

**Submission
No 193**

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

Name: Ms Lynda Gavenlock

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Inquiry on the planning process in Newcastle and the broader Hunter Region – the decision to terminate the Newcastle rail line at Wickham and any proposal to construct light rail along Hunter and Scott Sts (terms of reference 2e)

The Director
Select Committee on the Planning Process in
Newcastle and the Broader Hunter Region
Parliament House
Macquarie St
Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Sir/Madam

Terminating the rail line at Wickham and any proposal to construct light rail ... (terms of reference 2e)

Thank you for providing me with the opportunity to provide a submission to your Committee/enquiry.

As I understand it, the idea of democracy, not dictatorship, is supposed to be about consultation and consideration; of the people, by the people and for the people.

Sadly, I feel, and the community should feel, let down about the decision to terminate the rail line to Newcastle mainly because, for decades, when people have wanted or needed to travel to Civic or Newcastle by rail public transport they have had quite a reasonable expectation that they would arrive there as quickly, safely and as easily as possible but this will not occur when the rail line is terminated. Clearly, given that the ABS regional profile statistics for 2012 from the ABS website (www.abs.gov.au) show the population of Newcastle and Lake Macquarie (SA4) to be 360,882, Maitland (LGA) 71,866, Cessnock (LGA) 53,289, Port Stephens (LGA) 67,938, Dungog (SA2) 8,696, Singleton (LGA) 23,785, and Muswellbrook (LGA) 16,694, the number of people who will be affected by the decision to terminate the Newcastle railway line is not minor or insignificant.

I strongly object to the decision to terminate the Newcastle rail line and to force passengers to disembark and get on and off buses from Boxing Day 2014 into the foreseeable future, given that we have acceptable and functioning infrastructure already in place and it is an unnecessary and unacceptable burden and waste of resources to spend extra money on simply moving people from one place to another in a different (and I feel a less efficient) way. Due to the cost and, in my view,

spurious reasons for constructing a light rail I doubt whether it will ever be built so I will not waste much time and effort addressing what I consider to be a sheer folly (light rail for Newcastle). I feel we should be treating our transport resources as precious commodities and valuing the foresight and good sense of our railway's builders, not wasting precious and scarce money. I feel the money that will be wasted in cutting our existing transport service clearly could and should be better spent on other projects and priorities. In my view, no rational argument has ever been made for cutting the rail line and I feel it simply beggars belief that the Government would propose, let alone decide or dictate, that the rail line be terminated. Furthermore, I feel it would be a travesty of justice to allow a community asset (the Newcastle rail corridor) to fall into the hands of the private sector because the community would be denied the use of such a unique community asset (because of the community's asset what other community can get to the beach or elsewhere so easily?).

I and my family are users of the train service to Newcastle and Civic Station, and apart from our 5 year old family member who due to age has used the service for less than a decade, we have been users of the train service for decades. We have used the train service to Civic and Newcastle for shopping, medical and legal and other appointments, work, connecting to public transport to other places, and general outings such as to Newcastle beach, cafes and restaurants, events at the Civic Theatre, Civic Park, the Newcastle Foreshore, the Newcastle Conservatorium, the Newcastle Museum and the Newcastle Art Gallery. I actively promote the benefits of travelling to Civic and Newcastle by train to any Sydney or international visitors that I meet on the train, including recently a lady from Richmond who travelled from Richmond on a short holiday with her daughter because she knew she could get to Newcastle by train.

Users of the Newcastle train service need to have their views taken into account but it seems the decision to terminate the Newcastle train line has been taken without: due consideration or regard for the views of users; the inconvenience that the users will experience (the Transport NSW Media Release of 21 October 2014 available at www.transport.nsw.gov.au refers to buses leaving Newcastle about 25 minutes before the connecting train to Hamilton so journey times could be doubled or more for people who might now have a 25 minute trip to their station from Newcastle); and without any

release of a cost benefit analysis for such a major and costly decision. How or why could there be no publicly released cost benefit analysis released for such a big ticket decision?

Given what I view as undue haste and a lack of consideration about terminating the Newcastle rail service questions need to urgently be raised by your Committee before it is too late about: why the decision was made; why the service is being terminated so close in time before an election; what has been the role of all relevant parties to the decision and whether the decision can and should be reversed, especially following the recent ICAC enquiries, revelations, admissions and consequences. I note that your Committee is due to report on 5 March 2015 and I feel that as this is just before the scheduled 28 March 2015 election that the deadline sets up your Committee for failure; I feel an interim report would need to be issued well before the scheduled Boxing Day 2014 cutting of the rail line so that a rational and considered decision can be made to defer or reverse the decision to terminate the Newcastle rail line.

