

**TRANSPORT ADMINISTRATION AMENDMENT (CLOSURE OF RAILWAY LINE AT
NEWCASTLE) BILL 2015**

Bill introduced on motion by Mr Andrew Constance, read a first time and printed.

Second Reading

Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE (Bega—Minister for Transport and Infrastructure) [4.20 p.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Central Newcastle has the potential to be a significant economic, social and cultural centre. Currently, however, a number of factors limit its ability to capitalise on this wonderful opportunity. That is why this Government is implementing the Newcastle Urban Transformation and Transport Program. The program will revitalise Newcastle, bringing people back to the city centre. It will create vibrant public spaces and strengthen connections between the city and the waterfront. Historically, central Newcastle has been serviced by heavy rail. Heavy rail limits the opportunities for urban renewal. To ensure public safety and because of extensive ground and overhead infrastructure, a heavy rail line involves a wide, fenced-off corridor.

As a result, pedestrian and traffic flows are limited and different parts of Newcastle are separated. In particular the heavy rail creates a barrier between the main street, Hunter Street, and the waterfront. The fencing and infrastructure of the heavy rail line also compromise the visual amenity of the area. In contrast, light rail is conducive to urban renewal. Due to the lower speeds and less obtrusive fixed infrastructure, pedestrians can move over a light rail line, public spaces can be more open and better integrated with the surrounding community, and visual amenity is enhanced. Light rail supports vibrant urban environments in various cities overseas, and that is the Government's vision for Newcastle.

This Government has already taken steps to revitalise Newcastle. It has opened six pedestrian crossings, reconnecting the city centre to the waterfront at Steel Street, Kuwumi Place, Worth Place, Wolfe Street, Argyle Street and Perkins Street. A seventh new pedestrian crossing will soon be opened at Civic. While the pedestrian crossings represent only the beginning of the transformation of Newcastle, already there is a change in mood, as residents begin to realise that finally they have a Government that is willing to invest in that great city and the Hunter region. The Government has committed more than \$1 billion to infrastructure projects in the Hunter region since 2011.

The purpose of the Transport Administration Amendment (Closure of Railway Line at Newcastle) Bill 2015 is to enable the replacement of heavy rail from the Wickham Transport Interchange to the beach at Newcastle with light rail. In doing so, the bill supports the Government's agenda to maximise the urban renewal opportunities of central Newcastle through economic growth and the development of the second-largest city in New South Wales. The Government has made clear its commitment to Newcastle. It is revitalising the Newcastle city centre to boost economic activity and reinforce the city's role as a twenty-first century regional centre. This bill is a continuation of this Government's commitment to the rejuvenation of Newcastle.

I turn my attention to the need for the bill. Section 99A of the Transport Administration Act 1988 provides that a rail infrastructure owner must not, unless authorised by an Act of Parliament, close a railway line. For the purposes of section 99A, a railway line is closed if the land is sold or otherwise disposed of, or the railway tracks and other works are removed. Due to specific arrangements relating to the heavy rail line into Newcastle, the relevant Government entities considered that section 99A would not require an Act of Parliament before the heavy rail infrastructure from Wickham to Newcastle was removed. The Government acted in a manner consistent with its clear commitment to deliver the

timely transformation of the city.

In December, a group opposed to the closure of the line—a minority group that is opposed to change and economic development—obtained a court order with the effect that Government entities could not close the line and remove the infrastructure without an Act of Parliament. Government entities have appealed the decision to the Court of Appeal, which has not yet handed down its decision. The purpose of this bill is to end the current uncertainty and to ensure that the Newcastle Urban Transformation and Transport Program can proceed without delay. Because the bill's scope is limited to the application of section 99A to a part of the railway line into Newcastle, it is a simple bill. The key provision is section 3, which states that the rail infrastructure owner of the line between Wickham station to Newcastle station is authorised to close the whole or any part of that section of railway line. I draw the attention of the House to the significant progress that has been made already on delivering Newcastle's future. The Wickham Transport Interchange is central to it. The Interchange will be the intersection of heavy rail, light rail, regional bus, taxi and car transport.

Mr Tim Crakanthorp: There are no buses.

Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE: I have just said that there will be a regional bus. The interchange will allow seamless connections between different modes. It will be the gateway to the central business district. The design of the Wickham Transport Interchange has been unveiled. It is an impressive design that pays tribute to the city's industrial history, while at the same time looking to the future. The Government has consulted and taken on board feedback from the community so that the final design includes additional weather protection, public space and amenity. It will be a pleasure to use.

Construction contracts have already been let. The early works package is near completion. The main works will now begin. Construction is expected to start later this year. As the progress on the Wickham Transport Interchange demonstrates, the Government is getting on with the job of meeting its commitment to the people of Newcastle and revitalising their city. This bill enables the next stage—light rail. Light rail will allow Newcastle to capitalise on this opportunity for renewal and reach its potential as an economic, social and cultural centre. The Government believes Newcastle deserves a world-class transport system. This bill will ensure its delivery. I commend the bill to the House.

Debate adjourned on motion by Ms Jennifer Aitchison and set down as an order of the day for a future day.