

INQUIRY INTO INTER-REGIONAL PUBLIC TRANSPORT

Organisation: Destination Jindabyne
Name: Mr Peter Bird
Position: Chairperson
Date Received: 18/05/2012

Dear Members,

Re: NSW State and Regional Development committee "Inquiry into inter-regional public transport".

Please find our below our submission to this inquiry and we hope that you consider our recommendations:

Given the terms of reference we make our responses:

1. How Country Link Services can be improved

By providing a service to the Snowy River Shire, located in southern NSW. As the Ando Road or Snowy River Way, is now sealed between Dalgety and Bombala, this would allow for an extension of the current service to provide a circuit route from Bombala or the far south coast to Dalgety, up to Jindabyne and back to Berridale before going on to Cooma. In the event of extreme weather in winter, buses can easily detour to Berridale from Dalgety and then on to Jindabyne. Our Shire is possibly the only Shire in NSW that is not serviced by a regular CountryLink service. We are currently completely bypassed with up to 14 services per week going through the neighbouring Bombala and Cooma shires. Reference 1 and 2

We would like the governments to understand that the area is about the needs of the local community as well as those of tourism and that we are not just requesting a tourism transport network.

By providing this service the following sectors of our community would benefit:

HEALTH

The provision of a service to the Snowy Shire would allow ease of access to medical services, which include hospitals and specialist medical services, provided in both Cooma and Canberra and also Sydney.

Attached is a copy of the submission that Snowy River Shire Council submitted to the CountryLinkUp enquiry which stated that the *"lack of transport choice impacts not only on residents but also businesses and visitors to the Region."* While the Community Transport is certainly a great service for the area, it is far from ideal for the population of the Shire who are unable to access this service because they are not covered by the health scheme.

EDUCATION

There are two K-12 schools serviced by school buses, but there is no service that would allow the high school students and those choosing to continue their education to attend University and TAFE courses that are offered outside of the normal school hours and outside our shire.

With the building of the Jindabyne Central School in 2006 which moved from a primary school to a primary and secondary school, this allowed local families to have their children educated closer to home, but there are still children who are boarding outside the area and a regular service would allow these children to return home for more visits.

The Department of Planning in 2006 estimated that there would only be a small percentage increase of under 18's, but that was before Jindabyne Central School was established and many local families were now able to send their children to the school. The school population has increased from 322 students in 2006 to 602 today with a seasonal intake over of the two winter terms of at least 10%. Reference 3

Snowy Mountains Grammar School offers boarding house facilities for students and has seen a 200% increase in enrolment in both the school and boarding house to current levels of 235 and 51 respectively over the last six years. Reference 3

SCEGGS Redlands also offers a winter campus for students with enrolments unknown.

With these increased enrolments our population has grown accordingly. Many of our families are single family units with no extended support network of other family members nearby. The only means for visitation is by private transport or travelling to Cooma to meet the current services or relying on private operators in our winter months with services that operate at their discretion.

ECONOMIC

With no regular bus service within the Snowy Shire most families find it necessary to run two vehicles, which is a large expense to the family budget and high petrol costs add to this.

With employment available in Cooma and the district, a regular service would allow people to apply for jobs outside the region for full time year round employment.

The ABS in 2006 stated that there are 4744 families in the Shire and that one third of these families have parents or children who don't live at home on a permanent basis because employment and education is further away than a reasonable commute would allow. Reference 4

Employment during the winter season increases exponentially with up to 5000 seasonal staff employed and that a regular service for those commuting to jobs within the Snowy area is important.

2. How Network Linkages between CountryLink train and coach services can be improved

Network linkages between CountryLink train and coach services can be improved by a reconfiguring of the timetable to include return travel and provide a bus service that would link up with selected arrivals and departures from Canberra.

3. The Potential for CountryLink Services to carry Light Freight

With the increase in the number of people buying and selling online, there is the opportunity for local businesses to use the CountryLink service to carry light freight at competitive prices. Whilst there are several privately run freight operators delivery outside of the peak winter period can be spasmodic dependant on loads.

