

**Submission
No 48**

INQUIRY INTO INTER-REGIONAL PUBLIC TRANSPORT

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Date Received: 14/05/2012



The Committee Manager
State and Regional Development Committee
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14 May 2012

Dear Sir/Madam

Sustain Transport is a Working Group of Sustain Northern Rivers (SNR), a collaboration of 26 peak regional organisations working to address the impacts of climate change and to generate sustainable transport, food and energy outcomes in the Northern Rivers. Its transport goals are to reduce transport emissions, increase transport options, and to increase physical activity, social inclusion and resilience. *Sustain Transport* welcomes the opportunity to respond to the **NSW Legislative Assembly's Inter-regional Public Transport Inquiry**.

We wish to bring the following issues to the attention of the Inquiry:

- **Contractual restrictions**
CountryLink services provide coach transport across much of regional NSW but their potential to increase transport options is limited by a number of factors, including the need for passengers to travel a distance of at least 40 kilometres, restricted routes, timetables and bus stops, lack of connection and coordination with other transport, and high cost of fares. At present services are limited by contracts which appear to favour the needs of service providers over service users.
- **Cross border issues**
The high demand for cross border transport encompasses not only commuters and tourism, but includes access to essential medical care, the Gold Coast airport and the rail network north. There are obvious economic, environmental and social benefits in establishing a twice daily cross border commuter service between the Northern Rivers region of NSW and South East Queensland. The 2001 ABS Journey to Work data for Tweed Shire identified that 22% of all workplace destinations were in SEQ, with 63% of these in the Gold Coast.¹ The NSW Government are currently undertaking a study into the viability of

¹ SGS Economics and Planning 2005 *Overview of Economic Implications of South East Queensland on the Northern Rivers Region: A Discussion Paper as Input to the Draft Northern Rivers RIEP V3*, Northern Rivers Regional Development Board, Lismore.

reintroducing the Casino to Murwillumbah rail line. If this were part of an integrated transport network the reinstatement of this line would improve transport options for Northern Rivers' residents. Linking this line to the existing South East Queensland rail network by connecting Murwillumbah to Robina could provide a vital cross border transport link.

- **Lack of connections to Brisbane and Grafton train services**

At present there are no CountryLink coaches to deliver people to meet early morning services from the North Coast to Sydney and Brisbane. For example, there are no services to get from Maclean to Grafton for the 6.30am Sydney XPT service, or from Lismore to Casino for the 3.55am Brisbane XPT service, which is the only rail service to Brisbane. The provision of coaches or a demand responsive micro transit arrangement would make these services accessible for those who are unable to get a lift or catch a taxi to the station as there is no public transport available at these times.

I have attached a copy of the recent Sustain Northern Rivers submission to the NSW Transport Master Plan Discussion Paper which contains further information relevant to this Inquiry.

Yours sincerely

Linda Wirf
Convenor, Sustain Transport



Sustain Northern Rivers

An Initiative of the Northern Rivers Climate Change Collaboration

14 May 2012

Summary

SNR recommends that:

- The Long Term Transport Master Plan includes strategies and funding allocation to collect comprehensive regional data about transport needs to inform the Regional Plans.
- The need for alternative and sustainable regional transport options, such as active transport (walking and cycling) and innovative, flexible, multi-modal public transport is urgent and this needs to be a high priority. The need to reduce single mode transport dependency aligns with other important goals to increase the region's resilience, social inclusion and population health.
- The Plan identify ongoing strategies for representative community engagement in regional transport planning, based on deliberative democracy principles to provide a voice to all sections of the region, specifically for those who are both transport disadvantaged and are less likely to engage in formal consultations, such as Aboriginal people and young people.
- The Transport Master Plan, as a key opportunity, redress the poor prioritisation of Aboriginal transport issues so that processes around further planning for the draft Plan and Regional Plans *expressly* involve Aboriginal communities. Aboriginal people experience very specific transport problems around isolation from services, discrimination, inflexible or culturally inappropriate services, poor access to health services and affordability.
- The Plan includes increased support for collaboratively managed transport solutions, such as the work of the Sustain Northern Rivers Transport Working Group and the Northern Rivers Carpool.
- Cost/benefit equations between transport and health, education, employment and economic development be incorporated into transport planning. For example, road congestion cost Australia \$10 billion in 2005 and this figure is predicted to double by 2020.² Approximately 1 500 people are killed and 30 000 seriously injured each year on Australian roads.³ The costs of externalities such as these need to be factored in to analyses of the relative costs of transport infrastructure and subsidies.

