



Transport
for NSW

NSW Government Response

Legislative Assembly Committee on Community Services Inquiry into access to transport for seniors and disadvantaged people in rural and regional NSW

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1 Introduction

The Legislative Assembly Committee on Community Services' Report on its inquiry into access to transport for seniors and disadvantaged people in rural and regional NSW was published in December 2016. The Report made 19 recommendations to the NSW Government, which is required to table its response by 19 June 2017.

This document sets out the NSW Government response to each of the above-mentioned recommendations. In providing its response to the Report, the NSW Government recognises the need for further improvements to rural and regional transportation services. It has supported or supported in principle the majority of the Committee's recommendations.

The matters considered by the Committee were:

- (a) Specific issues relating to the transport needs of seniors and disadvantaged people in rural and regional NSW;
- (b) Accessibility of current public transport services in rural and regional NSW;
- (c) Potential strategies to improve access, including better alignment between different modes of transport, available routes and timetabling generally;
- (d) Support that can be provided to seniors and disadvantaged people to assist with the costs of private transport where public transport is either unavailable or unable to meet the needs of these groups; and
- (e) Any other related matters.

The Legislative Assembly Committee on Community Service's report follows a 2012 the State and Regional Development Committee Report on Inter-Regional Public Transport. The 2012 report included 31 recommendations to enhance the standard of inter-regional public transport.

In response to these recommendations, Transport for NSW has delivered substantial improvements to rural and regional transport services. These include:

- Purchasing a new intercity fleet that meet the needs of regional customers for disability access, luggage storage and carriage of bicycles
- Accelerating the renewal of NSW TrainLink's medium-and long-distance diesel fleet, starting with the XPT trains
- Improving regional bus services by working with local bus operators to introduce a more robust contractual framework for rural and regional buses, including service connections and frequency

- Amending the Passenger Transport Act to improve the integration of community transport services into the passenger transport system
- Improving customer information by extending on-line transport planning tools to rural and regional NSW
- Continuing to upgrade rural and regional stations through the Transport Access Program.

Ongoing improvement of rural and regional transport will be a focus of the Future Transport Strategy and key Transport for NSW Plans targeting transport disadvantage: the Disability Inclusion Action Plan 2017-2022; the Older Person's Mobility Plan; and the Social Access Plan.

2 Overview of the report findings

The Committee lists six key findings in its report which are set out below:

1. Poor transport connections and timetabling have a significant impact on seniors and disadvantaged people in rural and regional NSW. Lack of services and poor connections between local and longer distance services can increase the disadvantage.
2. The new rural and regional bus contracts allow for the provision of more flexible and customer-focussed transport services.
3. The introduction of the Centralised Trip Allocation and Booking System should assist in providing more efficient and coordinated transport services, and the data collected should improve long term planning of services.
4. The availability of point to point transport services, such as taxis and ridesharing, in rural and regional areas should increase following reforms to the point to point transport industry.
5. Transport services and support for Aboriginal people must be culturally sensitive to encourage greater use of services, especially for Aboriginal people living in more isolated locations.
6. The community transport sector is experiencing a period of uncertainty due to funding changes as part of the transition to the National Disability Insurance Scheme and My Aged Care.

3 Response to the recommendations

The Government's response to the Legislative Assembly Committee on Community Service's inquiry into access to transport for seniors and disadvantaged people in rural and regional NSW is set out in more detail below.

3.1 Recommendation 1

That Transport for NSW work with NSW Health and the Department of Education to develop structures and approval to share transport assets.

Response: Supported in principle

The NSW Government fully supports its agencies working together to optimise use of transport services in rural and regional NSW. This works best through improving the ability of government funded services to carry each other's clients, rather than sharing assets. A coordination model that provides visibility of travel arrangements across a given area will be developed to facilitate shared service arrangements. The introduction of the Centralised Trip Allocation and Booking System will assist in tracking services delivery and making better use of existing assets to meet demand.

