

The arguments for cutting Newcastle's train service...

...and why they're wrong.

'The Newcastle City line doesn't carry enough people to be worth it.'

- The line carries about 7,000 riders per day. **Train use is growing.**
- **We need to think of the future.** A congestion-free regional train service will be more valuable in future as population and traffic congestion increase.
- The line carries more people than a number of other Cityrail services which are not under threat. Why pick on Newcastle?

'That's not a fair comparison. In Newcastle there's also the 'railway barrier' between the city and the harbour. And delays at level crossings. That's the real problem.'

- Yes, it is a problem. So let's think of constructive solutions that consider all options.
- **The 'railway barrier' can be greatly reduced** by removing fences and sidings, building more ground level crossings, and related civic improvements around the line.
- **Delays to motorists at level crossings can be cut by at least two thirds** by simple changes to train operating procedures to reduce closed time.
- **There is no need to cut the service.**

'All that would cost a lot. Surely it's easier simply to cut the line?'

- No. **Cutting the line would cost more than keeping it**, mainly because of the high capital cost of the interchange: \$46 million.
- That sort of money could fund works to remove the 'railway barrier', *and* improvements to public transport throughout the Lower Hunter, *and* civic improvements in Newcastle City. And you can keep the train service.

'That's capital costs. But buses are cheaper to run than trains. Surely the interchange service will be cheaper in the long run.'

- **The interchange is not cheaper in the long run.** The upfront cost of cutting the line is so high that any saving of running costs will never be enough to compensate.
- So cutting the line will not free resources to improve the region's public transport. It will consume resources that could have been used to improve the region's public transport.

'A Broadmeadow interchange would provide a better service.'

- Nonsense. **The usual delay to interchange passengers would be at least 15 minutes.** The bad effect on comfort and reliability is just as important.
- The delay and inconvenience would mean less people use the trains. This could well make the entire regional train service to Maitland and Lake Macquarie unviable.
- No thought has been given to the problems of passengers who are mobility impaired, carrying prams or bicycles, etc.

‘The interchange could allow better cross-suburban bus travel.’

- **Diverting buses to pass the interchange would delay riders** who don’t need to use it. There is no way of knowing whether it would do more harm than good without detailed study. That study has never been done.
- The proposed site on Broadmeadow bridge is a train/bus changeover point only. It is a **very poor site for bus/bus interchange**. That would prevent it from serving any wider improvement of the bus network.
- In any case, improving the buses does not require cutting the trains.

‘Cutting the line will improve property values and promote development in Newcastle City.’

- This claim is wishful thinking not supported by evidence.
- Most research suggests the opposite: **nearby rail service improves property values**.
- A recent report which predicted huge economic benefits from closing the line made fundamental mistakes in its working. It has no credibility.
- Cutting the line would make Newcastle City less accessible and would increase congestion and parking problems as some train riders use cars instead.
- This would harm the long term prosperity of Newcastle City.

‘But what about development opportunities on surplus railway land?’

- All proposals keep a ‘transport corridor’. Keep the tracks as well, and it makes little difference to the development potential of surplus land.
- The only development that depends on closing the railway would be on the waterfront land between Newcastle station and Brown St. That should be rejected anyway: the site is too narrow and it would encroach on public parkland and block views of the harbour.

‘But the line is noisy and ugly.’

- The line is only a few steps from busy city streets. It is most unlikely that it makes a noticeable difference to the total city environment.
- **Cutting the line would add to bus and car traffic** and would make it harder to improve the amenity of Hunter St by means such as traffic calming.
- Works to remove the ‘railway barrier’ would include civic improvements around the line. Train speeds can be reduced to improve amenity.

‘Trains don’t work well in dispersed, low density cities like Newcastle.’

- This depends on the details. Newcastle’s three biggest activity centres are on or close to the line (City, Glendale and University). The Maitland corridor is growing strongly.
- Overall there is good potential for the train service to contribute to the region’s transport future if there are supportive regional planning policies.

‘Four fifths of Newcastle’s public transport trips are on buses. People obviously prefer buses.’

- This is because Newcastle has many bus routes but only two train lines. It doesn’t say anything about what people prefer.
- People prefer the extra speed, comfort and reliability of trains if they have a choice.
- **Buses and trains have complementary roles in a efficient public transport network.** Both can and should be improved.

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Notes and references

- **'about 7,000 riders per day':**

Cityrail 2003 weekday entries and exits: Hamilton-Newcastle 6,920; Wollongong-Pt Kembla 1,940; Unanderra-Nowra 6,580; Clyde-Carlingford 3,700; Riverstone-Richmond 6,320.

