



# Hunter Environment Lobby Inc.

PO Box 188  
East Maitland 2323  
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Department of Planning and Environment Level 2  
26 Honeysuckle Drive Newcastle 2300

## **Draft Greater Newcastle Metropolitan Plan**

Hunter Environment Lobby Inc. (HEL) is a regional community-based environmental organization that has been active for well over 20 years on the issues of environmental degradation, species and habitat loss, and climate change.

HEL has submitted comments to all major planning developments within the Greater Hunter Region for much of the last 20 years, have put in submissions on Draft Environment Plans and we have attended and submitted at Planning Assessment Commissions regularly.

Land Use Planning is important to ensure best practice outcomes for our local communities as well as the environment, however it is vital to use well founded strategies that have a clear results oriented base, that is sustainable environmentally, socially and economically.

We welcome the NSW Government's initiative in preparing a Greater Newcastle Metropolitan Plan, and recognising the status of Australia's seventh largest urban area. Indeed it is the second largest urban area in NSW, and the connectivities between Sydney and the Hunter are part of our priority in submitting to this Draft Plan.

It is the connectivity that we see through rail connection that interests us especially, for that is the transport that is most sustainable by way of Greenhouse Gas reduction. In other words, the better the rail connectivity and freight and passengers moved by rail, the greater the savings in fossil fuel pollution, and the greater the environment fares.

We find that even though the need has been recognised for a metropolitan plan, it is quite hazy to us what the purpose of this plan actually is. We find even the exact area that the plan applies to remains uncertain, similarly the relationship between planning for Newcastle and for the Greater Sydney Metropolitan Area is not clear.

The Draft Greater Newcastle Metropolitan Plan on exhibition is a mishmash of fuzzy ideas, not easily understandable delineations and an apparent lack of commitment. We had a deal of trouble seeing any real flow of ideas.

We wonder if there is missing data or any analysis justifying how the area currently operates? Similarly we need to know the future challenges we can expect to confront us, the proposed improvements that are needed, and how there needs be clear priorities set out?

We will attempt to make some sense of the document and hone down the content as we see it:-

There seems to be Ten 'catalyst areas' identified that are supposed to drive regional -growth and transformation by creating jobs – the rationale of this process is not spelt out?

'Collaborative governance' – seems to be a critical element of the plan, is largely the responsibility of a development authority that has no legislative responsibilities nor capabilities to carry out this role? We are not sure what this means?

Thirteen 'strategic centres' are identified only five of which have good transport links? Only seven of these align with 'catalyst areas', confusing?

Four 'urban renewal corridors' are identified, based around existing roads and renamed 'priority multimodal corridors' without definition or explanation. Only three of these align with 'strategic centres';

When we examine the 'priority housing release areas' identified, we see that none is aligned or closely linked with a 'strategic centre' or 'catalyst area' or a proposed transport link. This is confusing, foolish and downright bad planning;

Freight and transport improvements identified in the plan are not clear and seem meaningless, they do not reflect actual transport patterns, and do not even consider links to eight of the 'strategic centres'?

Government agencies and local governments are encouraged to 'align' their plans, but without any responsibility or program, we do not understand this ad hoc form of request, and would see Local Councils having similar problems?

There does not seem to any clear strategic thinking in any of the above suggestions. We see also that the plan ignores significant and inevitable challenges or shortcomings facing the area including:

Demographic changes such as population ageing and sea level rise will significantly alter the needs of all communities, and especially those around lakes, seas and waterways;

Renewal of ageing infrastructure requirements such as roads, water and sewer, electricity transmission, and telecommunications;

Rapidly increasing traffic congestion brought on by increased densities of housing and inadequate public transport;

Increasing community health costs will rise steadily and this is linked to inactive living;

A transition to zero carbon emissions is needed at all scales;

The continuing loss of regional biodiversity, and natural ecosystems that support the quality of life locally and regionally will result in decreased ecosystem values, that is in air quality, water quality and social amenity.

HEL sees that the issues above need to be addressed in an effective strategic land use plan. We are disappointed that the Draft Greater Newcastle Metropolitan Plan seems to indicate that it will not address what we see as the major challenges identified above, even worse, is likely to exacerbate existing problems. In particular, it strongly reinforces Newcastle and Lower Hunter areas as a car based city, contrary to international trends that sees private car usage in cities has peaked.

The substance in the plan could have been presented much more succinctly and understandably. Jargon and statements are made that are inexplicable – there seems to be new buzz words invented in many areas – for no good reason.

We have found that maps are used extensively in the plan, but are particularly poorly presented and not well connected to each other, they often fail to show important features. They also do not show roads and railways consistently.

In particular, walking catchments around railway stations are hypothetical, not actual or potential (as an example, Metford Station can only be accessed from the south, and roads and pedestrian walkways limit access considerably), keys are inconsistent and many elements are not explained fully.

HEL feels that the first priority for the Greater Newcastle Metropolitan Plan should be to make sure that land use planning and long term transport connectivity are viewed together. The plan should include the following actions:

- Recognise in a major way that rail underpins the public transport system and must be given a high priority;

- Recognise that the Greater Newcastle Metropolitan Area should include destinations within 1 hour travel time of Newcastle, especially Singleton, Karuah, Nelson Bay and Anna Bay which are functionally part of the Metropolitan Area;

- Show railway lines and railway stations on all maps in the plan, especially those needed to be developed;

- Propose a new railway station between Metford and Victoria Street to service the new Maitland Hospital in the East Maitland Catalyst Area as well as redevelop the Oakhampton station to service the enormous growth in population in the Rutherford area;

- Investigate the Hunter LinkRail transport proposal, linking Glendale, Kurri-Kurri and Maitland along existing rail corridors, and protect this corridor through land use planning measures. This proposal was developed over 10 years ago by HEL to answer the many faceted challenges put to Planning NSW and Department of Transport to develop climate change proof rail connections;

- Include a map showing proposed long term public transport connectivity, including the alignment of a future east coast fast rail link, Glendale Interchange, bush priority routes, ferry links, links to Williamstown Airport, and a flood free Newcastle Freight Rail bypass, preferably along the proposed Hunter LinkRail alignment, included in this submission;

HEL maintains that the plan must also protect regional biodiversity areas as a priority. This is not given adequate recognition in the plan, and a specific strategy and related actions should be included in the section on Outcome 2 to achieve this. A key strategy should be to identify new conservation areas with high biodiversity values to be protected in public ownership within the plan area.

HEL feels finally that the Draft Greater Newcastle Metropolitan Plan represents a step forward in ensuring that land use planning governance is relevant for future challenges facing the area. Implementing the recommendations above in the final plan will contribute to the emergence of Newcastle as a dynamic, integrated and liveable metropolitan area.

It is not too late to reverse many of the bad planning decisions made recently, especially the final link area that is the Newcastle CBD. The shortsighted decision based on flimsy community consultation that resulted in the transport corridor in Newcastle being rezoned for high rise development can be made a priority in the interests of good strategic planning practice.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jan Davis', is positioned above the typed name.

Jan Davis  
President Hunter Environment Lobby Inc.