

**Submission
No 330**

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

Name: Mr Francis Young

Date received: 27/10/2014

Partially Confidential

To the Chair

Inquiry on the planning process in Newcastle and the broader Hunter region

Submission by Francis Young of on 24 October 2014.

I make this submission as a private individual, and it contains my personal understanding of the facts. It relates to material which I supplied to the Chair before the inquiry was called.

Transport NSW, in what appears to me a failure in its obligations in regard to responsible custody of public moneys and delivering public amenity, had evidently decided by 2011 that the Newcastle railway would be truncated west of Stewart Avenue, even if there was a cheaper and better solution. I am concerned that a cheaper and better tunnel option was proposed to, but rejected by, Transport NSW without public explanation.

I believe that persons unknown within Transport NSW have colluded with persons associated with one or more of the agencies named in the Terms of Reference, to withhold, suppress, ignore and/or deliberately misrepresent information provided by the senior rail engineer of GHD that would, if assessed, have resulted in an obvious decision to lay a low-cost, open-excavated rail tunnel into the publicly-owned rail corridor, to lower the railway stations at Wickham, Civic and Newcastle, to remove all of the surface rail barriers other than station entrances, and to unite the city for the full length of the Honeysuckle waterfront on level ground.

Instead, the one-off cash windfall from the Newcastle port sale will be exhausted by the Wickham truncation this Christmas, without delivering any needed transport outcomes for Newcastle, nor for commuters from the lower Hunter and Central Coast.

The outcomes sought for Newcastle are quite straightforward:

- **removal of rail gates which block arterial and local traffic in central Newcastle**
- **removal of fences and footbridges that divide the city from the waterfront**
- **reducing the amount of road traffic in the CBD**
- **increasing patronage of public transport by commuters**
- **releasing the rail land to purposes approved by the public**
- **attracting private money to revitalise Newcastle to capitalise on growth in its resident and commuter population once the surface rail obstacles are gone.**

But the outcomes of the Wickham truncation will include:

- **increasing** public transport journey times, in both directions
- **increasing** the use of cars to commute to Newcastle due to even slower public transport journeys
- **increasing** the amount of public transport clogging roads in the form of buses and/or trams.

The key predictor of public transport use is frequency. The international minimum benchmark is considered four services per hour (15-minute intervals), which is the frequency that sees patrons catch transport without consulting a timetable.

Patronage on the Maitland-Newcastle line is modest, because the train intervals are 20-40-20-40 minutes, throughout the day and night. Missing a train means a 40-minute wait!

At present, however, to increase train frequency would mean closing rail gates even more often.

The solution to both road congestion and train patronage is traffic separation. No rails on roads.

The tunnel proposal

GHD Rail Senior Engineer informed me in a lengthy phone conversation on 3 November 2010 that Newcastle's intercity railway can be retained and services improved by lowering it into a cheap, cut-and-cover tunnel, uniting city and waterfront and largely alleviating the traffic problems of the city. estimated that it can be built in two years at a cost of around \$200 million, half of that being the cost of civil works to relocate stormwater services and a fibre optic trunk.

told me that for three weeks during 2010, his team of engineers had examined some ninety publicly funded rail studies spanning over a century, and concluded that a tunnel was the obvious solution in Newcastle, and was not only feasible despite the sand and water table issues of the site, but was quite cheap to lay, since it could be open excavated, not bored. informed me that they had approached various (unnamed) politicians but that not a single one of them would meet to discuss a tunnel proposal. In the end, they had to drop the project for lack of a client to pay for their time.

Concerned that Transport NSW was about to waste money, I wrote to Treasurer Eric Roozendaal on 21 November 2010 with full details, including contacts for GHD Rail. Transport NSW replied more than three months later, on 25 February 2011, with no mention of a tunnel, merely referring me to their website to read about the Wickham rail truncation!

After his own investigations, journalist Ian Kirkwood confirmed on 7 March 2011 in the *Newcastle Herald*, that GHD Rail was unable to proceed with a formal tunnel project in 2010 because it did not have a client to fund further work. The client they needed was Transport NSW.

Transport NSW has repeatedly failed to explain the absence of a tunnel costing and feasibility study from its public consultation, when it was often raised in the press, at public transport meetings and in direct correspondence.

I request that the Minister for Transport make public the detailed cost breakdown of a rail tunnel into Newcastle, upon which Transport NSW must presumably have based its decision to exclude a tunnel from consideration in favour of a \$340 million truncation and bus station west of Stewart Avenue, to the detriment of commuters.

Did Transport NSW create "gold-plated" costings to make a tunnel less attractive?

Did it obtain costings at all?

If no assessment of a tunnel was carried out, then Transport NSW should do one now, and should suspend any specific works that would preclude varying the Wickham project scope to deliver a rail tunnel as part of the solution.

For instance, along with a rail tunnel, improved bus management could occur in the zone west of Stewart Avenue, with a passenger access under Stewart Avenue, or in the vacant area between the existing Wickham rail entrance and Honeysuckle Drive. This will be far superior to having thousands of train passengers disembarked and walking across Stewart Avenue as proposed.

GHD Rail's cut-and-cover tunnel was to have taken about two years and cost less than the \$340 million currently allocated for rail removal.

If Newcastle experiences the expected large growth in its commuter population in the next five years, including users of the new law courts and the 4700 staff and students of the new Civic campus, then a tunnel which permits commuters to arrive and leave, at a point close to their CBD location, without using the surface, will dramatically improve the amenity of the city, for people, buses, and investors.

Virtually every global city with successful surface transport ALSO has mass transit underground within the city centre. Underground trains help buses to travel faster, by reducing road congestion.

I recommend that a rail tunnel proposal be sourced and publicly assessed now, and a modified Wickham project be developed to lower the railway if this proves a better solution and of comparable or only modestly higher cost.

I also believe that it would be of public interest to ask Transport NSW to produce their internal analysis of a tunnel proposal, or if they have not done one, the internal email correspondence in which a tunnel for Newcastle may have been discussed.

It is quite inexcusable that no public assessment exists of a tunnel, which is the only permanent and total solution to the inner Newcastle road congestion which also delivers efficient commuter transport capacity with adequate frequency.

I thank the Committee for their concern that planning decisions for Newcastle comply with public expectations of transparency, honesty, consultation, public amenity and value for money.

Newcastle needs a rail tunnel vision, not more rails on roads.

Yours sincerely,

Francis Young