INQUIRY INTO PLANNING PROCESS IN NEWCASTLE AND THE BROADER HUNTER REGION

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Submission to the Select Committee on the Planning Process in Newcastle and the Broader Hunter

My main concerns about the Planning process in Newcastle and the Broader Hunter concern the lack of transparency and consultation in decision making of major decisions. The failure of the State government to delay these decisions eg the cutting of the rail line until after the election especially in the light of the ICAC revelations is a major worry.

I will use the decision to truncate the rail line into Newcastle as a case in point.
There had been no consultation with commuters before the decision was made and then details of how the process would be managed was quite frankly less than helpful and smacked of policy made on the run. The 'information sessions in the Maitland area allowed no meaningful contributions, were contradictory and it was obvious that ramifications of the closure of the line for commuters outside the Newcastle area were an afterthought

There is a general feeling in the broader Hunter community that the decision was made to further developer interests and the interests of those who used the line were of no importance. Arguments that the elderly , the disabled, mothers with prams , kids going to the beach etc were ignored completely. We are being continually told that Newcastle residents are in favour of cutting the line, a claim that has been refuted in all the polls/ suveys carried out in the media.

As far as I can tell there has been no case made that cutting the rail line will be economically beneficial to Newcastle and I firmly believe that to restore faith in the planning processes the State government should postpone the decision until proper consultation has been carried out with ALL the stakeholders especially those who are already isolated or totally reliant on efficient public transport. At the very least the decision should not be made until after the March election.