

LIVERPOOL PLAINS SHIRE COUNCIL



Submission

***To State & Regional Development Parliamentary
Committee – Regional Transport***

FEBRUARY 2013

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This submission is based on the premise that where this committee refers to 'Countrylink' it is in fact considering regional and rural services that will be operated by 'NSW Trains' from July 1 2013. It has been stated that 'NSW Trains' will be focused wholly on the needs of intercity, regional and rural customers.

NSW Transport Minister Gladys Berejiklian when announcing the establishment of 'NSW Trains' stated that, "in the past not enough thought has gone into the quality and comfort of trains, providing adequate intercity and regional travel information or ensuring the timetable best meets the needs of customers."

Liverpool Plains Shire Council (LPSC) fully concurs with these sentiments. The needs of regional and intercity passengers are vastly different to those utilising suburban and inner city services. LPSC believes the establishment of 'NSW Trains' provides the opportunity to better tailor services to meet the specific needs of regional and rural travelers.

Liverpool Plains Shire Council has received overwhelming support for the submission (Appendix 1) it provided, advocating an extension of the current Cityrail Newcastle – Scone – Newcastle service to provide a day return Tamworth – Newcastle – Tamworth service, to the enquiry held to help formulate the NSW Long Term Transport Master Plan.

This support has come from residents in our Shire as well as those from the Upper Hunter and Tamworth regions. They clearly recognise the benefits of a service that provides the option of day return plus the ability to connect with Newcastle – Sydney – Newcastle electric trains. Additionally, Tamworth Regional Council has indicated the plan has merit that deserves further consideration.

Your committee is examining how 'NSW Trains' services can be improved and LPSC believes its submission meets the NSW Government's stated aims, to invest in improving the rail system while at the same time ensuring taxpayers and customers get better value for money.

Our submission highlights the problems that exist with the current 'Explorer' service and the need for affordable, user friendly services. Other issues that have been raised to Council include, dissatisfaction with the way passengers are informed of service changes and disruptions, the need for better communications

with intending passengers at unmanned station, dirty trains and stations, ticketing arrangements and overuse of substitution of buses for trains during track work.

The recent introduction of a Bathurst – Sydney – Bathurst day return service utilising Endeavour railcars has shown that a service such as LPSC is advocating, Tamworth – Newcastle – Tamworth, is feasible. It provides a realistic solution to increasing the amount of inter-regional travel undertaken by public transport, linking the major centres of the Hunter, Upper Hunter, Liverpool Plains and the north-west's largest regional centre and hub Tamworth.

It would also provide the possibility of better transport links for Gunnedah and Armidale if connecting coach services were provided. One of the pluses for the LPSC proposal, when compared to the Bathurst – Sydney – Bathurst service is that it ~~not~~ would not only improve inter regional links, it also provides for connections with double-deck electric trains to and from Sydney but at the same time it doesn't duplicate services whereby diesel rolling stock is operating 'under the wires' of the inter-urban electric train network.

The introduction of such a service also has the potential, if properly marketed, to increase tourism to our region by providing more affordable transport options, an issue particularly important to battling families. LPSC also believes there is a need to improve co-ordination between local councils/tourism bodies and 'NSW Trains' to better market tourism packages.

Recent reports from Infrastructure NSW suggesting that regional rail services could be replaced by buses as current rolling stock comes due for replacement has been a cause of consternation to many country residents. Again, they feel they are the poor relations of their city cousins. LPSC believes that with better, more convenient timetables and a more affordable fare structure, that doesn't discriminate against them as opposed to city travelers, public transport can play a vital role into the future for our region.

In contrast to NSW where country rail services have withered on the vine over many years, Victoria has had astounding success in revitalising its regional services. V/Line the operator of regional services operates 1,444 rail services and 592 coach services every week across its network. The V/Line system carried a record 15,554,638 passengers in the 2011-12 financial year, a 6.2% increase on the previous year, and is the fastest growing rail business in Australia. LPSC believes better initiative and investment could see a similar renaissance for regional passenger rail in NSW.

Minister Berejiklian has stated that, "NSW Trains will be able to serve daily regional and intercity customers better because it will be dedicated to delivering services that benefit regional customers."

LPSC believes our submission would substantially improve rail services to our region and encourage travelers away from clogged highways where private motorists are competing with ever increasing numbers of large trucks and the potential for horrific accidents.

For further information please contact Mr Robert Hunt, General Manager, Liverpool Plains Shire Council on [REDACTED]

Appendix 1

SUBJECT: NSW Long Term Transport Master Plan - proposal for extension of current Cityrail Scone – Newcastle - Scone service to Tamworth to provide a day return service for Liverpool Plains Shire residents to and from Newcastle.

This submission is presented by Liverpool Plains Shire Council, seeking better public transport options on behalf of its residents.

Council is seeking support for an increase in train services to Tamworth that would not only benefit this major regional centre but also centres in the Hunter Valley along with Willow Tree, Quirindi and Werris Creek in the Liverpool Plains Shire.

Rail services to Willow Tree, Quirindi and Werris Creek have deteriorated substantially over many years. From the days when passengers had the choice of travelling on up to four trains a day, either way, the service has been cut to one train, in both directions, daily.

Increasing fuel costs, the fact that it is a finite resource, environmental considerations, an ageing population, and road safety issues, all add as important factors highlighting a need to improve rail passenger services to rural and regional areas such as the Liverpool Plains. The increasing need for people to travel to medical appointments in Newcastle and Sydney from this region is another important reason to improve rail passenger transport options.

