

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

**Organisation:** Albury City  
**Name:** Mr Michael Keys  
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Mr Andrew Gee MP  
Committee Chair  
State and Regional Development Committee  
Parliament House  
Macquarie Street  
Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Mr Gee

**Inquiry Into Inter-Regional Public Transport**

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the State and Regional Development Committee's Inquiry Into Inter-Regional Public Transport.

AlburyCity has reviewed the terms of reference of the inquiry, which seeks to inquire into how inter-regional public transport can better serve the needs of regional New South Wales. The Albury community's strategic plan, Albury 2030, identifies the development of an integrated transport network as a key outcome for the community, and AlburyCity is keen to facilitate this through measures such as enhanced public transport. A detailed response to the issues raised in the terms of reference is attached for your consideration.

Should you or your staff wish to discuss our submission, please contact Steven Swann, Traffic Engineer on [REDACTED]

Yours faithfully

Michael Keys  
**Acting General Manager**

CC: Greg Aplin MP, Member for Albury

## Introduction

Albury is a bustling city at the central point on the highway between Melbourne and Sydney. The population is just over 50,000. Albury has a vibrant and diverse CBD which serves as the base for a larger regional population of 170,000.

Albury is well connected when it comes to transport. The Hume Highway provides road connections to Melbourne and Sydney, with other regional destinations accessible by connections to the highway. Albury also has the third busiest airport in regional NSW, with approximately 300,000 passengers passing through the terminal each year. Rail connections are available to the north and south.

Public transport in Albury is provided in the form of rail and bus services. Train services include the XPT service, operated by CountryLink, and running between Sydney and Melbourne. V/Line also operate services between Melbourne and Albury. Albury is serviced by a single train station, located on the eastern fringe of the Albury CBD, meaning that train usage in Albury tends to be between Albury and another regional destination, rather than within Albury.

Bus services include interstate, regional and local services. Interstate buses run between Melbourne to Albury, Canberra and Sydney, as well as connecting Albury to Adelaide and Mildura. Regional buses provide regular services between Albury and Beechworth, Corowa, Corryong and Mount Beauty, with services to Falls Creek being provided during the winter snow season.

Public transport use in Albury is relatively low – the ABS Census indicates that in 2006, less than 1% of Albury residents travelled to work using public transport, and of that 1%, over 95% travelled on buses, which are the predominant form of public transport in Albury. Private motor vehicle use for the journey to work exceeded 90%.

## How CountryLink services can be improved

The principal concerns for persons considering utilising public transport in Albury are:

- Reliability of the service, particularly between Albury and Melbourne; and
- Comparison between public and private transport.

Improving CountryLink services requires these concerns to be considered and appropriately addressed.

In recent years, trackwork between Melbourne and Albury has impacted on the reliability of services between these two destination. Works were undertaken to upgrade the infrastructure along the line, including replacement of ballast, sleepers and rails. During this period, the train service was either unreliable or unavailable, with replacement by bus service a frequent occurrence. The bus service added considerably to the length of the journey. Following completion of the works, a number of faults



were identified with the works that required further remediation, which resulted in additional disruptions to the rail service. A limited service is now in place between Albury and Melbourne, however public confidence in the service has been eroded as a result of these activities.

CountryLink services also compete with air travel and private motor vehicles. For a family of four to travel from Albury to Melbourne by train costs approximately \$160 and takes 3 and a half hours. The same trip by private vehicle costs approximately \$60 (taking into account just under \$50 for petrol plus \$13.80 for tolls) and takes just over 3 hours. The equivalent air travel costs approximately \$750 one way (taking into account the cost of airfares and a taxi to the Melbourne CBD), but reduces travel time to approximately one and a half hours.

For a family of four, the private motor vehicle is considered faster, and has a lower direct cost, than public transport by train – even though other costs, such as parking in Melbourne, and the costs of owning and maintaining the vehicle, are not considered. The motor vehicle is also perceived as more convenient – there is no waiting time in between transfers, and the ability to go wherever else you want once in Melbourne. Air travel is the preferred method of travel for persons who place a premium on time and convenience – in particular, those travelling for business purposes – which public transport simply cannot compete with.

### **How network linkages between CountryLink train and coach services can be improved**

Connections between CountryLink train and regional bus services in Albury are made at the Albury train station. In general, regional bus service arrivals and departures align with the train services. The principal improvement that could be made would be frequency of services – more frequent services could encourage more use of public transport.

It should be noted that local bus services do not directly connect to CountryLink services, as local buses do not currently service the Albury train station. To access local bus services in Dean Street requires a walk of almost 1km from the train station, which is an issue for persons with mobility issues or young children, as well as tourists with large amounts of luggage. Improving the connection between local bus services and CountryLink train and coach services would eliminate this issue, and this would require modification of local bus services.

