

**Submission
No 213**

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

Organisation: Northern Rivers Trains for the Future Inc

Name: Ms Karin Kolbe

Telephone:

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Subject:

Summary

Northern Rivers Trains for the Future Inc.
(NRTF)

Submission to the Legislative Council
Inquiry into the Closure of Casino to Murwillumbah Rail
Services

4 June 2004

Contact

Ms Karin Kolbe
PO Box 1775
Byron Bay NSW 2481
(02) 6680 8516
karin@peppinotpress.com.au
website: www.nrsdc.org.au/nrtf.htm

Contents

Overview	2
Who are NRTF	2
Aims of NRTF	3
Campaigns and community support	4
Attachments	5
Response to Interim Report of Ministerial Inquiry into Sustainable Transport in NSW, 7 October 2003.	5
Sample Press releases	5

Overview

Northern Rivers Trains for the Future Inc (NRTF) is a community group representing a wide range of people in the Northern Rivers who support rail services in the area. NRTF members know and talk to the people who are affected by the lack of transport services. Our campaigns are successful because the people of the region support our aims and us.

In October 2003 NRTF submitted a submission to the Parry Inquiry detailing a profile of the area, our transport needs and funding issues. With the December promise to keep the XPT service for a year, we then turned our attention to getting a commuter service running. Our work in that direction has been entirely disrupted by the need to (again) campaign for the XPT service.

We call for the urgent restoration of the XPT service, and the establishment of appropriate plans for:

- the maintenance of the line
- improved timetabling of the XPT service
- the establishment of a commuter service
- the construction of the 'missing link' between Murwillumbah and Queensland.

Who are NRTF

NRTF is a group formed in November 2002 to campaign for rail services in the region. Our regular meetings are well attended by an extremely diverse range of people, representing:

- the whole geographic region (from Casino in the west, to Lismore, through Bangalow, down to Ballina on the coast, up through Byron Bay, Brunswick Heads, Mullumbimby, Ocean Shores and Murwillumbah, and many small localities in between)
- all age groups (from high school students to retirees and pensioners)
- a range of political affiliations, local government representatives and councillors
- retirees, students, people with disabilities, employees, self-employed and unemployed.

Many of our members represent groups in their own communities, such as local progress associations, retirees and political parties.

Aims of NRTF

The aims of NRTF are:

1. Continuation of the XPT service from Sydney.

Despite the difficult timetable, this service is well patronised by many people, many of whom cannot travel by any other means.

2. Preservation of existing rail infrastructure and no sale of the rail corridor land under any circumstances

The rail corridor is an asset owned by the people and it must remain as such. The road system is already stretched enough. The rail infrastructure should be used for both freight and people.

3. A new regional commuter train service for locals & tourists

The area has very little public transport, hence there are many people who simply cannot participate fully in employment, attend medical facilities, socialise, participate in sport, education and other activities. We know some people who would like to attend our meetings, but simply have no transport.

4. The construction of the 'missing rail link' between Murwillumbah and Gold Coast.

We call for urgent support and funding from the Commonwealth Government for what we see as a significant cross-border public transport issue. With the 'missing link' in place, both the XPT service from Sydney and the commuter line would attract far greater passenger numbers.

Campaigns and community support

Since formation NRTF has organised, or assisted with, many campaigns such as rallies, media releases, letter writing, a protest train and collecting signatures for petitions.

We will continue our campaigns. **People are not losing interest in this issue** but are becoming increasingly angry that they are not being listened to. Traffic accidents, inaccessible events, rising petrol costs and an empty rail network are daily reminders that the transport problem has not been fixed.

The following are the highlights of our recent campaigns.

