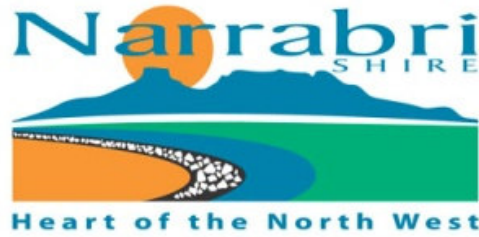


## **INQUIRY INTO INTER-REGIONAL PUBLIC TRANSPORT**

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**Date Received:** 18/05/2012



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

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## **SUBMISSION NARRABRI SHIRE COUNCIL**

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Narrabri Shire recognises itself as the heart of the North West, and in this title encompasses a large food bowl within the Shire boundaries. Narrabri Shire has a resident population of over 14,000 people across 13,065 square kilometres. The Local Government area also consists of the towns Wee Waa and Boggabri and the villages of Baan Baa, Bellata, Edgeroi, Gwabegar and Pilliga.



Narrabri Shire consists of approximately 75% of agricultural land which produces Wheat, Barley, Soya Beans, Sunflowers, Citrus, Beef, Pork as some example primary products. Also the Shire is home to producer of foods for niche markets such as olives, honey, pasta and other specialised products. Canned commodities and Cargill also operate businesses within the Shire in processing and packaging of food. There are also transport companies that freight food from Narrabri.

There is also an extensive mining industry in the Shire with currently coal mines in operation and coal seam gas wells currently in operation and in construction.

## **SUBMISSION**

### **How CountryLink Services Can Be Improved**

CountryLink is a vital service within the regional communities of NSW. The service provides the communities with access to main city centers which contain services unavailable in regional areas, such as medical, educational and interstate connections. The service has also become a vital part of increasing tourism to regional centres such as Narrabri Shire.

Throughout the services issues have been identified for improvement for all public sectors that utilize this service.

The issue of customer service has been raised locally from CountryLink at the base level. The lack of staffing on the arrival and departure of trains from the Narrabri Station has created a drop in passenger usage. Such issues are usually concerning the elderly, disabled or families who are unable to receive assistance in boarding or disembarking trains as there is a low level of staffing during these crucial times. This creates an unwelcoming environment to arriving and departing Narrabri. This is of concern as Narrabri Shire promotes the area for conferences and events which will increase patronage and put particular strain on the staff currently manning the stations.

Another issue is the level of security in travelling with CountryLink trains. Platforms are not security patrolled and carriages are not monitored for public safety. This does not promote this service as secure for the public members travelling. Also with alcohol consumption on trains not monitored it can be discouraging for families to travel using CountryLink. This could also be addressed by increase in staffing. A zero tolerance for unruly and offensive passengers should be upheld with passengers removed from trains at the nearest point should behavior continue.

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Maintaining clean and fully operational services for patrons. This is highly important to promote an efficient and safe travel option. This could also be extended to considering service attendance button systems for passengers requiring assistance medically or otherwise.

CountryLink services are also at risk of being encumbered by the increased rail traffic produced from mining particularly in areas such as the Narrabri Shire and also harvest seasons. This issue needs to be addressed as it is important to ensure that passengers will continue to utilize the service for reliability.

Entertainment and facilities should be reviewed to maintain a level of service to match competing modes of transport. In consideration of wireless internet and a free service or fee for service entertainment such as music or movies, keeping the cost to a minimum for passengers. This provides further incentive for professional people to utilize the service and also provides entertainment to regular patrons of the service. Also the provision of colouring in packs or educational packs to children to provide some interest in the area they are travelling through.

The seating of the elderly or disabled with young families on long haul trips does not always blend easily. Considerations should be given in addressing the possible needs required by different patrons of the CountryLink service to ensure a pleasant and comfortable travelling experience. This may include the seating of young families to a carriage with a small play area to assist the families in entertainment of children without disrupting other patrons. Also the consideration of elderly patrons being placed closer to facilities for easy access.

