

REPORT ON PROCEEDINGS BEFORE

COMMITTEE ON COMMUNITY SERVICES

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

At Macquarie Room, Parliament House, Sydney on Friday, 23 September 2016

The Committee met at 10:40 am

PRESENT

Mr A. Marshall (Chair)

Mr K. Conolly

Mr A. Greenwich

Mr D. Harris

Mr B. Notley-Smith

TISH BRUCE, Executive Director, Health and Social Policy Branch, Ministry of Health, affirmed and examined

DAN HUNTER, Chief Executive, HealthShare NSW, sworn and examined

TERRY LEE-WILLIAMS, Director, Rural and Regional Service Delivery and Performance, Infrastructure and Services, Transport for NSW, affirmed and examined

ANTHONY WING, Executive Director, Transport Policy, Transport for NSW, sworn and examined

JO LAWRENCE, District Director, Western NSW, Department of Family and Community Services, affirmed and examined

DOMINIC SCHUSTER, Director, Government Relations, Department of Family and Community Services, sworn and examined

The CHAIR: I declare open this hearing of the Legislative Assembly Committee on Community Services into Access to Transport for Seniors and Disadvantaged People in Rural and Regional New South Wales. I thank all witnesses for appearing before our hearing this morning. Before we proceed to questions, would anyone like to make any opening remarks?

Mr WING: Thank you for allowing us to appear. We were asked not to give an opening statement. We have made a joint submission, so I think we are quite happy to move to questions.

The CHAIR: We will proceed to questions. That will save a bit of time. I will start the questions and we will go around the table. It is a formal hearing, but we will keep it as informal as possible. In the joint Government submission on page 15 you talk about the appointment of senior regional officer positions which, I gather, replace the transport coordinators from around the regions. We have already heard evidence in the inquiry about the perceived efficacy of those former positions. My first questions are: Have all of those positions been filled? What is the delegated authority of those positions: what seniority will they have and what decisions will they be able to make at that local, regional level?

Mr LEE-WILLIAMS: They report to me. They are now called area managers, as of yesterday. There has been an update in their title position to reflect their seniority. I think that makes a point. They report through the regional centres in Newcastle and Wollongong, and they are aligned to a contract management team as well. Their role is to work with the communities to identify the need and then work with the contract manager to procure the service that meets that need. It fills a gap that we have had for quite some time where operators themselves determined what the need was in the community and then determined what service they would provide. This works in parallel with the new regional and rural contracts, which were implemented this year—

The CHAIR: The school bus contracts.

Mr LEE-WILLIAMS: All rural and regional contracts—that is, school and route services. There is no distinction in the contract anymore. This enables us to now plan with the community what services we will need to put in place over time. In addition to that, there is another layer. Just this week we announced the appointment of the first principal manager of regional service planning. There has never been a regional service planning function in the agency before. They will be doing regional reviews of all transport supply and demand using the people on the ground to do the footwork and then putting the whole thing into a strategy. We have quite a deep, layered approach that has not existed previously.

Those area managers are responsible for their area. They also have reporting to them a support officer. It is not an identified position but we are attempting to engage Aboriginal people to each of those support officer positions because we have a huge supply chain to Aboriginal communities but we do not have adequate Aboriginal staff to get a level of comfort in the communication with those communities, so we are building that up as well.

The CHAIR: Have those five area manager positions been finalised and appointed yet?

Mr LEE-WILLIAMS: They have been in place now for roughly 12 weeks.

The CHAIR: Where are the five located, or what are the regions they cover?

Mr LEE-WILLIAMS: We will go to the north and start on the coast: Coffs Harbour, which looks after the North Coast and the mid North Coast down to the edge of the Greater Metropolitan Region, so essentially from mountains to sea; then Tamworth, which looks after New England; then Dubbo, which looks after the Central West and Far West. That appears to be a very large region but in terms of the number of

people, there is a lower number of people and a lower number of services provided. There is far less in the Far West. We could never fully utilise the person who was located in Cobar previously, as there was not sufficient work to keep them engaged. There is Wagga Wagga, which looks after Murrumbidgee, and then Queanbeyan, which looks after the South Coast.

The CHAIR: We have heard evidence already in our inquiry and on our site visit to Armidale, Uralla and Walcha that in a lot of country communities there is latent transport capacity because there are many assets that are used for very little time. They might be buses that are dedicated to school bus routes and used in the morning and afternoon but not throughout the day. A lot of health multipurpose service [MPS] facilities or district hospitals have buses attached to them that are used sparingly. But there is frustration from community transport organisations and others that they cannot break through that silo and lease or hire those buses to fill a growing transport need.

My question is: What can Transport for NSW do to break down those silos? It makes sense to better utilise the resources that country communities have rather than pour in more taxpayer money to duplicate what is already there. Will it be part of an area manager's brief to look at assets like that and have the authority to go to the hospital manager and say, "We're going to procure the bus that sits in your shed doing nothing for six months a year for a service in the community"? Is that something that can happen?

Mr LEE-WILLIAMS: There are a lot of questions there, and I will try break them down. First, it is almost universally true that no further assets are required in regional New South Wales. There are enough buses to meet the current demand. The issue is how to distribute those assets across customer needs. I think that is a true statement. In terms of authority, unfortunately no-one who works in Transport for NSW can direct someone in a health agency or in Family and Community Services [FACS] to release their asset. That is not possible. We must collaborate and communicate. That is exactly the role of the area managers; that is, to collect information about the entire supply chain in the region and to determine the demand. They then work on ways of procuring what they need.

We have started changing the process with all the assets we control so that we can reuse them. Without naming names, because unfortunately it does not have the final signature, we are taking a school bus in a regional area that runs from town A to town B and doing the reverse run, town B to town A, carrying fee-paying adult passengers. Then we go back again in the afternoon and take the school kids back. We are now able to provide a five-day-a-week, day-return service to the nearest town at no cost, because we are paying for what we call the "dead running" kilometres.

The CHAIR: It is covered under the contracts.

Mr LEE-WILLIAMS: We are trying to unpeel all of those opportunities. The logistics are not always simple, because it is about time—that is, whether we have time to get to and from between school opening and school closing. We believe there is a lot of opportunity to do that. With what we call the "underutilised" assets, which would be a vehicle sitting in a health service, a FACS service or even a disability service, there has to be an incentive for people to make the vehicles available. Every time you run a vehicle you devalue it and incur costs. One of the hardest things has been, first, knowing what is available and, secondly, working out how you can procure that service.