- **Events to save the XPT rail service late 2003:**
 - Signature collecting at Bangalow Markets (23 November)
 - Protest at Mullumbimby (24 November) – see report in *The Echo* http://www.echo.net.au/pg.php?pg=01&issues_id=18_27&view=gif
 - Rally at Lismore City Hall (4 December)
 - Rally at Byron Railway Station (6 December) – see report in *The Echo*, p 2 http://www.echo.net.au/pg.php?issues_id=18_29&pg=02&view=gif.
- We sought statements from the recent **council election** candidates on their position to rail. We were pleased to see that the new mayors are all strong rail supporters.
- **Events to save the XPT rail service 2004:**

When the rail service closure was announced in April, NRTF organised or assisted with the following well-attended rallies and protests:

- Lismore Railway Station (26 April)
 - Mullumbimby (28 April)
 - Casino (29 April)
 - Protest Train to Sydney (28 April)
 - Murwillumbah (5 May)
 - Byron Bay Railway Station (13 May)
 - Vigil at Lismore (16 May)
 - Murwillumbah (16 May)
- **Petitions** – On behalf of state and federal politicians, NRTF members have collected thousands of signatures.
 - **Coupons and Letter Writing** – During the 2003 campaign we organised a ‘What I want for Christmas’ campaign that resulted in hundreds of coupons going to Mr Carr’s office. In 2004 we collected a bag full of letters and ‘Not to Go’ cards. These were taken on the Protest train and delivered to Mr Costa’s office.

- **Media Releases** – The local papers, radio and TV stations have regularly reported our campaign. The following sample press releases are attached as appendices.
 - 26 Sep 2003 *Becton Train Trial*
 - 27 Nov 2003 *Save our trains...now and for the future*
 - 27 Feb 2004 *Branch line communities fear driver audit will lead to scrapping of Countrylink trains*
 - 16 April 2004 *Get On Board Protest Train*
 - 7 May 2004 *Residents stage rail vigil to put pressure on Premier Carr.*

- **Sydney Media programs** – NRTF were instrumental in producing programs for:
 - ABC Stateline (screened 14 May 2004)
 - A Current Affair (screened 19 May 2004).

Attachments

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

Sample Press releases

**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

Please address correspondence as follows.

NRTF
C/O B. Cameron
PO Box 27
Federal NSW 2480

basilcam@nor.com.au

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 off 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)

**MEDIA RELEASE from NRTF, Northern Rivers Trains for the Future Group
regarding Becton Train trial 26/9/03**

Northern Rivers Trains for the Future, NRTF, is not giving Becton any direct support for the train trial on Oct 25/26.

Spokesperson for the group Peter Westheimer said that the group want to make it clear that we are not connected in any way with the Becton Railway trial.

We welcome the fact that a development proposal is linking itself with public transport solutions but we are also acutely aware of the fact that Becton has submitted a master plan that many in the community feel is too larger a proposal with respect to transport and infrastructure issues in Byron Bay.

NRTF seeks a regional solution to the paucity of Public Transport and not one isolated solution. Communities from Murwillumbah to Burringbar to Mullumbimby, Byron Bay, Bangalow, Lismore and Casino are expressing growing support for restoration of meaningful train services.

The Northern Rivers is experiencing extremely rapid population growth and 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. Recent initiatives from Lismore council via it's economic development unit include bringing together the Tweed Economic Development Corporation and Gold Coast City Council with key regional government managers from both sides of the border to look at a new approach to public transport. A meeting is scheduled for 21 October and will be held at Tweed Heads.

NOROC, Northern Region Organization of Councils is giving strong support as well. We urge the community to put in a submission to the NSW Government re the interim public transport review (i.e. the Parry report) which was focused only on bottom line economics and has not taken social and environmental sustainability into it's overview regarding costing of public transport solutions.

We urge the community to email submissions to either
enquiry@transport.nsw.gov.au
or send to: Ministerial enquiry into public passenger transport
Minister of Transport
GPO BOX 1620 Sydney NSW 2000.

