MEDIA RELEASE

EMBARGO: Monday 23 December 2013

LIGHT RAIL TO TRANSFORM NEWCASTLE FROM CITY TO SURF

The NSW Government today announced the first stage of the new Newcastle light rail line will link the beach with a new transport interchange at Wickham as part of a transformational project that will revitalise the city centre.

Minister for Planning and Infrastructure Brad Hazzard and Minister for Transport Gladys Berejiklian said detailed studies proved Wickham to be the best location for a fully accessible interchange to support the revitalisation of the Hunter region.

Mr Hazzard said the NSW Government was getting on with determining where light rail would travel between Wickham and the beach, which could form the spine of a future light rail network for the Hunter.

Community consultation, starting in early 2014, will seek feedback on two potential short-listed light rail routes. The two options, which connect Wickham to Newcastle Beach, are:

- The rail corridor and Scott Street to near Newcastle Beach at Pacific Park; and,
- Hunter Street and Hunter Street Mall to near Newcastle Beach at Pacific Park.

“This is about providing the first stage of a light rail system for Newcastle – connecting people to prominent, vibrant areas of the city centre, such as the Honeysuckle precinct and Hunter Street, and encouraging ongoing investment,” Mr Hazzard said.

“Both options promote urban renewal and improve access to key destinations in the Newcastle city centre – supporting Newcastle and the Hunter’s revitalisation.

“Consultation with the community, which we will start in the new year, will be critical to our decision-making about Newcastle’s future light rail system.

“Up to 11 new pedestrian and road crossings will be delivered as part of this project – opening up the city centre to the foreshore as never before.

“Truncating the heavy rail line, creating a fully accessible transport interchange at Wickham and introducing light rail will enhance and accelerate many renewal initiatives – helping bring jobs, residents and visitors into the Newcastle the city centre.”

Ms Berejiklian said Wickham was selected as the location for a new, fully accessible interchange for heavy rail, light rail and buses following detailed studies.

She said an interchange at Wickham also provided the best outcome for transport customers, as all bus, heavy rail and light rail services would be located on one level for easy interchange.
“We carried out a rigorous assessment of a range of options and through this process identified Wickham as the best option to deliver urban renewal outcomes for Newcastle compared to the other locations considered,” she said.

“A transport interchange at Wickham will help create a new business district within the emerging Newcastle CBD at the western end of Newcastle city centre.

“An interchange at Wickham will offer customers convenient public transport with direct access from trains on the Hunter and Central Coast lines.”

More than 11 hectares of undeveloped land is located within 400 metres of Wickham.

Mr Hazzard said this means there is potential for this interchange to trigger significant development and economic growth.

To assist with the community consultation, the NSW Government will next year release comprehensive detail about both options for the light rail route between Wickham and the beach.

Separate work continues on planning for future routes linking to this spine.

The announcement of an interchange at Wickham and the light rail route options comes as two key tenders were awarded for the project.

International consulting firm URS has been appointed to provide detailed advice on the design of a new interchange at Wickham, including operational requirements, a new stabling and maintenance centre, which will provide customers a straightforward transition to buses and light rail.

In addition, the tender to develop a business case and economic studies for the Newcastle light rail project has been awarded to EY, which has an extensive track record in economic assessment projects of this type.

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