

**Submission
No 13**

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

Organisation: Intereach
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Position: Executive Director
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Inquiry into access to transport for seniors and disadvantaged people in rural and regional NSW

That the Committee on Community Services inquire into and report on access to transport for seniors and disadvantaged people (including but not limited to Aboriginal persons, persons with disability, and social housing tenants) in rural and regional NSW. Matters to be considered include:

- a) Specific issues relating to the transport needs of seniors and disadvantaged people in rural and regional NSW.**
- b) Accessibility of current public transport services in rural and regional NSW**
- c) Potential strategies to improve access, including better alignment between different modes of transport, available routes and timetabling generally;**
- d) 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; and**
- e) Any other related matters**

Organisational overview

Intereach works together with children, families, older people, carers and people with disabilities to provide services, support and information throughout the Riverina Murray region of NSW. Intereach has offices and Community Hubs in Albury, Buronga, Cootamundra, Corowa, Deniliquin, Finley, Griffith, Hay and Wagga Wagga . The Intereach vision is *strong supported communities* and we work toward this through our purpose, which is to:

- strengthen and improve social and personal well-being for individuals, families and communities;
- promote and facilitate access, equality and social justice; and
- deliver services locally that are of quality and have value.

Responses have been formulated from a number of sources. These include:-

- *Organisational led Annual Consultation – Have Your Say 2015* - Intereach engages with its communities through face to face conversations and “Having your Say” surveys to find out what stops people getting the help they need, when they need it. In 2015 Intereach communicated with 608 people from 24 of the 28 local government areas in the Riverina Murray. The availability of specific service types, such as mental health services, **transport** and allied health services, and services for young people and carers featured strongly in survey results across the Region. Data has been drawn from these survey responses to comment against the key reference points outlined in the submission response.
- *Aboriginal Transport Development Program LPA – Final Report: June 2015*

- *Staff consultation* – Tenant Participation Resource Program, Community Transport – Deniliquin and Griffith, Commonwealth Respite and Carelink Program staff – Riverina Murray
- *Experience and Learnings* as a rural/regional Community transport Provider
- *Anecdotal feedback* from Intereach staff who work directly with Seniors and disadvantaged people across a number of program areas and rural communities

Organisational Response

a) Specific issues relating to the transport needs of seniors and disadvantaged people in rural and regional NSW

- Reluctance by seniors to use public transport.
- Lack of understanding and education/promotion about current levels of accessibility of Public Transport. Previous experiences of inaccessible transport options prevail.
- Seniors have preference for door to door service as opposed to location specific drop off and pick up points, similar to that provided by taxi services and Community Transport. This relates to general levels of safety, security and mobility factors that prevent older people from getting to and from public transport.
- Lack of public transport within towns, particularly smaller rural towns, and limited options for public transport out of town except to regional centres. The cost of community transport is seen as a barrier, as well as eligibility requirements. For those with private transport, the cost of fuel for regional travel is a key barrier.
- No daily bus routes to take people to different areas in the town. Only bus services are those that run to and from school and out of town from the train station.– Cootamundra
- Greater Hume Residents have stated that Public transport is needed in their LGA. A bus a couple of times a week going to Wagga and or Albury early in morning and coming back again in afternoon was highlighted as a need.
- Community transport providers are not well known among social housing tenants
- Inter-town bus links are limited and this has stopped some social Housing tenants accessing some of Intereach training programs. Fuel vouchers have been provided to assist.
- Feedback suggests that many tenants feel stigmatised due to being social housing tenants which creates a barrier to accessing public transport.
- Barriers exist in all areas of the region relating to how Aboriginal people access public and community transport through the Riverina Murray region and predominantly relate to cost, knowledge and personal capacity.
- One of the most common barriers for Aboriginal people is lack of awareness to transport that is available through:
 - a. the lack of promotion/advertising to the Aboriginal community,
 - b. lack of active community engagement,
 - c. lack of general relationship building by transport providers, and
 - d. lack of disclosure from local organisations (both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) to Aboriginal communities and their working parties about what is available.

Current Case Examples highlighting transport difficulties in Riverina Murray

Mary is a young woman living in a small rural town. Mary uses a wheelchair for mobility. Mary requires a modified transport option in order for her to attend a larger regional Centre in Wagga Wagga to attend specialist appointments and complete her shopping. The cost of this trip is \$50 return. Mary receives a Disability Support Pension and is unable to sustain this cost. Mary has MS and her condition is deteriorating resulting in increased costs with medication, equipment and personal support. Mary has been unable to negotiate a fee with Community transport which is affordable. The service has been unable to meet Mary's needs only being able to offer 1.5 hours for Mary to complete all appointments both medical and social when in Wagga.

