

**Submission
No 310**

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

Name: Ms Carrie Jacobi

Date received: 24/10/2014

Please accept this submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Newcastle Planning Processes.

I would like to raise my concerns about the decision to cut the intercity rail line at Wickham.

Over the years, the reasons publicly espoused for cutting the rail have been along the lines of creating connection between the city and the foreshore, or, more recently, to revitalise the city.

Historically, Newcastle CBD was at the height of business, trade and activity when there were 8 – 10 rail lines (including freight rail) on the harbour side of the city. These were reduced down to 2-4 lines when the foreshore was resumed for public amenity.

The downturn of activity in Newcastle can be directly traced to the development of the super malls in Kotara (now Westfield Shopping Centre), Charlestown (GPT's Charlestown Square), and, to some degree, Glendale Shopping Centre.

The role of the CBD had to change but for decades it clung to a by-gone idea of being a shopping precinct which has seen a gradual and inevitable decline in activity and trade – it simply could not compete with the mega malls because of the nature of the long strip of shops running down Hunter St. In fact, Renew Newcastle has been the saving grace for the city because it has offered an alternative to the mega shopping centres.

Now, however, with Renew Newcastle, the incoming University campus, the influx of new residents, and the rise of small, trendy bars and cafes, the city is recreating itself in a new image and is already experiencing a sense of revitalisation.

Given how preposterous the decision to cut the rail at Wickham is, it is inconceivable to see how this decision could have been reached using any reasonable public policy process. I am aware of deficiencies in the reports that have been relied on (Newcastle City Centre Renewal Report, Hunter Development Corporation, 2009), and of the influence of vested interests in the land on which the rail is situated, and can only come to the conclusion that this decision was not made in the public interest or with any true belief that the truncation of the line would revitalise the city.

Against the many arguments in favour of keeping the rail line, the reliance on dodgy reports and the influence of vested interests appears to be the only explanation for such a ludicrous decision to be made. No other city in the world is removing rail infrastructure. And we have one of the best used lines in regional NSW, currently increasing in patronage, which will be amputated.

This leads to a question of, "Why was such an unreasonable, costly decision made?" The only conclusion has to be in the undue influence of vested interests in Newcastle. The recent ICAC inquiries provide a rare and valuable insight into the secretive and nefarious methods by which vested

interests seek to influence public policy outcomes. Many of the people named in the ICAC inquiries have been central figures in the push to remove the Newcastle Rail Line.

The circumstantial evidence suggests a high probability that such conduct may have been involved in the decision to cut the rail line. Certainly, there is clear evidence of a public policy outcome favouring vested interests against the public interest.

The cutting of the rail service to Newcastle Station will have a major detrimental effect on the current trend of Newcastle's revitalisation. The rail provides access to the city which is already suffering from car congestion, and parking difficulties. With the development of the University campus (with a projected student base of 5000) this congestion would be intolerable without access to direct intercity and intercampus rail services.

To spend more than \$400million to remove Newcastle's rail infrastructure is complete lunacy, and there is currently no money budgeted for the building of the light rail.

I urge the Inquiry to recommend that the decision to truncate the intercity service be suspended, if not revoked, and that a proper strategy for the city's future public transport system be initiated using an open, transparent and evidence-based process.

Carrie Jacobi