

**Submission
No 127**

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

Organisation: Action for Public Transport (NSW)

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Action for Public Transport (N.S.W.) Inc.

The Director
Select Committee on the Planning Process in Newcastle and the Broader Hunter Region
Parliament House
Macquarie St
Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Mr Nile,

Newcastle/Hunter Planning - Submission

Action for Public Transport is a transport consumer group. Our members are users and beneficiaries of public transport. We have no affiliations with any political party.

We are particularly concerned with reference term "E": the decision to terminate the Newcastle rail line at Wickham and any proposal to construct light rail including along Hunter and Scott Streets. We see this decision as typical of several recent transport-related decisions which were made by politicians despite the absence of substantial public benefits flowing from the decisions. Worse, most of these decisions stand to cause serious inconvenience to the travelling public.

Lack of justification:

In the Newcastle case, no public benefit has been shown that would result from removing the railway. The major beneficiaries would appear to be developers who stand to win the only land in central Newcastle which is not undermined by old coal pits and hence the only land which can carry tall buildings.

Despite claims (which we do not believe - see below) that most Newcastle people are in favour of removing the railway, we assert that it should remain in operation. The number of people in the Honeysuckle precinct would be quite small, and certainly not large enough to be disadvantaged by having only a couple of locations where the railway can be crossed.

Light rail line:

The argument for truncating the rail line states that high quality services will instead be provided by a light rail system. This "replacement" system is nowhere in evidence, and yet the proposed cessation of rail services is intended to happen on Boxing Day 2014. Especially if the light rail is to run on existing roads, it should be built before the heavy rail is cut so that service is continuous.

Hierarchy of Alternatives:

In order,

1. Leave the railway running; do not cut rail services at all
2. Remove the railway but retain a corridor adequate for restoring direct heavy rail services at some future date. All buildings erected along the corridor would have easements for the corridor. The building straddling the railway north of Chatswood station exemplifies one possibility. The Newcastle corridor need not be above ground.
3. Cut the railway only between Newcastle and Civic stations. This would preserve the rail service to the educational and cultural venues around Civic. In particular, it would preserve the service between two campuses of Newcastle University.

All of these alternatives should be assessed publicly.

Public opinion:

Claims that the majority of Newcastle people think that the railway should be cut are difficult to believe. They are strongly at odds with recent polls reported by the Save Our Rail organisation on their website <http://saveourrail.org.au/>.

Stewart Ave Level Crossing:

A short video by David Threlfo illustrates what actually happens there in peak hour - see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P200A4G00tk> (three capital O, one zero). The video shows a reality quite different from the government's claim that traffic congestion caused by rail level crossings and/or the lack of crossings is strangling Newcastle. It shows traffic signals as the bottleneck; the government has not announced any plans to alter the traffic signals.

Conclusion:

The inquiry is urged to review all the government's claims and to compare them with claims made by us and other people who oppose the government's stand.

Jim Donovan
Secretary
Action for Public Transport (NSW)