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MEDIA RELEASE

Improving access to transport in rural and regional NSW

Better access to transport can help improve the quality of life for people living in rural and regional NSW, Clarence MP, Chris Gulaptis, Chair of the Committee on Community Services, said today.

“Better co-ordination of transport services can provide people with the flexible transport they need to do things like shopping, going to the doctor and catching up with friends,” Mr Gulaptis said.

The Committee has tabled the report of its inquiry into access to transport for seniors and disadvantaged people in rural and regional NSW.

The Committee’s 19 recommendations focus on improving the co-ordination, flexibility and accessibility of transport services. They also recognise the need to provide more information about transport services and concessions, particularly given the higher costs of transport in rural and regional NSW.

The Committee found that in many areas there are vehicles operated by local organisations and schools that are underused and could be used to provide extra services.

“We have recommended that Transport for NSW work with NSW Health and the Department of Education to put in place agreements to make better use of vehicles such as school buses, to benefit the wider community,” Mr Gulaptis said.

The introduction of a new electronic booking system and new contracts for bus operators provides the potential for improved services. Additionally, initiatives to increase the number of taxis and expand ridesharing services could better meet local needs.

“Innovations in technology allow transport providers to better use and share resources and the expansion of ridesharing outside of metropolitan areas offers more flexible on-demand services,” Mr Gulaptis said.

The Committee heard work is underway to upgrade transport infrastructure to provide people with easier access to bus and train services.

“It is important that the public be kept informed on the progress of these upgrades so they know when their local services will become more accessible,” Mr Gulaptis said.

The Committee found there is a lack of awareness about what services are actually available in rural and regional areas. Similarly, people are not aware of concessions and travel subsidies that are available. We also heard about the First Stop Transport travel training program to help people unfamiliar with using public transport system.

“It is vital that people know how and where they can access transport services, particularly at times of illness and vulnerability,” Mr Gulaptis said, “and this is why we have recommended that Transport for NSW and NSW Health publicise information about the support schemes that are available.”

In very remote communities with no public transport or taxi services the Committee has recommended that fuel cards be available to help residents with fuel costs.

“There are places where it is not feasible to run regular transport services and making fuel cards available is an effective way to help people who have to travel even greater distances,” Mr Gulaptis.

Aboriginal people have particular issues with getting a drivers licence as they often have problems getting the identity documents needed to apply for a licence. The Driving Change program has successfully helped a number of young Aboriginal people to get their drivers licence.

“We are encouraged by the success of the Driving Change program and would like to see the program extended to allow more Aboriginal people to get their drivers licence,” Mr Gulaptis said.

The Committee’s report is available at: <https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/communityservices>.

The New South Wales Government has six months to respond to the Committee’s recommendations.

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