

**Submission
No 12**

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

Organisation:

Name: Mr Tim Herbert

Position:

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Access to public Transport for seniors and the disadvantaged in rural and regional Areas

Submission 11/07/2016

I believe the format of a submission is open to interpretation I will attempt to address this to some of the given criteria.

a) The requirements of people living in rural and regional areas can be vastly different to metropolitan areas like Sydney. The tyranny of distance requires the client to plan the journey. To recognize it is not just walking to the local bus stop and riding to somewhere. Isolation requires planning. Public transport can be non-existent or very infrequent. Linking with other modes of transport can be difficult. Example

There is a train service that leaves Bathurst Station early every morning and returns each evening. For clients, from Orange, to use this service they must catch a bus which links to the train. If the bus is delayed the passengers miss the train connection, thus not getting to their destination. This could be crucial for the elderly and the disadvantaged as they may need to make a medical appointment. For the elderly and disadvantaged it is a reality.

As I observe the specific needs are-

- Modern, comfortable transport
- Transport that is reliable
- Actual public transport that meets the needs of all
- Transport that provides equal and easy access
- Transport that is cheap to use

These issues obviously fall under section "C" of the criteria but I see the different sections being linked with the core idea Universal Access.

b) Access to current public transport, in rural and regional areas, can be limited, especially trains, this is because of the aging fleets Endeavour and Xplorer class trains both being introduced somewhere around 1996. The Endeavour class trains were not even built to the then standards.

I cannot speak about the other stations so I will address my comments about station access to Bathurst. Out front there seems adequate and functional dropping off and parking it is getting to the platform that is extremely difficult. Everyone must enter the station where there is a waiting room, toilets and the ticket office. Being an older building it has magnificent wooden doors, they are bulky and difficult to open. Approximately ten years back these doors, the original doors being retained but left open, were replaced with big, bulky, heavy glass doors with the same being from the building area to the platform. These doors are impossible to open without assistance. Transport NSW has advised that anyone who cannot get through these doors needs to get the attention of the station staff to assist with entry and exit. Transport NSW refuses to even consider making the doors electric. It is a symptomatic attitude to many real problems before you even attempt to board the train or exit station. In summary this station is not user friendly.

Not having travelled on Country link buses I cannot comment from personal experience but many have assured me they are very modern and comfortable. As they need to be because it can be a long journey.

The trains are an entirely different matter. There are two classes of train that service country NSW. The Endeavour and the Xplorer. The Xplorer being the primary service. Both trains were built in the 90s using 90s standards with the Endeavour not being built to the then standards.

I believe there is a lack of understanding of the needs seniors and disadvantaged people in country NSW. The current minister The Hon Andrew Constance, through Mr Terry McSweeney, in correspondence dated December 10 2015, stated that any new country train would-

“include a designated space for a single wheelchair or similar sized mobility device”

When the previous minister, now treasurer, the Hon Gladys Berejiklian, was asked, in an open forum, about improving access for those with mobility devices to a country train her reply was that it was important that women with strollers and children have access to country trains. She seemed to completely dismiss the idea that those that are disadvantaged needed improved access. This seems to be a mindset as the song goes “Walk a mile in my shoes”.

Both fleets are nearing their maintenance life they need replacing. The government needs to recognize that there are wider needs, for seniors and those that are disadvantaged. With an aging population and the introduction of the NDIS the spotlight is firmly focused on improvement in services for both groups. In the Long Term Transport Master Plan and the Disability Action Plan it clearly states that public transport breaks down Isolation something both groups experience more than the rest of society.

In country towns there has been an increased use of other mobility devices namely mobility scooters. Many people view these as a viable method of transport giving more independence than wheelchairs. The local mobility device retail outlet sells more mobility scooters than wheelchairs, wheelchairs being viewed as a last resort. The NSW government does not seem to view mobility scooters as a legitimate mobility device. They are vastly different to wheelchairs. Mobility scooters are used by people who are still relatively mobile, users believe that these devices should be accommodated on public transport especially trains. City rail trains have electric double doors as well as open space that will easily accommodate all mobility devices.

Country trains have single narrow doors, no open space and with the Endeavour trains only one designated wheelchair space.

