

INQUIRY INTO INTER-REGIONAL PUBLIC TRANSPORT

Organisation: Lake Macquarie City Council
Name: Councillor Greg Piper
Position: Mayor
Date Received: 29/05/2012



From the Office of

His Worship the Mayor of the City of Lake Macquarie, Councillor Greg Piper

24 May 2012

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

Dear Sir

Subject: Inquiry Into Inter-Regional Public Transport

Thank you for the invitation to make a submission to the Inquiry into Inter-Regional Public Transport.

This Council supports the strengthening of Inter-Regional Public Transport to ensure that it provides a viable alternative for travel.

It is unclear whether Lake Macquarie is considered as a regional or metropolitan area for the purposes of this inquiry. It would be appreciated if, as part of the review of this submission, that advice on this issue be forwarded to Council.

This Council does consider it appropriate that CountryLink services provide a link with Sydney and regions south and west of Sydney, as well as to the north. At present, the CountryLink trains only stop at Fassifern Station within the Lake Macquarie Local Government Area. It is considered that many Lake Macquarie residents would use Broadmeadow Station as it is closer and it is not possible to catch Countrylink trains at Fassifern to travel to or from the south.

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. While the existing stop at Fassifern is of value to residents of the Toronto area, a greater number of people from a larger area would be likely to benefit from a stop at Morisset. Organisations such as the Southlake Business Chamber and Community Alliance identify, I believe correctly, that the current location disadvantages many travellers.

Public transport links to both Fassifern and Broadmeadow stations are very poor. Many Lake Macquarie residents would need to catch two or three buses, or a bus and a train, to travel to Fassifern Station. When travelling by bus from the Lake Macquarie area to Broadmeadow station the nearest bus stop to Broadmeadow station is about 450 metres which is a considerable distance – particularly for people who have luggage or during periods of inclement weather. 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 make complicated travel arrangements involving

additional movements so they can avoid Fassifern. The security concerns are understandable, because Fassifern is relatively remote and isolated compared with Morisset.

There are obvious benefits that would be available to CountryLink customers if the service made use of Morisset station. Morisset has the benefit 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.

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. A shift to Morisset as the Countrylink station would, therefore, provide greater benefit to residents of both east Lake Macquarie and the Cessnock area. Services from 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 demonstrates 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 main arterial roads, making it more easily accessible 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. Central Toronto may have a larger population than central Morisset, but the broader issues of regional connectivity and functionality should be the main criteria for selecting the appropriate location for a CountryLink stop. Based 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. 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, with further potential for significant 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.

A key component in facilitating the use of CountryLink services by Lake Macquarie residents, and one that would compliment the use of Morisset as a Countrylink stop, is the construction of Glendale Station (Lake Macquarie Transport Interchange) and its subsequent use as a stopping point for CountryLink trains. This station will have good links with local public transport and will be a key hub for transport in the Lower Hunter. The station has been identified as a priority by the State Government for over ten years and the Glendale area is identified also as an emerging Regional Centre in the Lower Hunter Regional Strategy. While the government has committed funding for the roads that are associated with the

Station, there is no current commitment for the station.

In order to increase patronage, the same methods as apply to all public transport need to be considered – faster, more frequent services, cheaper fares and good connections with other transport.

In relation to travel times between Broadmeadow to Central Station, it is noted that the trip takes 2 ¼ to 2 ½ hours, which is an average speed of just over 60 km/hr. This is the same as the fastest Cityrail service. There is a need to shorten the travel time for all trains from the Lower Hunter to Sydney and this should be given a top priority, initially by shortening and straightening the existing line, for example the Teralba rail loop. In addition, tilt trains should be explored to enable higher speeds and then a Very Fast Train line should be constructed.

Yours faithfully


Councillor Greg Piper
Mayor