

Community survey of train users in Newcastle and the Hunter, NSW

October, 2014

Coppice Research

for Community Too Incorporated

Bar Beach, NSW

Executive Summary

An online survey of 12 questions was conducted 2nd October to 18th October 2014 by Coppice Research. Community Too Inc sponsored the research because of their concern at the lack of any publicly available, current information about the role of train travel in the day-to-day lives of people in Newcastle and the Hunter. The Newcastle Planning Inquiry gave the prospect of some review of State Government decisions that may have profound effects on local communities in the region. The survey could inform the work of the Select Committee and be useful in public conversations about cuts to train services.

733 people responded to the survey; 90% had used the train in the last 12 months. While travellers to Sydney appeared to be most numerous it was travellers to Newcastle, Civic and Warabrook who were the most regular travellers for work, study and family visits.

There was a pleasing spread of ages, with over 100 in each age group participating, from 20 to 69 years. Gender was also fairly balanced with 52.6% women and 47.4% men.

The large majority, 63.2% were against cuts to rail services, with 32% supporting the cuts. Over 600 people commented in their own words about how they were affected. Half of those in favour said they would not be affected by cuts at all. Others looked forward to connection between CBD and harbour, improved traffic flow and light rail that would be more convenient for them than current services. Those against faced extra time travelling, rejected buses as a substitute, described major difficulties from disability or poor connectivity and some said they would buy a car or stop making their journey at all. The cuts made bike travel more difficult and were seen to impact most on young people, including threats to their safety. A few saw the decrease in travel into Newcastle as a signal for business failure, disruption of community events and further traffic congestion.

With information from this survey, cuts to the two city stations in Newcastle appear more like a social experiment than a project for public benefit. Certainly, more time and opportunity for public discussion and for evidence-based, integrated planning is needed. We request the Select Committee recommend that this happen.

CONTENTS

Background	4
The research	4
Recruitment	5
The participants	6
Train journeys	6
Company for the journey	7
Reasons for travelling	7
Personal impacts: those who agree with cuts to train services	8
Personal impacts: those who do not agree with cuts to train services	10
A holistic view. One person's train travel and observations	15
Conclusion	15
Our request on the basis of this submission	16

Background

This research was conducted to reveal the ways that people are using trains in the Hunter and to explore what the loss of services in nine weeks' time might mean in daily lives. The state government is cutting the destination station, Newcastle, and the one before it in the CBD, Civic station.

Community Too Inc is sponsoring this research to present it to the Select Committee on the Planning Process in Newcastle and the Broader Hunter Region. It provides a research base for the Select Committee, specifically addressed to planning issues about rail services in the Hunter.

Community Too Inc are local people concerned that governments follow due process, make transparent decisions, use up-to-date research and communicate regularly to those affected.

There has been no systematic public consultation about changes to train services with users in the Hunter and no discussion of research evidence about their needs for transport or how they will be affected by the disruption to services. No detailed policy or planning has been presented about new infrastructure.

Recent ICAC hearings have shown the extent of corruption by political representatives in Newcastle and the Hunter (for example, the mayor and two local members who have now resigned). These people have worked in co-operation with members of the NSW Liberal Party and decision-makers in the current government.

The research

Online survey of 733 people

This is a study of train users. A survey of 12 questions was placed online through surveymonkey.com. The following link provides access to the questions and overall results on the Survey Monkey site. This excludes the hundreds of open-ended answers for questions 9 and 10.

https://www.surveymonkey.com/sr.aspx?sm=8cL_2bgJ2iO8wSyf93bRpHlODbt56YYzvaMKkqnnw4Zal_3d.

The questions sought detailed information about what people actually did: the station they left from and travelled to most frequently, who they travelled with, the purposes of their travel, suggested improvements and whether they agreed with the cuts. Two open-ended questions asked how they would be affected personally by these cuts, and for any general impacts.

