

**Submission
No 115**

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

Name: Dr Greg Berry

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To

Select Committee on the Planning Process in Newcastle and the Broader Hunter Region

How can an ordinary citizen like me prove that there has been impropriety and shady deals done behind closed doors during the formulation of the so-called "Newcastle Urban Renewal Plan". I don't have the resources, contacts, or access to information that would identify the individuals and the negotiations that have taken place, and shine a light on any possible illegal or unethical activities that have partly been uncovered by the ICAC.

All I can rely on is my personal experience, intelligence, observation and insight. The NSW government seems to be ignoring the fact that there is a Senate inquiry into the processes (or lack of them) that have been followed in developing this highly suspicious outcome for Newcastle. I have been appalled when I have heard statements by the Premier and the Transport Minister reported in the media saying that the truncation of the rail line and the building of the Light Rail will proceed despite the announcement of a Senate inquiry into the "Newcastle Renewal Plan". This confirms my worst suspicions. If this "development" is really in the best interests of Newcastle surely the government should welcome an inquiry which proves that. By saying that they will go ahead with the truncation regardless, the government is identifying itself with the same corrupt behaviour, contempt and arrogance that has greatly distressed the residents of Newcastle.

For example, the decision to remove the heavy rail lines into Newcastle, at great cost, has been a deeply flawed and corrupted process. There has been a lack of broad community consultation. The resolve to override local planning rules in Newcastle as well as significant community opinion has been influenced by vested interests who have used their financial clout to manipulate the outcome.

In March 2014 I attended what I thought was a community consultation on the future of the heavy rail line into Newcastle CBD. It was a poorly advertised event and I was only alerted to it by our small local newspaper (The Portside Local). However, when I arrived at the forum I discovered that it was an information session organised by "Urban Growth NSW". I was shocked to find that the decision to remove the rail line had already been made! In fact it was the first action that was going to occur. Why remove significant infrastructure as a first step before any other infrastructure was in place, or even approvals for their construction had been obtained. This would inconvenience the traveling public for years to come, if not indefinitely.

For example, residents travelling by ferry from Stockton or the Northern side of the harbour would have an extra, long, disruption to the already time consuming trip to Sydney by rail. We would have to catch at least 3 different modes of transport. In previous years when the possibility of truncating the heavy rail was raised the proponents promised to look into adding a ferry wharf close to where the rail line would be truncated. When I raised this with the public servant (a "Transport Expert") at the March 2014 meeting she had never heard of it and wrote it down as an interesting idea !! It had not occurred to Urban Growth planners that the proposed integrated transport exchange of a harbour city should include the ferry!!

And to this day the ferry has been not been included in the Wickham transport exchange plan. Currently we get off the ferry and walk 5 mins to Newcastle station and catch the train into Sydney. This works. Why incur great cost and disruption to substitute something so inferior, inconvenient and inefficient?

I could smell a rat because of the dismissive and arrogant approach towards the general public and the hasty resolve to ignore local planning rules and to remove the heavy rail line at any cost. At the meeting we were given feedback forms to fill out. The forms were mainly to ask which of the three routes the new light rail should go. The forms were meant to be put into a locked box, but no box was available and our forms were thrown into a pile on the floor. I was convinced that there had been collusion and corruption and this has now been partly verified at the ICAC inquiry.

It has since been announced that the rail line will close on Boxing Day, 2014. Why on Boxing Day? Apparently (for those who responded to the question relating to the route of the light rail) the favoured route was along the heavy rail corridor. I have since heard that it will run along Hunter Street. Why? I

know that a developer had property for sale along the rail corridor on their web site in the early stages of the "Urban Renewal Plan". They removed it when they were alerted to the illegality of it. On Saturday September 6th I was shown a Developer Brochure advertising the sale of units in an 18 story complex on the Newcastle foreshore near the heavy rail corridor. Apparently (for those who responded to the light rail route question) the favoured route was along the heavy rail corridor. I have since heard that it will run along Hunter Street. Why?

If this hasty and highly controversial and tainted "Urban Renewal Plan" is allowed to proceed, it will seriously undermine our democracy and legitimise corrupt behaviour by vested interests.

Thanks

Greg Berry