I will provide a little detail. I apologise, but I hope it makes sense. The biggest difficulty is knowing what is there and when it is available. That has always been the hardest thing to determine. Everybody wants to travel at the same time; everybody wants to go in the morning and come back in the afternoon. The asset may be used only for a couple of hours a day, but that is when there is a demand. Not everybody wants to travel for a couple of hours in the middle of the day. We have to work out when they are free and then determine the demand.

The submission refers to a software platform called the Centralised Trip Allocation and Booking System [CTABS]. It is at the very early stage of being rolled out. Eventually we will have a statewide platform that has the entire supply chain in it. It will allow people to book any service that anyone allows us to put into the platform, and also to pay for it. Our intention is to work out an agreed brokerage rate with other providers, taking into account what it would cost to use their asset to provide a service to the community. People will be able to book a service online. The platform will use the nearest asset to the demand and it will be paid for.

That will not be easy. People have talked about this for the more than 25 years that I have been in the game. The issues have been access to information, availability and ensuring that the person who owns the asset can still deliver what they need to deliver. We have not been able to do that. However, with satellite tracking, mobile technology, and a platform that enables sharing, we are hoping to break that down over the next couple of years. We have already had about a 15 per cent increase in the number of kilometres we can provide with

existing assets in the areas in which CTABS has been rolled out. We are aiming for 40 per cent over the next five years.

One thing has prevented everything from happening previously. Someone who owns a bus might need it to transport their client at a particular time of day. If we take that bus away to do something else, they will not be able to carry their client. We will now have the capacity to say, "We can carry your client, because we have a car available. That will be a cheaper option, and you will pay less to access it. We will pay you to take the bus because we have 20 people we want to carry at the same time." Logistics are boring for most people, but it is what enables us to unlock capacity by using every asset as efficiently as we can. In terms of authority, it is in negotiation.

The CHAIR: You have shared an example with the Committee, and I will share the example with you that prompted my question. The Committee was in Walcha at the community transport operation, which is auspiced by Walcha Council. The building we were in was adjacent to the Walcha Multipurpose Service, and we could see the shed housing the 22 seater bus. If it is used one day a month, that would be heavy use. It has been sitting in the shed for two years being used perhaps one day a month. However, community transport in Walcha is desperate to get extra vehicles; they have more people than they can carry with the existing fleet. How do you suggest that we proceed, given that we all want, as you said, to maximise the use of the assets we have? If these area managers will not have the authority to reach over the top—in this case the MPS manager for whatever reason will not let anyone else use the bus—how do you suggest we proceed? Surely you would agree that it is not acceptable to have that bus sitting in that shed not running anywhere when people need to be transported, and we have a service that will pay to use the bus to transport them?

Mr LEE-WILLIAMS: I am not being flippant, but in that case we would need to eliminate either the State or the Commonwealth. One is a Commonwealth-funded service and one is a State-funded service. We tender to the Commonwealth and it provides us with \$55.7 million each year to deliver services. The eligibility criteria are very tight on who can use their vehicles. The way they write their contracts appears—and the word is "appears"—to inhibit the ability to sell access to their vehicles or their services to other people.

The CHAIR: Are you talking about the health system?

Mr LEE-WILLIAMS: Yes—and the Multipurpose service system.

The CHAIR: The bus was bought by the hospital auxiliary for the hospital; it was not bought by the taxpayer.

Mr LEE-WILLIAMS: That makes it even harder because we have just cracked with the Commonwealth that we are allowed to hire their vehicles out as long as we recharge their funding for whatever it costs. Trying to get what is generally the ladies auxiliary to give up access to their beloved asset is a very difficult thing. We have tried it many times. Community transport have tried it for years and they are part of the same community. I do not know that there is a simple way of convincing people who have raised usually around \$100,000 to \$130,000 for a vehicle to allow other people to use the vehicle because they do not have the set-up in terms of financial capability to understand the trade-off.

The CHAIR: Sorry, Mr Lee-Williams. You misunderstand me. The auxiliary raised the money to purchase the bus but it is now an asset of the MPS. They do not have any control over who operates it or who manages it. They simply raised the money to facilitate the purchase of the vehicle. The case might be that it has to be a whole-of-government policy—

Mr LEE-WILLIAMS: It would be.

The CHAIR: —around allowing those vehicles to be accessed for community benefit. Whilst there are various ownership models of those vehicles in country communities, in a community such as Walcha—and we were only there for a short period—it is clear that everyone there simply wants a good outcome for the community because everyone lives in that community.

Mr LEE-WILLIAMS: Absolutely. There are two things there that are important. I agree wholeheartedly there should be a whole-of-government approach. As a transport agency, you would not ask us to conduct any health or education services but we are very good at getting the logistics right and squeezing the efficiency out of assets—that is what we do. We are negotiating with both Health and Education at the moment to assist them in improving the efficiency of their fleets. It is a given that it would be very helpful if there was movement on that front to set up some cooperative structures with approvals so that people feel they have the authority to work together.

The CHAIR: Yes.

Mr KEVIN CONOLLY: I have a related question. You talked about government assets and agency assets. Does this model also apply to private sector assets, whether it is a club, a private school, a church or an aged-care facility that has a bus? Are there examples of that being used and are you familiar with a mechanism and a pathway to achieve that?

Mr LEE-WILLIAMS: There are. You are talking about Walcha because you were there but right across the State there are community transport providers who pretty much buy in access to fleets in their entirety. They try not to run fleets themselves. They tend to be the most efficient operators. It happens mostly in smaller communities where it is much easier to see the asset, to know who controls and manages the asset and to negotiate access. What we are hoping to get to with that community transport service providers platform is we can have that same level of understanding in more complex communities. We are also encouraging service providers that are funded through government to be more socially entrepreneurial—to sell access to their services to others.

There is probably no reason why most clubs need to run a courtesy bus when they could hire kilometres from the community transport and put money back into the community in a way that benefits broader outcomes for the community. The funny thing about buses—and that was the second point I was going to make—is that people love their asset. They want to hold on to their asset. They polish it like it is a jewel and they do not like anybody else having access to their asset. We need to break down that culture. As a government when we talk about what we need in a community, one of the most important things we need to talk about is that we need services, not buses.

The CHAIR: That is right.

Mr LEE-WILLIAMS: We have come across a number of communities where everybody gets promised a bus but there is no driver and no way of maintaining it or insuring it, so they sit there and do nothing—really expensive assets just rotting in fields. That is incredibly frustrating. But if people continuously adopt the term that people need a service to access their community, as a government we can go much further with that model.

