

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

**Organisation:** Bathurst Business Chamber  
**Name:** Mr Angus Edwards  
**Position:** President  
**Date Received:** 20/05/2012



20 May 2012

Mr Andrew Gee  
Chairman  
State and Regional Development Committee  
Parliament House  
Macquarie Street  
SYDNEY NSW 2000

by email: [stateregional@parliament.nsw.au](mailto:stateregional@parliament.nsw.au)

Dear Sir,

**Submission to the Inquiry into Inter-Regional Public Transport**

We refer to the above inquiry and now **enclose** herewith Submission for the consideration of the Committee, on behalf of the Bathurst Business Chamber.

We would welcome the opportunity to address the Inquiry in relation to the subject matter of this submission, or generally to matters within the terms of reference of the Inquiry.

Yours faithfully,

**Angus Edwards**  
President

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18 May 2012

## **Bathurst Business Chamber Submission to Inter-regional public transport inquiry**

### **1. The Bathurst Business Chamber**

The Bathurst Business Chamber is the peak representative body for business in the Bathurst Region. The Bathurst Business Chamber is affiliated to the NSW Business Chamber and works closely with Bathurst Regional Council in promoting business and economic development in Bathurst. Our membership base covers all sections of the Bathurst economy from manufacturing to professional services. There are a total of 3,240 registered businesses in the Bathurst Region.

Bathurst Business Chamber members are amongst the largest users of transport to Sydney, as a means to travel interstate or overseas, and as a final destination. The need to travel to the state capital has always been important and remains so. Travel to Sydney for leisure, medical treatment and other essential services is important for the community generally.

Access to public transport and reliable transport enhances the business opportunities and population growth of the region. Reliable and fast public transport also assists in attracting staff and makes the region more accessible to for tourism and visitors.

In addition, travel throughout the central west and regional NSW is becoming more important, as businesses expand, and the customer base grows.

The Bathurst Business Chamber recognises the importance of transport to regional development, be it by road, rail or regular public transport air service. Access to the state's capital and connecting destinations, whether by road, rail or air is important for the development of business in Bathurst and further afield. It is equally important for attracting business and investment to the region.

The Bathurst Business Chamber has resisted moves by Sydney Airport Corporation to restrict access to regional airlines, to increase fees and charges and otherwise adversely affect connections to Sydney by air, which at present is the preferred means of travel for business travellers in Bathurst. The Bathurst Business Chamber lodged a submission with the ACCC in relation to a price notification to increase fees and charges to regional airlines, particularly Regional Express, in 2010<sup>1</sup>.

### **2. The Bathurst Region**

Bathurst is a vibrant and growing regional city located 200km west of the Sydney CBD. Bathurst has a current population of 40,187, which is forecast to grow to over 50,000 by 2031<sup>2</sup>. In 2009 Bathurst's gross local product was \$2,108.70 million<sup>3</sup>, across the diverse local economy lead by the manufacturing, agriculture, health, government, retail and education sectors.

Bathurst has an unemployment rate of around 5% which is lower than the NSW average. Bathurst has a skilled workforce, making it an attractive proposition for investment and business opportunities.

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<sup>1</sup> see ACCC Decision regarding Sydney Airport Corporation Limited's price notification for regional air services, September 2010

<sup>2</sup> Bathurst Regional Council Forecasts web page

<sup>3</sup> Bathurst Regional Council Forecasts web page

Bathurst Regional Council has an active programme to attract business, investment and residents to the region, via the successful Evocities programme.

The key issues and priorities for residents and those looking to relocate are employment, education, health and transport.

### **3. Current Transport Options**

Bathurst is served by the following transport options:

#### *a. Road*

Great Western Highway to Lithgow, mainly single carriageway, prone to snow and ice in winter, with options of travel via Katoomba to Sydney connecting with M4 motorway at Penrith or alternate route via Bells Line of Road, with limited overtaking opportunities for access to Richmond and Windsor, with connections to M7 motorway.

Travel to Penrith in non peak times is less than 2 hours, with just over 2 hours to the M4/M7 interchange via Katoomba. Travel time in morning and evening peaks is increased substantially due to congestion in the Sydney region.

Mid western Highway to Blayney, Cowra which is the preferred road route to Canberra (4 hours)

Mitchell Highway to Orange (45 minutes), Dubbo (2.5 hours) and the west of the state.

