
Appendix B: Critical Appraisal of GPT Proposal

Appendix prepared by Save Our Rail NSW Inc. – January 2009

saveourrail.org.au

--: an appendix to :--

NEWCASTLE Towards a Sustainable and Vibrant City

A Proposal for CBD Integration

Prepared by Save Our Rail NSW Inc. – December 2008



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BACKGROUND

General Property Trust (GPT) has a proposal to construct a mixed use development centred on the Hunter Street Mall between Hunter and King Streets below the grounds of Christ Church Cathedral. The proposal would include retail outlets, a large residential component, parking and leisure facilities.

GPT has acquired properties to begin the process, with many now empty, adding to the considerable neglect within Newcastle CBD. GPT has lodged Development Applications with Newcastle City Council, including closure and partial closure of some roads.

In October 2008 GPT reignited debate about the future of the rail to Newcastle Station by seeking to cut the rail line back to Wickham. Additionally GPT sought the alteration of road patterns and bus routes and announced that it would seek Federal Government funding of \$165 million to implement the plan.

GPT gave an ultimatum to the state Government to make a decision to cut the Newcastle Rail Line by February 2009 or it would consider pulling out of the \$650 million plan.

The NSW Government, at the briefing on the Warabrook proposal in August 2008, announced that electric rail services would be retained to Newcastle and stated firmly “the issue regarding the Newcastle Rail Line will not be re-visited”.

SAVE OUR RAIL

Save Our Rail NSW Inc is comprised of volunteers acting on behalf of the community to retain and improve public transport. We have become the voice of those who most need the rail, many of whom do not have a strong voice. We will continue represent the community and to advocate for the importance of public transport provision for Newcastle, the Hunter Region and the Central Coast.

SUPPORT FOR SHOPPING CENTRE AND RESIDENTIAL PROPOSAL

Save Our Rail is not opposed to the GPT shopping and residential development around the Hunter Street Mall area and has factored it into an alternative proposal for the Newcastle CBD. The Save Our Rail alternative proposal addresses the perception that the rail line creates a barrier effect and provides solutions by improving access across the line, maintaining direct regional train access to Newcastle, while retaining the benefits of the heavy rail and the hard won existing infrastructure.

Save Our Rail advocates for improved access to Newcastle Station in the form of ramps at its western end which would lead directly to The Mall and the proposed GPT development, at Bolton and Newcomen Streets as well as the return of the pedestrian overpass recently removed.

Save Our Rail proposes a new station, Harbourlink Station with a pedestrian level crossing situated close to the western end of the Mall. This would connect the new shopping and residential precinct, not only to rail but also by providing easy foot passage to the foreshore area. The rail service with a new station would be an advantage to any shopping development, bringing customers from remote areas and from the nearby leisure strip while enhancing the travel and recreational prospects for new residents.

The GPT proposed shopping and residential development could be considered as a Transit Oriented Development (TOD) as defined by Prof Peter Newman,¹ because it is a major proposal, including a large residential component and because of its proximity to the Newcastle rail line. **For the proposal to be favourably considered as a TOD, however, the existing rail line and services must be retained and upgraded.**

Prof Newman stated:

*“Transit Oriented Development is building closely around rail stations where it is possible to add a significant premium on land values. Buses can’t do this because their flexibility does not give certainty, they are not able to carry as many people and they are noisy”.*²

*“The revival of rail across Australian cities will be an important phenomenon, but to make the most of it, it is essential that the projects cluster high-density developments around the stations”.*³

OPPOSITION TO TERMINATION OF RAIL AT WICKHAM

Save Our Rail is strongly opposed to the component in the GPT proposal which states that to achieve its aims for the Newcastle CBD the rail line must be cut, terminating the service at Wickham on the western edge of the CBD.

This was first made public at the Taskforce meeting on 13th October 2008 and subsequently published in the local press. GPT spokesperson, Phil Heaney, at the Hunter Business Chamber (HBC) forum on 24th November 2008, stated that “the rail must go because it is unsustainable.”

Save Our Rail sees this as counterproductive to GPT’s own proposal.

