

**Submission
No 55**

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

Organisation: Port Macquarie-Hastings Council
Name: Ms Julie Priest
Position: Access & Seniors Coordinator
Date Received: 21 July 2016

Where do you want to go today?

Submission by Port Macquarie-Hastings Council

Demographic Snapshot:

- On average in Australia 4.6% of the population is diagnosed with a disability. In Port Macquarie-Hastings it is significantly higher with 6.6% of our residents identified as having a disability.
Our 4,826 residents with a disability may experience difficulty moving around their locality and in accessing information, facilities and services;
- 24.7% of our residents are aged 65 years and above compared to the NSW average of 13.8% (Australian average 14%);
- Migration of Seniors (retiring from Sydney) to live in our LGA adds to the increasingly high numbers of our ageing population.

Geographic area to be serviced:

- Hastings covers an area of 3686 square kilometres and is located 420 kilometres north of Sydney and 510 kilometres south of Brisbane;
- The area has some 29 small localities and villages in addition to three main townships: Port Macquarie, Wauchope and Laurieton; and
- One of our townships - Camden Haven (Dunbogan), has the startling distinction of being the oldest population per capita in NSW with an average age of 56 years.

According to the key findings of the *Local Government and Ageing Report, July 2010*, Hastings LGA is:

- Categorised as *"Becoming older": losing young to metropolitan LGA's, gaining working age and gaining seniors*;
- Migration of older people to non-metropolitan coastal areas (rather than 'age in place') with pockets of very high concentrations along the NSW Coast; and
- Potentially PMHC aged population could double by the year 2021. Our projected percentage change in our population aged 65 and over is 52- 99.9% growth by 2021.

A: Specific Issues

- Consistent public transport difficulties for 29 of our rural communities including Comboyne, Telegraph Point, Kendal, Dunbogan and Pembroke with almost no public transport and low levels of public transport for our three major townships - Wauchope, Laurieton and Port Macquarie due to geographic distances. Services are typically less frequent, less available (e.g., nights and weekends) and less accessible (i.e., bus stops are not in a convenient location, may not be disability accessible, may not be linked to footpath and connected walkability) than public transport in urban areas.
- Because of their location, residents living in our rural areas are often required to travel longer distances to work or access services.
- Access to a variety of safe ways to travel provides people with choice and allows communities and people to decide how they want to move. In order for this to be true, infrastructure such as footpaths, safe road crossings, bike

lanes, bus shelters and connected transport hubs need to be in place to ensure the safety of those choosing active methods of transport. The quality of life in a community increases as more people choose to walk, bike, take public transport and interact.

- An efficient public transport system helps prevent social exclusion and contributes to creating cohesive communities.
- There are high levels of car ownership in our LGA so has typically been assumed that public transport is not a significant problem however due to our ageing population, and 3rd highest in NSW for dementia, when drivers lose their licence then public transport becomes hugely important.
- Transport in rural areas, with scattered populations trying to access necessary services based in far-off places have low-density rural populations and long distances
- The disproportionate amount of Federal and State funding going towards roads (i.e. car based transport) when compared to alternative transport modes and improving public transport to move away from car reliance.
- Regional and Rural communities have a lot of legacy infrastructure that is noncompliant with current access standards therefore further disadvantaging the aging population and other vulnerable groups within those communities. This infrastructure backlog typically sits as a lower priority compared to other infrastructure backlogs such as bridges, therefore Councils, without specific funding assistance, are unlikely to be able to afford the much needed improvements.

B: Accessibility of current public transport services

- Boarding and de-boarding from buses. High need for a fleet of accessible buses (kneeling buses). Approximately 75% of bus journeys are not accessible in our LGA. We have been advised that by 2030 (!) the entire fleet will be accessible however it's a matter of replacing buses when they retire.
- Need for accessible bus stop infrastructure. The PMHC Access Committee are auditing bus shelter infrastructure and identified over 25 bus stops that need a bus shelter (with wheelchair space, bench seating, tactile ground surface indicators for vision impairment and connected footpath). Council has been successful in receiving \$200k funding over the last few years to construct 20 connected bus shelters from the Passenger Transport Infrastructure Grant - we will be applying again for the \$50k grant in August 2016. It is estimated we need \$250k for bus shelter infrastructure.
- Cost of Community Transport /Taxis - with vast geographic space between townships and to medical centres, with many over a 40 minute drive our residents may experience transport disadvantage and financial stress and reliance on car ownership.
- Boarding and de-boarding from Ferry. Council owns the ferry to the North Shore community located on an island and there is no bridge. The ferry is designed for vehicles and not pedestrians. It is impossible for wheelchairs and mobility scooters to access the ferry as there is no pedestrian jetty, the vehicle ramp is in water and variable gradients depending upon tides. It is not possible to install a portable wheelchair ramp as the gradient is too steep,

will be in water and there is a permanent pedestrian barricade which doglegs around and wheelchairs and mobility scooters cannot navigate the tight turning circle. The only solution will be in a decade or so when purchasing a new ferry that it has wheelchair commuter access and a jetty is built.

Currently the only way a wheelchair or mobility scooter user can access the ferry is if they are inside a maxi taxi or access van.

- Train Station. The only train station located in Wauchope does not have a continuous unobstructed footpath linking it to the Wauchope main street. There are scheduled coach services from the train station to Port Macquarie CBD - which is about a 25minute journey.
- Need for cycleways and supporting infrastructure - change rooms, bicycle lock ups, as a legitimate form of transport. Would result in well documented health benefits for using active modes of transport. For example a cycleway linking the 15km from Lake Cathie, a burgeoning new suburb, and the Port Macquarie CBD.
- Access by mobility scooters (much larger vehicles and wider turning circle than a motorised wheelchair). Many of the mobility scooters are too large to fit into a maxi taxi - and the journey is too far and no connected footpaths to go from resident house into CBD. Our Libraries offer free charge and go sites to recharge mobility scooters to allay range concerns if battery getting low.

C: Potential strategies to improve access , including better alignment between different modes of transport, available routes and timetabling generally

- Grant funded needed for footpath and kerb ramp infrastructure. We have over 1000km of missing links to our footpath network. Council has committed \$500k in the 2016/17 budget for footpath infrastructure however this is shy of the approx \$6M needed.
- Cycleway infrastructure funding - for infrastructure of cycle paths
- When commuters ride public transportation or walk, contact with neighbours tends to increase, ultimately helping to bring a community together.
- Public transport ensures that persons with disabilities and the growing number of senior citizens remain actively involved in their communities and have access to the full range of facilities and services
- It has been said by Robert Putnam, author of Bowling Alone, that for every 10 minutes of additional travel time by car, social connections are reduced by 10%. [Sustainable Cities Collective](#)
- Transport infrastructure is linked to increased retail sales and safer roads. A 2012 study of shoppers in NYC East Village where protected bike lanes were installed showed that cyclists and pedestrians both spent more per capita per week than car drivers. These results were echoed in similar studies in cities across the USA. [Bicycle Coalition of Greater Philadelphia](#)
- The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends adults should do at least 150 minutes of moderate exercise a week. This equates to walking or cycling

for 30 minutes five times per week. This could be achieved simply by changing your commute method to work.

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 support the needs of this group:

- The Access Committee supports the waiver of annual car registration fee and reduction in cost of Driver's Licence for drivers who receive a pensioner concession and this reduces financial stress.
- The Access Committee endorses the Community Transport subsidies - however due to long distances this could still cost over \$60 for a resident to access a medical facility or service and may create financial stress.