

**Submission
No 57**

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

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

Email: communityservices@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Dear Mr Marshall

Re: Submission- Access to Transport for Seniors and Disadvantaged People in Rural and Regional NSW

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input into access to transport for seniors and disadvantaged people in Rural and Regional NSW.

Maitland City Council hopes that the comments made in this submission will be considered by the Legislative Assembly Committee on Community Services in the interest of improving access to transport for seniors and disadvantaged people in rural and regional NSW.

Yours faithfully,



Lynn Morton
Manager, Community and Recreation Services

Submission to the Legislative Assembly Committee on Community Services an inquiry into the access to transport for seniors and disadvantaged people (including but not limited to Aboriginal persons, persons with disability, and social housing tenants) in rural and regional NSW.

1. Introduction

The Maitland LGA has 16,271 people aged 55 and over (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2012), approximately 24.2% of the total population of 67,478.00 and 8.76% of our population over 55 identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent. And despite older people generally being in better health and with more opportunities to be physically fitter those aged 65 and over are the group most likely to be restricted when needing to travel. For example they are more likely than younger people being able to not walk for long periods have more difficulty in physically accessing public transport. They are most likely to reduce their driving or have given up driving altogether.

Seniors and people with a disability have reported that the challenges they experience to access transport result in difficulties in engaging with and feeling part of their local community. Public transport will have an increasingly important role to ensure independent living and social inclusion for our seniors and financial disadvantaged community members.

Council is a member of the Aged persons and younger people with disabilities and carers Forum. The Forum has established a transport working party in February 2016 and the objectives of this group are

- To provide an opportunity for Community Members and Community Care providers across Maitland to work together to identify what inclusive transport options are available.
- To raise awareness amongst community members and providers of services of travel planning options available for individuals.
- To develop cooperative partnerships between service providers and community members to provide feedback to NDIS Re: Hunter Trial Site of existing transport gaps.
- To break down barriers between services users and transport operators-to work together to achieve access to quality transport services that are sustainable.

The Forum is working towards achieving these objectives and has identified that need to understanding older people and financially disadvantaged people transport needs require a relationship centred approach. Their relationship with their environment, and other people that use the environment- vehicle, drivers, cyclists and pedestrians, different modes of transport interacting together and influencing one another.

The challenge to achieve an inclusive design approach to transport provision and built environment infrastructure where solutions are functional and of choice to the user not just

one mode of transport but multi-modal. The Forum members are of the opinion that a balance of diverse requirements is required and the need to engage and involve older people and financially disadvantaged people to understand the barriers and solutions from their perspective.

2. Matters to be considered

2.1 Specific Issues relating to the transport needs of seniors and disadvantaged people in rural and regional NSW

- Having access to transport has a significant impact on the health and wellbeing of seniors and financial disadvantaged people as they need to access cultural, social and recreational activities, health care and other service providers. Seniors and financially disadvantaged people have identified problems of affordability, availability, appropriateness and lack of information of the type of transport available as a barrier to their participation in the community.
- Community Transport is available from a user's home in Maitland it is a flexible mode of transport that operates between pick up and drop off locations determined by the needs of the passenger. Users of this service report travelling for social as well as practical purposes (shopping, GP appointments). There is added value for users of community transport as they have a driver assistant who supports with access in and out of the vehicle and with carrying baggage on and off the vehicle. This can be of vital benefit to the user as much as the journey itself. The barriers reported by users is that you have to plan your trip in advance, availability out of business hours and weekends, affordability of using the service outside of the Local Government Area and waiting lists.
- It has been identified the lack of coordination between providers of transport i.e. taxis, public transport, community transport, carpooling and patient transport. Improved coordination could increase patronage for all these transport options.
- There is a lack of awareness of the taxis public and community transport options available to Seniors and financial disadvantaged people.
- Seniors have commented that they are afraid of crime and victimisation.
- Having a fear of the systems and are challenged by a ticketing machine.
- The lack of service staff at stations to be able to assist with information and how to use systems.