Our research indicates that rail is considered by world experts to be the most sustainable mass transit mode currently available, based on reduction of the ecological footprint. Trains cannot be matched by buses as they do not have an equivalent capacity and they produce more “greenhouse gas emissions.” They are therefore deemed to be less sustainable.

What GPT is proposing does not make sense. It would take out the most sustainable transport option for a far less sustainable substitute.

¹ Professor Peter Newman is currently professor of Sustainability at Curtin University, Perth. He was previously Director of the Institute for Sustainability and Technology at Murdoch University, Perth, and was for a time Sustainability Commissioner for the NSW Government

² P. Newman, “It’s Not Tunnel Vision, Rail Means Business,” *Newcastle Herald*, 20/04/05

³ P. Newman, “Perthlings Take Us to Your Railway System,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 06/01/09

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REASONS TO REJECT THE GPT PLAN FOR WICKHAM RAIL TERMINUS

Arguments for the total retention of the Newcastle Rail Line fall into three categories as follows:

- Economic
- Environmental
- Social and Heritage

1. ECONOMIC REASONS

Save Our Rail contends that the removal of the rail line would constitute an unnecessary Government cost and this amount of money spent to remove rather than to improve, would exceed the \$165 million being sought by the developers. This funding could be used to solve the North-South access problems, while retaining the valuable existing transport infrastructure for current and future development and growth needs.

It makes no sense to destroy what is already there and replace it with a less efficient and less sustainable transport option.

This would constitute a gross waste of public money.

(a) Costs of Line Removal

The cost of physically removing the rail line between Wickham and Newcastle Station and building a new terminus at Wickham would be considerable.

This was established in previous case studies:

- When the previous decision to cut the line to Broadmeadow was re-examined the Kellog Brown Root consultants stated that it would be more costly to remove it than to maintain it.⁴
- WorleyParsons, consultants, in their report on the recent Hunter Business Chamber, (HBC) Warabrook proposal, estimated the total cost of de-electrification to Newcastle and electrification to Warabrook with associated reconstruction at \$97 million. This proposal was considered unviable by the NSW Government.

Totally removing the line to Newcastle and creating a new terminus at Wickham as proposed by GPT would waste an existing asset, absorbing an estimated \$165 million of scarce funding for no benefit to the travelling public. Public transport is crying out for an injection of funds for improvement, not to destroy infrastructure that is needed for current and future use.

⁴ Kellog Brown Root, "Newcastle Transport Options Planning Study," NSW Government October 2003

(b) Other Costs

The cost of additional transport

The additional buses needed to carry the passengers who currently use this service is not included in these costings (7,000 per day entries & exits 4 stations Hamilton to Newcastle).⁵ An “average” figure of 14,000 disembarking from Civic and Newcastle each week according to a 2007 RailCorp study.

* Averages do not account for true needs and are irrelevant in determining transport need. The high point or peak time needs can be enormous while the “average” takes into account the lowest use. This reduces the apparent need and could result in transport disruption if the higher figure is not adequately provided for. An “average usage figure” has been used to reduce the apparent use of the rail to a ridiculously low figure. This is an unfair misuse of a statistic. Roads are not in full use at 4.00 am and there are no buses running at that time. Buses are often almost empty during the day. To reduce train use to the level of an average is misleading and to provide transport accordingly could cause a serious shortfall in peak times.

It is unclear if the RailCorp study included school students, whose travel passes are issued through schools. Hundreds of children use trains daily to attend public and private schools in Newcastle.

GPT expects the normal Hunter Street buses to transport the trainloads of passengers.

*“Existing Newcastle Buses services on Hunter Street were underused and could accommodate current rail passengers”*⁶ according to Nelson/Nygaard, consultants to GPT.