The CHAIR: I have one final question on a slight change of topic. Page 17 of your submission talks about the Xplorer train fleet in rural and regional New South Wales—we are leaving you alone, Mr Lee-Williams, and moving to Mr Wing now—and says that the Xplorer trains are accessible to people with a disability or aged people that have walking frames because of the portable boarding ramps that are carried on each train. We have heard evidence on our site visit and in written submissions that the ramps are unsafe for passengers using wheelchairs because of the height different between the train and the station platform.

Mr KEVIN CONOLLY: At some stations.

The CHAIR: At some stations—not all, because country stations vary in height. There is a submission from Mr Steve Austin about the situation in Armidale. He, along with Peter Bannon, says he will no longer use the train because the length of the ramp is so short and the gradient is so steep from the platform to the train that it is simply unsafe to use it. He will not use it and neither will anyone else in wheelchairs. He said that there were supposed to be some longer ramps installed on those trains. He presented a letter to the Committee that indicated that that would be the case. When will the longer ramps be made available on the Xplorer fleet to resolve the differential height between platforms and trains so that everyone, not just those who are able-bodied, can access the train?

Mr WING: Let me start by saying that of course in an ideal world we would be able to have all the trains flush to the platform, but of course we have historic situations—different height platforms and different train sets as well—so in many cases we require a boarding ramp. We provide those so that people using wheelchairs and others can get on and we make sure they are available. We have ramps and we are complying with requirements, of course, but what we always want to do is make the best customer experience we can. We do not have a date for when those new ramps will be rolled out but we are considering how we can respond to those requirements. If some customers are feeling unsafe, that is important to us, simply as a customer experience as much as anything else. While we would say the ramps are safe, we do care about what the customers think and we are responding to that.

The CHAIR: There was a suggestion that, given the situation at Armidale and it may be the same for other regional stations, with the platform being so much lower than the train, the length of ramp needed to make it safe would be prohibitive to store on the train—that is, it would be too long. We are talking about it being almost two metres in length, so it cannot be stored on the train. Instead of having the ramp on the train, if we are only talking about a number of stations in country New South Wales, why not store the ramp at the station so

that the staff member from the station can put the ramp in rather than have the train carry different sized ramps all the way around the State?

Mr WING: We do have some stations where we store ramps. I do not know the specifics of Armidale—I will have to take that one on notice—but I am happy to go and look at that specific case and see whether it is possible.

The CHAIR: If you could take that on notice, that would be great.

Mr WING: Yes.

The CHAIR: Thank you.

Mr KEVIN CONOLLY: We have already covered some of the issues I want to ask about. Various witnesses at previous hearings have spoken about the costs of the taxi industry and how taxis could play a part particularly in some of the lower volume situations in which a bus run is not needed and there are not large numbers of people around and a car is far more appropriate. Yet it is that very context in which a viable taxi service is most marginal—it is harder to make a living. I asked the question about the cost inputs imposed by government on taxi services and whether there is any way government can play a role in making the taxi industry more viable in those low volume areas. Do you have any thoughts about how taxis interact with the service that you provide in smaller towns?

Mr WING: There are two different elements to that. The first are the costs that we, as a Government, impose on taxi providers, and the other is the extent to which they could more efficiently provide some of the services, especially in small towns, and to the extent to which that would help keep them viable. One of the big issues for us in many smaller towns is making sure that we not only have a taxi service but also a wheelchair accessible one. We have done a couple of things recently, but there is more that can be done, as you were saying. Late last year the Government removed a whole lot of red tape regulation around the taxi industry.

In December over 50 pieces of red tape were removed because they were not necessary anymore and they were imposing a lot of costs on industry, a lot of things that—especially outside metropolitan areas—made no sense. That was a significant removal of red tape to try to reduce costs and allow taxis, especially taxis in country towns, to be more viable and to compete. We also have put out a whole lot of extra subsidies as well, especially around disability access and wheelchair accessible taxis. The Government doubled the maximum taxi transport subsidy scheme payment from \$30 to \$60. It also increased the amount of money that is paid to taxidrivers for picking up customers who require wheelchair accessible taxis; that payment has doubled. That payment is made to drivers to encourage them and to recognise the fact that it may take longer to—

Mr KEVIN CONOLLY: It takes longer.

Mr WING: Yes. There was also a \$5 million loans fund for people to convert taxis over to wheelchair accessible taxis. Obviously there is quite a significant cost in making a conversion. We had a loans fund in the past, a smaller fund. It was already exhausted and an extra \$5 million has been put into that. We have opened up applications recently. We have had some 60 applications, of which somewhere between 20 or 30 have been from regional areas. That is very promising. That is great, we can see some more services rolled out that way. In relation to allowing or getting more ability for taxi providers to service areas as well on community transport type trips, we had plenty of representation from country taxi operators saying, "We could provide those services as well as anyone else. You do not need to run a bus for a single person." Mr Lee-Williams talked about this. We are moving to make more flexible services available. The CTABS project that he talked about is actually providing a lot more of the information that will be helpful for that. Historically, the lack of information has been difficult, and I think the IT systems that we have today, the data systems can make things more viable and more efficient than they were in the past. Do you have anything to add to that?

Mr LEE-WILLIAMS: I will take you through as quickly as I can the concept of flexible transport. I cannot tell you where we are going to run a pilot because, again, I am waiting for a final sign-off, but we are going to be running quite an extensive pilot of what you are referring to, which is—we use the term right-sizing and supply chain; sorry—using the right-sized vehicle where we can. There are a couple of things that underpin that. If you have already paid for a vehicle and the driver, it does not matter what size the vehicle is, you have already paid for it so you might as well use it. The biggest change that will assist in the new regional and rural bus contracts that went out this year and everybody signed up to is that there is no exclusivity. Previously we were restricted. We gave people exclusive rights to provide public transport in a region and we had to use whatever they provided. Now we can buy whatever we need for the public in the most efficient way. What we are planning to do is look at whether we even need to run fixed route bus services for a lot of areas. The demand is so low and so sporadic that we may actually be attempting to provide a service in a way that does not meet

customer need, and CTABS provides the basis for this. It will have a booking system so that you can book ahead, and we will pick you up and take you where you need to go.

