

## **INQUIRY INTO INTER-REGIONAL PUBLIC TRANSPORT**

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The Committee Manager  
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Inter-Regional Public Transport Inquiry  
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Dear Sir/Madam,

**RE: INTER-REGIONAL PUBLIC TRANSPORT INQUIRY**

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Regional Development Australia – Northern Rivers (RDA – Northern Rivers) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the *Inter-Regional Public Transport Inquiry*.

Our organisation is a non-profit community-based and regionally focused organisation that connects people and businesses in our region to opportunities through partnerships focusing on community, environment and economy. RDA – Northern Rivers provides a conduit between governments and our regional communities. We enable our communities to inform governments about the strengths and weaknesses of our region and:

- improve community engagement;
- contribute to regional planning;
- enhance whole – government approach;
- increase awareness of government programmes; and
- enhance community and economic development.

Given that many of the issues being considered by the *Inter-Regional Public Transport Inquiry* are discussed in the RDA – Northern Rivers submission to the *Discussion Paper for the NSW Long Term Transport Master Plan*, we are forwarding the submission we made on the Discussion Paper for consideration by the State and Regional Development Committee. We believe the key consideration in reviewing inter-regional public transport is developing an integrated transport system, which would require a total review of the current CountryLink system and other public transport contracting arrangements in NSW.

For further information on the matters raised in the attached submission, please do not hesitate to contact our CEO, Katrina Luckie on 02 6622 4011.

Regards

Katrina Luckie  
CEO



# NSW LONG TERM TRANSPORT MASTER PLAN DISCUSSION PAPER

## SUBMISSION BY REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AUSTRALIA – NORTHERN RIVERS

### CONTENTS

<b>INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>REGIONAL OVERVIEW (P 71-72 of Discussion Paper) .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>TRANSPORT OBJECTIVES:</b> Are the objectives for future planning for transport in NSW appropriate and comprehensive? Do you have any other objectives to suggest for both public transport and roads? Should additional or different objectives be considered for the NSW Long Term Transport Master Plan? .....	5
<b>REGIONAL TRANSPORT:</b> What are the key transport objectives for your region? How should regional connections be improved to meet future freight and passenger demands? .....	6
Consistent Definition of Northern Rivers Region for all Regional Planning.....	6
Addressing Cross-Border Transport Planning: Linking the Northern Rivers to South-East Queensland .....	7
Reduce Transport Disadvantage: Establish Innovative, Flexible, Demand Responsive Transport Solutions .....	7
Focus on Sustainability and a Transition to a Low Carbon Economy .....	9
Regular Collection of Local Data to Inform Regional Planning .....	10
Invest in Critical Economic Development Transport Projects.....	11
Develop an Integrated Regional Transport Strategy .....	12
<b>REGIONAL TRANSPORT:</b> How can different levels of government and the non-government sector work more effectively together to improve the transport outcomes for the regions? .....	13
<b>REGIONAL TRANSPORT:</b> In what form can CountryLink best serve the needs of the regions over the long term? .....	14
<b>FREIGHT TRANSPORT:</b> What investments are needed across NSW to improve the efficiency of freight movement? How can the NSW Government best support an efficient freight system as well as meeting community expectations for safety and amenity in residential areas? .....	14
<b>FUNDING:</b> How much would people be prepared to pay for further investment in the transport system and what would be the expectation flowing from these investments? Given the limitations on funds available for future transport investment, what mechanisms should be employed to manage demand? .....	15
<b>CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>15</b>



## INTRODUCTION

RDA – Northern Rivers believes that transport is about access and a means to an end, and decisions about transport therefore affect social equity, amenity and the health and wellbeing of our communities – where and how we live, work, learn and recreate. Effective transport planning, investment and management are fundamental to our collective impact on the environment's life support systems and have far-reaching implications for income distribution and welfare dependency. An effective transport system also plays a key role in engendering social inclusion as it provides access to education, health and other services. It provides an opportunity for people to move within the region and employment prospects are broadened by wider transport opportunities.

