

**Submission
No 331**

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

Name: Mr Stephen Weatherstone

Date received: 27/10/2014

Dear Reverend Nile

I believe the decision by the Baird Government to truncate the heavy rail service to Newcastle Railway Station is flawed. It is a politically expedient decision, influenced by big business and developers, to show that the Baird Government can make tough decisions and stick to them.

The first concern I have about the decision is that there is no estimate of the cost of the whole project-

- construction of a new interchange
- demolition and landscaping the corridor and appurtenances
- contaminant removal from the corridor
- construction, maintenance and servicing of the proposed light rail service
- there has been no estimate of the value of the existing infrastructure – it has zero value as far as the Baird Government is concerned, but NSW citizens paid for it!

I expect the cost to be far more than anyone realises – costs that are not necessary.

Secondly, the main justification claimed by proponents of truncation is to remove physical barriers between the old city centre and the foreshore -

- this really is a nonsense - this view of a non problem has been pushed relentlessly for years by Newcastle centric proponents
- there are already several opportunities to cross from the city to the harbour at level crossings and overhead bridges
- there could be several more crossings - there used to be one at Hannell St and Market St some years ago and there may have been one at Worth Place earlier than my memory.

Thirdly, there has been no consideration of future transport needs for an increasing residential population in Newcastle City itself and the potential existing and future demand for a direct service from various parts of the Hunter Valley, Central Coast and other parts of the State.

- new law courts with limited parking are being constructed two minutes walk from Civic Station
- Newcastle University precinct in the city is being expanded – again, two minutes walk from Civic Station
- there is a direct link from the Shortland Campus of the University by rail from Warabrook to Civic
- there are extensive housing developments with rail access planned in Hunter Valley and West Lake Macquarie
- the Newcastle Regional Museum is one minute walk from Civic Station
- there are two beaches less than ten minutes walk from from Newcastle Station (one of the few Stations in NSW and Australia to claim this attraction)
- the ferry terminal is five minutes walk from Newcastle Station

- disabled citizens can have direct access to all inner city locations without changing modes of transport
- the existing rail service will be quicker than any alternative transport
- the inconvenience of changing to bus or light rail will lead to more car use.

My fourth objection relates to the light rail location and the interchange.

- light rail is proposed along Hunter Street and this will simply clutter up the street space and compromise road use by cars and other vehicles
- light rail would cross Stewart Avenue so road traffic will still be held up by the 'regular' shuttle trams crossing that main thoroughfare
- Railway Street crossing will be closed to facilitate the new interchange
- No consideration has been given to rerouting traffic along Gordon Avenue and reconstructing the existing bridge over the rail line at the extension of Gordon Avenue and then utilising an old rail corridor and land resumptions to join Hannell Street.

My fifth objection relates to the claim that removing the heavy rail services will revitalise Newcastle

- there really is no evidence for this claim and in fact building and redevelopment has been occurring and projected across the city
- Hunter Street is slowing undergoing a makeover and I expect it to develop a unique character that will be attractive to locals and visitors alike without big developers
- heavy rail could in fact be a part of the attraction and is clearly the case when steam trains travel all the way into Newcastle Station.

In summary I believe that there are more benefits in retaining and enhancing the existing heavy rail service into Newcastle Station than truncating that service at Wickham and that the substantial funds required to undertake state sponsored vandalism would be better spent on more worthwhile projects around NSW.

Reverend Nile, I urge you to take every effort to stop the expensive and unnecessary truncation of heavy rail to Newcastle.

It might not look pretty but it works.

Yours sincerely

Stephen J Weatherstone MIEAust CPEng