

1. Could you describe how the service provided to young people by BAT Bus operates?

BAT or Byron Area Travel is an innovative youth transport service in Byron Shire that was developed as a response to the lack of public transport in the region.

The coordinator is employed to work 6 hours per week to organise trips and liaise with young people. As it is often difficult to keep within those hours there is some flexibility to go to 12 hours per week if needed.

Buses are booked in advance with generally a minimum number of passengers of 8 people for local trips and 10 for further afield such as interstate. Buses are hired through a brokerage system; there are many advantages to this. Firstly the buses are chosen for the specific size of the group, if only 8 people travel we can hire an 8 or 12 seat vehicle and not have to run a coach of say 35+ seats. Also we can be flexible, if 3 groups want to go on the same day we aren't restricted to the one bus being already booked but can keep hiring vehicles because there are many buses in the community eg buses that do school runs. One of the biggest advantages is that we don't have to maintain a bus, by hiring them our costs can be kept low.

Passengers ring the coordinator and book the bus. A timetable for the journey is worked out, such as where would passengers like to be picked up from and at what time. Buses can go to passenger's door if required and numerous collection points can be arranged if convenient. There is no extra cost for this. We aim to keep charges down so that travel is affordable for young people. They pay a contribution and the NSW Ministry of Transport funds the difference.

2. How long has the service been running, and what geographical areas does it cover?

The service has been operating for approximately 17 years and targets young people from Byron Shire in northern NSW. Other passengers can travel from outside our target group but we require at least 50% to be between the ages of 12 – 25 and reside in the Shire. Passengers travel to a variety of destinations, most destinations are within 2 hours radius, and the furthest we have assisted transport for is a group in a self drive 12 seat vehicle that went to South Australia.

3. Which government department and program funds the service; how much funding does it receive; and is the funding recurrent? Does the service receive any funding from any other sources?

The Ministry of Transport funds the programme on a recurrent basis for \$29472+GST per annum. It was initially funded through the Area Assistance Programme for 2 years and the MOT picked up the funding after that period. Passenger contributions are important for the sustainability of the project and

provide around 30% of our funding. Presently we have some funding from the Ministry of Transport to assist young people to attend Sports events and have funding of \$13621+GST to do this. At this stage this isn't ongoing funding.

4. What are the demographics of the young people who mainly use the service?

Most of the passengers are between the ages of 12 and 25 that reside in Byron Shire. We have found however that the greatest use of the service is by young people between the ages of 14 and 17 as they are at an age where they are keen to do things socially but are too young to drive.

5. To what extent are Aboriginal young people using the service and for what reasons?

Aboriginal young people use the service generally through their social network with their friends. It is rare that we are requested for transport specifically for Aboriginal youth although it has happened through the Aboriginal Liaison Officer at the Local High School. BAT has worked with the Aboriginal Transport Development Officer at Tweed Byron & Ballina Community Transport to build links with the Aboriginal community. Young people however generally use the service in an integrated group. I am aware that the youth transport services in the neighbouring Shires provide more specific transport for Aboriginal groups as there are Aboriginal communities in there to assist.

6. Could you provide data about how many people use the service on an annual basis?

In the last 3 years we have transported between 2500 and 3000 people per annum. This translates as 5000 to 6000 passenger trips as most outings are return travel.

7. What do you consider would be required to increase the effectiveness and coverage of the service?

The service operates on a small budget and consequently keeps its parameters of service small to continue its sustainability. There are groups that we are unable to assist, such as those requiring transport for tertiary education, those over 18 that want safe transport home from licensed venues. If we had more funding we could expand our terms of service.

8. Is your youth transport service able to use HACC funded buses during low-use periods?

Yes. It is one of the ways that we can keep our operating costs low. We use HACC buses with a volunteer driver provided at low cost by Tweed Byron and Ballina Community Transport.

9. Do you know of any other innovative transport programs for youth in NSW?

There are sister services running in the neighbouring Shires: Yaxi in Ballina Shire and Yowi in Lismore/Kyogle Shires. They are both auspiced by Community Transport services and run on similar models. Rydon in Tweed shire was non-recurrently funded, this funding has been fully expended and the service has been ceased. I understand there is an application for funding for this much needed service awaiting approval by Ministry of Transport.

