

**Submission
No 49**

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

Name: Ms Helen Cummings

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Submission

To Reverend Fred Nile

My name is Helen Cummings and I am 64 years old. Apart from my early childhood in a Newcastle suburb I have spent the rest of my life in the inner city of Newcastle, the past five years residing in an apartment three blocks from Newcastle Railway Station.

I spent the last 25 years of my working life in the Newcastle Family Law Courts in the Newcastle CBD. In 1991 when was talk of cutting the rail in 1991 I joined "Save the Rail". Our new court had been built 3 blocks from Newcastle Railway Station and I thought it seemed absurd to cut a line that the public could use to reach the court. My role in the courts assisted people and I always suggested transport. In all my 25 years I cannot recall a single court client who caught the train. Many did not live on the rail line and besides there was a mostly empty 6 storey car park opposite the court. However most chose to pay the parking fee in and around the court precinct. Many caught buses as they serviced most of the outer Newcastle suburbs.

For the next 20 years I closely followed the more than 40 reviews, studies, suggestions, opinion pieces and letters in the Newcastle Herald regarding this controversial topic. In the last State election Tim Owen stood as a liberal candidate with a mandate to cut the rail and provide light rail. Leaving aside the ICAC and extra money spent on his campaign it was a democratic election and he won. Being a Life Member of the Australian Labor Party I supported and voted for Jodie McKay who also supported redevelopment of inner city CBD and light rail. Jodie and Newcastle for that matter lost due to labor skulduggery. However I got to know and respect Tim and he did much good work for this city. I am sad that his reputation is in tatters because he was a very decent man. The hatred that pours forth from members of the ALP and Greens about him and others is nothing short of appalling.

Five years ago I bought an inner city apartment and live on the 9th floor overlooking Newcastle Harbour and CBD with our magnificent Newcastle Cathedral in the west. I feel I have the best view of our beautiful city. This also gives me a unique perspective of the narrow peninsula between ocean and harbour. How convenient it is to walk to the station, hop on a train to Sydney and then the airport to visit family in the USA and do the same on return. But I love my city more than this convenience and so called 'seamless' trip. The infrastructure is big and ugly. The trains are heavy and 90% empty. I know this because I can see from my apartment the only station exit onto Watt and Scott Street.

It has become impossible to have a civilised dialogue with the people running the Save our Rail campaign. Their hatred of developers has no bounds. Developers have also restored many of our beautiful heritage buildings and have put their finances and reputations on the line to invest in our city. I believe the government must work hand in hand with private, public and community to finance major projects. So you can see that over these past 2 decades I have come full circle and can't believe this could all be lost because people believe:

- a. The light rail will not be built.
- b. Developers can't wait to get their greedy hands on the corridor.

- c. People will have to wait in a tin shed for buses that will not run to get them into town.
- d. Their seamless journey will be interrupted by needing to change their mode of transport.
- e. The public were not consulted even though as far as I can tell they have been consulted and elections have been held ad nauseam for 20 years.
- f. The people of Dungog and Maitland have been vocal about what is a decision for Newcastle.
- g. Everyone is corrupt and greedy, even though there has not been any evidence to prove the process was corrupt.
- h. Underground, overground, building over the top, light rail to outer suburbs, running down Hunter Street and don't do anything.
- i. There will not be help for the disabled.
- j. No one has been consulted.
- k. Let's have a referendum even though we have had 6 or 7 State elections.
- l. Everyone has an opinion and many believe they have the answer and will not entertain a different point of view. Believe me I have been on the receiving end of outright rage.

Our city could be as beautiful as any great port city in the world if this ugly barrier is removed. I am fortunate from my vantage point nine floors above to see how alive, busy and beautiful our harbour is. The yachts, the tugs, the fishing trawlers, the container vessels and the Stockton ferry. Everyone else on the ground is denied this by the fence, heavy infrastructure and long monotonous empty heavy trains that, if we miss this opportunity, will remain unsustainable indefinitely. I do not trust that a change of government (ALP) will truly give back the money owed to us from the sale of the Port. They had many opportunities in government to truncate the rail.

I plead with you Reverend Fred Nile please do not let our city stagnate for another decade. We must move forward if we are to become world renowned city.

As an aside matter my mother Joy Cummings was the first female Lord Mayor in Australia and her legacy was the Newcastle Foreshore. She would have wanted nothing less.

I am also 2014 Newcastle Woman of the Year.

Helen Cummings