

**Submission
No 25**

INQUIRY INTO INTER-REGIONAL PUBLIC TRANSPORT

Name: Name Suppressed

Date Received: 18/04/2012

17 April 2012.

Dear Sirs,

I wish to make a submission on the Inter-regional public transport enquiry as follows:

I do not own a car, and use trains as my travel mode of choice, particularly when travelling to Sydney, but also when holidaying. I generally take the train from Canberra, and either stay in the vicinity of the destination railway station, or I hire a car at the destination station for exploration further afield.

I also like to put my bike on the train and do cycle tours, returning to the same or a different station.

I would love to use the train more, but a number of factors inhibit this:

1) Canberra station is located at Kingston, unlike most railway stations which are in the downtown area of the station's city. Currently ACT public transport (ACTION buses) does serve the station, but does not coordinate with the trains. Indeed, there is no bus service to the trains departing Canberra early in the morning, and no service to meet the trains arriving at night to take passengers to the city bus terminal. Connection with weekend train services is particularly poor.

For me, it takes about 2 hours to get the 6km to the train station due to a 1 hour gap between the two buses I need to take. It would be quicker, and much more direct, to walk, but this is impossible with luggage.

I understand that the ACT government intends to rectify this in the near future. However Countrylink should be working closely with any city council (which the ACT government effectively is in this case) to coordinate local transport (tram/bus) with Countrylink services in both directions (buses to get people to a train and buses to carry passengers descending from the train).

2) Canberra station needs to be relocated along an extended line to the central city somehow. Countrylink and the NSW government should be working with the ACT government to ensure easements are retained as Canberra conducts in-fill development. Ideally any extension should continue to Yass, so that a one-mode (Sydney-)Canberra-Melbourne train ride can be had. Currently those in Canberra have to train to Goulburn then wait for the Sydney-Melbourne train to come through some hours later, or take a bus to Yass to connect with the Sydney-Melbourne train, or take the bus right through to Cootamundra for the most efficient connection. This inconvenience forces people to take a direct bus, to drive or to fly instead.

3) Canberra (and other) station have bike racks outside them in the surrounding carpark areas, but there is no secure storage for bicycles. For anyone cycling to the station to take the train, they have to leave their cycle chained up in an exposed position, where it is likely to be vandalised overnight before they return.

There is plenty of room in many station buildings, on their platforms (at the far end) or elsewhere inside fenced railway land at the station to have secure bicycle storage (in a locked room at the station, bike racks or just chained to railings on the platforms, or at racks or cages nearby but inside the fenced/secure station area.

Secure bicycle facilities would encourage more day-tripping and overnight holidays by people with bicycles but not cars (youths, and older persons like myself).

This is particularly pertinent in Canberra given the poor bus connections.

4) Compared to Victoria, NSW's ability to carry bicycles on trains is almost non-existent.

- While bikes are easily taken on board Cityrail services, on Countrylink services there is space for only 2 bicycles per train. This restricts families or groups with bikes from taking the train.

- Bikes must also be pre-booked, which again prevents last minute decisions or changes of plan. For a cyclist (particularly a cycle tourist) who may not be able to know far enough ahead of time when he will arrive at a station, there is a big risk that when he meets the train, it is already carrying the maximum number of bikes.

- Bicycles must be boxed before being placed in the luggage area. Most manned stations have a few boxes on hand, but there are obviously no boxes available at unmanned stations (the majority). Countrylink unrealistically suggests cyclists bring a bike box with them (!!). The need for a box prevents cyclists from joining a train at an unmanned station.

- The boxing of bikes, which requires disassembly of pedals, wheels and possibly handlebars, can be difficult for non-mechanically minded (women), or older people. Indeed, it is potentially hazardous if the person cannot retighten the nuts sufficiently upon reassembly (i.e. women, children, older persons). Again, this requirement for boxing constrains many people who would otherwise travel by train and use a bike at each end of the journey.

- In contrast to Countrylink, Vicrail has dedicated luggage vans (not just a luggage area within a carriage), or allows bikes to be wheeled into carriages (there is often room for wheelchairs, bikes and large luggage at the end of the carriages), where boxing is not required. Vicrail also has more services per day to each destination, and doesn't require prebooking. This allows flexibility for cyclists in case they miss their intended service due to a puncture etc. When I lived in Melbourne I did frequent train and cycletours, using the train to get into the countryside, and riding from one station to another to reboard a train back to Melbourne. It can also be done in many other countries (Thailand, Denmark,...). Why not NSW where it is almost impossible on Countrylink, despite the great potential for people in Sydney,

especially, to use the train to get out into the countryside for hiking or cycling holidays, or to go for business, shopping etc to regional centres.

5) Countrylink services do not connect to Sydney airport. It would be easier and less hassle for many regional people to be able to take a train directly to Sydney airport rather than a bus, private or hire car or a domestic flight. Likewise, for people flying in to Sydney, to be able to connect on site to a regional train service would be useful. This can be done in other cities such as Copenhagen and Frankfurt. Why not in Sydney, given the train line through the station already exists?

