
Subject:

FW: SOR SUBMISSION TO HUNTER REGIONAL PLAN 2016 (V2).doc

Attachments:

SOR SUBMISSION TO HUNTER REGIONAL PLAN 2016 (V2).doc

SUBMISSION TO HUNTER REGIONAL PLAN 2016

To Planning and the Environment,
The Parliamentary Secretary for the Hunter,
Scot MacDonald MLC

Attached is a submission on behalf of SAVE OUR RAIL NSW INC.

This group has prepared various proposals for improvement of transport previously, based on community surveys of the needs of the community of Newcastle and the Hunter Region. This submission is a response to the draft documents of planning for the Hunter Region and the draft proposal for a Hunter City.

Even though the time frame was extended, we would have been able to prepare a much more in-depth analysis of the draft documents and a fuller response if there had been more time. We do not feel that the Save Our Rail submission has been adequate because of the lack of time to properly assess the situation. It is a response rather than a fully researched document of the calibre of our previous proposals. We would welcome the opportunity to add further and undertake more rigorous examination of the issues before any decision is made regarding the draft documents, which if implemented will affect all residents of the Hunter Region.

Any planning of this magnitude requires a period of at least 12 months to allow for adequate data collection as to the community's changing needs and expectations.

For due processes to have occurred there needed to have been public meetings and workshops involving all of the communities affected, with adequate time for advertising of these to ensure attendance of all stakeholder groups and residents as well as surveys using credible methodology and data collection with presentation of evidence before decisions are made.

We do not feel this has been undertaken with sufficient attention to the seriousness of the changes and directions being put forward.

Please consider the matters covered in this submission and also the need for further community involvement.

Yours sincerely,

President, Save Our Rail Inc.
P.O.Box 212
ISLINGTON NSW 2296



Save Our Rail NSW Inc
PO Box 212
Islington 2296 NSW

saveourrail.org.au

SUBMISSION TO DRAFT HUNTER REGIONAL PLAN

INTRODUCTION AND GENERAL COMMENT

The previous Regional Strategy had a major fault in that it placed an arbitrary division across the Hunter River and planned only for the part that fell into the “Lower Hunter” section. This made no sense because of the natural boundary and connectedness defined by the Hunter River, with transport and industry links that continue to exist despite a line drawn on a map.

It is therefore to the planning department’s credit that this draft plan encompasses the entire Hunter Region.

HUNTER CITY

With regard to the notion of a Hunter City, it is problematic as to how the three existing cities would view this concept in consideration of the way these have developed. The conurbation of Newcastle/Lake Macquarie has been linked from the outset arising from a convict outpost. The Newcastle port, shipping and the ship-building industry arose because of its position at the mouth of the Hunter River. This port became crucial when the massive coal mining industry took over in the Hunter Region and the coal transport continues to dominate to the present day. Later for the same geographical reason the steel-making industry became the focus with BHP establishing itself on the harbour adjacent to the port facilities. The city spread naturally toward the very large lake nearby and along the coast. With only a street separating them on maps the twin cities have commonly been referred to as “Newcastle” despite Lake Macquarie becoming a city in its own right.

Maitland however has had a totally separate development and identity. It has a distinct proud history, reflected in its heritage buildings and long known as a centre of agriculture, with river transport being crucial. Maitland city pre-dates the rising of Newcastle as a city and was recognised as the second city in NSW in 19th century writings.

It is difficult to conceive of Lake Macquarie , Newcastle or Maitland wanting to relinquish the name of their city, for “Hunter.” Proposals to merge councils have met with resistance and this mega city proposal is likely to be rejected.

Save Our Rail makes the observation that it takes more than financial success to make a city; it takes people and the super city proposal will cause some disquiet and be rejected by the people of the existing cities. There is no logic in clumping three cities together without adequate transport or evidence of common purpose.

TRANSPORT

The Save Our Rail community organisation has been concerned with the provision of public transport over a period of more than twenty years. The name, Save Our Rail does not fully reflect the group’s interest in and proposals for the retention of, promotion of and planning for provision of **all** forms of public transport, not just rail.

This submission will focus on Transport, which is almost completely lacking in the draft planning document. It is a crucial element in planning and has huge implications for the success of cities. Internationally recognised planning and sustainability experts have published studies which conclude that rail is the most ecologically sustainable mode of transport provision.