There were two main considerations that guided fieldwork and recruitment. One was recruiting people who actually travelled on the trains. The second was to involve a very diverse group throughout the Hunter; people travelling from smaller stations, people of many ages and backgrounds.

The survey ran 17 days from Thursday 2nd October 2014 to Saturday 18th October. The design, fieldwork and analysis was conducted by Dr. Patricia Gillard, Principal of Coppice Research for Community Too Incorporated, Bar Beach NSW.

Recruitment

There were four different ways that people were contacted and invited to answer the survey.

Online communities and contacts.

A current link to the survey was placed on community Facebook sites and disseminated by email to interested organisations and individuals. They were encouraged to send these to others who used the train. The link to the survey site (the url) was changed every two days and a new link created for the next round of invitations. This provided some limitation to the numbers that one special interest group might contribute to the survey.

Invitations at large community events.

A second approach was to hand out invitations on slips of paper at large community events. These provided the current link and asked people to go online to do the survey. During the period of the survey, the Maitland and the Newcastle Farmer's markets, the Olive Tree Market and the Mattara Hill Climb provided the opportunity to recruit people. Some of the fieldwork was conducted outside these venues.

Invitations near major stations.

The third approach used paper invitations but involved a visit of an hour or less in the vicinity of a few of the stations. These included Fassifern, Hamilton, Warabrook, Civic, Newcastle and Broadmeadow.

Email requests following newspaper article.

The fourth approach was a short information piece written by a journalist for the local newspaper. An email was given that individuals could use to request a link to the survey. 24 people did request the link and they were provided with it by email.

The participants

733 people took part in the survey by completing it online. A very wide cross-section of ages was obtained (See Q 11 using the link on p3 of this report), with the largest group being 50 to 59 year olds (22%). There was a consistent distribution of ages across all other categories between 20 to 70 years which is excellent. Numbers for younger age groups often have to be 'weighted up' to make up for fewer recruits. It is a strength of this survey that no weighting of the data has been necessary. Slightly more women (52.6%) than men (47.4%) participated (see Q12).

The number and distribution of participants gives confidence that the results are likely to reflect patterns of use of other train users that were not in the survey. However, the participants were not randomly selected, so it can't be assumed that the frequencies and percentages in this survey exactly predict the same proportions across the Hunter.

We can confidently use this survey to report general patterns for the most frequent journeys by train, who people travel with and the purpose of their train trips. The comments in their own words made by 656 of the participants (Q9) makes visible the widespread impacts of cuts to train services on people across the Hunter. It gives warning of some of the unintended changes that may follow government actions.

Train journeys

Most stations in the Hunter were mentioned as the start of a train trip for someone. (See Q2. Many stations were listed within the 'other' category) Newcastle (23.1%), Broadmeadow (17%), Hamilton (12%), Civic (7.6%) and Fassifern (7%) were selected more frequently.

Major destination stations (Q3, 'What station did you travel to most often?') were Central (40.9%), Newcastle (21.3%), Civic (10.3%), Warabrook (4.9%) and Hamilton (4%).

A comparison of this question with question 6 ('...How often did you use the train ...?') using the crosstabulation software showed travellers to Newcastle were more regular train users than those going to Central. Half of those who went to Newcastle travelled at least once a week but only 14% of those who travelled to Central travelled each week. Warabrook (the station nearest Newcastle University) had the highest proportion of weekly travellers with 77% of the people who alighted there saying they took the train at least once a week. These findings suggested further analysis of the destinations in Newcastle City (Newcastle and Civic) compared with Sydney (Central).

These analysis were carried out by creating two new 'destination' measures: Newcastle+Civic (combined) and Sydney. A standard test used in statistics to make comparisons (Chi Square test) established that people whose destination was Newcastle or Civic were much more frequent train travellers. This finding was highly significant.

People who travelled most often to Newcastle or Civic were also much more likely to disagree with the cuts to services. This finding was also highly significant.

