

29 November 2012

Our Ref: D2012/124876

Mr Todd Buttsworth
Research Officer
Legislative Assembly
State and Regional Development Committee
Parliament of NSW
Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Mr Buttsworth

Inquiry into inter-regional public transport

I am writing in response to your letter dated 15 November 2012 and the Committees' additional questions in relation to the above inquiry. Please find answers to your questions below:

1. CountryLink is always seeking to improve patronage from what ever market segment that can be achieved. Initiatives that may improve the product offering to the business customer such as communications technology (Wi Fi), timetable changes or improved train amenities are now matters under the control of Transport for NSW. CountryLink will of course provide advice to TfNSW as required.
2. Local Councils can play a very constructive role in improving regional public transport. Local Councils working cooperatively with TfNSW can improve the integration of local transport modes with regional rail and connecting coach services. In addition, improved cooperative arrangements with local councils on the maintenance of unattended railway stations would improve customer amenity and experience.
3. CountryLink develops packaged products in partnership with Destination NSW. This is currently undertaken on a fairly small scale and could be considered for expanded packaged tourism products based on rail travel.
4. Linkages between train and coach services could be improved a number of ways from increasing the number of connections to that which currently exists to improving the amenity of coach stop facilities. Some initiatives may be best achieved in partnership with regional councils others would need additional funding from Government. Research and appropriate business cases would need to be developed.
5. I think the level of integration is sufficient to achieve the level of service currently provided to regional areas. Current routes and schedules are reviewed to optimise the service provided with the existing resource levels. If there was a desire to increase the level of service this would require the commitment of additional funding.

6. The Regional Excursion Daily (RED) is a product offered by private regional coach operators. It is not a CountryLink product and cannot therefore comment on the response to it.
7. CountryLink provides for the carriage of pushbikes on its services with some conditions and restrictions. There has not been increase in demand for the carriage of bicycles.
8. CountryLink facilitates access to its regional services for seniors through the sale of a range of subsidised fare products including the CountryLink Pensioner Excursion, Pensioner Concessions and Pensioner Travel Vouchers. CountryLink provides services for seniors and other customers with mobility difficulties.
9. CountryLink train and coach services are equipped to accommodate wheel chairs and other mobility devices for customers who are mobility impaired however there are restrictions due to the dimensional limitations of trains and coaches.

With regard to the CountryLink stations, eighty five percent of the stations at which we stop are considered accessible for mobility impaired people.

10. CountryLink does not discriminate against intending customers based upon mental impairment or other mental health issues. The only consideration would be the welfare and comfort of other customers on the services. CountryLink does its utmost to accommodate special needs customers on its services, however there are instances where, due to the severity of the physical or mental disability a carer may be required to travel with the customer.
11. Blue Mountains stations are not CountryLink Stations. Questions with regard to disability access upgrades at these locations would be best directed to TfNSW.
12. The Survey to which you refer has not previously been provided to, or discussed with officers of CountryLink. The assertion that coach drivers are unwilling to use wheelchair lifts to assist passengers with mobility issues cannot be verified.
 - a) I do not know if TfNSW are aware of the survey
 - b) This question would be best addressed to TfNSW
 - c) CountryLink, through its contractual arrangements with coach operators, requires the provision of disability compliant (wheelchair accessible) coaches. These coaches are available for the use of wheelchair bound customers and any refusal without justification would be considered as a non-compliance and dealt with accordingly.

Yours sincerely



Matthew Coates
Acting General Manager CountryLink