

**Submission  
No 24**

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

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The Chair  
Legislative Assembly Committee on Community Services  
Parliament House  
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Dear Sir / Madam

**Inquiry on Access to Transport for Seniors and Disadvantaged People in Rural and Regional NSW**

The Bega Valley Shire Council thank you for the opportunity to provide input into the inquiry on access to transport for seniors and disadvantaged people in rural and regional NSW.

As a Shire more than 6 hours car drive from Sydney or 5 hours from Wollongong and 3.5 hours from Canberra, the potential isolation for seniors and disadvantaged people is immense and can have significant impact on the health and wellbeing of these groups.

We look forward to reading in full the issues that are presented to the Committee and possible solutions to improve the transport options for people in our Shire.

Should you need to clarify any items in our submission please contact Mr Anthony Basford, Director Community, Relations and Leisure on [REDACTED]

Yours faithfully

[REDACTED]

**Leanne Barnes**  
General Manager



**Bega Valley Shire Council submission to the Legislative Assembly Committee on Community Services inquiry into access to transport for seniors and disadvantaged people in rural and regional NSW.**

The Bega Valley Shire is located on the far south coast of New South Wales (NSW), with a population of 33,475 spread across 6,052 square kilometres. Compared to other areas of regional NSW, the Bega Valley Shire has a higher proportion of people aged over 65; it also has a SEIFA score of 968.7, indicating higher relative disadvantage than NSW on average (Profile ID, 2016).

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

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

*Transport access within the Bega Valley Shire*

The Bega Valley Shire is comprised of four major towns and a series of smaller towns and localities. The major towns (Bermagui, Bega, Merimbula and Eden) have limited bus timetables and one or two taxis. Outside of these towns there is limited or no public transport: some localities have no bus stops, or only have access to school buses during school bus timetables. Buses in the Shire stop operating daily at 5pm, and do not operate on Sundays at all. A bus trip from Bermagui to Bega, totalling 62 kilometres, takes approximately 1.5 hours.

Trips to and between towns are essential for residents to access services such as supermarkets and doctors; however many younger, disadvantaged people do not own vehicles and some older people have restricted licences with a limited travel radius. As a result there can be significant costs associated with travel in the Shire for seniors and/or people who are disadvantaged. For example, a taxi fare from Eden to the new South East Regional Hospital in Bega (54 kilometres) would cost approximately \$200.

As the new South East Regional Hospital is not within walking distance of Bega's main central business district, access to health services can be restricted even for residents who live in Bega itself. Bega Valley Shire Council's (BVSC) Ageing & Disability team, which provides case management support to frail and vulnerable individuals exiting hospital, frequently funds the cost of a taxi trip home for isolated residents in Bega who have no other means of transport. BVSC's Brighter Futures team similarly provides taxi vouchers to vulnerable families requiring access to essential community services and welfare support.

The Bega Valley Shire's Community Transport service offers an alternative means of transport for people who do not have their own vehicle and cannot use buses or taxis. This service is well utilised and in frequent demand; however it cannot cater to all types of passengers or offer the flexibility that some residents require. For example, the service requires 48 hours notice, and passengers receiving dialysis or oxygen cannot be transported. Financial considerations can also present a barrier as passengers are charged from base to base, not from home to appointment. As a result, a passenger travelling from Tathra to Pambula will be charged in the following manner: Bega-Tathra-Pambula-Tathra-Bega. The cost for this service would be \$35; a trip from Bermagui to Bega would be \$55.

Individuals who require wheelchair accessible transport are further disadvantaged in their ability to commute across the Shire. For example, Meals on Wheels supports community members with a weekly shopping bus; however this service is not wheelchair accessible. Wheelchair accessible taxis can be found in the Shire but must be booked well in advance, with Merimbula being the only town with a wheelchair accessible taxi on call. Community Transport, whilst having the capacity to accommodate passengers in wheelchairs, requires that a carer travel with the passenger at all times.

**Bega Valley Shire Council submission to the Legislative Assembly Committee on Community Services inquiry into access to transport for seniors and disadvantaged people in rural and regional NSW.**

For some families, an inability to access transport in the Bega Valley Shire impacts upon their child's education and care. At one of Council's childcare centres, attended by many disadvantaged and low income families, there are seven enrolled families where parents do not have a car licence. On occasions, some children cannot come to school at all if their parent has no transport option on that day. On other days, parents rely on other family members or taxis in order to transport their children to care. One family reported that, whilst they own a vehicle, they cannot afford the cost of repairs and thus must rely on others for transport assistance. In February 2016 BVSC's Indigenous Advancement Strategy Reference Group, comprised of Aboriginal Elders and community members from Bega and Eden, confirmed that the aforementioned barriers similarly affect the ability of Aboriginal families to access education and support services.

