

**Submission
No 6**

**ACCESS TO TRANSPORT FOR SENIORS AND
DISADVANTAGED PEOPLE IN RURAL AND
REGIONAL NSW**

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Submission to NSW Legislative Assembly Committee on Community Services. The Inquiry into access to transport for seniors and disadvantaged people in rural and regional NSW

RAILWAY BUS SERVICE Inverell to Tamworth

Public transport between Barraba, Manilla and Tamworth regional city consists solely of a railway bus which travels from Inverell to Tamworth daily to meet the train which runs between Armidale and Sydney Central. This means that anyone travelling between Barraba and Tamworth has to stay in Tamworth up to 8 hours. This is totally unsatisfactory for aged or people with a disability. Aged also find they have no way of travelling from home to the bus stop or back to their home often in the dark. Aged people also have difficulty accessing bus services due to the steps involved in accessing the bus.

RAIL SERVICE SYDNEY TO ARMIDALE

The only public transport service north from Willow Tree is the Sydney to Armidale train which comes north once a day in the afternoon. This requires all people travelling to Tamworth to be accommodated overnight in Tamworth before travelling south again the next day. This adds to the cost of travelling. The train arrives in Tamworth about 3.40pm (when it is on time) and then leaves the next morning around 10.20am this is hardly enough time to manage to fit in a medical appointment especially if you are frail aged. Then the clients also have to travel from the rail station to and from their appointment or to their home.

The train service also has a major problem with access and egress at the Tamworth railway station, the gap is too wide and the ramp used for the disabled is too steep (we have been asking for this ramp to be fixed for many years). Many cannot manage the steps into the train.

TAXI SERVICE IN RURAL AND REGIONAL AREAS

Neither Barraba nor Manilla have a taxi service.

Due to distances travelled in rural and regional areas, the frail aged and people with disabilities are unable to utilize the small number of taxi services that are available as they are too expensive.

Many clients have to travel over 100 klms to access specialized medical services.

Some clients due to medical reasons have to attend the Hunter New England Regional Hospital on a regular basis, such as renal and cancer patients. They are not well enough to access public transport. Recently a maxi taxi was sent to pick up a renal client for his regular visit to the hospital the client did manage to struggle into the taxi the driver then had to ask the client the directions to the renal unit. When a taxi was called to take the client home once again a maxi taxi arrived and the client refused it and asked for a sedan. This places a great deal of extra stress on these clients.

Taxi drivers rarely get out of their car to assist the frail aged. We had an incident recently when a taxi driver dropped a vision impaired lady off at the wrong address and sat in his taxi watching her flail around not knowing where she was until one of my staff rescued her and organised for her to be taken to the correct address. This is the treatment from the taxi service, Management is continually complaining to them about their quality of service.

They send maxi cabs to pick up frail aged even though we continually tell them we need sedans and only maxi cabs when requested.

Recently a taxi pick-up was organised for 2 wheelchair clients and one mobile client from the same address, at the same time, on the same night, and the taxi service sent 3 different taxis for that one service all within a few minutes of one another. This is the second time this has happened and we have told them we will not be responsible for payment in the future when this happens. The local maxi cabs can take 2 passengers and 2 wheelchairs in the one maxi cab.

Taxi drivers are often impatient and if the client is not waiting outside in the rain the driver simply drives off then we have to call the taxi once again. We have asked the taxi service to be more patient with our clients.

PUBLIC BUS TRANSPORT IN TAMWORTH

Travelers living in Coledale needing to travel to the Tamworth Base Hospital in Tamworth have to take 2 different bus services from one side of town to the other, this can take up to 2 hours to travel a distance of 5.5klms by car, 15 minutes in time. Most of the people living in this area live well below the poverty line and therefore cannot afford taxi fares.

One of the strategies which could make this easier for this disadvantaged group would be bus routes in Tamworth travel around the city not just from one side of the river to the other side,

making people catch 2 buses instead of one after all the city is not very big. Timetabling could also be better so that customers do not have to wait between routes.

The increase in dementia and the increasing age of the population means that there are many more aged unable to utilize public transport.

ACCESS FOR FRAIL AGED AND PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES.

Transport is very often the first service an aged person requires when they no longer have a driver's license. Lack of transport is the very thing that keeps them isolated.

Many of our recent referrals have come from aged people who have in the past relied on their children to transport them to their appointments. However, there has been an increasing realization by these parents that as their own children lead busy lives the parent has felt that they are becoming a burden on them and therefore they are seeking another way of accessing transport services. Sometimes children live too far away to assist their parents.

A number of our new clients have told us that they have cancelled medical appointments because their children could not assist on the day.

Often the aged are too frail to wait around for public transport or even a taxi.

Public transport is not door to door, this is the type of service required by the frail aged and people with disabilities.

These are the problems that are addressed and serviced by the Oxley Community Transport Service Inc. to support the frail aged under the Commonwealth Home Support Program (CHSP) and people with disabilities in the Tamworth Regional Council and Liverpool Plains Shire Council areas to lead a useful and independent lifestyle.

Support that can be provided to seniors and disadvantaged people to assist with the costs of private transport where public transport is either unavailable or unable to meet the needs of these groups.

Oxley Community Transport Service Inc. has provided services to these groups for over 28 years and is funded under the Community Transport Program through TfNSW via the Federal and State governments to provide a service for seniors, transport disadvantaged and people with disabilities.

Carole Nash

Manager

Oxley Community Transport Service Inc.