

**Submission
No 65**

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

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Community Transport Organisation Inc. (CTO)
submission to the



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

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About the CTO

The Community Transport Organisation (CTO) is the peak body for community transport in New South Wales. It is dedicated to strengthening community and political awareness of community transport; as well as representing and advocating on behalf of community transport services in NSW.

The CTO is proud to have been providing professional leadership, support and resources to its community transport service members for over 25 years, and pride themselves on being transparent, ethical and honest.

As an advisory and consultative body, Community Transport Organisation work proactively with many organisations and other transport providers to contribute to the wider community transport Sector.

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

The CTO welcomes the opportunity to make a submission on behalf of 86 of the 93 Community Transport Service Provider (CTSP) organisations across NSW.

The CTO membership is made up of a diverse assortment of organisational structures encompassing the following:

- Standalone CTSP's
- CTSP's that fall under the umbrella of a Multi Service Outlet (MSO) environment
- Council auspiced services

Funding of these organisations ranges from 100% funded under subcontract from TfNSW to only a small percentage of funding derived from this same source with the remainder being directly funded from the Federal government under the Commonwealth Home Support Program (CHSP). As a point of reference, of the \$89 million dollars being directed into community transport in NSW (source TfNSW 2016-20 budget) an estimated \$68 million is derived from CHSP.

The sector delivers services to over 125000 transport disadvantaged people annually through the use of 3500 volunteers and 1500 paid (various classifications) employees. The majority of services delivered in rural and remote areas are circumstantial due to the historical lack of appropriate infrastructure, supports and basic traveller protection, reliable alternative sources (including State operated trains and bus services) or a combination of all.

The points presented in this submission are a cumulative result of continuous engagement with our rural and remote service providers across an extensive range of topics and categories and not just limited to the ToR. This has been overlaid across the results of a recent survey of CTSP's based on the ToR.

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a) *Specific issues relating to the transport needs of seniors and disadvantaged people in rural and regional NSW*

It is worth noting that there is a consistent theme of dissatisfaction experienced across rural and remote NSW for the transport disadvantaged and/or those requiring specialised levels of service and assistance during their journeys. That is that; State provided services such as CountryLink proven to be inconsistent in their delivery standards with; safety, staffing and staff training and accessibility, and with successive state government interventions and adjustments of core service expectations such as manned stations.

- Affordable, accessible and appropriate transport
 - ✓ The need for reform of pensioner concessions and free transport outside the metropolitan area to include CTSP's as a viable alternative to traditional public transport modes if services are unavailable or limited
 - ✓ The further refinement of client categories that require specialised attention under
 - *NEHRT (Non-Emergency Health Related Transport)*
 - *IPTAAS (Isolated Patients Transport and Accommodation Assistance Scheme)*

Key areas of risk identified by CT providers are

- *Mental health*
 - *Bariatric*
 - *Cancer treatment*
 - *At risk women, children and men*
 - *Social isolation*
 - *LGBTIQ teens*
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- Access to affordable and specialised transport for Carers
 - ✓ Lack of equity and access that impacts negatively upon existing familial or employment relationships under the revised measuring and monitoring regime adopted by TfNSW - Carers will not be allocated as trip
 - ✓ Lack of formal/funded enablement programs for Carers
 - ✓ No focus on capacity building for this cohort of clients to embark on non-provider based supports

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a) *Specific issues relating to the transport needs of seniors and disadvantaged people in rural and regional NSW: continued*

- Need for flexible and adaptive transport solutions for Aboriginal communities that are culturally appropriate, as provided by CTSP's and the NSW ATN providers
 - ✓ Patriarchal perspectives from mainstream organisations ignoring opportunities for mentoring by aboriginal organisations rather than vice versa
 - ✓ Ineffective or non-existent cross cultural collegiate networks

- Need to ensure that CT service provision is protected – in many regional and remote communities CT is the only transport option
 - ✓ The erosion of the underpinning benefits of CT service delivery via economic rationalisation
 - P2P Bill diluting quality mandates for service delivery standards-this affects State and federally funded clients rights under the Aged Care and Disability service principles, guidelines and respective Acts
 - ✓ Lack of understanding as to the economic benefits CT service connectivity and flexibility brings to regional communities

