

**Submission
No 35**

INQUIRY INTO INTER-REGIONAL PUBLIC TRANSPORT

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The Chairman Andrew Gee M.P.

My Name Iain A.Macdonald Retired Pharmacist resident of Jindabyne since 1976.

I am now an old age pensioner, whilst I do currently have a drivers licence this may not always be so in the future. I have 3 Children who live and work in Sydney and 5 grandchildren.....and 1 Child currently working in the UK.

I already find the return drive to Sydney tiring and necessitates breaks regularly. Snowy River Shire encompasses many major visitor attractions all year round however the complete absence of mainstream public transport affects the lives of many residents , and businesses. In the course of my working life as a Community Pharmacist in Jindabyne I came across many hundreds of people stranded in town unable to connect with ongoing transportation from Canberra by train. Coach or Plane. One only has to look at the numbers of hitchhikers of all age groups trying to get lifts at the town exit road, similarly from Cooma trying to get to Jindabyne, Berridale, and the resorts within Snowy River Shire.

Snowy River shire is one of the few local government areas without a Countrylink service. Previously excuses dished out have been on the basis of no previous rail service.....many areas such as Lightning Ridge also had no previous rail service but have a 7 day a week Coach Connection to XPT Rail at Dubbo...and many other examples. Jindabyne as a major tourist hub already has a first class transport interchange facilitygrossly underutilised.....adjoins the Kosciusko National Park visitor centre, a 7 day a week cafe and clean restrooms. Jindabyne basically provides services 7 days a week across the whole commercial spectre...and as such would benefit enormously from a 7 day week Countrylink service..Most people on vacation begin and complete their vacation on weekends.

I am in no way critical of the Private service operated by Greyhound which operates in the ski season only for approximately 16 weeks...or Cooma Coaches who operate a school bus service which only operates during school term time Monday to Friday.....no service at all at Major Holiday times such as Easter, Christmas, January, and all school holidays. They have to make a profit to remain commercially viable. They do not offer the fare structures of Countrylink services for Pensioners and social welfare recipients. The communities of Snowy River Shire, are Berridale, Adaminaby, Jindabyne, East Jindabyne, Dalgety Thredbo ,Perisher valley and Charlottes pass...they are all transport disadvantaged. Following my retirement I commenced locum work in many regional areas of NSW and invariably found my home town the most difficult to get to and from. I had to have a personal vehicle. I travel on Countrylink services quite often now.....and staff at the Booking Call Centre have repeatedly told me they get many enquiries about a Countrylink service to Jindabyne.and Thredbo. I recently travelled on Countrylink to casino and then by coach and found many small communities receive a service 7 days a week. Eg 1 Passenger to Pottsville, 2 passengers to Kingscliff, 3 passengers to Burleigh Heads, 1 passenger to Palm Beach,,,,,the remainder to Surfers Paradise. Whilst young people in Snowy River shire who need to travel to Canberra for job interviews or attend tertiary education courses are disadvantaged and have to rely on lifts if they

have no access to personal transport. The Shire has a population of 8200 year round and in winter during the ski season up to 30,000 people. 80% of development takes place within 10 kms radius of Jindabyne. The completion of a full High School Jindabyne Central School and the existence of Snowy Mountains Grammar School a day and boarding educational school have seen an increase in Students from 240 in year 1990 to excess of 1100 students today.

How Can countrylink Services be improved: A timetable that is more user friendly and avoids unnecessary overnight stops particularly in Sydney where accommodation is expensive. For example the Canberra Sydney service arrives 10 minutes after the Northern Line service to Brisbane has departed.....and similarly Southern Line services . It is impossible to travel to Orange in the Mid West a major mining town and Wine and food region in 1 day.....overseas visitors I knew were astounded. Additional capacity should be available to cover peak seasonal demands.....I have travelled on a number of fully booked services. There should be the capacity to run extra Countrylink coaches when such a situation arises.....as they do already when track maintenance is underway. I note in the recent issue of the on board magazine that holiday packages are available but none to the Snowy River Shire region.(Due to lack of a service)

In Norway there is an excellent system of coaches called Fjord Line 1 and 2 which are fully integrated and offer efficient transport even on roads which are frequently subject to adverse weather conditions.....forget the perennial excuse that we do not have the population.....Norway has a smaller population and a terrain far more difficult to cover by rail or road.and many small communities.

Suggestion for suitable trains ...one should just look north to Queensland and their Tilt Train services.....having travelled on them they are fast and efficient and the standard of service is equal to any.....these Tilt trains could easily be converted to standard gauge operations. I note the continuing reduction in platforms allocated for Countryrail Services at Central Station ..now taken over by stealth with City rail Services. I note the number of Country Services which are being operated by CityRail to towns such as Lithgow where passengers are transferred to Countrylink coaches.....these services are notable by the absence of baggage storage areas on the City Rail sector.....causing significant inconvenience to both City rail and Country passengers.in particular service 533 Sydney to Orange. Needless to say the Countrylink passengers then have to remove baggage from the Rail and transfer to the coach and restore the baggage.....this creates great obstacles for elderly or handicapped passengers.

