

# Train to Cessnock

## Submission to the NSW State Government 2024/25 Budget process

### Summary

This submission to the NSW State Government 2024/25 Budget process has been prepared by the group Train to Cessnock. Our aim is that the NSW State Government:

1. Immediately move to acquire the rail corridor from Maitland to Cessnock (Bellbird) from its current private owners,
2. Commit to getting passenger services operating on the corridor as soon as possible, and
3. Allocate initial funding for full business case and design in the 2024/25 state budget.

The Maitland to Cessnock Rail line, also referred to as the South Maitland Railway, was built by private mining companies over a century ago and has been used for transport of coal from various mines in the Cessnock / Kurri Kurri areas to port at Newcastle. However, the use of the corridor for coal transport ceased in 2020, and the line no longer has any trains operating. It technically remains an 'operating' rail corridor and could readily be upgraded and repurposed to provide a viable and useful public transport service.

We have done an amount of work to demonstrate that upgrading and repurposing the existing rail line to carry passenger train is viable, relatively cheap and will provide a useful service for many in the community. Our work shows that this project would be the best value rail project that any Australian government could pursue, and (by a long way) it is better value than any comparable rail project the NSW government is currently funding or considering.

Our proposal is more fully outlined in the document "The Case for the Train to Cessnock," attached as Appendix 1 to this submission and available for download at [www.traintocessnock.org](http://www.traintocessnock.org).

The use of this corridor to enhance transport options between Newcastle, Maitland, Kurri Kurri and Cessnock has been identified in many recent transport and planning strategies, including the October 2022 Hunter Regional Transport Plan and the 2018 Greater Newcastle Future Transport Plan. These plans describe the proposal as a "Visionary Initiative 20+ years" (2018 Greater Newcastle Future Transport Plan) or "For investigation 0 – 10 years" (2022 Hunter Regional Transport Plan). Our contention is that this project should proceed now, for the following reasons:

- **The population is there and rapidly growing.** Around 50,000 people were recorded in the 2021 Census as living in the suburbs immediately surrounding the corridor – Gillieston Heights, Kurri Kurri, Weston, Abermain, Neath, Kearsley, Aberdare, Cessnock and Bellbird. This number is rapidly growing. Cessnock LGA is the second-fastest growing area in the state, with a forecast population increase by 60% in the period to 2041.
- **The need is immense.** There are currently only very limited public transport options available to people who live in the communities along the corridor, and what is provided is infrequent and inaccessible. A train service would connect these communities to employment, education and health facilities, and would also provide a means to boost inbound tourism to the Hunter Valley vineyards area.
- **The cost of establishing the corridor is relatively cheap, and will only increase.** Because the corridor remains an active railway it can be readily upgraded to passenger standard at a relatively low cost. Our estimates show that this project represents far better value than any other rail project that the NSW Government is currently considering or delivering. Conversely, if the corridor is left it will deteriorate and the cost to establish services will increase substantially.

The following pages set out this case in more detail.

Our request is that an amount of \$10M be allocated in the 2024/25 NSW State Budget for Transport for NSW to undertake the business case and design phase of the project, with an objective to complete this work and make a submission to the Cabinet Expenditure Review Committee so that delivery funding can be confirmed in the 2025/26 budget.

During the business case phase, the NSW Government should also commence engagement with the current owners of the rail corridor, Aurizon and Yancoal, to resolve the approach and mechanism for Government acquisition of the corridor and existing rail infrastructure.

## The Train to Cessnock is consistently identified in and aligned with Government planning

Introducing passenger rail services on the existing rail corridor between Maitland, Kurri Kurri and Cessnock, as proposed by Train to Cessnock, is not a novel idea. This initiative has appeared on State Government plans and strategies going back several years. Table 1 provides a summary of the references to this corridor in some key recent plans.

