

INQUIRY INTO INTER-REGIONAL PUBLIC TRANSPORT

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Members ~ Namoi Catchment Management Authority, Narrabri Shire Council, Gunnedah Shire Council, Liverpool Plains Shire Council, Tamworth Regional Council and Walcha Shire Council

**Working together to increase the viability, sustainability and effectiveness of
Local Government**

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SUBMISSION TO NSW PARLIAMENT

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

STATE AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

INQUIRY INTO INTER-REGIONAL PUBLIC TRANSPORT

APRIL 2012

Closing Date for Submissions – 18 May 2012

1 COMMITTEE OF INQUIRY TERMS OF REFERENCE

That the State and Regional Development Committee inquire into how inter-regional public transport can better serve the needs of regional New South Wales.

Particular issues for consideration include:

- (a) how CountryLink services can be improved;*
- (b) how network linkages between CountryLink train and coach services can be improved;*
- (c) the potential for CountryLink services to carry light freight;*
- (d) how CountryLink can be better utilised to increase tourism in New South Wales;*
- (e) how the amount of inter-regional travel undertaken by public transport can be increased;*
- (f) the extent to which regional public transport networks are integrated and how they can be better integrated;*
- (g) the role local councils can play in improving inter-regional public transportation networks; and*
- (h) the type of buses and trains that will be required for the provision of regional passenger services in the future.*

For the purposes of this inquiry, the Committee uses the term inter-regional travel to refer to travel between regional areas or between a regional area and a metropolitan area. The Committee does not intend to consider the privatisation of existing government owned public transport, including CountryLink, as part of its Inquiry.

2 INTRODUCTION

Namoi Councils is a Regional Organisation of Councils located within the Namoi and Peel River Catchments of the North West Slopes and Plains and New England Regions of northern New South Wales.

Membership of Namoi Councils comprises Narrabri Shire Council, Gunnedah Shire Council, Liverpool Plains Shire Council, Tamworth Regional Council and Walcha Council and is unique to the extent that the Namoi Catchment Management Authority is a member.

The primary aim of Namoi Councils is to:

- (i) effectively advocate on agreed regional positions and priorities;*
- (ii) resource the capacity of the region to plan for and resource economic growth and diversification;*

- (iii) work together to increase the viability and effectiveness of local government in the region; and
- (iv) facilitate and foster cooperation, information exchange and resource sharing.

Local Government and Community infrastructure, mining, exploration and energy, water supply, economic development and diversity and local governance are principal priorities of the Organisation.

The Mission of Namoi Councils is to be recognised as the 'Voice of the Region' locally and nationally as the peak Namoi Regional Body that effectively advocates on agreed regional positions and priorities, focuses and fosters cooperation, information and resource sharing, and improves the image of the Namoi Region and Local Government.

(a) How CountryLink Services Can be Improved

It is accurate to say that there is widespread support in regional communities for the services provided by CountryLink. The service is valued by regional communities and is widely recognised as a vital public transport service for the regional community. The service provides reasonably cost effective access to the Newcastle Sydney metropolitan areas for individuals and groups to connect with family, friends, business, health and education services, employment, sport, recreation, tourism, arts, culture, connection to intrastate, interstate and overseas travel.

CountryLink services can be improved by:

- An independent CountryLink business model separated from CityRail Metro services delivering cost effective and operationally efficient inter-regional CountryLink public transport services to regional NSW.
- A constant focus on the customer and continuing improvements in customer service by CountryLink staff which is already acknowledged as being above average.
- Increased staff resourcing to ensure that passenger carriages are maintained and all services remain clean and fully operational during long haul journey time.
- As many train travel services as possible but at a minimum a daily return service to avoid the need for overnight accommodation and one evening service to connect train travellers residing in or within close proximity to regional centres such as Tamworth with access to the Newcastle Sydney metropolitan areas.
- Priority given by ARTC to regular rail passenger CountryLink regional services.

- Priority given within the CityRail network to regular rail passenger CountryLink regional services.
 - Special consideration and improved levels of service for aged and disabled travellers and generally, travellers with special needs and medical conditions including duress and service attendant button systems.
 - Improved levels of service for passengers travelling with children including services to keep children actively engaged during long haul periods of travel.
 - Zero tolerance for difficult, unruly and offensive passengers who disrupt the travel comfort of other passengers to the point where such passengers are removed from the train at the first available opportunity.
 - Wireless internet access and battery charging services and facilities be available on all CountryLink services to provide passengers with access to social networking media and allow business travellers to be able to conduct business and commercial activities during travel time.
 - Availability of CountryLink in-train-travel entertainment services on a fee for service basis, similar to in-flight air travel services, to occupy the time of travellers during long haul travel including the design of future rolling stock to accommodate such services.
- (b) How Network Linkages between CountryLink Train and Coach Services can be Improved**

Network linkages can be improved by

- On time arrival and departure of all regional CountryLink services.
- CountryLink establish partnerships and enter into collaborative arrangements with regional and sub-regional bus and taxi transport operators so as to integrate seamless intermodal *hub and spoke* transport service connections to small urban centres from regional centres with CountryLink services.