This is an unrealistic assessment of current train and bus use and does not take into account the following:

- **Capacity difference:** Train capacity: The 2 car Hunter Line diesel has a seating capacity of 136, the Endeavour trains, 177. On the Newcastle- Sydney line, a 2 car Newcastle Line K-set has seating capacity of 224 and an 8 car V-set, 832. Newcastle Buses are licensed to carry 59 passengers. If there is a full train load, even on one of the Hunter Line trains, at least three buses will be needed. A full train on the Newcastle Line could require 5 buses or an 8 car train load would need 14 buses. Who will provide the extra buses? How will people be able to be punctual with the buses queued up at the terminal and proceeding down Hunter Street in a Conga line?
- **This will be of particular concern at times when special events are being held,** such as New Years Eve, The Big day Out, Australia Day or Surfest. Additional buses would be needed and this will be a higher cost factor than providing extra trains.
- **The provision of a bus loop to access the proposed Wickham terminus** is estimated to add 53,000 km per annum and for the buses currently terminating at Newcastle to be returned to Wickham will add an estimated 650,000 km per annum. This will create an additional ongoing Government cost for transport.

⁵ LHTWG (Lower Hunter Transport Working Group) figures Nov. 2003

⁶ Michelle Harris, Transport reporter, *Newcastle Herald*, 25/10/08

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- **Operational cost of Newcastle Rail Line is quoted as \$4 million.** Half of this is terminus operational cost, which would continue at Wickham. This leaves a supposed “saving” of only of \$2 million. Based on these estimates of operating cost the GPT proposal at \$165 million would equal the cost of operating the existing line for the next 80 years.
- It was suggested that “normal” bus services could run more frequently in Hunter Street, “every 5 minutes”. **This would interfere with regional bus timetables** to cause them to fit the Hunter Street schedule e.g. University bus services have been arranged to arrive pre-lecture periods (a lot of work went into organising this in the recent bus review). The Redhead bus runs every hour – how will it be adjusted to fit the new Hunter Street schedule? The accommodation of buses every 5 minutes in Hunter Street would cause disruption to suburban bus timetables and possible loss of services.
- **The proposed additional loop,** not only adds to the trip time (which is already longer than the train trip time) but adds to the overall bus kilometre allowance, which will reduce the allowance for other suburban services.
- **Trains run at night.** If buses are to replace all rail services additional buses will be required for the night services. This will add to cost for their operation. As well, penalty rates will be needed for night drivers.
- **Loss of fares.** Peak time commuters are usually full fare paying passengers. The inconvenience of interchange on trains, or the prospect of crowded buses, could cause full fare paying passengers from the suburbs, to defect to cars. This loss of full fares, from both rail and bus services, would be a considerable loss of revenue for the NSW Government.

Apart from the monetary cost the loss of train services would come at a cost to the city and community in real terms, causing passenger inconvenience, lost patronage, loss of customers to inner city businesses, loss of tourist potential, the added congestion of more cars and buses, increased parking problems and diminishment of the regional capital role of Newcastle.

(c) Land Value Capture / Loss

Land value is increased through proximity to rail.

The valuation firm, Dupont Fagan, in 2000, advised the Honeysuckle Development Corporation CEO, Angus Dawson, **that property values would increase if the Newcastle CBD remained connected by rail, and that it would further increase if additional crossings were installed along the rail line.**⁷

This advice was deliberately misinterpreted in the LHTWG report according to Prof. Currie,⁸ who pointed out that the report took an opposite position to that in the valuation advice and did not acknowledge other factors influencing value. **Closing the Newcastle Line will cause property values to decrease.**

⁷ Dupont Fagan Valuers, Letter to Mr Angus Dawson, Honeysuckle Development Corporation, 20/10/2000 (obtained through Freedom of Information)

⁸ Prof Currie, “Decision to Close the Newcastle Branch Line – Independent Review of Transport Reports”, Monash University, Nov. 2005

‘Land value capture’ involves retaining a part of the increased value in land when it is rezoned for a use that yields a higher economic return, and hence value. NSW Government has a form of ‘land value capture’ which is the developer contributions for infrastructure.⁹ The WA Government used ‘land value capture.’ It invested \$70 million in the rail system and within 2 years had doubled this amount. **The possibility of such ‘Land value capture’ will be lost if the line is closed.**

(d) Business and CBD Viability

Commercial activity requires customers and workers.

The Newcastle CBD requires direct rail services to retain its viability.