Professor Peter Newman (from Curtin University, Perth) visited Newcastle various times and spoke against the cutting of the heavy rail line, providing a comparative table which indicated the huge advantage of heavy rail as a connection between cities, far outweighing light rail or bus transport for efficiency and capacity.

It must be emphasised that there are two types of transport needed for Newcastle:

- 1. The transport of people within the city area which can be achieved by bus or light rail. These need to be provided more adequately than current provision and current proposals.**
- 2. Intercity transport mode which has the capability for the long haul –**
 - a) between Newcastle and Sydney,**
 - b) between Newcastle and the Hunter Regional communities**
 - c) Between Newcastle and other centres – e.g. Tamworth and Taree**

*The proposal to replace the truncated section of the Newcastle Rail Line with “light rail” will not serve the above need as it has neither the capacity nor the capability.

GENERAL COMMENT RE DRAFT PLAN’S TRANSPORT SECTION

The authors of the draft plan do not seem to have begun with an initial survey of the communities as to the transport NEEDS of the area, on which to base their objectives.

Save Our Rail conducted work-shops and a major survey prior to writing major submissions on behalf of the community. The transport workshops collected the views of over 400 attendees. The survey on a) the reason for using train to access Newcastle CBD, b) the reason for choosing to travel by train rather than an alternative mode of transport gathered written responses of 2,300 people.

TRANSPORT NEEDS IDENTIFIED

The following needs were most frequently identified at the SOR transport workshops:

- Retain rail to Newcastle Station
 - *Save Our Rail suggests that the need for direct transport still exists and as this was by far the most common need expressed at the workshops, the Planning Department needs to heed the suggestions in this submission for provision of direct intercity transport to Newcastle Station area and the beach.*
- Reduce the trip time between Newcastle and Sydney
- Greater frequency of all public transport services
- Provide at least one night running train on both Hunter Lines. (Last train to Dungog 5.30 p.m. Last train to Scone 5.45 p.m. This forces many to drive cars, otherwise they cannot get home from night lectures, meetings, entertainment etc.)
- Lack of consultation – transport not meeting needs, (e.g. Airport) system imposing decisions – e.g. timetable changes
- Bus provision – need some direct express services, some “meandering.”

**There were many other expressed concerns, including needs of disabled, need for continued access to the beach from inland towns, some places have no public transport, concern re environment (excessive car use), transport not when & where needed, improve integration, Park and Ride facilities, freight by-pass, luggage & bike spaces on trains, promotion of public transport.*

SURVEY RE TRAINS

- Reason for using train to Newcastle: 1. Commuter trips (27%); 2. Medical & specialists (19%) ; 3. Beach & social (each 15%)
- Reason for choosing train mode: 1. Convenience (42%) 2. Mobility issues (19%) 3. No car (17%) others – parking/traffic, safety & security, prams & bikes, ferry connection, petrol cost.

In the context of this community consultation Save Our Rail will advocate that these needs still exist and should be met in this planning as follows:

i) To meet the need for retention of rail to Newcastle the following suggestions are made:

PROVISION OF DIRECT INTERCITY RAIL TO NEWCASTLE STATION PRECINCT

“Sky Train” and underground rail combination

The heavy rail line is proposed to terminate at Wickham, however this has been in order to free up the valuable rail land East of Wickham for development. Save Our Rail believes the most effective use of the corridor land is for transport. We oppose the development of large buildings in that situation and we express concern over the heritage value of existing buildings. None of these historic buildings should be removed.

Save Our Rail previously supported extensions to the heavy rail system using light rail as outlined in the 2010 Westrans document. This provided greater frequency of service and used an existing but unused corridor to Glendale via the Callaghan Campus of the University of Newcastle.

This would extend transport to parts of Newcastle/Lake Macquarie that are poorly serviced. The proposals in Westrans link many educational facilities to advantage. (Details available on website: saveourrail.org.au)

“SKY TRAIN”

This would be similar to the raised rail line in Vancouver and also similar to a very much longer section being built in North Western Sydney.

The space under the “sky train” can be used and provide an ongoing stream of revenue for future improvements. Uses can include retail outlets, storage spaces for hire or car parking spaces.

