

INQUIRY INTO INTER-REGIONAL PUBLIC TRANSPORT

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Submission to the NSW Legislative Assembly Inquiry into Inter-Regional Public Transport

Transport Action Group of Sustainable Living Armidale Inc.

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General

Overall CountryLink provides a high quality of inter-regional rail and coach services. It is clear that much work has been done by CountryLink in recent years to improve customer service, provide better and healthier food choices and reduce station standing times. We commend the New South Wales Government for continuing to provide these services.

Rail provides a higher quality of service for the passenger and must at least be retained to locations currently served or expanded to serve more. It is also a safer and more ecologically sustainable form of transport than road-based modes. Per passenger kilometre there are far fewer 'greenhouse' and other pollutant emissions, and many fewer deaths and injuries than travel by private car.

Specific Terms of Reference

We submit the following comments specific to each of the Inquiry's Terms of Reference:

(a) How CountryLink services can be improved.

CountryLink passenger services should be expanded by extending services on the existing network that currently have no train services. The Main North Line should once again provide services from Sydney to Brisbane. This requires a significant financial investment to rejuvenate abandoned tracks, yet it is considered a worthwhile long-term investment in the interests of ecological sustainability and equity within our community, especially with an increasingly aging population.

There needs to be significant improvement in tracks that are currently used. Those between Armidale and Tamworth are a prime example. The journey from Sydney to Tamworth is quite fast, certainly competitive with road transport in terms of time. Yet north from Tamworth the train takes two hours to reach Armidale, which is far slower than travelling by car along the highway. Priority should be given to track work to permit existing CountryLink trains to travel at the rapid speeds they are capable of.

(b) How network linkages between CountryLink train and coach services can be improved.

Significant studies are probably required to assess the extent of existing services, potential for new services and whether arrival and departure times can be altered to better serve the needs of various communities serviced. Consideration should also be given to linkages between all CountryLink transport services and those of private operators.

(c) The potential for CountryLink services to carry light freight.

This is supported, as it could enhance the financial viability of passenger services and reduce road transport movements. We draw your attention to the 2011 Regional Rail Freight Policy Report submitted to the NSW Government by Friends of the Northern Railway (FONR) into expanding rail freight in country New South Wales. (www.fonr.org.au)

(d) How CountryLink can be better utilised to increase tourism in New South Wales.

Better packages for families and groups, including significant discounts, more space for and promotion of the carriage of bicycles. "Motor rail", where significant trains had a roll-on, roll-off car transport carriage may be of significant benefit to increase tourist traffic.

There should be more promotion to international tourists for travelling in New South Wales by rail, including 'off the beaten track', that is the specific promotion of services other than linking Brisbane and Melbourne. More international tourists travelling this way could enhance patronage on these vital services.

(e) How the amount of inter-regional travel undertaken by public transport can be increased.

This can be achieved by investing significantly over the long term in the capital development of rail passenger services and ancillary connecting coach services. A proportion of the State's existing road capital expenditure budget should be set aside each for strategic development of rail infrastructure. The existing XPL and XPT trains are both capable of significantly higher speeds than many sections of track currently permit.

Therefore investment in track upgrades should be given priority with the specific aim of permitting increased speeds along sections that are currently restrictive.

(f) The extent to which regional public transport networks are integrated and how they can be better integrated.

Current levels of integration are as low as the general level of development of regional public transport networks. Significant studies are required to identify problems and options for achieving improved integration.

(g) The role local councils can play in improving inter-regional public transportation networks.

Councils need to be involved in promoting the improved rail and bus services to their local communities. They can also provide specific tourism information to promote CountryLink services to tourists, including from international origins. Councils also need to be involved in planning local public transport that links with inter-regional services and the provision of high-quality transport interchanges, for example, the areas around railway stations.

(h) The type of buses and trains that will be required for the provision of regional passenger services in the future.

Trains that provide a range of cost options from cheap to luxurious would be highly desirable as more choice could result in more customers. Options should include:

- Lowest cost seats with minimal luggage allowance
- Lower cost overnight sleeper reclining seats
- Higher cost luxury overnight sleeper compartments
- Family / group travel compartments
- Link between passenger travel and light freight e.g. option for higher allowance
- Silent / quiet carriage (as currently being trialled on CityRail)
- Luxury lounge carriages
- Lowest cost food options
- Premium food and beverage options
- Maximum possible wireless internet coverage