Customers often prefer to travel by car, but many from outer areas will use public transport if it is convenient. This is especially so if parking is difficult, as in Newcastle. Workers usually prefer public transport if it can guarantee arrival time. Time equals money therefore punctuality is important for workers.

Rail provides certainty for commuters to Newcastle CBD, from Muswellbrook, Singleton, Dungog and the city of Maitland with the Hunter Line trains crowded at peak times. Lake Macquarie commuters comprise 30% of those coming in to Newcastle to work, many parking their cars at Wyee, Morisset and Fassifern as a Park and Ride situation.

If the Newcastle Line was closed at Wickham that certainty would no longer be there – there may not be a bus connection immediately available. (The bus supposed to connect with a particular arrival time may be full, or late.) Commuters are likely to revert to car use, to ensure arrival time and to avoid the stress and inconvenience of changing mode. Increased cars will cause traffic congestion. A decline in patronage is predicted to be considerable—30% resulted from closure of the Toronto Line. A survey of Maitland train commuters conducted by the Liberal Party found 50% would go by car if the line is cut at Wickham.¹⁰

Prof. Currie, in an independent review, suggested that if the line had been cut back to Broadmeadow the patronage loss would be more like 60% than the 38% predicted in the Transport Interchange Feasibility Study (TIDC).¹¹

Save Our Rail estimates at least a 20% patronage loss if the line is cut at Wickham.

It has been stated that any cut to the Newcastle Line would have severe impacts on regional services. The loss of patronage could create a situation where the whole system lost viability and could therefore cause the loss of services to the outer areas of the Hunter Valley and the Central Coast.

Maitland and Lake Macquarie commuters could lose services, which would affect the worker exchange between the three major Hunter cities.

⁹ DIPNR Website Fact Sheet 5 –“How will infrastructure be funded?” NSW Government

¹⁰ Juleanne Strachan, “Most Want To Keep Rail,” *Newcastle Herald* 5/11/08,

¹¹ Graham Currie, “Decision to Close Newcastle Branch Rail Line – Independent Review of Transport Reports,” Monash University, p.18, Nov 2005

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(e) Newcastle as Regional Capital

The Lower Hunter Regional Strategy recognises Newcastle as the major “Regional Centre”¹²

The Kellog Brown Root report, commissioned by the NSW Government¹³ stated:

...any removal of the heavy rail line towards Woodville Junction would mean that preservation of the CBD’s role as the regional centre would be compromised.

Prof. Graham Currie, in his independent review of the reports which had led to the 2005 decision to close the Newcastle line at Broadmeadow, stated:

...closure of the branch line will considerably reduce the rail travel market in the Hunter Region. The viability of the remaining passenger rail service will be reduced since effectively the “head” of the rail system will be removed from its body. ...the impact of the proposal on high quality sustainable public transport is negative. Increased car dependence and transport disadvantage will result for the people of the Hunter region.¹⁴

The NSW Government in its City Centre Plan for Newcastle stated:

The distinctive character of Newcastle City Centre will be developed to position it to attract new commercial sector investment and build on the assets it has. This will reinforce Newcastle’s position as the capital of the Hunter Region. Key actions include: Concentrating new development along the railway...¹⁵

The above quotations and others, from Government and independent transport and city planners indicate that cutting off Newcastle’s rail connection to the Hunter Regional areas would have a negative impact on the Hunter Valley and on its major city, Newcastle.

(f) Peak Oil

Oil supplies have reached their “peak” which means the availability of this resource for energy will diminish.

This has already been evident in the rise in cost of oil products, including petrol. It will become a more important factor in transport in the future. As people realise they can no longer afford to drive their cars to the extent they do now, public transport provision will become crucial, and the type of transport option will also be critical. The most appropriate form of transport will be the one that does not consume petrol or diesel, therefore the role of trains, in particular electric trains will be paramount. Newcastle has been fortunate in gaining an electric train service in 1984, which has been of great benefit to the city and region. To reduce this provision and suggest replacement of any part of it with buses is to ignore the reality of the depletion of oil reserves.

