

**Submission
No 9**

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

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Community and Economic Outcomes

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SUBJECT Inquiry into Transport Access in Rural and Regional NSW

The Blue Mountains LGA has a land area of 1431.168 square km, however approximately 70% of this land area forms part of the Blue Mountains National Park; a World Heritage listed area. The area extends from just west of the Nepean River at Penrith, to Mt Victoria and Bell in the west, across a 100km strip of sandstone ridge and deep valleys. The developed areas mostly follow a narrow spine centred on the Great Western Highway in 26 townships with typically low density residential development. The topography of the study area includes many hills and valleys where access and mobility can be challenging.

In addition to this, the Blue Mountains LGA comprises of 26 townships or villages with a total population of approximately 79,812 (estimated resident population 2015). It is characterised by mainly low to medium density residential developments, national parks, and local shopping areas, as well as a number of key tourist centres including Katoomba, Wentworth Falls, Leura, Blackheath, and Mount Victoria.

Whilst the Blue Mountains Local Government Area is not considered a rural or regional area its proximity to the City has it classified as peri urban. In terms of transport it is still nevertheless, an area where the need for accessible public transport infrastructure is in huge demand.

Based on the Blue Mountains City Council Community Profile, the most populated towns are Springwood (12%), Katoomba (11%), Blaxland (10%), followed by Winmalee (9%). The Blue Mountains Community Atlas (Atlas.id) shows that the population density across the Blue Mountains LGA ranged between 0.34 persons per hectare and 9.67 persons per hectare, with Mt Riverview, Glenbrook, Winmalee, and Blaxland all having population densities over 6 persons per hectare.

The age profile for the Blue Mountains LGA compared to the rest of the Greater Sydney area has a high proportion of residents aged over 50 years. In turn, there are significantly fewer residents aged 20-39 years. This illustrates that the Blue Mountains LGA has an aging population, with an expected increase of residents aged between 60 and 75 in the coming 20 years.

The NSW Department of Planning and Environment population projections have forecasted that by 2031, 25% (24,100) of the Blue Mountains population will be aged over 65 years. With the population ageing the complexity of care issues and incidence of disability temporary and or permanent will increase. For a large majority of residents in the mountains

who in fall into this age category the emphasis on specialists to assist with their often chronic and complex care needs increases, these specialists are invariably in inner Sydney.

This presents future challenges regarding pedestrian access and mobility particularly considering grade and climate constraints.

Typically pedestrians aged 0-9 years have a greater need for good walking facilities, due to the use of prams (0-4 years old) and the vulnerability of young, inexperienced users. The 'seniors' group also require safe, accessible facilities for various reasons, including mobility impairment, decreased fitness, use of walking aids, and vision impairment.

Public Transport and Access

Almost all of the major town centres and villages within the Blue Mountains LGA are located directly on or near the Blue Mountains Train Line, with the exception of Winmalee and Mt Riverview. Other small villages including Hawkesbury Heights, Yellow Rock, Berambing, Mt Wilson, Mt Irvine and Mt Tomah are also not serviced by trains.

In off peak periods, the maximum frequency is one train per hour, with lower stopping frequencies at stations west of Katoomba. In off-peak periods, selected services operate between Springwood and Central only stopping at all stations between Springwood and Blacktown.

The Blue Mountains Bus Company services from Emu Plains to Mt Victoria. Service frequencies vary by route but in general most routes only provide an hourly service outside peak periods and a half hourly service during peak periods. Frequencies on Sundays and Public Holidays are generally every two hours. There is also one bus operating in the morning and evening peak connecting Berambing and Richmond.

Access to public transport to visit there specialists is difficult as many elderly people reside far away from the train service, hence they rely on a taxi service of which for people with complex care needs there are only two accessible taxi's that operate in all 26 town villages, and the local bus service is not close to where they reside.

Most train stations in the Blue Mountains LGA are not accessible in terms of the DDA definitions, with the exception of Blaxland, Springwood, and Katoomba. One of the key responses from the online community survey was that better disabled access be provided at train stations. As this is the responsibility of Sydney Trains, Blue Mountains City Council continues to lobby for better accessibility at stations.

For many elderly people, the reliance on Community Transport is paramount, however with individualised packages of care under the Aged Care Reforms there is a lack of understanding by the elderly on how to purchase services. There have been instances where by the elderly have had to pay full costs for transport under this scheme due to the funds in their package being fully expended. Further now that the market for aged care services is open to for profit agencies, and the client chooses the service they rely on with their own pocket of funds businesses such as Uber have come onto the market to provide transport, Uber like many other possible for profit agencies don't have the necessary quality frameworks that Community Transport currently provides which places many elderly in vicarious situations.

Disadvantage in terms of access to transport is also experienced by our younger generation that reside in the Blue Mountains. We have many single parent households that don't own a vehicle, therefore emphasis on public transport that is accessible at all hours to inner Sydney and the Greater Western region is a significant issue particularly like the elderly when the need for early intervention and specialists are required.

Westmead Hospital is a major health service provider for NSW. In addition to its core business, it also offers a number of district wide and specialist services, such as cancer treatment, paediatrics, neonatal intensive care and brain injury management. As these services are centrally located, the need for a high level of accessibility to Westmead Hospital is even more critical. This is particularly so for the elderly, socially disadvantaged and those living some distance away, such as residents of the Blue Mountains, where the train may be the only practical means of transport. Council wishes to draw attention to the fact that there are no services provided by Sydney Trains from the Blue Mountains Intercity Line to Westmead Station. Access to Westmead can only be made via the T1 Western Suburban Line, which necessitates a change from the Intercity Service at either Blacktown or Parramatta Stations. The impact from there being no trains stopping at Westmead Station is having an adverse impact on patients, their family and friends. This need to change trains is an additional burden that many are faced with, at a time when their physical, emotional and financial capacities are under duress.

These factors alone highlight the significant disadvantage and specific issues that seniors experience on a day to day basis trying to access transport for basic services for their wellbeing and connections with the community.

It is hoped that the Committee will seriously consider these issues as part of their strategy for improved transport networks for seniors and disadvantaged people in rural and regional NSW.

For further information regarding the content of this submission inquiries can be made directly to [REDACTED] or alternatively contacting [REDACTED]

Yours faithfully

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