RDA – Northern Rivers recognises that transport systems, together with communications, are fundamental foundations for maintaining a healthy and dynamic regional economy. We have adopted a transport position statement with the following principles that we recommend be considered in developing the *Long Term Transport Master Plan*. RDA – Northern Rivers:

- advocates for improvements to transport infrastructure, systems and capability in the region and encourages prioritisation of such improvements through the development of a regional transport strategy;
- recognises that a holistic, integrated and long-term approach to transport is needed to address the economic, social and environmental needs and challenges of the region;
- advocates that sustainability, land use, settlement pattern and the environmental, cultural and economic characteristics of the region should drive transport planning, investment and management decisions;
- acknowledges that transport planning and development should aim to maintain a stable and predictable investment environment for regional industries including agriculture, tourism and residential development;
- recognises that efficient, cost-effective and convenient transport links to South East Queensland must be central to transport planning and development;
- encourages transport planning to be an integral part of a comprehensive approach to major infrastructure development including telecommunications, energy and water distribution;
- encourages maximisation of existing infrastructure for multi-modal traffic flows;
- advocates for improved transport options to include walking, cycling and carpooling;
- supports transport development that balances the needs of stakeholders and avoids usage conflicts to ensure higher standards of safety;
- advocates for policy reviews to address current transport constraints and barriers (e.g. licensing and contracting of bus routes);
- advocates that transport infrastructure projects should be subject to full and public cost accounting prior to approval;
- recognises the need for an adaptive capacity to deal with rising fuel costs, changing fuel options and the need to reduce emissions; and
- recognises that transport development should encourage behavioural change by all categories of users to achieve more energy efficient and environmentally sustainable outcomes.

## REGIONAL OVERVIEW (P 71-72 of *Discussion Paper*)

The Northern Rivers region covered by RDA – Northern Rivers covers the seven local government areas from Tweed Heads to Clarence Valley. The additional information for the Regional Overview provided below is based on the Tweed to Clarence Valley Northern Rivers region.

The overview of the Northern Rivers region in the Discussion Paper could be enhanced by inclusion of the following additional information:

- the Northern Rivers has the fastest regional growth rate in NSW, and adjoins South East Queensland, the fastest growing region in Australia;
- the ageing population is much higher for the Northern Rivers than metropolitan Sydney, with 30% of the population projected to be over 65 by 2031, compared to 16% for Sydney;
- the *Discussion Paper* refers to the jobs growth for Sydney of 530,000 new jobs. Modeling for the Northern Rivers has identified that there will be 60,000 new jobs in the Northern Rivers of NSW in 2027, of which 16,000 need to be driven by export related jobs;
- the region has a dispersed settlement pattern, with a majority of the population residing in villages, resulting in the region's identity as a region of villages. This settlement pattern, the local geography and the low socio-economic status of a majority of the population contributes to a significant level of transport disadvantage;
- protection of significant biodiversity, natural assets and significant agricultural land and minimising the impact on these assets would be encouraged by the region in future transport corridor identification and protection;
- the Northern Rivers is a cross-border region, and transport connectivity to South East Queensland and the Port of Brisbane should be acknowledged as a key factor influencing State transport planning;
- the Northern Rivers is a car dependent region, with limited public transport options and fragmented infrastructure for cycling and walking;
- in 2006, 8.8% of households in the Richmond-Tweed did not have a motor vehicle<sup>1</sup>;
- tourism is a major industry in the region, and has a significant influence on transport activity and planning. Transport planning in the region needs to acknowledge major events and their transport needs;
- access to tertiary education provided by Southern Cross University and North Coast Institute of TAFE is limited, particularly for students who come from low socio-economic status households.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

*It is recommended that:*

- *the Transport Master Plan and Regional Transport Strategies adopt a consistent approach to the Northern Rivers region and align the regional boundaries with the NSW 2021 Regional Action Plan by including the Clarence Valley in the Northern Rivers; and*
- *the additional information about the Northern Rivers region is incorporated into the transport challenges for the Northern Rivers region.*

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006 [www.censusdata.abs.gov.au](http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au)



## **TRANSPORT OBJECTIVES:**

**Are the objectives for future planning for transport in NSW appropriate and comprehensive?**

**Do you have any other objectives to suggest for both public transport and roads?**

**Should additional or different objectives be considered for the NSW Long Term Transport Master Plan?**

The transport objectives cover many of the key issues, and the current objectives are supported. RDA – Northern Rivers supports the Government’s goal to ensure all public transport is fully accessible by 2032. The explanation of the objectives states that an important objective is for the NSW Government “to deliver a transport system that is equitable, affordable and accessible to all” (p21). This objective needs to be clearly included as one of the key objectives identified on p22 of the *Discussion Paper*. We also recognise and support the objective for planning to inform investment strategies, as land use and transport planning cannot be separated in our highly transport dependent societies.

