

Submission
No 298

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

Organisation: Hunter Environment Lobby Inc.

Date received: 24/10/2014



24/10/14

The Hon. Catherine Cusack MP.,
Select Committee on the Planning Process in Newcastle and the Broader Region.
Parliament House
Sydney 2000.

Hunter Environment Lobby Inc. (HEL) is a non party political community and environmental organization that has been active in the Hunter region for over twenty years. Our focus has been on supporting processes which value remnant habitat for endangered species, as well as supporting good planning processes, especially where it involves public transport. Climate change is also on our agenda, and rail transport figures well in the transport movement equation.

You may examine our submissions on the proposed Hunter LinkRail as well as see all our submissions on the Huntlee Development in Branxton, in all submissions we have supported fast efficient public transport, especially rail. Rail is the best form of transport when examining carbon dioxide produced per mass moved, thus climate change effects will be reduced with efficient and effective rail transport.

As a regionally based group, HEL has worked tirelessly to promote better, more frequent, safer and efficient rail services in the Hunter at every opportunity. In the last ten years we have helped the Save Our Rail organization to staff stalls, talk to communities and organize meetings and rallies where ever we could, especially Maitland, but also Muswellbrook and Scone.

Since the cutting the rail option was made public by this government in December last year, we have worked at every opportunity to alert the public and commuters to the state of affairs. This has been an uphill battle. There are still people catching the train from Newcastle up the valley who do not know what the government has planned for their transport options after Boxing Day.

In this submission, we would like to stress that the public who catch the trains from regional areas, that is Scone, Muswellbrook, Singleton, Dungog, Paterson, Lake Macquarie areas and Maitland areas in particular have not been canvassed, asked or contacted what they think of the idea of cutting the rail line at Broadmeadow or Hamilton.

I name Broadmeadow and Hamilton because that is effectively what will happen from Boxing Day forward. There is a promise of a 'Light Rail' being built from Wickham, but because the cost of this venture is well over \$400 million, we are not confident that it will progress.

As far as the commuting public who will be affected from our Hunter regions are concerned, the fact that they will have to alight the train at either Broadmeadow or

Hamilton for a number of unspecified years or forever, and find a bus that may take them to their destination, they are all horrified and angry.

This is no light issue, firstly that these commuters have not been asked about their wishes and secondly the profound inconvenience that this decision will cause is having a negative effect on people's lives.

Most regional commuters who catch the train regularly or infrequently to Wickham, Civic and Newcastle Stations do so for a reason, trains are quicker, more comfortable, reliable and passengers are able to take wheelchairs, prams and strollers, bicycles and surfboards on the trains. There is absolutely no guarantee that one train load of passengers from one train could fit on a bus at any one time.

While travelling yesterday to Newcastle on the train from Maitland, there was two full carriages most of the way comprising four bicycles, two wheelchairs, three prams and several boogie boards, I find it difficult to believe the government's promise that all people will have a smooth and seamless journey on a bus after being forced to alight from the trains at Broadmeadow.

For the people of our Hunter regions the issues of the rail truncation is the dominant one for most. In the latest poll in August 2014 by the Newcastle Herald, the poll was in favour of keeping the line over 72%. We are totally mystified that this government can think anyone except the developers who will build on the rail line will benefit.

The Minister for Transport herself has stated that the amount of commuter support will drop dramatically, while saying the decision was not one made by the Transport Department. We look forward to seeing the inferences that will be made in this Inquiry by others on why the Planning Department made the decision to cut our precious rail line.

Regional commuters are essentially having their throats cut, to cut off the last four stations on this line is to cut off our very being, stop us getting to the beach, our doctors, the foreshore, the various shops and retail outlets, and the ferry wharf.

When the train line to Cessnock and Kurri Kurri was cut in the early seventies the crime rate for young people in Cessnock and Kurri started to climb higher than Maitland, as Maitland still had a link for young people to catch the train, go swimming, surfing, having some summer recreation in Newcastle. It is still higher, along with unemployment for younger people in that area.

Rail is the link for quality of life for our region, not only for the young, but for older people wanting a quality social life, healthy choices for walking, swimming, cycling etc. Carrying bicycles on trains is such a boon and healthy family activities involving cycling are a growing phenomena.

I can just see the cyclists who will be alighting from trains at Broadmeadow trying to find a safe way to the foreshore having a very confusing time in the future, they will not do it, they will have to go elsewhere.

The exodus of travelers and shoppers from Newcastle will be enormous, businesses will feel the pinch. The supposed new residents of Newcastle who will be attracted to rail corridor units built by speculators will be in for a shock when they look for parking in an already overcrowded environment that will be parked out.

HEL looks orward to hearing the various submissions by many people and organizations who want some answers on why the Department of Planning has seemed to have been ruled or influenced by the Corporatised arm of this agency, that is Urban Growth to cut our precious rail line link.

There is obviously a lot of speculation in the public on why this decision was made, and when I am on the trains asking people to write letters to various politicians it seems common knowledge that developers rule this state government and the decisions it makes. It is a sorry state of affairs that general cynicism of government motives will be a long lasting legacy of this government's decisions here in our Hunter Valley.

Sincerely,

Jan Davis
President Hunter Environment Lobby Inc.