Some of that sounds like a taxi service, clearly, and it is. One of the service models we are looking at is hiring the taxidriver as the bus operator in what we call out of peak. For example, if the train comes into Broken Hill—I think it is at 3.40 a.m.—currently we have to put a bus service on to meet that, that is our customer charter, and then that bus has to go within 400 metres of 90 per cent of the homes in Broken Hill. You might only be going two kilometres but you will have to go 10 kilometres to get there, and it proves to be not a very popular service. What we would rather do is people tell us when they get off the train that they need transport, pay the same \$2.50 when they get in the taxi, and the taxi then takes them to their home directly. They might take four people. It is called an optimisation in CTABS; it works out what the shortest possible route is to get those people home as quickly as possible. Then we pay the taxi operator what he would have on the meter. It is still cheaper than us running a bus because we do not have to pay for an entire shift, which is a minimum of four hours, for a bus to operate.

Mr KEVIN CONOLLY: And it makes the taxi service in Broken Hill more viable.

Mr LEE-WILLIAMS: And it gives them something more to do. Where there are taxi services in smaller regional communities, they will become part of the supply chain—that is the plan. It takes a lot of cooperation. It takes the taxi operator wanting to do that and going back to area managers. One of their jobs will be bringing those people to the table on a regular basis and helping them understand what we are trying to do and getting them enthused about participating.

Mr KEVIN CONOLLY: Good. Thank you.

Mr LEE-WILLIAMS: Hopefully early next year we will start to see some of that on the ground.

Mr WING: Occasionally that sort of thing has happened in the past. There are towns that, historically, might have had TrainLink coaches that were often running empty or with one person in them and there has been a move in some of those places that when a person wants a coach, we arrange a taxi for them instead. That has obviously been on a point-to-point case. What Terry is talking about will allow that to expand much more.

Mr KEVIN CONOLLY: Thank you.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Why was the Central Coast not one of the places that area managers and branch officers were placed? Is it historical that Wollongong and Newcastle always get them and the Central Coast does not?

Mr LEE-WILLIAMS: We have an office of 16 people who service Newcastle and Central Coast down to Sydney, so putting one person specifically logically did not add any value.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: We used to have one.

Mr LEE-WILLIAMS: And, logically, it did not add any value. When we did the review, we kept the same number of people but we tried to put them where the needs are greater. We had one in the Hunter as well, even though we had 16 colleagues sitting next to him doing a far more comprehensive job and we took those out so that we could double up in more remote regions.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: There are 350,000 people there.

Mr LEE-WILLIAMS: One person trying to service the needs of 350,000 is the kind of model that does not work, unfortunately. We went through that review, which was triggered by one of these committees that led to the change in those positions, for exactly that reason. Having a comprehensive public transport system that already has planning, has sophisticated operators operating there does not lend itself to a more one-on-one type service delivery model, which is what we would have to get in the more remote regions.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: In respect of the review, page 17 states there are 647 new rural and regional bus contracts. Do those routes still follow the old rail lines or do they now include more direct services, for example, from Tumut directly to Wagga and not via Cootamundra?

Mr LEE-WILLIAMS: That is a long distance coach. These are school bus service and town bus service contracts. Rail Link looks after the services that connect the towns over greater distances where a private provider does not. We always hope that a private provider gets in and we do not have to provide it, but if they do not, then TrainLink steps in. Of the 647 contracts, 580 essentially try to service schools; the others are town services that also service schools.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Has there been any survey or examination of the traditional, long-range bus routes to make them more direct? Generally, if people are going from Tumut to Wagga Wagga they do not go

via Cootamundra, because it is a long way. Although it has been traditional to follow the old rail line it is not actually what people want, so they do not use it.

Mr WING: We hear what you are saying. Another example might be in Coffs Harbour. The answer is, yes, they do get reviewed from time to time. We look at exactly the kind of thing you are talking about. On the other hand, people like the services that they are used to. There is no doubt that there are cases—including the two we have just talked about—where some of the services have moved from where the old rail lines were laid down. There are different centres that people want to go to now. So the answer is, yes, we do review those and are reviewing those.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I had an email from a fellow, Daniel Greenwell, who has cerebral palsy. He requires a scooter to get around. He used to go to Newcastle via the heavy rail. He now has to get off at Broadmeadow and get into a taxi because, apparently, his scooter cannot make the turn to get into the bus. He also has to cross the road, which has made the whole trip quite difficult for him. He acknowledges that the subsidy has increased but he is wondering whether people with disabilities, particularly people who use his type of transport mode—he is very reliant on his scooter—have been taken into account with the planning for transport in Newcastle.

Mr WING: Yes, they have. There has been consultation both with the broader peak bodies—we have an Accessible Transport Advisory Committee which has the broader peak bodies for New South Wales on it—but also more directly with groups in Newcastle. One of the issues is that although the heavy rail can offer to take larger mobility scooters the disability standards and all the existing buses have been built around wheelchairs. Those buses could take a person in a wheelchair but I suspect we will never be able to fit large mobility scooters on buses. For the interim period we need to provide taxi services as well.

Mr LEE-WILLIAMS: Once the light rail is in there, people will be able to roll straight onto the light rail. This is a temporary inconvenience, unfortunately. It is very important to note for a committee such as this that there are no standards for scooters. There is no ability to ensure that a scooter is securely fastened in any vehicle. This continues to be a major problem for consumers and customers, and a major problem for transport providers. Everybody wants to be able to carry every mobility device but the danger of having a 175 kilogram to 225 kilogram unsecured unit in a moving vehicle is, as you would understand, quite a risk. Our agency has been lobbying for a considerable time for there to be a national standard because if it does not occur at a national level then nobody is going to manufacture to the standard, but if they have tie-down points, which we have on wheelchairs, we would be able to secure them. You are not allowed to travel while you are on the mobility device; you must transfer to a seat because you cannot secure it.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I refer to the point-to-point transfer and the changes that have occurred around taxis and hire cars, et cetera, and what will occur when hire cars lose their plates in five years time. Hire cars are used in particular by the Department of Veterans' Affairs [DVA] to transport people in regional areas. They are also heavily used to bring people from Newcastle and the Central Coast to the cruise ships and to the airport. When the plates are abolished they will have no advantage over a normal car travelling in any of the transit lanes, et cetera. Has it been taken into account that that use is different from hire cars in the city—that in regional areas there is a real purpose for having hire cars?

