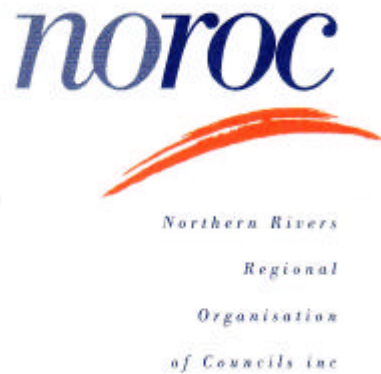


**INQUIRY INTO THE CLOSURE OF CASINO TO
MURWILLUMBAH RAIL SERVICES**

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Position: Executive Officer
Telephone: 02 6622 2650
Date Received: 01/06/2004

Subject:

Summary



SUBMISSION BY NOROC
(Northern Rivers Organisation of Councils Inc)

**LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL INQUIRY INTO CLOSURE OF
CASINO TO MURWILLUMBAH RAIL SERVICE**

**PRIORITIES FOR
FUTURE RAIL DEVELOPMENT FOR THE
NORTHERN RIVERS REGION**

May 2004

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This submission has been prepared by NOROC in response to the recent NSW Government decision to close the Casino-Murwillumbah line. It represents the views of the councils of the Northern Rivers region and is the product of consultation with key stakeholders including

- Northern Rivers Trains for the Future community group;
- Mayors from Lismore, Tweed, Richmond Valley and Byron Councils;
- Local Members of Parliament;
- Lismore City Council Public Transport Advisory Panel;
- Rail consultants;
- Transport experts; and
- Historians.

The NSW Government forecasts that by the year 2020, 25% of the nation's population will be living along the coastal strip between Coffs Harbour and Hervey Bay in Queensland.¹

Indicative patronage estimates show that extension of the rail connection to the Gold Coast could result in up to 4,850 passenger trips per day, based solely on patronage prior to closure of the rail services on 16 May 2004.² An unofficial estimate of demand for a local commuter service on a Mullumbimby-Byron Bay-Lismore sector is approximately 3,000 per day.³

To meet recent patronage of up to 300 passengers per day – as well as accommodating future demand for commuter and tourism services – the Northern Rivers Councils call on the NSW Government to commit to achieving the following:

Immediate priorities

- Re-introduce rail services on the Casino-Murwillumbah line, accompanied by a re-invigorated marketing campaign and better schedules to encourage increased patronage that will satisfy demand for commuter and tourism-oriented services, including a link with the Sydney/Brisbane service;
- Enhance existing rail infrastructure (including lines, bridges and stations) by the guaranteed expenditure of funds to achieve a minimum 80 km/h standard;

¹ Submission to the Parry Inquiry into Public Transport in NSW, Lismore City Council, 10th October 2003, Manager – Economic Development and Tourism, Andrew Lovett

² Submission to the Parry Inquiry into Public Transport in NSW, Lismore City Council, 10th October 2003, Manager – Economic Development and Tourism, Andrew Lovett

- Encourage transfer of road freight to rail by establishing rail freight depots;
- Develop an Integrated Northern Rivers Transport Blueprint that incorporates rail services as an integral part of services into the future.

Medium-term priority

- Establish a rail link between Murwillumbah and the Gold Coast, enabling commuter services and tourism to be connected with Brisbane services.

³ Verbal advice from unpublished research provided Dr Robert Weatherby, Chair of Lismore City Council Public Transport Advisory Committee.

TRANSPORT PLANNING IN THE NORTHERN RIVERS: CURRENT ISSUES

The Casino-Murwillumbah rail line has been subject to a regrettable decline in maintenance and a removal of services over the last twenty years. Significant investment is needed to bring the line up to a satisfactory standard.

At the same time, the Northern Rivers road network is largely in poor condition and rapidly increasing urbanisation is creating pressure for a significant upgrade. Some areas experience seasonal transport 'gridlock' due to high visitor numbers.

Road travel in the Northern Rivers region is increasingly unsafe as the number of large B-double buses has increased, with school buses making frequent stops during peak hours on major trunk routes.

Increased road damage repair costs and costs of providing and maintaining transport infrastructure (eg shelters, bus bays) must now be paid for predominantly by local government, increasing the financial burden on Northern Rivers ratepayers.

Population Growth/Tourism

The Northern Rivers is experiencing extremely rapid population growth. In certain areas the population is growing at rates between 2-4% per annum, compared with the NSW average annual population growth rate of approximately 0.8%.

The Australian Financial Review reported in January this year that "Everyone...wants to live on the NSW north coast. New highways to the Gold Coast and Brisbane have opened up once-sleepy coastal towns such as Pottsville, Kingscliff and even Byron Bay to the possibility of a daily commute to Brisbane. Recent upgrades to the Pacific Highway have spurred a mini development boom and buyer frenzy".⁴

Gold Coast Airport experienced 23.5 per cent growth in domestic passenger movements in December 2003/January 2004 compared with the same period 12 months prior. This growth has been attributed to "the growing popularity of the Gold Coast and Northern Rivers as a holiday and lifestyle destination along with the strong growth in airline seats available".⁵ The airport's General Manager predicts that the growth of value based airlines, and the imminent start-up of a low cost carrier, point to a continuation of the growth.

⁴ Australian Financial Review, 9 January 2004, "Guide to Beachfront Property"

⁵ www.goldcoastairport.com.au/sub-media/newsdetails.cfm?id=1KTO

Further, industry officials have estimated that about 400,000 people holidayed between Coffs Harbour and the Gold Coast during the Easter Holiday Period, 2004.⁶ Tourism NSW reported that, during this period, the North Coast attracted the second highest number of visitors in the State, after Sydney. The North Coast is now a recognised destination in it's own right and represents an alternative to the more heavily built-up South-East Queensland areas.⁷

The consequence of this seasonal popularity is to put greater pressure on our already over-committed roads system. Traffic jams are now a regular feature of Easter and Christmas holidays on the Pacific Highway. Governments must begin to look at increasing transport options in the region.

Based on previous patronage of 200-250 passengers per trip on the Casino-Murwillumbah line, CountryLink would need to run 5 x 49-seater coaches per trip, equating to an additional 2,900 buses on the road each year, just to meet previous demand. This projection is conservative, given it does not provide for increased demand arising from population growth and seasonal tourism, or improved scheduling and marketing of rail services.

Australian and international experience indicates that when a train service is replaced by an unpopular coach service, a large proportion of rail passengers will switch to travel by car.⁸ Some passengers may opt for air travel (particularly with the introduction of cheaper air fares to and from the region). However, they will still need to commute to their airport of choice by car or bus.

It is critical that both State and Commonwealth Governments, in partnership with local councils, invest strongly in the provision of infrastructure. It is not the time to withdraw transport infrastructure from the region, rather to substantially increase sustainable transport capacity.

Investment

CountryLink system has been starved of investment over many years. The XPTs are coming to the end of the useful working lives and there has been no programme of either upgrade or replacement. Similarly there is a lack of adequate investment in fixed infrastructure and services.

This lack of investment in services may account, in part, for a Tourism NSW report showing that in 2000, 88% of domestic visitors used private vehicle to commute to the Northern Rivers

⁶ Northern Star, Tuesday, April 13, 2004

⁷ Northern Star, Tuesday, April 13, 2004

⁸ Advice from Lismore City Council Public Transport Advisory Committee.

region, while only 4% used rail services. Similarly, 46% of international visitors to the region used long distance bus or coach, while less than 4% of international visitors used train.⁹

The following table indicates the inequity in investment levels between City Rail and CountryLink areas as well as the complete absence of any meaningful investment in CountryLink.

Capital Investment	2000-2001	2001-2002	2002-2003
City Rail	\$238m	\$250m	\$420m
CountryLink	\$ 10m	\$ 7m	\$ 1m

Source: Submission to the Parry Inquiry into Public Transport in NSW, Lismore City Council, 10th October 2003

Both Victoria and Queensland are investing heavily in their country rail systems. NSW needs to at least match the levels of investment of our neighbouring states.¹⁰

Despite the poor investment in infrastructure, CountryLink is a more profitable service to run than city trains. CityRail services return 28 cents per revenue per one dollar of expenditure. CountryLink services return 32 cents for every one dollar of expenditure.

Access and Equity

Many retirees are choosing to relocate to the Northern Rivers area. Consequently the ageing of the population is particularly accentuated in this region.

At the same time, the socio-economic profile for the area indicates low levels of household income and the nation's highest level of unemployment.

There are many people in the Northern Rivers region who do not have access to a car and therefore rely on the train for travel in and out of the region. Rail presents the only transport option for many people with a disability, Aboriginal people and those who are socio-economically disadvantaged.

