

**Submission
No 327**

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

Name: Mr Stefan Rose

Date received: 24/10/2014

I am of the opinion that the NSW Government decision to permanently close the heavy rail line between Wickham and Newcastle stations on 26 December this year has been significantly influenced by corruption. The uncontested admissions of corruption by the key decision makers as revealed by the recent ICAC inquiry have tainted the proposals for the inner city to such a degree, that I believe the decision to truncate the rail line, and the circumstances under which it would occur, should be overturned.

I believe that the decision was unduly influenced by the vested interests of developers and is not only socially but also economically irresponsible. It is a highly flawed strategy to spend hundreds of millions of dollars to remove an efficiently functioning railway line providing seamless delivery to the CBD and replace it with a short, isolated section of light rail along much the same route. This is particularly the case considering the stringent economic restraints that are currently being applied at all levels of government.

If it goes ahead, this action will result in massive inconvenience to the travelling public, because passengers will be obliged to change from one transport mode to another (being slow and inefficient buses for at least the first two years) which will be particularly difficult for passengers in wheelchairs, parents with prams, and the elderly. An inevitable result will be a sharp drop in patronage of public transport, leading to increased traffic congestion on roads and increased air pollution. The light rail will become token and a 'white elephant'. Alternatively, light rail will never be built when decision makers realise this, and passengers will be stuck with slow and inefficient buses to complete their journey indefinitely.

The stated reason for removing the line, to improve connectivity with the harbour, could be easily addressed by a range of alternative means using the same money or less. Additional road and pedestrian crossings could be constructed and innovative development options (plazas, shopping and eating precincts etc.) could be designed adjacent to and, in parts, over the rail line without removing it thus providing spectacular public vantage points overlooking the harbour.

There would be very little 'opening up' of the city centre to the harbour by removal of the line since most of the harbour front has already been isolated from the city by the Honeysuckle, hotel and other developments on the waterfront.

The alternative plans for public transport into the city, including the plans for a 'transport interchange' at Wickham are conceptual only at this stage. It is impossible to evaluate how the alternative transport strategy will actually work on the basis of what is publically available so far, or what the facilities will look like.

I recommend that the decision to close the rail line on 26 December should be reversed, or at the very least postponed until after the results of this inquiry are publically available and proper plans are able to be scrutinised and evaluated.