

# Hunter MPs put their support behind a Train To Cessnock (Maitland Mercury 18/03/24 as Cessnock to Maitland rail campaign gains momentum)

Andrew Fenwick  
Train To Cessnock Group

Since the 2023 NSW State election there has been growing momentum in the community campaign to bring effective public transport into the Cessnock area; in the form of a regular passenger train service.

Joining that campaign have been local rail industry experts, Bill Palazzi (PalazziRail) and Stuart Sutherland (Lycopodium Infrastructure). The enthusiastic involvement of these volunteer professionals has created a clear picture of what work is required, how long it could be until trains run and importantly how much investment will be required.

Mr Palazzi has invested a great deal of his 35 years' worth of industry expertise and energy into preparing a myth busting document 'The Case for The Train To Cessnock, The Best Value Rail Project In Australia'. This detailed document is available to download at [www.traintocessnock.org](http://www.traintocessnock.org).

In addition to Mr Palazzi's report, the expert team at Lycopodium and Mr Sutherland have determined in a preliminary feasibility review, that the costings in the Train To Cessnock case report were accurate and that the proposed work was feasible to commence as soon as possible; before the integrity of the infrastructure is lost over time.

A project, that most politicians and observers expected to be a massive burden on taxpayer funds has turned out to be very affordable and very achievable if acted on by the current State Government and in this current term. The timing of the initiative being actioned now, will ultimately save the state 100s of millions of dollars; if of course, this current window of opportunity is pounced on while within easy reach.

The Train To Cessnock campaign team have met with and presented the case report to the Federal Member for The Hunter Dan Repacholi, Clayton Barr MP for the Electorate of Cessnock, Jenny Aitchison MP for the Electorate of Maitland and Minister for Regional Transport & Roads and Emily Suvaal the Cessnock based NSW MLC.

From there, the team were invited to meet with the Transport for NSW Strategic Integrated Transport Plan Team as part of their community consultation and will be meeting Yancoal's Austar shutdown team to discuss the Cessnock to Bellbird portion.

Both Mr Repacholi and Mr Barr have since written letters of support for the project and the Train To Cessnock's upcoming submission for NSW State budget allocation for the corridor acquisition, initial feasibility and design work. The Federal MP stating

*"As Federal Member for Hunter I support the Train to Cessnock initiative and their endeavours to have the NSW Government consider this important proposal. This would be a welcome project to our community and I look forward to assisting in any way I can to ensure a successful outcome."*

Clayton Barr, who previously had expressed some doubts publicly about the proposed rail services being a possibility in his time as an MP, has shown flexibility in his initial thoughts to write

*“The group are seeking that the NSW Government acquire the Maitland to Bellbird rail corridor and commit to getting passenger services operating on the rail corridor as soon as possible, but at least prior to the end of 2028. To achieve this, the group is requesting the allocation of initial funding for a full business case and design in the 2024 State budget. I support the Train To Cessnock group in their objective ..”*

To reenforce the value of the Train To Cessnock, a recent announcement of the investment of \$2.75B by the Queensland government to build a 19km link to the Sunshine Coast, with Federal funding of \$1.6B already allocated to the project, shows the importance both state and federal governments see in using effective rail public transport to link communities.

The total expected cost of stage 1 is between \$5.5B and \$7B to provide services to an estimated 100,000 people; an investment of \$55-\$70,000 per person potentially served.

With an estimated per person investment of between \$2-\$4,000 to provide services to an existing community along the 28km Maitland to Bellbird line of around 50,000 people, is incredibly good value, when compared to any existing or planned rail projects nationwide; it would be negligent to see this proposal passed over for any reason.

Ahead of the estimated 60% population explosion in the Cessnock LGA by 2041, it is so important that the community and the politicians who serve it act quickly to get in front of this massive growth and to secure this high value low-cost opportunity before the costs quickly blow out into prohibitive amounts.

We are at that point now, where we will see if there will be negligence in serving the communities along this rail line or will the 100 plus years of Labor voting in the Cessnock electorate be recognised with a long overdue investment in effective public transport.