

PETER DRAPER

INDEPENDENT MEMBER FOR TAMWORTH

MEDIA RELEASE

Draper Applauds Rail Retention in North West

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Member for Tamworth Peter Draper has welcomed an announcement that the rail link between Tamworth and Armidale will not be closed. Following the release of the Interim Parry Report, Transport Minister Michael Costa announced that the rail service between the two rural cities would close, with coaches to replace the train.

Mr Draper has paid tribute to the many community members who rallied to save the train, and also to Independent Member for Northern Tablelands Richard Torbay for his energetic and active campaign to save the service.

"The turning point in my opinion was the massive rally in Armidale where the community made their views very clear to the Minister," Mr Draper said.

"Prior to some 3,000 people gathering at the Armidale railway station, the Minister was using rhetoric such as "When we close the line." After the rally he changed tack, and began using terms such as "exploring options", and "community consultation." The rally was a terrific example of democracy in action, and people winning over the economic rationalists in the bureaucracy.

"I learned an enormous amount during this campaign about how the Parliament can be used effectively to get a result for your community," Mr Draper said.

"Richard Torbay was like an orchestra conductor, with Ministers, Labor backbenchers, Greens and Coalition members in and out of his office every day as the campaign escalated. He spoke in Parliament on this issue daily, and you could see the Government starting to cringe in embarrassment as he got up to speak."

The vigorous campaign to save the train however, had not convinced all Members of the Government that there was a chance of winning the fight. As late as last week, Labor Member for Heathcote Paul McLeay had a wager with Peter Draper that the line would still be closed. Mr McLeay's wife Cassandra works in Minister Costa's office specifically concentrating on rail. Mr Draper will now be the proud owner of a bottle of Grange Hermitage.

"I would pay tribute to the people who galvanised into action once the threat was announced," Mr Draper said. "I received letters of support and petitions from many residents of Walcha and Gunnedah Shires that helped enormously in the campaign."

"In particular, Walcha Mayor Bill Heazlett played a pivotal role, while Gunnedah Mayor Gae Swain recognised the potential for a bad decision on the Armidale line to have implications on the service to Moree via Gunnedah. This is a stunning victory for commonsense and people power over the dry economic rationalism that the Government seems to favour over regional communities best interests."

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