Mr WING: Yes, it has. The reforms that were put in place, on the one hand obviously freed up the market for hire cars and other booked services so that a lot more could be available. The traditional hire cars which had the hire car plates and taxis have access to the bus lanes. In the future we will not allow large numbers of new hire cars to enter the bus lanes but we have grandfathered them for four years so that there can be a transition, because if people make investments in hire cars they need to be able to make that transition. Taxis will still have access to the bus lanes. The other thing I should say about that is that a large part of this is about dealing with congestion. Although the issue is around every bus lane in Sydney and elsewhere, it is really about the Sydney Harbour Bridge and Victoria Road. The answer to your question is that we cannot have large numbers of non-buses filling up the bus lanes in the future, but we have grandfathered them for the time being. Taxis will still have access to the bus lanes, as will buses, of course.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: It is a fairly large cost getting a taxi from the Central Coast to the airport.

Mr WING: That is true for a hire car too. Obviously in those cases DVA is also funding some of the costs.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Has there been any look at schemes to assist Aboriginal people to gain a driver licence? A lot of Aboriginal people do not have access to a car or the funds to go to a driving school. Has there been any look at programs to boost that area to give Aboriginal people more access?

Mr WING: Absolutely. We recognise that one of the big issues—not just for Aboriginal people but for people in rural areas—is that a driver licence is needed to get a job, basically. It is particularly an issue in the remote Aboriginal communities because there is a bit of a cycle. Since not many people have driver licences and you need to do your hours with someone who has one, it can be quite hard for Aboriginal learners to get their licences. Some members of the Committee would be aware that one of the side effects of that is people being shut out of education and employment. The other side effect is that there is an issue with unlicensed driving. People who have lost their licences or do not have one drive anyway because it is very hard for them to get to a job without it.

So we have a mentoring program which is being piloted. It is trying to match volunteer mentors with Aboriginal people who want to get their driver licences. Although it is initially a trial I would say that it is proving to be a great success. I cannot say that officially until we do an evaluation but I would say it is proving to be a great success because there is no doubt that that is one of the big impediments to getting a driver licence. We match participants with volunteers. That way we allow them to get their hours up. We also assist Aboriginal learners through the whole process from getting the initial permit to getting a full licence, and trying to remove any impediments. If that is shown to be a full success then we would roll it out very widely. It would be very helpful because, as we discussed, it is not just about a driver licence; it is about your full participation in the community.

Mr BRUCE NOTLEY-SMITH: If the Committee were to revisit a few of the issues that have been looked at in this inquiry with particular area managers in, say, 12 months time, how would their success be gauged? How could the Committee be confident that the area manager positions are fulfilling those objectives that this Committee is repeatedly hearing regarding utilising underutilised assets and resources?

Mr LEE-WILLIAMS: It comes down to evidence, I guess, and that is one of the hardest things until we start tracking the supply chain, which we will do but will take more than 12 months to get CTABs across that supply chain. Certainly we will have seen multiple instances of communities and service providers coming together and at least starting to be in the same room talking to each other rather than pretending they do not exist, because we are formalising that structure across the State as transport advisory groups. I would hope that we would see, from the space where we buy transport, that we are buying it from a broader base of service providers. I would hope that these would be the most likely outcomes.

Given that it has been a problem for more than 30 years—I have been in this game for too long!—I am not expecting a rapid resolution to these issues. I would like to be an eternal optimist, but we are putting all of the infrastructure in place to make it happen. I would like to see that it had begun moving quite well to at least get to the point where we could sign agreements with people to start delivering services better within 12 months. I think the actual delivery of services will start slowly as we encourage people to let go of their gorilla grip on the assets. It should grow exponentially over five years. That is our fervent desire.

Mr BRUCE NOTLEY-SMITH: What do you see as local government's role in assisting this to happen?

Mr LEE-WILLIAMS: Local government makes up about 15 per cent of our provider group. Local government will actually be involved in all of the transport advisory groups. Local government people often miss out as the driver of demand services largely by where they agree to set up services and allow hospitals, communities, employment centres and schools to be built. They are central to the planning of the service task. One of the great benefits of working with local government is that they are generally more open to enabling access to their existing assets than community groups often are, because they have enough sophistication to understand that if they are being given money to use their asset they are getting a return on their asset. We have found that has been pretty consistent across the State.

In the Far West, where it is largely unincorporated lands, the equivalent of local government is absolutely critical because it is not only the provision of vehicles but the allowing of vehicles to be domiciled at people's homes rather than in an official depot away from the community. The cost of depots can actually stop a service being delivered. It is a multilayered thing, but they will be involved all the time. We meet with the Local Government Association on a pretty regular basis. We work with local government on the provision of regional bus stops as well and we fund them to do that. This is an extension of that central role they have in the community.

Mr BRUCE NOTLEY-SMITH: Local government also generally has the connections within the community to persuade community groups or non-government authorities to loosen their grip on assets.

Mr LEE-WILLIAMS: Absolutely. That is why they are a great partner for us.

Mr BRUCE NOTLEY-SMITH: Regarding motorised wheelchairs, you said that there is no national standard for tie-down points.

Mr LEE-WILLIAMS: Motorised scooters.

Mr BRUCE NOTLEY-SMITH: And wheelchairs do?

Mr WING: They do.

Mr LEE-WILLIAMS: They do. That is relatively new in itself.

Mr BRUCE NOTLEY-SMITH: Do you include wheelchairs when you say people cannot remain in the mobility device once they—

Mr LEE-WILLIAMS: No, in wheelchairs you stay in the device; in mobility scooters, or what we call sort of supercharged golf carts that people get around in, it is unsafe for them to travel because there is no lockdown device. There is also no way of providing a seatbelt around an individual. In wheelchairs we tend to use what are called backboard devices, where you travel backwards pressed against a platform. Most mobility scooters have an overhang at the rear so there is no way of keeping people stable. They have a terrible habit of falling over, even when people are using them on the street. Unfortunately mobility scooters are quite unstable in many situations. There is a design issue there.

Mr BRUCE NOTLEY-SMITH: Who have you been lobbying about a national standard?

Mr LEE-WILLIAMS: The Australian Transport Council [ATC].

Mr BRUCE NOTLEY-SMITH: Does it perhaps need a kick?

Mr LEE-WILLIAMS: It is always handy if people can be reminded that this is a pressing need in the community. As the community ages—but also with the significant change in the wealth of the ageing community, so many more people can afford the device than was previously true—it is a growing issue. It is a growing issue for the taxi industry as well. I know that the taxi industry has been very keen to try to get this sorted out as well.