Company for the journey

The majority of people (51.6%) travelled by themselves on their most frequent trip (Q4) but one fifth took this trip with family members (20.9%) or with friends (16.3%).

Reasons for travelling

Eight reasons for train trips were provided in question 5 and people could choose as many as applied to them. Only 10 people (under 1.5%) travelled to 'Attend court or prison'. Many chose each of the other reasons, with 'See family and friends' (319 people, 48.4%) and 'Go to work, school, college or uni' (292 people, 44.3%) being the most common.

An additional comparison (using crosstabulation on Survey Monkey) with the three destination stations Newcastle, Central and Warabrook shows that the survey was sensitive enough to pick up clear associations between stations travelled to most often and reasons for travelling. For example, the largest proportion of those travelling to Central were those who travelled to 'see family or friends' (138 or 51.3%). For Warabrook people who used the train for 'work, school, college or uni' were the largest proportion alighting there (30 people, 93.8%) and the purpose of those who travelled most often to Newcastle was described as sport, beach, bike track etc (81 or 57.9%).

Personal impacts: those who agree with cuts to train services

In response to the question of whether respondents agreed or disagreed with permanently cutting rail services to Newcastle and Civic stations (Q8), 233 (32 % of the survey group) said 'yes'. A later question asked what impact the cuts would have on them and 204 made comments. The percentages given below are the proportion out of those who said 'yes', that is 233 people.

Half will not be affected at all

Most were very concise. Just under half (44%) said 'none' or 'absolutely none' to the question of impacts. They would not have to change their daily patterns as a result.

Connection of harbor and CBD for a vibrant city

Fifty people (21%) spoke of the improvement that would come from connecting the Newcastle CBD to the harbour and 32 others (14%) elaborated on the kind of vibrant city that cutting the rail would make possible.

...the exciting prospect of significant urban renewal in Newcastle. Freedom to move on foot through the inner city... opportunity to evolve our urban landscape and reach the forefront of modern urban liveability.

I view the revitalisation of our CBD as a critical part of the development of Newcastle. I value the somewhat bohemian and 'artsy' (for want of a better word) culture that is developing in our city. If the removal of the rail will allow for improvement in the environment of our city and, thus, encourage further community involvement in the growing arts scene than I would not be opposed to the decision.

Significant improvement of road/path access throughout the cbd, particularly to the popular harborside locations and businesses; encourage cycling/pedestrian activity throughout city; much improved aesthetic, more pleasant, presentable and vibrant city environment with greater living and tourism appeal

Some with this view specifically mentioned that greater productivity and increased employment would be an outcome from creating this more open, attractive environment.

Improve road transport in the city. Enhance productivity in the city. A decision that should have been made 10 years ago when I was 12!

Improved traffic flow

Another benefit described by 23 (10%) of this group was the improved traffic flow from not having to stop at rail gates in future.

Cars will stop queueing at the crossings, blocking the Stewart ave, mainland rd and Hamilton st intersections

Light rail

The Light rail service promised by the State government as was mentioned by 15 people (6%).

I am looking forward to regular tram services in the CBD so I can get to places without my car.

If there is light rail from Wickham there is no issue - it will be better than what is currently there.

Inconvenience OK if benefits follow

There were a few (12, or 5%) who supported the cuts but acknowledged they would create some inconvenience for them. However this was considered to be worthwhile as long as it resulted in light rail and benefits in the future.

I'll have to walk a bit further to catch the train at Wickham instead of Civic. Slightly less convenient but not a big issue.

A huge impact - I will have to catch other means of transport which is fine by me. There will be light rail and buses alike. If it is a nice day I will walk which is good for the heart. Other people should walk too.

Personal impacts: those who do not agree with cuts to train services

The majority of participants, 63.2% (461) of the survey group, rejected the cuts to rail services. 421 of them wrote comments about the impact of these cuts and many of the comments detailed their own circumstances. The percentages given below are the proportion out of those who said 'no', that is 461 people.

