

**Submission
No 114**

INQUIRY INTO INTER-REGIONAL PUBLIC TRANSPORT

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The Committee Manager
State and Regional Development Committee
Parliament House
Macquarie St
Sydney NSW 2000

Submission to Senate Inquiry into Inter-regional public transport

The Illawarra Forum is the peak body working for community services and organisations in the Illawarra and the Shoalhaven.

The Illawarra Forum:

- supports community organisations;
- promotes expertise and innovation;
- fosters industry development; and
- advocates for social justice.

THE AREA

The Illawarra and Shoalhaven covers approximately 5784 square kilometres sprawled along the south east coast of New South Wales. The region is extremely diverse, with urban centres such as Wollongong City (NSW's third largest city), Shellharbour City, and Nowra; large suburban sprawl, many outlying villages, and rural areas.

Wollongong Local Government Area covers an area from Helensburgh in the north to Lake Illawarra in the south. Wollongong has a population of approximately 200,000, spans an area of 714km sq, and is the third largest city in New South Wales (Sydney and Newcastle are 1st and 2nd largest), and the tenth largest city in Australia.

Shellharbour Local Government Area ranges from Albion Park Rail to Dunmore, has a population of approximately 66,000, and spans an area of 154km sq.

Kiama Local Government Area covers an area of 256km sq from Minnamurra River in the north to Gerroa in the south. Approximately 21,000 people live in the Kiama LGA.

Shoalhaven Local Government Area, with a population of approximately 98,000, consists of forty-nine towns and villages over an area of 4,568 km sq on the South Coast of New South Wales. This geographic area also includes the Jervis Bay Territory with an important Aboriginal community at Wreck Bay.

THE ISSUES

The diversity of settlement and the vast distances has resulted in many people in the Illawarra and Shoalhaven experience geographic and social isolation. Among the groups most vulnerable to this isolation are:

- young people;
- people living with physical or mental illness or disability;
- people living on Centrelink benefits, pensions or low incomes;
- older people ;
- carers of older people and people with a disability; and
- people experiencing an emergency or crisis.

Public transport, particularly in the Shoalhaven area is extremely limited, with Countrylink services stopping at Bomaderry, which is in the North of the region, leaving the majority of the region with little or no access to inter-regional public transport.

Some examples of difficulties caused by the lack of public transport, and in particular rail transport are:

- Absence of viable public transport to travel to health and medical services. For example, people living in Ulladulla may need to attend mental health appointments in Sydney. These appointments can only be made for 7am, which means consumers must leave Ulladulla by 4am. The Shoalhaven Community Transport Service cannot operate before 7am, and there is no public transport, so for people without family support, attendance at these vital appointments is impossible;
- Lack of viable transport to enable disadvantaged people to take advantage of educational opportunities including preschool, primary and secondary schools, Tertiary education such as TAFE and University;
- Inability to access training including work experience and apprenticeships;
- Lack of viable transport to enable disadvantaged people to take advantage of employment opportunities. For example, there are employment opportunities in the industrial zone at South Nowra, but no public transport accesses the area.
- Inability to participate in social and community events, which leads to social isolation and increased incidence and severity of mental illness.

The current NSW Government incentives for people to move out of Sydney and other major cities will encourage population growth in both the Illawarra and Shoalhaven areas. However, there is still a disproportionate investment in public transport between Sydney and regional areas. *Illawarra Forum recommends extension of the current rail services into the southern Shoalhaven and that investment in public transport be commensurate with population growth.*

Transport disadvantage is a significant issue throughout much of the Illawarra, and in particular in suburbs with low socio-economic indicators, such as Port Kembla, Warrawong, Warilla and Albion Park; and Bomaderry, Nowra, Ulladulla, and the Bay and Basin area.

Viable public transport is fundamental to communities being resilient. Its members should have access to health and other services, education, and employment. Such access increases opportunity to enjoy health and wellbeing, and to engage in social and community activities.

The Australian Government's vision of a socially inclusive society is one in which all Australians feel valued and have the opportunity to participate fully in the life of our society. All Australians be able to learn by participating in education and training; work by participating in employment, in voluntary work and in family and caring; engage by connecting with people and using their local community's resources; and have a voice so that they can influence decisions that affect them. (Australian Government Social Inclusion website <http://www.socialinclusion.gov.au/>)

To enable more equitable access to inter-regional public transport in the Illawarra and Shoalhaven, the Illawarra Forum recommends:

- *Shoalhaven free shuttle service, similar to the existing free 'Gong Shuttle'. This free shuttle would link the Bomaderry Train Station with Nowra CBD, TAFE Campuses, University of Wollongong Shoalhaven Campus, and Shoalhaven Hospital. This will be increasingly important as the Cancer Care Centre is completed at Shoalhaven Hospital, which will bring cancer patients from out of the region to take advantage of services at Nowra;*
- *Improved community access to public transport in order to meet the needs of transport disadvantaged residents and the ageing population;*
- *Increased frequency and improved reliability of rail services to and from Sydney. This will improve access to employment opportunities and health and other services;*
- *Fare parity, as enjoyed in Sydney;*
- *Broaden the Regional Excursion Daily Ticket program to include people on Newstart and Youth Allowance. This will enable disadvantaged young people to travel for \$2.50 per day and increase access to educational and employment opportunities;*
- *Extension of the South Coast Rail line south to Ulladulla – or at least identify and protect a future rail corridor to enable the line to be extended in future. This would not only improve access for Shoalhaven residents, but would help to build the vital tourism industry in the area;*

Freight, Industry and Employment

The Illawarra Forum recognises the economic benefits of increasing throughput at the Port of Port Kembla, and of building the manufacturing and mining sectors. Growth in these sectors will significantly increase the employment opportunities for many of the region's disadvantaged residents.

However, it is important that transport infrastructure keeps pace with freight growth and demands. This would include a coordinated approach to the establishment of intermodal facilities and improved management of the freight task between Sydney and Port Kembla, including the provision of dedicated freight rail line

To improve freight movement, to increase the viability of the Port of Port Kembla, to increase investment in manufacturing and other industries, and to improve employment opportunities, the Illawarra Forum recommends:

- *Completion of the Maldon-Dombarton rail link;*
- *Dedicated rail freight line to the South Coast;*

- *Increased frequency and improved reliability of commuter rail services to and from Sydney to enable Illawarra and Shoalhaven residents to take advantage of employment opportunities in the city, and to encourage business to invest in the regions;*
- *Greater inter-modal integration – both from a freight and a commuter-transport perspective.*

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on Inter-regional public transport. Please feel free to contact this office for further information.

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This submission is also supported by the Shoalhaven Managers Taskforce.