Peter Westheimer PO Box 343 Mullumbimby NSW for NRTF

Save Our Trains...NOW and for the FUTURE

Community campaign gathers steam

Mayors to speak at public rallies in Lismore and Byron Bay

Community campaigners overwhelmed by level of public support

'Tell Mr Carr what you want for Christmas' coupon campaign in daily newspaper

Local State MPs involved

Latest campaign details

Web page link

**Contact: Basil Cameron
Northern Rivers Trains for the Future (NRTF)
02 66849107 or 0416 277244**

Update. 27 November 2003 at 8 pm

Petition to local MP

Petition signatures collected in the Ballina electorate over the last few weeks will be presented to State MP for Ballina, Mr Don Page, by ex-train driver and keen student of local rail history, Mr Neale Battersby. Neale's father was the last full time station master at Bangalow and Neale represents our rail heritage...NOW and for the FUTURE.

Neale will present the petitions in River St Ballina at 12.10 pm on Monday December 1 in front of the Save the trains stall, assembled volunteers and interested residents of Ballina Shire.

PUBLIC RALLIES

December 4, Lismore City Hall at 5pm. Mayor of Lismore Merv King to speak.

December 6, Byron Bay at 10.30am, Mayor of Byron Shire Tom Wilson to speak in Railway Park. Charlie Cox, Mayor Casino will also address the Byron Bay meeting.

Further details to be announced as they come to hand.

CAMPAIGN TO SAVE OUR TRAINS...NOW and for the FUTURE

Campaign highlights so far include.

- Mayors Charlie Cox of Casino and Merv King of Lismore City have been actively campaigning on the streets of their towns to save Countrylink services and for the expansion of commuter rail services.

- Mayors Merv King and Tom Wilson of Byron Shire will speak at public rallies organised for Lismore and Byron Bay. Casino Mayor Charlie Cox will also speak at Byron Bay.
- Public meetings have been held in Murwillumbah.
- Thousands of petition signatures have been gathered. A further 1800+ in Lismore this morning with the Mayor of Lismore in attendance. Last Sunday, volunteers were overwhelmed by the response at a local market where 700 signatures were collected before running out of petition forms.
- The local daily paper the *Northern Star* is printing a 'What I want for Christmas' coupon (addressed to Mr Carr) for residents to complete and leave in present boxes situated in businesses across the region. All Christmas lists will be forwarded to the Premier.
- Volunteers of all ages and backgrounds have been campaigning in centres across the region including Goonellabah, Bangalow, Mullumbimby, Alstonville, Lismore, Casino and Ballina. This activity continues up until the public meetings.
- Completed petitions to date will be presented to the State MP for Lismore, Mr Thomas George on Friday 28 November and the State MP for Ballina, Mr Don Page on Monday 1 December at 12.10 pm.
- NRTF is negotiating a meeting with State MP for Tweed, Mr Neville Newell and a representative from the Transport Minister's office.

NRTF web page

www.nrsdc.org.au/nrtf.htm

Northern Rivers Trains for the Future (NRTF)

27 February 2004

‘Branch line communities fear driver audit will lead to scrapping of Countrylink trains’

NRTF calls on the Minister of Transport, Mr Costa, to ensure that the current audit of train driver health does not lead to the withdrawal of Countrylink services on the Casino-Murwillumbah line.

‘At the NRTF meeting on February 26, concerns were expressed that branch line communities are vulnerable to any attempt to operate current services with fewer crews as this would mean terminating train services at Grafton or further south and replacing current services with buses.’

‘We fear the audit may be used as an excuse to scrap services despite the 12 month reprieve promised following community protests against the loss of Countrylink trains’

‘Mr Costa and the Premier Mr Carr need to explain the Government’s plan to ensure that our community’s train services do not suffer from a reduction of train driver numbers.’

‘Representatives from various branch line communities attending the meeting called on the Government to provide details of plans to recruit and train new drivers for Countrylink services on the branch line.’

‘Northern River’s residents have consistently expressed concern over the safety and accessibility of bus and road transport, especially over a fourteen hour journey to Sydney.’

‘Our region is plagued by increasing numbers of road accident fatalities, while bus travel involves increased risk of DVT (Deep Vein Thrombosis) and is simply not accessible to many aged, disabled and parents of very young children.’

