

**Submission
No 17**

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

Organisation:

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Position:

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Until 2013 I was the Social Planner at Tweed Shire Council, where local transport and services for older people were part of my responsibilities. In 2004 the NSW State Government closed the rail service between Casino and Murwillumbah and substituted a coach service.

Despite the use of supposedly accessible coaches, this was a major backward step for older people, as well as young people and many others. Many older people cannot get into coaches, and once in they cannot move around, stretch their legs, get to a toilet or to a buffet. The coaches were sold as serving more stops en route, however these stops amount to a bus stop, without the services, information, safety and comfort that comes from a railway station.

The patronage of the services immediately declined, and I am not aware that it has ever recovered. With such policies, the service usually declines to a token bus service, and then is closed finally for lack of use. Regional accessibility can be improved by developing better train services, such as the case of V-Line in Victoria, which has more than doubled patronage since it was upgraded. Trains are inherently a better mode of transport for older people, in terms of safety, comfort, services en route and assistance from staff.

The lack of train services throughout NSW has been a major factor in the decline of regional towns and the rural economy. They can also reduce road traffic and the costs of road maintenance. I would urge that the Casino-Murwillumbah and many such lines be re-opened and operated as feeder services to the main line services.