Table 1 Identification of the rail corridor between Maitland, Kurri Kurri and Cessnock in recent NSW Government plans and strategies

Strategy / Plan	Reference	Notes
<b>Hunter Regional Plan 2036 (October 2016)</b>	Page 13, Figure 3	The corridor along the railway line, from Maitland to Kurri Kurri and Cessnock is identified as a growth area within the Greater Newcastle area.
<b>Greater Newcastle Metropolitan Plan 2036 (2018)</b>	Page 10-11, Figure 2	The corridor along the railway line, from Maitland to Kurri Kurri and Cessnock is identified as a corridor requiring “improved future connectivity.”
	Page 76, Local Government Area Narratives, Cessnock	Notes that “a rapid transport connection from Cessnock and Kurri Kurri to Maitland and the metro core will become more important, as will improved connectivity to the Airport and Sydney to cater for tourism growth.”
<b>Greater Newcastle Future Transport Plan 2056 (2018)</b>	Page 6, Figure 3	The railway line from Maitland to Kurri Kurri and Cessnock is identified within the Future Transport Network as “New or upgraded rail”
	Page 128-129, Figure 85	<b>Initiative 37:</b> Cessnock to Newcastle rail services via Kurri Kurri identified as a “Visionary initiative, 20+ years”
<b>Future Transport 2056 (2022 update)</b>	Page 26, Figure 11	The railway line from Maitland to Kurri Kurri and Cessnock is identified within the “existing and future Six Cities Region integrated transport network” in the category of “non-operational infrastructure and services include committed, funded and visionary”.
<b>Draft Hunter Regional Transport Plan 2041 (October 2022)</b>	Initiatives action plan, page 70 and following	<b>Item 72:</b> Undertake a feasibility study looking at opportunities to better align the growth areas in the Maitland (and Cessnock) LGAs with a focus on the rail corridor, potential electrification of the line and including better overall public transport integration and service frequency and timetable structure needs. Timeframe: 0-10 years <b>Item 73:</b> Cessnock to Newcastle rail services via Kurri Kurri, timeframe: 0-10 years

The Draft Hunter Regional Transport Plan 2041 identifies some eighteen objectives in response to issues and opportunities facing the future transport needs of the Hunter. These objectives are focused on supporting the six directions of the Plan: Connected, Safe, Liveable, Sustainable, Productive and Resilient.

The Train to Cessnock directly addresses nine of the eighteen recommendations, as set out in Table 2. We would note that many of the outcomes identified in the table below could be further enhanced by establishing supporting bus services and active transport facilities, with the Train to Cessnock forming the spine of a wider public and active transport network within Cessnock LGA and surrounding areas.

Table 2 Train to Cessnock alignment with objectives identified in the Draft Hunter Regional Transport Plan 2041 (October 2022)

