of it that are being considered, and in some cases implemented, without recourse to genuine community consultation. Many of the important decisions – particularly the one regarding the truncation of the railway line at Wickham – were made while the communities of Greater Newcastle were forbidden to comment, let alone dispute. This basic decision by cabinet in the face of clear evidence to the contrary provided by the Government's own experts (Confidential Cabinet Document 71, and Planning Reports of September and November 2014) makes a mockery of the phoney consultation process that has been attempted since. To use a well-worn cliché, the 'consultation' now taking place is very much in the mould of shifting the deckchairs around on the Titanic.

ONE OF THE ASPECTS OF THE 'PLAN' that makes no sense to us is the 'planning' for transport. Current developments have made commuting worse than ever! Even if we deplore – which we do! – the additional time it now takes to get to or from Sydney by train over the time it took thirty or more years ago, current plans and actions have exacerbated that situation. What is more, the additional *time* inconvenience has been exacerbated on the Hunter Line as well. So, current 'planning' and implementation has led to a retrograde transport situation the likes of which would not be tolerated, without exceptional cause, anywhere in the world. Even if it made sense to rip up the main line rail service to Newcastle Station (and we do not think it does) the situation where it was removed well before any efficient and convenient replacement was installed defies understanding. In addition, the

arguments being aired that main line rail patronage has been falling for years are based on two very flimsy pillars:

- a. *the fare box figures* – school excursionists, students, aged, disability and other concessional patrons – were never counted in the fare box.
- b. *The inconvenience of the current shuttle bus arrangements between Hamilton and the city* - These are so difficult, or inconvenient, for many patrons that use of the shuttle has clearly declined. Ex-patrons are either not coming to Newcastle any more, or they are using their cars and contributing to the clearly increased and obvious traffic congestion in and around the CBD. If there is an up-side to this rather curious arrangement it can only be the increased parking fines that are contributing to the coffers of the Newcastle City Council. Also, it is important to keep the **Marchetti Principle** in mind. This principle states that: *people keep the time they travel per day the same, even though the distance or inconvenience may increase*. The principle certainly applies in Newcastle: hence the use of private transport to maintain travel times in the face of deteriorating travel conditions.

WE WILL ADDRESS OUR CONCERNS USING THE HEADINGS on page 23 of the Draft Plan provided by the Department of Planning and Environment.

NEW JUSTICE PRECINCT – NEWCASTLE CITY CENTRE

This new building with all its facilities and courts is certainly an impressive asset. While some of us would have preferred that the new justice precinct had been built around the old one at the top of Bolton Street, the fact is that it is now located in Hunter Street in the heart of the Civic precinct. However, it seems that there is very little parking at the new centre. Also, while it is situated right beside Civic Station the Government, in its so-called wisdom, has pulled up the railway line and destroyed the rail service that connected the justice precinct with the city, its suburbs, and the region. Yes, there is talk of a light rail system being built right in front of the new courts at Civic, but this will take some time to construct, thus judges, barristers, court officials, jury members, litigants, offenders and the general public will have difficulty getting there. Postponement of the rail cut until the light rail was constructed along Hunter Street would have been an intelligent approach, but for reasons no-one can really, rationally explain, this has not happened. Why?

And given that the additional pedestrian journey to Civic Station to alight on either the main line rail service (now gone) or a light rail (or tram train) service that would provide speedy, direct and efficient connectivity to the suburbs and region is a mere twenty metres away, it is hard to understand why the Department of Planning is not availing itself of this excellent transport corridor asset.

This approach to urban 'planning' begs the question: *Is the rail corridor up for sale?* When will we be assured that it is not? Or be told that it is? And will there be any *genuine* community consultation on this issue? And if so.....when?

NEW UNIVERSITY CAMPUS – NEWCASTLE CITY CENTRE

There is no need to detail the uses of this new building. Your draft makes that clear. However, what is *not* clear is how the thousands of students, lecturers, staff and service providers are going to access the building. We are advised that there are *five* parking spaces in the whole complex. This means that there will be a heavy reliance on public transport. Again, with the rail service being destroyed it is difficult to see how this excellent asset can be accessed. And the irony of aborting the direct link between the two campuses of the University – City and Callaghan – defies sanity. What was the department thinking? If the campus is expected to be finished late this year 2016, and the light rail is not expected to be completed until 2018, it follows that 2017 is going to be a terrible year. And, of course, there is no guarantee that the light rail *will* become a reality. It seems that people and community groups and commercial enterprises are starting to doubt the likelihood of the light rail eventuating. Who are the planners responsible for this debacle? Are they still employed? If so... why?

Why is the light rail being routed down Hunter Street where it will clash with car, bus and commercial traffic, and with cyclists (whose representative organisations have expressed a clear preference to use Hunter Street), and pedestrians at no less than *fourteen* traffic lights intersections?

