

**Submission  
No 79**

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

**Organisation:** Upper Hunter Shire Council  
**Name:** Mr Daryl Dutton  
**Position:** General Manager  
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17 May, 2012

The Chair  
State and Regional Development Committee  
Parliament House  
Macquarie Street  
Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Sir,

### **Inquiry into Inter-Regional Public Transport**

Upper Hunter Shire Council welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Inquiry into Inter-Regional Public Transport on behalf of its community. Upper Hunter Shire is located approximately 250 kilometres north west of Sydney in the Upper Hunter Valley and is known as the "Horse Capital of Australia". The Shire has four major towns, that of Scone, Aberdeen, Merriwa and Murrurundi. The area of the Shire is 8,100 square kilometres with a population of 14,000 and as with many rural shires the local road network is an important link in connecting our communities. Major transport infrastructure facilities of national importance also pass through the Shire – these being the Golden and New England Highways and the Great Northern Rail Line.

The Great Northern Rail Line starts in Sydney and runs through the Central Coast, Hunter and New England regions. Country Link operates one passenger service along the line through the Hunter Valley on a daily basis (north and south). The line is used for both freight and passenger traffic. Along the section from Maitland to Armidale freight dominates, especially coal in rich Hunter Valley coal fields. Country Link clearly faces pressure from freight companies for track access. Due to this paucity of passenger services a trip to Sydney for medical reasons or business requires an overnight stay or possibly two. The Xplorer service departs Scone at 12.50pm and arrives in Sydney at 5.10pm. The following day the service departs at 10am, leaving little or no time for the purpose of the trip. To exacerbate the infrequency of Country Link services, City Rail services terminate at Muswellbrook during the day. These obvious timetable shortcomings can be addressed with adequate resourcing providing two trains daily in each direction, making the service much more attractive.

The Upper Hunter population is not diminishing and has the potential for rapid growth. A barrier to this growth is access to reliable public transport. If the train lines are handled better there has to be some efficiency gains. To enable Country Link to benefit tourism in NSW, track access needs to be enhanced in the Hunter Valley. Country Link could provide and participate in weekend rail tours to events such as the "Return to Murrurundi Festival", similar to arrangements in place for the Parkes "Elvis Festival".

Upper Hunter Shire Council can only reiterate on the concerns of local communities, not only within the immediate area, but those in surrounding areas and supports the right of the community to have reasonable access to inter-regional public transport.

Yours sincerely

For Daryl Dutton  
GENERAL MANAGER

## **A Quality Rural Lifestyle – in a caring and thriving community**

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