Objective	Contribution of the Train to Cessnock to this objective
<p><b>Objective 1</b> – Improve connectivity between key centres and towns within the region.</p>	<p>The Train to Cessnock provides a direct and rapid connection between Cessnock, Kurri Kurri, Maitland and Newcastle, as well as all smaller centres in between. In Figure 11 of the Draft Hunter Regional Transport Plan, each of Maitland, Kurri Kurri and Cessnock are identified as Strategic Centres within the Hunter Region. The corridor from Maitland to Kurri Kurri and Cessnock is identified as a Key Spoke.</p> <p>The Train to Cessnock also connects and provides transport options to these key centres for the communities in Gillieston Heights, Weston, Abermain, Neath, Kearsley and Bellbird, as well as many other communities in surrounding areas.</p>
<p><b>Objective 3</b> – Support and improve local connectivity within centres</p>	<p>The Train to Cessnock provides a direct and convenient link between the numerous centres along the corridor, allowing for local connectivity between the stations of Bellbird, Cessnock, Kearsley, Neath, Abermain, Weston, Kurri Kurri and Gillieston Heights (and potentially expanding to include West Cessnock, Aberdare and Loxford as future enhancements).</p> <p>Further, the Train to Cessnock connects these communities to those already served by passenger trains between Maitland and Newcastle, such as East Maitland, Thornton and Beresfield.</p> <p>The Plan notes that “the Newcastle Light Rail has improved connectivity by providing a high capacity, frequent and reliable service through the city centre.” (p29) The Train to Cessnock would act in a similar function for the communities surrounding Cessnock and Kurri Kurri, permitting public and active transport to be used for shorter journeys from say Abermain to Cessnock – whereas currently such a journey can only be made by car.</p>
<p><b>Objective 8</b> – Enable and support successful places to live, work and visit</p>	<p>The Train to Cessnock supports and permits critical initiatives such as movement and place planning and promoting the 15-minute neighbourhood.</p> <p>In the absence of useful public transport options (as is the case now for the communities along the Train to Cessnock corridor), options for movement and place planning are limited. However, once the Train to Cessnock is established then these principles can be applied in the rapidly growing Cessnock LGA, including in communities such as Gillieston Heights and Bellbird where housing development is rapidly expanding.</p> <p>The Train to Cessnock will also support 15-minute neighbourhoods in these areas, with the corridor providing direct access to the centre of established communities and allowing for efficient public transport between locations along the corridor.</p>
<p><b>Objective 9</b> – Improve mobility options for all customers to reduce transport disadvantage</p>	<p>Figure 20 of the Draft Hunter Regional Transport Plan shows that the entire population along the rail corridor from Maitland to Kurri Kurri and Cessnock is shown as having a Public Transport Accessibility level of 1 (Low) - the lowest rating possible.</p> <p>The 2021 Census also shows that the Cessnock LGA has much higher proportion of its population is disabled or of low socio-economic status compared to national averages. As the Plan notes, “providing equitable access to transport options, regardless of a person’s age, ability, personal circumstances or level of disadvantage is an important outcome when designing the transport network.” (p46)</p> <p>The Train to Cessnock is an easy, quick, cost effective and obvious way of addressing this transport disadvantage for these needy communities.</p>
<p><b>Objective 12</b> – Increase the number of trips made by walking, cycling and public transport across the Hunter</p>	<p>The 2021 Census shows that the number of people in the Cessnock LGA travelling to work using public transport (train or bus) is 0.5%, with 1.5% walking. This compares to State averages of 4.0% and 2.5% respectively. These differences are reflected in the worse health outcomes recorded for the Cessnock LGA compared to State averages.</p> <p>The Train to Cessnock will act as a public transport spine for a community of over 50,000 people, providing options (that are currently not available) for the use of active and public transport for many daily tasks including work, leisure and recreation. Combined with other local initiatives such as the Shiraz to Shore bicycle route, the Train to Cessnock will be an important step towards addressing some of the above statistics.</p>

Objective	Contribution of the Train to Cessnock to this objective
<p><b>Objective 13</b> – Transition to lower emission technologies to improve health and amenity</p>	<p>The 2021 Census shows that almost 25% of households in the Cessnock LGA have three or more cars, compared to a State average of 17.5%. The 2023 Cessnock LGA Traffic and Transport Strategy identifies that 97% of all trips in the LGA are via private vehicles. These numbers reflect the lack of viable public transport options available to residents within the Cessnock LGA.</p> <p>Whilst the transition to electric vehicles is a critical component of moving to a lower emission economy, the use of public transport is also a recognised and essential component of the strategy. Provision of the Train to Cessnock will enable residents within a short distance of the corridor to reduce car dependency and to reduce the number of cars required in each household.</p>
<p><b>Objective 14</b> – Strengthen freight connections to Williamstown Special Activation Precinct (SAP), Newcastle Port and major freight generating precincts</p>	<p>The Train to Cessnock passes near two potentially significant industrial and freight precincts: the Hunter Economic Zone and the site of the former Hydro Aluminium Smelter, both located near Kurri Kurri and the Hunter Expressway. Beyond passenger transport, the Train to Cessnock corridor could be used to provide a rail connection into both of these sites, expanding the range of industries and uses that may be developed in either.</p> <p>The Train to Cessnock would enable a rapid and robust rail connection between these sites and the Port of Newcastle, Sydney and further afield.</p>
<p><b>Objective 15</b> – Provide a more productive freight network within the region</p>	
<p><b>Objective 16</b> – Improve connectivity to jobs, health, education and visitor attractions</p>	<p>The Train to Cessnock provides vital connectivity for over 50,000 people along the corridor to important centres for jobs, health and education and visitor attractions. This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Jobs:</b> Direct connections to Cessnock CBD, Kurri Kurri CBD and industrial area, Maitland CBD, East Maitland and Newcastle CBD, with connections to other centres in Newcastle. Should the potential industrial precincts noted above develop, the Train to Cessnock would provide direct public transport access to these employment sites as well.</li> <li>• <b>Health:</b> The Train to Cessnock provides a connection to the Maitland Hospital in East Maitland, via Victoria Street Station.</li> <li>• <b>Education:</b> The Train to Cessnock provides direct links to the important tertiary education institutions of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Newcastle University – Callaghan Campus and City Campus.</li> <li>○ Newcastle TAFE – Tighes Hill and Hamilton.</li> <li>○ Kurri Kurri TAFE – via the proposed Stage 2 station at Loxford.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>The Train to Cessnock also provides transport options to many primary and secondary schools along the corridor (including Cessnock High School), and in particular provides a public transport link for secondary students from the Cessnock LGA to attend Merewether High School, the only academically selective high school in the Hunter region, as well as the Hunter School of Performing Arts.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Visitor Attractions:</b> For residents of the Cessnock LGA and elsewhere on the corridor, the Train to Cessnock provides direct public transport links to visitor attractions throughout Newcastle such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Newcastle city, foreshore and beaches</li> <li>○ Newcastle Entertainment Centre, Newcastle Showground and McDonald Jones Stadium.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>For residents of Newcastle and visitors to the area, the Train to Cessnock provides public transport option to visit Cessnock and other communities along the corridor, as well as the Hunter Valley wine region.</p>