Rail travel also affords passengers better safety, comfort and access to facilities/amenities than coach travel.

Environment

The NSW Government has reported that road congestion, air pollution, accidents, noise and heavy vehicle road damage cost Australians more than \$30 billion per year.¹¹

⁹ Northern Rivers – Tropical NSW Region Tourism Profile Year End December 2000, Tourism NSW

¹⁰ Submission to the Parry Inquiry into Public Transport in NSW, Lismore City Council, 10th October 2003, Manager – Economic Development and Tourism, Andrew Lovett

Road transport causes 14% of total greenhouse gas emissions and 89% of the nation's transport greenhouse gas emissions. In contrast, rail causes just 0.4% of total emissions and only 2% of transport emissions.¹²

Similarly, road accounts for 73% of noise in urban areas while rail accounts for 6% of noise in urban areas.¹³

In the Northern Rivers, significant and growing opposition to highway-based travel is occurring at the community level. Residents who are fed up with highway noise are demanding less traffic and greater traffic restrictions.

Safety

The Australasian Transport Safety Bureau Annual Review 2003 reports that:

- The relative risk of fatal injury is five times lower for rail than for car; and
- Between 1998 and 2002, rail accounted for 2.1% of Australian transport fatalities compared with 93.5% for road.

Meanwhile, the Bureau of Transport Economics reports that the:

- Annual cost of road accidents was conservatively estimated at \$15 billion (1996);
- Annual cost of rail accidents was estimated at \$196 million (1999).

In today's terms, based on the above, road accidents would cost the economy \$20.5b compared with \$238m for rail.¹⁴

During January and February 2004, there were 74 fatalities on Australia's country roads. This represents 20 more deaths than for the same period last year, representing a 37% increase.¹⁵ Road fatalities on the Pacific Highway increased by almost 40 per cent from 53 to 73 road deaths between 2002 and 2003.¹⁶

In the absence of train services, many older commuters may choose to drive instead of taking a bus or coach, putting them at increased risk of injury.

Meanwhile, in the United Kingdom, a Highways Agency Survey showed lorries were involved in more motorway accidents per mile than cars. It was also reported that freight trucks were 10% more likely than other vehicles to be involved in fatal accidents.¹⁷

¹¹ NSW Government.

¹² Australasian Railway Association Inc. web site (www.ara.net.au/society/environment.php) 11/04/2004

¹³ Australasian Railway Association Inc. web site (www.ara.net.au/society/environment.php) 11/04/2004

¹⁴ Email advice from the Australasian Railway Association, 2004.

¹⁵ http://www.donpage.com.au/parliamentnews_4074ce39b0e23643121828.html

¹⁶ Don Page MP, Electorate Media Release, 11/03/2004

MAKING RAIL AN INTEGRATED PART OF NORTHERN RIVERS TRANSPORT

In order to solve many of the emergent problems of transport planning in the Northern Rivers, rail must be prioritised and strengthened.

NOROC is calling on the Government to reintroduce services on the Casino-Murwillumbah line. These services should be better scheduled to accommodate the needs of locals for inter-regional travel (work, university, medical, social etc), and to accommodate existing and projected tourism demand.

IMMEDIATE PRIORITIES

Local services

The Northern Rivers differs from a typical regional area given its strong population growth, relatively high population density and strong demand for rail services for commuting purposes.

The Northern Rivers Trains for the Future (NRTF) reports that the region does not fit a typical rural profile, especially in the shires of Tweed and Byron, for the following reasons¹⁸:

- Population and population densities are generally high
- Growth rates are high (consistently above average compared to other areas)
- Main towns and centres are relatively close to each other
- Local economies are more diversified with strong tourism and service sectors
- Local labour markets are integrated with regional labour market to a higher degree.

Further, NRTF reports that the previous XPT rail services did not adequately meet the commuter needs of the Northern Rivers residents. For example, the previous schedule did not accommodate:

- Casino residents travelling to Lismore for work
- Casino students travelling to University, TAFE and schools in Lismore
- Students, workers, tourists and consumers in Lismore
- Worker and student travellers from Bangalow to Lismore, Byron Bay, Mullumbimby, Brunswick Heads, Ocean Shores and Murwillumbah
- Inbound and outbound workers, travellers, students and consumers from Byron Bay to all points on the line
- Worker and student travellers from Billinudgel to Murwillumbah, Mullumbimby, Byron Bay, Lismore and other points on the line.

¹⁷ 'Rail Comment', Rail 457, March 19-April 1 2003, p3.

¹⁸ NRTF Response to the Interim Report of Ministerial Inquiry into Sustainable Transport in NSW, 7 October 2003

A detailed discussion of these points is included in Appendix 1 (NRTF Response to Ministerial Inquiry into Sustainable Transport in NSW).

In the Richmond-Tweed Statistical Division, less than 2% of the workforce use public transport to travel to work¹. Low utilisation of public transport is due to two factors:

- Unavailability of services; and
- Insufficient government subsidy of fares in comparison to fare structures in Sydney.

It is therefore NOROC's view that there is significant opportunity for increased commuter patronage on the Casino to Murwillumbah line with improved scheduling for unmet demand, as well as promotion of services.

Tourism services

Casino to Murwillumbah is located in one of the fastest growing regions of NSW, adjacent to the fastest growing region in South-East Queensland that is part of a rapidly growing corridor stretching from the Sunshine Coast, north of Brisbane to Coffs Harbour, NSW.

In Byron Bay, for example, road infrastructure is inadequate to cater for the major influx of tourists. Visitation to Byron Bay has been estimated at 1.7 million per annum and expected to double within a decade. The Casino-Murwillumbah line runs through the heart of the township of Byron Bay and greater utilisation of this existing infrastructure, coupled with an aggressive promotion of services, would help to relieve heavy vehicular congestion during peak holiday times.

There is a significant opportunity for rail to increase its market share through improved scheduling, extended services and the implementation of a strategic marketing campaign.

Enhance existing rail infrastructure

The Casino-Murwillumbah line is constituted by a single standard gauge rail line that ran from Casino through the main centres of Lismore, Bangalow, Byron Bay, Mullumbimby, Murwillumbah and terminated at Condong.

The line services so many main population centres and is an asset that should not lightly be discarded.

In order to maximise patronage on the Casino to Murwillumbah line, basic infrastructure must now be upgraded as a priority. For example, serious consideration should be given to restoring the Bangalow railway station, replacing the Billinudgel station and replacing or fixing wooding bridges.

Rail Freight

An opportunity exists for the NSW Government to work with local government to establish and promote regional rail freight depots, including a terminal at Casino that acts as a hub for regional export bound for Brisbane Port.

Stretching 800 km along the eastern seaboard, the Pacific Highway is the main access route between the fastest growing non-metropolitan centres in New South Wales and southern Queensland. The Pacific Highway carries 5.4 million vehicles a year, making it one of Australia's most heavily used interstate road corridor by all classes of vehicles. Within the daily traffic flow, about 770 vehicles are heavy transports.¹⁹

There are many instances where freight currently transported by road could be transported more efficiently by rail, including containers and logs. Materials required for road construction (eg fly ash from Brunswick Heads bypass) could also be transported by rail, alleviating pressure on the Pacific Highway and arterial roads.

The Australasian Railway Association Inc. (ARA) reports that one freight train between Melbourne and Sydney replaces 150 semi-trailers and saves 45,000 litres of fuel and 130 tonnes of greenhouse gases compared with road haulage²⁰.

The ARA also reports that rail is twice as energy efficient as road even after fuel use has been included for rail line haul, road pick-up and delivery from rail terminals, manufacture of transport equipment and construction of roads and railway lines. It reports that Australia's domestic freight task is expected to double by 2020. In the same period, fuel consumption by articulated trucks is forecast to increase by at least 70% and greenhouse gas emissions from articulated trucks are forecast to increase by at least 75%.

In 1991, the Senate Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology found that rail freight services could help Australia achieve large savings in fuel consumption and carbon dioxide emissions.

Develop an Integrated Northern Rivers Transport Blueprint

In order to develop a blueprint for the provision of future public transport in the Northern Rivers, careful consideration must be given to the unique needs of the Northern Rivers region. We are, effectively, an outer part of the Brisbane-Gold Coast urban area, and public

¹⁹ Australian Government Department of Transport and Regional Services: Transport Programs
http://www.dotrs.gov.au/transprog/road/pac_hwy/

²⁰ www.ara.net.au/society/environment/php

transport planning must include a long-range vision to link the communities of Queensland and NSW in a meaningful way.

