

**Submission
No 61**

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

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21 July 2016

The Chair- Mr Adam Marshall MP
Legislative Assembly
Committee on Community Services
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Dear Mr Marshall

SUBMISSION TO PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY- ACCESS TO TRANSPORT FOR SENIORS AND DISADVANTAGED PEOPLE IN RURAL AND REGIONAL NSW

Newcastle City Council (NCC) is pleased to have the opportunity to provide comment to the current Parliamentary Inquiry into 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.

The submission is provided to the committee as a current reflection of the Newcastle community's concerns with transport related matters in Newcastle gleaned through community consultations facilitated by Council over the past 12 months. These discussions have informed planning strategies developed to guide Council and community operations in progressing towards our strategic vision under Newcastle 2030 (the community strategic plan) Strategic Direction of Connected City which states:

"In 2030 our transport networks and services will be well connected and convenient. Walking, cycling and public transport will be viable options for getting around the city."

Whilst Council has no role in the provision of public or community transport, local government does provide and maintain supporting infrastructure for public transport including shelters and seats, maintaining the road network and advocating for improvements to public transport. In addition to this and of relevance to this current inquiry, is Council's advocacy role, on behalf of the Newcastle community, to other levels of government for improvements in transport in the city and funding to meet transport needs.

Our current demographic context is that of a growing and ageing population. From 2006 to 2011, Newcastle's population increased by 4.8% to 155,550 people and is currently estimated to be 161,225 people with continued steady growth predicted. Newcastle has a higher than average proportion of people with disabilities and our proportion of people aged over 65 years is forecast to reach approximately 18% by 2031. These projections support state government moves to increase transport choice and improve equity of access in public transport and our pedestrian networks in particular.

Regional cities and surrounding areas often have a high number of older people as a proportion of their population and as a result will face significant age related challenges around infrastructure and transport systems in the future.

Part 1 - Summary of matters raised by the Newcastle community as specific issues relating to the transport needs of seniors and disadvantaged people in rural and regional NSW

In 2015/2016 financial year, NCC undertook the preparation of a suite of strategy documents to guide Council's forthcoming four year delivery program. These included:

- Social Strategy 2016 - 2019;
- Multicultural Plan 2019 - 2019; and
- Disability Inclusion Action Plan - 2016-2019.

All strategies were underpinned by consultation with the Newcastle community, human services sector, business and government agency workers. Transport related concerns and suggestions included the following:

- Broad acknowledgement of the increasing presence of socially isolated seniors ageing in place and aged lone person's households.
- The human services sector suggested the need for a review of the local bus network to better support access to key nodes such as the John Hunter Hospital and other health and recreation facilities.
- The multicultural community highlighted lack of awareness about transport and lack of translated information as a key determinant in social isolation within Newcastle LGA.
- Newcastle's disability community highlighted concerns relating to physical access and design of transport infrastructure, transport affordability and availability, the need for better integration of services, highlighting the need for diverse options such as single travel, group travel vehicles with drivers day time and evening, 7 days.
- Funding changes to transport as a result of the implementation of the National Disability Insurance Scheme has resulted in instances of increased disadvantage resulting from the cost of private transport, or an assumed reliance on an unfit public transport system for people with disability.
- Strong indication that participation in free or low cost community events has been limited to transport funding changes implemented under the NDIS; and

Part 2 - Specific matters raised by Newcastle City Council as issues relating to the transport needs of seniors and disadvantaged people in rural and regional NSW

Transport Planning and Major Infrastructure Development:

Community consultation during the development of the Newcastle Disability Inclusion Action Plan included strong feedback from the community on the need to design beyond the Disability Discrimination Act minimum standards in order to achieve improved inclusion for people with diverse access and mobility needs.

Within the Transport for NSW Action Plan, a key strategy is *'Accessibility is a performance criteria for transport products and projects'*

Ancillary Infrastructure:

Like many Councils across Australia, NCC has financial constraints which impact on how comprehensively its statutory roles are addressed and the extent to which it can undertake discretionary functions. Council, in its capacity as a roads authority, approves the location of transport stops. At its discretion, it provides ancillary infrastructure such as seating and shelters. If Council does choose to provide this infrastructure, it must ensure that it is compliant with the Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport 2002.

The adopted Newcastle City Council Transport Strategy makes a commitment in Action A4 of that plan to:

"Improve equity of access to public transport, through upgrading of transport stops to meet the Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport.

The compliance timetable included in the Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport indicates that 90% of transport stops should be compliant by 31 December 2017 and 100% by 31 December 2022. Council's Transport Stops, Shelters and Seating Policy provides guidelines for location, design and construction of stops, shelters and seating; placement and content of advertising; and defines performance standards for maintenance."

Likewise, the Transport for NSW Disability Action Plan 2012-2017 demonstrates that TNSW seeks to 'implement measures to increase the number of accessible bus stops', however the action plan does not clearly define funding streams available to government agencies, local government or other service providers.

However, unlike many rural Councils, Newcastle City Council is not eligible to apply for assistance under the Country Passenger Transport Infrastructure Grants Scheme and Council's ability to secure funding assistance for upgrade of stops is limited.

As appropriate bus shelter infrastructure is critical for safe and comfortable public transport mobility within the regional centres across NSW, effective funding streams to improve this need to be developed by the Government and distributed throughout the regions. It is suggested that a funding mechanism for regional city transport infrastructure is developed to progress the roll out of accessible bus shelter infrastructure.

Part 3 - Potential Strategies to improve - better alignment between modes, available routes and timetabling technology - transport access. journey planning and travel confidence in a regional and rural setting and 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

NCC will continue to work collaboratively with the NSW State Government and the wider transport sector towards improved transport outcomes for the community, particularly seniors, people with a disability and other disadvantaged groups in NSW.

The continued support and direction of the NSW Government under the Regional Transport Plan and NSW Disability Action Plan 2012-2017 is welcomed for transport within the Newcastle LGA.