(c) The Potential for CountryLink Services to carry light freight

Namoi Councils would support CountryLink services carrying light freight to improve the productivity and cost effectiveness of the service. However, such a move must not be at the expense of regular rail passenger services which should always be considered the core business of CountryLink.

(d) How CountryLink can be better utilised to increase Tourism in New South Wales

Rail Corp should engage, and enter into partnership agreements, with Destination NSW and all regional tourism bodies to develop strategies and programs to cater for the needs of train travelling tourists and visitors, and to provide attractive cost effective alternative options for road transport tourists and visitors to elect to travel by rail transport.

Most regional centres have a signature event which attracts intra and interstate visitors to NSW. Such events include the annual Country Music Festival held in Tamworth, the annual Elvis Presley Festival in Parkes and the annual Blues Festival in Byron Bay, to mention a few.

Providing choices and options for cost effective rail transport and accommodation packages to regional centres to attend regional venues and signature events, coupled with a robust strategic marketing plan is the pathway to position CountryLink to capture a new and growing travel business.

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

Namoi Councils advocate greater consideration to transport for the aged, people with a disability and others residing in country NSW who cannot access mainstream public transport services. The ageing of the Australian population is well documented, as is the need to plan for services to meet the growing demand arising from this population in the future.

Currently the population of people over 65 years of age is 1,047,225 in NSW and 3,119,999 in Australia. By 2026 this is forecast to grow to 1,665,076 in NSW and 5,265,650 in Australia so that 18% of the population will be over 65 years and, by 2056, 25% will be in this age bracket.

The “elderly” (people over 65 years) should be seen as a growing market segment opportunity for CountryLink transport services. More than ever before, the “elderly” are more active, mobile, travel much more than in the past and are making valuable contributions to the economy and society in both the paid and volunteer workforces.

The “Seniors Card” market of people 60 or more years of age who are in paid work positions of less than 20 hours per week should also be seen as new business opportunity for CountryLink and marketed aggressively.

It is acknowledged that the “elderly” are not a homogenous age cohort. Their travel behaviour and use of transport modes depends on their personal capabilities and disposable income. But with the declining capability associated with age, CountryLink transport planning and service delivery must address the questions of access and flexibility of services if it is going to meet the transport needs of an ageing population.

(f) the extent to which regional public transport networks are integrated and how they can be better integrated;

Regional NSW public transport networks are vital to the social and economic wellbeing of regional communities. Given the current public debate and discourse about a second international airport for Sydney, and the often mooted changes to remove continued NSW regional access to Sydney Kingsford Smith Airport for the more profitable international air traffic, planning for an integrated and high speed inter-regional train travel service assumes much greater prominence and importance.

Sydney Kingsford Smith Airport underpins regional business, tourism and visitor travel to Sydney as the State's Capital. Namoi Councils' policy position is that Sydney Kingsford Smith Airport is a piece of national infrastructure that belongs to all Australians and that continued access from regional areas must always be a foundation stone of the operations of the Airport.

However, it would be judicious and astute for public transport planners to factor into future CountryLink business planning, strategies for daily return high speed regional rail services to Sydney to fill the void occasioned by any discontinuance or reduction in regional air service operator access to Sydney Airport.

(g) the role local councils can play in improving inter-regional public transportation networks; and

Since election of the O'Farrell Government in March 2011, a welcomed and much appreciated feature of the State Government's reform program and formulation of policy, strategies and legislative change has been reasonably widespread consultation and engagement with the public at large and key stakeholders, such as Local Government.

Local Government clearly has the resources and capacity to articulate community opinion from within its local government boundaries and the wider regional community on major State Government policy and issues.

When developing plans and strategies for new public transport infrastructure and improved inter-regional public transport services, NSW Councils are well qualified to inform regional transport strategies and provide relevant input, comment and opinion.

(h) the type of buses and trains that will be required for the provision of regional passenger services in the future.

Future regional bus and train services must offer passengers an intermodal seamless and comfortable service, combined with competitive and affordable fares that have the capacity to attract increased levels of patronage, and offer the travelling public a cost effective alternative to private motor vehicle transport.

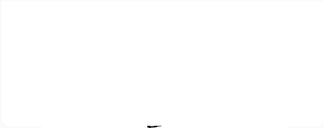
To reiterate previous comments, trains and buses must offer wireless internet access, battery charging facilities so as to allow passengers access to social media and permit business travellers to conduct business and commercial activities during travel time.

Future trains and buses must provide in-train/bus-travel entertainment services similar to in-flight air travel services.

3 CONCLUSION

Namoi Councils is appreciative of the opportunity to make a submission to the NSW Parliament Legislative Assembly State and Regional Development Committee of Inquiry into Inter-Regional Public Transport.

Namoi Councils wish the Committee every success in its endeavours to improve NSW inter-regional public transport which is without doubt a significant factor in the social and economic wellbeing of regional communities.



Stephen Bartlett
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16 May 2012