Mr WING: The difficulty for us, obviously, is until we get a national standard anything could appear and we cannot necessarily build transport to deal with the situation. As Mr Lee-Williams is saying, the taxi industry faces complaints from time to time because when taxidriviers with wheelchair accessible taxis turn up, they will not take mobility scooters because they cannot tie the device down in the back. It would be great to have a national standard, because that would help not just this State but all States deal with what I think is growing use by older and other people. But there is not much point us having a single standard in New South Wales, because that will not achieve anything.

Mr LEE-WILLIAMS: We would drive up the price exponentially. All of those devices are imported.

Mr ALEX GREENWICH: I will pick up on Mr Conolly's questions about the incentives for taxi operators to have disability-accessible vehicles. How are we ensuring that those incentives are going to the areas of greatest need? Obviously a subsidy comes at a cost. How are we ensuring that areas of need are identified? What sorts of incentives are given in that context?

Mr WING: I spoke about two different sets of subsidies before. One set is essentially going to the customer, so the customer is making their choices. Those are the Taxi Transport Subsidy Scheme payments and the wheelchair accessible taxi driver incentive scheme payments, which are going to the driver but are relating to individual customer trips. They are generally available so that customers can make their own choice about where they want to travel. The particular subsidies, though, that need to be especially targeted are the ones that go towards the vehicle and the take-up of a wheelchair accessible taxi licence or the monies to convert a taxi. In the \$5 million fund I spoke about, which is the wheelchair accessible taxi loan fund, some of the criteria that are being used to assess applications look very much at areas that require extra service. If people are putting forward applications for loans in areas that do not currently have a wheelchair accessible taxi, that is an obvious place that is prioritised for access to that fund. We will have more applications than we have funding, but we want to target extra places that are underserved. I think that is also a key part of trying to make sure that, as the National Disability Insurance Scheme is rolled out, we are providing subsidies and loan funds to areas that need those services for customers.

Mr ALEX GREENWICH: I refer to the potential to use taxis instead of buses at the end of the journey to fulfil that last round. There are some jurisdictions in the United States that have used services such as Uber to pick up what they call the last mile. Have you considered using services such as Uber in combination with taxis?

Mr LEE-WILLIAMS: We are non-discriminatory about who provides services. On the other hand, Uber is discriminatory in that it does not provide anything outside the metropolitan area. The company has made it very clear that if there is not a population of 15,000 or more, it is unlikely to be able to establish the supply chain it needs to meet a service offering to the customer. Therefore, it is unlikely to move into that space. What is more encouraging is that in both Europe and the United States there are other providers of Uber type services who can work in much smaller communities because they do not have a massive, multi-billion-dollar infrastructure to service. We are very keen for people to get into that space.

One of the conversations our area managers very regularly have is with people exploring what markets might look like and what opportunities there might be. They are the repository of a lot of the information about what demand looks like in the community. However, so far no-one has bitten that bullet under the new point-to-point regulation to set up a competitor in those regional areas. If they do, our job is always to provide the most cost-effective, safe, quality service we can find.

Mr WING: In addition, I know of at least one example—I will not name it because I am not sure whether an announcement has been made—where one of the providers that can operate under the new reforms has been talking to a local town where there are insufficient taxis. The town itself has been trying to get extra taxis, but the previous regulations made it impossible for anyone to provide additional services. The freeing up has meant that the community as a whole has been able to go to this alternative provider and talk to it about coming into town to provide point-to-point services. If that is announced, it is a good example of how towns that were previously underserved can get new services that are different from the traditional services offered. It could be a taxi service providing new types of services in a regional town, but in this case it is a new provider.

Mr ALEX GREENWICH: The submissions from some of the advocates for people with disability have stressed that access to transport goes beyond being able to get on and off; it goes to the service provider. Can you take us through the type of training staff on the ground receive for supporting people with a disability? How is it monitored and how can it be improved?

Mr WING: That is a broad question. We started by talking about taxis, so I will start there again. People who want to provide wheelchair accessible taxi services must be trained to provide them. That obviously goes to safety—for example, tying down the wheelchair safely—and to customer service; that is, ensuring that people are comfortable and that they can get in and out of the taxi. That training is compulsory for any driver of a wheelchair-accessible taxi service. We provide training for all of our customer service staff. Frontline training is given to TrainLink customer service staff—both train and coach staff. Again, that goes very much to how they should deal with safety issues and customer care. Obviously that is important to us, because we try to give the best service we can to our customers.

In respect of services that we contract, most or all of our contracts require some level of training in customer care. Most recently, we have introduced new laws for community transport, which again require them to have an appropriate level of accreditation and driver knowledge. We require that kind of training across the board to deal with both safety and customer care. I do not see that going away given that we increasingly want people to have a good experience.

Mr ALEX GREENWICH: Has the feedback been largely positive? How do you monitor the situation to ensure that the training is appropriate and is delivering the result intended?

Mr LEE-WILLIAMS: We monitor customer feedback, satisfaction and complaints. Community transport has a 99 per cent customer satisfaction rate. I am proud to say that that is the highest of any mode of transport in the country, not only in New South Wales. That is a good indication that most people are comfortable with it. Customer complaints are very low per 100 kilometres for specialist services. They relate more to the reliability of services, because we have trouble getting drivers in some areas as the population ages, rather than to the quality of the service and handling of the disabilities. The Commonwealth, which very generously funds most of the specialist services that we provide, has community care standards with which every operator must comply, and they are audited every year.

If people do not meet those requirements, they are not funded. Therefore, there is a strong incentive for operators to comply. That is not to say that there will not occasionally be a complex disability or a type of disability that is unknown to some operators. There are lots of conversations and calling back managers to ask how they should deal with something. The most common difficulties involve people with severe behavioural and mental health issues. They are the cases that cause problems because there is no standardised training and every person is different. We are generally pretty good with people who have physical disabilities.

Mr ALEX GREENWICH: This inquiry is focusing on seniors and disadvantaged people. That cohort can often experience isolation issues and companion animals are an important part of their life. Private bus and

community transport services have very good pro-companion animal policies in terms of accessibility and commuting to shops or wherever. That seems to vary with State-provided transport depending on who is at the station or driving the bus. What is the policy, and have there been any moves to review it?

Mr WING: The policy at the moment is that guide dogs are allowed to use those services. Companion animals, for that matter any other animals, are allowed on buses as long as they are carried in a container or some sort of carry case. The same applies to ferries. However, they are not allowed on train services. The historic reason for that has been that a bus driver can see and control the bus itself, whereas we do not have a person on every train carriage. We are weighing up the questions involved. Some customers want to travel with their companion animals, but we must consider the safety of other customers. We have to be very careful and concerned about the question of whether having a dog, for example, moving freely around a carriage could contribute to safety risks for other passengers.