Sara is a 23 year old young woman with Phelan McDermid Syndrome and Autism. Sara is unable to access Community Transport as a support person is required to be with her. Sara however is able to utilise a taxi quite safely and without a support person. The cost for Sara to attend her social support program 5 days a week by taxi is \$110 per week. Sara's family are unable to afford this service. The costs of brokering a support person for Sara is approximately \$700 per week.

Geoff resides in a hostel and requires low level care. Geoff is able to independently go shopping and attend appointments. Because Geoff resides in a hostel he is unable to access Community Transport. If Geoff lived at home in the community he would be eligible for community Transport services.

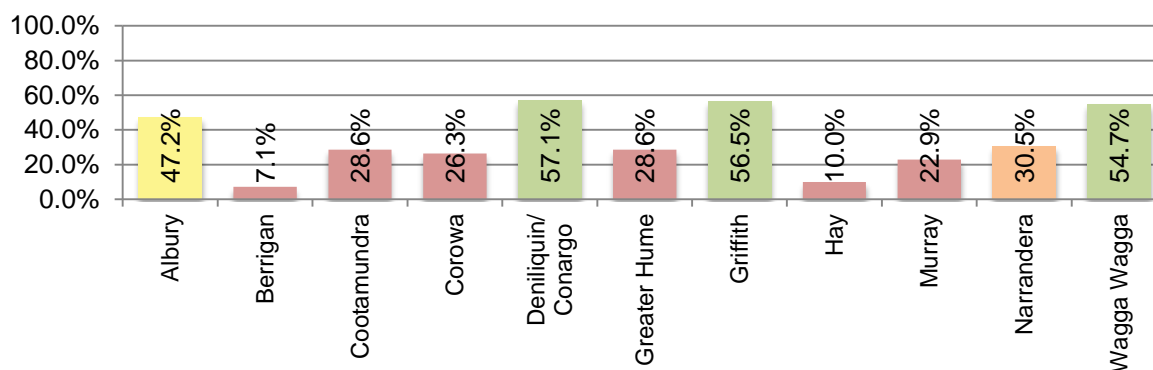
The Community of Corowa have been advised that the local Community Transport Provider will now operate from Albury only – 57 km away. This means that all requests for Community Transport must be made 48 hours in advance. Residents in Corowa have no access to Community Transport for medical appointments that are required on the day making taxis the only option. This is unaffordable for many. A daily return bus service from Corowa to Albury and Wangaratta is the only available public transport service. This generally operates around school timetables.

b) Accessibility of current public transport services in rural and regional NSW

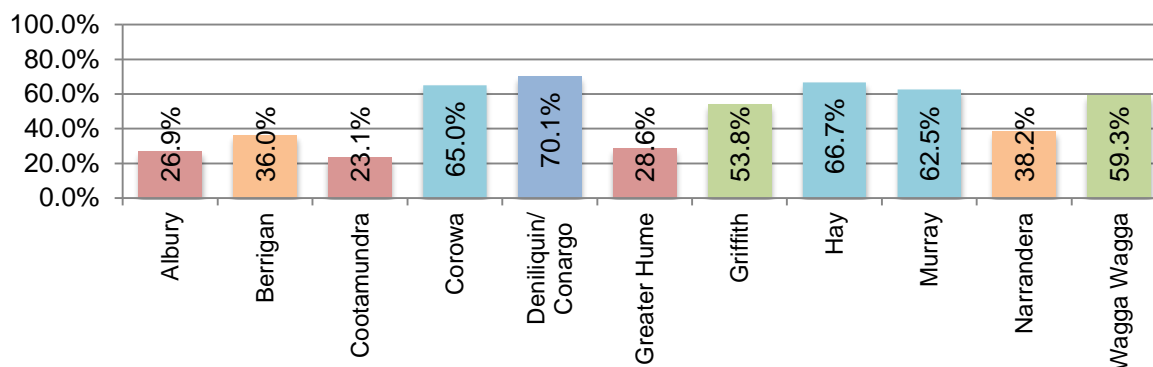
- In the Deniliquin area, Public Transport services include a town service bus as well as train link Coaches to major regional centres including Echuca, Bendigo, Albury and Wagga Wagga. V/line provides a daily service to Melbourne. Good coverage across the vast majority of our the Riverina Murray area, however, services are not daily reducing availability and usefulness. Encouraging older community members to access these is also difficult. Getting to the destination town is only one part of the travel challenge for seniors. Navigating the larger city to get to specific appointments for example becomes another barrier.
- There is no evening or weekend public transport in many communities across the Riverina Murray which creates significant social isolation issues for older people and disadvantaged community groups.
- There is no bus run from Narrandera to Leeton to Griffith which hampers employment opportunities
- Physical accessibility on local bus services across the region is considered to be good with low floor vehicles, hoists and wheelchair access available. Knowledge of this is low.
- There are limitations for rural people in terms of timetable options which then in turn don't meet required appointment times for medical appointments for example at their destination point. This is further exacerbated by the need to potentially change mode of transport once reaching a larger centre in order to get to a specific location within a larger centre. This is particularly daunting for older people who's limited mobility may prevent them from safely navigating and changing between a range of transport options.
- As the data tables support below, in the Riverina Murray, the greatest concern is the availability of public transport, in the Berrigan, Hay, Murray, Corowa, Cootamundra and Greater Hume areas. It can be noted that the four areas where public transport is of a lower concern, Albury, Deniliquin, Griffith and Wagga Wagga, are those with the largest populations.

