

**Submission  
No 123**

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

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## **BusNSW submission to Inter-regional public transport (Inquiry)**

### **Introduction**

BusNSW is the peak body for the NSW private bus and coach industry whose members continue to provide essential services on a daily basis and provide a key interface with the travelling public. BusNSW's mission is to foster the efficient and sustainable growth of public transport in NSW.

Buses and coaches play a vital role in delivering Public Transport in regional NSW. Improving bus and coach services in NSW will have a positive impact on reducing social exclusion, reducing pollution, improving health and safety, and improving energy security.

BusNSW welcomes this opportunity to make a submission to the Committee on how inter-regional public transport can better serve the needs of regional NSW.

#### **a) How CountryLink services can be improved?**

CountryLink provides an important role in connecting communities. Any changes to CountryLink should give high priority to how the services can deliver the objectives of social inclusion and regional development.

BusNSW believe that an expansion of the CountryLink coach services is a cost effective way to deliver improved services and reduce social isolation. A review should be undertaken to determine if CountryLink rail services can be replaced by

coach services on some routes to drive service improvements for customers (i.e. frequency and span of hours) and better value for tax payers.

The 2010 CountryLink review monitored service frequency, service connectivity, on-board facilities and ticketing systems and included 13 regional public meetings across NSW. BusNSW believes that this review should be used as a background document for the State and Regional Development Committee.

CountryLink coach services are currently procured using a tendering model. There should be a review of these coach contracts, and the methodology for procuring these services, with a view to having sustainable operations.

**b) How network linkages between CountryLink train and coach services can be improved?**

Service reliability is an ongoing concern for CountryLink rail services as they are impacted by the poor condition of many sections of the rail right-of-way which results in speed restrictions. CountryLink rail services are also given less priority than freight services and CityRail services, resulting in frequent unscheduled delays.

To improve network efficiency and further link towns, CountryLink needs to address reliability issues. Improved communications between CountryLink rail services and the CountryLink coach operators would also help to minimise the impacts of unscheduled delays. GPS monitoring and real-time information should be available at all CountryLink stops, as well as up-to-date on board manifests provided to the driver, to improve CountryLink coach services.

These improved communications would help to maximise all available capacity. Consideration should also be given to providing more staff at key interchange points which would greatly improve the customer's experience.

**c) The potential for CountryLink services to carry freight?**

There needs to be investment in the regional rail network to generate a greater proportion of freight being carried by rail. Regional coach services should carry small freight where it improves the viability of the service and is not undertaken at the expense of reliability and customer satisfaction.

For CountryLink coach services consideration needs to be given to wheelchair hoists and passenger luggage, as space for freight is limited. Timetables should allow time for freight transactions or movements without impacting on the customer's experience.

**d) How CountryLink can be better utilised to increase tourism in New South Wales**

Tourism is a major industry in NSW. The coach industry plays an important role in supporting the industry. BusNSW believes that the lack of investment in tourist related transport infrastructure is holding the industry back. Recent research has found that international visitors to Australia travelling by coach stay for 26 nights and spend \$8,246 on their trip, an annual contribution of more than \$2.3 billion to the Australian economy. International visitors travelling on charter or tour bus services

average 11 nights and spend \$8,166 on their trip. This equals annually more than 2.5 million nights of tourism and a contribution of almost \$2 billion to the Australian economy spread mostly between the NT, QLD and NSW. These figures compare favourably with aircraft travellers who stay an average 16 nights and spend \$6,933.

A small investment in coach related infrastructure will support the tourism industry and greatly improve the customer experience. Facilities for coaches throughout NSW need to be upgraded to world class standards.

CountryLink coach services provide flexible and efficient options for regional areas without access to rail services and can be better promoted as a form of transport for tourists visiting regional areas. There should be greater focus on promoting local bus services linking with CountryLink to give tourists access to tourist destinations in regional towns.

Recommendations were made in the 2010 CountryLink report to consider greater service connectivity for rural towns to larger regional centres, identifying many timetabling inefficiencies and a greater need for logical transport networks. Maximising connectivity to larger centres provides greater access to health services, education and employment, minimising the risk of social inequality.

Better coordinating local bus services to CountryLink services would improve overall efficiency. Many problems with the current network see services arriving to regional centres without a logical return journey available; making overnight stays the only way to travel on public transport in some regions.

Connections across the state, via Sydney, were also considered important in this CountryLink report.

A marketing strategy for regional events such as the annual Elvis Festival in Parkes should be developed to encourage a greater use of the inter-regional transport network, with an assurance of value and reliability. Public transport should be promoted through these campaigns targeting regional tourism.

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

Rural and regional bus services play an important role in providing village to village, village to town, town to town and town to regional centre connections. These services need to be provided in line with contracts and service planning guidelines which recognise the population of the community serviced. These services should be responsive to local patterns of travel demand, taking into account the needs of those who are most reliant on public transport.

Throughout NSW, a variety of public and private agencies and organisations provide transport services to people who are somehow disadvantaged in their ability to obtain public transportation (such as people with functional impairments or disabilities, older persons, those with low incomes, the young, and others without access to private automobiles). These transportation providers often receive funding from multiple sources, including federal, state, and local government, as well as charitable and non-profit organisations. Funds from such programs are often

accompanied by service objectives focused on specific clienteles and by program-specific rules, operating requirements, and reporting requirements. This leads to duplication of services and limits to ability of one service providing transport for other groups. Regional transport resources should be managed in a more coordinated way to meet such needs.

BusNSW recommends that the state, federal and local governments should work together through COAG to establish Regional Accessibility Councils across NSW comprised of key regional stakeholders with an interest or involvement in personal transport/accessibility, to identify the most pressing regional needs to improve regional social inclusion and to also identify ways for getting better use from existing transport resources to meet these needs.

**f) The extent to which regional public transport networks are integrated and how they can be better integrated?**

There is a need for CountryLink services and services operated under Rural and Regional Bus Service contracts to be coordinated so that CountryLink service timetables are designed to link with local services.

The village to village, village to town, town to town and town to regional centre connections provided under Rural and Regional Bus Service contracts should also be promoted via CountryLink to ensure the community is aware of all bus services available between destinations that are serviced by CountryLink.

**g) The role local councils can play in improving inter-regional public transportation networks?**

Local councils have an important role to play in inter-regional coordination and provision of Bus and Coach Infrastructure. They are key stakeholders with extensive local knowledge of transport disadvantage within their communities. They would be members of the Regional Accessibility Councils and may provide support services with the ability to play a coordinating role with transport operators through Local Traffic Committees.

Local councils also need to work closely with the state government to improve passenger facilities including bus shelters, lighting and disabled access.

Consideration must be made to coordinate planning for road upgrades in regional areas, particularly on routes where school and CountryLink services are run. An integrated approach between Government agencies and local councils would improve safety, reliability and infrastructure, in line with enhancing the customer's experience.

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

Manufacturers should be encouraged and assisted by Government to design vehicles that optimise the customer's experience for long distance travel. Emission control standards and wheelchair lifts are improving, however they can add to vehicle weight.

Technology is becoming more cost effective and passenger comfort could be improved by taking advantage of advances such as wireless internet and on board entertainment systems.

### **Conclusion**

A collaborative approach, between Government and the bus industry via BusNSW, should be fostered to enhance inter-regional public transport and promote social inclusion. A partnership approach to the development of sustainable CountryLink coach service contracts, as well as strategic communication and marketing, can deliver real service improvements to customers.

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