

**Submission
No 46**

INQUIRY INTO INTER-REGIONAL PUBLIC TRANSPORT

Name: Mr Greg Piper MP
Position: Member for Lake Macquarie
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PARLIAMENT OF NEW SOUTH WALES
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

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26 April 2012

Mr Andrew Gee, MP
Chairperson
State and Regional Development Committee
Parliament House
Macquarie St
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Mr Gee

SUBMISSION TO INQUIRY INTO INTER-REGIONAL PUBLIC TRANSPORT

Thank you for the opportunity to lodge this submission on improving Countrylink services within my electorate of Lake Macquarie.

I am of the view there would be considerable benefits in connectivity and service to patrons if the present Countrylink stop at Fassifern was replaced by the service stopping at Morisset.

On 15 September 2011 I spoke on this matter in the Legislative Assembly and enclose an extract of Hansard which provides detailed information on this matter.

I trust my submission will be favourably considered.

Yours sincerely

Greg Piper, MP
Member for Lake Macquarie
enc



Lake Macquarie CountryLink Services

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Extract from NSW Legislative Assembly Hansard and Papers Thursday 15 September 2011.

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Mr GREG PIPER (Lake Macquarie) [4.25 p.m.]: The needs of rail travellers from Lake Macquarie and other electorates could be better served if the CountryLink stop at Fassifern was relocated to Morisset. There is no argument that the existing stop at Fassifern is of value to residents of the Toronto area, but a greater number of people from a larger area would be likely to benefit from a stop at Morisset. I have received correspondence from a number of parties on this matter, in particular from the Southlake Business Chamber and Community Alliance. These correspondents identify, I believe quite correctly, that the current location disadvantages many travellers. They point instead to the obvious benefits that would be available to CountryLink customers if the service made use of Morisset station.

Last year a joint project between RailCorp and Lake Macquarie City Council delivered a much-needed bus/rail interchange at Morisset, which has increased the importance of Morisset as a transport node. Morisset is also the destination for bus services from Belmont and Swansea to the east and from Cessnock and Kurri Kurri in the north-west. In this regard, I believe the member for Swansea and the member for Cessnock would share an interest in a change that would be of benefit to residents of both of their electorates. Services from both of those areas are limited, with Newcastle Buses route 352 from Belmont and Rover Coaches route 163 from Cessnock each running twice daily. Whilst this is a modest level of service, it acknowledges that Morisset is a logical location for connectivity to the broader region. Using Morisset as the CountryLink stop would foster a growth in the use of these routes and of public transport overall.

The connectivity advantages are not limited to public transport. Morisset has the advantage of being on both the F3 and State Route 133, making it more easily accessible by road for more people. The new transport interchange at Morisset is on State Route 133 in Morisset's commercial centre and it is two kilometres from the Morisset interchange on the F3. I am advised that use of Morisset as a drop-off point for coach services is increasing, and it is reasonable to anticipate that this would increase further if passengers could also board CountryLink services. Central Toronto may have a larger population than central Morisset, but the broader issues of regional connectivity and functionality should be the main criterion for selecting the appropriate location for a CountryLink stop. On these criteria Morisset would appear to be a better option for more people.

Indeed, Morisset and surrounding suburbs are undergoing significant population growth, which has been well identified in the Lower Hunter Regional Strategy and in Lake Macquarie City Council's strategic plans, which predate the Lower Hunter Regional Strategy. Whilst the Government may see the need to reconsider the Lower Hunter Regional Strategy, the fact remains that it was based on residential growth that is actually occurring in the Morisset area. In early 1997 a six-month trial of the XPT stopping at Fassifern commenced. The member at the time, Jeff Hunter, correctly sought to fix an anomaly that had the local government area with the highest population in the region not serviced by the XPT. Fassifern may well have been the correct decision at the time, but, in hindsight, it is remote from a commercial centre and has reduced amenities for those waiting for a train or for a transfer to another mode of transport.

I have received correspondence requesting the change to Morisset because of the availability of coffee shops and automatic teller machines at the adjoining shopping centre and I am advised that there is a more timely service for checked luggage. Also, Fassifern is criticised because it is not secure and safe for elderly people, and at times the toilets are locked. A number of correspondents from the Morisset area have confirmed that they undertake more complicated arrangements involving additional movements just so they can avoid Fassifern. The security concerns are understandable, because Fassifern is relatively remote and isolated compared with Morisset.

Changes in population also point to the increasing relevance of Morisset. The 2006 census shows the population in the five postcode areas surrounding Morisset is 23,038. Developments planned or already underway will bring this close to 42,000, but that understates the remaining potential for further growth. Relocating the CountryLink stop from Fassifern to Morisset would appear likely to produce a net benefit and I expect that it should be relatively easily achieved with no changes to the Morisset station necessary to accommodate the change. I am pleased to bring this matter to the attention of the House, but in so doing I recognise that significant argument may be raised against the proposal. For that reason I believe that the two options should be reviewed and the community consulted as to what would best suit the needs of CountryLink customers in that area.