

**Submission
No 62**

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

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Parliamentary Inquiry into access to transport for seniors and disadvantaged people in rural and regional NSW

Thank you for this opportunity to make a submission to the Inquiry into access to transport for seniors and disadvantaged people in rural and regional NSW. Tweed Byron and Ballina Community Transport (TBBCT) is a community based, non government organisation, located on the Far North Coast of NSW. We provide transport options for people who cannot access private or mainstream transport due to age, disability or other reasons of transport disadvantage.

TBBCT provides services in an area where there are high levels of transport disadvantage. Public transport is limited, expensive and inaccessible to a large part of the population. TBBCT staff field inquiries from people whose transport needs we are unable to accommodate because their situation falls outside of the conditions of our funding agreements or because we simply do not have the capacity or resources to be able to accommodate their needs.

Renal Dialysis

One of the highest areas of unmet need is transport for renal dialysis. Renal transport requires the commitment of significant resources for long periods of time as patients receive treatment three times a week, over three to four hours, for the rest of their lives. Dialysis is performed at regional hospitals, requiring rural patients to regularly travel some distance to treatment. The nature of treatment leaves patients exhausted and unfit to drive home, and public transport is often unavailable or unsuitable. TBBCT has recorded unmet need for renal transport in the following areas:

- Alstonville to Lismore
- Byron Bay and Mullumbimby to Ballina
- Mullumbimby, Byron Bay, Murwillumbah and the Tweed Coast to Tweed Heads

TBBCT receives limited funding through NSW Health to provide renal transport within Ballina, but this situation is unusual and not available in most areas. Outside of this arrangement, TBBCT is able to provide very limited renal transport, because the needs of each individual would tie up significant resources, which would therefore be unavailable to other clients. Additionally, it is difficult to

attract volunteer drivers who are willing to make this regular commitment, as it requires them waiting around for up to five hours at a time.

Aboriginal Transport

The causes and effects of transport disadvantage in Aboriginal communities are well documented. TBBCT makes a point of prioritising Aboriginal transport, however there are occasions when we are unable to assist, in particular when individuals require transport at very short notice, or on weekends.

One flexible solution that has worked well in some communities is that of the community vehicle. Members of the community are jointly responsible for the vehicle and all can access it according to their needs. In other communities a less formal arrangement occurs, whereby an obliging individual with a vehicle and drivers license assists other members of the community with their access needs and they in turn may offer some money towards fuel. It is worth considering how these arrangements could be supported, perhaps with the provision of funds to assist with registration, repairs and fuel etc.

Public Transport

Public transport on the North Coast is limited and this impacts people's ability to access employment, health care, shopping, sport and recreation, social opportunities and goods and services generally. Links between regional towns are particularly poor and services are even more limited or non existent on weekends and school holidays. Greater bus linkages between towns would be an improvement.

Whilst buses that kneel and have ramps are becoming more available, in order for them to be accessible there needs to be kerb and guttering in place, as well as safe set down points. Unfortunately, at this stage, it is all too often still not the case.

It is noted that Kingscliff TAFE bus set down is unsafe on the busy main road. A teacher has witnessed a bus drive past a vision impaired student waiting at the stop. A simple and workable solution is that the bus be diverted into the TAFE carpark to allow the safe pick up and drop-off of students. This will also allow for better access for students with disability or mobility issues.

Community Transport Funding

TBBCT is experiencing high growth in demand, particularly for older people needing to get to medical appointments. There has been an increase in the in the aged population of the region, particularly in the Tweed and forecasts suggest this growth will continue.

Growth funding has not been made available and the aged care reforms have taken the focus off the immediate need of service providers such as TBBCT funded under the current block funding model to manage the demand from the community. Additional CHSP Transport funding is required to meet the demand and deal with the unmet need for transport for frail aged and vulnerable people.

Aged care package recipients are calling for transport for long distance appointments and their package providers do not have the capacity to assist.

Nursing Home Residents

TBBCT provides transport for individuals in the 65+ age group, through the Commonwealth Home Support Program (CHSP). This program is designed to assist older people to stay in their own homes and avoid premature nursing home admissions and therefore, nursing home residents are ineligible for transport under this program. Additionally, the care needs of nursing home residents are generally greater than community transport is able to accommodate. However, many of these individuals do need to access the community occasionally, particularly for medical care and the only option available to them is taxis, which most disadvantaged people would find unaffordable.

Yours sincerely



Phil Barron

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Tweed Byron and Ballina Community Transport