

**Submission
No 214**

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

Name: Rev Warwick Cadenhead

Date received: 24/10/2014

The attached file is a letter written by me on behalf of the Uniting Church's Hunter Presbytery (the church's regional council) in July raising concerns with the Premier regarding the choice of light rail route in Newcastle. The State Government's response has been that the 'hybrid' route is the 'optimum' solution, without substantiating their claim. I believe the Committee is entitled to ask questions about the lack of transparency and lack of substantive reasons for the Government's choice of route.

Regards, (Rev.) Warwick Cadenhead



The Uniting Church in Australia

Synod of NSW and the ACT - Presbytery of The Hunter

11th July 2014

TO: The Hon. Michael Baird, Premier, NSW
RE: Newcastle Light Rail Route

Dear Premier

At its 24 June meeting, the Hunter Presbytery, the regional council of the Uniting Church in Australia, resolved to write to you and express concern regarding the choice of route for the planned light rail project in Newcastle.

Your Government recently announced that it has chosen what is termed the 'hybrid' route for light rail in Newcastle. This would see light rail vehicles use the existing rail corridor for a relatively short distance, before the route turns right and then left and travels along Hunter and Scott Streets for the majority of the length of the business district.

The Hunter Presbytery has reservations about this being the best choice for three reasons: cost, disruption during construction and effectiveness of the route for regional transport.

- 1) **Cost** The Uniting Church has a long and broad commitment to community service and seeks Government priorities that enable the maximum service to the community for any expenditure. If expenditure on one project is beyond the most cost-effective option, other vital projects suffer unnecessarily.

With this principle in mind, the Presbytery notes that the consultation documents made available at the 'revitalising Newcastle' website indicate a choice between three possible routes:

- 1) existing rail corridor and Scott Street;
- 2) Hunter and Scott Streets; and
- 3) a 'combined' approach (more recently termed the 'hybrid' route.)

- The document acknowledges the cheapness of route 1 (based on the existing rail corridor) – indicating it would be half the cost of route 2.
- The document notes the 'hybrid' route would cost 'less than Hunter Street but more than the existing rail corridor' options.

The Presbytery considers choosing any other route than the existing rail corridor to be a waste of public money, which could be spent on other vital infrastructure. This is especially the case as converting the existing heavy rail corridor to light rail substantially achieves the goal of enabling connectivity between the business district and the harbour foreshore. Choosing the 'hybrid' route could see many millions of dollars spent simply to have light rail 20 metres closer to shops and would not be a cost-effective solution.

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- 2) **Disruption** The Uniting Church is committed to the common good of all including the environment in which we live. This leads the Church to encourage a reduction in pollution in urban environments.
Converting the existing rail corridor to light rail will be far less disruptive to the already busy traffic along Hunter Street during the construction phase, as the Government's documents acknowledge. This disruption is likely to encourage more commuters to use cars, generating increased pollution.
- 3) **Regional Transport Effectiveness.** Many commuters travel for some time to get to their destination in the Newcastle business district. Having to complete the journey on light rail travelling slowly down an already-busy Hunter and Scott Streets is likely to have a negative impact on public transport patronage, leading to increased car usage and attendant congestion and pollution. Your Government's consultation document acknowledges that the rail corridor route would provide the fastest public transport journeys.
Given the Church's valuing of the environment, we are concerned not only about the inconvenience to public transport users that will likely take place, but also the likely increase in pollution.

The Hunter Presbytery urges you to reconsider your Government's choice of light rail route and select instead the 'existing rail corridor and Scott Street route.'

Yours sincerely,

(Rev.) Warwick Cadenhead
Chairperson

Copies to: Minister for Transport; Minister for Planning; State Member for Newcastle; Lord Mayor of Newcastle