

**Submission
No 25**

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

Organisation: Nambucca Shire Council Access Committee
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Position: Councillor
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Submission 25: Nambucca Shire Council, Access Committee (Cr Anne Smyth)

The Chair

Legislative Assembly Committee on Community Services

SUBMISSION: INQUIRY INTO ACCESS TO TRANSPORT FOR SENIORS AND DISADVANTAGED PEOPLE IN RURAL AND REGIONAL NSW

This submission is made on behalf of Nambucca Shire Council's Access Committee, of which I am a member. The Committee is an advisory committee of Council, whose members include two Councillors, representatives from Guide Dogs, SES, Nambucca Valley *Phoenix* (a supported employment service for people who have an intellectual disability), Macksville Aquatics Centre, as well as a number of interested members of the public.

The Nambucca Shire Local Government Area is located on the Mid North Coast of NSW, approximately 500km north of Sydney and 480km south of Brisbane and has a population of 19,655 (ABS). The median weekly household income is approximately \$700.

The population of Nambucca Shire includes more than 7,000 rural residents; 24.4% of people are aged 65 years or older; 7.3% of people are Aboriginal; and 10.7% of the population are unemployed. According to ABS statistics, there are 5,742 people with a disability who are living in private dwellings.

With regard to accessibility to transport in the Nambucca Shire, Public Transport options are limited to a couple of train services north and south each day. There is a privately-run bus service available which connects to towns in the Shire and north to Coffs Harbour. There is a private taxi service available for those who can afford to utilise that service. Community Transport operates a service in the Shire, which is always in high demand.

At a recent meeting, the Access Committee discussed access to transport and the challenges presented to the elderly and those with disability and decided to make a brief submission to the Inquiry.

The issues identified by the Access Committee in relation to accessibility to transport services in our Shire are:

- **ACCESS TO TRAINS: TIMETABLES, ACCESS TO NIGHT TRAINS**

Railway stations in the Shire are not located in town centres, nor connect with bus services. Accessing train stations at night is particularly concerning, but due to the limited service available to Sydney and Brisbane, this is sometimes unavoidable. Timetabling has been an issue in recent years, with one of the daily services to Nambucca Heads being removed.

The Access Committee supports the recent decision by the NSW State Government and NSW Trainlink to ensure that employees will continue to staff Macksville and Nambucca Heads Railway Stations particularly so that trains will continue to be met by staff. This is a high priority due to the number of night connections and the large number of elderly people and people with disabilities relying on train services.

Also, timetable reform would be supported if trains were able to offer a daily commute

within the region as well as travel options.

- **CONNECTIONS TO TOWNS AND CITIES SOUTH OF THE VALLEY, PARTICULARLY KEMPEY AND PORT MACQUARIE**

Difficulties with connections arise because bus services to the south are operated by a different company to that which operates from the Nambucca Valley.

- **CONNECTIONS TO SCHOOLS AND UNIVERSITY IN COFFS HARBOUR/PORT MACQUARIE**

More connections would be desirable, particularly to allow students to attend classes/activities conducted out of school hours.

- **DISCHARGED PATIENTS (WHO HAVE ARRIVED VIA AMBULANCE) HAVING TRANSPORT FROM MACKSVILLE HOSPITAL TO RETURN HOME OR TO AGED-CARE FACILITY**

Patients who arrive by ambulance to hospital are required on discharge to find their own way home. This can be a costly exercise, particularly if a taxi is required to travel from Macksville Hospital to a remote rural property.

- **ABILITY TO TRAVEL TO COFFS HARBOUR TO VISIT DOCTORS AND SPECIALISTS**

The number of specialist doctors practising out of the Nambucca Shire is limited, necessitating travel by many residents to attend appointments in Coffs Harbour (our closest city), 50kms north. Trying to juggle a limited bus and train timetable to attend appointments in Coffs Harbour is particularly challenging for the elderly and those with mobility issues. Many residents do not have their own vehicle and the cost of a taxi is often out of people's reach. Due to the demand on its services, Community Transport is not always available on short notice.

The Access Committee would welcome the introduction of a fuel card similar to that available for seniors in remote Western Australia, which assists with the costs of private transport where public transport is unavailable.

Increased availability of Community Transport services in the Nambucca Shire would also be of great benefit.

Thank you for the opportunity of making a submission to this important Inquiry.

Councillor Anne Smyth
Access Committee member
Nambucca Shire Council
19 July 2016