Historically we have not allowed those on train carriages. We have had representations asking if we could think about extending some of the rules. We are reviewing it. As I said, that review has to take into account those safety questions. On New South Wales train services where there are long distances between stops we have to think about things like sanitation and so on. All of those things will be taken into account but we recognise that the world is changing and some of our customers want different things these days.

Mr ALEX GREENWICH: Obviously there is a big difference between having a dog in a carrying case and having them roam freely. There are ways in which to control a companion animal without locking them in a carry case. Indeed, particularly for an elderly person, the physical lifting of that can be near impossible.

Mr LEE-WILLIAMS: I add a practicality for context. There is actually no definition of a companion animal or what the animal may be. We have had cases of people trying to bring their pythons with them as companion animals, and you can imagine—

Mr DAVID HARRIS: On the Central Coast.

Mr LEE-WILLIAMS: Yes, on the Central Coast. You have read it. Clearly that causes significant distress to other people on the vehicle. This is one of those issues where it is incredibly difficult to get it right.

Mr ALEX GREENWICH: Would a clearer definition make life easier—or an additional definition perhaps, somewhere between guide dogs and the current undefined space? That seems to be the cohort in which there is a bit of difficulty—elderly people travelling with their dog to the vet, for example.

Mr LEE-WILLIAMS: As a person who buys and regulates services, yes. Please do not ask me to help define it.

Mr ALEX GREENWICH: Sure. I appreciate that. I also have a question for the representatives from Family and Community Services. In terms of identifying the transport option needs of social housing residents, how do you interact with Transport for NSW when a need is identified and how that need is communicated to residents?

Ms LAWRENCE: It happens on a piecemeal basis depending on the estate that you are working in. We would generally talk with local operators and local government to develop a more robust response there. It is interesting—I have not long ago taken over the Riverina-Murray area. I was out in Griffith recently where they regaled us with examples of an estate in Leeton called Wattle Hill which was five or six kilometres outside of Leeton. There was literally no public transport so residents had to pay \$40 round trip for a taxi to get their groceries. You can appreciate that that is significant for someone who is financially disadvantaged. In that case we would be speaking to local operators. It is comforting to know that there are area managers now that can provide that support to get some traction. It does not happen universally. It is a big problem for our social housing tenants. In the regional centres it is not so bad—they have a relatively robust transport infrastructure—but in the smaller communities where you are becoming reliant on a more fragile service sector, those who are not able to pay certainly miss out.

Mr ALEX GREENWICH: Are there any examples of newer services such as GoGet, for example, which is throughout the City of Sydney, where one vehicle is shared by multiple people, being considered in those estates in which people may not own their own vehicle but are able to drive and taxi costs are prohibitive?

Ms LAWRENCE: The short answer is no. It is an interesting concept. There is the point about people having their licences. Many of our tenants touch upon the welfare and justice system so sometimes it is very difficult for them to get into that space. If you could look at a non-government provider being the source of that, enabling that and tying that to a licence acquisition process then that is absolutely worthwhile considering.

Mr ALEX GREENWICH: Thank you.

The CHAIR: I have a few quick questions to finish with. Mr Wing, in relation to the question you took on notice about Armidale station and the ramp, I will provide you with a copy of submission No. 83 from Mr Steve Austin. I have highlighted the relevant sections in terms of the ramp. That might assist you in coming back to the Committee. During our inquiry, concern has been expressed by a number of submission makers about the ongoing viability of community transport. With the advent of the National Disability Insurance Scheme [NDIS] and moving to an individualised funding model rather than a block funding model for services, some concerns raised with us were that that could mean providers move to a full cost recovery model. There have been concerns raised about the money set aside within NDIS packages for transport. Whilst I do not want you to touch on that I am interested in your thoughts on how that transition to an individualised funding model will impact on the viability and availability of community transport services in rural and regional areas.

Mr WING: Obviously the National Disability Insurance Agency [NDIA] has not been up and running in a major way for very long so we are obviously still monitoring how that is going to play out. We expect that in many areas, because people will now have choice—they will be able to spend their money as they choose—there may be increases in demand for some kinds of services. In those areas that is great but there could be other areas where, for example, if you need a certain amount of basic funding to buy an asset, the question will be whether or not any changes in demand from participants affects your ability to make that investment. We have not had that problem so far but, as I say, it is early days. We are certainly monitoring what is happening there. Earlier we talked a bit about how we are targeting some of our subsidies and funding for wheelchair accessible services. If there is an issue with community transport then we will of course have to look at that as well. But at the same time I would say that one of the ways of responding to this is going to be with some of the flexible transport schemes we just talked about.

Mr LEE-WILLIAMS: I will add to that. I hear this all the time, as you can imagine, because I am the one who funds the 92 community transport providers across the State. I have to remind them that in the past four years their Commonwealth funding has increased by 30 per cent and their State Government funding has increased by 300 per cent. Even with the trading out of the total funding that is going to NDIS they are still on average about 35 per cent more greatly funded than they were just four years ago. So in terms of viability I think it would be a stretch to say that that will make or break them.

At the same time the challenge for community transport is that they have to provide services people want to procure when they are buying it of their free will rather than being forced to go through that service. That is a significant change in culture which we have been trying to enable the providers to get through with a huge amount of support. It would be true in many instances that community transport will no longer be required by those people with a disability. The experience in the Hunter in particular has shown that people would rather put the money in the pocket of their existing carer as part of their transport payment and get the carer to also transport them. That is choice. That is what the whole model comes down to. It will decrease some demand for some services, for certain, but that also means that where there are waiting lists, which occur across a great number of providers, they will have some capacity to provide the other services.

Mr KEVIN CONOLLY: I have a follow up question. I am not sure who can comment on the impact of My Aged Care in relation to community transport. We have heard from people that in order to become eligible for community transport they had to answer a raft of questions as if they were applying for aged care. People were simply giving up and saying, "I do not want to spend all this time telling you that. I just want to travel from A to B." They gave up and did not use the service.

Mr LEE-WILLIAMS: I can comment on that. For those who are not in the know, My Aged Care is the Federal Government's outsourced eligibility measurement system. They fund eight different service types. Previously you would go to each service type and go through an eligibility assessment for every service type. They have centralised it into a thing called My Aged Care. It would be true to say that it has been a significant learning experience for the Commonwealth Government as to how they approached it because it did not work at all for the first seven months that it was in. It has been getting significantly better and as the State Government we have negotiated with the Commonwealth to do two things. One is to significantly lessen the number of questions if people nominate that the only service they require is transport. That is starting to roll out now.

