

**Submission  
No 10**

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

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I feel Countrylink does a very good job on the Canberra to Sydney run, which I use most, perhaps 40 times a year, though the absence of some night trains on some days is a bother and one sometimes therefore has to take a bus, which is awful as the lights are poor, the seats uncomfortable and unbookable and there is no buffet etc. It is a shame that more train seats are not occupied on this route and it may be a good idea to advertise spot trips of, say \$10 each way, on days when the booking is light...? It might also help to devise some simple sort of loyalty program, e.g., you take 10 trips and the eleventh is free, etc.

One problem on the Canberra Sydney run is the length of time the trains take. Of course, they stop a lot, which is nice, but for many people, the bus is the obvious choice because [a] it leaves from Jolimont, not Kingston; [b] it takes 3 ¼ to 3 ½ hours (depending on whether it stops at the airport) and is ALWAYS on time, whereas the train is often late and takes 4 and ½ hours; and [c] it costs less. Of course, it is an awful trip and the train is far more congenial, but the young and the in-a-hurry don't care about that. In general people have chosen speed and frequency over comfort – compare the discomfort of modern planes, buses and cars, with the luxury of the U.S. Pullman trains in the old days and one can see the truth of this. One does wonder, though, whether there is any possibility of improving the track between Goulburn and Canberra and running the odd express train at at least bus speeds? The time the train takes never bothers me, and I suppose it never bothers the pensioner / concession passengers, but a faster schedule might attract a younger or an adult ridership??

The Action bus connection from Kingston to Canberra centre is also a problem. For example, the early morning train from Sydney is scheduled to arrive Canberra at 11.17. Action puts on a special bus, scheduled to depart for the city at 11.30. It does so, whether the train is on time or not. On one occasion the train got to Canberra at 11.29 and I exited the station to see the bus simply drive off, with no passengers..... The same problem exists for the evening train, except at weekends when there is no service at all provided.

In general, it is necessary to put the trains better in the public eye because most people don't seem to know [a] that they exist and [b] that they are more comfortable than any other form of transport available. I also think it a good idea to try to encourage all parties (tourism bodies, local councils and all advertising modes), to at least mention the existence and comfort of the trains, and to a lesser extent

the connecting buses. Too often people assume you have to drive - they never seem to know that there are very comfortable alternatives to driving. A very simple visual TV ad showing comfortable train seats and views from, with a simple one line message 'it is more comfortable NOT to drive' or something like that, flashed on from time to time might help.

On the whole I think Countrylink does a very good job with its limited patronage. I often use the overnight sleeper service to and from Melbourne, and appreciate the free snack and breakfast and the package of toothpaste and such things. Again, the message could be got across that if you want to be in Melbourne (or Sydney) bright and early, then you have to go by train - who wants to get up at 3 a.m. to make a plane connection?

One thing about the overnight train though - it is too fast for the track and is very rough, especially if you are in the end sleeper compartments. Does it have to travel so fast?

A final point: reliability and punctuality. Trains are very poor on both counts. They are often replaced by buies, or they don't run via Strathfield or they are much delayed by 'trackwork'. I feel a new policy should be instituted whereby every attempt was made to make sure the trains ran *as timetabled*. There are very few trains on the tracks these days (unlike the 1950's, for example, when far more trains ran and kept far better times), so why can they not keep to their schedule? This is important and needs attention.

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