4. How CountryLink can be better utilised to increase tourism in New South Wales

The Snowy River Shire is one of the largest growing domestic tourist districts in New South Wales with tourism now exceeding agriculture/farming in local income. The NSW State Government have mandated that domestic tourism expenditure in NSW is to be doubled by the year 2020. Located only two hours south of our National Capital, the shire borders the Kosciuszko National Park, the only Alpine Area in NSW and location of our highest summit. Contained within the park are the four snow sports resorts.

The largest tourism activity within the Snowy Shire is the ski season, which runs from June to October each year. The ski season is the major economic contributor to the Snowy area, either by direct employment, small business income or associated businesses. Reference 5

However over recent years there has been an increase in tourist numbers outside this season. There are now any number of spring/summer activities held in the region; Lake Light Sculpture, Dragonboat Flowing Festival, a growing number of mountain bike events, the iconic trout fishing and the Kosciuszko National Park, which is one of the top 5 national parks for tourists to visit.

One of the major constraints for the area in order to grow tourism within the spring/summer months is the lack of a permanent year round service. While the winter season is well serviced by private operators and at their discretion, the summer season is not.

Just try and Google "how to get to Jindabyne" and the reply is DRIVE or catch the school bus and return to your days of being yelled at by the bus driver.

Studies undertaken by Tourism Snowy Mountains on understanding perceptions of the Snowy Mountains as a holiday destination, show the lack of transport as the major issue to overseas and domestic tourism, affecting many segments including the lucrative backpacker segment.

An integrated CountryLink service with the Snowy Shire would allow CountryLink Holidays to include many of the wonderful Spring/Summer events held in the area, refer TSM website - <http://www.snowymountains.com.au>, and would greatly improve access to international visitors.

5. How the amount of inter-regional travel undertaken by public transport can be increased

As our national capital is only two hours to our north with the large student populations in tertiary education many of whom are overseas students enormous potential exists to increase visitation to our region.

With many retirees now inhabiting our nearby coastal regions and reluctant to drive long distances or mountain roads potential for an increase in local domestic visitation also exists.

Increased domestic and international growth within our own "Snowy Mountains" region would be greatly enhanced by the ability to have access to the entire region not just select segments.

The very real possibility of Canberra Airport being opened to international air travel in the near future allows the possibility of the Snowy Mountains region and the Kosciuszko National Park becoming the what the Blue Mountains are to Sydney, in terms of community, economic and tourism growth and potential.

6. The extent to which regional public transport networks are integrated and how they can be better integrated

An extension of the existing CountryLink ticket would be an integrated ticket that allowed use of the Cityrail network.

VLine currently have a bus service that runs through Cooma and CountryLink may be able to partner with them to increase services for our region.

7. The role local councils can play in improving inter-regional public transportation networks

We understand that the Snowy River Shire Council is also doing a submission and we as a community support the Council in their submission.

Whilst there are existing Bus terminal facilities in Jindabyne with a large purpose built area designed to allow bus services to pickup/put down, including space for ticketing and luggage storage we are confident of the support of council in upgrading other regional facility requirements at Berridale and Dalgety.

8. The type of buses and trains that will be required for the provision of regional passenger services in the future.

Normal buses and those with wheel chair access would provide the necessary service.

References

1 http://www.countrylink.info/_data/assets/pdf_file/0013/13810/SouthernRegion.pdf

2 http://www.vline.com.au/pdf/timetables/canberra_via_sale.pdf/canberra_via_sale

3 Sourced from principals or administration staff at both schools

4 <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@nrip.nsf/Latestproducts/145207050Population/People12006-2010?opendocument&tabname=Summary&prodno=145207050&issue=2006-2010>

5 http://www.snowyriver.nsw.gov.au/Community/Community_Profile industry employment and the workforce. Last update date unknown but based on community profile 2004 -2009

With Thanks for your consideration

Signed: _____

Name: _____

Company: _____

Address: _____

1. Introduction

The provision (or lack thereof) of public transport is an issue affecting the communities of the Snowy River, from an economic, social and environmental perspective. The lack of transport choice impacts not only on residents but also businesses and visitors to the region. This has been made very obvious through Council's strategic and social planning processes.