The grounds for my objection to terminating the Newcastle train line are:

- The current train service provides a valuable, quick, accessible, safe and seamless passenger transport service to the key places that people want to go to, providing easy access and equity to whatever activities people (whether from Sydney, the Central Coast, Lake Macquarie, Newcastle, the Hunter Valley, overseas or wherever) want to engage in at Civic, Newcastle or beyond. In regard to access and equity I have noted that the current train service is used by people of all ages and circumstances, such as city workers, schoolchildren going to school, people going to the beach with their surfboards or other surfing accessories, the disabled (including in wheelchairs), mothers (with or without prams), the elderly, people with bicycles, and people with their luggage or shopping. To force people to get on and off a train and onto buses will inevitably increase journey times and affect people's decisions about whether or not they will drive instead, or have to forgo journeys, experiences and opportunities, because of having to spend extra time and suffer inconvenience because of the decision to terminate the Newcastle rail line/service.

- In terms of cost, previous generations have paid for and constructed the valuable asset (the train line and service – there is an Engineering Association plaque on a platform at Newcastle station about construction of the line in the 1850's) and to waste this precious resource by failing to use that train line and service (a sunk cost) and put in place a different service, which I feel is for no good reason, I feel is a ridiculous waste of economic resources (past, present and future). Furthermore, given that the Law Courts and a new University campus are planned to nearly be on the doorsteps of Civic Station it seems so intuitively obvious that surely those extra people going to those new buildings would be entitled to feel that it is simply ridiculous that they could have easily got off at their destination at Civic railway station had that service been kept in place, instead of waiting to get on and off buses and increasing their journey times and inconveniencing their lives. If people choose to drive instead of putting up with or suffering inconvenience this will increase parking, traffic and pollution. Why should we not be allowed to use a valuable asset (a train line) and be forced to get on and off buses, especially if not enough buses happen to be provided to meet demands (in my experience the customers getting off a 4 or 8 carriage train from Sydney would be more than 1 busload at Civic and Newcastle stations)? How will the proposed replacement bus services cope (will people be forced to stand on the buses or have to wait until more buses can fit them on or are called in, especially if there are many people with surfboards and luggage)? I shudder to think what people who attend major events, such as pop concerts and community activities at the Foreshore, such as the recent Police display, as well as national and international tourists, will think of not being able to get as easily, quickly and as safely to where they want to go to as what they can now (perhaps there will be less major events held in Newcastle because of the cutting of the Newcastle rail line?).
- In my experience the Newcastle train service has been well patronised; I and my family have witnessed big crowds on the Civic and Newcastle stations. I am aware that recently (3 October 2014) the Rev the Hon Fred Nile MLC, the Committee Chair, saw with his own eyes, and photographed, large numbers of people alighting at Newcastle station.

- In terms of environmental impact, especially pollution, it does not make any sense for extra buses to run from one point to another and back the other way time and time again, as opposed to the current system of running environmentally friendly electric trains to Civic and Newcastle stations. Furthermore, if some affected people swap or substitute travelling by train with driving the adverse environmental impacts will be magnified. The disruption to people's economic, social and environmental costs when there are substitution effects simply cannot be beneficial to society.

I note that although the terms of reference of the enquiry refer to terminating the Newcastle rail line at Wickham and any proposal to construct light rail, the ground seems to be shifting, with trains terminating at Broadmeadow initially then Hamilton, and no mention of a proposed starting date for a light rail service (see the Media Release of 21 October 2014 of Gladys Berejiklian MP *Buses to Run Every 10 Minutes As Revitalisation of Newcastle CBD Gets Underway*).

Whilst I welcome the opportunity to comment it should also be noted that I and others have had to waste their time and money fighting the decision to terminate the Newcastle rail line because I feel that our views have never been taken into consideration. Please also note that while many people are clearly affected by the decision to terminate the Newcastle rail line only a limited number of people will take the time to provide submissions to your enquiry and a letter from just one person such as me may be representative of the views of so many who do not write to you. I am aware that the *Newcastle Herald* has published countless sensibly worded Letters to the Editor about the foolishness of terminating the Newcastle rail line.

In conclusion, we desperately need to retain our current Newcastle rail line/service. I urge your Committee to: listen to the views of the users of the rail service; use common sense and intelligence; and conclude that the Newcastle rail line decision should be reversed.

Yours sincerely

LYNDA GAVENLOCK

23 October 2014