The population growth rate in the Northern Rivers is comparable to that of both Wollongong/Illawarra and Newcastle/Hunter. It is therefore clear that the Northern Rivers will demand the provision of comprehensive public transport infrastructure of a level comparable with those areas.

Consideration must be given to a range of transport options, with reference to successful case studies from around the world and consulting transport experts both nationally and overseas. The UK 'Rail' publication reports that in Germany, for example, new trains, refurbished stations and integrated buses have rejuvenated rural railways, where high frequencies have led to vastly improved traffic and... lower subsidies.²¹

Consideration could be given to a range of new options including urban light rail and metro systems as well as urban motorways, as part of integrated public transport solution for the Northern Rivers and surrounds.

Failure to adequately plan the Northern Rivers transport mix will not only destroy the future potential for cross-State integration, but also severely affect the future viability of the rail network as a whole, as commuters move away from rail to concentrate on other options. There will undoubtedly be social and health implications for those who rely on rail to access Sydney-based medical services, and to visit family and friends.

MEDIUM-TERM PRIORITY

Establish Rail Link Between Murwillumbah and the Gold Coast

NOROC supports calls for an urgent study into the existing rail line to the Gold Coast, enabling commuter services to be connected with Brisbane services.

Three areas of demand were considered by Lismore City Council as part of councils' response to the Parry Inquiry into Public Transport in NSW. These indicate the potential patronage on the Casino-Murwillumbah line resulting from a connection to the Gold Coast line at Coolangatta, and are reported below²²:

Estimates for Patronage

Tourism inbound to Northern Rivers	950
Commuting to South- East Queensland	2,700

²¹ 'Rail Comment', Rail 457, March 19-April 1 2003, p3.

²² Submission to the Parry Inquiry into Public Transport in NSW, Lismore City Council, 10th October 2003, Manager – Economic Development and Tourism, Andrew Lovett

Other visitation to South- East Queensland	1,200
<u>Total Daily Patronage</u>	<u>4,850 trips per day</u>

Attached as Appendix 2 is a breakdown of the assumptions and estimates used in these calculations. The calculations are indicative only.

Queensland Government Commitment

It is clear that increased patronage on the Gold Coast line would result from the connection from Condong to Coolangatta. Involvement and funding from the appropriate Queensland Government authorities is desirable.

Medium-term plans are already in place for upgrade and augmentation of the Gold Coast line that currently runs from Beenleigh to Robina. The line is at capacity and will be duplicated and extended to Tugun. A further extension to Gold Coast Airport at Coolangatta has been planned and is subject to determination of the Tugun bypass route.

An Impact Assessment Statement (“IAS”) has been carried out for the initial component of the extension from Robina to Tugun. The following table is an excerpt from the IAS²³, which shows the projected patronage on the various segments of this line.

Line Segment	Year 2011 Patronage*	Year 2021 Patronage
Helensvale to Nerang	16,680	22,080
Nerang to Robina	9,440	15,140
Robina to Reedy Creek	8,180	13,080
Reedy Creek to Andrews	7,780	13,180
Andrews to Elanora	7,880	13,280
Elanora to Tugun	6,280	11,180
Tugun to Coolangatta	2,640	4,840

**Note: Recommended year of opening of the rail extension from Tugun Station to Coolangatta Station.*

There would be significant mutual benefits by having an integrated approach. If residents of the Northern Rivers were able to visit or commute to Brisbane/Gold Coast via a Queensland suburban rail service, then there would be significant social, economic and environmental benefits. Similarly, tourists would be able commute by train from Coolangatta airport to Byron Bay.

²³ Robina to Tugun Impact Assessment Study: www.pb.com.au/robina/Background_FrameSet.htm

RECOMMENDATIONS

The NSW Government must now pursue a long-term strategic approach to link the Casino-Murwillumbah line with the Gold Coast rail service.

Regional rail services have suffered from a lack of investment over many years. The State Government now has an historic opportunity to reverse this situation in the Northern Rivers region.

In order to achieve the priorities outlined in this document, the following recommendations are made:

- Re-introduce rail services on the Casino to Murwillumbah line to meet existing demand for commuter and tourism services;
- Instigate the development of an investment programme for bringing infrastructure, particularly rail bridges, up to an acceptable standard;
- Instigate appropriate business management and planning aimed at increasing the scope, availability, utilisation of both inter-regional and intra-regional rail services in this area (including the integration of feeder services and park and ride options);
- Instigate discussions with Pacific National, Interail and local freight companies to explore rail freight options;
- Undertake immediate planning for connection of the line from Condong to Coolangatta (incorporating feasibility studies, business planning and environmental impact statements);
- Develop a long-term vision for the further development of the rail corridor from Gold Coast Airport to Casino over the next 50-100 years, incorporating the implementation of dual gauge, dual carriageway and electrification;
- Include the enhancement of regional development in decision criteria for the selection of transport projects.

CONCLUSION

Historically, there was a rail service running from Brisbane to Coolangatta. During the 1960s the services were terminated and the rail line pulled up. The Queensland Government is now in the position of having to resume large tracts of land and redevelop previously available infrastructure. Not surprisingly, the Mayor of Gold Coast City Council has warned the NSW Government to take history into account when considering the Casino-Murwillumbah rail line²⁴.

NOROC believes that the NSW Government stands on the brink of a momentous historical decision. To allow the Casino to Murwillumbah line to run down is to repeat short-sighted mistakes of the past, while an investment in rail at this time will assist in providing a modern and efficient transport solution for the Northern Rivers that provides new impetus for economic development with subsequent social and environmental benefits.

²⁴ The Gold Coast Bulletin, 27 September 2003, p26. "Rail line a vital link to Coast"

APPENDIX 1

Northern Rivers Trains for the Future (NRTF) Response to Interim Report of Ministerial Inquiry Into Sustainable Transport in NSW

(Attached separately as PDF document)

7 October 2003

APPENDIX 2

NOROC's submission dated 30th September 2004 – Submission to the Parry Inquiry

(Attached)

September 30, 2003

The Secretary
Ministerial Inquiry into Public Transport
C/- Ministry of Transport
GPO Box 1620
SYDNEY 2000

NOROC's Submission to the Parry Inquiry

I am pleased to provide the following as NOROC's submission to the Parry Inquiry.

1. NOROC Inc (Northern Rivers Organisation of Councils Inc) is a co-operative of local government Councils representing ten Councils in the Northern Rivers from the City of Grafton to Tweed Shire Council and inland to Kyogle, Richmond River Shire Council (at Casino) and Lismore City Council. Councils within our region represent in excess of 250,000 people with the coastal fringe currently experiencing one of the fastest population growth rates in NSW. Our area adjoins the accelerated growth of South East Queensland, particularly the Gold Coast which has a population of some 425,000. The NSW Government predicts that by the year 2020, 25% of Australia's population will be living along the coastal strip between Coffs Harbour and Hervey Bay (QLD).

The aim of our Association is to provide forum and advocate for Local Government in the Northern Rivers.

2. At a meeting of NOROC held at Grafton on 23rd September 2003, it was resolved to make this submission and strongly oppose any proposal to replace Country Link services with bus services.

3. The basis of our submission not only strongly supports the retention of rail services in the Northern Rivers but also supports the expansion of services to cater for a rapidly growing area. Particular reference is made to the rail link between Casino and Murwillumbah where we strongly urge rail services be adequately maintained.

4. Not only do we strongly support the retention of rail services between Casino and Murwillumbah, but we also support the provision of daily commuter rail services on this rail link, justified on the basis of the region's growth.

NOROC is a partner of a group called the Northern Rivers Rail for the Future which is lobbying for the provision of daily commuter services between Casino and Murwillumbah. Northern Rivers Rail for the Future comprises community representatives and representatives of local government Councils covering

the areas of Bangalow, Lismore, Casino, Tweed Heads, Byron Bay, Murwillumbah and Mullumbimby.

Provision of a commuter service will link the Hinterland towns of Lismore and Casino to tourist areas such as Byron Bay which has 1.2 million staying visitors per year and 500,000 day trippers a year. A commuter link will also provide a valuable service for students of Southern Cross University located at Lismore with business and community interests along the route.

5. Significant opportunities also exist for linking rail services from Lismore, Casino and Murwillumbah to the proposed rail link from Tugun (QLD) to Coolangatta Airport. The linking of services to Queensland would provide a major economic boost to the Northern Rivers.

6. NOROC strongly believes that retention and expansion of the rail services will not only provide substantial economic, community, social and safety benefits, but also significant environmental benefits of alleviating motor vehicle traffic volumes from regional road networks.

In conclusion we commend our submission to your Inquiry.