The rail can proceed direct (no need for forced interchange) from the existing heavy rail at Wickham Station and use air space above the existing corridor to Civic Station.

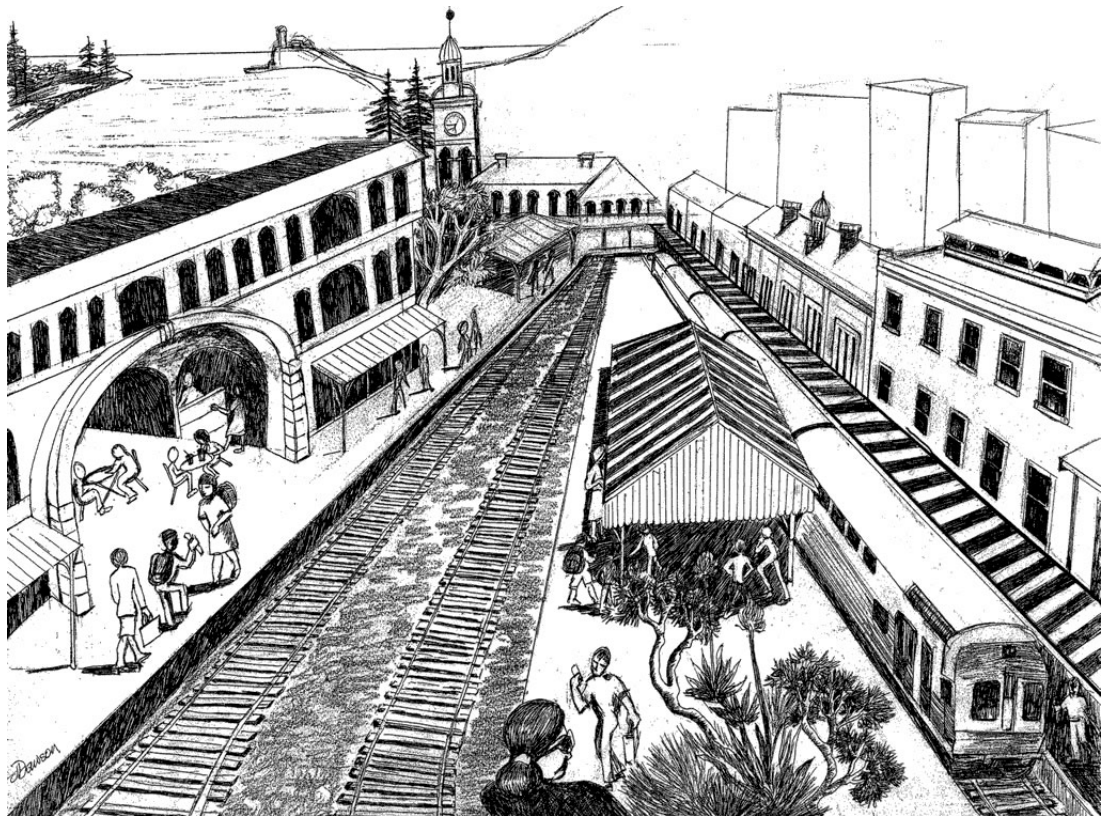
An imaginative integration of the line would be to incorporate it into buildings, as has been done in Charlotte, North Carolina, USA.

From Civic Station it is proposed to continue the rail line underground to Newcastle Station. Many cities have put in underground facilities which allow full use of the land above. Why not Newcastle, as a fitting compensation for the privatisation of the Port?

Newcastle Station

This fine old building needs a special intervention as the heritage and historical value of this building demand that it should be preserved and used as an asset for the city.

The station could be underground as in Auckland’s Britomart, and the upper sections fully utilised. The desire for development could be satisfied by building a sympathetic building to the north of the existing station building.



SOR concept drawing as earlier proposed, showing sympathetic building with car park underneath

The need for development in Newcastle should not be a reason to reduce the direct transport to the CBD and eastern part of the city, to the beaches and for access to Stockton Ferry.

ii) *Reduce the trip time between Newcastle and Sydney*

It is quite absurd that current travel time between Newcastle and Sydney, the two most important cities in NSW is slower than in the days of steam trains and the “Newcastle Flyer.”