As noted earlier, RDA – Northern Rivers believes that transport is about access to goods and services. There is considerable change occurring in the way people access goods and services due to the greater use of telecommunications infrastructure, an international digital economy and increased practices such as teleworking and logistics just-in-time technology. In the Northern Rivers region, one of our major growth sectors, the creative industries, views high speed broadband as a key mode of transport that is critical to business capability and success. The *Discussion Paper* does not address the role of new telecommunications infrastructure as supporting transport goals and outcomes. Information technology also provides less carbon intensive access than traditional transport modes. The *Long Term Master Plan* provides an opportunity for integrating this key influence in future transport, and integration with the NSW Government’s *Digital Economy Industry Action Plan*.

The Discussion Paper acknowledges the importance of environmental sustainability and the major energy challenges for the next 20 years, however there is limited detail on how future transport planning and development will address issues such as the impacts of fossil fuel use, sterilisation of environmental assets by infrastructure development, peak oil, climate change, establishing a low carbon transport system and the costs of environmental externalities. The transport sector currently contributes to 13.5% of total carbon emissions<sup>2</sup>; and occurrences of extreme climate events and the resulting inundation impacts on transport infrastructure are likely to become more frequent. To reduce the long term maintenance costs, it is critical that the *Long Term Transport Master Plan* identifies future proofing strategies by building transport infrastructure for future conditions. The *Master Plan* also needs to identify how infrastructure can support the low carbon economy as an increasing driver for changing behaviour.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.environment.gov.au/settlements/transport/fuelguide/environment.html>

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

*RDA –Northern Rivers recommends that the Master Plan:*

- *clearly include the objective “to deliver a transport system that is equitable, affordable and accessible to all”;*
- *include an additional objective to ensure the transport system adapts to changing economic conditions and drivers, such as the digital economy, peak oil, low carbon economy; and*
- *include strategies about how transport infrastructure will be environmentally sustainable, and “future-proofed” to adjust to changing environmental conditions and energy challenges.*

**REGIONAL TRANSPORT:****What are the key transport objectives for your region?****How should regional connections be improved to meet future freight and passenger demands?**

The key transport objectives for the Northern Rivers region include:

- consistent definition of Northern Rivers region for all regional planning;
- addressing cross-border transport planning: linking the Northern Rivers to South-East Queensland;
- reducing transport disadvantage: establish innovative, flexible, demand responsive transport solutions;
- focusing on sustainability and a transition to a low carbon economy;
- regular collection of local data to inform regional planning;
- investing in critical economic development transport projects; and
- development of an integrated regional transport strategy.

A more detailed overview of these objectives, including improving regional connections to meet future freight and passenger demands is provided below.

**Consistent Definition of Northern Rivers Region for all Regional Planning**

The Northern Rivers region covered by RDA – Northern Rivers includes the seven local government areas from Tweed Heads to Clarence Valley. This region is different to the Northern Rivers region used by Transport for NSW which does not incorporate the Clarence Valley and ends at the Richmond Valley. The *NSW 2021 Regional Action Plan for the Northern Rivers* is based on the Tweed to Clarence Valley region; however the *Far North Coast Regional Strategy* uses the same region as defined in the *Transport Master Plan Discussion Paper*. It would be helpful if the *2021 Regional Action Plan*, *Transport Master Plan*, *Regional Transport Strategy* and *Land Use Strategy* adopted a consistent region for all regional planning.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

*RDA –Northern Rivers recommends that the Master Plan and the Regional Transport Strategy for the Northern Rivers region include the Clarence Valley Local Government Area to be consistent with the 2021 Regional Action Plan for the Northern Rivers.*



## Addressing Cross-Border Transport Planning: Linking the Northern Rivers to South-East Queensland

The *Discussion Paper* addresses transport as an issue confined to the State of NSW. However, for regions that border other States, issues associated with connectivity across State borders is of high importance. The Northern Rivers is adjacent to South East Queensland (SEQ), the fastest growing region of Australia. The Northern Rivers is a region of villages of 304,000 people. South East Queensland is a populous city region/conurbation of 3.4 million people. The 2001 ABS Journey to Work data for Tweed Shire identified that 22% of all workplace destinations were in SEQ, with 63% of these in the Gold Coast<sup>3</sup>.

