

**Submission
No 21**

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

Organisation:

Name: Mr Milton Trott

Position:

Date Received: 18 July 2016

Submission 21: Mr Milton Trott

Good afternoon.....

Committee of Community Services.....

This submission deals with the need for country rail in NSW; particularly focused on the branch line from Casino to Murwillumbah and the affected towns along that route as it traverses the far North Coast of the state. I thank the Committee of Community Services for considering this submission.

Before 2004, the passenger rail service to Murwillumbah had been running profitably until unexplained changes to the timetable and the train itself resulted in a service that wasn't suited to local consumers; instead focusing on a "Sydney-centric" situation. Once these changes were implemented, along with financial reports regarding the condition and possible costs of replacing numerous bridges, the pleas from affected communities for a passenger service that actually addressed their needs were ignored leading to the degradation and closure of the line.

Since then, successive attempts by various groups to educate the Government to the folly of that decision, the stunning about-turns from local politicians and the arrival of the insidious rail-trail lobby have frustrated locals who clearly know what kind of service they need and who continue to be ignored. Maybe it's because of the current talent pool of concerned individuals who are fatigued by the long, drawn out campaign whose important message hasn't resonated with the State Government? Or maybe it's the vested interests that are conspiring to thwart what is essentially a commonsense approach to dealing with social needs into the future.

But where there is little doubt, is that the existing wreck of a rail corridor remains an incredibly valuable asset for the State and local communities on the far North Coast going into the next 50 - 100 years. Some say that for a rail corridor to be viable, it needs to be high speed and that the "early 20th century" route taken across the north coast can only deliver an outdated transport solution. I say that thinking overlooks an array of creative possibilities that can not only address the transport needs of an aging population, but can also provide employment across the region as well.

Currently, there is ample data showing the north coast of NSW is being choked with cars, trucks and buses. We know that rail is safer. So what to do?

My belief is that the situation can have a beneficial outcome for all. It just needs some thinking outside the box.

I can see Casino becoming a rail transport hub for passenger rail. It's already becoming a freight hub. There is room near the intersection of the Sydney - Brisbane line where it meets the branch line to build the necessary infrastructure to stable rolling stock for a localised railcar service. At the other end at Murwillumbah, the same can be constructed there. Not only will this enterprise call for local employees to staff the passenger rail service, it will provide a raft of allied hospitality business opportunities for the towns. Examples exist of successful Community rail projects

across Europe. In some situations, patronage on once depleted rail lines has tripled. These figures are hard to ignore. And it's doable across NSW too.

The communities across the north coast have been articulate about how they'd like the service to run and when it should run. Not only can elderly and isolated people benefit, there is also an abundance of evidence that a proper service would be used by students as well. All of these needs have ignored in the past.

Ultimately, the "elephant in the room" emerges as to whether investment in the line should extend (quite literally) to sending the line to Coolangatta airport. It seems incongruous that a major airport some 23 kms away, can't be accessed by rail serving the north coast. If the line were to be extended past Condong with a bridge over the Tweed river, the service could then engage patrons in Tweed Heads and deliver people from as far away as Casino, to the airport. It has been suggested too, that the airport in Ballina (now being further developed), could also benefit from a rail link. That possibility has been thrust into the debate over the years as to why nothing has been done to reinstate the line with people claiming political favoritism or jealousy was to blame. But where once a branch line ran to Ballina as well, there's nothing to suggest it can't be put back in the future. However, I would suggest that careful analysis needs to be made for that particular plan. And then, there are the heritage and tourism rail business that surely would flourish.

The main game here is finding a way for the NSW Government to realise that the bridges do need replacing and the passenger rail service rightly returned. And that to do this successfully requires a new way of looking at the situation (beyond the blinkered and self-serving desires of current vested interests) for the good of all the future generations who choose to live across this region.

In places prone to flooding, where emergency mobility and evacuation warranted, the rail line proves its worth. It mystifies me as to how and why the successive NSW Governments have sought to look away when the communities have for so long, clearly stated both their outrage at the way their beloved passenger rail service was taken away and that now they want it back. It requires a mindset that it functionally ok with the idea that a branch line can have its own rolling stock, timetables, connection to the main Syd-Bris protocols, staff and community engagement. It almost seems cruel that intelligent people who support the return of passenger rail have been treated so cynically.

Luckily, the NSW Government has found the sense to notice that attempts by the Rail-trail lobby to hoodwink all and sundry to their chardonnay-sipping notions of a rail trail to replace the rail line, have been thwarted (for now) due to the acknowledged perception of community value of the existing infrastructure. But the Rail trail lobby are insidious. They've done an excellent job of shmoozing local Government authorities with their delusional concepts of economic growth and tourism without having any answers for who will pay for the maintenance of the rail trail.

With the reinstatement of the passenger rail service to Murwillumbah, based on a Community branch line from Casino model, no-one is saying it will be run privately at a profit. The NSW Government will have to have to participate as stakeholders and

while some will ask about profitability, it was never going to a situation where the NSW Government wouldn't be making some kind of contribution.

So where the Victorian Government is now seriously looking at renewing and revitalizing their branch lines, and the WA Government seeing the sense of using rail in it's forward planning (even the SA Government is embarking on new trams), surely the NSW Government should be leveling with it's populace and finding a way forward with the expanding and democratization of their transport department. We're talking about sophisticated transport options for the next 50 - 100 years .

So in conclusion, in writing this for your consideration, I sincerely hope that this small offering might just be realised by someone within the NSW Government who has the ability to see beyond immediate political gains to a wider, more altruistic socially engaged future where older or disabled residents can enjoy safe, reliable and democratic transport options that are fully supported.

Thanks again.

Should you, or anyone in NSW Government wish to discuss any of what I have set out here, further, I would welcome contact from them.

Milton Trott

[Redacted]

[Redacted]