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**Recommendation: That staffing levels in regional areas be increased to ensure that all patrons enter and depart trains safely and comfortably with any assistance required, into a well lit and safe environment.**

**Recommendation That the consideration of extra staffing or security be available within trains for long haul journeys to enforce zero tolerance and maintain a safe environment for patrons.**

**Recommendation: The installation of duress or assistance button facilities to enforce a customer service priority to train travel.**

**Recommendation: CountryLink must also seek priority status from ARTC to ensure that the service is not encumbered by the increased rail traffic produced from mining.**

**Recommendation: That wireless facilities be provided within trains and also the consideration of other travel entertainment on a low fee basis.**

**Recommendation: The consideration of working towards providing a carriage for families with children with a small play area and also a designated section for elder patrons in order to provide a more pleasant environment for all patrons of the service.**

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## **How Network Linkages Between CountryLink Train And Coaches Service Can Be Improved?**

Linkages within the service are vital to the sustainability of the network as this must maintain a fluid system to ensure viability.

Network linkages in the Narrabri Shire have been highlighted as showing the following issues;

On time arrivals and departures are paramount to ensure that the best service can be to patrons and that all linkages can be made for patrons to travel throughout the network particularly as some networks will only travel to certain destination one day a week such as the Narrabri to Burren Junction Service.

There is also an issue of waiting times for people with connections. From Werris Creek train station to Tamworth via bus there is a two hour waiting time. This creates issues for patrons wishing to attend appointments in Tamworth.

Narrabri Shire is a transport hub being situated on the Newell Highway and the CountryLink Service line. However, there are issues in providing transport for people trying to travel to smaller destinations in the region. Narrabri Shire's tourism department has increased difficulty in providing transport options for people wishing to travel from Narrabri to places further west being Walgett or Lightning Ridge as the links do not connect. Also for people wishing to travel from Narrabri to Dubbo who have to first go through Sydney to reach their destination.

There is also irregular transport between smaller regional towns such as Wee Waa and Burren Junction which have limited days for public transport options. This does not support the regional development of these towns and does not allow fluid links with other transport services to other areas.

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**Recommendation: That the timing of arrivals and departures be paramount to the service to provide a reliable service and the times be reviewed to ensure a fluid system of providing the transport service to minimize waiting periods.**

**Recommendation: That further services be provided on a regular basis to smaller centres with links to areas surrounding Narrabri Shire.**

**Recommendation: That CountryLink work with regional public transport providers to ascertain further service connections to the region.**

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## **The Potential For CountryLink Service To Carry Light Freight**

Narrabri Shire Council supports the potential of CountryLink to carry light freight. This has the capacity to minimize the amount of heavy vehicle traffic along highways. This also provides another diversification for CountryLink and the ability to provide the staff to ensure a beneficial service for both passengers and those utilizing the freight service.

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**Recommendation: That the use of CountryLink to carry light freight be supported and introduced expeditiously.**

**Recommendation: that the light freight service not affect the provision of service to passengers or the cost of travel.**

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### **How CountryLink Can Be Better Utilised To Increase Tourism In New South Wales.**

Narrabri Shire Council tourism department currently works with CountryLink to produce packages to the Narrabri Shire. These are created in conjunction with motels and service providers in the Narrabri Shire and are advertised once every two months.

There are a number of simple ideas to promote tourism in the area without the promotion of packages. A promotional cd or blue tooth communication can be used to advise people of the tourist attractions along the journey. This could include additional information on towns and tourist attractions such as Mount Kaputar and promote the facilities available such as bushwalking, lookouts, cabin accommodation, sawn rocks and sometimes the experience of snow during winter. There are also the telescopes in Narrabri Shire that interlink with the Parkes telescopes and many historical areas along the journey. These could be offered to passengers as an entertainment choice.

Also the introduction of activity packs for children to identify landmarks along the journey and promote family activities within the region to increase the interest of families to visit the region. Narrabri Shire Information Centre currently has packs for children regarding the Shire landmarks and attractions and finds this stimulates families to visit areas they were not originally part of their journey.

Narrabri Shire currently has two main festivals that are conducted through the year, the first being Nosh On The Namoi a food and wine festival and also the Boggabri Drovers Campfire, these along with conferences that Narrabri Shire is encouraging to the region create the ideal activities for active strategic marketing to promote CountryLink travel to the region.

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**Recommendation: That strategic marketing is used to develop specialized packages for signature events in regional areas.**

**Recommendation: That tourism based information is provided on trains and buses as an entertainment option and also children be given activity packages with a tourism base.**

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### **How The Amount Of Inter-Regional Travel Undertaken By Public Transport Can Be Increased.**

The services provided by CountryLink are vital however the fluidity of the service must be reviewed before a campaign to promote the service can increase travelers. The services currently provided do not provide a fluid transport service throughout the regions. All travel sources provide excellent access to metropolitan areas but interregional travel is stilted. As

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identified for patrons to travel to Dubbo from Narrabri they must travel by rail to Sydney and return to Dubbo. Also patrons wishing to extend travels from Narrabri Shire further West to Walgett cannot connect to a CountryLink Service without travelling south through to Dubbo. There is a stilted service from major centre's to the coast such as Coffs Harbour and quite often provides a large amount of stopover time between connecting services.