This is a situation that could have and should have been attended to years ago. The technology is available on current trains to improve the trip time and the following measures could be employed:

- a) Cease the timetabling which allows an express train from one city to another to stop at various smaller centres. It should leave Newcastle, stop at Hamilton and Broadmeadow then go direct to Hornsby, Strathfield and Central. It is ridiculous to have Epping and Eastwood stops, as these communities have plenty of trains they can catch to access Sydney Central, as do Gosford and Wyong and all places in between. Commuters from Newcastle to Sydney need a much faster service and if provided many more would choose the train over the car. The advantage aside from the cost, is the ability to read or do work on the train, which cannot be done while driving down the freeway.
- b) Remove the bends in the line- the Booragul loop is a case in point. The map clearly shows a deviation that is quite unnecessary.
- c) Stop the practice of slowing the train to fit the schedule, which is geared against the Newcastle train service. Currently the “fast” train crawls into Hornsby, reduces speed in various places, crawls again into Epping and Strathfield and always seems to be held

up at Redfern. Some other trains service always seem to have priority over this one. The trains I believe have the capability to do the speeds, but are being retarded because of timetables.

- d) Install wi-fi facilities and add a dining car – at least coffee/ breakfast. This would add to patronage immensely and facilitate commuters' needs.

iii) Greater frequency on all public transport services.

Transport in overseas cities is greatly superior to the NSW experience and it has a lot to do with the frequency. If you are in Moscow, Paris or Los Angeles you won't be standing around wasting time before you can get onto a train, bus or trolley bus. If you just miss one it doesn't matter, in a few minutes there is another. That is why they are successful and well patronised.

This is a major problem, a cause for huge frustration and needs to be seriously addressed if NSW is to run an efficient system. It is not a matter of whether it can be afforded. Public transport's value cannot be counted by the fare returns – its value lies in the advantage it brings to cities by reducing car use, traffic snarls and pollution as well as value adding to real estate. The "user pays" principle is irrelevant in this equation. Good planning of the state must look at public transport as an asset which is calculated in terms of community advantage.

One way improved frequency could be gained for the outer Hunter communities would be to extend the commuter train services from Newcastle to Taree and Tamworth. This would provide additional services to the intermediate communities. The Taree services would benefit Gloucester and Dungog while an extension of regular trains to Tamworth could provide additional stops to Scone, Muswellbrook and Singleton. This would be a forward thinking project, which could advantage Newcastle as well as the other cities being brought into the Hunter loop.

The Stockton ferry service has better frequency than the trains and buses, but ceases to run at night and has a reduced week-end service, with very late start on Sundays.

Weekend services.

It is an archaic principle that reduces all public transport to virtually nil on week-ends, in Newcastle and Hunter towns. This is a time when many people still need these services and it reduces the ability of this city to provide for visitors and residents.

Tourism is greatly needed as one of the industries being advocated following the closure of BHP. Shops are open, restaurants want people to eat out and communities want tourists to visit their art galleries and other attractions on the week-end. There should be a seven day timetable for all public transport.

iv) Night trains to Hunter Lines.

There is a problem in being able to use the trains if you live in the Hunter Valley beyond Maitland. Workers who do not finish until 5.00 p.m. and whose workplace is not right at Hamilton cannot be guaranteed to catch the last train at 5.30 p.m. or 5.45 p.m. As it is the last service they could be stranded overnight, so cannot take the risk. Therefore a great number of people who work or have commitments in Newcastle are being forced to drive both ways when they would prefer to use the train, which is safer and less polluting. This applies to students, who often have evening lectures, at TAFE or University. It prevents people from the region enjoying cultural events in Newcastle, their major city. It

stops the young people from accessing the harbourside venues and prevents attendance at community meetings if they are held in the evening (when working people can attend.) Both the Scone service and the Dungog service are affected in this way. Both have a very early train which travels up virtually empty to begin the morning commuter service. It surely would make more sense to have a late night train which then is stabled overnight at both destinations, ready for return in the morning.

vi) Lack of consultation, transport not meeting needs, system imposing decisions.

There has been a distinct lack of true consultation in planning in Newcastle and the Hunter Region. Decisions have been imposed on communities, with token “consultation” after the changes. The recent train timetables are an example of this. Submissions were put in but ignored. Even business ventures of a mini tourism nature were adversely affected and many people disadvantaged by the timetable changes.

