

**Submission
No 6**

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

Name: Mr David Suttor

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The Director
Select Committee on the Planning Process in Newcastle and the Broader Hunter Region
Parliament House
Macquarie St
Sydney NSW 2000

Public Submission

Dear Sir/Madam,

As I private citizen I wish to lodge a submission in respect of your parliamentary enquiry concerning a number of planning decisions in Newcastle. My submission will be limited to the proposed truncation of the rail line east of Wickham.

I am happy for this submission to be made public, however, I request that my address and phone number are kept private.

My submission will be based on how this decision will affect the travelling public (of which I am a member) as well as the potential for future public transport deficiencies in the coming years. In addition, I will also touch on the fact that I don't feel that the decision has been made for the right reasons, given recent events at the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC).

My Situation

I currently drive my private motor vehicle to Gosford Railway Station from where I catch a train five days per week to Civic station which is close to my workplace. I have been doing this trip for almost 15 years.

If the trains are terminated at either Broadmeadow, Hamilton or Wickham, I believe that the journey will take at least an additional 15 minutes each way. This equates to 30 minutes per day or 2.5 hours per week.

I can clearly recall when the latest version of the train timetable was released, the Transport Minister made the point that there were more express trains from Gosford and Wyong to Central and this would allow the average commuter to spend an additional 2.5 hours per week with their families. Once again, those travelling in the opposite direction to Newcastle (who I might add relieve congestion for those travelling to Sydney) are treated like second class citizens.

Future Public Transport Requirements for the Newcastle CBD

If the train line is truncated at Wickham as proposed, this will have a severe effect on the adequacy of public transport in Newcastle and in particular the CBD.

At the moment, in the Civic precinct alone and before any of the new buildings are completed, there are already several large employers present. These include, but are not limited to:

- Newcastle City Council;
- Telstra;
- Chifley Hotel;
- Holiday Inn Crowne Plaza;
- Australian Taxation Office;

The above is evident by the large number of people waiting on the Civic Station platform in the afternoon peak period. A lot of buses are going to be needed to move these passengers efficiently.

I also understand that it is not uncommon for school groups to visit the Newcastle Museum (which is located right next to Civic Station) via train.

In addition to the above employers, there are going to be two new significant buildings constructed in the Civic Precinct. They are the Newcastle Court House (7 or 8 storeys) and the University of Newcastle Campus. Both are a short walk from Civic station with the latter being directly across the road.

The University Campus is anticipated to have around 3,000 students come and go during the course of the day. The train is the logical choice for these students to travel there given the proximity to Civic Station. Without the train, the students (and staff) will most likely drive there which will place further pressure on the parking difficulties already evident in the area.

The existing rail line also links the three university campuses (Civic, Callaghan and Ourimbah).

The Honeysuckle area is also going to experience increased development in future years and the people using such facilities are going to need an efficient and reliable public transport service.

If the train line is truncated, it is something that the City will regret in the years to come and by then it will be too late as it is proposed that some sections of the rail line will be built upon. This would make it impossible to ever re-introduce the train line back into the heart of Newcastle ever again.

The Government's position on the Newcastle rail line is also contrary to their own policies on rail travel in the Sydney Metropolitan area. I refer specifically to the new rail line being built to service the area around Castle Hill. Why spend so much money building a new rail line and promoting its benefits whilst also cutting another perfectly functioning and well used train service?

ICAC Events

Quite a number of government members have been found by the ICAC to have engaged in wrongdoing. In particular, such members were seen to be accepting donations from developers which is contrary to the law.

It is also the developers generally who have the most to gain from the truncation of the rail line. For they have a desire to build on sections of the line, and in fact a Government minister was quoted in the media as confirming that sections of the line would be sold off for development.

I therefore feel that the Government hasn't made their decision based on the best interests of the community. Rather, their motivation has been to benefit the developers from whom they have been accepting donations illegally.

The decision seems so illogical and makes no sense from a public policy perspective, hence, the reason to question the motives of the Government in making the decision.

Conclusion

In an era when governments of all political persuasions and affiliations are trying to encourage use of public transport in key areas where large numbers of people congregate and at the same time discourage use of private motor vehicles, the decision to truncate the rail line will do the exact opposite.

Many commuters from places as diverse as the Upper Hunter, Sydney and Gosford will instead drive their cars into the heart of Newcastle. Private car is already faster than the train and the need to change onto a bus when you are 'almost there' will only make the private car more enticing. In turn this will exacerbate the already existing parking deficiencies in the Newcastle CBD and have adverse environmental impacts for the community at large.

Finally, I re-iterate that I believe that the Government's motivation in closing the rail line is not to benefit the community, but to satisfy their political donors from whom it is illegal to accept political donations.