



Two More Trains For Singleton

Campaign for additional daily passenger rail services from Newcastle to Singleton

19 August 2024

NSW Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure

Dear Sir/Madam

Submission - Huntlee Stage 2 Development Application

Two More Trains for Singleton, a community group based in the Hunter Valley, wishes to make a submission in response to the exhibition of the Stage 2 development application for the proposed Huntlee new town near Branxton. The plan allows for creation of around 5,000 lots and dwelling houses.

Two More Trains for Singleton (TMTFS) advocates for improved passenger train services and public transport in the Hunter Region, including 2 hourly daily train services from Newcastle to Singleton and Branxton.

In making the submission, TMTFS also refers to previous submissions from TMTFS dated 25 February 2013, 2 November 2012, 12 July 2012, 6 April 2011, and 11 November 2010 regarding the development of Huntlee. These submissions raised concern about public transport accessibility and the need to design the town to take advantage of its proximity to Branxton railway station.

TMTFS is working with the community and NSW Government to achieve additional daily passenger train services between Singleton and Maitland to complement the current weekday half hourly service from Newcastle to Maitland. The group's proposal includes additional services to Branxton and Greta railway stations which are both close to the Huntlee new town proposal.

Future planning for Huntlee must provide for substantially enhanced public transport to support expected additional urban development and growth in rail passenger demand. However, the Huntlee new town design as shown in the lot layouts and draft Huntlee Development Control Plan (DCP) actively discourages passenger rail as a public transport option. This is unacceptable, irresponsible and short sighted. The design of the development should be modified to improve access to Branxton Railway Station and the DCP should not be made in its current form. A revised site layout is required.

In its present form, the proposal will contribute to unsustainable urban development and is contrary to current accepted planning practice to maximise connectivity to existing public transport nodes. The exhibited DCP ignores rail as a transport option for Huntlee and relies on private car transport. As a result the proposal will contribute significant additional carbon emissions. The transition to a zero carbon emission transport sector is ignored in the development layout and DCP provisions, and barely considered in the supporting environmental impact statement notwithstanding its fundamental importance.



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TMTFS proposes the following DCP amendments to overcome the significant deficiencies outlined above:

Section 2.2 Vision and development objectives

The DCP vision for Huntlee should be amended to include a development objective to “establish an urban area that allows residents easy access to the local and regional rail public transport network”.

Section 4.2 Pedestrian and cycle network

A key objective for Huntlee should be to provide convenient and usable links for pedestrians and cyclists to access Branxton railway station. Figure 20 does not acknowledge that the railway station is an important pedestrian and cycle destination and should be amended to ensure adequate links to the regional passenger rail system are planned and constructed.

Section 4.4 Public transport network

The DCP objectives are limited to within Huntlee and do not recognise that Huntlee needs to be connected to the regional and national public transport network. It totally ignores the proximity of the proposed town within 500 metres of an existing railway station. An objective should be included to ensure that Huntlee provides good connectivity to Branxton Railway Station to provide regional public transport links.

Relevant controls should be included in the DCP to ensure direct connectivity to the railway station is provided from the town centre. While Figure 22 does show the location of the railway station, it only shows internal bus routes and demonstrates that the railway is not connected with the proposed town. This figure should be amended to indicate the proposed staging of public transport routes over time, recognising that the frequency of passenger rail services is likely to increase in the future.

The road and pedestrian access layout should be designed to link with the Branxton Railway Station which exists within 500 metres of the town centre area. The DCP should include a railway access precinct plan, including an overbridge for pedestrians and cyclists directly linking the Huntlee town centre to the railway station. The whole subdivision design should be reworked to facilitate direct pedestrian/cyclist access from each lot to the Station, including the provision of shade and amenities.

Section 5.3 Residential development and sustainability

This section of the DCP fails to acknowledge a key national and state objective to transition to zero carbon development. An additional subsection should be added to recognise that all development should minimise embodied and operational carbon emissions, and that providing sustainable and carbon neutral transport and accessibility must be underpinned by access to passenger rail services.

It is noted that major centres in the Lower Hunter Regional Strategy, and the Sydney Metropolitan Strategy are all located around rail transport, except for Huntlee. This proposal is inconsistent with the public interest and the principles of sustainable development.

The 'Green Travel Plan' on exhibition as part of the Stage 2 development application



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includes no data on travel patterns for Stage 1, although states that in the Cessnock local government area less than 1% of trips are by public transport. This compares to a state average of 16% and a "desired proposed 30% mode split to public transport" for Huntlee sought by Transport for NSW in its comments on the Stage 1 development in May 2011. An objective of the development should be to facilitate a substantially higher than 1% proportion of trips from Huntlee made by public transport, primarily rail. Data about 'method of travel to work', 'place of work' and 'distance to work' is all publicly available from the 2021 Census down to the very small area of 'Mesh Blocks' (encompassing 'residential blocks' of housing development) and should be utilised and learnt from. The 'Green Travel Plan' needs update.

TMTFS urges the NSW Government to not allow construction of the Huntlee new town Stage 2 proposal unless the town links directly to Branxton railway station and until passenger rail services improve in their frequency.

The Huntlee developer should also contribute financially to the provision of necessary infrastructure to achieve increased passenger rail services at Branxton to service the town and for pedestrian and cycle linkages to access that station.

Recommendations

The following recommendations should be applied in the determination of the development application, and finalisation of a DCP:

1. The Stage 2 development application should not be approved until the plans, and road layout is modified to improve infrastructure and accessibility of Huntlee residents to Branxton Railway Station.
2. The Huntlee layout plan and the DCP should be revised to ensure access to rail services is recognised and given priority.
3. The Huntlee developer should contribute financially to the provision of necessary infrastructure to achieve increased passenger rail services at Branxton and Greta to service Huntlee (eg provision of additional rail carriages and railway station infrastructure such as a pedestrian and cycle bridge and paths).
4. The Stage 2 development should not proceed until the frequency of passenger train services to Branxton is increased substantially, and there is a strategic accessibility plan for rail access and a credible public transport plan.
5. The Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure should initiate a consultative process with Transport for NSW, the Australian Rail Track Corporation and community groups to work towards a credible public transport plan for Huntlee that includes regular passenger rail services.

Thank you for your consideration of this submission.

yours sincerely

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Contact Two More Trains for Singleton by email – 2moretrains@gmail.com or Facebook at www.facebook.com/pages/Two-More-Trains-for-Singleton