

Submission to the Draft Plan for Growing Hunter City

I would like to make a submission to the Draft Plan for Growing Hunter City. I was born in the beautiful city of Newcastle, in the suburb of Hamilton, and spent the first 22 years of my life at Broadmeadow, attending Newcastle University during this time. Of my now 65 years, I have spent all but 11 of them living in Newcastle, and even during these 11 years visited Newcastle regularly as we had parents and other family members residing here. We lived in Cardiff for the first 6 years of our married life, moved away from early 1979 to early 1990, and have lived in Valentine almost the whole time since returning. Having been born in Newcastle and having lived in 3 quite different areas, I can confidently say I know it well.

I love everything about this city, from its unique geographical position sandwiched between the harbour, the beaches and Lake Macquarie, to its history, heritage and general character. I have read the Draft Plan for Growing Hunter City and there are numerous items in it that I feel I need to comment on for further explanation or clarification.

To begin with, I found it extremely offensive that the name Newcastle did not appear in the title of this draft plan which is called "Draft Plan for Growing Hunter City". "Hunter City" is defined as *"the metropolitan area extending from Toronto and Swansea in the south to Raymond Terrace in the north and from Newcastle Harbour in the east to Lochinvar in the west"*. The area defined thus has always been known as Newcastle or the Greater Newcastle Area. The name Newcastle reflects its history as being the most important coal mining area in NSW at the time, hence it was named after a significant coal mining and industrial area in the UK. Fabricating the name of "Hunter City" is an insult to the people of the region, and the 200 plus year history and heritage of this area.

To clinically discuss these 2 names in terms of a brand, the Newcastle 'brand' is associated with the port, beaches and lake. On the other hand, the Hunter 'brand' has a narrow association with vineyards and wine, and this association has been carefully cultivated over many years. The Hunter 'brand' represents areas largely outside the area defined as "Hunter City". The Newcastle 'brand' is well known throughout Australia and to some extent overseas, in an association with the harbour, beaches and lake, whereas the Hunter 'brand' is largely unknown outside of NSW, apart from a narrow association with wine. People living within the area from the Hunter River south to Swansea and west to Toronto, more often than not refer to themselves as being from Newcastle or the Newcastle area. The term "Hunter" is usually understood to mean the Hunter Valley, outside the area referred to in this plan.

One could cynically suggest that the whole idea of using the manufactured name of "Hunter City" in a draft plan about growing the Newcastle area is an attempt to airbrush away Newcastle's proud, 220 year history of mining and industrial heritage and culture. This is both belittling to the Newcastle area, and insulting to its residents. I would have thought that a plan as important as this one purports to be, achieving growth for the Greater Newcastle Area over the next 20 years, would have at least used the word Newcastle in the title. This issue of reinventing the name of the Greater Newcastle Area is symptomatic of the lack of respect shown to Newcastle, its surrounding area and its residents by Sydney centric government bureaucrats.

ACTION 1.2.2

"Future sites located within or adjacent to existing urban areas will be prioritised to protect rural and environmental values and support the efficient delivery of infrastructure."

This is all well and good but there have been instances of this not happening in the past. I believe an example of this is the establishment of the new Hunter Valley town of Huntlee, where Cessnock Council had land set aside for new residential development close to the town centre, but the government overruled them and approved Huntlee, out in the middle of nowhere. This will make services very expensive for the 2 councils involved – Cessnock and Singleton.

ACTION 1.2.3

"The growth in the number of single or couple-only households is significant and is set to continue. It is contributing to a strong growth in demand for smaller dwellings."

I am assuming this means higher density housing, and while that may be a good thing it needs to be properly controlled and managed. Specific areas need to be adhered to, taking into account the fact that not everyone wants to live in high density. High density can destroy the amenity of green areas and historic areas.

DIRECTION 1.3 Enhance City-wide transport

"Hunter City requires good inter-regional and local transport to meet the needs of individuals and industry."

My question here is – why was it necessary to destroy the historic rail line which connected the harbour and coast to the growing population centres to the west? The buses which now transport rail passengers between Hamilton and Newcastle stations are proving to be a great inconvenience. They were a stop gap measure while the light rail was being built, but the build date for the light rail is getting pushed back further and further, and I believe the current start date is now 2019. It is a bit hard not to be sceptical that this light rail will ever be built at all! A significant amount of time has been added to rail journeys now the rail line has been cut, it is now difficult for teenagers from Maitland and beyond to get to the beach with surfboards etc, and disabled people, particularly the vision impaired, are having to use other forms of transport whereas before they used trains. This destruction of the rail line is also the destruction of a potentially very significant tourist drawcard.

"Over 90 per cent of the City's workforce travels to work by private vehicle, demonstrating a significantly greater reliance on car travel than other major cities in Australia."

"The growing trend towards people choosing an inner city lifestyle signals a need for integrated transport planning across Hunter City."

