

**Submission
No 267**

**INQUIRY INTO PLANNING PROCESS IN NEWCASTLE
AND THE BROADER HUNTER REGION**

Name: Dr Niko Leka

Date received: 24/10/2014

NSW Legislative Council Select Committee on the Planning Process in Newcastle and the Broader Hunter Region

Thank you for opportunity to address this. I will concentrate on the “decision “ to cut the rail, and also item f) in the terms of reference, “any related matters”.

Regarding the rail I have a disagreement on record in the press and private correspondence with disgraced former MP Tim Owen. He claimed in an op-ed in the Newcastle Herald that he had campaigned for election on the basis of cutting the rail and replacing it with light rail. That is not true. I repudiated that in the press and directly to him. I repeatedly asked him to provide direct evidence to support his claim. He has not been able to do so- because there is none. If this is the behaviour on one person regarding the rail, then how much other lying has been going on? The inquiry should examine correspondence between those implicated in their recent ICAC hearings regarding the decision to cut the rail. Mr Owen’s correspondence suggests he and McCloy were working in harmony regarding the rail. Here is some of the correspondence between Mr Owen and myself:

Jan 10

to Tim

Dear Tim

thank you for your reply to my email about the lack of detail and costings for the latest attempt to cut the rail by replacing it with light rail from Wickham. I was alarmed by the fictions it contained, and its flippant tone on a serious issue is not what I expect from someone in your position.

I am surprised by your claim that you "sought a mandate" in your election campaign to "replace the heavy rail line with light rail" and that your maiden speech reinforced this "exact issue".

I did not see this on any of your election material and it certainly was not stated in your maiden speech. Less than a year ago your opinion piece in the Herald was about cutting the rail and replacing it with buses.

I ask you provide me with 2011 electoral material that substantiates your claim.

Your claim that the "current Lord Mayor stood also on a platform of support for the truncation of the heavy rail" is entirely unfounded.

I ask you once again that you provide the details of the costs and benefits that the Government has used in coming up with the notion of cutting the heavy rail at Wickham and replacing it with light rail to Pacific Park.

Regards

Niko Leka

On Wed, Jan 8, 2014 at 9:51 AM, Tim Owen

wrote:

John and Leka, Thank you for your emails and let me be clear with both of you, as I always am. I sought a mandate as part of the election campaign in 2011 to change the city of Newcastle in terms of getting the Mall renewal back on track and the replacement of the heavy rail with light rail in the city of Newcastle. I door knocked the vast majority of this city and the overwhelming response was positive in favour of the heavy rail's removal and its replacement with light rail and the renewal of the city of Newcastle. I was elected John and Leka, and I intend to deliver what I said I would as my primary platform. My maiden speech again reinforced this exact issue.

Secondly, and I am sure you will remember this, as it was closer in time. The current Lord Mayor stood also on a platform of support for the truncation of the heavy rail and its replacement with a public transport system that would suit the urban renewal of the city's CBD. Well guess what - he was independently elected by a majority not seen in this city for decades. I'd say there is a message in that?

The truncation decision will not be reversed: people understand (as we always said) that we are very serious about delivering a different public transport system in the city and renewing the CBD of Newcastle. I appreciate you have a different view - but we are going to fix the problems that people have been complaining about for decades. There will always be advantages and disadvantages to any decision of this nature, but it is my job to weigh the benefits of both sides of the argument and make a decision for government to consider. I and the government have done that as you would expect. We will provide an alternative public transport system that will enhance hugely the beauty and connectivity of Newcastle. I am sure the vast majority of people in this city will all be very happy in a couple of years once all the work is completed and we can look back and say - "why did it take three decades to make our city even more vibrant and beautiful and at last we are now able to enjoy something that the community of Newcastle deserves - a world class regional city".

There will be consultation in coming months to refine the plan with the community - but be assured, we are going to deliver this change.

Always nice to hear from you.

Kind Regards

Cutting an efficient mass transport system into a major city without any feasible replacement credibly costed beyond the drawing board is not only incompetent government, but is sheer madness. The only way it can be reconciled is if there are vested interests behind it who stand to profit. I ask that I be allowed the opportunity to speak to a hearing if one is convened in Newcastle.

Re item f "any other related matters"- the granting of mining and CSG licences, the sale of the port, the Jodi's truck's campaign, the sale of public utilities such as electricity assets- I believe the State government and both the State Labor and Liberal parties have been serving corporations seeking to profit from assets that are owned by the citizens of this state and should be kept in their hands.

Unfortunately, given the recent T4 hearings, the upcoming Incitec PAC hearing, the elections- and factor in having a job, and a family- I have not had the opportunity nor the resources to be fully abreast of these things. I ask, again, that if there is a hearing, that I be given the opportunity to speak then.