¹² Lower Hunter Regional Strategy. p.1. Department of Planning, NSW Government, 2006

¹³ Kellog Brown Root, “Newcastle Transport Options Planning Study,” NSW Government, 2005, p.8

¹⁴ Graham Currie, “Decision to Close the Newcastle Branch Rail Line, Independent Review of Transport Reports,” Monash University, Nov. 2005

¹⁵ City Centre Plan – Revitalising Newcastle, NSW Government, Planning Department, 2007

The cost of running the replacement buses and adding to the current metres travelled will inevitably increase in step with the increases in the price of diesel fuel.

This added cost will need to be addressed with diesel powered trains, but they have greater capacity than buses and can be justified more readily on that basis.

The predicted increase in private car use as previously mentioned, apart from being counter to the current advice from planning bodies which are calling for a reduction in car use, is also a negative in that the increased car use encouraged by closure of the rail line, would consume more of the scarce oil resource.

(g) Tourism

The tourist industry has become more important to Newcastle in recent years.

International Tourists

The train system is important to those arriving in Sydney. International backpackers look for places where direct train travel is available, and Newcastle within 2 ½ hours becomes a desirable destination.

Some of this tourist market would be lost if the trip is interrupted and involves a forced interchange at Wickham.

Steamfest

Maitland's Steamfest attracts thousands of tourists to the Hunter Region annually. There is an attraction for many in looking at and riding in steam trains from the past and this heritage interest translates into tourist dollars, not only for Maitland but for the neighbouring city of Newcastle. The race from Maitland Station to Newcastle Station involving steam trains and planes is a highlight of this event, which over several days, involves steam train trips between Maitland and Newcastle and to other stations in the region.

If Newcastle Station is cut off from rail this will never again be possible.

The Newcastle Flyer

All long-term Novocastrians have memories of the Newcastle Flyer which carried passengers efficiently between Newcastle and Sydney. The mighty steam trains were overtaken and replaced by the cleaner greener electric trains. Heritage events bring tourists to indulge in nostalgia and ride again in carriages pulled by the 3801 and other famous steam engines and to rekindle memories. In recent times we have seen the Newcastle Flyer re-badged as the "Gosford Flyer" and running to that city. This has upset train buffs, who hope for the return of the Newcastle Flyer, doing re-runs between Sydney and Newcastle, as special events.

Hopes of linking such events with other heritage facilities, the Newcastle Maritime Museum and the planned re-location of the Newcastle Museum and organising tourist "heritage train trips," will be dashed if the line is cut back to Wickham.

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2. ENVIRONMENTAL REASONS

Professor Peter Newman described sustainability as “reducing the ecological footprint, that is the effect we (humans) leave behind environmentally”.¹⁶

This has implications in our choices of travel, as the environment is affected by emissions from the machinery of transport. Prof Newman also stated that “Successful cities have less car use.”

Car usage is known to affect air quality. The implications of over use are in two layers:

- Deterioration of local air quality
- Global warming and greenhouse gas effects.

Every community has responsibilities in regard to what is allowed to be emitted into the air. The predicted reduction in train patronage if the rail line is cut due to an interrupted journey is balanced by an increase in car use. The increased bus kilometres caused by replacing the train service would create additional bus emissions of diesel fumes.

The NSW Government is committed to the Kyoto Protocols. Cutting the Newcastle rail service would, through increased car use and added bus mileage, be inconsistent with its Kyoto initiative.

In *Actions for Air*, a NSW Government 25 year plan to integrate air quality goals and transport planning, the stated aim is *to reduce Vehicle Kilometres Travelled (VKT) and to make reduction of VKT a planning priority across government.*¹⁷

Any reduction of rail infrastructure goes against this policy.

Save Our Rail has been for several years, a member of a coalition of 25 environmental groups, Environment and Community Coalition of Hunter Organisations (ECCHO), which worked with local planners, towards the Lower Hunter Regional Strategy. In the ECCHO submission to the strategy there are statements regarding the sustainability of rail as a transport option and the demand that: *all new developments be no more than one kilometre from rail, that all existing rail services be retained and that rail infrastructure not currently in use be brought back into service.*

This large coalition of Hunter community groups, with a focus on the environment, has recognised the importance of rail transport in planning for the future and has advocated against any reduction in current services.