## **The Train to Cessnock delivers against key Government priorities and immediate issues**

Beyond (simply) providing a public transport service to needy communities, the Train to Cessnock will assist the NSW to deliver against key state priorities and against current hot issues.

### **Budget concerns**

Treasury's budget portal requests that submissions consider the Government's commitment to rebuilding essential services, supporting families with cost-of-living pressures, and budget repair. The Train to Cessnock delivers against each of these issues.

#### **Rebuilding essential services**

Transport is an essential service, and the Train to Cessnock aims to extend that essential service to over 50,000 people who live in communities where currently little public transport is available.

#### **Supporting families with cost-of-living pressures**

The Train to Cessnock would provide a valuable public transport service to communities that are currently car-dependent – often requiring several cars per family – and struggling with high fuel prices, high vehicle prices, insurances, registration and all the other costs that are associated with car ownership.

The train will provide a viable option for many families to reduce their dependence on car ownership. In addition, the train will support young people with access to education and recreation, and disabled and older people as they struggle to live on government support incomes. Many of the communities along the Train to Cessnock corridor, such as Kurri Kurri, Weston, Abermain, Neath and Aberdare, are low SES communities with high levels of dependence on Government support. The Train to Cessnock will provide a vital service to these communities and will also assist in opening up job opportunities (due to reliable transport), further assisting with cost-of-living pressures.

#### **Budget repair**

Budget repair is an important task; our state cannot perpetually live beyond its means. However, even in the midst of budget repair the Government cannot sit on its hands when it comes to provision of essential services to the community. This is where the Train to Cessnock is valuable.

The cost of the Train to Cessnock is incredibly low compared to similarly impactful transport initiatives (as outlined in the document *The Case for the Train to Cessnock*, page 13). With a total projected cost of \$100M - \$200M spread over 5 years, and with potential Federal Government contributions, the Train to Cessnock is affordable even in fiscally constrained times yet would provide a tangible demonstration of the Government's commitment to continue to deliver and expand services.

Further, the cost of upgrading the corridor will be cheaper now than at any time in the future – this is discussed further below. Progressing the project now can be considered an investment in future budget sustainability as it avoids the need for much higher expenditure in future years.

### **Transport for NSW priorities**

The Train to Cessnock directly addresses four of Transport for NSW's five priorities, as outlined below.