The Parliamentary Inquiry into planning decisions in the Hunter Region revealed many examples of improper procedures, lack of transparency and resultant poor planning decisions. Save Our Rail cannot make any proposals about this item other than to point out that the election results in the Hunter Region were a reflection of disaffection over the lack of due process.

vi) Bus provision – need for direct express services and some “meandering.”

The bus system in Newcastle and Lake Macquarie is pathetic. All buses run “round the moon” taking hours to cover a distance that can usually be covered in 20 minutes by car. That is why buses are only used by those who are unable to drive or have no car. There needs to be a mix of commuter express buses that actually take a direct fast route, while still allowing for the “meandering” services at off peak times for less mobile passengers who need a collection point closer to their homes.

SPECIFIC COMMENTS RE DRAFT PLAN

Freight

- I query the role of Newcastle Airport in the movement of freight. This would have to be a secondary use surely. The need to efficiently bring people to Newcastle should be a priority – the city has been crippled by the removal of its direct long distance train services. This is what is needed most – a replacement for these services that are lost.
- A Freight rail by-pass has been supported by Save Our Rail, with a suggestion that this connect Thornton to Morisset.

Roads

The road infrastructure is important, however there should be more emphasis on providing public transport, especially train services. It has been proved that a new road expressway only relieves traffic congestion for a short period, because of the increase in cars using it. The only way to effectively deal with transport needs is to provide adequate mass transit systems such as rail. The notion that they should have to make a profit through fare gathering is nonsense. The major benefit to a city comes through the relief of having fewer cars entering the city. This reduces pollution, saves on road maintenance as well as on the cost of car- parking provision and encourages people to come – revitalising the city.

Prof. Newman said “Strong rail cities are more wealthy.” His influence has been the reason for Perth’s successful planning and the expanding rail networks that bring people into that city.

Global Transport Gateways

This sounds fine except that the point is missed, when you only mention coal, agriculture and cruise ships. The trains that connected Newcastle to Sydney were bringing thousands to Newcastle. The direct link is required to be restored. Newcastle was in the top 10 in the backpackers' guide, "The Lonely Planet" in 2011. The reason was obvious: it was easy to reach with direct train service from Sydney (Australia's gateway) and it offered splendid beaches right near the rail line. Newcastle needs this type of tourism as well as cruise ships. Cruise operators tend to take tourists on trips away from the berth city. The money doesn't always come to the city. Ships look spectacular but the constant flow of visitors on trains could be a more certain injection of life to the city.

Journey to work

The acknowledgement that Newcastle "has a significantly greater reliance on cars travel than other major cities in Australia" is interesting. Save Our Rail has suggested various proposals to assist in overcoming this trend. The word "integration" is being used but over past decades no actual sensible planning has been done, instead the most used and most valuable public transport asset has been cut off, leaving many commuters no choice than to use their cars. The planned "light rail" will not overcome this loss, as it cannot link with other cities and communities; it lacks the capability for the long haul.

It is tragic that major projects – the University city campus and new court complex have been undertaken while at the same time the mass transport option to both has been removed. This needs to be addressed in any future planning.

CONCLUSION

It is difficult to take this planning document seriously as it has not done even basic research in determining the needs of Newcastle, a major city, and the surrounding regional communities.

There are clear errors in statements and even a map with a glaring error showing the existing rail line to Dungog not going through Maitland! Who drew this fictional representation?

Please consider the proposal for re-instating direct train services to Newcastle. This proposal does not oppose a light rail system, but advocates that such expenditure should provide a much more extensive system to areas that need transport, not just a short run down Hunter Street.

The suggestions of a "Sky Train" and underground combination would allow the "connectivity" claimed to be so important though observations indicate very few people using the "temporary crossings."

As in other cities there are ways of freeing up land for development without sacrificing much needed public transport infrastructure. In Newcastle that has resulted in a cost in terms of lost patronage – more than 50% loss since the rail services were terminated at Hamilton. As well the additional car usage is causing considerable traffic congestion. The queues at Stewart Avenue are observed to be worse than when the trains were running, with traffic regularly banked up to the Carrington roundabout.

I hope you will consider seriously the points made in this submission and take appropriate action.

Save Our Rail NSW Inc.