

**Submission
No 299**

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

Organisation: The NSW Commuter Council

Date received: 24/10/2014

The NSW Commuter Council thanks the NSW Upper House for the opportunity of contributing to the inquiry into the planning process in Newcastle and the broader Hunter region.

The NSW Commuter Council together with the Hunter Commuter Council joins together over several decades many Hunter organisations involved with commuters and transport.

The NSW Commuter Council was established in the early seventies by the NSW Government to afford organised commuter organisations the opportunity of ensuring that the needs and wishes of NSW commuters was correctly determined and taken into account by decision makers.

The NSW COMMUTER COUNCIL is a central organisation which has met at least every month since its formation in the early seventies.

These people seek consensus between their groups to advise the transport minister of the day.

After due consideration, the submission below has been supported by both the NSW COMMUTER COUNCIL and the HUNTER COMMUTER COUNCIL.

Our most obvious concern is related to Terms of Reference 2(e) planned termination of heavy rail and installation of light rail in Newcastle.

It must be said very positively that not one of our member groups support either of these proposals and have repeatedly advised the minister that is the consensus of HCC. These views have been endorsed by the NSW Commuter Council.

Since the Coalition took office in March 2011 the government has made the following promises:

- 1) Any changes to Hunter transport will be 'better' than the existing system. Nothing that is proposed is better by any stretch of the imagination for the following reasons;
 - a) It will take about a half an hour longer to arrive at one's destination – this means commuters will almost certainly need to take the previous service to meet their work commitments and arrival times. This may also result in lost

connections on the return journey

- b) The proposed changes will not be more convenient for commuters particularly the disabled, frail elderly, and those carrying various luggage.
 - c) Much luggage that is currently conveyed by heavy rail may or may not be capable of travelling on the proposed light rail such as pushbikes and surfboards.
 - d) To terminate the heavy rail at Wickham and expect commuters to wait up to 10 minutes for a light rail replacement is ludicrous and it can be guaranteed that travellers subjected to this imposition any being an able bodied person going to the university or court house sites will walk there.
 - e) Terminating a perfectly functional and convenient system which has delivered people promptly to their destination for over a century cannot be bettered by forcing people to take a similar system 40 meters away from their current transport.
 - f) Those advocating the termination of the rail use as their main reason that; 'the heavy rail I underutilised'. His is a statement only someone who never catches trains could make, however it begs the question that if there are as few commuters and they say and many will certainly be driven away by a forced interchange what viability can be expected from the proposed light rail?
- 2) Millions of dollars were spent very successfully on Wickham Rail Station a few years ago to minimise delays on the Pacific Highway that is Stewart Avenue. These delays now are down to a maximum 1 minute or about 10% of possible through time during peak hours. This huge investment will not only be negated but aggravated by placing a bus interchange right at the worst bottleneck of the Highway.
- 3) Commuters were assured that they would be placed first in all transport planning. This is unbelievable regarding the proposal to force commuters into a totally unnecessary delay and inconvenience by cutting heavy rail services and condemning commuters to a projected 2 years of bus interchange when there is no justification for cutting heavy rail until after the light rail replacement is place and operational as the government originally promised.
- 4) The projected 'temporary bus' service will I expect travel along Hunter and Scott streets, while these streets are being rebuilt for light rail access. This appears set to

provide even more delays for commuters.

CONCLUSION

After due consideration, all members of the Commuter Councils strongly support the retention of the existing rail service to and from the existing station.

The NSW commuter council would welcome the opportunity to address the investigation.

Regards

Kevin Parish OAM, Chair
NSW COMMUTER COUNCIL.