

Mayoral Minute- December 19, 2012 Council Meeting

1) Rail Passenger Services

Councillor Col Stewart, Deputy Mayor of Liverpool Plains Shire, has raised the issue of the need for communities in the North –West and New England areas to fight “long and hard” to retain these passenger services and avoid privatization or closure.

In fact Councillor Stewart has called for the extension of the current CityRail Newcastle Scone service to provide an affordable day return Tamworth –Newcastle –Tamworth service.

Councillors may not be aware that passengers traveling from scone on the present Scone-Newcastle Service can travel to Newcastle/Sydney in the same day on this service. Pensioners and Seniors can do so at a cost of \$2.50.

Theoretically similar passengers from “over the range” can do so at a cost of \$5.00 by taking a train from Gunnedah /Narrabri/Tamworth, etc. and traveling to Scone (cost of \$2.50) where they can catch the Scone service.

The only problem is that the Explorer service DOES NOT GET INTO SCONE early enough for the passenger to catch the Scone Service which leaves early in the morning. Hence, passengers would have the cost of over-night accommodation at Scone and a similar problem on the return journey- the trip taking THREE days rather than the preferred single day. And the cost being considerably more than the potential \$10 fare.

This issue, together with both the events of the last month- I refer to the damage to the Boggabri Rail bridge as well as the sale of electricity assets – together with the potential effects of the Draft NSW Transport Master Plan and The State Infrastructure Strategy 2012/2032- do not point to a positive future for passenger rail travel in the region.

Both of the above mentioned reports put regional NSW rail transport under scrutiny and the State Infrastructure Strategy openly questions whether the substantial investment in rolling stock to replace ageing equipment is justified and further raises the alternative of greater use of buses in lieu of trains.

Recent use of bus substitution suggests that this alternative simply does not work in practice.

Recommendation:

- A) That GSC approach the local member, Mr Kevin Anderson, supporting the request that the City Rail Newcastle –Scone daily service be extended to Tamworth.

- B) That GSC indicate its willingness to enter into a regional passenger rail alliance, utilizing the existing Namoi Council organization, in order to resist any plans to substitute buses for trains on the present passenger rail routes.