This 'mixed running' makes no rational sense! Also, Keolis Downer has made it quite clear that transport networks involving tram/trains work far more efficiently when the light rail service is separated in its own corridor from road and pedestrian traffic. This company already has transport service contracts in Melbourne and is doing its best to separate the tram service from other traffic there in existing situations. Why would we want to replicate the historical misfortune of Melbourne here in Newcastle?

Not going for the sensible option of using the rail corridor for tram/train light rail can only indicate that *the rail corridor is to be privatised and destroyed for all time as a public transport corridor.*

"NSW Premier Mike Baird says he will consider extending the Newcastle light rail line beyond the 2.5 kilometre stretch promised for Hunter Street once the system's "spine" is completed.
<http://www.theherald.com.au/story/3740227/light-rail-non-negotiable/>

If Premier Baird is as good as his word it would make great sense for the sake of efficiency and service to the entire region that the rail corridor becomes the route for the light rail service. It is the only option available for a comprehensive and efficient *regional and suburban* rail network. What is more, the observations of Hunter Concerned Citizens members in Angers France and the Minneapolis St Paul MN USA clearly confirms the value of 'separate running' and the avoidance of 'mixed running' wherever possible.

And these are not the only examples of modern networks of light rail have avoided 'mixed running'. Adelaide and Melbourne provide good examples of modern practice, and these cities only have 'mixed running' where there is no alternative. Keolis Downer can provide confirmation of this important development in a variety of situations.

The 'mixed running' situations of cities like Paris or Lisbon are the result of *historical* circumstances and are not to be replicated in this day of congested road traffic in inadequate streets. Even the partially built new light rail network in Atlanta GA USA is failing – and will continue to do so until the bulk of the network finally arrives on its planned separate corridor.

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE NEWCASTLE MINES GROUTING FUND

While this is a commendable strategy in some ways it seems to be primarily an example of 'developer welfare'. The very existence of this fund is proof enough that the perpetual ranting by many mainly business-aligned groups that the main line railway from Hamilton to Newcastle Station, and to the subsequent denial of 'connectivity' of the city to the waterfront, was *not* the reason for the decline of the city's retail and commercial life – particularly west of Civic Station. The blame was placed on the absence of sound foundation issues for buildings.

However, there have been many factors in this decline, yet they never seem to have been considered. The factors include:

- the rise of the suburb over the past forty or more years and
- the birth and healthy life of the love (and necessity) of owning a motor car
- the rise of the suburban malls
- the 1988/9 earthquake
- the use of these low cost city premises to gain tax loss advantages – which were enhanced by *not* spending money on them.

One wonders why this subsidy was chosen over an obligatory owner/developer fund to perform the same functions. Such a fund would have ensured that the taxpayer did not have to shell out to support property owners who were too indifferent to develop their holdings. An obligatory fund contribution would have focussed the mind of such entities and encouraged consolidation and accelerated the speed of redevelopment.

LEASE OF PORT FUNDS INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT

The long term (98 years?) lease of the Port of Newcastle for \$1.75 billion is just about equivalent to giving the port away! The government was surprised when it was offered this sum, expecting a little over half that amount. But the lessees knew a bargain when they saw one and snapped the port up for roughly the equivalent of *five years profit!* This means the leaseholders are 'home free' for 93 years!

This is a very poor business deal by any standard. It is a quick and cheap financial 'sugar hit' with the result of a long term problem for the 'mouth' of the Hunter River. It is hard to believe that this deal was ever considered, let alone consummated. And the additional insult for Greater Newcastle is that of the \$1.75 billion sale price *not even a quarter of it will stay in the Hunter!* And even if you add the \$120 million that the Government has already allocated to the city centre, this still only amounts to \$460 million – or just a little over a quarter of the sale price. Newcastle could reasonably claim to being short changed in this deal.

What is more, the segment Greater Newcastle is to get includes the cost of a light rail gimmick we didn't actually need! But even if we did admit that the main line rail had to go and that light rail was superior, by running the light rail along Hunter Street we see at least \$100 million being spent that could have been put to better use by retaining the rails and running the new service along the rail corridor. When you look at it like this, Newcastle is not at all in front on the whole deal – and suffers gross inconvenience on the way to an inferior outcome!

Even when you consider the fund being set up using revenue earned by the long term leaseholder to make available at least \$1 million for community infrastructure projects, Newcastle is still not doing well. If the government can spend \$100 million to move a rail service about twenty metres for 2.5 kilometres a fund contributing about a million dollars a year is a trifle, and should be treated with near disdain.

PURCHASE OF THE STORE BUILDING TO DELIVER THE WICKHAM TRANSPORT INTERCHANGE

Few of us were surprised when The Store building was purchased. And the sale went through so quickly it almost seemed as if this purchase had been anticipated a long time ago and that its arrival on the market was not merely fortuitous.

