

**Submission  
No 255**

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

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# Submission for the Inquiry into the Planning Process in Newcastle

To **The Chairman Mr F. Nile MLC**

Newcastle's Cultural Background has always been one of the community fighting for what the city needs and deserves, always involving hundreds of volunteers. This Hunter Valley Region has always been "the Bridesmaid" helping and providing for "the Bride" – Sydney, since the first township began in 1804.

## **1. The Rail Line.**

The electric train line was completed in 1984 and this was greatly celebrated.

30 years on, the former Newcastle Express Train does not exist, the travel time is half an hour to one hour longer and facilities (toilets, luggage, faulty air conditioner, crowded at peak hours, no refreshments like the former Flyer) on the train are extremely poor. Now, this trip is planned to take another half an hour longer, with the inconvenience of changing into another mode of transport. This is Public Transport, and no consideration or consultation is given to the members of the public. For almost the past 30 years, the fight to keep the rail line has continued.

Instead of improving the access to the CBD, the rail line is to be removed just as the new law courts will be completed and the building of the city University Campus is to commence. The rail line was to provide transport to these 2 sites as very few car parking spaces are included in these buildings. Future students are also encouraged to use push bikes, which can be another reason to use the train. In addition, transport between the 2 Campuses is the quickest at 10 mins by train. Add to this over the last 3-4 years, there has been a huge increase in school students of the Hunter Valley travelling by train direct to the Regional Museum also at Civic Station, removing several buses at a time from the City roads. (A check with the Museum staff will verify this fact)

Besides the above, the direct rail line to the CBD is used by commuters, CBD residents, disabled, elderly, non-car owners, young families especially with strollers, beach goers with boards, (even from Hornsby!!) tourists & backpackers with luggage & attendees to large events at the foreshore (at least 14 in 1 year), especially the extra large ones at New Years Eve and Australia Day Maritime Celebrations. All the above travel from Sydney, the Central Coast, Lake Macquarie and the Hunter Valley to Newcastle and return.

So the purpose of this rail line is to bring people easily and quickly into the City of Newcastle, its beaches and foreshore from outlying centres. This is being confused with the suburban transport system which could be an "offshoot" separate light rail system of the future. The rail transport into Newcastle Station moves large numbers of people, is as fast as it is possible at this moment, and convenient. The only real area of contention is the small distance of line from Brown St to Newcastle Station for ease of access from Scott St to the Foreshore. This problem could be solved at a much reduced total cost with consultation, discussion and compromise after observing similar situations world-wide, thus improving the access.

No wonder Novocastrians are very suspicious of the dictatorial NSW Govt wanting the rail land, the only unmined land, to sell to developers, for both groups to profit from the transaction.

## **2. Building Heights in CBD**

The Newcastle Community was very happy with the former NSW Govt planning decision to have 8-10 storey buildings in the CBD, with much higher stories in Newcastle West (West End). Suddenly the NSW Govt dictates without community consultation the height is to be doubled for the land, jointly owned by the said Govt and GPT. How convenient??

It's the underhand way the NSW Govt has dictated & enforced its rules, in collaboration with GPT, which has overseas connections. These 2 groups have a vested interest in the land to be used for the HighER rise buildings that interfere with the view of Christ Church Cathedral on The Hill, a priority of Novocastrians.

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These 2 projects, the cutting of the rail line and doubling of building heights were wholly supported by Newcastle City Council, ruled by the developer, the then Lord Mayor, who also controlled the numbers in the Council. His political friends still rule the Council at this moment, until November when the Lord Mayoral Election takes place.

Finally, the anxiety and stress levels of Novocastrians are on the increase and diplomatic mediators are urgently required.

Elaine Street