2.2 Accessibility of current public transport services in rural and regional NSW

- The contracted provider of public bus transport in the Maitland LGA only 55% of the fleet meet compliance for accessibility.
- Only 60% of train's stations in the Maitland LGA are wheelchair accessible.
- Whilst trains are accessible from the majority of stations in Maitland the train compartments are not inclusive for people who use wheelchairs for mobility.

- There is a recognised need for government planning to consider the diversity of sizes and abilities of people as well as age related issues. This could be achieved through involving users of transport from the start of planning. Knowing what users of public transport expect in transport provision with the goal that transport should be both functional for the widest range of users possible and should be desirable for them to use. Solutions should be sought that work for everyone or that are easily adaptable to varying needs.
- Decision makers are often not aware of how demographic change is challenging public transport and seniors are depending on their private vehicle.
- Not all of our public transport facilities provide adequate lighting, seating, protection from the weather.

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

- Development of travel information that older people and people with disabilities have been involved in; the systems development of how to provide this information and what information do they need and in what format e.g. hard copy, electronic, how to promote the dissemination of information.
- A need for better coordination between community transport services and public transport services e.g. transporting people to public bus stops or train stations.
- Consider pricing mechanisms for public transport that may benefit these community members where financial accessibility may be an issue.
- 62% of Maitland seniors identified in a survey conducted by Council that they do not currently use public transport. For many seniors, who have not previously used public transport, to become familiar with transport options would require a relationship centred approach i.e. information, promotion and individual assistance. The Public Transport sector could contribute to strengthen the competences of seniors and help overcome the psychological barriers which prevent seniors from not using it.
- Develop strategies to raise awareness to non-users of public transport of the transport options available.
- Incorporating universal design principles for all bus stops.
- Many organisations supporting seniors and financial disadvantaged people should be considered as partners. They have excellent knowledge and network; it would be useful not only to consult with them but to involve them into Projects and this approach can help to develop suitable and good value solutions.
- Enhance orientation at stop with clear and simple signage

2.4 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 meet the needs of these groups.

- New opportunities for models of government funded community transport that are modelled on the public transport system i.e. community transport services apply the same fare structure as public transport.
- Having Community Transport services that link to public transport
- Having all community transport vehicles meeting the accessibility compliance requirements.
- Taxi transport subsidy scheme to be able to be used by users of community transport.
- Involving seniors and financial disadvantaged people in the planning of how to improve mobility and access to achieve inclusive transport options.
- National Disability Insurance Agency Planners recognising a persons with a disability transport needs at the initial planning stage i.e. if the person requires a person to accompany them to use public transport, include the care workers hours in the plan and identifying how long it will take the person to access the community facility from their home on public transport.

2.5 Any other related matters

- The image of public transport among seniors needs to be improved. Market the advantages of public transport for example, comfortable/stress free, no parking required, environmental friendly, informing them when public transport is included in an event.
- Explore how making public transport suitable for them and how to gain them as passengers.
- To consider diversity it is not only language barriers but also the ways information is communicated.
- It is essential that transport staff are approachable as the staff informs and assist and improves safety and security.
- Pre-trip and trip information must be adapted, technical visual, audible and most importantly easy to understand from a cognitive point of view.
- The National Disability Insurance scheme participants are provided with a plan and budget for "Transport to access daily activities" to enhance a participants independence and community access. Whilst these meet some of the transport needs of participants the individual plans often do not include training or educational support to travel on public transport.
- Education and training to help older people and financially disadvantage people stay mobile that focuses on both emotional and practical support for accessing public transport.

- Supporting seniors to moving onto other modes of transport when necessary if unable to drive. A formal evaluation of funded programmes to identify what outcomes are achieved from community member's participation on the course, for example higher use of public transport.
- Federal/State Governments need to consider Community Strategic Plans and other Council policies and plans that are related to transport for Seniors and disadvantaged groups. For example, other documents that Maitland City Council is preparing an Ageing Strategy and Pedestrian and Access Mobility Plan (PAMP).

References:

Aged Persons and Young People with Disabilities and Carer Forums- Minutes and Notes
Engagement with Community Members Re: Ageing Well in Maitland, an Active Ageing Strategy
2016-2020
Engagement with individuals (National Disability Insurance participants, Local Aboriginal Elders)