



# Revitalising Newcastle

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UrbanGrowth NSW

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## Introduction

The Hunter Business Chamber is the largest regional business chamber in Australia and was established in 1886. The Chamber represents almost 2,000 member businesses to all levels of government. The Chamber is the peak industry association in the Hunter which represents all sectors of business in the region.

The Hunter Business Chamber works as an integral part of the Chamber network in NSW and represents business at local, state and federal level to advocate for an improved operational climate for businesses in this region.

The Hunter is well recognised as the home to Australia's most resilient and diverse regional economy. The Hunter region in NSW just north of Sydney covers over 31,000 square kilometres and has over 660,000 people or 9% of the state's population.

An unparalleled cross section of industry calls the Hunter region home. Newcastle is the eighth largest city in Australia and is renowned for being the world's largest coal export port. The contribution to the region, state and nation from the port's operation has grown exponentially over the past ten years.

The Hunter Business Chamber has long been an advocate for urban renewal, improved connectivity and an appropriate transport system for our city and broader region. The Chamber's discussion paper, *Newcastle Central*, released in September 2012, advocated for much of what is now proposed in UrbanGrowth's *Newcastle Urban Transformation and Transport Program*.

The Hunter Business Chamber welcomes the opportunity to provide a brief submission to this paper.

## Key Points

Newcastle, as the second largest city of NSW and the capital of the Hunter has the potential to be a world class city. Population continues to grow and importantly the City needs to be able to accommodate and support this growth and future visitor activity. The NSW Minister for Transport and Infrastructure is recorded in Hansard on 9 September 2015 as saying *Central Newcastle has the potential to be a significant economic, social and cultural centre*.

The Chamber addresses the Revitalising Newcastle opportunities as two separate areas.

### 1. Wolfe Street to Watt Street including Newcastle Station

The Chamber supports the concept of repurposing Newcastle Railway Station so as to provide a hallmark destination of activity in the city. Combined with surrounding activated public spaces, this will provide a place where people come to meet and play, generating activity and a sense of community.

We agree that the site has the potential to become a significant tourism destination point attracting residents from the Hunter region as well as visitors from outside the region not just to the developments in a repurposed Station building but also to other retail, hospitality, cultural and leisure attractions. Commercial activity which currently exists or will grow over time as the redevelopment of the City progresses will also serve to increase economic and visitor activity.

It is important that the plans developed by UrbanGrowth in consultation with Newcastle City Council, Hunter Development Corporation and the community involves nothing less than the refurbishment and repurposing of Newcastle Station rather than just maintaining this site in its current state or only partially refurbishing it. The Station building and environs could potentially house high end markets and pop up activities and should take the current adjacent green space into consideration for how the destination will work and the facility it will provide.

There is an opportunity here to be visionary and create a significant destination point modeled on examples such as the Pike Street Market in Seattle, the Borough Market in London or the Chelsea Market in New York, appropriately scaled for the Hunter captive market. This is a different concept to some existing and successful stall holder markets which operate in Newcastle and the Hunter and should not be rejected on that basis. This is a once in a generation opportunity which deserves a long term visionary and ambitious approach. Every community needs to encourage experimentation and we should not be afraid to do so with this opportunity.

Adaptive reuse of the Station building and environs should not duplicate already well-established facilities such as the museum and art gallery in Newcastle although, in time, there is the opportunity to attract complementary cultural facilities. Plans for redevelopment now should take the mid to long term view so that future opportunities are not ruled out because of what is developed today.

The Chamber recognises the station and the surrounding areas as fundamental to the urban renewal process and should be implemented as a priority. Government should address funding of the destination space as a civic space and fund the enabling works, removing the tracks and undertaking remediation work necessary to incentivise development.

## **2. Worth Place to Wolfe Street**

The Chamber notes this area requires a staged program of delivery of high quality public spaces in close connection with market driven development. This space should however, accommodate temporary activation of areas until development can or does occur. Reactivation of those land spaces must integrate and allow pedestrian activity through Hunter Street and to the City.

Development should make best use of parts of the corridor that don't lend itself to green space and could provide for potential mixed use development of retail, commercial and residential that will further activate the City and provide uplift to the local economy.

In its *Newcastle Central* discussion paper the Chamber advocated for a green link or pedestrian corridor from Stewart Avenue to Market Street. The Chamber envisaged that this area would be suitable for low impact development such as cafes and outdoor dining facilities and would encourage the refurbishment of existing buildings by creating new and modern facades opening onto this part of the corridor.

### **Interface with Hunter Street**

Whilst works in Hunter Street are being managed by Transport for NSW, we believe it is critical that urban renewal projects integrate seamlessly with Hunter Street and the broader CBD. Key features include wide pedestrian friendly spaces that link King Street and Hunter Street to the waterfront particularly at new north-south crossings. In particular, it is critical that the light rail infrastructure integrates into the urban form and does not compromise the pedestrian friendly attributes that are essential to livable cities.

### **Conclusion**

The Chamber's overarching beliefs are that the planning proposal should be about economically sustainable development. Importantly, the Hunter region has the skills, experience and local knowledge to deliver this project locally and calls on the Government to ensure the project procurement reflects this capability.

The Chamber further believes that there is unequalled opportunity to provide a planning proposal that will create economic activity and support the activity that will come with work already underway in the civic precinct. Ensuring seamless North – South connections are retained will be important in maximizing the activity that can occur in connecting the City to its waterfront. Newcastle is blessed with a strong sense of its unique identity and the question is not how to dramatically change the city but how to creatively respond to it.

The Chamber welcomes the opportunity to provide comment on this Paper and would equally welcome any further engagement throughout the Planning Proposal process.

### **Contact**

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