Intereach Data – “Having Your say 2015” survey results

Percentage of respondents who report *public transport is sufficiently available.*



Percentage of respondents who report *community transport is sufficiently available.*



C) Potential strategies to improve access, including better alignment between different modes of transport, available routes and timetabling generally;

1. Many of the Local Government Areas of Riverina Murray NSW are broadly connected via Public Transport. There is a significant challenge however with older people in relation to how they think about transport options and their confidence and flexibility to try alternative solutions. Regardless of accessibility and availability, any transport option requires a level of coordination and planning that is often beyond the cognitive or technological capacity of the older service user. A “**transport coordination access point**” for older people would assist this target group to navigate the transport system, plan the most appropriate type of transport option and “contingency plan” for variations or emergency situations. The fear of transport not being suitable to needs, not being accessible or available at key times, can result in Public Transport options not being considered. If this type of facilitated transport support role was available to older people there may be a greater degree of confidence to explore alternative options and access other options not previously considered. This role could be an extension to existing Community Transport Services who are the preferred and trusted provider of this target group. This existing relationship could be used to manage transport options, trouble shoot issues on the

individuals behalf and plan the safest and most appropriate transport option relevant to an individuals needs. A training element component could be incorporated to encourage older people to self navigate as they become more confident.

2. Community specific **cross departmental planning** that maps all Transport solutions in one locality (eg: Griffith), so service duplication can be reduced. (Community Transport, Lands Councils, Aboriginal Medical Services, NGO's and other Aboriginal organisations in particular)

3. **Better use of technology** in Community Transport vehicles to enable more flexible pickups. The Albury Aboriginal Medical service has tablets in vehicle to allow real time pick-up information.

4. **Increased accountability** for organisations that are funded to run transport programs, with service agreements and regular reporting in place and attendance at Community Working Parties, or Lands Council meetings at least once a year.

5. Extend programs like the Intereach Deniliquin Community Transport – **LR / MR Driver Licencing** to help provide driver training to people of the Deniliquin area. This has seen around 4-6 aboriginal participants getting their LR/MR licence to aid employment, and volunteering (TfNSW Regional Transport Coordination funding) *but only where identified by the local community.*

6. **Better promotion** of town bus services and broader education on how to use the Public Transport system generally.

7. Taxis and buses that are **timetabled / available for longer hours**

d) 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; and

- Fuel vouchers (cards) is one way of supporting community members to assist with offsetting costs of private transport. These could be administered by Community Transport or other community agencies .
- Vehicle ownership and driver licensing is very low in the social housing areas, especially among Aboriginal tenants. Intereach has responded to this by running an intensive L plate driver licensing program aimed at assisting people with low literacy, and difficulty engaging in mainstream systems, to get their L plates. It has been popular and successful. More than 90% of the more than 30 participants so far have achieved their license.
- Regional Coordination projects to meet short term/emerging needs of the Aboriginal community like taxis, cultural buses and licencing. (Griffith and Deniliquin) These projects are successful as they allow local providers to respond to short term needs, 'road-test' them, and if successful, integrate them into their ongoing service delivery.
- Expansion of NSW IPTAAS scheme to assist with reimbursement of travel costs for medical appointments generally.

e) Any other related matters

- All planning of new housing supply should consider access to public transport as a priority in locating new stock
- Long term working partnerships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal transport providers will assist in developing trust and building knowledge about what is available, and encourage access to a variety of services. Griffith Community Transport and the DirriBangu Elders Group is a good example of this.
- Community Transport providers in this region would benefit from attending Aboriginal Working Parties, and become more actively involved in their local Aboriginal community. This would enable promotion of support that is available, and build good working relationships. Community Transport providers would benefit from attending aboriginal community events, meetings, and building better partnerships to engage Aboriginal clients to use the service.
- The region would benefit from transport for clients in hospitals that are being discharged from hospitals after hours.

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