

**Submission
No 42**

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

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Position:
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Submission 42: Southlake Carers

Southlakes Carers would like to make a submission on the following matters to be considered:

a) Specific issues relating to the transport needs of seniors and disadvantaged people in rural and regional NSW:

Southlakes Carers has been assisting the elderly and the disadvantaged with transport for over 30 years in the Southern Lake Macquarie area (Lower Hunter region).

We have a large population of seniors; projections show those over the age of 65 would increase by 57.1% as compared to the 2011 population data. Even if able to access public transport, if you are elderly, or disadvantaged due to a disability or other mobility issues, accessing public transport is difficult. Many people are geographically disadvantaged and as a result many feel very isolated.

b) Accessibility to current public transport:

The area we service is made up of peninsulas; hamlets and villages separated by waterways and many kilometres of road in between. The transport service is sporadic and in some areas non-existent. Other barriers: two (2) of our train stations have several flights of stairs - no ramps or lifts, therefore if someone has a disability or is well aged they are unable to access the station(s). Some bus services only run a couple of times a week therefore difficult to coordinate appointments. Some of the major centres that people need to get to require several modes and changes of transport and can take several hours, to travel less than 20 kilometres. There are often long wait times in between connections.

c) Potential Strategies to improve access:

Southlakes Carers - has been involved since 2011 with SLMPTAG (South Lake Macquarie Public Transport Action Group) the goal is to have a public bus (at public bus rates) direct from Morisset to the Wyong Hospital campus. This hospital/medical campus is where the large percentage of community members go for emergencies and are often referred to the specialist centre at Kanwal. Presently the trip can be several hours either side of the appointment due to different modes of transport, often connections are missed and access to some of the stations as mentioned before is difficult. Further to that if you are elderly; unwell or have a disability/mobility issue that makes the whole event very difficult. At this point we have been unsuccessful in our campaign to secure a public bus for our community.

d) Support that can be provided to seniors and disadvantaged people to assist with the costs of private transport where public transport is unavailable or unable to meet the needs of these groups:

Southlakes Carers have supported seniors and disadvantaged people to access services; medical/specialist appointments; hospital admissions/procedures; visiting loved ones and shopping etc. We are not funded to provide a transport service we utilise volunteer drivers (who are reimbursed) it is a user pays system that we subsidise at a cost to our organisation, this is becoming increasingly difficult as the need grows. We would like to be able to offer cheaper transport provision particularly to those that might be economically disadvantaged. The current demographics of our area and the projected growth in an ageing population means that the need to support these groups particularly those that have difficulty accessing the transport system is only going to increase.