Extra time spent travelling

The largest proportion (21%, 98 people) detailed the impacts that extra *time* in travelling would have on their journey to work, time available for children or ability to see friends or family. For some, the combinations of train, bus and walking or bike that they now used would be disrupted and this could add over an hour each way. Those whose route was not so disrupted nevertheless anticipated longer and unpredictable time spent travelling.

I will need to use multiple forms of private and public transport every morning and evening as my commute to work. Drive, Train, Bus, Walk Work then Walk, Bus, Train and Drive home. The frequent change between transport methods means that I am unable to do work while commuting and it will significantly increase my travel time meaning I will get to spend less time with my young child. This applies further pressure and guilt as I struggle between work and parenting responsibilities.

I will have to leave earlier for work and get home later. In wet weather this is just one/two more times throughout the day where I will get wet.

Travelling times will increase because it will be difficult to know how much extra time to add when you have to factor in a bus as well as the ferry commute.

Making day trips to Sydney from Telarah or Maitland almost impossible because the usable time in Sydney will be compromised.

Buses not a replacement for trains

Fifty-seven people (12%) were explicit in not accepting that buses could replace trains without causing extra problems. Instead, for them, a good service was being permanently withdrawn. They expressed anger and frustration at this.

Arriving to appointments like work, uni studies etc late. The buses are already known for being always late.

Inability to travel from my home near Paterson right into the city on one carrier - have to change to buses, which will be busier and roads slower and more congested.

If I decided to travel into the city then I would have to wait for a bus that probably wouldn't turn up anyway (notorious of Newcastle buses) and would extend my travel time.

Buses in Newcastle are not an adequate replacement - they are unreliable and take far too long. This may also cost me more money.

I travel by bus to work, am concerned about traffic congestion. Also buses are not very reliable in Newcastle so replacing trains with buses will be a step backwards.

Major difficulties from disability or poor connectivity

The poor connectivity created by cuts to services was mentioned by 51 people (11%). Helplessness and frustration was expressed by those entirely dependent on public transport to go to medical appointments, education or visit family at a distance. For many, access was now in doubt because of their difficulties with changing from train to bus. The current train services provide a range of benefits to these people that will be disrupted, causing them anxiety.

Give me more trouble when I take my wife to the Doctors Newcastle.

Disabled access is excellent at Newcastle it is not so great at other station.

MASSIVE. Disabled. No car. Difficulty accessing public transport.

I'm 83 yrs and my Doctor's Surgery is in Newcastle. Cutting the train service will make the trip from Beresfield over 1 hour instead of 20 minutes and I'm concerned about being knocked over in the rush to buses among other things.

This is a bad decision. My partner and I will be very inconvenienced. We live at Stockton and can easily catch the train from Newcastle Station. If the service is terminated, we will have to catch a bus to Wickham. Even if light rail is implemented, we will still need to change transport. Also, my partner is now using a wheelchair which will make changes even more inconvenient.

I frequently travel by train between Sydney and Muswellbrook. I prefer to change trains at Newcastle because this station has better toilet and other facilities than Hamilton. The facilities at Hamilton need to be vastly upgraded BEFORE services to Newcastle are discontinued.

I'm considering studies at the uni where I want the uni and Civic station connected. It's a stupid decision to take out effective infrastructure.

Stop using trains or change to car travel

For 43 people (9%) the need to change from train to bus to get to Newcastle or Civic meant they would not travel there or that they would now go by car and not use public transport.

I will have to buy a car, it's as simple as that. Longer connections no incentives. It's a real shame just when Newcastle is coming alive.

More traffic congestion on Hunter and King Street because of increase in cars - this will make my daily bus trip to work longer.

Longer travelling times, missing bus & train connections. Hold ups as buses or trams are stuck in traffic jam caused by more cars as they can't trust that rail/ buses/ trams will get them to work on time.

