

**Submission
No 139**

INQUIRY INTO INTER-REGIONAL PUBLIC TRANSPORT

Name: Mr Stephen Miller

Date Received: 25/05/2012

18th May 2012

Hon Andrew Gee MP
Legislative Assembly

Dear Mr Gee,

Re: Submission to Inquiry in Countrylink

Country passenger rail services remain an important link for people in regional NSW. Unfortunately its market share remains low compared to its high operating costs. One reason for this is that the XPT fleet is rarely able to operate to its fullest potential. The XPT power cars produce high levels of horsepower, yet they rarely put this power to good use. The main reason for this is that is due to the poor track alignments of NSW Mainlines resulting in low overall average speeds. The cost to remedy this problem would be astronomical. However, it is essential that action is taken to improve this problem; otherwise country rail passenger services will continue to remain redundant in the minds of most people. Very Fast Trains would certainly go a long way in restoring the profile of rail travel for most travellers, unfortunately to construct a dedicated corridor would cost \$17 billion from Sydney to Newcastle alone.

Tilting-trains can reduce running times from 15% to 40%, yet they can be introduced at 10% of the cost of VFT. An example of this is that tilt-trains can reduce running times from Sydney to Canberra from 4 hours, 15 minutes to 3 hours, 40 minutes and the running times from Sydney to Newcastle from 2 hours 25 minutes to 1 hour, 45 minutes. A Swedish X2000 Tilt-Train was trialled between Sydney and Canberra in 1995 by former Premier John Fahey. Track realignment work in strategic locations will lower running times further. Although earthwork associated with track realignment work is very high it is possible that the original track alignments that were bypassed early in the 20th Century could be reopened because they are better suited for higher speed operations than the existing double track routes. A good example of this is the Picton-Mittagong Loop Line that is about 5 kilometres shorter than the main line via Bargo. The original routes were bypassed to ease the grades for steam traction of 19th century technology, but the heavy grades are not barriers for modern diesels.

I would like to suggest that diesel tilting-trains could be introduced initially from Sydney to Canberra three times a day. An electric tilting-train service could be introduced operating every two hours during the day from Sydney to Newcastle. At a later stage diesel tilting-trains could be introduced from Sydney to Melbourne and Sydney to Brisbane to replace the XPT sets when they become life-expired. Tilting-trains would go a long way to lift the profile of rail services in NSW. Xplorer Railcars could operate on routes to Armidale, Dubbo, Grafton, Broken Hill and Wagga Wagga. The Xplorer railcars have lower operating costs than the XPTs, yet can operate on similar running times as the XPT. Road coaches should replace rail services to low patronage routes such as Werris Creek to Moree and Junee to

Griffith. Rail services should be concentrated on higher patronage routes like the North Coast and Sydney to Wagga Wagga.

Towns located in the far west of the State like Euabalong West, Ivanhoe and Menindee are difficult to serve by coach as there is no direct road link. Therefore, the Xplorer service should be maintained for the goodwill to people in these communities. I would propose that the single Xplorer service to Broken Hill should be increased to three services per week. Much discussion has been mooted regarding the future of the Casino- Murwillumbah line. The cost of rebuilding the line would come at a high cost with very return. However, I would like to suggest that the Queensland Rail network should be extended from Robina into northern NSW to at least Bryon Bay and possible to Casino. This would serve the people in the Northern Rivers district far better than a service from Sydney.

In the immediate future I would propose that the XPT services to Melbourne should remain unaltered. However, the XPT services to the North Coast should be replaced by an XPT service departing Sydney at about 8pm arriving in Brisbane about 10am the following day. That service would depart Brisbane about 7pm arriving in Sydney about 9am in following day. The day service from Sydney to Casino would remain unchanged; however the day service from Grafton to Sydney would start at Casino. The train lengths would be increased to about eight or nine cars to take up from the lack of a third service. The three daily Xplorer services to Canberra would be reduced to two services, with the third service replaced by an Endeavour service from Sydney to Goulburn. An Xplorer set would replace the XPT service to Dubbo. The Broken Hill service could operate from Sydney to Orange amalgamated with the Dubbo service.

The Xplorer service to Armidale would also remain unaltered except that the section operating to Moree would be omitted. This set could then form a service starting at Tamworth in the morning to Sydney, returning in the evening. Likewise the other surplus set could form a day- return service from Orange to Sydney. Rail passenger services have been of great interest to me for a long time. I believe that rail passenger services in NSW can have a bright future if action is taken to turn around the current situation. I hope my suggestions are accepted by the committee.

Yours Sincerely

Stephen Miller