The present services from Griffith, Melbourne and Canberra that approach Sydney from the south should be rerouted through the airports stations before they terminate at Central. This would reduce the need for people to drive to the airport, or take taxis or buses, and provide a more seamless, more comfortable and safer connection. I fly out of Sydney with reasonable frequency, and cannot understand why Canberra buses go to the airport but not the trains, which are much more pleasant and safe to ride (and after a long international flight to Sydney, a train with a toilet on board is much better than a long bus trip with no toilet...)

6) Timetables published and shown at stations should include both Countrylink and Cityrail (and any private) services. A passenger at Goulburn, for example, should not have to go to 2 different websites or look at 2 different platform posters, or 2 different books, in order to find out all the services that taken him to Sydney. There should be a single timetable for all train services (and connecting buses) regardless of operator. This is particularly important from the point of view of foreign tourists, who cannot be expected to know that the NSW government operates two different brands of train between a pair of stations and each has its own separate timetable and website. Ideally, the NSW government should provide a single website that allows perusal of all registered train and bus services, regardless of operator, and which can be used to plan journeys across NSW by train or bus. London Transport can do this. NSW should too.

Likewise, station staff should be knowledgeable about all services. I was particularly annoyed last year when staff at Wollongong denied that the Cockatoo Run train to Moss Vale even existed, despite my holding a ticket for it. When I complained to Cityrail management, I got a head-in-the-sand response that it "was a different company". Yet for a traveller at a station, he doesn't care what the company is, he just wants to get from A to B. Much better integration of operators, timetables, routes, and station staff knowledge is needed so that travellers can easily work out how to get from A to B.

7) Queensland Rail offers a free transfer within Brisbane on commuter trains to any passenger arriving on an inter-city service. There is no need to travel to Roma Street then buy another ticket to backtrack to a local station that the inter-regional train did not serve. This provides a seamless service for people travelling to or from the state capital. A similar scheme should operate with Countrylink and Cityrail: a traveller with a Countrylink ticket should be able to take a Cityrail train to get to Central, Strathfield, Campbelltown etc to board his service, without having to buy an extra ticket. Likewise, a Countrylink passenger arriving in Sydney should be able to connect to any Cityrail train to arrive at his Sydney metro station of choice without needing an extra ticket.

8) Countrylink offers a number of special trains to events such as the country music festival in Tamworth. Special trains once or twice a year along freight and branch lines not normally served would be a great way to boost tourism to smaller centres. People ride a train not just to get from A to B, but to enjoy the ride itself, or to say that they have ridden along that particular line. Thus special annual trains (perhaps timed to coincide with local festivals) would have a good customer base if suitably advertised. NSW has many lines that are only served by freight trains. They may not warrant regular passenger service, but an annual or semi-annual special trip would boost tourism to these smaller centres (Cobar, Nyngan, Tottenham, Hillston, Lake Cargelligo, Mudgee...)

9) Countrylink should cooperate with car rental agencies (and Queensland Rail and Vic Rail) to offer deals for people wanting to take a train to one station, hire a car, and drive to another station on another line, and take the train on from there. This would help reduce the one-way and remote-location fees charged by rental companies for someone wanting to connect between Moree or Armidale and Charleville; or Dubbo and Moree; or Mildura and Broken Hill; or Griffith and Echuca. A more imaginative approach to the needs of travellers is needed (rather than simply the current train ride and bus tour packages on offer in Countrylink's brochures).

10) This is probably outside Countrylink's remit, but the many closed lines in NSW should be turned into railtrails. Victoria has had great success with these, and the fact that they are branch lines means more people take the train to the former junction, in order to walk or cycle the railtrails. I cannot understand why NSW has so much potential in this regard, but none of the closed country branch lines has been converted to a walking/cycling trail. Such trails would also be used by locals for commuting, and thus take cars off the road.

11) Currently Countrylink's trains are mainly 3-car sets. These are presumably uneconomical to run more frequently or on other routes. Why are there no railcars (1 or 2 car sets) operating on smaller lines, or operating frequent shuttle services? For example, there are only 2 or 3 services between Goulburn and Canberra per day. The morning service to Canberra arrives too late for anyone commuting to work Queanbeyan or beyond. Surely an single-car railcar could make the run hourly, between 7am and 7pm, which would take many cars off the road, and provide a great service for people out to Goulburn who wanted to reach Canberra's shops, offices or hospitals. It would encourage public rather than private transport use (less pollution, safer roads) and be very convenient for residents of Goulburn, Tarago, Bungendore and Queanbeyan (and the increasing numbers of people in these towns that commute to Canberra daily), besides those of Canberra. A bus is all very well, but a train is much more comfortable, especially for older people or people with young children, and allows commuters to do work as they travel.

12) Timetables in relation to public holidays need to be rethought. Specifically, there is an evening service from Canberra to Sydney and reverse, only on Monday, Wednesday Friday and Sunday nights, but not on Tuesday, Thursday or Saturday. Therefore when any public holiday falls on a Friday, Canberra people cannot take a train to go on holiday that night, nor can out of town workers return home for the

weekend, nor can Sydney or Goulburn residents come to Canberra. This issue is felt particularly at Easter, when there is no train to or from Canberra on the Thursday night before Good Friday.

I hope the Committee will consider these proposals, and I am available to discuss them in person if required.