

**Submission
No 48**

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

Name: Mr Kevin Eadie

Date received: 13/10/2014

Revd the Hon. Fred Nile MLC
Chairman
Legislative Council Select Committee on the Planning Process in Newcastle and the Broader
Hunter Region
Parliament House
Sydney.

(newcastleplanning@parliament.nsw.gov.au)

Dear Sir,

Inquiry on the Planning Process in Newcastle and the Broader Hunter Region.

The Select Committee called for submissions to this Inquiry in a press advertisement on 1 October 2014. The closing date for submissions was quoted as 24 October 2014, and the Select Committee's phone number was given as 9230 2898.

This submission refers specifically to Term of Reference “(e), the decision to terminate the Newcastle rail line at Wickham and any proposal to construct light rail including along Hunter and Scott Streets”.

The State Government has announced that the existing “heavy rail” branch line between the Main Northern Line at Hamilton and the terminus at Newcastle is to be curtailed to Wickham, where an interchange is to be built for passengers to transfer to and from a new light rail line between Wickham and the Newcastle Central Business District (CBD). Train services on the existing branch line are to cease in late December 2014. Trains will then terminate at Wickham. The railway between Wickham and Newcastle, a distance of approximately two kilometres, is to be demolished for re-development. Passengers (both suburban and inter-city) for Newcastle Terminal will be required to transfer to buses to carry them to the CBD until such time as the light rail line and its associated support facilities are planned, funded, built and commissioned.

This Inquiry should investigate whether, in the planning process leading up to the decision to curtail the heavy rail line, all the options for retention of the heavy rail line to Newcastle Terminal were fully and fairly considered. The Inquiry should also investigate whether any undue pressure, explicit or implied, was used to influence the decision to curtail the railway by a distance of just two kilometres.

I invite the Inquiry to compare the attractiveness and functionality of those of the world's cities whose CBDs are served by off-road mass transit systems, with those cities whose CBDs are not so served. I suggest the Inquiry should draw some conclusions as to whether Newcastle might be a better city in fifty or a hundred years time if it retained an off-road mass transit corridor to its CBD such as that now provided by the heavy rail line.

By way of example, I cite the case of Sydney. Many years ago, Sydney planners reserved an underground easement for a future two-track heavy rail line through the CBD, southward from Wynyard Station platforms 1 & 2. For whatever reason, that easement was largely destroyed by the approval to construct an underground car park for the Queen Victoria Building below York Street. I understand the easement has been further sterilised by the construction of other building basements along the rail alignment.

All is not yet lost for Newcastle.

A frequent criticism of the existing branch railway is that it “cuts off” Newcastle's CBD from its waterfront.

You don't have to kill the railway in order to bury it.

It is quite practicable to both retain the railway, or at least an easement for it, and facilitate surface movement between the CBD and the waterfront, by placing the railway below ground level. This proposal has been criticised on the grounds of anticipated cost. But with proper planning, the cost can be cleverly minimised. The value of the waterfront land through which the railway passes can be expected to increase over time, to the extent that high-rise buildings on the strip will become not only financially viable, but necessary. As has happened in other cities, underground basements in such buildings also become financially viable.

It is a simple matter for the relevant planning authority to develop a planning instrument which ensures that a mass transit easement is preserved through the basements of all the new buildings, generally along the alignment of the present railway. The cost of providing such an easement would be small, compared to the cost of the new buildings. Novocastrians can thus succeed where Sydney failed, and at some future date, enjoy direct mass transit access to the centre of their CBD.

I offer this scenario for your discussion. I hope that the Inquiry will recommend that the above proposal be fully considered in determining the long term access requirements for the city of Newcastle.

Yours sincerely,

Kevin Eadie

f/NcstleRail1.odt

13 October 2014.