Sofala Road and Castlereagh Highway to Mudgee (1.25 hours)

Oberon Road to Oberon connecting on to Abercrombie Road to Goulburn (2.5 hours), Canberra (5 hours) and south coast (4 hours)

There are regular coach services operated by private coach operators and Countrylink.

#### *b. Air*

Bathurst Airport has a single sealed runway of 5595ft in length, a modern terminal building with recently upgrading lighting. The airport services extensive general aviation traffic, and regular passenger service operated by Regional Express Saab 340 turpoprop aircraft. There are 6 flights operating to Sydney Kingsford Smith Airport each day.

#### *c. Rail*

Bathurst is on the western rail line connecting Sydney with the Central West and continuing to Broken Hill for passenger services. The line is electrified to Lithgow, where the Cityrail service terminates, connecting with Countrylink coach. Bathurst is serviced by daily XPT service between Sydney and Dubbo, coach connections to the Lithgow Cityrail service and a weekly Outback Explorer service to Broken Hill.



#### **4. Current Public Transport**

This submission is focussed on the key element of inter-regional transport for the Bathurst region, that is, rail.

Bathurst has extensive rail infrastructure including significant track, siding and associated warehouse facilities, much of second world war vintage, when Bathurst was a significant military training camp for troops and for warehousing of supplies. Bathurst also has heavy rail industry in both rolling stock and rail track.

Bathurst has connection to Sydney via the Blue Mountains, with two rail lines. Bathurst Railway station is the primary active railway station, and also services as the terminal for connecting Countrylink coach services. The rail line between Lithgow and Bathurst is not electrified, and has no overhead line infrastructure. There are no electric services to Bathurst, although it should be noted that at the time of the introduction of the XPT in 1982, an electric version was also designed in anticipation of electrification of the Sydney-Melbourne line. It was never put into production.<sup>4</sup>

The XPT rail service was introduced in 8 April 1982<sup>5</sup>, and the current journey takes approximately the same time as it did at that time, of approximately 3.5 hours.

There is an XPT which depart Sydney at 7.10 am arriving into Bathurst at 10.43 am (3 hrs 33 minutes, which is 4 minutes longer than in 1982 when the service commenced) and returns from Bathurst at 5.07 pm arriving into Sydney at 8.49 pm (3 hrs 42 minutes which is 11 minutes longer than in 1982).<sup>6</sup>

There is a Monday Outback Explorer Service from Sydney to Broken Hill on a Monday with return on Tuesday. This service has equivalent travel times, and schedule, but uses the newer Explorer trains introduced into service in 1993. The journey from Bathurst to Broken Hill takes 9 hours.

In addition to direct passenger service to Sydney there are a number of alternatives, primarily coach service connecting with Cityrail at Lithgow. Many travellers also drive to railway stations in the Blue Mountains, park their cars and travel to Sydney on Cityrail trains.

A Countrylink coach service departs Bathurst at 6.14 am connecting with the 7.37 Cityrail service arriving into Sydney at 10.30 am, a journey time of 4 hours and 16 minutes. The return journey requires the Cityrail service to Lithgow departing Sydney at 5.23 pm, and connecting with Countrylink Coach at Lithgow arriving Bathurst at 9.31 pm, a journey time of 4 hours and 7 minutes.

#### **5. Problems with current service**

For Bathurst commuters wishing to travel to Sydney for the day there are few options.

The preferred option for business people travelling to Sydney is to travel by air, departing Bathurst at 6.30 am<sup>7</sup>, arriving into Sydney within 30 to 40 minutes (although the timetable allows 50 minutes per flight), and catching the airport train service to the city. Return flights at 3.45 pm and 7.35 pm from Sydney allow a full day of meetings. The cost of such service is at the very least \$178 for return

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<sup>4</sup> [www.railpage.org.au/xpt](http://www.railpage.org.au/xpt)

<sup>5</sup> [www.railpage.org.au/xpt/revenue.html](http://www.railpage.org.au/xpt/revenue.html)

<sup>6</sup> Countrylink Western Timetable, 23 October 2011

<sup>7</sup> Regional Express flight schedule, [www.regionalexpress.com.au](http://www.regionalexpress.com.au)

flights and \$25 for return airport train. The cost of flights is often much more expensive, depending on demand and time of booking.

Access to Sydney airport is under pressure and the recent study into the Sydney's airport needs, indicates there will be no additional slots available for smaller regional operators, and a desire to restrict flights into Sydney to larger aircraft. An alternative is needed.

Rail is not a viable alternative for most business travellers, for the following reasons:

a. The XPT service travels in the wrong direction.