10. Are you aware of how many Community Transport Organisations in NSW have Aboriginal transport officers? Do you consider that there are benefits of having youth transport workers and Aboriginal transport workers co-located in Community Transport Organisations?

Tweed Byron Ballina Community Transport (TBBCT) service has an Aboriginal Transport Development Officer (ATDO). I believe all 6 members of the North Coast Community Transport forum, (Coffs Harbour, Bellingen and Nambucca Community Transport, Manning Valley and Area Community Transport, Hastings Macleay Community Transport, Northern Rivers Community Transport, Clarence Valley Community Transport, Tweed, Byron and Ballina Community Transport) have ATDO's. The NSW North Coast has the largest contingent of ATDO's in the state. There are only approx 5 other services in NSW (out of over 100 CT organisations) employing Aboriginal people in this type of role. I have found there is a great benefit in this position as transport is an essential service for Aboriginal people to have equity in our society. It makes sense to co-locate service providers so that they can share resources and information. Having an ATDO available to support the provision of information out to Aboriginal youth in the region, assist in developing culturally relevant services, educate staff and volunteers, nurture fledgling projects, support Aboriginal volunteer programmes and assist to troubleshoot complex transport issues (funeral transport, homework clubs, young mothers groups, mens groups) is invaluable in redressing community disparity.

Operating under the auspices of Tweed Byron and Ballina Community Transport has many benefits for BAT: issues such as insurance, PBI status, and volunteer compliance requirements, can be dealt with under one umbrella, and the cost effectiveness of utilising the resources of a large CT organisation is imperative to our ability to provide the numbers of services we are able to for the relatively small amount of funding we are provided.

11. What benefits do you consider youth transport services bring to young people and their families, both Aboriginal and non- Aboriginal?

Transport is intrinsic to the normal social development of young people. Young people need to socialise to learn skills that will hold them in good stead as adults. Social events can also provide fun and healthy activities, important for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal young people and their families. As they are too young to drive themselves and generally unable to afford taxis they rely on other means to get around. In a rural area they are particularly disadvantaged with scarce public transport and long distances to travel. On the NSW North Coast many Aboriginal people do not have drivers licenses, or cars, and there is very limited public transport available.

The focus on “closing the gap” in life expectancy between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in Australia has pointed to the provision of transport for all people to be able to access hospital and medical appointments, the chemist, and “normal” social and sporting activities. Many Aboriginal people in this region rely on Community Transport to be able to access these basic, day to day needs.

In Byron Shire, much of the transport is focussed on tourists, and not on the needs of the local population. Our shire is comprised of towns of Byron Bay, Suffolk Park, Mullumbimby, Ocean Shores and lots of smaller villages and hamlets, many villages on isolated and mountainous roads. People rely on school buses to get around where there are no regular scheduled bus routes. The Casino – Murwillumbah Railway which provided a vital link through the Byron Shire ceased operating in 2004, and many young (and old) people hitchhike to get around. The Batbus provides transport options for all families in our area and allows parents to focus on other pressing duties with the knowledge of a coordinated transport option for their children, supports young people to participate in their community (through the BAT groups) supports inclusion (buses can be hoist enabled if needed), encourages forward planning and enables groups of friends to have fun without the need for alcohol. (Batbus is drug and alcohol free).

12. Does BAT Bus have an advisory committee? Are young people involved in planning the service in any way?

Yes the Batbus has advisory groups of young people in both of the local State High Schools in Byron Shire. They meet regularly through term time. Their input is highly valued by the organisation particularly on policy decisions. Their feedback is extremely important to ensure that the service meets the needs of young people. At times they also send representatives to the Management Committee meetings. That committee has representatives from Byron Shire Council, Tweed Byron and Ballina Community Transport, and Yaxi, a Youth transport service operated (under the auspices of TBBCT) out of the Ballina Shire.