

19 February 2024

Mr. Peter Chrystal  
Director Planning and Environment  
Cessnock City Council  
PO Box 152  
CESSNOCK NSW 2325

By email: [council@cessnock.nsw.gov.au](mailto:council@cessnock.nsw.gov.au)

Dear Peter,

### **Draft Cessnock Traffic and Transport Strategy**

The Urban Development Institute of Australia NSW (UDIA) is the state's leading development industry body, representing more than 450 member companies and agencies across the public and private sector. We are proud to count Cessnock City Council as a valued member. UDIA invests in evidence-based research that informs our advocacy to state, federal and local government, so that development policies and critical investment are directed to where they are needed the most. Together with our Members, we shape the places where people will live for generations to come and in doing so, we are city shapers.

UDIA welcomes the development of the Cessnock Traffic and Transport Strategy (draft CTTS), noting the importance of integrating land use and transport planning, and we thank Council for the opportunity to make a submission.

As stated on the CTTS exhibition webpage:

*"The Cessnock LGA is among the fastest growing areas in New South Wales, with an Annual Growth Rate of approximately 3.8%. By 2041, the number of residents is predicted to reach 112,419, which represents a massive 67% increase over the period. This makes Cessnock the 2nd fastest growing LGA in NSW and the 11th fastest growing LGA in the Nation out of 563."*

UDIA recognises the magnitude of the task of planning for sustainable transport solutions across a large LGA with a dispersed population subject to formidable growth projections. We commend Council for undertaking this important work.

While UDIA generally agrees with the direction of the draft CTTS, we offer the following recommendations for enhancement, and our submission offers further comments for consideration.

**UDIA recommends:**

- 1. Clearly identify the infrastructure and policies that should be included in the Hunter Strategic Regional Integrated Transport Plan to support Cessnock's housing, employment and liveability needs.**
- 2. Articulate the need for upgrade of the Lovedale Interchange from a half to a full interchange, and recognise that north bound on/off ramps to HEX will be provided at the Loxford Interchange.**
- 3. Ensure consistent application of the site-specific DCP relating to the Cessnock Branch Line.**
- 4. Consider more fully the constraints for the northern end of the Lovedale Link, including those posed by Pokolbin Creek, Cessnock Airport growth, and adjacent vineyard.**
- 5. To relieve pressure on Allandale Road, investigate a northern Cessnock city centre bypass connecting Maitland Road to Wine Country Drive at Nulkaba.**
- 6. Consult with prospective developers along the Anambah to Branxton corridor to explore opportunities for improved transport connections in conjunction with planned future urban growth, including potential transit-oriented development at Branxton station and within the Anvil Creek URA.**
- 7. Advocate more strongly for the transition of the Great North Rail Corridor to a passenger-focussed rail corridor as coal uses diminish.**
- 8. Increase consideration of major on-road and off-road cycleways and enhance the planning for cycle tourism.**

## **Role of TfNSW and DPHI**

It is incumbent upon TfNSW, in partnership with the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure (DPHI) to take a leadership role in planning for the future of the Lower Hunter's sustainable transport ecosystem. This ecosystem includes car, bus, cycle and passenger rail transport. While these issues are too broad and wide-reaching for individual councils to solve, they should nonetheless be raised in local strategies such as the CTTS. We recommend a stronger link in the CTTS to land use considerations and the role of the state departments.

UDIA is pleased that TfNSW is working to deliver a Hunter Strategic Regional Integrated Transport Plan (SRITP) this year. We recommend that the CTTS identifies the NSW transport policies and infrastructure items Council needs to support its growth, and advocate strongly for TfNSW to include the CTTS items in its Hunter SRITP and identify their funding pathways for delivery. Examples of items would include required upgrades to state roads, such as upgrades at the Loxford interchange and Wine Country Drive; and opportunities for transit-oriented development especially along the rail lines.

We recommend that the CTTS identifies the housing areas, catalyst employment areas and current place strategies around the LGA and identify their state infrastructure links. This will assist TfNSW to work with Council to ensure their corridor studies and plans account for this specific planned growth, and identify key issues including:

- Current network performance
- Scale of the infrastructure required to support growth
- Beneficiaries from upgrades
- Funding/Delivery options

By taking this approach, Council's priorities could be more likely to be included in the Hunter SRITP and better positioned to support Cessnock's housing, employment and liveability needs.

**UDIA recommends: Clearly identify the infrastructure and policies that should be included in the Hunter Strategic Regional Integrated Transport Plan to support Cessnock's housing, employment and liveability needs.**

## **Hunter Expressway**

Better linkages to the Hunter Expressway (HEX) that relieve pressure on the existing main roads that run through Cessnock CBD are supported. In order to take full advantage of access to HEX, the CTTS should clearly articulate the need for upgrade of the Lovedale Interchange from a half to a full interchange to cater to traffic heading to/from the northwest.

