

INQUIRY INTO INTER-REGIONAL PUBLIC TRANSPORT

Organisation: Tourism Snowy Mountains
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Committee Manager
State & Regional Development Committee
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000

Re: NSW State & Regional Development Committee - Inquiry Into Inter-Regional Public Transport

Dear Committee Members

Please find below Tourism Snowy Mountains' submission to the inquiry. This is an endorsement of the views expressed by Destination Jindabyne and in recognition of the local community's need for greatly improved public transport services.

This response is framed to reflect the Inquiry's terms of reference.

1. How Country Link Services can be improved

There is currently no regular service. By providing a service to Snowy River Shire, located in southern NSW, social, cultural and economic aspects of the community would be greatly enhanced.

As Ando Road, or Snowy River Way, is now sealed between Dalgety and Bombala, this would allow an extension of the current service to provide a circuit route from Bombala, or the far south coast, to Dalgety, up to Jindabyne and back to Berridale before going on to Cooma. In the event of extreme weather in winter, buses can easily detour to Berridale from Dalgety and then on to Jindabyne.

Our Snowy River Shire is possibly the only shire in New South Wales that is not serviced by a regular CountryLink service. We are bypassed with up to 14 services per week going through the neighbouring Bombala and Cooma Shires. (Reference 1 & 2)

This is not just about tourism but the very real needs of the local community. By providing a service, the following sectors of our community would benefit:

Heath

The provision of a service to Snowy Shire would allow ease of access to medical services, which include hospitals and specialist medical services, provided in both Cooma and Canberra and farther afield, Sydney.

Attached is a copy of the submission that Snowy River Shire Council submitted to the CountryLinkUp enquiry that stated that *"the lack of transport choice impacts not only on residents but also businesses and visitors to the Region."*

While Community Transport is certainly a welcome service for the area, it is far from ideal for the population of the shire that is unable to access this service because they are not covered by the health scheme.

Education

There are two K-12 schools serviced by school buses, but there is no service that would allow high school students and those choosing to continue their education to attend University and TAFE courses that are offered outside normal school hours and outside the shire.

The building of Jindabyne Central School in 2006, which moved from a primary school to a primary and secondary school, allowed local families to have their children educated closer to home. However, there are still children who are boarding outside the area and a regular service would allow these children to return home for more visits.

The Department of Planning in 2006 estimated that there would only be a small percentage increase of under 18 year olds, but that was before Jindabyne Central School was established and many local families were now able to send their children to the school. The school population has increased from 322 students in 2006 to 602 today, with a seasonal intake over of the two winter terms of at least 10%. (Reference 3)

Snowy Mountains Grammar School offers boarding house facilities for students and has seen a 200% increase in enrolment in both the school and boarding house to current levels of 235 and 51 respectively over the last six years. (Reference 3)

SCEGGS Redlands also offers a winter campus for students with enrolments unknown.

With these increased enrolments, our population has grown accordingly. Many of our families are single-family units with no extended support network of other family members nearby. The only means for visitation is by private transport or travelling to Cooma to meet the current services or relying on private operators in our winter months with services that operate at their discretion.

Economic

With no regular bus service within Snowy River Shire, most families find it necessary to run two vehicles, which is a large expense to the family budget.

With employment available in Cooma and the district, a regular service would allow people to apply for jobs outside the region for full time, year round employment.

The ABS in 2006 stated that there are 4,744 families in the shire and that one third of these families have parents or children who don't live at home on a permanent basis because employment and education is further away than a reasonable commute would allow. (Reference 4)

Employment during the winter season increases exponentially with up to 5,000 seasonal staff employed and a regular service for those commuting to jobs within the Snowy area is important.

2. How Network Linkages between CountryLink train and coach services can be improved

Network linkages between CountryLink train and coach services can be improved by a reconfiguring of the timetable to include return travel and provide a bus service that would link up with selected arrivals and departures from Canberra.

3. The Potential for CountryLink Services to carry Light Freight

With the increase in the number of people buying and selling online, there is the opportunity for local businesses to use the CountryLink service to carry light freight at competitive prices. Whilst there are several privately run freight operators, delivery outside the peak winter period can be spasmodic dependant on loads.

4. How CountryLink can be better utilised to increase tourism in New South Wales

Snowy River Shire is one of the fastest growing domestic tourist regions in New South Wales with tourism now exceeding agriculture/farming in local income. NSW State Government is targeting a doubling of domestic tourism expenditure in NSW by 2020. Located only two hours south of our nation's capital, the shire borders the Kosciuszko National Park, the only alpine area in NSW and location of Australia's summit. Within the park are found four world-renowned alpine resorts.

The largest tourism activity within Snowy River Shire is the winter ski season, which runs from June to October. The ski season is the major economic contributor to the Snowy area, by direct employment, small business income and associated businesses. (Reference 5)

However, over recent years there has been an increase in tourist numbers outside this season. There are now many spring/summer/autumn activities held in the region - Lake Light Sculpture, Dragonboat Flowing Festival, a growing number of mountain bike events, iconic trout fishing and Kosciusko National Park, which is one of the top five national parks for tourists to visit.

One of the major constraints for the area in order to grow tourism outside winter is the lack of a permanent year-round service. While the winter season is well serviced by private operators, at their discretion, the summer season is not.

Studies undertaken by Tourism Snowy Mountains on understanding perceptions of Snowy Mountains as a holiday destination, show the lack of transport as a significant issue to overseas and domestic tourists, affecting many segments including the lucrative backpacker segment.

An integrated CountryLink service with Snowy Shire would allow CountryLink Holidays to include many of the wonderful spring/summer/autumn events held in the area, and would greatly improve access to international visitors.

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

As our national capital is only two hours to our north with the large resident and student populations - many of whom are overseas students – an enormous potential exists to increase visitation to our region.

With many retirees now inhabiting our nearby coastal regions and reluctant to drive long distances on mountain roads, potential for an increase in local domestic visitation also exists.

Increased domestic and international growth within our own Snowy Mountains region would be greatly enhanced by the ability to have access to the entire region not just select segments.

The possibility of Canberra Airport being opened to international air travel in the near future also increases the potential for tourism growth and puts greater pressure on the need for public transport.

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

An extension of the existing CountryLink ticket would be an integrated ticket that allowed use of the Cityrail network. VLine currently have a bus service that runs through Cooma and CountryLink may be able to collaborate with them to increase services for our region.

7. The role local councils can play in improving inter-regional public transportation networks

We understand Snowy River Shire Council is also preparing a submission.

Whilst there are existing bus terminal facilities in Jindabyne with a large purpose built area designed to allow bus services to pickup/put down, including space for ticketing and luggage storage, we are confident of the support of council in upgrading other regional facility requirements at Berridale and Dalgety.

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

Normal buses and those with wheel chair access would provide the necessary service.

Should the committee require further information, I would be delighted to assist.

Sincerely


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References

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2. http://www.vline.com.au/pdf/timetables/canberra_via_sale.pdf/canberra_via_sale
3. Sourced from principals or administration staff at both schools
4. <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@nrr.nsf/Latestproducts/145207050Population/People12006-2010?opendocument&tabname=Summary&prodno=145207050&issue=2006-2010>
5. http://www.snowyriver.nsw.gov.au/Community/Community_Profile industry employment and the workforce. Last update date unknown but based on community profile 2004 -2009