

**Submission
No 35**

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

Organisation: Lithgow City Council
Name: Ms Viktoria Gulabovski
Position: Community Development Officer
Date Received: 20 July 2016

Reference: VG: C&C



18 July 2016

Mr Adam Marshall MP
Committee Chair
Legislative Assembly Committee on Community Services
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

communityservices@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Dear Mr Marshall MP

Submission regarding Access to Transport for Seniors and Disadvantaged People in Rural and Regional NSW

Thank you for the invitation to make a submission regarding the inquiry into the access to transport for seniors and disadvantaged people in rural and regional NSW.

In developing this submission, key stakeholders were consulted, which comprised relevant local organisations and community representatives, as follows:

- Disability Access Committee
- Uniting Care Lithgow
- Ability Links
- Portland Men's Shed
- Department of Health

The following submission is a collation of input from these groups specifically created for the Committee's consideration.

If you would like further information please contact myself, Viktoria Gulabovski, Community Development Officer on [REDACTED] or email [REDACTED]

Lithgow Council appreciates the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry and wishes the Legislative Assembly Committee on Community Services all the best with this very important work.

Yours sincerely

Viktoria Gulabovski
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT OFFICER

SUBMISSION

Seniors and disadvantaged people in Lithgow have many day-today challenges when it comes to transport. Some of the difficulties experienced by seniors and disadvantaged people in Lithgow include:

- e-health record is a great idea across all ages and locations (especially with seniors in rural and remote regions), however there is no assistance provided to those who are not internet savvy or may not have access to the internet, such as the elderly and disadvantaged people. Perhaps a health worker can travel to rural and remote community centres connecting that person via internet to their doctor, reducing travel and costs to that person equally and overall concessional outlays to the government.
- Promoting the health direct number 1800 022 222 to seniors and disadvantaged people may reduce the amount of travel they have to do to and from their closest medical centre or hospital. Many older people do not realise this is an additional free service that they can access, which could reduce the amount of unnecessary travel and thus improve their quality of life.
- Lithgow community transport plays a vital role in our community as it ensures that seniors and disadvantaged people make it to their appointments on time and it also reduces social isolation. However, due to a lack of funding, the demand for this service outweighs the supply and many are left to find alternative means of transport, such as public transport or family and friends. In addition, patients with chronic medical conditions that access community transport currently travel for up to 3 hours to get home without any medical supervision during the trip. Community members who have radiotherapy or chemotherapy deserve to have a qualified in attendance while being transported.

Issues with public transport when it comes to specialist appointments include:

- There is a shortage of specialist doctors in Lithgow so more often than not seniors and disadvantaged people have to travel into Sydney to receive specialist care. Seniors have reported that they are too scared to go on public transport themselves in case they have a fall or get lost. In most cases, seniors and disadvantaged people are unable to afford public transport when they have to frequently visit a specialist doctor in Sydney.

Similarly, they are unable to afford a staff person to assist in travelling by public transport to get to their specialist appointment if they do not have a family member that can accompany them.

- In some cases, older people fall asleep on the trains and they miss their specialist appointments in Sydney. They wake up disorientated and confused, which can lead to other safety issues. Older people find it difficult to find their way around huge Sydney hospitals unless they have a support person to achieve the whole transport and appointment process. Other frequent scenarios include older people not changing their specialist appointment times when they need to due to not wanting to "put anyone out".
- Further, medical professionals/ receptionist staff book awkward times for older people's appointments, such as 4pm or 8am, without asking the older person how they are getting to and from the appointment. Greater consideration needs to be given to those who have a return journey with a 1-3 hour wait for public transport and then another 3 hour train ride to get home. Older people who have little money and no family support and live 30-60km from Countrylink or a train station, with no other local public transport after 6pm between Mon-Fri face many challenges indeed.

By having more specialists available in our local area, either in person or via telelink, overall concessional costs with regards to transport will be reduced.

- Knowing where to get face to face assistance at any time at any Railway Station is very important to older people. With the rise of technology, it seems the older person has been forgotten in the public transport system, particularly those community members that live in rural and regional areas.
- For example, a local resident was recently travelling back from interstate. She is in her 60s and a very capable person. She purchased a ticket from the airport to Central Station with no problems. However, once at Central, the situation became rather stressful. The person at the information desk gave her a 1 minute brief (with noise in the background) on how to get a ticket from the ticket machine. The instructions were not written down on paper, so it was very difficult to remember all the information. There were many people at the ticket machine also struggling to work it correctly. Finally, after fumbling for about 5 minutes she managed to get a ticket.

Had it taken any longer she would have missed her train and would have had to wait another 2-3 hours for a train home as it was the weekend and trains run less frequently. The Opal card can help with these sorts of situations, but there's always the issue of running out of credit and not remembering to recharging it regularly.

Transport – Rail - Country

The following issues relate to rail, boarding, entrance and exit from railways stations:

- Station – most have ramps but often is it difficult to locate the person who will put this in place.
- Notification is made where the participant will exit but often this is not ready at the destination station.
- Ramps – some have access others not – Warrimoo, Linden, Hazelbrook (need to reviewed this is memory based at this stage).
- People rush and push to get on and off the train.

The following issues relate to seating on country trains:

- Usually remain in wheelchair and sit in the vestibule. This is the main entrance and exit point and often they are in the way of the traffic flow.
- If suffering broken bones on larger extremities - eg leg, this adds further restriction.
- It is cold as the doors are frequently opening and closing – usually dress with warmer clothing and carry a blanket.
- People moving between carriages are rude and push.
- To securely travel here you really on the brakes on the wheelchair as there is no anchoring position.

The following issues relate to carriage access:

- Unable to enter the seating area due to the width and weight of the door
- If a good day able to stand and have the chair in the normal seating area and use the seats provided. There is no storage available for the chair so it is placed between seats therefore restricting access to seats for other passengers. This meets with annoyed and abusive travellers as they are required to stand.

The following issue relates to amenities on country trains:

- Unable to access toilets - doors and movement between carriage.

Transport - Rail - Inner City

The following issues relate to rail, boarding, entrance and exit:

- Station – most have ramps but often is it difficult to locate the person who will put this in place.
- Notification is made where the participant will exit but often this is not ready at the destination station.

The following issue relates to seating on inner city trains:

- Seating positions are easier – but at times the area is used by the able bodied and also have their bags in the area allocated for wheelchair positioning.

Transport – Bus

The following issues relate to boarding:

- Unable to board the bus without assistance due to gap and steepness of boarding area
- Limited local service with accessibility

Transport – Taxi

- Limited local service (One only)
- Pre booking required – can wait some time
- Very high cost, particularly if you live outside Lithgow, i.e. Wallerawang or Portland – have worked with voucher when possible.

Transport – Community Transport

- Pre booking required
- Limited hours for out of area use
- Sometimes they over assist with the wheel chair which impacts on personal independence

Transport Issues In the Town of Portland

Portland is a town in the Lithgow LGA and is located approximately 25km North West of the city of Lithgow. At the 2011 census, Portland had a population of 2,307 people, with 609 people aged 60 and over. Furthermore, 228 people said that they provided unpaid assistance to a person with a disability (in the last two weeks). Given this background, the transport issues experienced by seniors and disadvantaged people in Portland, include:

- Transport for seniors and disadvantaged persons does not exist in Portland.
- In a small community such as Portland seniors and disadvantaged persons are transported by relatives, friends and kindly business owners.
- Community transport is available at the door from TRANSLINC however this is an over-stretched service and not always available when needed. I believe their transport is limited to certain hours of the day.
- All in all seniors and disadvantaged persons depend on the kindness of the Portland community for all their transport needs.