Transport for NSW and NSW Health have been working in collaboration to solve mutual challenges regarding community transport service delivery across NSW. NSW Health currently operates the Non-Government Agency Grants Program which provides small grants to community transport providers to provide health-related transport. Total funding is under \$1 million. The feasibility of Transport for NSW undertaking contract management and administration of the NGO Grants Program on behalf of NSW Health is pending final approval.

There are a number of complex issues that would need to be worked through before more extensive sharing of transport to health assets could occur. These include:

- Identifying the assets available for shared purposes;
- Quality assurance and safeguarding systems;
- Vehicle insurance and fit out requirements, and
- Related indemnities/insurances.

The Department of Education does not own or operate transport assets, but has contracts with approximately 650 service providers to provide assisted school transport services. Transport for NSW is working with the Department of Education to improve the Assisted School Travel Program. The potential benefit of Transport for NSW administering assisted school transport service contracts on behalf of the Department of Education is currently under discussion.

3.2 Recommendation 2

That Transport for NSW evaluate the effectiveness of the new area manager roles after two years.

Response: Supported

Transport for NSW's Rural and Regional Service Delivery and Performance area managers are responsible for managing rural and regional bus services, and contracted community transport services in seven regions across NSW. Transport for NSW will continue to work with the area managers to support opportunities for service growth and development in rural and regional areas. Early feedback indicates that the area managers are playing a valuable role.

Evaluation is planned to occur in 2019 to allow for sufficient time to measure effectiveness.

3.3 Recommendation 3

That Transport for NSW evaluate the rollout of the Centralised Trip Allocation and Booking System after two years. This evaluation should assess the impact that internet black spots in rural areas can have on the system.

Response: Supported

The Centralised Trip Allocation and Booking System (CTABS) implementation will occur over two years from 2017 and evaluations will commence at least one year after state-wide rollout is completed. The increase in the number of trip kilometres provided with existing community transport assets in the areas in which CTABS has been rolled out will be a key measure of effectiveness.

An evaluation of areas with limited internet coverage is being considered in conjunction with the program roll-out. It should be noted however that the tablets used to book services will continue to operate even if internet coverage is interrupted or not available. Bookings are stored and automatically forwarded to the CTABS central computer when coverage is resumed.

It is expected that internet coverage will improve over time. A program jointly funded by Australian Government, NSW Government and telecommunications providers is underway deliver over 174 mobile towers in regional communities.

3.4 Recommendation 4

That Transport for NSW publish the timeframe for the completion of all access upgrades to bus stop and train station infrastructure, with progress reports provided on a regular basis.

Response: Supported in principle

There are approximately 20,000 bus stops in rural and regional NSW which are owned and operated by local governments in NSW. Transport for NSW currently provides assistance to councils in rural and regional NSW to upgrade bus stop infrastructure through the Country Passenger Transport Infrastructure Grants (CPTIGS).

A total of \$3 million (over two years) is available within the grants program. The CPTIGS program has been redesigned to give priority to applications from councils wishing to upgrade their stops to comply with the Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport 2002. In the 2014-15 CPTIGS funding round 98 per cent of funded projects were for bus stops improvements. The current round is pending final approvals. This round is expected to yield compliant bus stops in 626 locations.

In 2012, the NSW Government announced the Transport Access Program which delivers accessible, modern, secure and integrated transport infrastructure where it is needed most. Program and project information is available to interested customers and community members at www.transport.nsw.gov.au/projects/tap. This website provides details of completed and current projects, including information on current works, relevant planning documents, and, where applicable, project completion timeframes.

Transport Access Project completion timeframes are also detailed in the Determination/Planning Approval Reports of relevant projects published on Transport for NSW's website. However, it should be noted project timelines can be impacted by a broad range of planning, design and construction requirements, including heritage obligations, accommodating major construction within limited rail possessions, inclement weather, and maintaining the customer experience. As a result, publishing of completion dates is supported for announced projects only.

The Transport Access Program website currently provides information on each ongoing project. Project information is clearly articulated, and includes information on 'Current Work'. Where applicable, there may be an opportunity to reposition, or further emphasise, expected project timeframes.

The Transport Access Program is continuing to work with all delivery agencies (Transport for NSW, Sydney Trains) to ensure the Program website consistently reflects the current status of all active projects, both in Sydney and across Rural and Regional NSW. Information on Transport Access Program upgrades can also be obtained by calling 131 500.