Given the population growth pressures and major investments on the upgrade of the Pacific Highway, Coolangatta Airport, Port of Brisbane, Bromelton freight intermodal terminal, an integrated plan to address cross border transport connectivity and movement of passengers and freight is a key requirement. Critical issues to be considered in cross border transport planning and delivery between NSW and SE QLD include:

- road infrastructure upgrades to improve road safety and travel times to major centres and key gateways (particularly airports and ports);
- the identification and protection of a corridor to link the existing rail infrastructure of NSW to the SEQ Robina line that will extend to Coolangatta ;
- addressing the weight requirements by NSW export businesses determined by road or bridge loads in NSW that limit freight movement to the Port of Brisbane;
- recognition of the 1.5 million visitors to Byron Shire each year, many of whom make day trips from SEQ;
- addressing taxi movement inconsistencies (e.g. NSW Taxi Transport Subsidy Scheme vouchers for people with a disability are not accepted by QLD taxi drivers) and constraints of a limited number of dual taxi ranks to provide services in NSW and QLD;
- streamlining ticketing, fares and concession procedures, particularly for people who are transport disadvantaged, to coordinate their movements between the States, without having to change buses, pay non-concessional fares etc.; and
- motor vehicle registration and licensing (e.g. ability to gain a licence in one State even if a licence has been lost in the other State).

### **RECOMMENDATION:**

*RDA –Northern Rivers recommends that the Master Plan acknowledge and provide a framework to improve cross-border transport planning and service provision, and that Transport for NSW work with the NSW Cross Border Commissioner on this.*

## Reduce Transport Disadvantage: Establish Innovative, Flexible, Demand Responsive Transport Solutions

The Northern Rivers is a region of villages, with a highly dispersed population, and a high proportion of people on low incomes (the median weekly income is \$695 compared to \$1,093 for NSW, with

<sup>3</sup> SGS Economics and Planning. 2005. *Overview of Economic Implications of South East Queensland on the Northern Rivers Region: A Discussion Paper as Input to the Draft Northern Rivers RIEP V3*, Northern Rivers Regional Development Board, Lismore.



64% of households earning less than \$1,000 per week, compared to 48% for NSW<sup>4</sup>). The outcome of transport services is access or the movement of people, and this needs to acknowledge the real costs of transport disadvantage to health, employment, education, training, business and economic development. These externalities, such as the costs of road congestion (estimated at \$10 billion in 2005<sup>5</sup>) and road accidents (approximately 1,500 people are killed and 30,000 seriously injured each year on Australian roads<sup>6</sup>) need to be considered in planning transport systems and services. The *Transport Master Plan* should also identify mechanisms to address the most transport disadvantaged groups in regional communities, for example Aboriginal communities, people with disabilities (especially blind and vision impaired people and people who rely on mobility aids), older people, people living in isolated areas and youth.

To reduce transport disadvantage there is a need to improve the accessibility and affordability of public transport. Public transport is an essential service; however in the Northern Rivers (and most regional areas) it is restricted to school bus services, as many rural and regional bus services rely on the School Bus Subsidy Scheme to provide their core business. This tends to result in local transport providers focusing on school bus services instead of general services. These do not provide adequate public transport for the general public due to their restricted timetables and do not support employees or the needs of local business. There are no incentives or requirements for service providers to expand their services to better cater for the needs of regional residents, and access during weekends, school holidays, public holidays and at nights is also restricted. In regional areas, The *Transport Master Plan* provides an opportunity to review the current policy and contractual arrangements to encourage the development of innovative local transport solutions that are flexible, demand responsive, and maximise use of existing resources/capacity and infrastructure. For example, it could be possible to consider regular commuter services from Lismore to Ballina, Lennox, Byron and Casino as Lismore receives 35,000 commuting vehicles every day. There are also significant opportunities for time-specific public transport linked to major events and festivals in the region (e.g. Byron Bay Blues Festival, Splendour in the Grass and Northern Rivers Writers Festival). It should be noted however, that innovative transport solutions need time: at least two years to allow for cultural change and sufficient awareness to assess adoption and patronage.