² JWK Health Consultants 2011 *Sustain Northern Rivers Transport Options Plan*, Discussion document prepared for the North Coast Area Health Service

³ [Stanley](#), John & Simon Barrett 2010 *Moving People-Solutions for a growing Australia*, Australasian Railway Association, Bus Industry Confederation and International Association of Public Transport–UITP

- Future transport provision be integrated with land use planning, to ensure that crucial transport corridors are protected. Corridor protection is essential, as this can have a major impact on businesses that will make investment decisions based on current and future transport or logistics systems. Highway upgrades can have major impacts on businesses by impacting on agricultural land and eroding land required for production. Where possible, corridors should avoid areas of high biodiversity, agricultural productivity/significance and water catchment potential.
- The Plan recognize the importance of future proofing by building transport assets for future conditions which will be characterized by peak oil and changing climatic patterns. Alternative technologies will be a large part of the solution outside of metropolitan areas.

Introduction

We congratulate the NSW Government on the launch of the NSW Long Term Transport Master Plan and welcome this opportunity to make a submission on the Discussion Paper to inform the further development of the Plan.

Sustain Northern Rivers (SNR) is a collaboration of 26 peak regional organisations working to address the impacts of climate change and to generate transport, food and energy outcomes in the Northern Rivers. Its transport goals are to reduce transport emissions, increase transport options, and to increase physical activity, social inclusion and resilience. The SNR Sustain Transport Working Group (*Sustain Transport*) has undertaken widespread consultation through regional stakeholder forums and workshops in February and April of this year with the aim of collaboratively developing a submission to the Plan.

Transport pertains to climate change mitigation and adaptation, to the resilience of communities, businesses and industries and to rising levels of obesity and pressure on health systems. A coherent, informed and collaborative approach to transport has the potential to produce multiple positive outcomes. What is needed is a committed, multifaceted approach over the long term, with multiple strategies building on each other to create modal shift from single passenger vehicle journeys and fossil-fuel based technologies.

The regional focus in the Discussion Paper is on extending and upgrading major highways and the road network. As well as the need to upgrade highways for safety reasons, there is also a need to develop and integrate alternative transport needs, which the Discussion Paper fails to address. The integrated transport plan for South East Queensland recognises that 'it is neither financially nor environmentally sustainable for road traffic to continue to grow at current rates'⁴. The SEQ plan identifies implementing smarter bus, rail, walking and cycling strategies as possible solutions.

The Discussion Paper does not seem to acknowledge that a low carbon economy will become an increasing driver for changing behaviour and the infrastructure to support it. There is a very real potential for more frequent inundation impacts on road networks and infrastructure as the occurrences of extreme climate events increase. It is critical that the Plan recognizes the importance of future proofing by building transport assets for future conditions which will be characterized by peak oil and changing climatic patterns.

The following discussion has been developed under specific themes as compiled during the forums facilitated by Sustain Transport on behalf of SNR in February and April this year.

⁴ Queensland Government 2010 *Connecting SEQ 2031- An Integrated Regional Plan for South east Queensland*, Dept. of Transport & Main Roads

These forums were attended by a broad cross section of regional transport stakeholders and SNR members, including federal government, state government, local government, the non-government sector, community transport, Regional Development Australia (Northern Rivers) and community groups.

Challenges and opportunities in the Northern Rivers

The Northern Rivers is a car-dependent region with few transport options. Distances are significant and public transport generally poor. Many rural settlements are served only by school buses, which do not meet the needs of employees, the elderly, people with disabilities, apprentices, job seekers or tertiary students.

The Northern Rivers is typical of many regions in Australia that lack transport options, yet must decrease reliance on motorised transport. Nationally, the transport sector is a large source of carbon pollution (14% of total emissions). Without mitigation and the creation of alternative travel modes, this sector is forecast to increase at a yearly rate of 1.8% between 2010 and 2020.⁵ The need to reduce emissions from transport aligns well with other important goals to increase the region's economic and community resilience, social inclusion and population health.

Regional areas face enormous challenges in enabling access to work, essential services, training/education and health care, exacerbated by depleting oil supplies and the need to reduce transport emissions. In the Northern Rivers, the challenge is amplified by high levels of social disadvantage, and by rapid population growth that accelerates the ageing profile of the population.⁶ It is likely that these demographic trends will be associated with an increase in transport disadvantage. In 2006, the percentage of households in the Richmond-Tweed without a motor vehicle was 8.8%.⁷

Transport options into and out of the region to capital cities are facilitated through, rail, air and road access. These options are essential for servicing the domestic and international tourism sector. The region is made up of various river systems which were once vital to trade and transport in the region and continue to be used in a recreational capacity. Ferries are an integral part of the transport infrastructure in the region.

