

**Submission  
No 156**

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

**Name:** Mrs Cecily Grace

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The Rev. Fred Nile

Select Committee into the Planning Process in Newcastle and the Hunter

Legislative Council

Parliament House

Macquarie St

Sydney 2000.

Dear Rev. Nile,

I welcome the opportunity to express my opposition to the proposed truncation of the Newcastle Railway Line. My hope is that your Committee will not be treated with the same dismissive attitude that has faced Newcastle residents. Whilst the planning process may not be found to have been illegal in any way, the process has certainly left many residents feeling powerless as any opinion opposing the truncation of the line is bundled into the "anti-progress box" and cast aside without consideration, as if unheard. Many residents hold the view that the rail line should stay and that the construction of sky scrapers is not appropriate for this part of the heritage city, but our voices are clearly less powerful and less valued than those in the building and construction industry. Ordinary citizens who do not normally become involved in the details of development applications and the like, place their trust in elected politicians. However, recent decisions made about Newcastle have clearly lacked transparency and open consultation, leaving me with the opinion that the decisions have been made by a suspect and distrustful group of people. The refusal of planners to entertain or investigate alternative suggestions to truncation and high rise means that they do not regard how unpopular and disliked these decisions are.

My husband and I live in the CBD which we have done so for many, many years. My husband works from an office on the street level and we live above. We have witnessed first-hand the decline of the centre of Newcastle which occurred after the construction of the large shopping centres at Kotara and Charlestown. We witnessed terrible street violence before hotel licences were modified. We witnessed the closure and decay of shops and public buildings.

However, in the last two years there has been a rejuvenation in town, undoubtedly with the help of the Renew Newcastle strategies. On the weekends the place is vibrant as restaurants, shops and galleries have emerged. In fact, a unique village atmosphere has been successfully created. Parking spaces are at a premium especially on a Sunday mornings, as people flock to the waterfront and the Mall. Many people are appreciating that this is an excellent place to reside and visit. The railway line is not inhibiting this rejuvenation.

My point is this: the city is alive and doing quite well with the railway line exactly where it is. If opening the city to the waterfront is somehow going to save it, then this isn't necessary. There is something organic happening in Newcastle and it is interesting to observe. It has not required the destruction of established infrastructure or the construction of monolithic sky scrapers.

I use this train service to Sydney regularly to visit family. I am finding it very difficult to be convinced that clambering off a train with luggage, often at night time, then clambering onto a bus or perhaps in the future, a tram, is going to be beneficial in any way. This will be a huge inconvenience to the ageing population which seems to be the primary demographic moving into the area. Alternatively,

if the rail infrastructure and service were developed to streamline travel Newcastle and Sydney, then revitalisation of the city would certainly ensue.

My observations from living and talking with neighbours and visitors are these:

- Newcastle citizens distrust the claim that the light rail will ever be built.
- Newcastle citizens believe that the existing rail corridor will be laid waste by the government, as has the old Post Office, and eventually be sold off, as has the port, for revenue raising.
- Newcastle citizens believe, despite all denials to the contrary, that developers, like the ex-Lord Mayor and his ilk, know that the rail corridor is not undermined by mining activity and is therefore suitable for high rise development similar to the Honeysuckle development. This development does, most effectively, succeed in cutting off the city from the waterfront!
- Newcastle citizens believe that the truncation of the line for such a short distance is not just a recipe for inconvenience for commuters but also financially wasteful. Such a lot of money which could be shared for the many projects throughout the entire city!
- Newcastle citizens fear that the, apparently, interim use of busses filling the streets of Newcastle is nightmarish. This city is hilly and many of the cross-streets are narrow. Busses can barely turn the corners.
- Newcastle citizens feel that the construction of sky-scraper apartment blocks should take place in Newcastle West and not on The Hill or the CBD. It is the remnants of the heritage city which give Newcastle its charm and could be exploited as tourist attraction, thereby revitalising the city. We are told these constructions must be so big to make them economically viable to build. The profit motive seems to be the only consideration taken into account.

By retaining and improving the railway infrastructure and promoting the unique village and historical aspects of the city, Newcastle will survive. It is my belief that Newcastle is evolving already, without construction of sky-scrapers and destruction of existing infrastructure. The cynicism in my street is palpable. Somehow faith must be restored in the democratic governance.

Yours faithfully,

Cecily Grace