#### **Providing a safe, equitable and integrated transport network**

The Train to Cessnock would be a key step to providing a safe, equitable and integrated transport network for the Hunter Valley. At present, the limited public transport services available in the Cessnock and Kurri Kurri areas are based on busses, which often present accessibility difficulties for less mobile members of the community. The Train to Cessnock would expand access to DDA-compliant public transport and would integrate seamlessly with the wider transport network in Maitland, Newcastle and with services to Sydney. This includes integration with the forthcoming Newcastle Mass Transit Corridor, soon to be announced by Government.

Re-configuring the existing bus routes in Cessnock, Kurri Kurri and surrounding areas, and aligning services to trains, would extend the integrated public transport offering into these communities, with the Train to Cessnock providing a public transport spine.

## **Restoring reliability and increasing patronage**

The Train to Cessnock is providing a public transport offering where currently no meaningful service exists – only 0.5% of journeys to work in the Cessnock LGA are via public transport, compared to a statewide average of 4%. The Train to Cessnock will have a much greater impact on public transport patronage than, say, a transport initiative in Sydney where most people are already provided with one or more public transport offering, and the new service may simply divert passengers from one mode to another.

## **City shaping and precinct making**

In the absence of the Train to Cessnock, the communities along the corridor will continue to grow in a manner that is based around the use of car transport alone. This leads to a disparate development pattern, widespread communities and greater resource use. With the forecast 60% growth in population in the Cessnock LGA over the period to 2041, the inevitable result will be greater congestion, demand for more roads and a less liveable environment.

The Train to Cessnock would provide a focus for development and enable the growth in the current communities to be supported by the option of public transport use. It is widely recognised that the availability of good transport is the biggest determinant in the ability to make new housing reserves available.

The Greater Newcastle Metropolitan Plan envisions the Cessnock LGA as within the ‘metro frame’ of Greater Newcastle. In future years, the Train to Cessnock will be a critical public transport spine in Greater Newcastle, and establishment of the corridor now will support city shaping over coming decades.

## **Local manufacturing and jobs**

As noted above, the Train to Cessnock passes near two potentially significant industrial and freight precincts: the Hunter Economic Zone and the site of the former Hydro Aluminium Smelter, and the Train to Cessnock corridor could be used to provide rail access to both. These two sites present a great opportunity for the establishment of local manufacturing facilities, for example supporting the Government’s initiative to re-establish local rolling stock manufacturing facilities in NSW. Supported by the Train to Cessnock, these sites would offer:

- Available land for the establishment of industrial facilities.
- Good transport connections, both to the Hunter Expressway and the rail corridor.
- Local communities to provide a workforce, and housing options for relocating workers.
- Rail stations for workers to use public transport to travel to work.

## **Other pressing issues**

### **Housing, including affordable housing**

There is a critical shortage of housing, and in particular affordable housing, across NSW.

A rail service between Maitland and Cessnock would mean that it is possible to live in the established communities along the corridor (e.g. Kurri Kurri, Weston, Abermain, Neath and Aberdare) without the need for multiple cars. With a median house value of between \$550k and \$600k (and hence many houses available for much lower prices), the Train to Cessnock would open up many of these areas as affordable housing, assisting to address a key issue in NSW at present.

Gillieston Heights, Cliftleigh, Abermain and Bellbird are just some of the localities in this area where there is already rapid housing development (not to mention other rapidly growing Hunter Valley localities off this corridor, such as Lochinvar and Huntlee). The Train to Cessnock would support these developments plus also enable new development areas or higher density development (e.g. townhouses) at virtually every station along the corridor.

### **Moving to net zero**

A vital component of the move to net zero is to reduce dependence on motor vehicles, including through a move to public transport use or active transport. Provision of the Train to Cessnock will enable residents within a short distance of the corridor to reduce car dependency and to reduce the number of cars required in each household.

## The Train to Cessnock needs to be an immediate priority for the NSW Government

As noted above, the introduction of passenger rail services on the existing rail corridor between Maitland, Kurri Kurri and Cessnock, as proposed by Train to Cessnock, has appeared on State Government plans and strategies going back several years. However, it is now time to move the project from a future initiative to an immediate priority.