There are also inequities in transport services across the State, as commuters in the Sydney region currently receive subsidies that are not available to regional residents. For example, a worker commuting from Ballina to Lismore (34 km) currently pays \$23.60 return or \$10.80 for a one-way 30 minute trip (e.g. Casino to Lismore). By comparison, a 30 minute one-way trip from Coogee to Sydney costs \$3.30 or 31 km from Mona Vale to Sydney costs \$8.60 return. The IPART decision to lower rural bus fares by 8% has a positive impact on this inequity, and Northern Rivers Buslines have also recently capped their rural bus fares at \$9.40 one way. However regional fares continue to be higher than metropolitan fares, and fares on services provided by operators other than Northern Rivers Buslines in the region remain disproportionately high. Fare concessions for public transport dependent people need to be consistent for people on low incomes and Centrelink Payments, and

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<sup>4</sup> RDA – Northern Rivers. 2011. *Northern Rivers Regional Profile: 2011 Update*.

<sup>5</sup> JWK Health Consultants. 2011. *Sustain Northern Rivers Transport Options Plan*, Discussion document prepared for the North Coast Area Health Service

<sup>6</sup> Stanley, J. and Barret, S. 2010. *Moving People: Solutions for a Growing Australia*, Australasian Railway Association, Bus Industry Confederation and International Association of Public Transport–UITP

young people are a priority. People should not be transport disadvantaged because they live in a regional area.

There is a need to consider multiple modes and mechanisms for reducing transport disadvantage: including standard public transport options (bus, rail, timetabled, demand driven) , car pooling, cycling, walking, better coordination and integration of current community transport provision by all providers or funders, information and technology/online services (i.e. mobility management and transport coordination technologies to ensure that new and existing transport services are coordinated with the needs of existing and potential passengers).

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

*RDA –Northern Rivers recommends that the Master Plan:*

- *reviews policy and contractual arrangements, such as the School Bus Subsidy Scheme, that restrict the development of local, flexible, demand driven transport solutions in regional NSW;*
- *provides a framework for a minimum standard of public transport provision in regional areas (e.g. public transport to be provided between major centres, larger towns and villages in on a work timetable as well as school bus timetable as [i.e. 8.30 – 3.30 service AND a 9.00 – 5.00 service]);*
- *ensures equity in rural and metropolitan public transport pricing, and increases subsidies in regional areas; and*
- *identifies specific mechanisms to address the most transport disadvantaged groups in regional communities.*

#### **Focus on Sustainability and a Transition to a Low Carbon Economy**

The *Discussion Paper* acknowledges that transport in regions is currently, and will continue to be oriented towards supporting vehicles, but also states that the “greater use of public transport is likely to provide the most optimal solution to addressing the rising cost of energy.” As roads are a heavily subsidised method of transportation per passenger-kilometre,<sup>7</sup> peak oil will restrict the affordability of single occupancy vehicles in the future and limited public transport exist in regions; RDA – Northern Rivers supports a focus on public transport as a means to address future energy and sustainability challenges in regions.

Data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics identifies that less than 1% of the population used any form of public transport in 2006.<sup>8</sup> There are also very low rates of active travel in the region, with only 4.5% of people walking all or part way to work, and only 1.4% riding a bicycle. In addition to greenhouse pollution, this level of car-dependence has health consequences. Every additional 60 minutes in a car per day, increases one’s odds of being obese by 6%, and each kilometre walked reduces the odds of being obese by 4.8%.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Department of Transport and Regional Services. 2004. *Auslink White Paper*, Commonwealth of Australia. [www.infrastructure.gov.au/transport/publications/files/whitepaper.pdf](http://www.infrastructure.gov.au/transport/publications/files/whitepaper.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006 [www.censusdata.abs.gov.au](http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au)

<sup>9</sup> Frank LD, Andresen MA, Schmidt TL 2004, *Obesity relationships with community design, physical activity, and time spent in cars* American Journal of Preventative Medicine 27(2) pp87-96



Sustainability solutions in regions and the Northern Rivers will require:

- mobility management combined with the use of digital and smart technologies;
- mechanisms to increase access to vehicles such as through car pooling (see <http://www.nrcarpool.org/>), by the provision of designated parking in key pick up and drop off zones;
- establishing hybrid car charging stations and supporting the use of eco-friendly alternative fuels (i.e. bio-fuels), particularly in the public transport system;
- increasing active transport by developing safe cycle and walkways, appropriate settlement design and land use planning and using shared space principles.<sup>10</sup> This will also result in the additional health benefits to individuals and society;
- creating physical and social environments to ensure real choice is available so the car can be left at home or that those without access to a private motor vehicle are not left isolated;
- better utilise spare transport capacity currently provided by a range of Government agencies through integration of these services by establishing integrated transport systems coordinated by Regional Agencies;
- extend the community transport model across the whole public transport system;
- encourage Councils to spend funds on sustainable public transport services, with a reduced emphasis on road maintenance. However, this would require additional resourcing to Councils that are currently struggling to maintain the existing networks of local roads in regional areas; and
- re-use existing non-road transport assets, with a key focus on rail infrastructure.