¹⁶ Peter Newman, address to UDIA (Urban Development Institute of Australia), Warners Bay NSW, 28/07/04

¹⁷ Kellogg Brown Root, *Newcastle Transport Options Planning Study*, NSW Government, Oct. 2005

3. SOCIAL REASONS

The provision of rail transport is a social issue.

Passengers who most use and need rail transport are often in the less wealthy section of the community. Those who would be most affected by the loss of this service whose lives would be disrupted and who could suffer real adversity are the less mobile who would be inconvenienced with a mode change during their journey. They include:

- Physically disabled passengers, who would have difficulty moving from train to bus. People with lung or spinal conditions are often unable to travel by bus as the jerky movement causes intolerable pain. Trains, on their smooth rails do not create this problem as they have only lateral movement.
 - Parents with young children using prams and other equipment will find difficulty in dealing with a transfer.
 - Elderly passengers often cannot move quickly and may have difficulty in boarding buses, and competing for places in them. Projections are that 26% of Hunter population will be aged over 65 by 2021.¹⁸ Many of the elderly will no longer be able to drive so will rely on public transport, the preferred option being train according to the 2005 Save Our Rail survey.
 - Passengers with bulky luggage, including backpackers, will have difficulty and may avoid this situation by choosing a different destination.
 - Cyclists are able to take their bikes on trains and surfers can carry boards. Often these items are refused on buses. Many surfers come from as far away as Muswellbrook to access the beach at Newcastle.
 - Blind passengers cannot travel on buses. Using only the sense of hearing they cannot distinguish between buses and trucks and have difficulty judging the distance – the number of steps to board the vehicle. Trains are used by blind people because announcements confirm when the train is coming, there is a constant distance between platform and train and announcements tell them when to alight.
- * The NSW Government could breach DDA (Disability Discrimination Act) guidelines if the Newcastle Rail line is cut because some groups of passengers would be denied access to the form of transport they can use independently.

¹⁸ Lisa Barritt-Eyles, "Alzheimer's to Increase", Newcastle Herald, 01/11/2008

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4. HERITAGE REASONS

There are a number of identified heritage items along the Newcastle Rail Line.

The Newcastle Rail Line

“The National Trust regards the existing rail corridor and its tracks as a heritage item in its own right.”¹⁹ The railway line was established in Newcastle in 1857 and is probably Australia’s oldest section of line in its original location and with some original brick culverts and infrastructure. This sort of heritage item must be protected and its importance should be actively identified. Steps should be taken to maintain it and highlight its importance in the same way as other heritage items such as the Convict Lumber Yard are promoted and celebrated by the Newcastle community.

Newcastle Station

Newcastle Station is a state significant working station designed by John Whitton. It was designed as one of the state’s most prestigious stations and as one of the few terminus stations. It has social, technical and historic significance at a high level.

The Newcastle Line and the Historic Newcastle Station must be preserved and restored as part of this city’s store of heritage treasures. The most effective method of preserving a building is through continued use in the purpose for which it was intended.

Closing the rail line as proposed by GPT and putting this fine example of Victorian railway architecture, Newcastle Station, to an alternative use would cause community concern at the prospect of the possible destruction of another Newcastle icon.

¹⁹ National Trust of Australia , statement by Chair Hunter Regional Committee, Submission to NSW Government, 2005

5. COMMUNITY CONCERN

The community has demonstrated its concern and disapproval over previous proposals to cut the Newcastle Rail Line at any intermediate station including plans to terminate at Civic, Woodville Junction and Broadmeadow. Community opposition and concern continue with regard to the Wickham proposal.