Creating a fluid travelling plan could provide further interest in the use of interregional travel and provide a product to promote to increase interest in rail and coach travel.

The use of public transport by elder citizens particularly pensioners is increasing and will continue to rise with the increase of the over 65 years population, 18% of the population by 2026. The increase in this dimension of population is also increased in the active lifestyles of this age group and is important in consideration of campaigning and facility provision. This market is ideal for the promotion of signature events and the "Seniors Card" is a strong incentive for this age group to travel.

Also families are strong area for consideration. Families encouraged by high service and facilities will opt for alternative travel considerations particularly if there is a fluid transport system available throughout the region. Narrabri Shire does not have a pediatrician and most families travel to Tamworth for this service as well as many others. To provide a seamless service inter-regionally would ensure that families could access these facilities and would increase patronage.

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**Recommendation: To review the current provision of Inter-Regional services to address tying in areas to make the service flow effectively throughout the region.**

**Recommendation: To increase facilities for the targeted areas of "Senior Card" holders and families.**

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### **The Extent To Which Regional Transport Networks Are Integrated And How They Can Be Better Integrated.**

The CountryLink transport networks work well on their own, although stopover times and delays should be identified and addressed, particularly for people travelling to main centre's such as Tamworth. However the networks do not flow fluidly together throughout the region as stated previously in this submission and integration of the networks should be addressed to ensure increased patronage.

Air and rail travel provide that backbone to the community in Narrabri Shire. These services provide the access required by people residing in rural areas to service within metropolitan areas. As Narrabri Shire has a increasing mining industry, coal seam gas industry, agriculture and research and development it is important for the Shire to maintain service to metropolitan and inter-regional areas to provide access for travelling workforces, qualified professionals, as well as the community. These services provide the social and economic wellbeing for the Shire.

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Due to the continued discussion of reducing or removing NSW regional access to Sydney Kingsford Smith Airport it is vital that a daily return high speed regional train service be provided to ensure that the continuance of services be provided for the sustainability of the regions.

Narrabri Shire uses daily transport methods to obtain the services of skilled professionals, particularly in the medical field and this must be identified as a definitive matter to be addressed for the future sustainability of the Shire.

Narrabri Home and Community Care currently provide a bus service to Tamworth once a week for people to access medical appointments and other such services. This should be considered an essential service especially for the aging population.

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**Recommendation: That that a daily return high speed regional train service be provided to ensure that the continuance of services to the regional communities.**

**Recommendation: That all public transport providers within the Shire be considered main Stakeholders in relation to developing an intergrated transport system.**

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### **The Role Local Councils Can Play In Improving Interregional Public Transport Networks**

Narrabri Shire Council is actively engaged in community consultations to ensure that the Shire is actively addressing issues relating to the community and key stakeholders. This in turn ensures that Narrabri Shire Council can actively engage in consultation in relation to improving inter-regional public transport networks.

The inter-regional public transport networks are vital for the sustainability of rural communities and local Council's are well equipped to identify the active needs of the communities they represent.

Narrabri Shire is a main transport hub with access from the Newell Highway, the Kamilaroi highway, rail and air. With all the main transportation requirements found within the Shire Narrabri Shire Council has a foundation of understanding the fundamental requirements to interlink all areas of transport.

### **The type of buses and trains that will be required for the provision of regional passenger service in the future.**

A high speed train service is needed for the continuing sustainability of the regional rail service to ensure that a day return service can be provided to regional areas.

Upgrades of current services with entertainment features, upgraded toilet facilities and disabled facilities will increase the safety of passengers and be provided with minimum change to the current trains.



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CountryLink coaches are of high quality however, upgrades of entertainment features, upgraded toilet facilities and disabled facilities will increase the safety of passengers.

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**Recommendation: That all trains and buses be considered for upgrades to ensure they are user friendly.**

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Narrabri Shire Council is supportive of this inquiry to inter-regional public transport and is appreciative of the opportunity to provide comment in reflection to the needs of the Narrabri Shire. The inter-regional public transport system is potentially the main asset to the NSW infrastructure and development of regional communities.