We have to ask ourselves *why* the Wickham site for the interchange was selected when there was – and still are – better sites for it. Hamilton could still be used as an interchange site. But Broadmeadow and Woodville Junction would have been better again. When there is so much room for infrastructure development at Woodville Junction in particular, but also at Hamilton and Broadmeadow, it is impossible to understand why the Wickham decision was made.

The CBD of a city does not have to be located at an interchange. One has only to look at Sydney to see the truth of this. But it is the same all over the world! So it would have been quite possible to move the commercial CBD to the area around Wickham – an area with a *vast* amount of development land free of the need to be grouted – and continue either the main line rail – or the light rail – along the corridor to Newcastle Station. This would have saved a vast amount of money, and would have retained the connectivity of all of the elements of Greater Newcastle with the ‘old’ CBD and the ocean waterfront. That this did not happen is *very strange*, to say the least.

INTRODUCTION OF LIGHT RAIL

LET’S CLEARLY STATE THE BENEFITS for a light rail and why it should run DOWN THE EXISTING CORRIDOR:

- It provides all the benefits recently claimed for light rail by Keolis Downer but is a significantly better option!
- would be more efficient in being deployed as part of an integrated system
- will be able to more effectively handle an extension west to Callaghan Campus and John Hunter hospital if it stays on the main line easement
- would avoid becoming a potential bottleneck in the total system: if it has to go through Hunter Street it will battle car and bus and truck traffic at 14 intersections
- provide all the benefits of a dedicated traffic free corridor which is what Keolis Downer advocates in Melbourne
- be less than half the cost of light rail in Hunter Street
- fulfils government promise of light rail
- avoids major slowdown of journey time by not running the light rail network along Hunter Street
- services Honeysuckle Drive and Wharf Road as well as Hunter Street
- would be far more effective than light rail in Hunter Street as far as business and traveller benefits are concerned.

NO DOUBT ABOUT IT! Light rail is beneficial, but common sense, probity and good planning dictate it should be in the corridor rather than Hunter Street.

REMEDIATION OF THE FORMER BHP STEELWORKS SITE – MAYFIELD

We do not know a great deal about the science or process of remediation, but we would like to make the following comments:

1. The Mayfield site has been restricted to the general public for many years and has been a heavy industrial site almost all that time. There must be a great deal of remediation required to make it suitable for future commercial, industrial or, in particular, residential purposes.
2. Observation of the Pasminco site at Glendale/Cockle Creek would suggest that the Mayfield remediation will be yet another massive task - and one that *must* be done right if the site is to be freely traversed. The presence of a new Bunnings Warehouse adjacent to the Pasminco site is an optimistic sign; however, it is no guarantee that the site is safe and the presence of the Warehouse might just be a way of fending off competitors. The Pasminco site had *very* serious contamination issues and several of our members still know people who grew up in the area while the refinery was operating and *still* suffer from contamination induced health issues.
3. In general, it would be reasonable to say that the remediation of almost all of the open cut mines in the Hunter Valley has not been satisfactory. Even if we were to gloss over the devastation of the natural land forms - and this also applies to the Pasminco site, though the Mayfield site is essentially in-fill - there is much to be concerned about. Even in now 'settled' areas around Singleton, Muswellbrook and the villages in the Hunter Valley, there is great concern about airborne contamination. Several medical General Practitioners in the Valley have registered their concerns, but with little attention being paid to their findings.

FOR THESE REASONS we would ask you to *take great care* in the remediation of the Mayfield site. It is close to the city and inner suburbs of Newcastle and the effects of contamination will be seriously felt by all of us living in Newcastle if the remediation is not done correctly and safely.

It seems a little peculiar that just \$7.6 million is being allocated for remediation. This would appear to be only a *first step* and that there will be much more expenditure to follow. How unsatisfactory it is to see so much of the sale price of the long term lease of the port to private interests go to remediation and other projects such as these, necessary as they may be. On the face of it, the new owners got a real bargain while we citizens/taxpayers/public owners are shortchanged with a return that at the very best is no more than the equivalent of *five years'* profit of the port.

IN ADDITION, Newcastle seems to have lost a potential source of income inasmuch as it appears that the new owners of the Port of Newcastle are not interested in, or have entered into an agreement not to develop, a container terminal in Newcastle. This seems a profound waste of an excellent resource, Newcastle being positioned just to the north of Sydney, and

being the focal node of rail and road transport to the west and north of New south Wales. A container terminal in Newcastle would have enhanced employment prospects for a region already suffering with high unemployment and with little prospect of seeing this condition remediated. This is particularly so since the once in a hundred years mining boom has burst, and the mines remaining are being continually computerized and mechanized, thus reducing the size of the workforce. Prospects for employment for many in the Hunter Region are much diminished and are likely to continue to be so for a very long time.