This has been evidenced in written support, donations and attendance at various gatherings organised by Save Our Rail over the past four years, including:

- The gathering of 3,169 signatures on Australia Day, 2005, when Newcastle Station was draped with ribbons by rail supporters.
- The attendance of about 850 and motions sent to the Minister for Transport from the Save Our Rail public meeting at the Newcastle Town Hall. (19/03/05)
- Approximately 500 rail supporters marched in the 2005 May Day march, with many unionists marching behind the Save Our Rail banner.
- 2,300 postcards were handed to the Minister for Transport in a suitcase along with a statistical analysis of this broadly representative sample.
- Thousands of signatures on petitions have been presented to Parliament urging retention of the line.
- Hundreds of letters from individuals were sent to the Premier and the Minister for Transport and this is ongoing.
- Written support and donations have come from many community groups, in the previous and present threat to the line, including: The Combined Pensioners and Superannuants Association of NSW (CPSA) Various Pensioner groups – Newcastle Combined Pensioners’ Area Council, Dudley Combined Pensioners & Senior Citizens, Islington-Hamilton Combined Pensioners, Beresfield Senior Citizens & Pensioners Association, Swansea Combined Pensioners, Newcastle Cycleways Movement, Parks and Playground Movement Inc, Newcastle University Students Association (NUSA), Citizens And Kooragang Alliance (CAKA), Hunter Commuter Council, Newcastle Heritage Council, The Hamilton Community Association, Newcastle East Residents Group, The Filipino Australian Society, Hunter Blind and Visually Impaired Social and Support Group, The National Trust (Hunter), Environment and Community Coalition of Hunter Organisations (ECCHO), Newcastle Teachers’ Association, Lake Macquarie Teachers’ Association, TAFE Teachers’ Association, The NSW Shires Association, The NSW Teachers’ Federation, Several Newcastle Council organised Forums – Stockton, Throsby, Shortland-Birmingham Gardens, National Seniors Association (Westlakes), The Wilderness Society, Older Womens’ Network (Wyong & Newcastle), Union of Australian Women, Our Town Model Show.
- Motions have come from various ALP branches, Newcastle SEC and Lake Macquarie SEC. ALP Conference has demanded that rail services to Newcastle be maintained. Support has come from other political parties – The Greens, The Liberal Party, The Socialist Alliance and the Progressive Labor Party.

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- Motions from Lower Hunter Councils, including Newcastle, Lake Macquarie, Cessnock, Muswellbrook and Singleton. Maitland Council has reaffirmed its support for rail retention, Dec 2008.
- Surveys of public opinion have been positive for rail. In 2005 the NBN survey resulted in 75% opposition to cutting the Newcastle rail line. The 2008 NBN poll registered 65% support for retention of the rail, a poll of small business owners resulted in 61% support for rail and the *Newcastle Herald's* 2008 poll resulted in 65% favouring rail retention. A survey of Hunter Liberals gave 89% support for retention of the rail.

* N.B. Save Our Rail does not accept online polls as being a reliable form of measurement of opinion as they can be manipulated.
- The Save Our Rail public meeting of 400 people, on 13th December 2008, during Christmas preparations, was an indication of a high level of support. The motion from this meeting called on the Government to adhere to its policy of retention of direct rail services to Newcastle, and to refuse to yield to developer demands.
- Letters to the Editor in support of rail retention published in *The Star, Newcastle Herald, and Maitland Mercury* have far outnumbered those against.

This broad community support continues and reassures Save Our Rail that there has not been a shift in opinion on the need for the direct rail service to Newcastle.

CONCLUSION

Save Our Rail is not opposed to positive development in Newcastle and would welcome a Transit Oriented Development as defined by Prof Peter Newman, which incorporated rail into it and offered improvements to transport which in turn would enhance property values.

The General Property Trust proposal in its present form, requiring the Newcastle Rail Line to terminate at Wickham, is not accepted by Save Our Rail as a Transit Oriented Development (TOD) therefore the Government is advised by this community group to reject the proposal and adopt instead one that reflects the needs of the community and supports Government initiatives on climate change and sustainability.

Save Our Rail accepts advice that rail is the most sustainable of transport options currently available and therefore rejects any proposal to replace rail with buses.

Save Our Rail NSW Inc as a community organisation has responded to public opinion through workshops and surveys of passengers. As the voice of those who need trains and who may not have a strong voice we say:

“SAVE OUR RAIL” and “IMPROVE NOT REMOVE”
