

**Submission
No 39**

INQUIRY INTO INTER-REGIONAL PUBLIC TRANSPORT

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Submission
to the
NSW State and Regional Development Committee
Inquiry into inter-regional public transport

This is a personal submission based on a recent experience of mine. It relates to the inquiry's terms of reference a, c, d, e and h.

Over the weekend of 23-25 March this year, Bicycle NSW ran a cycling event in Orange which about 400 cyclists attended. I was one of them - just.

Because of CountryLink's irrational restrictions on carrying bikes, I was unable to take my own bike on the train. On an XPT train with five or more carriages, in which one economy-class car seats 68 and a first-class one 44, there are spaces for five (5) bikes in total. These must be disassembled and packed in a box for transit. Folding bikes with small wheels, which can fold into a space 79cm long, 59cm high and 36cm wide, and contained in a cover, are able to be taken on as hand luggage in the seating compartment.

My bike, though a folding bike and in a cover, has normal-sized wheels (70cm diameter). When folded it fits within a space 85cm x 75 x 28 - no more than a large suitcase, and smaller than many bike boxes, but still too large to be taken on as carry-on luggage. It can only be booked through, for \$12.10, in the luggage compartment. I have no objection to that, but all five places were taken by the time I got round to doing so. Five places on a six- or eight-car train is ridiculously inadequate.

The requirement that bikes be disassembled is also unnecessarily restrictive: part of the point of cycling is to liberate the traveller from the tyranny of the car. The box requirement eliminates this possibility, because the box cannot be carried on a bike.

I did manage to hire a bike from an Orange bicycle dealer. I understand there is only one suitable bike available for hire in the town. So – lucky me. But how many others were like me? I could not get to Orange by car, and no other options were available. How many others in a similar position were discouraged from attending the event because of the ludicrous way CountryLink discriminates against bicycles? How much did Orange's motels, restaurants and bars lose because CountryLink is too choosy about what luggage it will carry?

I use the word discriminate because it was used by a CountryLink employee (who was in every respect extremely helpful and polite) to explain the situation to me when I was trying to make my booking. When I pointed out to another CountryLink employee that CityRail would allow my bike on board, she told me the XPT could not take my bike because it was a "premium service". What kind of premium service provides worse service and less convenience than a standard service?

Cycling is already undergoing a major renaissance in this country, as the boom in bike sales, and the increasing use of bikes as commuter transport show. Cycle tourism should be encouraged in parallel with this as a growth area for a tourism industry which is struggling with the high dollar and the high price of petrol. Cycling encourages a more leisurely form of tourism which is more genuinely relaxing than travel by car. Back roads are a better way to view the country than main highways.

Properly set up, trains, including the XPT, could take advantage of this obvious tourism opportunity. It already has services to many towns and regions well suited to bicycle tourism. Many regional towns already promote themselves as cycling destinations, and host cycling events. The commercial opportunity here for CountryLink is obvious. CountryLink was completely unaware of the Bicycle NSW event in Orange. Its marketing department clearly needs a shakeup.

I suggest that CountryLink:

a Make its XPT services more attractive by increasing their frequency from Sydney to major centres such as Orange to two a day (one morning, one afternoon) in each direction.

b Increase the volume of small freight items which each train can carry, and end its discrimination against bicycles in particular.

c Improve the promotion of its services by actively co-ordinating publicity and capacity with regional events when they occur. This will require an active marketing department, and the ability to schedule more trains, or differently configured trains, as necessary. The different configuration I have in mind would simply be extra luggage capacity.

Yours faithfully,

Christopher Henning