There is a need for integrated freight transport options, incorporating rail, in the Northern Rivers. There are currently no intermodal facilities close to the coast between Newcastle and the Queensland border. Consideration should be given to supporting proposed intermodal developments North of Casino.

The education sector in the Northern Rivers places significant demands on transport infrastructure and service provision. North Coast TAFE's Northern Rivers campuses deliver training to over 20,000 students. These numbers include significant numbers of students from disadvantaged backgrounds including refugees, migrants, Aboriginal students and students with disabilities. Classes are delivered both during the day and in the evenings and in some cases contracts for training such as those for refugee students, stipulate the hours for delivery.

⁵ Department of Climate Change and Energy Efficiency 2011
<http://www.climatechange.gov.au/publications/projections/australias-emissions-projections/transport-emissions.aspx>

⁶ NSW Department of Health, Population Health Division *The health of the people of New South Wales* - Report of the Chief Health Officer, Sydney www.health.nsw.gov.au/publichealth/chorep/

⁷ Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006 www.censusdata.abs.gov.au

As several TAFE campuses in the region are slightly outside of town centres, infrequent access to public transport at the times when students need to travel and expensive fares create major barriers for students. In many cases students need to catch several buses and for students with language barriers this further compounds an already challenging situation. Data suggests that lack of availability of public transport concessions for adult students studying higher level courses, is causing increasing numbers of students to withdraw from studies. In some areas, public bus services cannot be accessed by students in wheelchairs. In others, students with disabilities can access the bus service however the drop off point is so distant from the campus that disabled students are really disadvantaged. It is not uncommon for students to travel 2 hours each way to study at TAFE. With predicted population increases in the region all of these challenges will be amplified.

Southern Cross University currently services over 3000 equivalent full time students in the Northern Rivers. Many students travel considerable distances across the region to attend study, attend workplaces, and engage in community and leisure activities. Through the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program, the Australian Government is working to increase the proportion of tertiary students who come from low socio-economic status households. These students will face enormous challenges in securing accessible and affordable transportation options in the Northern Rivers.

ACE Community Colleges service around 5,500 students annually; of those 500 are Indigenous students. Many ACE students are from a low socio economic background. Byron Region Community Colleges taught 2260 students in 2011 (Byron Bay and Mullumbimby campuses), travelling primarily from Byron Shire but at least 10% from wider Northern Rivers. Most students need to have their own vehicle or arrange a lift as public transport is frequency low and not often fitting class times.

Aboriginal people in the Northern Rivers have expressed in a number of local forums that they do not feel that they have been properly included in the consultations in the lead up to the release of the Discussion Paper. Lack of transport is a major problem for Aboriginal communities across NSW and this exacerbates existing problems accessing employment, education, services and recreation. Aboriginal people experience very specific transport problems around isolation from services, discrimination, inflexible or culturally inappropriate services, poor access to health services and affordability. The Aboriginal Transport Network states that 'Aboriginal People are frequently excluded from transport consultation and planning processes'.⁸ The Transport Master Plan provides a key opportunity to redress the poor prioritisation of Aboriginal transport issues. It is, therefore, vital that processes around further planning for the draft Plan *expressly* involve Aboriginal communities.

There is an urgent need for alternative and sustainable transport options such as active (walking and cycling) and public transport, as well as using existing infrastructure and transport modes more efficiently. A physical and social environment will need to be created to ensure real choice is available so that the car can be left at home or that those without access to a private motor vehicle are not left isolated.

Sustain Northern Rivers conducted the *Commuter Mapping Project* which surveyed travel patterns from 16 North Coast organisations.⁹ This survey revealed exceptionally high car dependence and multiple barriers to alternative commuting modes. Data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics reveals very low rates of active travel in the region, with only 4.5% of people walking all or part way to work, and only 1.4% riding a bicycle.¹⁰ Less than 1% used any form of public transport. In addition to greenhouse pollution, this level of car-

⁸ Wadiwel, Dinesh 2007 'Transport disadvantage in Aboriginal communities', *NCOSS News*. 32.5 7

⁹ Sustain Northern Rivers Commuter Mapping Survey 2009, unpublished

¹⁰ Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006 www.censusdata.abs.gov.au

dependence has health consequences. Every additional 60 minutes in a car per day, increases one's odds of being obese by 6%, and each kilometre walked reduces the odds of being obese by 4.8%.¹¹

The benefits of increasing active transport extend well beyond goals to create a low-carbon economy. Transport strategies have been oriented towards supporting the motor car, at high cost. Per passenger-kilometre, roads are a heavily subsidised method of transportation.¹² A focus on people rather than cars is required in transport planning and funding. The key transport issue is moving people around –public transport (including rail, bus, community transport, taxis, coaches) car, bike and walking all need to be considered and integrated.