3.5 Recommendation 5

That Transport for NSW evaluate ways that access to public transport can be improved for seniors and disadvantaged people with companion animals in rural and regional NSW.

Response: Noted

Assistance animals and police or security dogs may travel on all public transport services. To be accredited as an assistance animal, specific training is required so that the animal is capable of meeting the person with disability's needs, will not react to distractions and is toilet trained to avoid toileting requirements over extended time periods.

Companion animals are allowed on local buses with the permission of the driver if the animal: accompanies a customer; is suitably confined in a box, basket or other container; and is under control.

Companion animals are not permitted on trains or stations. The longer distances travelled on NSW TrainLink services and animal toileting requirements make travel with domestic pets on long-distance rural and regional rail services impractical at present.

A range of issues to preserve the safety and comfort of all customers need to be addressed before a change to the current policy is considered. Transport for NSW is working with delivery agencies to address these issues.

3.6 Recommendation 6

That Transport for NSW make longer access ramps available at rural and regional train stations where there is a significant height difference between the platform and the train carriage, to ensure people using wheelchairs can safely get on and off trains.

Response: Supported in principle

Ramps are one of a range of asset treatments available to deal with the access challenges at locations where boarding is made difficult by the height of the platform in relation to the train entrance. The planned renewal of NSW TrainLink's medium- and long-distance diesel fleet, starting with the XPT trains, also will make a significant difference due to removal of the step at the train entry.

A trial of a longer ramp commenced in Armidale in late February 2017 and is expected to be completed in mid-2017. Transport for NSW and NSW Trains will jointly consider the outcomes of Armidale trial and the implications for other targeted

locations. Following evaluation of the trial, funding would need to be identified before any decision for a wider roll-out.

In addition to longer ramps, Transport for NSW is also considering partially raising platforms at some stations being upgraded under the Transport Access Program. By creating a boarding platform, standard boarding ramps can be used to facilitate access from the platform to the train. It should be noted that the suitability of this treatment would need to be determined on a site by site basis.

3.7 Recommendation 7

That Transport for NSW publish the timeframe for the introduction of the train access ramps, with regular progress updates.

Response: Supported in principle

Transport for NSW and NSW Trains will release information on the outcomes of the Armidale trial through the Accessible Transport Advisory Committee.

3.8 Recommendation 8

That Transport for NSW, NSW Health and the Department of Family and Community Services staff dealing directly with customers receive training on the transport needs of seniors and people with disability in rural and regional areas so they can provide appropriate support when required.

Response: Supported

Transport for NSW is committed to ensuring that all front line customer service staff are appropriately trained to meet the needs of customers with disability. Disability awareness training is part of pre-service training for front-line customer service staff.

Transport for NSW will work with the Ministry of Health to explore feasibility of providing training regarding transport needs to public hospital staff as part of the Centralised Trip Allocation and Booking System (CTABS) future roadmap. CTABS will enable staff at active destinations such as hospitals and clinics to make electronic community transport bookings.

In response to the NSW Government's Disability Inclusion Plan, the Health Education Training Institute is promoting to NSW Health staff a set of eight online training modules specifically developed to build the knowledge, communication skills and confidence of health staff when providing services to people with disability. This includes education and awareness-raising about disability inclusion principles.

In some Local Health Districts (LHDs) staff members from health transport units provide ongoing informal education to hospital staff about health-related transport needs and collaborate with other agencies to improve access to community transport.

An example of this collaboration is Northern NSW LHD's Transport for Health Network meetings which aim to improve access to transport to medical appointments at health facilities and to foster cross agency partnerships. Key stakeholders including community transport organisations, taxi services, bus services, hospital discharge planners, renal staff, Aboriginal Medical Services and the Transport for NSW regional managers are invited to attend these meetings.

The Department of Family and Community Services (FACS) ensures that case workers and contact staff consider transport access and incorporate it into case management and service delivery strategies for their clients. Among the approaches adopted to assist clients, FACS provides outreach services to smaller communities which allow clients to receive services without always needing to travel to centres. A new Mobile Service Delivery Van now visits small towns, enabling residents to meet with a variety of services, learn about the Department's functions and to provide practical assistance such as processing forms and applications.