Council's current Community Transport Program is not funded sufficiently to be able to meet growing demand from eligible clients, and in addition to these other large sections of the community are falling through the gaps. The issues faced by our service and residents in our Shire is not about service frequency, connectivity or ticketing systems, we simply have no Public Transport available to us to assess.

2. Existing Service Background

Our current service, Snowy River Cooma Monaro Community Transport, auspiced by Snowy River Shire Council, provides transport to eligible persons residing in the two local government areas of Snowy River and Cooma Monaro, (South East NSW).

Snowy River Shire, adjacent to Kosciusko National Park is currently the fifth fastest growing Shire in NSW. We also provide services to eligible residents of the Cooma Monaro Shire area, which with Snowy River Shire, has a total area of close to 11,000 square kilometres. The permanent population of both Shires combined is over 17,200. This can increase during winter months to almost 30,000.

The largest township is Cooma, where most services exist and need to be accessed. Cooma is 125 kilometres south of the business Centre of Canberra, and around the same distance to the coast on our east, and Bega, which, with Canberra, are where most of our medical transports are destined.

The distance between populations on the southern end of the area and the northern end is over to 200 kilometres. So in some cases, before even leaving our area, people need to travel 400 kilometres return to access services.

Our service currently has over 700 customers listed, predominantly within the HACC target group, who we transport by way of volunteer drivers driving their own, or service vehicles, or by one of our 8 regular bus runs.

We contract 2 local bus companies to conduct 6 of these runs from outlying villages to Cooma, and the service itself owns 2 buses:

- a 22 seat wheelchair accessible Toyota Coaster, based in Cooma Monaro Shire; and
- a 14 seater Toyota (soon to be wheelchair accessible) bus based in Snowy River Shire. The service also currently owns a 4-wheel drive necessary to access some customers.

Our 2 buses; (apart from a few privately owned domestic vehicles; and an accessible taxi in Jindabyne); are the only 2 'accessible vehicles' across both Shires.

Current data indicates that we are carrying out around 20,000 transports a year.

3. Impact of Lack of Service

Because of the complete lack of "mainstream" or public transport within the Snowy River Shire area particularly, all residents, (except those living in the larger town of Cooma) are "transport disadvantaged"; however the compensatory Community Transport Program (CTP) within the Shires is grossly underfunded compared to need, and the State Community Transport Organisation has lobbied government about this anomaly and lack of increase for many years.

The Department of Transport implicitly acknowledges the access and equity issues hinging around the lack of "mainstream" or public transport in rural areas through the existence of its Community Transport Program. Eligibility for individuals to access this program is assessed against criteria falling into 3 main categories; mobility, isolation and age.

Snowy River shire has been receiving a relatively small amount of funding for several years. The difference between the amount of funding and the unmet need is so great that the program has never been promoted to the community. The amount of funding has not increased beyond CPI, and there are no opportunities through funding rounds, needs based planning, population planning or other formalised processes to present a case to government.

As our Community Transport Program funding is so scarce, and so many people are eligible, we have needed to develop a process of prioritising customer need. However there are many other eligible clients who do not receive any transport assistance at all - as mentioned, we do not market the service, as we would not be able to meet the demand. This leaves a large section of the community which falls through the gap, including people who have no access to public or private transport who need to access community facilities and resources; and young people up to the age of 17 who need to travel more than 1.6 km to access community facilities and resources.

The only other forms of transport available within the areas we service are:

- School buses if seats are available
- Taxis are only affordable within the townships of Cooma and Jindabyne
- Countrylink has runs from Cooma to Canberra, Bombala & Eden, however, the scheduled times make this form of transport inappropriate and unworkable for most people to access medical or other appointments from Jindabyne. Jindabyne people would need access to private transport to get them to and from Cooma. If not, the only other option, school buses, do not run on return times so people would need to stay in Cooma overnight.