Young people in the Bega Valley Shire are further disadvantaged, due to the tyranny of distance. Many young people already have to leave the Shire to access further study options. This issue is exacerbated for young people who do not have a licence, where a seemingly short trip by car from Eden to Merimbula or Bega becomes a chasm due to lack of bus options and the expense of taxis. There are no trains in the Bega Valley Shire. If young people are able to secure a traineeship or employment through support of employment agencies, the placements often fail as there is support for equipment and training costs but not travel. A subsidy or allowance would provide welcome support for young people. Council recently offered tertiary scholarships for students studying at university or TAFE. Nearly all requests for scholarships indicated that the scholarship would assist with travel costs.

The issue of transport disadvantage has been a matter considered by Council previously. In 2010, following a Notice of Motion, Council sought to improve transport to our smaller towns by working with transport companies and the Chambers of Commerce, and in particular looking at raising awareness of the issue with policy makers to address the issue. On reflection, the issues have not improved since this time and potentially gotten worse for some people as the cost of transportation relative to income has increased.

*Transport access outside of the Bega Valley Shire*

Bega Valley Shire is home to Merimbula Airport, from which individuals can fly to Sydney or Melbourne; however due to lack of competition airfares are expensive (between \$160 to \$420 one way), so this option is prohibitive to people on low incomes that must travel long distances. Coaches run from Sydney to Melbourne twice daily, but passengers must change coaches in Eden as the service is provided by two different companies. Another coach service runs from Eden to Canberra and return with connecting train to Sydney; however it does not go via Canberra Airport.

Research conducted with the Eden Aboriginal community in 2014 (Far South Coast Family Support Service, 2014) highlighted that transport was a prohibitive factor for community members needing to attend medical and specialist appointments. Of the four Aboriginal community members in the survey who were booked in to a specialist appointment in Canberra or Sydney for health care reasons, all reported that they did not attend their appointment as they had no means of travelling there. Bega Valley Shire's local Aboriginal Medical Service, Katungul Aboriginal Corporation, has attempted to circumvent this issue by employing a Transport Officer who takes community members to long distance specialist health appointments, however as this is not a funded service its availability is restricted, and it cannot provide support in cases where a person is acutely unwell.

**Bega Valley Shire Council submission to the Legislative Assembly Committee on Community Services inquiry into access to transport for seniors and disadvantaged people in rural and regional NSW.**

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

- Better align timetables for buses: Use smaller buses more frequently; align bus timetables to business hours to ensure arrival before 9am and departure after 5pm especially in Bega and Merimbula; align timetables with other bus companies to allow travel between Eden to Bermagui and return.
- Demand-responsive transport. Have a smaller local town bus that travels around individual towns accessing doctors, schools, preschools, hospitals and other essential services. This is particularly required in Eden. (i.e. Telebus type program. Door or end of street pick up)
- Private, wheelchair accessible buses to organise more day trips
- Introduction of a similar Taxi Transport Subsidy Scheme for over 65's
- Make Community transport more flexible and less restrictive to particular types of disabilities
- Deregulate air route in NSW to allow greater competition
- Introduction of external transport company – Uber, use of private vehicle
- In Bega Valley Shire, Meals on Wheels could maximise use of their bus by offering more shopping trips from other towns
- Provide funding to Disability service providers such as Illawarra Trust/Workability to purchase wheelchair accessible vehicle to help job seekers and general community access

**(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**

- Introduction of Centrelink mobility type allowance to young people, seniors and disadvantaged residents which would help subsidise transport costs with a fortnightly payment, currently around \$100 per fortnight.
- Setting up a volunteer group of drivers willing to assist with transport, similar to community transport but with private vehicles and with much more flexibility. Users would be asked to make small contributions towards the running costs of the car (insurances and risk management would need to be considered).
- Free registration and CTP, and cheaper insurance to run a private vehicle for people on low incomes and working or training.

**(e) Any other related matters**

The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) represents a significant opportunity for people with a disability to live in the community as other Australians do; however the limited funding for transport under the NDIS compounds the issues reflected elsewhere in this submission relating to the lack of public transport, the lack of accessible transport options, and the fact that many people with a disability are restricted in their capacity to drive. For the people of the Bega Valley Shire who have a disability, it is critical that the issue of transport access remains high on the agenda. A key factor to the success of the NDIS in this area will be the development of new transport initiatives. There still remains a role for government to assist communities such as the Bega Valley Shire to innovate and implement new transport initiatives in local areas.

**Bega Valley Shire Council submission to the Legislative Assembly Committee on Community Services inquiry into access to transport for seniors and disadvantaged people in rural and regional NSW.**

**References**

Far South Coast Family Support Service (2014). Yarning Forum Evaluation. Bega: Far South Coast Family Support Service.

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