

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

**Organisation:** Bungendore Public Transport Group &  
Palerang Local Action Network for Sustainability

**Name:** Ms Melinda Hillery

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**RE: Submission to NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into Inter-reigonal Public Transport**

**GENERAL**

Thankyou for the opportunity to contribute to the Inquiry. Overall we would like to emphasize our view that the existing CountryLink network is an under-utilized resource that represents a major opportunity to improve public transport links throughout regional NSW and in and out of our major cities and centres.

In the medium term we believe the focus of development of inter-regional transport should be on upgrading the existing rail network to separate freight and passenger services in order to improve journey times on both networks. As the attendance and priorities of the over one hundred attendees at the recent Goulburn forum for the NSW Long Term Transport Masterplan indicated there is overwhelming interest in being able to use rails services to commute to Sydney and Canberra for daily and occasional work trips right across our region, as well as improving access to public transport for disadvantaged members of the community and travel for other purposes.

We would not like to see investment in a Very Fast Train at the cost of upgrading the existing network – we believe NSW can have a much better Somewhat Faster Train for less money in a shorter time reaching more people. We do however support the reservation of a corridor of land for the future event of a very fast train.

In the Canberra region cross-border integration is a very large barrier to public transport use and viability.

**TERMS OF REFERENCE**

Specifically in regard to the terms of reference of this inquiry:

*(a) how CountryLink services can be improved;*

Improved journey times from Canberra to Sydney to compete with car travel (down to 3hrs). This can be achieved through MFT processes (better pathway into Sydney, key track improvements, tilting train, improved signalling on canberra branch). Also develop a Canberra to coast service

*(b) how network linkages between CountryLink train and coach services can be improved;*

Sydney Canberra trains to go via Sydney airport. Coach service Canberra to Coast to allow coach train connection at Bungendore.

Running three services a day Sydney Canberra so connections are not dependent on the day of the week.

*(c) the potential for CountryLink services to carry light freight;*

This used to be how rail worked but we struggle to see how it would work now with unmanned stations and nowhere to store parcels etc. Would also potentially slow passenger services. Would be supportive if it could work. Bicycles are light freight.

*(d) how CountryLink can be better utilised to increase tourism in New South Wales;*

promote as a travel experience, agreements with accommodation providers at destinations. make sure there is a transfer between train station and accommodation so no need to try and find taxi etc in small country town or lug bags.

Promote travel with bikes (get rid of need for bicycle boxes as it is not possible to transport the bicycle box on a bike once you reach your destination)

Ability to transport bikes on coaches

*(e) how the amount of inter-regional travel undertaken by public transport can be increased;*

Frequency of service. Ability to make a return trip to closer centres in a day

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

Outside Sydney very poor integration of what limited public transport there is. Needs to be improved to make journeys viable.

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

Encouraging regional transport hubs that bring all services to one point.

Provided centralised information boards

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

Tilting diesel powered trains from Canberra to Sydney. Highlight key aspects of rail travel in the buffet car

## REGIONAL TRANSPORT:

Rural/regional residents do not have “fair parity” of transport availability compared to their city cousins. The comparison of 2 million trips per year on CountryLink compared with 300 million trips per year on CityRail is not a fair measure of the importance of each as distances travelled and the potential value (in terms of equity or access, savings in greenhouse gases, lower fatalities and reduced traffic on roads) is not reflected in these numbers. These numbers are evidence of an opportunity not yet realized.

We need to stocktake all available transport resources and infrastructure- including all existing services run by all levels of government and all companies, NGOs, etc, - and work to integrate/connect/expand these services.

Public transport must be available in regional areas to connect anyone who is unable to drive to essential services (e.g. shopping and health) and other transport hubs. This is an essential measure to prevent social isolation in regional areas.

We need to remove red tape that restricts full use of services, e.g. the Rixons bus service from south coast to Canberra, restricted by its funding from stopping in Bungendore and picking up or dropping off passengers.

Regional Transport Plans need to consider how they can support and encourage the development of a regional transport network tailored to the needs of local producers and processors distributing food and other locally produced products within the region as part of an overall goal of improving regional resilience to climate change and peak oil.

In the Canberra region we would like to see the investigation of local commuter trains running more frequently along the existing CountryLink route between Goulburn and Canberra. If this is not viable then there needs to be an integrated bus network across commuter areas outside the ACT into the ACT – individual bus routes developed locally may not be viable (as has been demonstrated in the past) but an integrated approach may work (e.g. Bus starting from Goulburn picking up commuters all the way down the Federal Highway and linking to smaller commuter bus route from Bungendore through Wamboin and Bywong ).

Promoting travel on local school buses needs to be investigated as one easy way of lifting the rate of public transport use in regional areas. If this was done at a state level, in consultation with private bus company representatives, it could make local campaigns to lift the use of public transport prior to campaigning for increased services, more effective.

Projects such as the Very Fast Train should not tie up precious resources that are required for the provision of public transport over a wide area of regional NSW. High speed rail lines are:

Dedicated lines for high speed trains only

Straight

Electrified

Need to be completely isolated (no such things as level crossings)

Generally do not carry freight

Stop infrequently

Generally operate up to 350 km/h

If the VFT does get up between Canberra and Sydney it would be likely to have only one or no stops in between, isolating communities with an existing service.

We would support long term planning to protect a corridor for an eventual VFT, but not at the expense of improving current facilities and services. A study should be encouraged into how the existing railway could be developed into a Medium Fast Train line between Sydney and Canberra with a target journey time for express services of 3 hours, which

would make rail services far more competitive, increase use and take cars and buses off our congested roads.

There is a great need to integrate transport services across the border with the ACT because so many of the transport destinations within our region are within the ACT. Some of the problems involved in making commuter public transport viable immediately around the ACT are tied up with coordinating services across the border, or the large challenges that the ACT faces in running an efficient, timely and reliable public transport service in a city with a decentralized lay-out). The solution to commuting in the Canberra region is buses crossing the border and reaching into satellite destinations such as Queanbeyan, Jerrabomberra, Bungendore and Yass. If Canberra goes down the guided bus path then regional buses could pick up outside the border then express into the various city centres on the bus pathways.

We would like to see the NSW Government look to the Victorian legislation that enabled non-operational rail lines to be made available to be developed into rail-trails for bicycle and foot touring throughout the regions.

#### FUNDING:

Public transport is an essential service that governments must provide, particularly for the disadvantaged in the community such as the aged, the very young, the sick and disabled and the poor. There should be no pressure for public transport to make a profit or even “break-even”; it should be run efficiently but remain subsidized. Perhaps this needs to be accounted for with a triple-bottom line approach so that the measure for ‘success’ of public transport is more than just hard dollars.

Public transport is also essential in cities to prevent traffic congestion and air pollution.

Given that NSW already has an extensive but under-utilised and neglected rail network, the first priority should be to upgrade and improve these resources to provide a superior service, rather than to invest massively in a new project such as a VFT. A medium-fast train running on an upgraded line is a more achievable goal.

The true cost of road-freight should be paid by the users. Trucking companies need to pay fully for the damage they do to roads and other infrastructure (particularly bridges) and those companies should be able to pass these costs on to consumers without suffering a market disadvantage.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute.

Sincerely

Melinda Hillery and other members of Bungendore Public Transport Group

On behalf Palerang Local Action Network for Sustainability.