Does this signify that the government is seeking to increase public transport patronage across the Greater Newcastle Area? Why then knowingly, would the government legislate to dismantle a perfectly good rail access into the harbour foreshore, city and beaches? The government's own research showed that public transport patronage on rail services into the city would drop by 25% after rail services were terminated at Hamilton at the end of 2014, and in reality it has been a drop of almost 60% in patronage! What was the point in dismantling a public rail system that linked key inner city areas to other parts of the city, in particular the University of Newcastle?

"The rail network services many of the traditional centres including Newcastle City Centre and Cardiff."

This is an incorrect statement as the rail network no longer services Newcastle City Centre. It was terminated at Broadmeadow on the 26th December 2014, and now only goes as far as Hamilton, and Hamilton is not the city centre of Newcastle.

"The NSW Government is investing in the rail network to manage congestion for both passenger and freight services."

Does this mean the NSW Government is proposing to extend the rail network within the Greater Newcastle Area? One way of managing congestion for passenger services is to build the western freight bypass. This would take considerable pressure off the rail system in the whole of the Greater Newcastle Area. We have a ludicrous situation at the moment where all freight being moved between Sydney and the northern half of the state goes through the Adamstown level crossing. This creates appalling congestion and safety issues on this very busy thoroughfare. People have been lobbying to get an over or underpass built here for decades, but to no avail. Investing in this section of the rail network would be a major improvement for Newcastle.

"This will be supported by walking and cycling, and road and rail networks to provide attractive transport options."

While more walking and cycling paths are always welcomed, they do not really play a significant part in any city-wide transport system. Walking paths are important from a recreational perspective, but contribute little to mass movement of people, particularly commuters. And while it is feasible for someone to cycle 10-15 kms to work each day, this does not represent a significant city-wide transport option.

These are just typical "warm and fuzzy" meaningless statements with no detail.

I assume the extension of the rail network shown going from Wickham into the Newcastle City Centre is the light rail route, however this graphic has been left off the key at the bottom of the map. I would have thought such an important part of the public transport network would have been clearly indicated on a map such as this. People could be forgiven for mistaking this section as an extension of the heavy rail network, as it once was, if it is not referenced as something else.

The university campus at Callaghan is clearly shown, but there is no mention of the new campus that is being built at Civic, quite an oversight particularly when this new campus is mentioned on Page 23.

I also notice that regarding the Woodville triangle linking Broadmeadow, Hamilton and Waratah stations, the 3rd section, allowing travel directly between Broadmeadow and Waratah stations, without the need to travel to Hamilton is missing. This is a very historic section of line which contains a lot of heritage buildings, and it is a bit worrying to see it omitted from a plan such as this. Was this just an error of omission on the part of the person who drew up this plan?

Northern Lake Macquarie District

ACTION 3.1.1

The NSW Government will:

• improve public transport efficiency by protecting the capacity of corridors linking northern Lake Macquarie's existing urban centres to strategic centres across Hunter City including:

- the Pacific Highway between Swansea and Newcastle;*
- Lakes Road between Toronto and Glendale; and*
- cross-lake connections, particularly between Belmont and Speers Point.*

To begin with, there is a spelling mistake in the 2nd bullet point above – it is Lake Road, not Lakes Road.

I am at a complete loss to understand what is meant by the “cross-lake connections” reference in the 3rd bullet point – Belmont and Speers Point are essentially on the same side of the lake! To me a cross-lake connection would refer to a bridge or ferry and it is in no way viable to use either of these means to link these 2 suburbs. This nonsensical statement has obviously been put together by someone who has no understanding of the geography of the Newcastle area. The section of road between Croudace Bay and the Lions Park at Warners Bay, known as the “Eleebana bends”, could certainly do with some upgrading, or even bypassing, but this has nothing to do with a “cross-lake” connection.

In summary, this whole document is an insult to the people of Newcastle, and appears to have been compiled by people with very little or no understanding of the geography, culture or heritage of the Newcastle area. While this plan does put forward a small number of good suggestions, many of which have already been put in place by the various local governments, on the whole it contains many omissions, errors and simply ideas that would not work. It is full of warm, fuzzy “motherhood statements”, and, as seems to be the norm for any Sydney generated “visions” about Newcastle lately, is totally lacking in detail.

I was dismayed after the Newcastle earthquake in 1989 to witness the destruction of so many heritage buildings, the George Hotel is an excellent example, partly through extensive damage but largely by uncaring property owners and government departments.

I fear we are now seeing another “earthquake” happening in Newcastle with the resultant destruction and loss of history and heritage on a huge scale, again by uncaring developers and government departments. Any Draft Plan for the Greater Newcastle area must include sensitive preservation and utilisation of Newcastle's precious heritage, but heritage does not seem to feature in this plan. This needs to be addressed.

Vicki Lindsay