

**Submission
No 323**

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

Name: Mr Milton Caine

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Dear Members,

When the government called for comment on the rail plan I was told my submission would not be acceptable since it assumes that there will not be a truncation of the rail line. The Minister was fully briefed in the presence of Hon Paul Green MLC concerning my proposal and her words were a good plan but the decision is out of my hands it is already been made. that was in mid November 2013.

It is a sad day when the Minister for Transport cannot decide on a transport plan.

The role of government ought to be about assisting the most vulnerable as a priority and the test of any government policy must be: how does this affect the most vulnerable? To be able to do this, the most vulnerable must be identified.

As to the proposed transport changes in Newcastle the most vulnerable are those who cannot drive; those in wheelchairs and those with other disabilities. As to other areas of the proposals for Newcastle, the vulnerable are the youth, who need an alternative entertainment infrastructure to that based around alcohol, gaming and all forms of prostitution where the majority are currently focussed. There is nothing in these plans that promote the development of a family friendly precinct. Many thriving family friendly businesses were damaged in the earthquake of 1989 and then redevelopment was obstructed due to the heavy burden of rigid regulations placed upon the owners.

Let us first deal with the transport matters and the truncation of the rail line into Newcastle Station. As a wheelchair taxi driver I know that there are at least 20 people who "live" in wheelchairs and frequent the rail service to travel either to Sydney or to the Valley on a regular basis. I either take ,or arrange for others to take , these people to Newcastle Station at various times of the day. While it is true that the cost of a taxi fare is subsidised up to \$30.00 and if all these people were transported to another station, it could be argued that it would only be a minor cost to them, but this is an additional cost and unnecessary in my view. These people have a higher cost for living because of their disability and mostly a limited income as well. Often on their way home they will ride in their chair, if they have a powered chair, as long as the battery has sufficient charge left in it. The truncation of the line will mean that travel for these most vulnerable Australians will become very difficult to the point where some will decide it is too difficult to go anywhere. I cannot stand by and allow this to affect the community of people with disabilities and neither should this, or any other government. The resulting pessimism and isolation that results will cause a greater health cost to the government as there's a direct connection between a good positive mental attitude and reduced health costs.

One may say we are going to supply buses to take the place of the train and then a tram. Let's be totally honest, a person's self-esteem is a valuable asset and if you turn up to a bus and a ramp has got to be put down and only 2 people in wheelchairs can travel in the bus (if it is a low floor bus) and you are the centre of attention and a mother with her child in a pram also wants to travel on the same bus, how would you feel? On a train all can travel but on a bus connection one of the two needs to be left behind. The disabled person know that they are different but they want to be included in all of society as much as possible and should we not make it as easy as possible? I had thought that the government believed that, but perhaps only if there is not heaps of money to be made from a decision that will result in making life more difficult for those with disabilities.

There are claims that the train is hardly used but that is not true at all. Newcastle University has a Bar on The Hill which many students will attend and then walk to the train station at Warabrook and catch the train to Civic station to go to Argyle House or to Newcastle Station to Customs House. The trains from about 9.30pm onwards will carry many of these revellers in their hundreds. This will happen from 3 to 4 nights of the week. During study times and holidays the numbers are less. On good weekends the Valley trains bring many people to the beaches with their boards and eskys. On special events days all trains stop with standing room only, especially on New Year's Eve, as people come to the city to see the 9.00pm fireworks; and the midnight fireworks over the Harbour. The trains are then full returning people until the early hours of the morning. Newcastle Buses cannot cope at all, even with ticket sellers on the footpath. I know because I worked for Newcastle

Buses for many years. I fear that the people will not take these changes well and with the crowd, the delays and the alcohol, it will take only one out of place word and we will see violence on our streets to commence the New Year.

I must state that there has never been an attempt to connect the Newcastle buses with the rail service in a functional way, simply because historically, the Newcastle Government Bus Service was created to service the BHP sites in Newcastle. The changing community needs of the service have never been seriously considered and in fact, the prospect of being sold has had an impact since 1980, a year that coincides with when I arrived in Newcastle. I have requested every transport minister since 1985 to arrange for the Newcastle buses to actually stop at the Broadmeadow Railway station but they have been unable or unwilling to do anything other than to write back with the standard comment "Your comments have been noted", which to me is "tell someone who cares" - well I do care and I do hope this committee cares as well.

There are issues with the development, or as some call it the redevelopment, of Newcastle. The drivers of the proposals are developers and people wholly connected to developers. There were owners of premises affected by the imposition of impossible regulations forcing them to get them to close and leave, for example, the Lyric Theatre owned by Margaret Goomas, was forced to close due to restrictive fire regulation intended for new applications. The business was only slightly damaged by the earthquake but as a result was forced to close. The people in charge of the Honeysuckle development are behind the drive to remove the rail line and to have a clean landscape in the CBD to build their developments. Former member for Newcastle, George Keegan, was a real estate agent in the city and backed plans for getting rid of the owners of the buildings that "were holding back the redevelopment of the CBD of Newcastle" by freezing them out by not having occupancy in the buildings.

As a cab driver I hear many conversations and while I do not know some of the names of the people I know what their involvement is in the process of development. One day about 3 weeks ago I picked up some Chinese Nationals from the Crown Plaza Hotel. I took them to several sites. They had a guide who spoke poor English and would say "take me here" he was holding a map with red circles on it. We went to several places in the city area and then to two locations near the railway line: the first between Civic and Newcastle Station and the other near where Darby Street, which if extended, would cross the rail line. The poor English speaker said "You no like this" as a train passed; unsure, I asked, what did he mean? He said, "Train." I replied, "I like it but some do not" he replied "Ooh" and said little more. We then went to the Newcastle Uni and after doing a full tour of the Uni we stopped at a parcel of land that is for sale on University Drive. There are two parcels of land there ready for development, so the sign says. What do I make of this? These people were in my mind developers and they had an interest on the rail line among other things. They knew what they were looking at. The Government has announced that one of their buildings that backs onto the track near where the Chinese people had a look; is there a connection? I do not know, but I have suspicions that may involve development of land that the track sits upon. The Property Council of Australia - Newcastle representative said when I asked why I was not invited to a forum he was organising for the by election, he said because you did not make a submission to the Urban renewal, to which I replied, I was excluded because I want the rail line to remain. His response was in summary, we will get what we want. So I suggest that there are plans for development of the track area that the government must know about but is possibly hiding from the public.

Statements regarding the so called light rail demonstrate it is unlikely to ever see the light of day as it is not financially viable being such a short line into busy streets; and certainty of delivery are nowhere in any of the Minister's statements. The reasoning given is the accessibility across the track for the need for its removal, but as can be clearly seen there are many barriers including buildings that would prevent access across the track area and so it is important to note if the sole reasoning is to have connect-ability between Hunter Street and the Harbour, the track is not the real problem just a convenient problem for those who have other, yet to be publicly disclosed, reasons.

It is my contention that we could have an open track area with a slower train and achieve the best of all worlds. I will attach a file to my web page for the full details to my plans for continued and even expanded rail service to Newcastle station. My full details of plans include a cruise ship passenger terminal housed in a multifunctional building constructed on Honeysuckle Drive. This could drive the cruising industry by giving the shipping companies reasons to spend over a day in the Port, while visitors are given a variety of things to do including the possibilities of historic steam train rides up the Valley. Such a change in emphasis in tourism and the establishment of family friendly entertainment precinct will assist in the natural growth of Newcastle at the pace the people of Newcastle will own but they need a strong and reliable transport system they can depend upon.