

**Submission  
No 13**

## **TRANSPORT TECHNOLOGY SECTOR**

**Organisation:** Via

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**Via Mobility, LLC**

(a wholly owned subsidiary of Via Transportation, Inc.)

**7 June 2021**

**To:** Transport Technology Sector Committee of the Parliament of New South Wales

**Attn:** Robyn Preston

Dear Transport Technology Sector Committee members

### **Transport Technology Sector Inquiry - Comments from Via**

Thank you for this opportunity to provide comments about how transport technology can be used to improve mobility and access for travellers across New South Wales. There have been significant developments over the last few years in the use of technology to improve and expand public transport, and governments across the world are updating legislation, regulations, and funding mechanisms to make sure cities, transport authorities, and other local and regional governments are able to harness technology in transport for the public good. Transport for NSW has played a critical role to date in encouraging transportation providers to use new technology to improve public transport. We believe this inquiry by the Committee on Transport and Infrastructure is well-timed, and we hope will help ensure that NSW remains a global leader in the deployment of innovative services to help people access jobs and other opportunities, move around their communities in a safe and convenient way, and reduce greenhouse gas emissions by using shared transport rather than driving vehicles alone.

Via is the world's leading provider of innovative public mobility solutions. Via works in partnership with more than 500 transport authorities, cities, and other providers of transportation across 26 countries to expand and improve public mobility in a variety of ways - including through on-demand first/last mile services to transport hubs; integrated services that put fixed route buses, on-demand transport, paratransit and other modes onto one platform; operating the entire public transport system in some cities; improving the routing and tracking of school buses; and developing mobility-as-a-service and other applications for governments. Via also recently required Remix, the world's leading collaborative transportation planning software firm which partners cities and transit authorities to plan and schedule their multimodal networks.

We are proud to have 9 deployments across Australia, including 4 in NSW. We summarize the services below:

<b>Service (Transport Operator)</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Description</b>
Coovee Busways (Busways)	Sydney, NSW	Providing first mile / last mile connections to Sydney's Metro station
KeoRide (Keolis Downer)	Northern Beaches, NSW	Providing first mile / last mile connections to rapid bus network B-Line stops
KeoRide (Keolis Downer)	Barossa Valley, South Australia	Providing end to end transport solutions for the residents of Barossa Valley
KeoRide (Keolis Downer)	Mt Barker, South Australia	Providing first mile / last mile connections to rapid bus network B-Line stops
RF On Demand (Reynolds & Fogarty)	Moree, NSW	Provides the entire public transport solution for residents and visitors to Moree
Assisted School Transport (CDC)	Canberra, ACT	Enables improved transport solutions for assisted school transport
Newcastle On Demand (Keolis Downer)	Newcastle, NSW	Provides end to end transport solutions for poorly patronised areas of the network
Lumi Ride (Lumi)	Melbourne, Victoria	A commercial ride share service focussed on community based solutions including supporting local business through delivery services
Hervey Bay (TMR)	Hervey Bay, Queensland	Replaced a legacy dial a ride system to provide improved operational and customer outcomes

Below we offer some examples of public transport services powered by technology, organized by the topics listed in your terms of reference. We have kept our comments intentionally brief.

But we would be pleased to provide more details on any of the services below, to answer questions about these or other services (such as our school bus or paratransit work) that we provide, or to discuss policies that other legislatures across the world are taking to encourage continued innovation in transport in ways that advance the public interest.

Also, should any member of the Committee be interested in an on-site visit to one the services in NSW powered by Via, we would be honored to arrange such a meeting, including with the operator of the service.

**On-demand transit, including first and last mile services:** Via now powers or operates about 200 on-demand public transport services across the world. In some cases the service creates a new public transport service in a neighbourhood that did not have it before, in other cases (ranging from Arlington, Texas, city of 400,000 people to Moree, NSW, a town of ~10,000) it operates as the entire public transport system; and still in others it provides a much needed first- and last-mile service to existing transit hubs.

We have certainly found this to be the case with our deployments in NSW. For example, in partnership with Transport for NSW and Busways, we together launched Cooee Busways in May 2019, which picks up commuters in small buses near their homes and takes them to their nearest station providing access to Sydney Metro or Sydney Train stations. At the end of the day, the service then collects commuters from the metro or train station and drops them back near their homes. In between commuter peak periods the service also allows passengers to travel to/from retail locations as well as the stations.

Importantly, the service accommodates public transport access for people with mobility impairments, with the vehicles being fully wheelchair accessible. We have also worked with TfNSW to implement trip planning capabilities as well as integrated payment options allowing customers to benefit from Opal discounts when using the service.

