

**Submission
No 17**

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

Name: Mrs Leanne Piller

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I have been commuting to the Newcastle CBD for thirty years. I have commuted from a number of different locations by car and also by rail from both Sandgate and Cardiff stations. For the last 15 years I have been commuting via rail from Cardiff.

I have followed the rail debate in Newcastle with interest over this 30 year period. At different stages of the argument I could see the point of removing the line, as the CBD lost major businesses and fewer people were attending the CBD (including using the rail), but in the past the removal of the heavy rail line always seemed to be linked to the proviso that the corridor was maintained for light rail or whatever was to replace the heavy rail.

However, I have perceived, particularly since the upgrading of Cardiff station, and the recent introduction of Opal, that more people are using the train, and we are about to dramatically increase the number of people travelling to the CBD with the additional university students.

The argument about the revitalisation of the CBD and the relationship to transport continually mystifies me. I would have thought the formula would go like this:

1. How many people can we get into the CBD within a reasonable amount of time?
2. What kinds of development would that number of people support? It seems completely the wrong way around to assume that certain kinds of developments will attract a 'sufficient' amount of people to make them viable – regardless of the practical difficulties of them actually getting there. If the transport is not right, people will just not attend.

I would certainly never choose to shop in the CBD if I was driving there, as the cost of metered parking in the middle of the day is too high. Last week it cost me \$16 to attend two dental appointments and two doctor's appointments with my children. I expect this dissuades a lot of people who would need to drive past free parking at many of the regional shopping centres, to get to the CBD. Therefore, it would seem that transport that is able to move large numbers of people quickly to the CBD without the need for people to bring their vehicles, would ASSIT the CBD development.

If there is a problem with the rail corridor being a barrier to the foreshore – fine – but keep the corridor so that people who are disembarking from trains do not have to sit in alternative transport in peak hour traffic in King or Hunter streets. One of the main reasons I use the train is to avoid the traffic during peak hour. This produces just a 5 minute door to door saving for me (40 minutes against 45 minutes to drive and walk from free parking).

However, with a break in the journey, and the crawl through peak hour traffic (especially the eastbound/westbound traffic), my timesaving is gone. Regrettably, this will put me back in my car where I am able to approach the city from the south/east and avoid the traffic which will be experienced by people travelling from Wickham (and particularly from Hamilton, during the construction period). I do not believe that people who are able to approach by motor vehicle from the south will catch a train that will then expose them to the much heavier traffic flowing in from the west.

At the very least, during the construction period I would suggest that interim park and ride arrangements be made in the area around Parkway Avenue/Bar Beach, which still has street parking available. It would be workable for commuters to catch a bus from there to the CBD but it is not attractive at the moment due to the very low frequency of buses travelling along Darby St and the fact that the free bus does not extend to the area where free parking is available (unlike the situation at the Hamilton end, where the last stop borders free street parking). Therefore, in order to access a free bus in Darby St you would need to walk a considerable distance from free parking (given the volume of parking that is already occurring in these areas, additional people would be parking at least 500m from the existing free route.)

Regardless of what the final decision ends up being, I fail to see why rail services need to cease more than a few weeks before they are ready to commence construction work at Wickham. I could not find a start date for this anywhere on the website (where it was admitted that the plans are not finalised), although the supposed completion date is published. How is it possible to forecast a completion date when the start date is obviously still so uncertain that it cannot be made public?