- **'Train use is growing':**

Ticket issues 1998/99 to 2002/03: Hunter region up 2.6%; Hamilton-Newcastle up 6.5%. In the same period Newcastle bus use declined by 10%. Lower Hunter Transport Working Group, 2nd report 2003, SRA/RIC submission. State Transit Authority Annual Report 2002-03.

- **'Predicted growth in population and traffic congestion:**

'Average car speeds for the entire modelled area are 39kph in 2001, falling to 35kph in 2011 and to 32kph in 2021...Future travel time by bus will also increase... Rail and walk speeds will not change.' Kellogg Brown & Root (2003), *Newcastle Transport Options Planning Study*, app. B:18.

- **'Level crossings delays can be cut by two thirds':**

By reducing train speeds so train drivers can check the safety of closed crossings visually.

- **Capital cost of cutting the Newcastle City line:**

Interchange costs: \$46 million (TIDC project cost study). A number of other costs should be added, such as decontamination, treatment of heritage items, new buses needed for Easy Access, works to prevent conflict between passenger trains and freight trains at Broadmeadow.

- **Capital cost of keeping the line:**

About \$40 million over 20 years; but most of this is 10-15 years off. Assumes that proposed Base Case major resignalling (\$22 million) is omitted as uneconomic (since it is less costly to continue maintaining the present signalling system). Figures from TIDC Project Cost Study.

- **The interchange is not cheaper in the long run:**

This requires calculating the 'present value' of future income and expenditure, so that capital and running costs can be combined. The present value of total net costs is at least \$17 million more for the interchange than for the Base Case (existing service). This is mostly because Base Case capital costs are further in the future and so have a lower present value.

- **Interchange delay:**

It is proposed to rely on existing Lambton Rd buses to carry train riders between Broadmeadow and Newcastle. Interchange wait will be up to 20 minutes, after allowing for the fact that when train riders arrive in large groups, many will not fit on the first bus that passes.

Total delay to interchange riders (number of people times minutes per person) would be at least five times greater than time saved by motorists from removing level crossings.

- **Lost ridership because of worse service:**

It is predicted that 34-43% of Newcastle City train trips will be lost because of the interchange delays (TIDC patronage review). This is a ballpark figure based on overseas precedents, without any research of the local situation. A number of local factors, not considered in the patronage review, suggest that a high end loss of ridership is more likely in this case.

As well, the amount of discouraged trips will depend greatly on how attractive the interchange environment is and how reliable the replacement bus service is. The proposed service scores **very poorly** on all aspects of service quality.

There will also be **some loss of existing Lambton Rd bus riders** as their buses are delayed and overcrowded by train riders. Up to a third of Newcastle's bus riders could be affected.

- **Whether an interchange would do more harm than good:**

A 2002 review gave many warnings about the risks of isolated interchanges. Most seriously:

- 'Interchanges away from commercial centres tend to become unattractive and unsafe places';
- Diverting bus routes to access the interchange might inconvenience the majority of riders who do not need to use it;
- Some transport interchanges in freestanding locations have been 'singularly unsuccessful.... The fundamental reason is that the trip linking to the commercial centre is often a third trip for many people.' SGS/Maunsell (2002): *Evaluation of Woodville Junction Proposal*, p7,8

- **'Very poor site for bus/bus interchange':**

Changing buses would require climbing **two** staircases, and a walk of 60m **under** the bridge - an isolated, unattractive environment which will have serious security concerns at low use times.

- **'Most research evidence suggests that a nearby rail service improves property values.'**

For example, see Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (2002): *Land Value and Public Transport - Stage 1 - Summary of Findings*. This reviews 150 studies.

- **'A recent report on economic impacts made fundamental mistakes...':**

GHD, *Economic Impact of Rail Closure in Newcastle*, report for Ministry of Transport, November 2004. The report misread and misunderstood its key data source (Duponts' property valuations, part of the TIDC Broadmeadow interchange documents). The mistakes destroy the report's entire line of argument and make its conclusions completely worthless.

- **Development proposal for waterfront land near Newcastle station:**

Described in an appendix to the Lower Hunter Transport Working Group's final report, 2003.

- **'Cutting the line would harm the long term prosperity of Newcastle City':**

'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.' Kellog Brown & Root (2003), *Newcastle Transport Options Planning Study*, p.3-3 (and many similar comments in the report).

- **Effect of the line on the total city environment:**

'By removing the rail line... there will be little impact on visual access to the waterfront. ... the main visual barriers to the waterfront are existing buildings...' KBR report, p.7-3.

- **Improving the amenity of Hunter St:**

Traffic calming in Hunter St is Council policy: Development Control Plan 40, p.40.

Reference: TIDC 2004: Transport Infrastructure Development Corporation, *Broadmeadow Transport Interchange Feasibility Study*