The daily Sydney-Dubbo return service is valuable providing access from Sydney to the central west. It boosts tourism to the region, provides transport to residents and the large student population in Bathurst's schools and universities. It connects Bathurst with Dubbo and Orange.

There is a need for an equivalent service between Bathurst and Sydney in the morning and returning in the evening.

b. It travels at the wrong times

The current service requires travel the night prior to any business meeting or medical appointment. It is an added cost, wastes time and takes people away from businesses and family for unnecessary additional time. A service leaving Bathurst at 6.00 or 6.30 am and arriving into Central at 9.00 or 9.30 am would service the needs of businesspeople travelling to Sydney. A return evening service departing at 5.00 or 6.00 pm would service the same demand for the return journey.

c. It takes too long

The XPT has a capability of travelling at high speeds, with a new Australian speed record of 183km/h set between Table Top and Gerogery on 6 September 1981<sup>8</sup>. The service to Sydney from Bathurst currently takes 3 hours and 42 minutes. The speed of the journey has not changes over the past 30 years. The length of the journey, which is substantially longer than driving, detracts from rail as a viable alternative means of transport.

d. The coach and rail alternative takes even longer

The alternate coach from Bathurst to connect with Cityrail service, takes even longer with connection time, and numerous stops on the coach and rail service across the Blue Mountains.

In deciding how to travel, the length of journey, the time of the journey, the ease of journey and cost of journey are the key considerations. The journey by coach and rail of well over 4 hours is too long.

To attract passengers, a shorter journey, at the right time and with the convenience of not changing modes of transport is required.

d. Onboard Services

The onboard services offer little value for business travellers. To be able to have space to work and access to wifi, power for laptops and electronic devices or other services will make travel by rail, with

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<sup>8</sup> [www.railpage.org.au/xpt/delivery.html](http://www.railpage.org.au/xpt/delivery.html)



productive work time on the journey a very attractive proposition for businesspeople. Entertainment devices or access as offered on airlines (including budget airlines) would also assist in attracting customers

Trains with such services are common throughout the world, where such services have been in place for many years.

## **6. Solutions**

### **a. Introduce a daily rail service between Bathurst and Sydney.**

The need for this is discussed above. This first step of providing a second service starting at Bathurst and travelling to Sydney in the morning will be a service people will use. The existing coach passengers could use this service, providing a pre-existing customer base. This service will provide a number of benefits including taking cars off the congested and often dangerous Blue Mountains roads to the city. This will reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The safer mode of transport will reduce accidents. This also takes the pressure off car parking at CBD destinations. The cost saving to travellers will also be significant.

Such a service would be of benefit to the whole community, and is well supported within the region. The Bathurst Business Chamber notes, and supports the submission lodged by Rail Action Bathurst in this regard.

### **b. Significantly shorten the journey time**

The limiting factor of any service is the journey time on the 200km route from Central to Bathurst. At top speed, assuming the rail line was on a route and to a standard that it could accommodate it, the journey by XPT could potentially be just over an hour. At present, the infrastructure will not cope with such speeds and the average speed of the XPT is just 60km/h. At even half the top speed, the journey could be reduced to less than 2 hours.

An investment in the rail infrastructure, whether additional lines, upgrading current lines, rerouting and straightening current lines and expanding capacity on the Blue Mountains and metropolitan lines are all long overdue. A lack of investment over many years has contributed to the problem of congestion, and track where numerous speed restrictions apply.

Tilt trains were tested in NSW but not introduced. Consideration of a replacement for the XPT to achieve higher speeds and faster journey times should also be considered.

The journey time should be such that a daily commute from Bathurst to Parramatta or the Sydney CBD for work is a viable alternative for workers wanting the lifestyle and cost saving benefits of life in Bathurst, with the employment opportunities available in the CBD.

### **c. Electrify the rail line between Lithgow and the central west**

Although a significant investment, the electrification of the line between Lithgow and Bathurst (and beyond) would open up significant opportunities to the region, and provide a proper connection to Sydney, by incorporating it into the Sydney rail network. The construction phase of such a project would itself provide a stimulus to the regional economy, through a major infrastructure project, not seen in the region for some years.

The project would facilitate the use of existing rolling stock, already in place on the Blue Mountains, central Coast and South Coast lines. The timetable for the existing services to Lithgow could be extended to Bathurst, making more efficient use of limited rail access in peak times across the Blue Mountains and into the city.