Transport is primarily about accessing goods and services. Information technology is starting to play a bigger role as a means of accessing goods and services and provides less carbon intensive access than traditional transport modes. Given that this is a 20 year plan for transport, there is an innovative opportunity to include new ways of accessing goods and services by aligning Trade and Investment NSW's Digital Economy Industry Action Plan with the Transport Master Plan.

The key transport issues discussed below have been developed through a comprehensive process that included two focused forums and workshops facilitated by *Sustain Transport* in February and April of this year, with a diverse range of stakeholders from across the Northern Rivers region, expert advice from a range of SNR members and a review of the relevant literature.

Improve sustainable transport options

- The lack of regional transport data is a consequence of NSW Transport Data Centre focusing on metropolitan areas only. The development of the Long Term Transport Plan should include strategies and funding allocation to collect comprehensive regional data about transport needs, equivalent to the metropolitan Household Travel Surveys. Evidence based data and the use of mobility management and transport coordination technologies will ensure that new and existing regional transport services and infrastructure are aligned with the needs of existing and potential users.
- There seems to be a policy that leads to local transport providers focusing on school instead of general services. For example, many rural and regional bus services rely on the School Bus Subsidy Scheme to provide their core business. These school bus services do not provide adequate public transport for the general public due to their restricted timetables and there is no incentive or requirement for service providers to expand their services to better cater for the needs of rural and regional communities. A review of contractual arrangements that block the emergence of local, self-organised transport solutions is also recommended. For example, a bus coming to Lismore may have 6 passengers that want to go to the hospital and a driver willing to take them, but they are prevented from driving an extra kilometre by contractual constraints. Self-organised solutions seem to also be negatively impacted by policies governing CountryLink bus services.
- Metropolitan commuters currently receive subsidies not available to country people. This has caused an inequity in transport services across the state. For example, a worker commuting from Ballina to Lismore (34km) currently pays \$23.60 return. A comparable

¹¹ Frank LD, Andresen MA, Schmidt TL 2004, *Obesity relationships with community design, physical activity, and time spent in cars* American Journal of Preventative Medicine 27(2) pp87-96

¹² Auslink White Paper 2004, Department of Transport and Regional Services, Commonwealth of Australia www.infrastructure.gov.au/transport/publications/files/whitepaper.pdf

distance in Sydney, (31km Mona Vale–Sydney) costs \$8.60 return. The inequity is also equally stark if considered from the perspective of trip time. Northern Rivers' citizens pay \$10.80 for a one-way 30 minute trip (Casino- Lismore). By comparison, a 30 minute trip Coojee-Sydney costs \$3.30. This inequity has been partially alleviated by the recent IPART decision to lower rural bus fares by 8%, however regional fares will still be much higher than metropolitan fares. Northern Rivers Buslines have also recently capped their rural bus fares at \$9.40 one way. This is a welcome initiative that will make some trips more affordable, but fares on services provided by other operators remain disproportionately high. Transport concessions for young people, especially public transport dependent young people, should be a priority.

- Public transport is required between major centres, larger towns and villages on a work timetable as well as school bus timetable (i.e. 8.30 – 3.30 service *plus* a 9-5 service) as a *minimum standard* for regional areas. There is also an urgent need to provide weekend, public holiday and night services.
- The Plan should focus on sustainable transport options, based on subsidies and incentives. Public transport should be subsidised as an essential service, based on the recognition that lack of transport results in cost shifting to other areas such as environment, health and education, as well as limiting regional economic development.
- The Plan would benefit by considering better integration of community, health and other transport services provided by a range of state government agencies to increase return on investment for government, reduce duplication or fragmentation and to enhance transport opportunities, particularly in regional areas
- Explore innovative, flexible, demand driven transport solutions – for example, consider ways to extend the community transport model across the whole public transport system and consider establishing integrated transport systems coordinated by Regional Agencies.
- Support the use of eco friendly alternative fuel sources and vehicles in the public transport system.