Brian Martin
Executive Officer

APPENDIX 3

Lismore City Council's Submission to Parry Inquiry

(Attached)



Submission to the Parry Inquiry into Public Transport in NSW

Introduction and Summary

This submission focuses on the aspects of the Parry Inquiry associated with rail services in the Richmond-Tweed area. In particular we refer to page xvii of the Interim Report, titled “Summary of Reform Options”, which suggests replacement of some Country Link rail services with Country Link bus services and to references elsewhere within the report to the Casino-Murwillumbah line.

Council is adamantly opposed to removal of rail services from the Casino-Murwillumbah line and their replacement with bus services. Instead the Ministry of Transport should be investigating options for the expansion of rail services and the connection of our line to the Gold Coast line in Queensland. There is huge support within the community of the Richmond-Tweed for this approach. Any move by the Government to terminate rail services will be met with a large and ongoing community protest.

Council has been working with “Northern Rivers Trains for the Future” and NOROC (Regional Organisation of Councils) to promote a new approach to the spur railway line that runs through this area. Together with Tweed Economic Development Corporation and Gold Coast City Council, we have called a meeting of key regional government managers from both sides of the border to look at a new approach. It is our view that connection of the Casino-Murwillumbah line to the Gold Coast line will be a viable and productive option for the future.

Indicative patronage estimates developed in this submission show that up to 4,850 trips per day could ensue from the provision of a rail connection from the Casino-Murwillumbah rail line to the Gold Coast rail line.

Acknowledgement of the Need for Large-Scale Reform

Council acknowledges the need for review and large-scale reform of the public transport system.

In the Richmond-Tweed Statistical Division, less than 2% of the workforce use public transport to travel to work¹. Low utilisation of public transport is due to two factors:

1. Unavailability of services; and
2. Insufficient government subsidy of fares (certainly in comparison to fare structures in Sydney).

The Casino-Murwillumbah rail line has been subject to progressive decline and removal of services over the last twenty years. Significant investment is needed to bring the line up to a satisfactory standard.

Our Vision for Rail in the Richmond-Tweed

Lismore City Council proposes the following vision for the future of services along the Casino-Murwillumbah line:

1. Preservation of existing services, whether they are delivered via the XPT or other rolling stock;
2. Preservation of existing fixed rail infrastructure, including railway stations, sidings, bridges, the rail corridor and other parcels of land;
3. Development of an investment programme for bringing infrastructure, particularly rail bridges, up to an acceptable standard;
4. The funding imbalance that sees urban passengers subsidised to a greater extent than regional passengers is redressed;
5. Appropriate business management and planning aimed at increasing the scope, availability, utilisation of both inter-regional and intra-regional rail services in this area (including the integration of feeder services and park and ride options);
6. Setting aside of a land corridor for rail to pass from Condong to Coolangatta (Condong is the place where the Casino-Murwillumbah line currently terminates and the Murwillumbah-Condong section of this line is believed to be currently unused);
7. Medium-term planning for connection of the line from Condong to Coolangatta, which would incorporate feasibility studies, business planning and environmental impact statements;
8. Setting up of a forum for joint planning and co-ordination of rail and other transport services between the New South Wales and Queensland Governments and local regional Councils with other major players such as Gold Coast Airport;

9. Construction of the rail connection between Condong and Coolangatta as projections meet the necessary patronage benchmarks; and
10. Development of a long-term vision for the further development of the corridor over the next 50-100 years, which would incorporate the implementation of dual gauge, dual carriageway and electrification.

Lack of Investment

It is clear that the County Link system has been starved of investment over many years. The XPTs are coming to the end of the useful working lives and there has been no programme of either upgrade or replacement. Similarly there is a lack of adequate investment in fixed infrastructure.

The table over page clearly indicates the inequity in investment levels between City Rail and Country Link areas as well as the complete absence of any meaningful investment in Country Link. The information is sourced from the SRA submission to the Parry Inquiry.

Capital Investment	2000-2001	2001-2002	2002-2003
City Rail	\$238m	\$250m	\$420m
Country Link	\$ 10m	\$ 7m	\$ 1m

Both Victoria and Queensland are investing heavily in their country rail systems. NSW needs to at least match the levels of investment of our neighbouring states.

Decisions not to invest are short sighted and will lead to future generations having a disintegrating road system.

Growth in Population and Demand in the Northern Rivers Region

The NSW Government's own forecasts predict that by the year 2020, 25% of the nation's population will be living along the coastal strip between Coffs Harbour and Hervey Bay (Queensland) in the north. The Northern Rivers is experiencing extremely rapid population growth. In certain areas the population is growing at rates between 2-4% per annum. It is critical that both State and Commonwealth Governments, in partnership with Local Councils, invest strongly in the provision of infrastructure. It is not the time to withdraw transport infrastructure from the region, rather to substantially increase sustainable transport capacity.

Many retirees are choosing to relocate to the Northern Rivers area. Consequently the broad-scale ageing of the population is particularly accentuated in this region. The socio-economic profile for the area indicates low levels of household incomes and the nation's highest level of

unemployment. Clearly this is a disadvantaged population area, which requires access to appropriate public transport options.

Regional Development Effects of Infrastructure Provision

With the Sydney basin struggling under massive population increases the quality of life for residents is clearly declining with increased congestion and pollution. The NSW Government should encourage the development of regions to alleviate these serious problems.

One key way to encourage the development of regions is to invest in the provision of infrastructure. Should Council's vision for rail services in the Richmond-Tweed be pursued, there will ensue massive regional economic development effects. There will be better connection of growing residential populations to labour markets.

In the interim report from the Parry Inquiry, Section 9 discusses "Decision criteria for choosing transport projects". We strongly advocate that the potential of projects to enhance regional development and reduce population increases in the Sydney basin be included in any criteria finally recommended.

Existing Rail Infrastructure

The Casino-Murwillumbah line is constituted by a single standard gauge rail line running from Casino through the main centres of Lismore, Bangalow, Byron Bay, Mullumbimby, Murwillumbah and terminating at Condong.

There is a very substantial, historical investment in stations at these various places along the line, together with the necessary infrastructure of bridges and other rail fixtures.

The fact that the line services so many main centres is an important strength of the system.

South East Queensland Rail

Historically, there was a rail service running from Brisbane to Coolangatta. During the 1960s the services were terminated and the rail line pulled up. The Queensland Government is now in the position of having to resume large tracts of land and redevelop previously available infrastructure. Not surprisingly, the Mayor of Gold Coast City Council has warned the NSW Government to take history into account when considering the Casino-Murwillumbah rail line⁵.

Medium-term plans are in place for upgrade and augmentation of the Gold Coast line that currently runs from Beenleigh to Robina. The line is at

capacity and will be duplicated and extended to Tugun, and then to the Gold Coast Airport at Coolangatta.

An Impact Assessment Statement (“IAS”) has been carried out for the initial component of the extension from Robina to Tugun. The following table is an excerpt from the IAS², which shows the projected patronage on the various segments of this line.

<i>Line Segment</i>	Year 2011 Patronage*	Year 2021 Patronage
Helensvale to Nerang	16,680	22,080
Nerang to Robina	9,440	15,140
Robina to Reedy Creek	8,180	13,080
Reedy Creek to Andrews	7,780	13,180
Andrews to Elanora	7,880	13,280
Elanora to Tugun	6,280	11,180
Tugun to Coolangatta	2,640	4,840

*Note: Recommended year of opening of the rail extension from Tugun Station to Coolangatta Station.

There would be significant mutual benefits by having an integrated approach. If residents of the Northern Rivers were able to visit or commute to Brisbane/Gold Coast via a Queensland suburban rail service, then there would be significant social, economic and environmental benefits. Similarly, tourists being able to catch a train from the airport at Coolangatta to Byron Bay would improve the logistics of this significant flow of people.

One area of concern is that there is a variation in the rail gauges between the Gold Coast line, which is of a narrower gauge to the standard gauge line used throughout New South Wales and running to Condong. Differences in gauges have been overcome in the past however, for example the dual gauge line running from Albury to Melbourne which accommodates the wider Victorian gauge and the standard gauge line. Clearly initial approaches would require a change of train at Gold Coast Airport.

Additional Rail Infrastructure Requirements

Once this work is complete on the extension of the Queensland system to Coolangatta, there will remain a gap of only approximately 20 kilometres between the termination of the Casino-Murwillumbah line at Condong and the Gold Coast Airport.

This further investment would represent a relatively small project in comparison to other transport options. For example, there would be no need to develop new stations.

Indicative Patronage after Connection

The Interim Report to the Parry Inquiry states on Page 7,

“Although transport services are important for maintaining social inclusion a low population density and limited population growth within rural and regional areas mean that the mass transport networks that are effective in large cities are not sustainable in these areas. Furthermore, demand for transport services has traditionally been driven by community needs rather than commuters travelling to work.”