The other thing is we negotiated with the Commonwealth that we were able to provide transport while people went through the assessment process because there was a massive backlog at one stage of literally months. They have now caught up so that has expired. People still have to go through My Aged Care. I guess the primary thing is that it is a Commonwealth service with a Commonwealth eligibility criteria funded by Commonwealth money and we administer the service delivery component of that, but the whole inflow of people is a Commonwealth issue. We meet with the service providers regularly and we have pushed all of that feedback quite strongly back to the Commonwealth to improve that situation. I honestly believe it is improving month on month as they get into it. It is the first time anybody had tried anything like that. Service providers

who are providing the assessment had never provided the service before either, so they had to learn how to do that and then the IT system was one of the most glitchy things we have ever experienced, and they have started to sort that out as well.

Mr KEVIN CONOLLY: Thank you very much.

The CHAIR: I have a question for our health representatives. Throughout this inquiry we have had some feedback about the Isolated Patients Travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme [IPTAAS] and the feedback we have received about the changes that were made is that they were very much welcomed, but there have been some suggestions to further improve it from a customer standpoint. Is there potential for the IPTAAS to be changed from a reimbursement scheme to an up-front payment in some circumstances, particularly when travel and large costs are involved for people who do not have the up-front capital; and could the reimbursement process be sped up or streamlined so that everything can be verified electronically via Medicare rather than the convoluted paper trail that some health professionals make difficult for patients by not taking the time to fill it out. I would be interested in your thoughts on those two aspects.

Ms BRUCE: Can you ask me the first question again?

The CHAIR: I am sorry, I have a habit of doing that. The first question was, in some circumstances, could it be an up-front payment rather than a reimbursement?

Ms BRUCE: In the majority of cases, the plan to go to up-front payments is not supported because individuals' plans for their health, their capacity to attend an appointment, even the appointment itself can change, so then we would have to go back into a rebate system and reabsorb that money back through the people. In cases of financial hardship, there are opportunities to discuss whether some or all of the costs can be paid in advance. What was the second question?

The CHAIR: The electronic verification via Medicare.

Ms BRUCE: I am going to refer to my friends as well. We have identified through the two processes that have happened so far to improve the website and improve the processes that are there, but there is an acknowledgment that we can continue to streamline and develop the system that sits behind the IPTAAS and make it easier for people to use. It is great to hear there has been good feedback about the changes that have come to date. We have identified additional areas that we can continue to work on. I will check with Jacky whether there are particular plans on those question areas.

The CHAIR: If we take evidence from others they have to be sworn in.

Ms BRUCE: Sorry.

The CHAIR: I am happy for you to take it on notice.

Ms BRUCE: Can you add anything?

Mr HUNTER: I might add that the process and the convolution of that process is dictated by the policy. We are working on the simplification of that policy and that needs to happen ahead of any system and process simplification. We will be working on simplifying that policy in the next six to 12 months, and hopefully we can simplify the application process and the reimbursement process greatly. That is what we are wanting to achieve because there is a recognition that that verification piece takes a little while at the moment.

The CHAIR: My final question was to Ms Lawrence. I was interested in your response to Alex's question. Maybe this is something for everyone on the panel. In a number of submissions we have been urged as a Committee to consider the implementation of a scheme similar to Western Australia's country aged pension fuel card, which is essentially for people in rural and remote areas where there is no public transport, that they simply become eligible for a fuel card, recognising the fact that there are no taxis or anything and the only way to get from A to B is literally by a car and giving a fuel card to those who are eligible to help cover that cost. Is that something that could be of benefit to some clients, particularly in some of the more remote areas?

Ms LAWRENCE: Yes, absolutely. In fact, our Aboriginal flexible respite scheme has an annual funding of \$233,000 and 50 per cent of that is spent on transport and most of that is with Caltex fuel cards. It is a highly efficient way of helping families to get from remote locations down to regional centres or Sydney. It is widely used where we can.

The CHAIR: Does anyone else have any thoughts on that? Transport for NSW, are you familiar with this scheme?

Mr LEE-WILLIAMS: Yes, we are. There are quite a number of fuel card schemes around and we provide quite a few fuel cards through our—I cannot remember the acronym now. I think it is called the

transport access regional partnership grants program. It used to be called the RTC grants program. It is a small fund of \$900,000 per year, and always within a community or local government. It is to fill those gaps that we do not fill through the service provision and there are a lot of fuel cards that go out via that.

The CHAIR: Can you take that question on notice and provide some information to the Committee on that particular scheme if it is already there, because we have been asked to consider this scheme. There are obviously a couple of models out there and we would like any information you can provide on that.

Mr LEE-WILLIAMS: When considering it, can you please also consider the potential for fraud and the trading of fuel cards.

The CHAIR: We will consider all of that, but we would like to have a look at it.

Mr LEE-WILLIAMS: You can certainly do it, but there is an administrative cost in ensuring that the public money goes where it is meant to go. In terms of efficiency, it depends on where you are doing it but in more remote communities it is much easier. In more populated communities they tend to become a tradeable asset.

The CHAIR: I am aware of that.

Mr WING: We will provide some information about the current scheme.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: The Committee has examples of people being discharged from hospital without arrangements for them to get home, sometimes involving long distances. Recently someone contacted me about their father who was discharged at 10.30 at night. The only relative lived in Sydney, which was some two hours away. They got a taxi and he was found half in his wheelchair, half trying to get in his bed some 10 hours later. Is there a specific policy where they take into account transport needs through the discharge process, or is it just, "We need the bed, see you later"?

Mr HUNTER: We run a non-emergency patient transport system. It is up to the medical facility to book that. It is for patients who require medical assistance to get home. It is not an ambulance service, but they do have some medical care. The key point is that it needs to be booked by the hospital and then that gets referred through a booking hub and, depending on the area, a green fleet ambulance without lights turns up and they transport patients home. We can have a look at that individual example and bottom that out because it probably should not have happened.

The CHAIR: There are no further questions. Thank you very much all of you for appearing today and for assisting us with this inquiry. We will send you documentation about those items that you have taken on notice so that you have them for your reference and if you can reply to those in a timely manner, it would be greatly appreciated. Again, thank you very much. We appreciate your evidence today.

(The witnesses withdrew)

(The Committee adjourned at 12.07 p.m.)