

**Submission  
No 60**

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

**Name:** Professor Philip Seccombe

**Date received:** 15/10/2014

---

To: The Select Committee on the Planning Process in Newcastle and the Broader Hunter Region

Submission on the need to retain the inner-city rail line to Newcastle

The current ICAC enquiry tells us all clearly that the results of the 2011 state election for the seats of Newcastle and Charlestown in the Hunter region, and the result of the 2012 mayoral election for Newcastle, are severely influenced by corruption. Subsequent decisions relating to the region are therefore tainted and are likely to have been skewed to favour the opinions of developers rather than the general public.

With this background, I ask that the decision taken by the NSW Government to remove the railway line to Newcastle be suspended immediately. My reasons follow:

1. Discussion has not been undertaken with the users of the rail line and the community at large. Rather, we have Sydney, aided by local developers, making the decision about a Hunter asset that is owned by the taxpayers of NSW. This process is undemocratic, arrogant, and is resented by all communities impacted by the decision throughout the Hunter Valley, including Newcastle, Lake Macquarie, Maitland, Cessnock, Singleton, Muswellbrook and Scone.
2. Cutting the rail to Newcastle and building a new terminal 3 kilometres west of the city centre at Wickham is like closing Sydney's Central Station and having commuters and travellers offload at Redfern - it would be highly wasteful of money, it would remove an important built resource and cannot be termed a transport plan. Even Minister for Transport Berejiklian has admitted that this plan does not represent an improvement in transport for the region.
3. Cutting the present rail line will result in problems and delays for local travellers and those travelling between the State's two principal cities. This cannot be tolerated or justified, especially since there has been absolutely no progress in building a replacement light-rail mooted for the city, and the abandoned rail corridor seems likely to remain unused for the foreseeable future, with trains replaced by further buses on the city's streets!
4. Costs such as removing the heavy rail, land purchase and construction costs for a new terminal station, plus additional construction costs for a head-on connection to a potential light rail system, all can be saved by abandoning the proposal to remove the heavy rail. The NSW State Government has already rejected, on the grounds of inconvenience, a head-on, heavy rail - light rail interchange for the proposed NW rail corridor in the Sydney area – the same argument should apply to Newcastle.
5. The NSW State Government should not be swayed by factions who attempt to portray the rail line as a stumbling block to progress in the city. After all, the rail line, for most of its length between Wickham and Newcastle, is a narrow corridor between rows of office blocks and not an impediment to development.
6. Termination of the rail line 3 kilometres from the centre of the city is particularly detrimental to encouraging greater use of public transport in a city that is already experiencing serious problems with road congestion. The rail line is the very means by which public transport can ease traffic congestion. What city abandons energy-efficient rail transport to its city core? This is nonsense planning and only disadvantages current and future users of public transport. Recent initiatives in the city such as the Regional Museum (adjacent to Civic Station) and the inner-city precinct of the University of Newcastle (ideally located close to Civic Station and 12 minutes by train from Warabrook, the station that serves the central campus of the university at Callaghan) will be severely affected by truncation of the railway.
7. A short-term transport solution for the region is to improve road and pedestrian access across the tracks in the existing Wickham-Newcastle section. A longer-term solution should be to put that section of the rail underground. Such an initiative could involve a public-private partnership, with obvious rights available to development of air-space above some of the covered section. The Hunter is an extraordinary generator of wealth for the State; due recognition of this needs to be reflected by provision of an adequate transport system with rail at its hub – the Hunter and Newcastle certainly deserve no less.

8. I call on this Committee to strongly recommend that the NSW State Government drops its plan to cut the present rail line to the Newcastle CBD. A proper transport plan for the region demands open and transparent consultation with the public. The recent dodgy deals done by elected officials in the Hunter region cover up the fact that the travelling public of the Hunter Region does not want the NSW State Government to terminate their railway at a poorly conceived station to be built in Newcastle's western suburbs.