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| Neighbourhood Forum 5 Wollongong's Heartland |  | Coniston, Figtree, Gwynneville, Keiraville, Mangerton, Mount Keira, Mount St Thomas, North Wollongong, West Wollongong, Wollongong City. |
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Australian Minister for Population, Cities and Urban Infrastructure
Standing Committee on Infrastructure, Transport and Cities

**Submission to Federal Inquiry into options for financing faster rail
by Neighbourhood Forum 5 (NF5) - 6 December 2019**

Background

Wollongong City Council (WCC) website states that Neighbourhood Forums (NF) are independent groups run by non-remunerated community members assisting Council with information and knowledge about their local community's aspirations, visions, needs and concerns amongst other things. Forums operate within an agreed locality that encompasses a number of neighbourhoods. The NF5 locality includes 10 suburbs based around Wollongong City which includes the CBD, Wollongong Hospital medical precinct and University of Wollongong education precinct. These are the most densely populated, have the highest employment opportunities and the most rapid growth of the NFs in the Wollongong local government area (lga).

On 6 December 2019 the Agenda for NF5 meeting on 11 December was emailed to the 401 addressees on NF5 regular mailing list, and it includes a report outlining the draft NF5 submission to the above Inquiry recommending it be endorsed at the meeting. The report was developed by me as NF5 Co-Convenor and acting Secretary after consultation with other members who have extensive knowledge of rail matters and are long-term residents in the Wollongong lga. Because the closing date is 6 December the following is the NF5 submission and further advice will be forwarded after NF5 11 December meeting

Submission

It is understood from the Australian government website that on 18 October 2019 the Federal Minister for Population, Cities and Urban Infrastructure requested the Standing Committee on Infrastructure, Transport and Cities to conduct an inquiry with the following Terms of Reference: *The committee will inquire into options for financing faster rail.*

WCC Economic Development Strategy 2019-2029 indicates that 33% of employed residents commuted for work out of the capital of the Illawarra region south of Sydney in 2016.

Whilst the strategy has a target of an extra 10,500 local jobs by 2029, there is still expected to be around 20,000 commuters, many of whom rely on the inadequate, unreliable, outdated Sydney-Wollongong rail network.

This submission reinforces the need for faster rail for the regional capital. It is in dot point form to provide concise emphasis, to assist the committee with its considerations in developing funding options. The main points supporting the need to speed up Sydney-Wollongong trains include:

- In the May 2017 Federal Budget, funds were made available for the development of business cases to improve regional rail links such as Wollongong-Sydney;
- A concurrent report “The National Rail Program: Investing in rail networks for our cities and regions” was issued;
- It notes a current average of 56 km per hour for express Sydney-Wollongong trains. This speed was being attained by some steam hauled trains in the 1930s;
- Until January 2019, overcrowding of some carriages in four car OSCAR sets in weekday mid-afternoon trains from Central to Wollongong is common;
- Wollongong requires a half hourly service on weekdays at peak hours (like Newcastle);
- The 2017 federal budget had \$20 million to allow for the development of three business cases for Faster Rail to improve regional rail transport people;
- It is understood that funds have since been allocated for more studies, including for Sydney-Wollongong;
- A 2014 consultants study had a \$3.6 billion option to speed up Wollongong trains;
- It is not known if Transport for NSW is prepared to work towards the times that were on offer for South Coast express trains up to 2005;
- The relevant federal Minister and department have been requested to complete and publish a comparison of Australian intercity train services for frequency, average speeds and seating availability, but no response/s as yet;
- Noting congestion on the South Coast line and the need for links to Sydney’s second airport, the NSW government has been requested to advise how it can facilitate Infrastructure Australia making a positive assessment of the case for federal funding to complete the Maldon Dombarton rail link, but no response as yet;
- It is noted that 4 lines in Victoria have had multiple major upgrades assisted by federal funding, whereas the South Coast line major upgrade was around 2001;

In summary, the Parliamentary Committee is requested to consider this submission and support federal funding of major upgrades on the Sydney-Wollongong line as a matter of urgency.

Thankyou for the opportunity to make a submission. We look forward to the outcomes.