

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

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*Northern Rivers*

*Regional*

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*of Councils inc*

22 May 2012

Mr Andrew Gee  
Chair  
State and Regional Development Committee  
Parliament House  
Macquarie St  
Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Mr Gee

**RE: SUBMISSION - INQUIRY INTO INTER-REGIONAL PUBLIC TRANSPORT**

The Northern Rivers Regional Organisation of Councils (NOROC) represents the local government areas of Tweed, Byron, Ballina, Lismore, Kyogle, Richmond Valley and Clarence Valley in northern NSW. Whilst NOROC represents the collective of councils in the Northern Rivers it does not reflect the opinions of each individual local government area.

Whilst the Northern Rivers continues to grow and expand as a region, there are also many challenges. The Northern Rivers has an aging population, a large indigenous population, unemployment rates that are traditionally higher than the state and national averages, and limited transport options beyond private vehicles.

NOROC supports the optimal development and use of public transport. Communities in the Northern Rivers are dispersed across villages, small towns and larger centres. Current public transport options are limited, inflexible and costly and this has a significant impact on the ability of people to get access to health services, education and employment.

Transport disadvantage in the Northern Rivers particularly affects young people, families on low incomes, the elderly, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and those with disabilities. In the absence of public transport there is therefore a reliance on private vehicle transport.

There is recognition by NOROC, local State and Federal Members of Parliament, community organisations, businesses and business organisations, and the general public, that access to coordinated transport options in the Northern Rivers is limited.

If the region is to adequately accommodate and cater for projected population growth, the aging population and the continued growth and development of the Gold Coast and South East Queensland – improving public transport needs to be a priority.

Given the proximity of the Northern Rivers to the Gold Coast it is imperative connectivity to the Gold Coast and South East Queensland be considered as part of any transport discussion.

CountryLink bus services began operating between Casino and Murwillumbah in 2004 after the closure of the Casino to Murwillumbah rail line. CountryLink buses connect passengers to the CountryLink train service in Casino. Daily services offer pick-ups in towns and villages that were not connected to the original Casino to Murwillumbah rail line.

There is general agreement that the CountryLink bus service in the Northern Rivers could better serve the needs of the community. The CountryLink service could be improved by:

- Offering local and intra-regional trips.
- Enabling residents and visitors to utilise buses as a regular commuter service allowing improved access to health care, employment and education, as well as helping to reduce social isolation for some sections of the community.
- Better timetabling and frequency of services to allow CountryLink buses to be used as commuter services.

NOROC has been advocating for the preparation of a Northern Rivers Integrated Regional Transport Plan to look at all transport issues in the region taking into account the social and economic needs of residents and businesses. NOROC was hoping this plan would be undertaken in 2012 but the NSW Government has indicated work will not begin until 2013 at the earliest following the completion of the NSW Long Term Transport Master Plan.

NOROC considers an integrated regional transport plan will take into account infrastructure projects planned by the Federal, NSW and Queensland and local governments, and will improve coordination and integration between transport nodes including freight, train, roads, walking, cycling and public transport options.

I thank the State and Regional Development Committee for the opportunity to offer this submission to the Inquiry into Inter-Regional Public Transport.

Yours faithfully

Ann Lewis  
Executive Officer

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