In addition, Transport for NSW has developed a comprehensive on-line travel training resource known as First Stop Transport to support people including older people to travel safely and independently on the NSW public transport system. It is available free of charge and can be accessed on-line directly by customers or by staff of organisations that support people who are transport disadvantaged. Transport for NSW will work with relevant agencies to identify channels of communication in rural and regional areas to improve awareness of the First Stop Transport resources.

3.9 Recommendation 9

That Transport for NSW evaluate the wheelchair accessible taxi program to ensure that wheelchair accessible taxis are made available in areas where there is the greatest need.

Response: Supported

The NSW Government has committed \$15.5 million a year to improve point to point transport services for customers with disabilities.

Initiatives that have been in place from 1 July 2016 include:

- Increasing the maximum Taxi Transport Subsidy Scheme (TTSS) subsidy from \$30 to \$60 per trip
- Increasing the Wheelchair Accessible Taxi (WAT) driver incentive payment from \$7.70 (ex. GST) to \$15 (ex. GST) per trip
- Expanding the WAT interest-free loan scheme from \$1 million to \$5 million to help get more WATs on the road.

The first round of WAT interest free loans put nine additional WATs on the road including five in regional areas. To strengthen opportunities for regional taxi operators to successfully apply, Transport for NSW has commissioned Ernst and Young to develop a methodology for assessing the financial viability of applicants, which takes into account the variety of business structures operating in the taxi industry.

Now that the legislative framework is in place under the *Point to Point Transport (Taxis and Hire Vehicles) Act 2016*, Transport for NSW has commenced a review of the TTSS and the incentives provided to WAT operators and drivers to provide services to customers with disability.

The Review will:

- Evaluate the objectives of the TTSS in the context of changes to the policy and regulatory environment for point to point transport services.
- Consider the effectiveness of current incentives to encourage investment in wheelchair accessible vehicles and to prioritise use of the vehicle for customers with disability.
- Clarify the relationship between the TTSS and other transport options, including public transport, and the impact on scheme eligibility issues.
- Consider opportunities to amend administrative arrangements for TTSS to improve the customer experience and the integrity of the program.

A key focus area for the review will be increasing supply of wheelchair accessible point to point services in rural and regional NSW. The review is expected to be completed by December 2017.

3.10 Recommendation 10

That Transport for NSW, subject to evaluation, expand the Driving Change program to provide more opportunities for Aboriginal people in rural and regional communities.

Response: Supported

The George Institute for Global Health is currently undertaking an evaluation of the Driving Change Program which it developed with support of founding partner AstraZeneca Young Health Program, and principal partners Transport for NSW and NSW Health. The program commenced in February 2013 and the evaluation is due to be completed later this year.

The project aimed to increase licensing rates among young Aboriginal people aged 16 – 24. This was achieved by providing practical support for Aboriginal community members to access licensing services using a culturally responsive approach that combines Aboriginal leadership, community capacity building and intensive case management through the licensing system.

Driving Change worked with communities in NSW that identified licensing as an issue for Aboriginal people. An Aboriginal Youth Worker was employed in each community, to provide case management to support young people through the licensing system.

This is a collaborative model that works with local services to link the individual to the range of support services they need in order to achieve a driver licence.

At the conclusion of the trial in 2016, five Driver Change sites were subsumed under the Transport for NSW Driver Licensing Access Program, which Transport for NSW is currently implementing. Findings from the evaluation of the Driver Change Program will inform future development of the Driver Licensing Access Program. The current objectives of this program are to:

- Improve road safety outcomes among disadvantaged Aboriginal people and other disadvantaged communities by supporting them to meet the GLS requirements, leading to reduced crash and injury rates.
- Provide culturally appropriate support and resources that assist disadvantaged Aboriginal people and other disadvantaged communities to obtain, retain and regain their driver licence across all stages of the licensing pathway.
- Contribute to improved access to education, employment, health and other community participation services for disadvantaged people through the attainment of a driver licence.
- Increase equity of opportunity for disadvantaged Aboriginal people and other disadvantaged communities to obtain a driver licence and to be safer and legal road users.

