

**Submission
No 293**

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

Name: Ms Sue Fetherston

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Inquiry into the decision to truncate heavy rail at Wickham at Boxing Day 2014

I write as a resident of the Upper Hunter Valley where. I have lived and worked since 2002. Having lived previously 20 years in Newcastle, I have valued and used the rail links up and down the valley and between cities for many years and still do, as have family members and friends. Hearing concerns of others around me in Scone and Muswellbrook and reading on the internet ^{below} [questions about the decision making process](#) to end the heavy rail at Wickham (with new transport interchange and light rail planned later), strike a chord with me. This change will impact on me and my friends, family members and community.

Time and place are important

Newcastle railway station's unique position on flat land a short walk to the harbour, Nobbys beach and aboriginal and colonial history sites is a valuable feature. It has a sense of place, of having got somewhere open and interesting and refreshing. **This major change deserves comprehensive and transparent investigation.**

I recommend checking into the **Wikipedia entry for Newcastle railway station** which sets out concisely its history, heritage value and current functionality as a transport interchange. The uninterrupted heavy rail trip is a great benefit for Regional users. I was struck on reading this entry how it functions as a transport link to regions of Newcastle and Hunter valley, reminding me also of rail travels I have done in other countries. It is a station close to current amenitiesamenities.

Impacts for my rail use I see include

Time

1) Disrupted connection with the Sydney service, at least in the interim period.

Plans for the Wickham interchange talk of a bus to Broadmeadow to join the Sydney service and do not mention maintaining efficient connection with the fast Sydney service. This is tightly timed, with a change at Hamilton at present. The Sydney train it meets starts at Newcastle station- what are the timetable implications of this?

My family friends workmates use the train service for multiple purposes

- access to specialist medical and dental services in Newcastle and Sydney,
- access to study – several women have been able to complete mature age university degree and post-grad further education as an enabling choice.
- Students going and returning to and from boarding school and uni terms
- School holiday excursions. School excursions
- access to work meetings and training workshops,
- Fluid employment opportunities- The opportunity the regular services provide allows people to live regionally and access some work in bigger centres- good for city and region
- Some employment is seasonal and the rail service has been important for some of the seasonal staff in my Scone workplace. It is an important aid to mental health to be able to maintain some social network for or to get away at this busy time and shifts.
- Access to the coast – mental health for the Hunter – good for youth and senior citizens
- Access transport to other places in NSW and international- eg Sydney airport

Place

I lived in the East End, in Parnell Place, for 13 years through the time of the Earthquake. I well know the value, history and interest (indigenous and colonial there is a great pictorial record of early times) and the health benefits of the access to openness, natural open scene, sea water (baths and beach) place to walk. It was used by such a mix of ordinary people. My family from other places always enjoyed their visits there. The railway station, is part of what Newcastle East is. It can be a good healthy day out, a refreshing break mid train journey elsewhere, a tourist destination for international visitors seeing real Australia. I later lived in Hamilton at Eva St right on the park along the station and I see the plans for the light rail impacting greatly here too – strangely, of the places I like to revisit on my trips to Newcastle, both are to be changed in nature by these developments and I am not clear they are for the general community good.

The Wickham interchange does not appear people friendly or an improvement as a waiting place in the artist impression, a remarkable loss compared to access to The coast/ Nobbys

Points I would like noted and investigated further

- 1) The Regional areas were not included in the Social Impact Statement for the new interchange. Upper Hunter people use the rail to access
- 2) Consultation with the community for such a significant change to the system does not seem to have reached those who will be impacted in the regions –the decision seems to have hit the news before the question.- how many users are aware of this rapidly approaching change? Dollars have been put into the road link Hunter expressway etc – the rail service is of even greater value to those who depend on it – older citizens, youth, those using it to commute to work and study.

- 3) Timing and nature of the announcement by the new state government raises question regarding political vs developer influenced vs balance decision-making for the general benefit. I felt affronted by the announcement, a change to be imposed “on Newcastle and Hunter” as opposed to “for Newcastle and the Hunter”- the rail is to be cut and made irreversible by taking up the heavy rail from Boxing Day 2014. The only reason previously in the news I had been aware of was developers stating the rail as the impediment to .Newcastle revitalisation. If change is to happen , may it be for the broad public good.
- 4) Psychological aspects of this decision for people of the regional areas. It is mental Health week(last week). In the coal fields community we increasingly notice the dust in our air from the cumulative effect of coalmines from Singleton to Muswellbrook to Denman to Mudgee and health statistics reflect it. In Scone town our roads are frequently interrupted by passing coal freight trains. **there is a psychological aspect to this change to direct access to the coast, and to the synchronised link with the fast Sydney service, of not being consulted or impacts considered.**

Thankyou for the opportunity to say something on this matter

Sue Fetherston

Sources

Wikipedia entry for Newcastle railway station..." Wikipedia entry. provides a history and concise summary of the station and buildings, its' heritage value and established function as a transport rail - bus inter change to regions. There is a gallery of pictures. .)

Wickham interchange environmental impact statement

2 more trains for Singleton,

Better Planning Network,

Newcastle Deserves Better,

news items Newcastle Herald

East End Residents Group

The East end project