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b) Accessibility of current public transport services in rural and regional NSW

- Public transport options across rural and regional NSW run to fixed routes. The rigidity of services often translates to:
 - Inaccessibility for frail aged or disadvantaged communities
 - Prolonged travel times in transit, to and from access points
 - This exposes this cohort to adverse weather conditions, and ongoing trip and falls hazards as many regional communities do not have curb and guttering or if they do it may be damaged due to time or elements
 - Connectivity with primary and/or allied health service providers is impacted upon negatively creating adverse scenarios for both clients/carers and impacts negatively on economic growth and opportunity for these service providers.
- Many public transport options in rural and regional NSW are not physically accessible to frail aged or low-mobility people, or the hours of accessible transport are severely limited reducing a person's ability to access services and support
 - It is acknowledged that there is significant investment in buses in the TfNSW budget, however by admission these are predominantly slated for roll out across metropolitan areas. There exists a comprehensive network of accessible CT vehicles with trained supports across the state. The first port of call should be to utilise existing task appropriate assets in a transitional sense until effective roll out is complete.
- Community transport services are one of the few, and sometimes only, accessible services in rural and regional NSW and are often limited by restrictive funding and eligibility criterion
 - Derestriction on intra and inter-regional town-to-town services linking communities, opportunities, services. Not restricting these to assessed needs, creating a parallel mainstream service
 - Apply a subsidy that qualifies an isolation/access based metric

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c) Potential strategies to improve access, including better alignment between different modes of transport, available routes and timetabling generally;

- Linking IPTAAS to Community Transport Service Providers to ensure efficient support linkages, increasing more frequent appropriate options
- Greater understanding of the economics benefits created by higher unit cost of specialised transport to end services such as Primary or Allied health care services
- Development of specialised funding program to facilitate linking transport to public and alternative transport options
 - expand CTP funds to allow CTSP's to run linking flexible/mainstream transport services
- The integration of rural and regional primary and allied health services with CTSP's to facilitate flexible transport services for frail aged and disadvantaged people.
 - Expansion of funding to existing CT programs and / or allocation of NEHRT funding to regional CTSP's
- Increase funding for carers of disadvantaged people to access CTSP's – e.g. NDIS no longer funds transport for carers
- Create opportunities and incentives for CTSP's and school bus companies to integrate and share their fleet to increase service provision and geographical spread
- Reform of pensioner concessions and free transport outside the metropolitan area to enable access to CT now it falls under the Passenger Transport Act (2014)
- Link service usage to concession cards for concession holders, including students.

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 meet the needs of these groups

- Extend Opal Card' to account for frail aged and disadvantaged people to purchase subsidised or discounted transport from taxi and private bus companies
- Fee for service funds for CTSP's to provide out-of-hours flexible transport solutions
- Fee for service funds for CTSP's to provide flexible transport linking people to public and alternative transport providers
- The design of a base line cost with a regional weighting that is matriculated based upon availability of service/frequency/access to primary and allied health etc.
- The cross pollination of peripheral but unmeasured service functions such as:
 - Assist frail aged or disadvantaged people on to and off public and alternative transport such as CountryLink train /bus replacing the need to permanently man stations and stops.

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Closing statement

Delivery of government services in a Rural and Remote setting has always been challenging. The complexities of linking services and prioritising clients by need was at the heart of the inception of Community Transport in this State. These challenges have largely been addressed over the years by Community Transport Service Providers, however with ongoing rationalisation of funding and the application of mainstream modelling across non mainstream service areas such as Rural and Remote service paradigms, there is a risk that significant gaps will be the cause of further erosion of the fabric of our State's heartland.

The reality is this, there exists no better network of qualified organisations that operate task appropriate vehicles compliant under Federal and State Aged and Disability Care guidelines. There is a bonded collegiate network that supports all other service delivery types in their connectivity.

The current trend to dilute effectiveness for a marginal efficiency increase is alarming and places vulnerable passengers, their families, carers and community supports across rural and remote areas of the state at significant risk of breakdown and fragmentation.

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