The range of driver licensing access services and support offered varies depending on the needs of the individual and the stage they are at in the licensing system. Service providers in the program are delivering a range of supports including dealing with some of the underlying issues that are a barrier to obtaining or maintaining a driver's licence. These include literacy and numeracy, familiarity with computer based licence testing, debt negotiation and management and access to a road worthy vehicle for driver testing.

In 2016/17 Transport for NSW provided funds of \$1.49 million and expanded the program to 14 providers covering more than 56 geographic locations with targets of achieving 630 Learner licences and 586 Provisional licences. Of the locations covered, 47 are in rural and regional areas.

The NSW Government is also offering 1000 free places on the Safer Drivers Course each year to help young learner drivers from disadvantaged backgrounds and Aboriginal communities. This fee exemption allows financially disadvantaged people to benefit from the road safety outcomes of the Safer Drivers Course.

3.11 Recommendation 11

That Transport for NSW publish travel information in paper format. It should be in locations where it is easily available to people who do not have access to online information, such as community centres and doctors' surgeries in rural and regional areas.

Response: Supported

NSW TrainLink makes paper timetables available at all stations. Rural and regional bus operators are required to publish their timetables on their websites. Operators that use predominantly web-based timetables are required to provide timetables in other formats on request, free of charge to the customer.

It is also possible to request printed timetables by phoning 131 500 and they will be posted to the customer. Consideration is being given to the best way of providing public transport service timetables and information at Service NSW centres throughout NSW, to assist those people unable to access online information at home.

A range of information is printed by Transport for NSW to support people who do not have access to online information. This includes publications relating to ticketing, Opal cards for seniors and pensioners and accessible travel on Sydney and inter-city train services.

Information is sent to community centres and doctors' surgeries in rural and regional areas on request to ensure printed resources are provided where they are needed.

3.12 Recommendation 12

That Transport for NSW area managers inform people in each of their respective areas about the transport services and subsidies that are available, with information made available both online and in printed form.

Response: Supported in principle

Transport for NSW area managers may provide information directly to customers, but also have a key role in facilitating information access via service providers and local transport operators. Ten per cent (\$89,200) of the Transport Access and Regional Partnership program is available to allocate to information services.

Transport for NSW will consider the best use of this funding. Opportunities include the development of coordinated transport information guides at the regional level.

3.13 Recommendation 13

That Transport for NSW area managers work with the local communities and stakeholder groups within their areas to promote awareness of the First Stop Transport travel training service.

Response: Supported

Contracted community transport service providers will be promoting the First Stop Transport under guidance from Transport for NSW Rural and Regional Service Delivery and Performance staff.

Additional channels for promoting the First Stop Transport travel training service to NDIS service providers and participants and to older people will be developed. Regular promotion on Human Services network www.hsnet.nsw.gov.au/ is a key opportunity.

Transport for NSW will work with Multicultural NSW's Regional Advisory Committees to promote travel training services to people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

3.14 Recommendation 14

That Transport for NSW consider introducing a fuel card system for people living in very remote locations where there is no access to public or point to point transport services.

Response: Noted

Transport for NSW will undertake further investigation of fuel card systems. If this investigation identifies options to address the high costs and risk of fraud and misuse generally associated with these schemes, Transport for NSW will give further consideration to introducing fuel cards in very remote locations.

It should be noted that NSW already has the most generous subsidies of motor vehicle taxes in Australia, including free licences and registration for all Centrelink and Veterans pensioners.

Transport for NSW administers the Transport Access Regional Partnerships (TARP) grants program which is available for projects that focus on transport disadvantaged groups within the community. Funds are directed to areas where projects are responding to clearly identified community needs and to organisations who demonstrate that the greatest community benefit will result.

The TARP program may provide fuel subsidies for bus services or cars for group travel for a particular purpose or event on a case by case basis. Due to wide spread difficulties with ensuring that person centred subsidies are used only by the persons

targeted and the proposed purpose of the subsidy, these types of projects are only approved under stringent administrative arrangements.