### The population already exists and is rapidly growing.

According to the 2021 census, around 50,000 people live in the suburbs surrounding the proposed Train to Cessnock stations. With the forecast growth of the LGA population by some 60% to 2041, the number of people living along the rail corridor will also grow substantially over this time.

### The need is immense.

The current public transport offering to this existing and growing population is limited at best. Most bus routes operate only a handful of services daily – nowhere near enough for most residents to use it in their daily activities. Accessibility for less mobile member of the community is poor.

### The cost of establishing the corridor now is relatively cheap, but will increase with the passage of time.

This is because:

1. Use of the Maitland to Cessnock corridor for transporting coal has ceased and the line is now only being used for storage of wagons. The current corridor owners, Aurizon and Yancoal, have indicated that they may be prepared to consider handing the corridor to Transport for NSW, under terms to be agreed.
2. The corridor is still classified as an active rail corridor and remains in a serviceable condition, noting that an upgrade will be required to lift it to passenger standard.
3. Transport for NSW is currently purchasing new regional rolling stock, which will enable the existing fleets to be retired in the period to 2028. The opportunity exists to refurbish a number of these trains to operate the Train to Cessnock, meaning that there would be limited costs in securing the necessary rolling stock for the service.

If the railway line is left inactive, it will inevitably deteriorate– sections will be removed, equipment vandalised, trees grow, etc. The works required to upgrade and restore it to use in, say, 10 - 15 years, will be substantially greater than now, and hence the cost of establishing train services at that time will also be substantially higher. If left longer, sections of the corridor may be sold or repurposed for other uses. Residents along the corridor will resist the re-introduction of trains after such a long time. The cost to restore the corridor for rail services may become impossibly high and the opportunity may be totally lost.

Right now, there is an opportunity to acquire the Maitland to Cessnock rail corridor and commence passenger operations for a very modest price - work to date indicates that the total expenditure would be between \$100 and \$200 million. Other passenger rail projects in NSW and Australia typically cost upwards of \$20,000 (and often closer to \$50,000 or more) per person in the catchment area. The Train to Cessnock would equate to **between \$2,000 and \$4,000 per person** to provide a rail service – the best value rail project in Australia.

## Consultation and community support

Train to Cessnock has been active in engaging with the community over this issue, and in securing community support.

- An ePetition was raised to the NSW Legislative Assembly, closing on 9 February 2024, and will be presented in the Legislative Assembly by Mr Clayton Barr, MLA for the Electorate of Cessnock. The ePetition received 2749 signatures.

The ePetition is entitled "Protect the South Maitland Rail corridor and urgent reintroduction of passenger rail services; Maitland to Bellbird." The ePetition text is:

*To the Speaker and Members of the Legislative Assembly, We petitioners bring to the attention of the House the urgent need to protect the South Maitland Rail corridor and the urgent need for the reintroduction of passenger rail services; Maitland to Bellbird. The introduction of regular environmentally friendly passenger services Maitland to Bellbird will allow safer, faster, economic and environmentally sustainable public transport between the Cessnock area and Maitland; linking residents to the new Maitland Hospital, Newcastle schools, colleges, university campuses, Scone and Dungog locally and direct connection to Brisbane, Northern Tablelands and Sydney. This corridor will become the tourist destination, connecting the state to vineyards and surrounding attractions and events, a featured journey for heritage trains and the Steamfest event. With over 3500 new homes expected west of Cessnock this service is needed, will significantly improve life for many electors and relieve growing road traffic pressures. The undersigned petitioners ask the Legislative Assembly to call on the Government to acquire the Maitland to Austar Colliery rail corridor for future public transport use from the current private owner, bringing the corridor under the permanent protection of the NSW parliament. We petitioners also request that the Government:*

- *Undertake the minimum necessary infrastructure and safeworking system repairs/ upgrades on the Maitland to Austar Colliery corridor to commence regular passenger services from Maitland to Bellbird using existing Endeavour/Hunter rollingstock*
- *The local manufacture of the long-term future clean energy powered rollingstock for these services are put out to tender.*

- Local representatives in both the NSW State Parliament and Federal Parliament have been contacted and engaged. This includes:
  - Mr Clayton Barr, State Member for the Electorate of Cessnock
  - Ms Jenny Aitchison, State Member for the Electorate of Maitland, Minister for Regional Transport and Roads
  - Mr Dan Repacholi, Federal Member for the Electorate of Hunter

We are also engaging with the key local councils, Cessnock and Maitland.