### **Regular Collection of Local Data to Inform Regional Planning**

There is a lack of transport data in regional areas, as the NSW Bureau of Transport Statistics has focused on data collection in metropolitan areas to date. The *Discussion Paper* also refers to the development of an additional data collection tool: the Customer Scorecard to rate what is most valued about public transport. In regions, development of an evidence base to plan and deliver transport services and infrastructure is critical, particularly if the NSW Government is planning to develop Regional Transport Strategies from 2013. This data is required before the development of the Strategy and it is important for the *Master Plan* to include strategies and budgets to collect comprehensive regional transport data. The Household Travel Surveys undertaken in metropolitan areas needs to be applied to regions in NSW.

In the Northern Rivers, Sustain Northern Rivers conducted a *Commuter Mapping Project* which surveyed travel patterns from 16 North Coast organisations.<sup>11</sup> Initial analysis of this survey identified a high level of car dependence and barriers to alternative commuting modes. Assistance from the Bureau of Transport Statistics to further analyse and report these outcomes would be valued.

There is also significant tourism data about visitor dispersal patterns collected by Tourism Research Australia, Destination NSW and Tourism Queensland that needs to be integrated into regional data collection and analysis for a strong tourism destination such as the Northern Rivers.

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<sup>10</sup> Fryslân Province. 2009. *Shared Space- Final Evaluation and Results* [www.shared-space.org](http://www.shared-space.org)

<sup>11</sup> Sustain Northern Rivers. 2009. *Sustain Northern Rivers Commuter Mapping Survey* unpublished



**RECOMMENDATION:**

*RDA –Northern Rivers recommends that the Master Plan include budgets and strategies for regional data transport collection and analysis prior to the development of Regional Transport Strategies.*

**Invest in Critical Economic Development Transport Projects**

The *Northern Rivers Regional Industry and Economic Plan (RIEP)*<sup>12</sup> identifies the facilitation of continued investment in economic capacity building infrastructure as a one of five strategic requirements to support regional economic development. Responsibility for achieving continued infrastructure investment lies with all levels of Government, and transport requirements focus on developing and improving intra and inter-regional road networks and rail infrastructure.

A recent review of the RIEP priorities with Local and State Government agencies in the region identified the following regional transport infrastructure investment priorities for the Northern Rivers:

- Pacific Highway upgrade to dual carriageway including Glenugie, Devils Pulpit and Woolgoolga to Ballina upgrades;
- Road linkages to the Australia Trade Coast (Brisbane Airport and the Port of Brisbane);
- Summerland Way upgrade linkages to Beaudesert/ Bromelton transport hub and Brisbane;
- MR 622 – Warwick/ Killarney/ Legume/ Woodenbong Road;
- Mount Lindesay Highway;
- Grafton bypass and Grafton Bridge duplication;
- Bruxner Highway – Ballina – Tenterfield;
- Gwydir Highway realignment and overtaking lanes;
- Grafton to Armidale Road (replace timber bridges and Nymboida realignment);
- Interchange and proposed inter-modal and warehousing hub facility at Casino;
- Cunningham Rail Link;
- Rail link from Coolangatta Airport to the Northern Rivers;
- Upgrade of bulk handling facilities at Grafton;
- Restoration of a local passenger rail service on the Murwillumbah to Casino rail line;
- Passenger rail connection to Gold Coast Airport;
- Ballina Airport; and
- Border to Ballina coastal cycling route;

Local transport investment priorities identified include:

- Ballina / Lennox Head Road;
- Lismore / Kyogle Road;
- Lismore / Woodburn (Wyrallah Road);
- Lismore / Bangalow (including bypasses of Bexhill and Clunes Villages);
- Murwillumbah / Kyogle Road;
- Tintenbar Road;
- Kirkwood Road Interchange;

<sup>12</sup> SGS Economics and Planning. 2005. *Regional Industry and Economic Plan for the Northern Rivers: A Community Road Map to Developing our Future*, Northern Rivers Regional Development Board.