The lack of an integrated Countrylink/ City Rail ticketing service is an absurd situation: Currently from Jindabyne if Cooma Coach is operating (School days only) you purchase 1 ticket from the driver: then you would have to pre book a Countrylink Ticket for the Countrylink Coach service to Canberra (Kingston) usually collect from driver, on arrival in Sydney Central a further ticket is required on City Rail .Bus/ferry services to your destination such as Sutherland.or Manly. Similarly from the Central West (Orange) pensioners and concession card holders buy 1 ticket from Orange on Countrylink Coach to Lithgow then have to purchase a City Rail ticket for the next sector to Sydney central. An example of the inequities at present are if you travel Jindabyne to Cooma (on School bus) pensioner fare is \$14 ..distance 75kms.....if you travel Cooma to Canberra Countrylink coach Distance 110kms approx fare for Pensioners is \$2.50.

Economy fare on rail from Canberra to Sydney is \$28.60 one way for Pensioners. The Greyhound winter service fare is \$98 for a pensioner 1 way. It is also notable that Murrays Coach Services have increased their frequency of operation from Sydney Central to Canberra Jolimont Centre to an hourly servicemany of these operate to capacity and duration of the trip is mostly 1 hour 15 minutes faster than the Countrylink Explorer service.....it would be ideal if some of these Murray Services terminated at Kingston rail terminal which is less prone to traffic and congestion.....Kingston rail should be immediately upgraded with additional parking and terminal facilities for Countrylink Coaches. With the gradual decrease in platforms available at Central for country rail services.....plans should be put in place to resurrect the disused freight rail tracks and remaining land at White Bay.....to establish a new Country Rail terminal suitable for eventual Med High Speed rail travel such as the QR tilt train.....it will have easy access from the CBD on the recently acquired Light rail network.

I am not an expert in freight operations and would think others could have input on the issue.....Formally country newspapers all came on the train as did much of Australia Posts Mail and Light parcels.....however Countrylink rail would need to have a better on time operation to be considered for light freight.

I would query why all Countrylink Train units XPT and Explorer Units need to be stabled in Sydney.....surely these could be decentralised.....I have watched the army of cleaning staff which descend on the Canberra Explorer service at Central due to the limited turn around time for Explorer Units. Whilst working as a locum pharmacist in Orange.....trying to get home to Jindabyne was totally dysfunctional.....Countrylink Coach Orange to Cootamundra, Countrylink coach from there to Canberra stay overnight and Countrylink coach to Coomathen hitch a ride or rely on friends. ?? Duration of travel 24 hours. It is important that suitable set down and pick up stops are built into a new service to Jindabyne and hopefully onto Thredbo Village. Departing from Cooma.....should have a stop pick up/or set down at Berridale.on request.....then East Jindabyne (Snowy Valley Motel) which has an egress and exit lane onto Kosciuszko Rd..also on request.....then to Transport Interchange at Jindabyne. Consideration should then be to Mini Bus operation to Thredbo Village during the months October to May each year. In winter a normal coach with set down pick up at SkiTube en route to Thredbo....suitable facilities are available there. Services to Adaminaby and Dalgety could be along similar lines to Goonellabah,Wollongbar and Alstonville communities by taxi service.on request.

Recently whilst in Sydney I note the presence of 400 new buses in particular the Red Cross City buses....which give 10 minute service in peak hours 15 minute service in off peak and 20 minute service at night and weekends.....many of them carrying small passenger loads.in fact last Saturday april 28th many were near empty. Then of course there is the Free Green Shuttle bus service in the CBD.....Perhaps just the costs of 1 of these services could be redirected to a once daily service to and from Jindabyne

I note also the contracted services from Canberra Kingston to Bega Merimbula Eden and Bombala are operated by Deanes Group who have a long involvement with the Snowy Mountains through their winter snow packages.

Centrelink require young people to attend interviews and carry out some voluntary work such as on offer at Thredbo Ski Museum yet they have no way of accessing the offer. I note also the federal Government wishes to encourage retirees to stay in their own home.....yet without public transport it is highly likely I may have to move away.....of course my grandchildren are reaching the age they would come and visit more often if there was Public Transport operating during their school holidays.

The citizens of Snowy RiverShire have put up with this for far to long.....and quite a few young lives have been lost on the roads whilst sharing lifts or driving long distances. The NRMA has made submissions on the subject of changing demographics and the needs of public transport for the increasing aged population.in regional communities.

Yours Sincerely
Iain A.Macdonald.