3.15 Recommendation 15

That Transport for NSW extend the Taxi Transport Subsidy Scheme to include other point to point transport providers such as Uber.

Response: Supported in principle

The feasibility of moving to a service provider-neutral transport subsidy scheme and the potential impact on service availability, cost and safety compliance will be considered as part of the review of the Taxi Transport Subsidy Scheme (TTSS) and the incentives provided to Wheelchair Accessible Taxi operators and drivers to provide services to customers with disability.

3.16 Recommendation 16

That NSW Health further simplify the process of submitting claims under the Isolated Patients Travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme, particularly the way attendance at medical appointments is confirmed.

Response: Supported

Significant reforms to the Isolated Patients Travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme (IPTAAS) were implemented in 2015/16. These included increases in accommodation subsidies for longer stay patients, increases in fuel subsidies, expansion of the eligibility criteria to include travel to specific highly specialised allied health clinics and prosthetic/orthotic services, a reduction in co-payments, further simplified IPTAAS forms, an easier online claiming system and the establishment of a dedicated 1800 number to streamline patient and carer enquiries.

As part of a process of continuous improvement, in 2017 the Ministry of Health will commence reviewing IPTAAS administrative processes and subsidies in order to further reduce the complexity of the scheme for patients and to reduce claims processing times.

3.17 Recommendation 17

That NSW Health make information about the Isolated Patients Travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme widely available to ensure those who may be eligible to claim are aware of the scheme.

Response: Supported

EnableNSW (part of HealthShare NSW) is responsible for overseeing IPTAAS's operational processes. EnableNSW implemented a communications strategy advising of the significant reforms to IPTAAS subsidies in September 2015. This included providing information about the reforms via email to medical specialists, bulk-billing IPTAAS accommodation providers and existing clients.

EnableNSW responds to requests for presentations about the scheme from hospitals, bulk-billing accommodation providers and other key stakeholders, and regularly updates the IPTAAS section of its website.

EnableNSW will be developing and implementing a communications strategy in 2017 to further increase awareness of IPTAAS in rural and regional areas, including amongst the general public, general practitioners and specialists. The needs of specific groups including Aboriginal communities and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds will be considered in the communications strategy.

3.18 Recommendation 18

That Transport for NSW, NSW Health and the Department of Family and Community Services monitor the impact of the National Disability Insurance Scheme and My Aged Care to ensure that people are not disadvantaged when accessing transport services.

Response: Supported

Responsibility for funding for transport for younger people with a disability which has been provided through the NSW Community Care Supports Program (CCSP) is being transitioned to the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). In general, NDIS participants will be able to access transport assistance if the participant cannot use public transport without substantial difficulty due to their disability.

Transport for shopping, visiting health practitioners and attending social activities for frail older people may be subsidised through the Commonwealth Home Support Programme (CHSP) and through Commonwealth Government Home Care Packages. Access to these subsidised services is through My Aged Care, the main entry point to the Aged Care System in Australia

Transport for NSW is working in partnership with the Department of Family and Community Services, NSW Health and providers to ensure community transport

organisations are ready for the transition to the NDIS and My Aged Care and have the capacity to meet the challenges ahead. Some NDIS providers in regional areas have also recently received grants under the Transition Assistance Program.

Transport for NSW is working with the Department of Premier and Cabinet to raise any concerns and provide effective arrangements during transition to the National Disability Insurance Service and My Aged Care.

The Taxi Transport Subsidy Scheme will continue to operate in NSW as an 'in-kind' service within the NDIS. This means that scheme users in NSW who are also NDIS participants will continue to receive subsidised taxi trips.

3.19 Recommendation 19

That Transport for NSW provide a report by October 2018 to the Committee on Community Services detailing the progress made in implementing all of the Committee's recommendations.

Response: Supported

Transport for NSW is committed to ongoing improvements to transport access in rural and regional NSW. A number of initiatives have long range targets and will be implemented incrementally over a number of years.

Transport for NSW will prepare a report on implementation progress in relation to all the supported recommendations by October 2018.