I will almost definitely choose to drive to university instead, adding to an already overloaded parking issue. When they move the uni building into town, I will not be able to easily travel between the two (which will be necessary for those completing double degrees - including all law students.) The building in town has chosen to not include parking spaces and instead rely on public transport - something I completely support, and yet will not be effective if the rail line is cut.

Bike travel made difficult

People who use bikes (22, or 5%) as well as trains to get to university or work detailed the problems that cuts to services would create. Numbers of bikes cannot be accommodated on buses at once, so some people needed to plan their whole journey from scratch.

They remove the ability for me to travel efficiently with my bike from home to work.

We will no longer be able to take our bikes all the way to the beach for a bike ride.

This will heavily impact on my travel to Newcastle University. This currently takes 11 minutes on the train, and I ride my bike between my house and Civic station and Warabrook station and the uni

proper ...which ends up with a round trip of 15-20 minutes. Buses take at least 40 minutes, and for me further time as I have to walk to the bus stop rather than ride, finishing up at least an hour for my trip.

Threats to safety and impacts on young people

Train services right into the city are important for young people who live there but study and work elsewhere. Access to entertainment and events that is safe and reliable is also crucially important for young people and their parents who live outside of Newcastle, especially on Friday night and during the weekend.

There were 35 people (8%) who raised this issue; many of them parents.

Going out on a Friday or Saturday night with no way of accessing a train home. Walking to Wickham at 3am in the morning from Newcastle station doesn't sound safe as a young female. I doubt buses will be running at this time.

Having to get off the train before Civic & then having to get on another form of transport to go 1 or 2 more stops is ridiculous.....try doing this with children,prams,boogie boards etc.....not to mention the elderly.

My son won't be able to take his surfboard to Newcastle beach with his friends anymore. My 16 year old daughter won't be able to travel into Newcastle beach for the day any more without switching to the bus.

As my children get older and we are more able to make day or weekend trips to Sydney, cutting the line means we would be less able to access the train to Sydney. I think cutting the rail line is a stupid decision for Newcastle - it is only being done for the financial benefit of developers who want the land and the State for its tax coffers. People who live here DO NOT WANT the rail line cut: there are better ways of 'revitalising' Newcastle. I can't believe how the Sydney-centric State government is ignoring the taxpayers of Newcastle and the Hunter. We want more, faster and better public transport NOT the removal of our access to Sydney and the rest of the region. Insane.

Decline of Newcastle City through fewer visits to businesses, restaurants and events

Concerns about the decline in the City and CBD were expressed by 46 people (10%) as part of other impacts and were seen to flow from them. In contrast to the idea of a flourishing city connected to the harbour that was envisaged by some who supported cuts; similar numbers in this group felt that cutting the rail to exclude the main city stations would reduce access to beaches, events, business or restaurants to such an extent that the

current inner city renewal was very likely to falter. A few business people were alarmed at the effects on their livelihood and five mentioned the likely decline in tourist numbers.

Others were mindful of planned expansions to services such as the university and Court precinct and residential development, and saw these threatened by the withdrawal of existing infrastructure.

Longer travelling time to and from work, inconvenient, tiring, avoid travel into Newcastle to attend concerts, go to restaurants due to inconvenience.

These cuts mean that I cannot travel into Newcastle from Broadmeadow or Adamstown Station so that I can go to the beach, go to a cafe in town, take my bike on the train to ride it in town, attend an event where parking would not be a viable option (E.g. fireworks) or to go to a party in town where I would be drinking so driving is not an option.

Rising anger - wasteful, absence of logic. Inconvenience. Effect on my business considerable.

A lot. There are so many people using this train from Newcastle and a lot more people living in the cbd I can't understand why they would cut it. Developers suck.

Inability to access Newcastle foreshore restaurants, shops, easy access to bus routes to bigger shopping centres.

Harder for customers to get to my business

This will affect generations of people. It simply does not make sense. I cannot understand the reason at all. We should be adding to the service not closing it.