### **The potential for CountryLink services to carry light freight**

Freight services in Albury are provided through a mixture of rail and road. Albury has an intermodal hub at Ettamogah, where heavy freight can be transferred between rail and road. The majority of light freight in Albury utilises the road network for distribution.

CountryLink services could be used to carry light freight, although there are a number of issues with this. The use of CountryLink rail services for light freight transport would not result in a significant



decrease in local traffic, as vehicles would still be required to travel to the Albury train station to drop off or collect light freight: at best this would result in a substitution of large trucks for small ones, although there may be an increase in the number of trucks required for the same number of items. Loading and unloading of light freight may require dedicated facilities at train stations, and for safety reasons, may need to be separated from passenger movements. Finally, loading and unloading of freight at train stations may increase the amount of time required to stop at each station, potentially increasing travel times.

However, if these issues could be overcome, and if the carrying of light freight were not at the expense of passengers, there is no reason why light freight could not be carried on CountryLink services. Fees obtained through the transport of light freight could be used to reduce fares for passengers, improving the ability of CountryLink passenger services to compete with other modes of services.

#### **How CountryLink can be better utilised to increase tourism in NSW**

In 2008, 342,000 Domestic Overnight Visitors came to Albury. Of these visitors, 121,000 were visiting friends and relatives, 69,000 were here on business and 119,000 were here for holiday and leisure. On average, 38% of overnight visitors are from Melbourne, while 19% are from Sydney. Tourism in Albury could benefit from improved CountryLink services, by encouraging more people from Melbourne to travel, as well as by increasing the proportion travelling from Sydney.

In addition to the tourism attractions of Albury itself, the city also operates as a hub for a number of local tourism attractions in the surrounding district – food and wine regions, events and conferences, historic towns, natural attractions such as the Alpine region and the River Murray. By enhancing connections between the rail and coach services servicing Albury and surrounding areas, access to key tourist attractions could be enhanced, with the potential to attract greater tourist numbers.

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

There are two ways to increase the level of public transport usage. One is to encourage additional use of public transport. The other is to discourage the use of alternative means of transport.

Additional use of public transport can be encouraged through the provision of more resources – making services more frequent, more direct, and covering larger service areas. It is understood that this comes at a cost, however given the significant costs associated with excessive use of private motor vehicles, diversion of funds towards public transport could have an overall benefit to society. Enhanced flexibility of services (demand-responsive rather than fixed routes) could overcome the attitude frequently stated by people that public transport does not go to or from the locations they desire. Finally, additional information on the range of travel options – including public transport – can enable people to make more informed choices. Information includes not only the frequency and time of public transport services, but in an integrated fashion, would include a comparison of the relative

costs of each travel mode – informing travellers of the total cost of their trip, including environmental costs, rather than just the direct costs of the trip.

Discouraging other means of transport is seen as an unpopular means of increasing public transport usage, generally from the point of view that it impacts on people's ability to choose. However, high levels of motor vehicle use has its own costs – such as pollution, and time lost through congestion – and although these are indirect rather than direct costs, they can be significant. A move towards fairer transport costing, as recommended in such instruments as the Henry Tax Review, would provide the public with better information on the actual cost of private motor vehicle travel compared to public transport (in a similar way to changes in electricity and water pricing structures in recent years), which would encourage more sustainable transport choices.

### **The extent to which regional public transport links are integrated and how they can be better integrated**

This issue has been addressed in the previous comment on how network linkages between CountryLink train and coach services can be improved.

### **The role local councils can play in improving inter-regional public transportation networks**

While local councils in general do not have a direct role in provision of public transport, it is in the community's best interests for council to adopt a strong role of advocacy between the community and those responsible for provision of public transport.

Albury's Community Strategic Plan (Albury 2030) contains a number of strategies to respond to the community's requirements, including enhancing public transport. Local councils can play a role in improving inter-regional public transportation networks, and AlburyCity initiatives include the following:

- Developing and enhancing tourism infrastructure, including the provision of a new Visitor Information Centre at the Albury Train Station, as well as redevelopment of the railway precinct;
- Developing an integrated transport strategy, which includes public transport;
- Focussing on development of the train network inland, and between capital cities, as well as provision of accessible and affordable bus transport – AlburyCity has established a Public and Community Transport Working Group for this task

These initiatives are an example of those that could be implemented by other local councils to facilitate improvements in public transport.



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

This question has been partially addressed in response to the issue of increasing public transport usage. In general, any form of transport that allows public transport to more effectively compete with private vehicles should be pursued – in general, such vehicles will be faster, cheaper, and more convenient than current ones. Several suggestions include:

- High speed rail link between major centres, to make rail travel faster than travel by car, and cheaper than travel by air;
- Smaller buses – to allow bus services to access more local roads;
- Smarter buses – Demand-responsive routes, better provision of information to users, and vehicles that make more use of improvements in vehicle safety and efficiency.