

**Submission
No 288**

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

Organisation: Local Living Dungog

Date received: 24/10/2014



Local Living Dungog is a rapidly growing community group based in Dungog, NSW. We have over 60 members who live in the Dungog Shire and surrounding localities including Fosterton, Main Creek, Monkerai, Brookfield, Wallarobba, Wallaringa, Sugarloaf, Gresford, Glendonbrook, Munni, Salisbury and Chichester. Our group is supported by the Dungog Shire Community Centre.

Local Living Dungog is a volunteer group that aims to increase the community resilience and self-reliance of Dungog Shire. Following The Transition Town model, we support shifting our community away from reliance on non-renewable resources such as fossil fuels and towards renewable, sustainable living practices. For further information on our group and our recent achievements please visit www.locallivingdungog.wordpress.com.

Local Living Dungog supports maintaining the railway line directly into Newcastle City, and its members are concerned by the lack of community consultation in the proposal to cut the railway line.

Our three main reasons to maintain the rail line are:

1. Convenience and affordability of train travel from Dungog directly to Newcastle City
2. Lack of Consultation for proposed rail line changes
3. Looking forward to a sustainable future

1. Convenience and affordability of train travel from Dungog directly to Newcastle City

For Local Living Dungog, transport is an important issue. Living in a rural area, our members rely on cars for a lot of travel, and whenever they can, members are glad to use public transport. From an environmental perspective, public transport reduces the number of cars on

roads, reducing greenhouse gas emissions (CO₂). We actively encourage sustainable transport in our local area.

In Dungog, the only public transport we have available is the train. Dungog is the last stop on the CityRail train from Newcastle. The early morning train (6.47am) takes many local residents from the Dungog area into Newcastle city for work, every day of the week. By the time the train reaches Paterson, it is well populated with passengers. This is because the train, travelling faster than a car, makes it convenient and affordable for residents of our rural area to be employed in Newcastle city, where employment opportunities surpass those of the Dungog region.

Other members of our group report that they travel by train to take their children to the beach, or other inner-city outings, usually taking a pram. Local teenagers use the train to Newcastle also to go to the beach, often taking surfboards or bicycles for the trip. These journeys would be difficult and crowded with a change to a bus.

Many people prefer to take the train to attend cultural and art events in Newcastle City Centre, enabling an important social, educational and necessary cultural function as well as a considerable economic one.

Members of our group who make the commute are concerned that if the rail line was cut off, the additional travel time involved with changing modes of transport and travelling by bus would make it difficult to continue to travel by train to the city.

2. Lack of Consultation for proposed rail line changes

Members of Local Living Dungog are in touch with matters relating to public transport, and it is only via approaches by other community groups that we received information of proposed changes to the rail line. In Dungog, neither our group as a whole or any of our members were invited to participate in formal community consultations, and we never came across or nor can find any local evidence of advertisements, posters, community information, letterbox drops or information at railway stations that would need to be undertaken in accordance with requirements of the Infrastructure State Environmental Planning Policy (SEPP) during the public display of the REF.

Indeed the only community consultation in the whole region noted by our members was one poster spotted by a commuter from Dungog at Hamilton Station, whereas regular travellers to Newcastle city saw no such posters.

We recommend that the enquiry investigate the decision making process behind the plan to truncate the rail at Broadmeadow. It appears the decision was not made in the public interest and with minimal public consultation.

3. Looking Forward to a sustainable future

Regional areas already miss out on so many services taken for granted in the city. The train line runs right through the Hunter Valley, and is already a well utilised infrastructure. The rail link between Dungog and Newcastle city provides an excellent public transport service in our rural areas. With the population of the Hunter predicted to increase by more than 21% by 2031, Local Living Dungog would like to see the train line continue to run directly into Newcastle city, now, and in the future.

Yours Sincerely,

Helen Rubeli

Coordinator of Local Living Dungog,

on behalf of the Local Living Dungog group.