4. Findings from the Snowy River Shire Council Social Plan

Snowy River Shire Council's social plan has identified the impact of the lack of public transport for the Shire particularly for disadvantaged and vulnerable groups within our community. A social plan describes the local community, summarises the key issues facing the community, formulates recommended strategies which Council and/or

other agencies could implement to address identified needs. Its particular focus is on identifying social justice, access and equity issues within the Shire.

The social plan notes that in common with many rural areas, the lack of public transport is a major issue. Lack of transport impacts across the board. It contributes to social isolation, access to employment, to training, to government and community services. It is raised at every forum and every consultation regarding "need" in Snowy River.

In relation to public transport the social plan notes:

- The lack of equity in provision of transport services and infrastructure when compared to other local government areas in the region and more broadly.
- A lack of access to public transport is identified as contributing to social isolation for numerous groups within the community including young people, older people, women and people with disabilities.
- The need for public transport services that meet the needs of seasonal workers
- The high dependence on private car travel and the need to explore alternatives to private car use.
- The impact of increasing centralization of vital services, in particular health services, in relation to the availability of suitable public transport
- The consistent identification of transport issues as a contributor to disadvantage and vulnerability in rural areas in planning documents and issues papers relevant to the region.
- Few vital government agencies and services are located within the shire necessitating that residents travel large distances to the larger centres of Cooma or Queanbeyan and Canberra. Residents without access to private cars are severely disadvantaged in relation to their access to these services which include amongst others; courts, hospitals, Centrelink and housing providers.
- Students wishing to study at TAFE are required to travel large distances to centres such as Cooma, Queanbeyan and Bega and are severely impacted by the lack of transport options.
- Young people living in smaller centres are particularly disadvantaged in terms of their ability to connect with their peers due to their lack of access to any transport options including private car travel.
- Transport is a major contributing factor for isolation amongst women particularly where no second car is available.
- Older residents are unable to access services located outside of the shire due to a lack of transport options
- People with disabilities are especially disadvantaged by a lack of public transport accessible to their needs such as wheelchair

5. Findings of the Jindabyne Action Plan process 2008-2009

Most recently, Council undertook a collaborative planning process with the communities of Jindabyne to prepare the Jindabyne Action Plan. One of the many positive observations that Council reported is that 22% percent of Jindabyne's regular population of 3,500 people took part in some form of engagement. By any standard research measure this is a very inclusive response - one that reflects a high level of interest in the town by residents and other stakeholders.

A series of important themes emerged as "*overarching themes*" from different topic areas and questions in the consultation Council undertook in the preparation of the

Jindabyne Action Plan. In the findings¹ from the consultation we referred to these as "overarching themes" because of the strength and prominence with which they appear in people's responses to different, but related topic areas and questions. In summarising the findings, it was deemed important to identify overarching themes, as they give additional credence and weight to issues people find important, as they have been raised strongly in different contexts.

A total of six overarching themes emerged from the consultation. Lack of public transport options appeared as one of these.

The lack of public transport options attracted a high number of unprompted responses from questions such as: *What do people like least about Jindabyne*, and *What three things would improve Jindabyne*.

Lack of public transport was the strongest themes in *What three things would improve Jindabyne*, where it was raised by all groups of people. Along with children and families, Older People, and Young People, it was mentioned by People with Disabilities as the major theme in the question : *What do you like least about Jindabyne*.

In the discussion of these questions, most people wanted to see expanded public transport shuttle options not only in and around Jindabyne, but also extended services to Cooma and Canberra also.

In another part of the consultation, discussions were centered around the nominated existing public transport routes and services, where people made a variety of comments about proposed usage and availability.

This theme also featured in the Survey of Jindabyne Businesses where it was raised as a major theme in response to both questions: *What do you like least about Jindabyne as a location for business* and *What three actions could be taken to improve Jindabyne as a location for your business*.

It is clear that the issues around local and regional public transport are on the minds of many people from all age groups across Jindabyne's communities and these issues are fully supported by local businesses.