The Northern Rivers is a regional area that offers a strong exception to this situation. In this area there is:

- Strong population growth;
- Relatively high population density for a regional area; and
- Strong demand and opportunity of rail services for commuting purposes.

We are in effect, an outer part of the Brisbane-Gold Coast urban area. The connection of the NSW and Queensland rail systems will generate a significant number of daily trips.

Three areas of demand have been considered to indicate the potential patronage on the Casino-Murwillumbah line resulting from a connection to the Gold Coast line at Coolangatta. The estimates for patronage are:

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|-------|
| a) Tourism inbound to Northern Rivers | 950 |
| b) Commuting to South East Queensland | 2,700 |

c) Other visitation to South East Queensland	1,200
	<hr/>
Total Daily Patronage	4,850 trips per day

Please refer to the Attachment for a breakdown of the assumptions and estimates used in these calculations. The calculations are indicative only.

The Special Needs of Byron Bay

The township of Byron Bay suffers from inadequate road infrastructure to cater for the major influx of tourists. Visitation to Byron Bay has been estimated at 1.7 million per annum.

The Casino-Murwillumbah line runs through the heart of the township of Byron Bay and greater utilisation of this existing infrastructure would assist in relieving heavy vehicular congestion during peak holiday times.

Parallels with the Hunter and Illawarra Regions

Lismore and the Northern Rivers region are rapidly growing within reach a status comparable to both Wollongong/Illawarra and Newcastle/Hunter.

Given the projected population growth in this area, it is clear that the Northern Rivers will demand the provision of comprehensive public transport infrastructure of a level comparable with the Hunter and Illawarra areas.

Quality of Service: Rail vs. Bus Travel

The Interim Report to the Parry Inquiry suggests that the replacement of rail services with bus services in regional areas will offer the same if not better level of service to passengers. This is not the case.

Elderly passengers, parents with young families and disabled people will clearly enjoy a better, less stressful travel experience on a long distance train as opposed bus. This is indeed true for all passengers as train travel offers less cramped travelling conditions.

Rail travel is measurably safer than road/bus travel.

Need for Commonwealth Government Involvement and Funding

As this is a very significant cross-border issue, we believe that involvement and funding from the Commonwealth Government is mandatory. The Northern Rivers region is nominated as a "Sustainable Region" under that Commonwealth Government program. Approaches for funding may be able to be made through that program.

It is also clear that increased patronage on the Gold Coast line would result from the connection from Condong to Coolangatta. Involvement and funding from the appropriate Queensland Government authorities would be also be desirable.

Inter-Regional Rail Forum – Tweed Heads 21st October 2003

Prior to the release of the interim report on the Parry Inquiry, Council was already investigating options for the connection of the Casino-Murwillumbah line to the Gold Coast rail line. We had previously organised a forum to be held at Tweed Heads on the 21st October 2003, which will be attended by representatives from Gold Coast City Council, Tweed Economic Development Corporation, Lismore City Council, Tourism NSW, Queensland Premier's Department and Queensland Transport, et al.

It is important that representatives from the Ministry of Transport and the Parry Inquiry attend the Forum.

We appreciate Ministry of Transport's offer to allow a subsidiary submission to be lodged by the 28th October following this Inter-Regional Rail Forum.

Conclusion

Any move to cease rail services on the Casino-Murwillumbah line would be short-sighted and lead to significant and ongoing community based protest.

Instead of short-term cost cutting, the NSW Government should be pursuing a long-term strategic approach to link the Casino-Murwillumbah line with the Gold Coast rail service. Council has put forward a vision towards this end.

Regional rail services have suffered from a lack of investment over many years. The Parry Inquiry offers an opportunity to reverse this situation particularly in this growing region. The analysis contained in the attachment to this submission illustrates that significant patronage of up to 4,850 trips per day will ensue from the connection of the NSW and Queensland systems.

Recommendations

That NSW Ministry of Transport:

1. Guarantee the preservation of existing rail services, whether they are delivered via the existing XPT or other rolling stock;
2. Guarantee the preservation of existing fixed rail infrastructure, including railway stations, sidings, bridges, the rail corridor and other parcels of land;
3. Redress the funding imbalance that sees urban passengers subsidised to a greater extent than regional passengers;
4. Instigate the development of an investment programme for bringing infrastructure, particularly rail bridges, up to an acceptable standard;
5. Instigate appropriate business management and planning aimed at increasing the scope, availability, utilisation of both inter-regional and intra-regional rail services in this area (including the integration of feeder services and park and ride options);
6. Set aside a land corridor for rail lines to pass from Condong to Coolangatta;
7. Undertake medium-term planning for connection of the line from Condong to Coolangatta, which would incorporate feasibility studies, business planning and environmental impact statements;
8. Set up a forum for joint planning and co-ordination of rail and other transport services between the New South Wales and Queensland Governments and local regional Councils with other major players such as Coolangatta Airport;
9. Construct the rail connection between Condong and Coolangatta as projections meet the necessary patronage benchmarks;
10. Develop a long-term vision for the further development of the rail corridor from Gold Coast Airport to Casino over the next 50-100 years, which would incorporate the implementation of dual gauge, dual carriageway and electrification;
11. Include the enhancement of regional development in decision criteria for the selection of transport projects; and
12. Ensure that representatives from the Ministry of Transport and the Parry Inquiry attend the Inter-regional Rail Forum to be held in Tweed Heads on 21st October 2003.

Attachment - Indicative Patronage

There are three areas of demand considered within this section to indicate potential patronage on the Casino-Murwillumbah line resulting from a connection to the Gold Coast line at Coolangatta. They are:

- a) **Tourism inbound to Northern Rivers**
- b) **Commuting to South East Queensland**
- c) **Other visitation to South East Queensland.**

The following calculations are indicative only.

a) **Tourism**

Annual visitation to the Northern Rivers is comprised of:

Domestic Day Visitors	2.7 million
International Visitors	0.2 million
Domestic Overnight Visitors	1.9 million
	<hr/>
	4.8 million ³

The potential within this market for usage of rail would be considered as those visitors originating from Queensland and backpackers (mainly visiting Byron Bay).

Therefore the market potential within the tourism segment is:

Domestic Day Visitors from Queensland	810,000
International Visitors likely to be Backpackers	159,200
Domestic Overnight Visitors from Queensland	760,000
	<hr/>
	1,729,200 visitors ³

Assuming a 10% share of this market potential is captured by rail, then patronage would be:

$$\begin{aligned}\text{Patronage} &= 1,729,000 \times 10\% \times 2 \text{ (return trip)} \\ &= 345,840 \text{ trips per annum} \\ &= 947 \text{ (say 950) trips per day}\end{aligned}$$

Considering that the extension from Condong to Coolangatta would provide rail connectivity to such tourism icons as Brisbane Airport, Gold Coast Airport, Gold Coast and Byron Bay, it is considered that these figures are reasonable.

b) **Commuting**

The workforce within the Richmond-Tweed Statistical Division is 74,493 people¹. Currently less than 2% of the workforce use public transport to

get to work. There are, however, a significant number of people from the Tweed area that commute to South East Queensland. The rail connection would encourage commuters from as far south as Byron Bay/Bangalow to use this option.

Assuming 3% of the workforce commute to South East Queensland on rail, commuting patronage would be:

$$\begin{aligned}\text{Patronage} &= 74,493 \times 220 \text{ (working days p.a.)} \times 3\% \times 2 \text{ (return trip)} \\ &= 983,307 \text{ trips per annum} \\ &= 2,694 \text{ (say 2,700) trips per day}\end{aligned}$$

c) Other Visitation to South East Queensland

The population of the Richmond-Tweed Statistical Division is 213,264⁴.

Assuming one trip per annum per head of population, patronage would be:

$$\begin{aligned}\text{Patronage} &= 213,264 \times 2 \text{ (return trip)} \\ &= 426,528 \text{ trips per annum} \\ &= 1,168 \text{ (say 1,200) trips per day}\end{aligned}$$

Potential patronage for rail following connection of the Casino-Murwillumbah line with the Gold Coast line would be:

Tourism Patronage	950
Commuting Patronage	2,700
Other South East Queensland Visitors	1,200
	<hr/>
Total Daily Patronage	4,850trips per day

References

1. Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2001. Census of Population & Housing, Richmond-Tweed (SD120). *B28 Method of Travel to Work by Sex*.
2. Robina to Tugun Impact Assessment Study:
http://www.pb.com.au/robina/Background_FrameSet.htm
3. Northern Rivers Regional Tourism Profile for the year ended June 2001, Tourism NSW.
4. Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2001. Census of Population & Housing, Richmond-Tweed (SD120). *B01 Selected Characteristics*.
5. The Gold Coast Bulletin, 27 September, 2003, page 26. "Rail line a vital link to Coast"

APPENDIX 4

Estimated patronage on the Casino to Murwillumbah rail line resulting from a connection to the Gold Coast line at Coolangatta

Tourism

Annual visitation to the Northern Rivers¹ is comprised of:

Domestic Day Visitors	2.7 million
International Visitors	0.2 million
Domestic Overnight Visitors	1.9 million
	<hr/>
	4.8 million

The potential within this market for usage of rail would be considered as those visitors originating from Queensland and backpackers (mainly visiting Byron Bay).