Liverpool Plains Shire Council is asking the inquiry to consider an option that is a little outside the square, as far as transport planning over recent years is concerned. Bureaucrats will say this isn't the way it has been done in the past and planners lacking vision will miss the potential of this proposal which provides a low cost opportunity to enhance services. It just means doing things differently to the way they have been done in the past and breaking down barriers that retard expansion of services.

Council proposes an extension of the current Scone – Newcastle – Scone Cityrail service to provide an “inter-urban” style Tamworth – Newcastle - Tamworth service (see Attachment 1). The proposal is for this train to maintain an inter-urban fare structure, rather than the current exorbitant Countrylink structure that prices rail travel out of the reach of many families.

The current Explorer service between Sydney and Moree and Tamworth/Armidale would be retained as a premium service while the proposed Tamworth–Newcastle service (connecting at Newcastle with electric trains to Sydney) would enhance service and allow a day return trip to Newcastle for medical appointments and the like, while the service on weekends would allow young people the opportunity of a day at the beach. This additional no frills service is envisioned to operate at an inter-urban fare scale.

Currently, a return ticket Scone – Newcastle – Scone costs \$16.40 adult, \$8.20 child/student and \$2.50 pensioner on the Cityrail service. For no additional cost travellers can transfer to an electric train to Sydney. This means that a Quirindi – Newcastle – Quirindi interurban fare should equate to about \$32 adult return and \$16 for a child/student. This compares with a Countrylink Explorer economy class return fare that varies between \$62.95 and \$89.90 Quirindi – Newcastle – Quirindi, depending on season.

Such a service should prove very attractive to battling families and make travel far more affordable. It certainly emphasises the current inequity faced by rural and regional rail travellers whereby Scone residents can get to Sydney and back for as little as \$16.40, while less than 80 kilometres to the north residents of Liverpool Plains Shire pay a minimum of \$100.05 and as much as \$193.65, plus accommodation costs.

Investment in rail services can revitalise the system as evidenced by the “Linking Victoria Project” which was introduced from 2000. It included a number of projects including fast rail services to regional centres and the return of passenger services to a number of centres. In 1998-99 V/Line patronage was 6.845 million and in 2008-09 was 12.050 million, an increase of 89.9% over a four year period. With a little investment and vision the same results could be achieved in NSW.

There is a considerable population base on this corridor that would benefit from the proposed enhancement to service. At the 2006 census, population figures were: Tamworth Local Government Area 53,590; Werris Creek 1,598; Quirindi 2,924; Willow Tree 169; Murrurundi 804; Scone 5,078; Aberdeen 1,791; Muswellbrook 10,707; Singleton 13,665; Branxton 1,971; Greta 2,321; Lochinvar 502; Maitland 61,431 and Newcastle 288,732.

Liverpool Plains Shire Council notes there have been numerous requests from Upper Hunter communities for an extra mid morning service to Newcastle. A train departing Tamworth between 6.15am and 7am would meet this requirement.

Council's proposal is for either the 4.10pm or 5.57pm ex Newcastle to Scone to be extended to Tamworth. The train would then be stabled overnight in Tamworth to provide a morning departure for Newcastle, which would provide an additional mid-morning departure from the Upper Hunter centres. The afternoon services to Scone currently return to Newcastle, although patronage is low on these journeys and the return of one train would suffice for any traffic offering. This means the other train could be more productively employed by continuing on to Tamworth and being utilised to provide a new morning service from Tamworth and an additional service from Scone south.

The 1970s saw the demise of New South Wales Government Railways and the long and slow process of abandoning both branch line and main lines in the country. At the same time, rural and regional residents have seen billions of dollars spent on Sydney's suburban and inter-urban network. With demographers recently predicting Sydney's population could grow to 6.9 million by 2049, the drain on the State budget is set to explode. Country residents are tired of all the investment flowing in one direction, and rightfully expect a fair go and improvements to their services.

Liverpool Plains Shire Council looks forward to support for this issue and in making this innovative proposal work to the benefit of Shire residents and in so doing improving transport options for the people of the Upper Hunter, Liverpool Plains and Tamworth region.

Appendix 2 – Timetable proposal.

Possibilities for extending afternoon Newcastle – Scone services to Tamworth:

1.15pm ex Central connects at Hamilton with 4.10 ex Newcastle

3.15pm ex Central connects at Hamilton with 5.57 ex Newcastle

	<u>PM</u>	<u>PM</u>
Newcastle	4.10	5.57
Maitland	4.43	6.32
Singleton	5.15	7.04
Muswellbrook	5.47	7.36
Aberdeen	5.56	7.45
Scone	6.06	7.55
Murrurundi	6.31	8.20
Willow Tree	6.53	8.42
Quirindi	7.05	8.54
Werris Creek	7.25	9.14
Tamworth	8.08	9.57

Possible timetable to provide extra morning train through Upper Hunter and providing a reasonable departure time from Tamworth:

	<u>AM</u>
Tamworth	6.15
Werris Creek	6.58
Quirindi	7.18
Willow Tree	7.30
Murrurundi	7.52
Scone	8.17
Aberdeen	8.26
Muswellbrook	8.36
Singleton	9.10
Maitland	9.50
Newcastle	10.24

Change trains 10.24am ex Newcastle connects Hamilton 10.29am and arrives Central 1.04pm