With country link buses there is a large storage department where, as was explained to me by a driver, even my scooter could be rolled into and stored. To facilitate this I propose that each country link bus carries light weight portable ramps, easily rolled out for all devices.

It can also be the simple things that able bodied people take for granted. The attached recent article from the Central Western Daily highlights the problem for people in wheelchairs and the reading of information. Mr Cairns cannot read the timetables because they are just too high. It is also noted that not every bus run by Orange Bus Lines are wheelchair accessible a major problem in country towns. To able bodied people the problems for the elderly and the disadvantaged are not always obvious.

This is the planning stage for new, state of the art high tech country trains.

I propose the following design features-

- Double entry/ exit doors, which would permit access for all mobility devices.
- Ramps, on all exit/ entry doors that automatically fold out adjusting to the height of each platform.
- Wider entry corridors to accommodate the above.
- All country trains accommodate parking spaces for at least two mobility devices.
- All country trains to accommodate mobility scooters (of all sizes) as well as wheelchairs.

Access to public areas is paramount for all seniors and disadvantaged people. In the 1977 Disability Act it clearly states that it is unlawful to restrict access to buildings and vehicles, within

reason. The new class of train will not meet the within reason section because there is no budget and they are still in the planning stage There is no need for changes, they must meet the regulations within the acts and the growing demands of all country users.

I also formally request that I be permitted to appear before the committee. I use a mobility scooter that the current country train service will not accommodate making it difficult for me to travel to Sydney. The committee, if it is serious in what it is attempting to achieve, needs to travel to various centres in country NSW to experience the many difficulties commuters face this would then permit me to appear before the enquiry.

I believe that this submission addresses many of the enquiries terms of reference. I am hoping the NSW government accepts that there are serious deficiencies in the current rolling stock and moves to address the issues not just burying the report because it has nothing to do with city transport.

I am hoping for a favorable response to my request to appear before the enquiry as well as positive outcomes for country commuters in the near future.

Tim Herbert

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NEWS

Bus stop times too high to view

BY TANYA MARSCHKE

MORE wheelchair accessible buses and lower bus timetables and route maps have been called for by wheelchair-bound passengers in Orange.

Orange wheelchair user Glenn Cairns has used the Orange Buslines service and said although he could read the timetables at the east bound bus stop in Summer Street from his motorised wheelchair, it still needs adjustment for those in lower wheelchairs.

"If you are in a manual wheelchair you are a bit lower and it is quite hard (for me) to work out the key on the route map," Mr Cairns said.

"If you are in a wheelchair you have to look at the key and then go around to the timetable. You have to see the key to see the route.

"If you are a first timer it's a problem."

Mr Cairns said he would also like to see more wheelchair-accessible buses in Orange, particularly on routes to the hospital.

"I've been up there and a bus arrived but it wasn't wheelchair accessible so I had to get a taxi and a bus is much cheaper."

CareWest Disability Services general manager Ben Wyatt said while there have been positive strides over the years in awareness about the needs of people with a dis-

ability or mobility issues there was more to be done.

"We need to be mindful in all that we do, including displaying new timetables at train and bus stops, that there is a proportion of the population who simply will not be able to access information due to the incorrect positioning, such as height of signage," Mr Wyatt said.

"Not being able to access information such as when the next bus or train will arrive could affect a person's confidence in getting out and about, and a knock-on effect is that it could likely add to an increase in social isolation for our community's most vulnerable."

The issue of bus timetables and route maps being too high to read from a wheelchair was raised at the last Orange City Council meeting through the Aging and Access Committee minutes, after being initially discussed in May.

Committee chairman Ron Gander said relocating the timetables is a council responsibility.

"It's on the books for the council, it's just a matter of dropping them down," Cr Gander said.

Council's Community Recreation and Culture director Scott Maunder said the matter has been included in the Active Travel Plan, which will be considered in August.



TOO HIGH: Orange man Glenn Cairns struggles to see the key in the route map Orange bus stop. Photo: PHIL BLATCH



BRING LOWER: Calls have been made to Orange City Council to lower bus times so passengers in wheelchairs can read them more easily. Photo: PHIL BLATCH