Will possibly no longer travel to Newcastle. Will need to change specialists. We are elderly and travel from Dungog to Newcastle station. We will be looking at just going to Maitland.

I believe it is short sighted to cut off our existing direct rail line from the upper hunter and Sydney into our city centre. Our city will grow and it is essential we are able to provide major rail links for international and local tourists to directly access our beaches and city centre / accommodations / future and present facilities.

Adding a connection so close to the final destination of many which will take time, likely be unreliable, and not allow passengers to take bikes and surfboards (and make life more difficult for less physically able and elderly people along with those with prams or small children) is incomprehensible.

A holistic view. One person's train travel and observations

A person living outside Newcastle described their train travel and how it was integrated in day-to-day activities. It gives some idea of the importance of train transport in people's lives and what will be displaced if simplistic administrative decisions are imposed.

The train is quicker, easier & cheaper to travel to Newcastle than a car from Metford station. I often use the train & alight at Civic or Newcastle station for study, medical appointments & to attend a wide range of events in & around Newcastle.

I also often accompany my elderly mother by train into Newcastle station & we will spend more time travelling & may have difficulty transferring to buses with shopping trolleys if the line is cut at Wickham. My mother always has a shopping trolley with her. We often meet at Newcastle station to walk around the area, have a coffee, do some shopping, banking, attend events, visit the cinema, foreshore, beach & generally enjoy the area.

We are unsure of the ability of buses to take all the passengers on the buses for many reasons ie a new university campus being built in inner Newcastle at Civic with 4000 students; during September to March many young people use the train to go to the beach especially during school holidays; also during large public events at the foreshore & the beach (eg surfing carnivals & cultural events) or in the area eg Mattara Hill Climb or film festivals .

My mother visits an ill family member in Merewether regularly & this change may make the trip for her more difficult. I travel to & from Newcastle by train often from Adamstown & other stations because it is convenient & some trains stop at stations every 30 mins eg Cardiff. I have travelled often by train to Sydney & Maitland from Newcastle station, sometimes with guests who love the convenience of alighting at historic Newcastle station with its great location & having a uncomplicated trip from Sydney.

I recently visited a medical ship docked at Honeysuckle wharf near Civic station. I and many other people arrived by train at Civic station to visit this ship. I don't see how cutting the rail at Wickham would help this important ship to raise money for medical services in PNG if it was more difficult to access. Just today I travelled by train to Newcastle station to meet my sisters at a Thai restaurant near the beach where we spent money.

Conclusion

This survey was conducted to gain information about current uses of train travel in the Hunter because of major community concern about losing train services in nine weeks time. Detailed measures of train use were supplemented by participants' own words describing the likely impact of this, day-to-day.

It is clear that people make extensive use of the trains for a broad range of purposes. Newcastle and Civic are destinations that people in the Hunter rely upon and travel to for work, business, medical reasons and family support. Trips to Sydney or from Sydney into Newcastle are also especially valued for family contact and recreation. Newcastle is known for and defined by the regular community events that train services right into the city make possible.

The comments included here are a distillation of the hundreds made during the course of the survey. It is very clear that government is not aware of the broad range of needs being supported every day by the rail service or the different patterns of use that should be the basis of future planning. Those who agree with truncating the rail seem to be unaffected by the changes or they see them as a necessary step in making way for a more vital city with light rail and integration with the harbour.

The large majority, who use the trains much more frequently, instead see that cutting the trains as proposed and supplying only buses will create many problems for individuals and possibly undermine the growth of the city.

Our request on the basis of this submission

We request the Select Committee recommend that cuts to the existing rail services at Civic and Newcastle stations be suspended until there is evidence of systematic planning that integrates the various public projects underway in Newcastle city and takes account of population projections.

We request that publics in Newcastle and the Hunter be informed of the detailed plans, with opportunities to provide feedback to government and to planners.