Therefore the market potential within the tourism segment² is:

Domestic Day Visitors from Queensland	810,000
International Visitors likely to be Backpackers	159,200
Domestic Overnight Visitors from Queensland	760,000
	<hr/>
	1,729,200 visitors

Assuming a 10% share of this market potential is captured by rail, patronage would be:

=	1,729,000 x 10% x 2 (return trip)
=	345,840 trips per annum
=	947 (say 950) trips per day

Considering that the extension from Condong to Coolangatta would provide rail connectivity to such tourism icons as Brisbane Airport, Gold Coast Airport, Gold Coast and Byron Bay, it is considered that these figures are reasonable.

¹ Northern Rivers Regional Tourism Profile for the year ended June 2001, Tourism NSW

² Northern Rivers Regional Tourism Profile for the year ended June 2001, Tourism NSW

Commuting

The workforce within the Richmond-Tweed Statistical Division is 74,493 people³. Currently less than 2% of the workforce use public transport to get to work. There are, however, a significant number of people from the Tweed area that commute to South East Queensland. The rail connection would encourage commuters from as far south as Byron Bay/Bangalow to use this option.

Assuming 3% of the workforce commute to South East Queensland on rail, commuting patronage would be:

Patronage

$$\begin{aligned} &= 74,493 \times 220 \text{ (working days p.a.)} \times 3\% \times 2 \text{ (return trip)} \\ &= 983,307 \text{ trips per annum} \\ &= 2,694 \text{ (say 2,700) trips per day} \end{aligned}$$

Other Visitation to South East Queensland

The population of the Richmond-Tweed Statistical Division is 213,264⁴.

Assuming one trip per annum per head of population, patronage would be:

Patronage

$$\begin{aligned} &= 213,264 \times 2 \text{ (return trip)} \\ &= 426,528 \text{ trips per annum} \\ &= 1,168 \text{ (say 1,200) trips per day} \end{aligned}$$

Potential patronage for rail following connection of the Casino-Murwillumbah line with the Gold Coast line would be:

Tourism Patronage	950
Commuting Patronage	2,700
Other South East Queensland Visitors	1,200
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Total Daily Patronage	4,850 trips per day

³ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2001. Census of Population and Housing, Richmond-Tweed (SD120). *B28 Method of Travel to Work by Sex*.

⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2001. Census of Population and Housing, Richmond-Tweed (SD120). *B01 Selected Characteristics*.

APPENDIX 5

Information for this document was obtained from the following sources:

- Australasian Railway Association Inc
- Australian Bureau of Statistics
- Australian Government Department of Transport and Regional Services
- Australian Services Union
- Australian Transport Council
- Lismore City Council Public Transport Advisory Committee.
- Media monitoring
- National Party of Australia
- Neale Battersby, Railway Consultant and Historian
- Northern Rivers – Tropical NSW Region Tourism Profile Year End December 2000, Tourism NSW
- NSW Government, Parliament/MPs (various references including media releases, Hansard and Legislative Assembly House Papers)
- NSW Ministry of Transport
- Richmond Valley Local Government Public Transport Working Group
- Submission to the Parry Inquiry into Public Transport in NSW, Lismore City Council, October 2003
- Tweed Shire Council Expression of Interest to the Ageing and Disability Department, Transport Demonstration Project: Northern Rivers Regional Passenger Rail Service – Murwillumbah to Grafton
- Various industry publications including the UK 'Rail' publication

**Northern Rivers Trains for the Future
(NRTF)**

**Response to Interim Report of Ministerial
Inquiry into Sustainable Transport in
NSW**

7 October 2003

Table of Contents

1. Northern Rivers Trains for the Future (NRTF)
2. Sustainability: social and environmental obligations
3. Northern Rivers: profile and needs analysis
4. Comment on 'alternative funding sources'
5. Comment on 'road use pricing'
6. Comment on 'choosing public transport projects'
7. Conclusion

Address for Correspondence

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1. Northern Rivers Trains for the Future (NRTF)

NRTF is a coalition of community volunteers and agencies supporting an increase in rail services on the Casino-Murwillumbah branch rail line. We have representatives in all local government areas traversed by the line (Tweed Shire, Byron Shire, Lismore City, Richmond River Shire) and have received letters of support from many organisations representing local and regional communities.

1.1 NRTF Objectives

Our principle objective is to successfully demonstrate the need and desirability of commuter rail services running on the branch line. We believe that a range of demographic, social, environmental and historical factors exist that demonstrate a case for sustainable commuter rail services on the branch line. In particular the fact that the existing rail line is ideally placed to take advantage of increasing urbanisation and population growth across the region.

1.2 Purpose of NRTF submission

We believe that effective closure of the line that would be brought about by 'refocussing' of Countrylink services (currently the only passenger services provided) and the likely subsequent deterioration of the infrastructure, represents a significant long term cost to the communities in the region and the taxpayers of NSW. A more sustainable total transport future depends on upgrading the line and providing services that meet the needs of Northern Rivers communities.

We note that due to rapid urbanisation and population growth in the Northern Rivers, the underutilisation of the existing rail line is currently creating increasing social and environmental costs for branch line communities due to the dependence on road transport and inadequate public transport.

We wish to comment on some of the analysis provided in the Interim Report. The following points in summary are particularly relevant to our submission given NRTF's objectives.

The Interim Report analyses the sustainability of rail services in the Northern Rivers based on an existing Countrylink service to Sydney and does not canvass the potential for unmet demand for commuter services that meet the needs of branch line communities.

Casino to Murwillumbah may be a branch line, but it far from the end of the line. The line is in fact located in one of the fastest growing regions of NSW adjacent to the fastest growing region in (SE) Queensland that is part of a rapidly growing corridor stretching from the Sunshine Coast, north of Brisbane to Ballina in NSW. While rail has or is being developed throughout this corridor, a missing link exists between Robina on the lower Gold Coast in Queensland and Murwillumbah in northern NSW.

Although the overall analysis of the Interim Report suggests that rail services outside of metropolitan Sydney are unlikely to be 'sustainable', specific aspects covered in chapters 5 (alternative funding sources), 8 (road use pricing), 9 (future public transport investments) and our unique regional circumstances suggest that the Northern Rivers would make an ideal candidate for innovative public transport development.

2. Sustainability: social and environmental obligations

We note with some concern the Interim Report's focus on financial sustainability as the primary consideration of 'sustainable' and in particular the failure to define the 'broader social and environmental responsibilities of government' (p 58). The analysis of the report begins with the identification of a 'funding gap' and proceeds without questioning what these responsibilities may be, whether they are adequately provided for at the moment or to consider what services taxpayers may be prepared to fund.

This analysis has a number of negative impacts on Northern Rivers communities aspirations for the development of sustainable public transport.

- It presumes a dichotomy between meeting 'social and environmental responsibilities' through the provision of public transport and funding public transport so that the more these responsibilities are met the greater the likelihood that they will be financially unsustainable to provide. NRTF proposes that for Northern Rivers communities there is an interdependent relationship between social, environmental and financial sustainability as a failure to develop low impact transport systems that caters for high visitor numbers will hasten the destruction of the natural environment that is a key attraction for visitors, which in turn will impact on local economies through decreasing visitor numbers. Increasingly community leaders are expressing concern about 'killing the goose that lays the golden egg'.
- Where broader social, economic and environmental benefits are allowed to be considered, it does not follow that financial sustainability is compromised. For example, NRTF acknowledges the potential to recover some of these costs through the provision of premium 'rail experience' services to tourists. NRTF also acknowledges the potential for a regional growth strategy based on low impact tourism where rail transport plays a central role as an environmental and marketing tool.
- It fails to take account of the value that taxpayers and communities place on planning for and meeting social and environmental responsibilities. Currently, our region is experiencing a massive imbalance in the dedication of taxpayer resources to private vehicle infrastructure(roads) over public transport (by NSW and Commonwealth governments) as well as an imbalance between the level of taxation and the level of all publicly funded transport services compared to urban areas and other regions.