Likewise, with the proposed residential development in the vicinity of the former Hydro Aluminium site and the potential urban growth in the Sawyers Gulley Precinct, the CTTS should recognise that north bound on/off ramps to HEX will be provided at the Loxford Interchange (upgrading to a full interchange) as part of the project known as 'Regrowth – Kurri Kurri'.

**UDIA recommends: Articulate the need for upgrade of the Lovedale Interchange from a half to a full interchange, and recognise that north bound on/off ramps to HEX will be provided at the Loxford Interchange.**

### **Cessnock Branch Line**

Action 1.6 requires a detailed investigation into the potential suitability of providing light rail, or a mixed-use transport corridor along the Cessnock Branch Line.

UDIA is aware that the part of the corridor that relates to the project known as 'Regrowth – Kurri Kurri' (former South Maitland Railway) has been identified for a future 'Regional Off-Road Cycleway' within Figure 13: Cycleways and Shareways Map of the site-specific Development Control Plan (DCP) that was adopted by Council on 20 August 2023. The first Development Application (DA) consistent with this site-specific DCP, was approved on 8 November 2023, being 8/2022/1116/1.

To ensure planning consistency, we note that the detailed investigations for the part of the Cessnock Branch Line that relates to 'Regrowth-Kurri Kurri' must therefore reflect its use as future Off-Road Cycleway, Roads and Residential Subdivision.

**UDIA recommends: Ensure consistent application of the site-specific DCP relating to the Cessnock Branch Line.**

### **Lovedale Link**

While the concept of the so-called "Lovedale Link" from Bellbird to the intersection of Wine Country Drive and Lovedale Road is supported in principle, UDIA suggests the northern end of the route requires further consideration given the constraints posed by Pokolbin Creek, Cessnock Airport (and its future growth potential) and an adjacent historic prized vineyard.

**UDIA recommends: Consider more fully the constraints for the northern end of the Lovedale Link, including those posed by Pokolbin Creek, Cessnock Airport growth, and adjacent vineyard.**

### **Northern Cessnock City Centre Bypass**

An opportunity that has not been identified in the CTTS is a northern Cessnock city centre bypass connecting Maitland Road to Wine Country Drive at Nulkaba, relieving pressure on Allandale Road. Given the overall traffic growth expected in the area, and the need for the strategy to be future-looking, this connection should be investigated.

**UDIA recommends: To relieve pressure on Allandale Road, investigate a northern Cessnock city centre bypass connecting Maitland Road to Wine Country Drive at Nulkaba.**

### **Anambah to Branxton Regionally Significant Growth Area**

The Anambah to Branxton Regionally Significant Growth Area has the potential to accommodate a substantial population increase of up to 100,000 people, warranting high-level consideration both by Cessnock, Maitland and Singleton Councils and Transport for NSW. Major landholders and prospective developers should be consulted to explore opportunities for improved transport connections in conjunction with planned future urban growth. The future potential of Branxton railway station and a new railway station within the Anvil Creek urban release area to support transit-oriented development should also be acknowledged and encouraged.

**UDIA recommends: Consult with prospective developers along the Anambah to Branxton corridor to explore opportunities for improved transport connections in conjunction with planned future urban growth, including potential transit-oriented development at Branxton station and within the Anvil Creek URA.**

### **Future Rail Opportunities**

While the CTTS includes an action to lobby state government to increase the frequency of passenger rail services along the Hunter Line, the strategy should advocate more strongly for the transition of the Great North Rail Corridor to a passenger-focussed rail corridor as the world pivots away from coal. This is one of the greatest opportunities for the Hunter into the future and advocacy work needs to commence now to ensure the opportunity is not missed or underutilised. Leveraging off this existing infrastructure will be key to seeing the potential of the Anambah to Branxton Regionally Significant Growth Corridor realised, as future residents would require an efficient and convenient rail service connecting Singleton, Branxton, Greta, and Lochinvar to Maitland and Newcastle.

**UDIA recommends: Advocate more strongly for the transition of the Great North Rail Corridor to a passenger-focussed rail corridor as coal uses diminish.**

## **Cycleways**

While the CTTS currently includes an action to develop a Cycleway Corridor Plan, deeper consideration should be given to the inclusion of major on-road and off-road cycleways in the CTTS, building on Council's Cycle Strategy adopted in 2016. This should have regard to a cycleway tourism strategy that incorporates the Shiraz to Shore cycle trail being championed by the Hunter Joint Organisation as well as other potential connections, such as to Branxton and Greta train stations.

**UDIA recommends: increase consideration of major on-road and off-road cycleways and enhance the planning for cycle tourism.**

## **Conclusion**

UDIA appreciates the opportunity to offer our comments for the draft CTTS. We would be pleased to discuss our ideas further. Please contact Elizabeth York, Policy Manager at [eyork@udiansw.com.au](mailto:eyork@udiansw.com.au) with any questions or follow up.

Kind regards,



**Gavin Melvin**  
**Acting CEO**  
**UDIA NSW**