- Byron Bay Town Centre Bypass;
- Upgrade of passenger facilities at Grafton / South Grafton
- Cape Byron cable car to lighthouse – light rail as alternative to vehicle access; and
- Bundjalung National Park and Iluka Nature Reserve access road improvements – bitumen a series of short dirt roads that provide access to a suite of day use areas on the Iluka Peninsula.

There are a number of significant transport proposals in development for the region that require close attention in preparing the *Long Term Transport Master Plan*. These include:

- the feasibility assessment of the Casino to Murwillumbah rail line;
- the Trans Regional Amalgamated Infrastructure Network proposal – one of the top 25 priority projects for Infrastructure Australia;
- intermodal developments north of Casino; and
- the Northern Rivers to Brisbane commuter rail service using the existing North Coast rail line.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

*RDA –Northern Rivers recommends that the Master Plan facilitate continued investment to improve economic enabling transport infrastructure in regional areas.*

### **Develop an Integrated Regional Transport Strategy**

Development of an Integrated Regional Transport Strategy has been a key regional priority for over a decade, supported by all local councils, Northern Rivers Regional Organisation of Councils, Northern Rivers Social Development Council and RDA – Northern Rivers. The development of such a strategy would enable a holistic approach to the prioritisation and investment in regional transport infrastructure, and address the cross border transport planning challenges. In 2005, the *Border Integrated Transport Plan* was developed to address the cross border transport challenges for Moree, Gwydir, Inverell, Tenterfield and parts of the Darling Downs South West and Scenic Rim regions. This could provide a framework for the cross border transport planning in the Northern Rivers and South East QLD regions.

The Integrated Regional Transport Strategy should identify and protect strategic transport corridors required for the future. The Pacific Highway upgrades have had impacts on local business certainty due to new infrastructure development, and future corridor protection could alleviate this. corridor protection is essential as this can impact upon business investment decisions about current transport and logistics systems. Another key consideration in identifying and protecting corridors is the protection of State and regionally significant farmland and biodiversity assets in the identification of these corridors in the Northern Rivers region.

In reviewing the *Discussion Paper*, a number of local forums on transport have been held (particularly by Sustain Northern Rivers), and Aboriginal people attending these have expressed a concern that they do not feel that they have been properly included in the consultations informing the Discussion Paper. The lack of transport can have a significant impact on accessing employment, education, services and recreation, and Aboriginal people in the Northern Rivers experience very specific transport problems (e.g. isolation, inflexible or culturally inappropriate services, discrimination, poor access to services and affordability). An Integrated Regional Transport Strategy



provides a key opportunity to specifically consider how to address Aboriginal transport issues, and it is recommended that further planning involve Aboriginal communities.

Establishing comprehensive data sets on regional transport patterns and trends is necessary to inform the Regional Strategy.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

*RDA –Northern Rivers recommends the development of an Integrated Regional Transport Strategy for the Northern Rivers region that addresses cross border transport connectivity and is based on regional data and evidence.*

## **REGIONAL TRANSPORT:**

### **How can different levels of government and the non-government sector work more effectively together to improve the transport outcomes for the regions?**

There is currently no transport authority with a focus on coordinating and developing transport systems and investments in the region, and there is benefit in the establishment of a regional governance model to monitor the implementation of the Master Plan. Transport is aligned to most Government portfolios, and should not be the sole responsibility of Transport for NSW. A regional governance model could ensure that population, health, education and other key drivers affecting transport planning are integrated into the transport planning system. Local government has a key role in regional and local transport, and most councils have Local Transport Advisory Groups. State agencies need to work collaboratively with these groups and other regional stakeholders.

The *Master Plan* provides an opportunity to:

- integrate community, health and other transport services provided by a range of stage government agencies to reduce duplication or fragmentation, increase the return on investment for government, and to enhance transport opportunities and access in regional areas;
- review the impacts of current transport policies on regional transport, and coordinate legislation and policy to facilitate innovative transport solutions;
- use existing social infrastructure and regional planning tools and research;
- integrate the governance challenges of transport planning and implementation across different levels of government and the community and private sectors;
- integrate environmental, sustainability, economic, and community development needs with transport planning;
- collaborate with large regional employers in planning public transport service delivery;
- build on current regional collaborations, such as Sustain Northern Rivers and Local Transport Advisory Groups in planning and delivery; and
- incorporate the advocacy and information of local government and non-government organisations in regions that have significant intelligence on transport needs and demand.