NRTF believes more should be spent on public transport services (particularly use of the existing rail infrastructure) that meet the social and environmental needs of the region and that the level of taxpayer subsidy that is financially sustainable be determined through consultation with the community on the appropriate level of 'social and environmental' costs considering the social, environmental and economic circumstances of the region.

2.1 Financial sustainability of existing services versus sustainability of potential services

A further disadvantage resulting from the methodology used in the interim report is that it analyses the public transport needs of Northern Rivers communities on the basis of one existing Countrylink service between Murwillumbah and Sydney. NRTF notes;

- the increasingly urban nature of public transport needs within the Northern Rivers is overlooked as the report only looks at one existing rural service.
- it should not be surprising that only '50 to 300' people use the service on the branch line as this is either at the end of or beginning of a 14 hour trip to/from Sydney where there is little scope to resell seats for the journey over the branch line given the operating time of the service. Clearly this analysis does not consider unmet demand for local commuter type services over the line and the financial sustainability of branch line services can not be said to have been fully assessed.
- To prove the point we rely on continuing community comment on the loss of such services available before the XPT services replaced the Motorail. The timetabling of the latter allowed branch line communities to use the morning service from Casino to travel to Lismore, Byron Bay, Murwillumbah and other branch line communities before returning on the evening service. This was a much used service and its loss has contributed to the 'sustainability' concerns now raised. NRTF strongly recommends not making the same mistake again.
- Further we submit that if the 'missing link' between Murwillumbah and the Gold Coast was completed and commuter services were able to connect with services to Brisbane, there can be no doubt that the 'sustainability' of commuter services and existing Countrylink services would be enhanced through increased patronage.
- NRTF notes the potential for savings from the reform of the STSS program and would support the redirection of these funds in the Northern Rivers to providing commuter rail services integrated with realigned bus services provided by existing STSS providers. It can be noted that the financial sustainability of existing STSS providers will be boosted by being able to increase patronage to include workers and others while traveling shorter distances than previously.

3. Northern Rivers Profile and Needs Analysis

3.1 Profile

In many regards the Northern Rivers region does not fit a typical 'rural' profile, especially in the coastal shires of Tweed and Byron.

- Population and population densities are generally high
- Growth rates are high (consistently above average in coastal shires)
- Main towns and centres are relatively close to each other
- Local economies are more diversified with strong tourism and service sectors
- Local labour markets are integrated with regional labour market to higher degree

Although an urban profile is not consistent throughout the region, the above factors are currently generating public transport needs above those that one would expect in a 'rural' area.

NRTF believes that the analysis adopted in the Interim Report fails to acknowledge the emerging regional needs of the Northern Rivers on the basis that one existing Countrylink service represented the demand for rail services in the region.

3.2 Needs analysis

Looking at the main centres currently linked by the rail line, it is possible to demonstrate profiles of likely users. Integration with local feeder bus services potentially expands service to cover a wide area where little or no public transport currently exists.

Description - Casino

- Closest to typical rural profile
- Rail and road transport hub able to connect passengers and freight with Sydney-Brisbane rail
- Agricultural service town drawing worker and students from surrounding area.
- Strong labour market linkages with Lismore and region generally.
- Primary and Secondary schools.

Current unmet needs - Casino

- Employees traveling to work in Lismore and other locations on the line
- Students traveling to University, TAFE and schools in Lismore.
- Jobseekers wishing to expand access to employment opportunities across regional labour market.
- Young people, families and others without access to private transport traveling to coastal locations for sport and recreation
- Aged and disabled travelers
- Providing access to retail and services (including specialist medical) in Lismore for anyone without access to private transport.

Description - Lismore

- Regional hub for retail, financial services, education, health, aged care and government services
- Draws large numbers of workers, students and consumers from surrounding areas particularly Richmond River, Byron and Ballina shires.
- Base hospital, St Vincent's hospital and various aged care facilities
- Primary, secondary schools, TAFE and University.
- Centre of regional labour market with linkages to Casino, Byron Shire and Ballina local labour markets as well as the Tweed/Lower Gold Coast regional labour market.

Current unmet needs - Lismore

- Mainly inbound traffic as described from other centres with especially high numbers of students, workers, tourists and consumers.
- Jobseekers, particularly young and/or without private transport to expand employment and training opportunities to all locations on the line.
- Young people, families and others without access to private transport traveling to coastal locations for sport and recreation.
- Aged and disabled travelers.
- Providing access to retail and services (including specialist medical) in Lismore for anyone without access to private transport.
- Potential to link services throughout Lismore City covering suburban and outlying areas of Nimbin, Coraki, Goonellabah and surrounding districts.

Description - Bexhill

- Village approx. 8 km east of Lismore with potential to connect workers and students from Corndale, Numulgi and Rosebank valleys with all points on the line.

Description - Eltham-Booyong

- More properly described as hamlets than centres, these locations provide considerable scope to connect workers and students with all points on the line through one of the busiest corridors on the line.
- Potential to service Clunes, Nashua and surrounding districts.
- Booyong was previously a junction for a line to Ballina.

Description - Bangalow

- Market town popular with tourists for its restaurants, shops and monthly markets.
- 10 km from Byron Bay.
- Geographic centre for overlapping local labour markets of Byron Bay, Lismore and Ballina.

Current unmet needs - Bangalow

- Worker and student travelers to Lismore, Byron Bay, Mullumbimby, Brunswick Heads, Ocean Shores and Murwillumbah,
- Jobseekers, particularly young and/or without private transport connecting to all points on the line.
- Aged and disabled access to Lismore and other points on line.
- Young people, families and others without access to private transport traveling to coastal locations for sport and recreation.
- Potential to service Brooklet, Fernleigh, Newrybar and surrounding districts.
- Potential for integrated bus services to connect Ballina and district communities for passengers traveling to Lismore and beyond.
- Providing access to retail and services (including specialist medical) in Lismore for anyone without access to private transport.

Description - Byron Bay

- Coastal tourist town with over 1.2 million staying visitor and 500,000 'day trippers' a year.
- Significant proportion of international tourists are backpackers usually without private transport.
- Limited potential to expand access to town by development of roads due to geographical proximity to wetlands.
- Strong labour market growth with linkages to surrounding local and regional labour markets
- Primary, secondary schools as well a diverse range of private training establishments.

Current unmet needs - Byron Bay

- Inbound and outbound workers, travelers, students and consumers to/from all points on line with most commuter traffic between Lismore and Byron Bay.
- Students and jobseeker traffic accessing training and labour markets at all points on line, particularly Lismore.
- Aged and disabled access to Lismore and other points on line.
- Potential to connect with Lennox Head and Ballina (for passengers traveling north).
- Providing access to retail and services (including specialist medical) in Lismore for anyone without access to private transport.
- Huge untapped potential to develop tourist subsidised services to transport (esp. backpacker) tourists to other points on line linking with localised tourism providers and helping to share the wealth effect of Byron Bay's tourism boom. Murwillumbah, Mullumbimby, Bangalow and Lismore are all potential destinations for such traffic.

Description - Mullumbimby

- 'Biggest little town in Australia'
- Main service centre for Brunswick valley
- Location of Byron Shire Council Chambers and offices.
- Primary and Secondary schools

Current unmet needs - Mullumbimby

- Inbound and outbound workers, travelers, students and consumers to/from all points on line with most commuter traffic between Murwillumbah, Byron Bay and Lismore.
- Students and jobseeker traffic accessing training and labour markets at all points on line, particularly Lismore, Murwillumbah and Byron Bay.
- Aged and disabled access to Lismore and other points on line.
- Potential to increase tourism visitors (especially from Byron Bay) through rail 'experience'.
- Providing access to retail and services (including specialist medical) in Lismore for anyone without access to private transport.
- Potential to service communities in upper Brunswick Valley and at Brunswick Heads.

Description - Billinudgel

- Service town for Pocket area
- Potential to provide rail access for significant population at Ocean Shores.

Current unmet needs - Billinudgel

- Worker and student travelers to Murwillumbah, Mullumbimby, Byron Bay, Lismore and other points on the line.
- Jobseeker and youth travelers accessing training and labour markets in Murwillumbah, Byron Bay, Lismore and other points on the line.
- Aged and disabled access to services at all points on line, particularly Murwillumbah and Lismore.
- Provide access for Ocean Shores population historically isolated by lack of public transport.

Description - Brunswick Valley integration.