Letters of support have been provided by Mr Barr and Mr Repacholi, and these are attached to this submission.

- Various articles have been published in the local newspapers the Newcastle Herald, the Maitland Mercury and other media, in support of the Train to Cessnock. Recent media articles include:
  - Newcastle Herald August 21, 2021, <https://www.newcastleherald.com.au/story/7388412/could-passenger-trains-return-to-the-cessnock-line/>
  - Newcastle Herald Letters October 23, 2023, <https://www.newcastleherald.com.au/story/8392180/cessnock-deserves-a-passenger-train-service/>
  - Maitland Mercury November 3, 2023, <https://www.maitlandmercury.com.au/story/8408763/call-to-make-use-of-dormant-rail-line-with-maitland-to-cessnock-service/?cs=171>
  - NBN News November 7, 2023, <https://www.nbnnews.com.au/2023/11/07/cessnock-train-petition-gains-momentum/>
  - Maitland Mercury November 16, 2023, <https://www.maitlandmercury.com.au/story/8423321/greens-voice-support-for-maitland-to-cessnock-ra,-l-petition/?cs=171>
  - Newcastle Weekly November 19, 2023, <https://newcastleweekly.com.au/reintroducing-cessnock-rail-corridor-a-win-win-situation-for-everyone/>
  - Newcastle Herald November 24, 2023, <https://www.newcastleherald.com.au/story/8432812/cessnock-rail-affordable-opportunities-for-passenger-railway/>



## Proposed action and budget allowances

As noted, work to date indicates that the Train to Cessnock could be established and operating for a total expenditure between \$100 and \$200 million and, with timely approval of funding, trains could be operating between Maitland and Cessnock in 2028. The following diagram illustrates the indicative work and schedule.

	2024				2025				2026				2027				2028			
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
<b>Initial funding (2024 NSW State Budget)</b>		◆																		
Business Case / Scoping / Design																				
<b>Full funding (2025 NSW State Budget)</b>							◆													
Procurement																				
Corridor upgrade works																				
Signalling and level crossings																				
Station and facilities construction																				
Rolling stock refurbishment																				
Driver recruitment and training																				
Operational testing																				
<b>Services commence</b>																				◆

Figure 1 Indicative timeframes to establish the Train to Cessnock

We propose that the NSW State Government allocates \$10M funding in the 2024/25 NSW State Budget for Transport for NSW to complete the business case and design phase of the project, with an objective to complete this work and make a submission to the Cabinet Expenditure Review Committee so that delivery funding can be confirmed in the 2025/26 budget.

During the business case phase, the NSW Government should also commence engagement with the current owners of the rail corridor, Aurizon and Yancoal, to resolve the approach and mechanism for Government acquisition of the corridor and existing rail infrastructure. Any funding requirements to support acquisition could then be reflected in the business case and included in the delivery funding allowances.

The proposed funding profile for including in the 2024/25 NSW State Budget is as follows:

Table 3 Proposed funding profile for inclusion in the 2024/25 NSW State Budget

Current Year (\$M)	Forward Allocations (\$M)				
2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	Future years
10	15	60	60	20	0

The above totals to \$165M, in line with the estimate of between \$100 and \$200 million

The nominal allocations shown in forward years (i.e. for project delivery) would be confirmed through the business case and design work and adjusted in the 2025/26 NSW State Budget.

Amounts would also be dependent on any agreement that may be achieved with the Federal Government on a funding split for the project.

## Appendices

**Appendix 1:** The Case for the Train to Cessnock

**Appendix 2:** Letters of support from local MPs

- Mr Clayton Barr, State Member for the Electorate of Cessnock
- Mr Dan Repacholi, Federal Member for the Electorate of Hunter