## **REGIONAL TRANSPORT:**

### **In what form can CountryLink best serve the needs of the regions over the long term?**

The CountryLink service is currently focused on servicing a train service between major centres and providing a mechanism to link regional communities to these metropolitan centres (e.g. Sydney and Brisbane). In its current delivery mode CountryLink provides limited to benefits to regions, as timetables are based on convenience at the metropolitan end point of journeys and not on regional requirements. To meet regional needs, CountryLink services need to be reconfigured to improve flexibility, frequency and timetabling to meet the needs of regional users. Timetables need to be integrated with local transport services to provide intra-regional linkages at termination points. The CountryLink network could also be extended to service more towns by rail, with short bus links to smaller towns; upgrading existing closed routes, or re-aligning others for higher speeds; and increasing frequency from a daily service. There also needs to be identification of demand for alternative non-metropolitan/inter-regional routes (e.g. Lismore to Newcastle), and a review of mechanisms to better utilise current spare capacity. There is a need to address barriers, such as the minimum travel requirement of 50km, affordability and accessibility of trains versus buses. Incentives to enhance travel include Wi-Fi for businesses and frequent traveler program with rewards for regular users. The Government needs to determine if it wishes to continue to provide a train service to metropolitan centres, or if it wishes to redesign the CountryLink services as part of an integrated transport system. The latter approach would require a review of local bus contracting arrangements to be considered.

## **FREIGHT TRANSPORT:**

### **What investments are needed across NSW to improve the efficiency of freight movement?**

### **How can the NSW Government best support an efficient freight system as well as meeting community expectations for safety and amenity in residential areas?**

Efficiency of freight movement in the Northern Rivers requires investment into:

- upgrading major highways such as the Pacific Highway on the east coast of NSW;
- improving the connectivity of the Summerland Way with linkages to the Bromelton Transport Hub and Port of Brisbane;
- cross-border transport connections; and
- rail freight infrastructure.

There is an urgent need to address the weight requirements determined by road or bridge loads in NSW that limit freight movement to the Port of Brisbane by NSW export businesses. There is also a need for integrated freight transport options incorporating rail in the Northern Rivers by supporting the proposed intermodal developments near Casino.

RDA – Northern Rivers supports the leadership of Transport for NSW in only identifying ports that have well established freight and export functions and are not constrained for future development by local environmental, cultural, economic or social barriers (such as the Port of Yamba). However, the Port of Yamba would need to be incorporated into the Regional Transport Strategy and its role and contribution to the State would need to be identified in Ports and Freight Strategies for NSW.

## **FUNDING:**

**How much would people be prepared to pay for further investment in the transport system and what would be the expectation flowing from these investments?**

**Given the limitations on funds available for future transport investment, what mechanisms should be employed to manage demand?**

Critical issues regarding investment in transport infrastructure in the Northern Rivers region relate to:

- funding for rural roads maintenance and improvement. A critical challenge in some parts of the Northern Rivers is the management and/or replacement of timber bridges;
- adequacy of disaster relief funding for impacts on roads that may not actually be flooded, but suffer inundation and stormwater damage, or impacted upon by the redirection of traffic off flooded roads. The disaster relief funding provides the capacity to repair the road to the condition prior to flooding, and does not encourage works to ameliorate future problems by raising road surfaces for future flood events;
- inequity of fares for regional and metropolitan residents;
- capacity to community groups cover the costs of regulating the new driver authorisation framework for community services;
- improved incentives for local transport drivers e.g. pay/conditions, especially for Indigenous workers;
- identifying opportunities to access tourist expenditure to support transport systems;
- the potential for social exclusion by the greater use of tolls in regions with a low socio-economic status and limited alternatives to major roads that could be subjected to a toll; and
- continuation of the 3x3 fuel levy.

## **CONCLUSION**

RDA – Northern Rivers appreciates the opportunity to respond to the *NSW Long Term Transport Master Plan Discussion Paper*. We would like to acknowledge the significant work undertaken by Sustain Northern Rivers in coordinating stakeholder feedback into the Sustain Northern Rivers submission to the *Discussion Paper* that has provided a key resource to inform parts of this submission. RDA – Northern Rivers supports the Sustain Northern Rivers Submission, but has provided this additional submission with more detailed information from our organisation's perspective. We are also willing to assist Transport for NSW with further consultation, research, community engagement and planning in the region. For further information on the matters raised in this submission, please do not hesitate to contact our CEO, Katrina Luckie on 02 6622 4011.