

**Submission
No 270**

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

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The future of Newcastle stands at a crossroad (Farrelly, E. It's now or never for shiny Newcastle. Sydney Morning Herald, 8 May,2014). Will the city's development result from plans imposed on it by UrbanGrowth and GPT, or will the citizens of Newcastle genuinely have the major role in determining the future urban design and infrastructure?

Take the decision to close the heavy rail line into the Newcastle CBD as an example. It is clear that, despite minimal consultation with Novocastrians and no consultation with Hunter residents outside Newcastle, the State Government is rapidly pushing ahead with the closure decision. This is despite the ICAC Hearings indicating the Newcastle planning process may have been subject to influence- buying.

The central role of transport connectivity in urban development is widely accepted, yet the State Government wants to cut Newcastle CBD's direct link to the Sydney and to the remainder of the Hunter Valley. This decision seems particularly inappropriate in the wake of the news that the new city campus of the University of Newcastle will cater for over 4,300 staff and 300 staff with only a handful of dedicated car park spaces.

The rail closure will result in the unnecessary expenditure of over \$400 million. Effectively, these funds will create a second-rate service which will increase commute times to the second largest city in NSW by 15-20 minutes, and require a journey disruption which will be problematic for the elderly, passengers with luggage, and youth with surfing gear.

This irrational plan only seems to make any sense if it is assumed that the Government has already given an unofficial indication to developers that they will be able to build on the railway corridor. This move will permanently alienate the land from public transport use and will have the reverse effect to the development plan motto, that is it will close off the harbour further, rather than "opening the harbour up to the city".

The results of newspaper opinion polls lend support to the view that most Hunter residents are opposed to the heavy rail line closure. While such polls are not without validity limitations, they represent stronger evidence than any evidence the Government has produced so far in favour of the closure decision.

Details of poll results are provided below:

- " Are you looking forward to the termination of the Newcastle rail line?" 60.89% said No. n=2,708. Newcastle Herald, 3 July, 2014. NB This poll conducted before the major ICAC revelations.

- " Should the truncation of the Newcastle rail line be postponed until the results of the ICAC inquiry are known?" 89.33 said Yes. n= 328. Newcastle Herald, 13 August,2014

- "Is there hope the decision to cut the rail line into Newcastle will be reversed?" 87.01% said Yes.
n=unknown. Maitland Mercury, 14 September,2014.

In summary, the evidence available suggests most Hunter residents are opposed to the closure of the heavy rail line to the Newcastle CBD. The Committee should recommend urgently that the line remain fully open till residents of Newcastle and the broader Hunter community have been allowed to have the major say in the closure decision.

Dr. Raoul Walsh