The Cooee service has been a great success since its launch with over 180,000 rides completed since May 2019. Customer satisfaction of the service continues to be very high and the majority of passengers have advised that if it weren't for the Cooee service they would have used a private vehicle for the trip. This demonstrates how a quality on-demand service can motivate members of the public to leave their cars behind and use public transport.

On-demand transit has also quickly grown in popularity in other nations across the world as riders, government officials, and elected leaders see its benefits for their communities. For example, just recently, a number of Members of Congress in the United States pushed for increased federal investment in on-demand transit pointing out that: "The benefits of these demonstrations are clear: increased access to jobs and economic opportunities, the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, a new mobility option for those with disabilities and the elderly, and a public transportation service that is adaptable and resilient in a time of crisis."

**Integrated Mobility Services, including journey management:** In a number of cities and communities across the world, Via is working with partners to integrate various travel options onto one platform to both improve mobility and increase efficiency. For example, we have implemented our multi modal solution into the Cooe Busways service, which allows passengers to be presented with both on-demand and regular route service options from within the Cooe App. The function provides live estimated bus arrival times for both services, with route information being drawn directly from TfNSW publicly available GTFS feeds. This allows passengers to see a range of public transport options and make an informed choice as to what service they will use. In addition, for some passengers this acts as a catalyst for them to ride a route service for the first time.

**Mobility-as-a-Service:** Integrating mobility services, as discussed above, is an important step in the direction of Mobility-as-a-Service (MaaS) systems in which riders can seamlessly access and pay for all mobility options. Via has both integrated services it is operating into a city's MaaS application, and has also been enlisted by governments to create a MaaS app. For our BerlKönig on-demand transit service in Berlin, we implemented an integration with the transport authority's MaaS application, Jelbi, which allowed us to populate public transport data into our trip proposals and provide a multi-modal journey planning experience for riders. In Israel, the Ministry of Transport (MoT) and Ayalon Highways has launched a nationwide MaaS platform ("The Station") powered by Via's software. Using the Station, travelers can plan journeys, pay for trips, and book custom transport across multiple integrated public and private transportation options.

**Autonomous vehicles:** As experts have explained, in order to most effectively reduce congestion, make better use of land, cut pollution, and improve livability in our communities, it is important that as much as possible AVs be deployed as public transport and on a shared basis. We are partnering with various autonomous vehicle companies and governments to pilot on-demand, dynamically routed autonomous public transport. In the United States, we recently received a competitive, federal innovation grant to add autonomous vehicles to our large on-demand transit service in Arlington, Texas.

Our very first autonomous vehicle pilot was a successful partnership with TfNSW, Busways, and EasyMile, and provided on-demand rides to residents of a retirement community in Coffs Harbour. The driverless trial will soon again operate at the North Coast Regional Botanic Garden in Coffs Harbour, marking the first time in the world an automated passenger shuttle bus service has reached driverless operation.

**Importance of Data:** The success of every deployment Via has depends on effectively harnessing the power of data to optimize networks of buses, shuttles, school buses, autonomous vehicles, electric vehicles, and more. We have worked with all of our partners, including transit agencies, to ensure that they benefit from the high volume and granular data generated from the Via platform. The nature of on-demand services allows transit agencies to see and understand customer and operational behaviour more quickly and deeply than any other form of public transport. For example, we can perform analytics to understand customer

tolerance levels around waiting times by time of day, the inbound/outbound trip, and in some instances the purpose of the trip. This quantum of data analytics allows better matching of resources to ensure the optimal quantum of supply is provided based on-demand.

We have also worked with TfNSW to integrate our reporting capabilities into TfNSW systems and we are presently working towards providing daily data feeds directly into TfNSW systems.

In addition, Remix is a map-based platform that turns complex transportation data into easy-to-digest visualizations. Our public sector partners can select custom geographic areas, pull relevant data (e.g., ridership, traffic speeds, demographics, collisions) and create presentation-quality visuals that can be shared internally or with the public to make better planning decisions.

**Conclusion:** Perhaps Rachel, a rider of the Cooee service, sums up best how customers feel about on-demand solutions. "This service is an amazing idea. It is perfect, stress free and easy. You don't have to worry about a timetable. I love it." Innovation has the ability to improve transport network efficiency, improve transport equity, get more people onto public transport (and out of their cars) and reduce greenhouse emissions.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide comments. If you have any questions or we can provide more information, please contact Ben Hague APAC Manager at

