

**Submission
No 45**

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

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Submission to the Enquiry into Rail Services in Regional NSW:

From: Catherine Smith

Reinstating passenger train services, with connecting mini buses to and from the train out to villages and towns, could be a source of many small businesses being formed and many jobs created in the Northern Rivers and a massive boon to the economy, particularly benefitting the aged, those with disabilities and those who are isolated in our local communities.

The cost of refurbishing the rail line infrastructure is not the huge cost mooted by the state government in the flawed ARUP Report of 2013. This report did not include even one tourist in the numbers of people who would use the service, which is ridiculous in one of the fastest growing and most visited areas in Australia. The addition of the many hundreds of thousands of tourists that come to our region (in fact Byron Bay alone attracts 1.6million visitors per year) would more than adequately cover the costs of running this service for the benefit of all those living in and visiting the region, particularly those on benefits and who have no transport of their own.

With the use of current technology through mobiles and internet we have so much potential to improve our local economies and our quality of life for those living in and visiting our region with the reactivation of a regular commuter rail service that runs through the heart of the Northern Rivers and to give access to those who need to be picked up by mini bus and delivered to the train station.

This is one of the most picturesque regions in the world, with Byron Bay being the second most visited place (Nimbin being the third) outside Sydney in NSW and Byron being the third most visited place outside of Sydney and Melbourne in the whole of Australia for domestic tourism. At present many of these travellers are stuck in Byron Bay but would be able to visit and explore the rest of the region in comfort if they could jump on a train in Byron – this would of course benefit our whole region's economy greatly. Currently many small boutique shops are closing in Lismore and Casino for want of patrons - this would change drastically if they could get to these major towns easily via train.

Many people find it hard travelling by bus - it's expensive and uncomfortable for longer distances, especially when visiting specialists in Queensland, and we have thousands of signatures on petitions from people who yearn for a regular passenger train service to be reinstated on our line.

Extending the line up to Queensland will further benefit the whole region and create a connection to Queensland that so many people would use, especially with the Commonwealth Games happening in 2018. The whole of southern QLD is already booked out for that time - this could be a boon for our region as far as travellers and people staying here and travelling up there for the Games.

Road usage is increasing at a rapid rate in our region and is leading to bottle necks, pollution, accidents and is not the way of a sustainable future. In other states of Australia and around the world governments are looking to create rail and tram services to provide more environmentally and socially responsible transport for their citizens and we already have the line as a central part of our

local infrastructure and do not need to build a new corridor – it would be a crime to destroy this great asset not only for our region but for the benefit of the whole of Australia.

Bike tracks could be installed by the sides of the tracks as they do in many parts of the world. It would be ludicrous to lose this important infrastructure that everyone in our region would potentially use for a bike trail that very few people would utilise, in comparison to a comfortable journey with good time tabling, connecting with small buses that can be co-ordinated via the internet for pickups and drop offs to all local towns and villages and within the CBD of Lismore as a truly integrated public transport system in the NSW Northern Rivers, where we are very much in need of real public transport for one of the fastest growing regions in Australia.

Indeed, bike trails alone would only service 10% of the population while it could be argued that a rail service with accompanying mini bus connections could service up to 100% of the population and visitors. Rail trails will not help the aged, people with disabilities and those who are isolated because they suffer from a lack of accessible public transport and would not be able to use a rail trail.

Apart from the incredible benefits to our local population, including the elderly and disadvantaged, this region has the potential to bring in much greater wealth to our country as many foreign tourists would utilise this service regularly, thus enriching many towns' economies that are currently struggling, such as Lismore and Casino, not having to drive their own cars to get around but being transported in comfort and able to alight at small local towns to partake in their refreshments and local produce.

Only a viable well time-tabled rail and integrated public transport system with the already existing rail line as the backbone of this much needed service will do the job for those in our region who have for a very long time not been treated in an equal manner to our counterparts in other regions and in cities – we are greatly disadvantaged by this lack of an essential service. You may say that they have larger populations but we have abundant areas where people could settle but without adequate services such as real public transport options this region will remain less feasible for young and old alike to live and work in.

A first step in this process of making our travel more accessible and more equitable is to reinstate a service on the Casino – Lismore section of the line so a regular service running from Lismore via Casino and Kyogle could reach Brisbane in roughly three hours, allowing many who need to attend doctor's appointments etc to cover the distance there and back home within a day. This part of the line is in very good condition and we are assured by those in the know that it could be opened again in a very short time to regular passenger services.

I plead with you to see the benefits and the sense in utilising this incredible asset that is not in such a bad state as has been suggested, according to experts we have spoken with, in comparison to the incredible benefits that would flow socially, economically and environmentally for these disadvantaged groups as well as the rest of the population living in and visitors to this important region of NSW with the reintroduction of services on our Casino – Murwillumbah line.