Reduce reliance on single occupancy vehicles

- Change the current transport culture to develop a positive public and active transport culture and establish drivers for cultural change through policy setting and program implementation that promote participation in diverse transport modes, and specifically public and active modes.
- Develop and support car sharing initiatives that enable increased opportunity of households to a vehicle.¹³
- As part of the Plan, the State could encourage or regulate Local Government not to spend transport funds (grants, rates or developer contributions) disproportionately on improving roads to increase capacity for single occupancy vehicle traffic, but to spend the major part of their funds on sustainable public transport services and active transport facilities, which can be used not only by car users, but by everybody.
- Consideration for the re-use of existing sustainable non-road transport assets, specifically current railway infrastructure, to increase public transport mode share and

¹³ Enoch, Marcus (Dr) 2002 *Supporting Car Share Clubs: a worldwide review*, Mobility Services for Urban Sustainability Project, European Commission

reduce overall transport spending will provide many benefits to the community. Consideration should be given to making existing rail infrastructure operational which would add to the State's productive transport assets, is much more cost effective than building equivalent new road capacity, and would reduce road and parking congestion in most of the region's major towns.

- As a result of peak oil single occupancy vehicles will become increasingly unaffordable and unsustainable The Plan must consider future proofing transport solutions such as hybrid car charging stations and bio-fuels.
- Identify strategies to support car pooling initiatives, including provision of designated parking in key pick up and drop off zones. Commuter mapping in the Northern Rivers region shows that efficient and accessible car pooling schemes have the potential to reduce single occupancy vehicle commuter travel by up to 50% for distances greater than 16 kilometres, thus significantly reducing greenhouse emissions and road congestion.¹⁴

Increase active transport.

- Use of shared space principles¹⁵ to maximise the existing road infrastructure. This concept is in use across Europe and the UK and encourages safe cycling and walking within and between towns and villages by creating changes to infrastructure and the way roads are used.
- Increase active transport- safe, pleasant, accessible bicycle and walking pathways that go where people need to go. Construction of safe cycle-ways and footpaths, particularly around schools. Safety and amenity of towns and villages and incentives for cycling, such as showers, changing facilities and secure bike storage. The chart above shows that walking would be the preferred option for trips of five kilometers or less if this was a safe and pleasant option.
- Legislation and infrastructure that provides for the easy carriage of bicycles and prams on all buses across NSW.

Sustain Northern Rivers

In mid 2008, peak regional organisations in the Northern Rivers region of NSW formed the Sustain Northern Rivers (SNR) collaboration to generate responses to climate change, with particular focus on transport, food and energy sustainability. These organisations signed the Northern Rivers Change Collaboration Agreement, thus demonstrating an ongoing commitment to communicate, consult and collaborate for action on climate change. The collaborative model that developed in SNR reflects adaptive governance models from resilience and complexity theory.

Sustain Transport is one of the working groups within SNR. It is an action focussed group that works to improve transport options within the Northern Rivers and significantly increase mode share from single occupant motor vehicles to walking, cycling, public transport and car pooling. Sustain Transport projects include the Commuter Mapping Project that leveraged the resources of SNR partner organisations to map major commuting flows on the North Coast between Tweed Heads and Port Macquarie to produce detailed Commuter Hub Reports. Sustain Transport represents a broad cross section of regional transport interests and has a unique understanding of transport issues and unmet needs for

¹⁴ Kavooru, S., A. Kia, A. Zask, K. Howton & L. Lomman 2009 *Lismore Commuter Hub Report*, Report prepared for Sustain Northern Rivers by North Coast Area Health Service

¹⁵ Fryslân Province 2009, *Shared Space- Final Evaluation and Results* www.shared-space.org

this region. As such, it presents a unique opportunity for the state government to develop and implement innovative transport options for the Northern Rivers region.

Sustain Northern Rivers participating organisations are:

1. ACE community Colleges
2. Ballina Shire Council
3. Byron Shire Council
4. Byron Region Community College
5. Clarence Valley Council
6. EnviTE Inc
7. Kyogle Shire Council
8. Lismore City Council
9. Local Community Services Association
10. North Coast TAFE
11. North East Waste Forum
12. Northern NSW Local Health District
13. Northern Rivers Catchment Management Authority
14. Northern Rivers Social Development Council
15. Northern Star Pty Ltd
16. Northern Rivers Tourism Inc
17. Northern Rivers Youth Advisory Council
18. NSW Department of Education and Communities
19. NSW Department of Primary Industries
20. NSW Department of Trade and Investment, Regional Infrastructure and Services
21. Regional Development Australia-Northern Rivers
22. Richmond Valley Council
23. Southern Cross University
24. Tweed Shire Council
25. University Centre for Rural Health-North Coast
26. Youth Environment Society

This submission has been prepared based on consultations undertaken by Sustain Northern Rivers and does not necessarily represent the views of each member of Sustain Northern Rivers, their officers, employees