They have indicated that the ability to use more frequent and expanded public transport options would significantly increase the feelings of connection and the ability to access the full range of the area's business, leisure and recreation services.

5. Findings from Learning Needs Analysis

During 2009 Snowy River Shire Council undertook a learning needs analysis to determine the level of demand for local delivery of education and training services. One critical factor driving the need for such an analysis is a change in the Shire's demography. Prior to the establishment of Jindabyne Central School in 2006, the majority of young people aged 12 years and up left the shire to access education. A small number of local students attended secondary school at Snowy Mountains Grammar (established in 1996); but the majority of young people completed

¹ The findings of the Jindabyne Action Plan consultations are summarized in 6 Volumes of Jindabyne Action Plan Workbook Findings 2009, available on Council's website.

secondary education at schools in the Cooma-Monaro Shire or in boarding schools around NSW and the ACT. However, this recent, significant increase in the Shire's youth population raises the issue of how well-placed the local education sector to respond to the emerging post secondary educational and training needs of this population.

Recent changes to government policy in relation to school leaving age is also an important consideration within this context. The availability of educational pathways for students which include access to vocational education options such as TAFE will become an increasingly important consideration. The lack of such facilities within the Shire along with limited transport availability to access facilities in other centres will present a challenge into the future.

The Learning Needs Analysis gathered data through surveys and face-to-face interviews with key stakeholders. Persons interviewed included:

- Industry and employer representatives;
- Local government managers and officers;
- Adult and vocational education services providers
- School teachers and principals; and
- Community members.
- young people

The impact of the lack of public transport options on access to training and education emerged as a strong theme in the findings. Transport and travel issues were the second most commonly identified among young people in relation to barriers to undertaking further study after cost and financial constraints. Interview participants from the business sector reported that the cost associated with sending staff away to attend short courses or other training was high, particularly in terms of transportation costs.

6. Projected Growth

The issues pertaining to public transport will only increase as the town and Shire continue to grow.

The NSW Department of Planning has recently released a report that presents population projections over the period 2006-2036 for the NSW Statistical Local Areas (SLAs) and Local Government Areas (LGAs) of NSW. The projections take into account 2006 census data and the latest expertise on fertility, mortality and migration.

The population projections are not targets. They do not necessarily reflect policy positions and may well differ from policy targets in departmental strategies (e.g. Sydney Metropolitan Strategy). It is important to recognise that population projections reflect the outcome of certain assumptions about the future mortality, fertility and migration - assumptions which may or may not eventuate. The projections should not be interpreted as precise predictions of the demographic future.

The key points for the Snowy River Shire Local Government Area are:

- Like every SLA in the State, the Shire population is projected to experience continued population ageing (an increase in the percentage aged 65 and above) over the next 3 decades;

- The population in 2011 is estimated to be 8,200;
- By 2036, it is estimated to be 11,300. That is nearly 4000 people more than at the 2006 census count.
- Unlike many LGAs with small populations, the population of Snowy River is projected to grow.
- Whilst there is the growth in the older populations there is also predicted to be growth in all other age groups except for 20-24 and 30-34 year old males.
- In a regional context the Shire's population could bypass that of Cooma-Monaro's by 2031. (Snowy River with a population of 10,800 and Cooma-Monaro - 10,500).
- In terms of the Shire, with 80% of most development actions occurring within a 10km radius of Jindabyne, much of the growth is likely to occur in and around Jindabyne.

7. A Way Forward

The Council would like to work in partnership with its communities, the Department of Transport and transport providers in planning for an improved future provision of public transport services to the Shire, to meet not only current but future needs.

This submission requests that CountryLink work with Council, education and health providers, communities and providers to consider:

- in depth analysis of need and viability of services within Jindabyne and between towns and the ski resorts
- implementing a trial offering of a regular weekly Cooma to Jindabyne and return bus run, at a time suitable for locals, and that fits in preferably with CountryLinks other runs from Cooma to other destinations.

Although a bus run has been offered by CountryLink within this route in the past during winter months, the times were aimed at bringing tourists into the area and not at local need.