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Blue Mountains, Lithgow
& Oberon Tourism
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Mr Andrew Gee MP
Committee Chair
State and Regional Development Committee
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
Sydney, NSW, 2000

26 October 2012

Re: Inquiry Into Inter-Regional Public Transport

Background of Blue Mountains Lithgow and Oberon Tourism

BMLOT is a not-for-profit organisation, with more than 350 members representing Australia's first (The Carrington Hotel and Caves House) and one of the most iconic tourism destinations. The recent NSW Government Visitor Economy Taskforce Report identified the Blue Mountains as the highest awareness regional NSW destination in the Australian domestic market. We are proud of our track record of delivering results including growing annual trackable public relations exposure of our destination from \$2 million to \$10 million in 5 years. With more than 4 million visitors a year, according to National Parks and Wildlife Services (other statistics do not properly capture international visitors, especially day visitors), Echo Point and the Three Sisters is the most visited natural site in regional Australia.

As a destination we pride ourselves on being proactive, having strong industry leadership and a united industry with an integrated membership structure, and a whole of community approach with Local Tourism Organisations (LTOs), Councils and National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) and Destination NSW having representation on the BMLOT Board and BMLOT working with all stakeholders including Aboriginal and conservation groups to achieve outcomes.

The Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area was one of Tourism Australia's and Parks Australia's first eight National Landscapes. This year in October we previewed an Aboriginal Cultural Experience Guide, the first of its kind, including cultural information and tourism products that we assisted to develop and commercialise from all six language groups across the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area. This is the result of four years consultation and engagement.

Our destination is one of the most awarded, with recognition given to product and service quality. In January NSW won a record 11 out of 27 national awards at the Qantas Australian Tourism Awards, two of which were for Jenolan Caves from our destination. Several individuals from our industry have won contribution to tourism awards at the NSW Tourism Awards over the past years.

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Our region has three outstanding tertiary education organisations/facilities that focus on, and/or deliver, Hospitality and Tourism qualifications outcomes:

- Blue Mountains International Hotel Management School (Leura)
- TAFE Western Sydney Institute (Wentworth Falls)
- TAFE Western Institute (Lithgow)

As a destination we embrace market trends and are therefore committed to becoming the first China Ready and Accredited destination in Australia.

Regional Public Transport Issues

1. The main focus of current CountryLink services is connecting smaller regional centres in a single line to larger regional centres which then connect with Sydney. E.g. Lightning Ridge has a service to Dubbo which connects through to Sydney. Moree connects through Gunnedah to Sydney, so if a tourist wishes to visit both Lightning Ridge and Moree they have to travel a long way around to visit both centres. If there were more services/options interconnecting the network you could design itineraries for tourists to travel to many regional destinations without the need for back tracking. The benefit to a region such as the Blue Mountains for this would be connecting Mudgee with the upper Hunter Valley as one possible connection – services could then be connected such as

- Sydney – Blue Mountains
- Blue Mountains – Mudgee
- Mudgee – Hunter Valley
- Then the option from Hunter Valley is either returning to Sydney or heading anywhere North
- Currently you have to do Sydney – Blue Mountains – Mudgee – return to Sydney same path to then travel North

The expansion of the Countrylink holiday programme to more regional destinations is desired. A greater connection between CountryLink and private services would allow greater communication and shared time-tabling. Ultimately, providing greater product information of all services, CountryLink and private, could lead to one ticketing system accepted by all operators.

2. Support the principle of integrating and planning for the existing resources that are currently out there i.e. rail, commercial buses, school buses, taxis, community service vehicles – at present working independently. To achieve this we need data, and so BMLOT supports the current aim for a Customer Passenger Strategy as identified in the Long Term Transport Master Plan. We would also support the role of the 12 Regional Transport Coordinators to ensure improved services.
3. BMLOT supports the expansion of the 131 500 customer service number, currently for metropolitan based transport information, to providing all information including for regional transport.
4. We support the use of coaches as being the most economical and flexible way of providing access to any areas not otherwise well serviced, or to those areas that can be identified as needing services.
5. We support the roll out of the OPAL card. From a tourism perspective this would ensure that visitors can access well-priced fares to regional destinations.
6. We support the need for better coach infrastructure. This could be in terms of creating interchange hubs with rail or CountryLink services. There is a need for safe, well-lit passenger environments. Just as important is our support for the roll out of practical facilities such as shelters, toilets and coach parking within tourist areas. Better infrastructure will bring more coaches to the regions which in turn will bring a significant economic boost. It is our understanding that average spend by a coach passenger is greater than an airline passenger.
7. We advocate for the engagement of Destination NSW as a significant tourism marketing body well-placed to promote land transport tourism packages, and similarly, the private sector tourism industry bodies, Regional Tourism Organisations (RTOs) and Local Tourism Organisations (LTOs) can assist in promoting land transport tourism packages.
8. There is a range of regional touring routes such as Greater Blue Mountains Drive, Grand Pacific Drive, Legendary Pacific Coast and Snowys Valley Way that include outstanding regional destinations and experiences. We would like to see a programme that creates simple to book one price open land transport ticket options, valid for a period of time, allowing travellers to make their own accommodation arrangements or take up an accommodation package. Touring experiences would be accessible to visitors without cars. Passengers/families/groups, from cities or major regional centres could undertake a journey/holiday via public transport (trains/buses/coaches) with flexibility and options to link with public and private transport providers for day trips in certain locations. This is an economic opportunity.

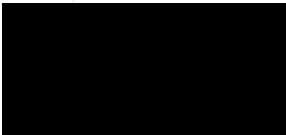
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9. There is a need for more packaging and marketing of regional events based on the land transport network.
10. In many destinations adequate public transport services exist, however, from a visitor perspective whilst a location may be identified as a "bus stop", unless a timetable and route information is available the opportunity is not able to be conveniently taken up, revenue is lost. We understand that displaying timetables that change and route information is expensive and prone to vandalism. It is however, relatively simple to provide a QR code for the majority of people travelling to use their smart phone to access that necessary information.

We thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Yours faithfully



Randall Walker
Chairman, Blue Mountains, Lithgow and Oberon Tourism