This service would have the effect of removing the need for coach services to connect through to Bathurst, with the electric service running to Bathurst which then becomes the hub for services to Orange and Blayney, at times when the current XPT service is not running. The existing Mudgee coach service could continue from Lithgow, although in view of the extremely dangerous nature of the Castlereagh Highway and spate of recent accidents, a wider ranging electrification project could be considered.

The close proximity to major electricity generation plants in the Lithgow area and the reduced environmental footprint of electric services are significant benefits of such a project.

d. Provide alternative freight routes

Delays for commuters, restricted track capacity and the competing requirements of freight and passenger traffic need to be resolved. Alternate freight lines from regional NSW to ports should be re-opened and maintained, so as to increase capacity. The freight traffic has quite different requirements in terms of timing to passenger services, and options for the conveying of freight to ports and terminals need to be further investigated.

## **7. Other Issues for consideration**

The CountrylinkUp Report in relation to Countrylink prepared by Penny Sharpe MLC and dated 26 October 2010 provides a comprehensive outline of current problems and 62 recommendations in relation to Countrylink services. We do not propose to repeat those recommendations, however each ought to be considered carefully by the committee in its inquiry.

It is, to some extent, “tinkering on the edges”. The neglect of rail and track closures over the past 30 years will take time and money to reverse. A bold vision for rail in NSW, and particularly regional areas, is required and a commitment by government to ensuring rail is a viable, well promoted and well patronised transport option.

We make the following further submissions, having regard to the terms of reference for the inquiry:

a. How Countrylink Services can be improved

The matters raised above are essential. Attracting travellers requires a service that meets the needs of passengers. Additional onboard services and facilities to make the service more attractive to business travellers would assist in this. Additional services – business class – with an appropriate ticket fee to offset costs, whilst remaining cost competitive with air travel, would be well received by the business community of the central west.

b. Network linkages between Countrylink train and coach services

Timetabling services to connect and travel to meet the needs of passengers is essential. Long connection times, or long delays for late trains or coaches should be avoided. Coach services should be replaced by trains where possible, providing reduced costs of running such coaches, alleviating



pressure and costs to councils and highway authorities in road repairs and providing more direct and efficient service.

d. utilising Countrylink to increase tourism in NSW

Regional centres, such as Bathurst, would welcome the opportunity to promote rail travel to regional centres. The downfall in most areas is the public transport within the town. Bathurst has the benefit of a railway station within 2 blocks of the CBD, and regular bus services within the city. Bathurst Business Chamber members in the tourism industry would welcome the opportunity to work with Countrylink to market rail travel and holidays to regions, such as Bathurst.

The Bathurst Business Chamber would welcome the opportunity to engage further in discussions and consultations on this important issue.

e. Increasing the amount of inter-regional travel using public transport

The majority of travel between regions is by private motor vehicle. It is convenient, relatively cheap and fast. Travel by public transport would be a last resort in the regions. For business people it would be used rarely, for the inconvenience and unhelpful timetabling.

The service needs to be enhanced to meet passenger needs. Once this occurs, the numbers will increase. If services are not run with a significant focus on meeting passenger needs, they will simply not grow, and the current stagnation in the passenger numbers, as demonstrated by the XPT service, will continue.

There has been a lack of investment in Countrylink. The infrastructure has been run down. The trains are between 20 and 30 years old and there is a real perception that the services are not being promoted or supported by government, and when they are not utilised this will be seen as a reason to close them down.

The Bathurst Business Chamber seeks a genuine commitment from government to promote, support and invest in regional public transport. The benefits to the people of regional NSW, both in terms of lifestyle, cost of living and economic development of towns and cities cannot and should not be measured simply in terms of dollars. The enhancement and attraction of investment and skilled staff to regional areas is essential to their continued growth, and taking pressure of the state's capital for housing, roads and other infrastructure.

## **8. Conclusion**

The Bathurst Business Chamber hopes that the government will embrace a bold vision for rail in NSW, and particularly the Central West. The tinkering with a system that needs significant investment is unlikely to achieve substantial beneficial outcomes for the region or the state.

The Bathurst Business Chamber acknowledges the cost of the proposals and recommendations are significant, however such an investment in rail is long overdue. The economic and social benefits to the region of a fast, efficient and effective rail service ought to be recognised by government.

The benefits of having a viable and fast daily commute from the central west and other regions to the city for employment, will relieve pressure on demand for land, housing, water, electricity, public transport, roads and associated infrastructure in the outer regions of Sydney. Increased population in the central west will also assist in driving economic growth.

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