- As described rail access can be provided to Brunswick Valley communities, particularly main population centres of Mullumbimby, Brunswick Heads and Ocean Shores.
- This can be achieved through a southern access point at Mullumbimby and a northern access point at Billinudgel with integrated bus services linking the two access points and collecting passengers from Brunswick Heads and Ocean Shores.
- This could overcome major disadvantage suffered by these communities with generally higher needs (due to socio economic profiles) isolated by a lack of public transport options.

Description - Crabbes Creek-Yelgun

- Rural valley communities in high growth corridors with potential to provide access to students and commuter traffic, particularly to schools and businesses in Murwillumbah.

Description - Burringbar

- Tweed Valley town
- Dormitory suburb for Murwillumbah with increasing tourism development
- Potential student, worker, youth, aged/disabled passengers for training, employment and services access, particularly in Murwillumbah.

Description - Stokers Siding

- Hamlet in high growth corridor with student/commuter potential from surrounding valleys
- Tourist potential

Description - Murwillumbah

- Main centre servicing Tweed Valley (currently fastest growing region in NSW)
- Terminus for branch line
- Primary, secondary schools and TAFE
- Hospital, health and aged care services.
- Potential to link rail transport with Gold Coast rail and bus services.
- Labour market linkages with regional and Byron Shire labour markets.

Current unmet needs - Murwillumbah

- Mainly inbound traffic as described from other centres with especially high numbers of students, workers, tourists and consumers.
- Jobseekers, particularly young and/or without private transport to expand employment and training opportunities to all locations on the line.
- Young people, families and others without access to private transport traveling to coastal locations for sport and recreation.
- Aged and disabled travelers.
- Providing access to retail and services (including specialist medical) in Lismore for anyone without access to private transport.
- Tourism potential as linking point for service providers throughout Tweed Valley, as entry point to a rail 'experience' drawing on the tourism hot spots to the north (Gold Coast) and south (Byron Bay).

Description - Murwillumbah - Gold Coast (the missing link)

- Construction of the missing rail link between Murwillumbah and the lower Gold Coast would enhance the sustainability of the current branch line, boost sustainable tourism development in an area dependent on maintaining its natural beauty as well as being a sound investment in sustainable (financial and environmental) planning for future growth.

4. Comment on 'alternative funding sources'

Generally on funding public transport infrastructure and services, we make the following observations and comments.

- NRTF affirms the role of the Commonwealth government in funding public transport development as part of a strategy to competently manage rapid urban growth such as is occurring in the Northern Rivers region. We believe that the Commonwealth government needs to increase such funding in the Northern Rivers.
- NRTF believes that the NSW government does not currently fund transport services (particularly public transport services) on an equitable basis in the Northern Rivers region compared to urban areas.

Of the alternative funding sources canvassed in the Interim Report, we make the following observations and comments.

- NRTF recognises the contribution made to cost recovery through fare box collection and support the view that equity and efficiency in fare structure and integration are important issues for sustainability.
- NRTF notes that those dependent on public transport have no alternative available and 'price elasticity' for such commuters is therefore a choice between making a journey or not.
- NRTF affirms the need to fund public transport through contributions from those indirectly benefiting from public transport and believe that this approach has considerable potential for development of services in the Northern Rivers given the inter-relationships between tourism, economic and environmental sustainability referred to above.
- NRTF notes that the promotion of tourist hotspots (eg Byron Bay) with taxpayer funds often generates benefits for the greater NSW economy as tourists fly in to Sydney, but that the costs of infrastructure to support large tourist numbers are not equally shared. NRTF believes that significant scope exists to provide public transport funding that is linked to tourism and economic development strategies.
- NRTF believes that there is also scope for specific purposes charges and rates where these are requested by the community to be affected.
- In relation to private funding options, NRTF notes increasing interest from the private sector in providing rail services on the Casino-Murwillumbah line. Northern Rivers Railroad have provided freight and premium rail services over a number of years until recently and Becton Developments have funded a feasibility study and are running a demonstration service to collect data at the end of October 2003. NRTF has also investigated the possibility of facilitating private/public partnerships to restore rail services to the line.

5. *Comment on road use pricing*

- NRTF notes that in the Northern Rivers;
- an extensive road network exists although most roads are rural, in poor condition and the responsibility of local government to maintain.
- rapidly increasing urbanisation is creating pressure for the rapid upgrade of this network, a task that is often beyond the reach of Councils due to limited resources.
- some areas such as Byron Bay experience transport 'gridlock' due to high visitor numbers in private transport. In Byron Bay this lockup occurs metres from the underused rail line. Mullumbimby and Bangalow are beginning to experience similar 'traffic' problems as visitors fan out from Byron in private transport, yet both destinations are potentially accessed by a 10 minute rail journey through spectacular countryside.
- one factor inhibiting the efficient use of local trunk routes such as the Bangalow to Lismore Road is the presence of school buses making frequent stops during peak periods in increasingly unsafe conditions for student passengers and drivers. A school bus system integrated with rail could see these buses travel only short distances and (often) in the opposite direction to peak traffic before connecting with commuter rail services to all centres.
- in recent times massive resources have been made available for upgrading the Pacific Highway often at high cost to local communities in terms of noise, pollution and safety. There is little evidence that this expenditure has improved public transport in the region with the most obvious impacts being a reported 30% increase in 'B doubles' and other freight transport 'migrating' from the New England Highway and an increase of private visitor vehicles onto inadequate local roads.
- costs to the community and individuals from road accidents continues to be a major cost to the taxpayers of NSW.
- environmental costs are higher in relation to building and using road networks.

NRTF believes that an imbalance exists between current levels of funding to road transport to the detriment of public transport.

NRTF believes that an imbalance exists between the level of funding for public transport in the Northern Rivers relative to the Sydney and other areas.

NRTF supports making road use pricing more transparent and decreasing the subsidisation of the road infrastructure development and use. Savings made should be made available for public transport development such as the commuter rail service proposed by NRTF.

6. Comment on 'choosing public transport projects'

We note that the chapter '*Decision criteria for choosing public transport projects*' examines planning for the 'Sydney metropolitan public transport network' with no discussion of planning for areas outside Sydney.

While it may be possible to apply general principles suggested in the discussion such as ranking projects according to 'their ability to contribute to economic, social and environmental welfare' (p 133), NRTF believes that consideration needs to be given to planning for public transport that addresses the particular challenges faced by Northern Rivers communities.

NRTF does not agree with the conclusion that rail services in the Northern Rivers should be replaced by buses. What is required is a forward thinking development of an integrated multi modal public transport system.

NRTF strongly believes that development of an integrated public transport system for the Northern Rivers based around commuter rail services on the Casino-Murwillumbah rail line should be made a high priority. Such a proposal;

- utilises existing infrastructure
- is based around existing settlement patterns and transport corridors
- provides a direct link to all major centres (with the exception of Ballina)
- could be made more 'sustainable' with the addition of the 'missing link' between Murwillumbah and the Gold Coast
- is environmentally desirable
- has potential to produce savings in road repairs, deferred road development costs, reduced road accident costs and increased efficiencies in subsidies to bus operators.

7. Conclusion

NRTF hopes that we have presented a compelling case that rail transport in the Northern Rivers is far from an unsustainable economic basket case as portrayed in the Interim Report, particularly when rapidly increasing urbanisation with a consequent level of unmet public transport needs are considered.

We hope to have drawn attention to the potential to develop an efficient integrated public transport system that meets the needs of Northern Rivers communities.

In particular we note that the construction of the 'missing link' between Murwillumbah and Gold Coast would enhance the financial viability of current and potential services. NRTF believes that the rate of urbanisation and our proximity to SE Queensland means that such a project is justified on current and future 'social and environmental responsibilities' and needs to be given high priority.

We note that public transport development in the Northern Rivers has lagged behind investment in road transport and that this imbalance is generating unsustainable costs for those responsible for maintenance of local roads and the community as a whole. Investing in the long term future public transport needs of the region can go a long way to reducing these costs, while utilisation of existing infrastructure such as the Casino-Murwillumbah rail line would reduce the capital investment in public transport thus focussing resources on the provision of quality services.

NRTF believes that it is imperative that the final report acknowledges the growing unmet needs in Northern Rivers communities and makes appropriate recommendations to address the imbalance of funding to public transport development in the region, utilise existing infrastructure and recognise the need to construct the 'missing link'.

A good starting point may be contained in recommendations by the Public Transport Advisory (*Light Rail Strategic Plan: Light Rail Proposals for NSW, 1999*) who advised future governments to

Monitor the value of introducing more frequent and accessible regional (rather than interstate) public transport services, using light rail technology, along the existing heavy rail corridor.

Explore the opportunity for the development of a 'local' light rail service, using the existing heavy rail corridor, in the context of any future planning for the relocation of the existing heavy rail services (p 115)