Question in NSW parliament

Following attendance at the NRTF meeting on January 15, upper house MLC Arthur Chesterfield-Evans is to be approached for assistance in obtaining details of the audit including the comparable standards applied to metropolitan and Countrylink drivers.

‘NRTF is requesting that Mr Chesterfield-Evans seek guarantees about driver recruitment for Countrylink services on the Casino-Murwillumbah line by asking a question in the NSW parliament.’

Basil Cameron
Spokesperson for NRTF

Contacts: Basil Cameron 02 6684 9107
Louise Doran 02 6680 4358
basilcam@nor.com.au

www.nrsdc.org.au/htm.nrtf

Northern Rivers Trains for the Future (NRTF)

Friday 16 April 2004 at 1.00 pm

“Get On Board Protest Train”

Northern Rivers Trains for the Future (NRTF) is supporting the ‘protest train’ to Sydney on April 28 that has been proposed by Sue Dakin and supported by the six regional Mayors and community representatives across the Northern Rivers.

Byron Shire Mayor Jan Barham, Lismore Mayor Merv King, Ballina Mayor Phil Silvers, Tweed Shire Mayor, Warren Polglase and Kyogle Mayor Ernie Bennett all support the campaign with Mayors Cox, King and Bennett all hoping to ride the train to Sydney in company with ALP candidate for Ballina, Sue Dakin and representatives from the Democrats

NSW Greens Transport Spokesperson, Lee Rhiannon will travel by train to Lismore to discuss the rail crisis with community representatives on Friday 23 April.

Many residents and community groups are expected to turn out to stations along the route to demonstrate their anger at the axing of Countrylink services on the Casino-Murwillumbah line. Among these are various Councillors, Rob Spragg from the Tweed Shire Council Public Transport Working Group; representatives from Byron Environment Centre, members of the Combined Pensioners and Superannuants Association and various unions representing rail workers.

Citizens encouraged to join campaign

NRTF member, Basil Cameron said ‘NRTF is encouraging as many citizens as possible to support the protest train by either joining the train to Sydney, turning out to stations to support the protest train or by writing a letter of support for the campaign.’

Residents wishing to join the protest train to Sydney can contact local stations for bookings on the following numbers.

Casino	66620222
Lismore	66221959
Byron Bay	66855002
National	13 22 32

Letters of support can be sent to C/ NRTF 22 Cathcart Street, Lismore 2480.

Residents are also encouraged to look for and complete coupons to be printed in the *Northern Star* and other regional publications. Coupons should be sent to NRTF, 22 Cathcart Street, Lismore 2480. Coupons will then be taken by NRTF volunteers to Sydney on the protest train for presentation to the NSW parliament.

Contact: Neale Battersby 02 66241187

Northern Rivers Trains for the Future
Press release - Friday 7th May 2004, 2pm

Residents stage rail vigil to put pressure on Premier Carr

A public vigil will be held at Lismore Train Station on Sunday, May 16 to coincide with the last XPT rail service from Murwillumbah to Sydney.

The 'sit in', organised by the Northern Rivers Trains for the Future (NRTF) puts renewed pressure on Premier Carr for Michael Costa to honour his promise to keep the train line open until December this year.

Local communities have been vocal in their opposition to the proposed closure during the past month. More than 4000 people attended four rallies across the region over the past few weeks. Many also travelled to Sydney on a 'protest train' last week. Meanwhile, thousands of letters have been sent and thousands more people have signed petitions.

"All these displays of community support for the train service, and outrage about the planned closure, seem to have fallen on deaf ears, spokesperson for the Northern Rivers Trains for the Future (NRTF), Karin Kolbe said.

"However, our fight's not over. Minister Costa and Premier Carr should be warned that we are going to be more vocal than ever."

"It's not too late for them to honour their promise to keep the line open until the end of the year."

The vigil will start at 4pm. At 7:30pm the train will pass through going north and the last train will go through at 11:34pm.

"Everyone in the community is urged to wear red and join in," Ms Kolbe said.

She encouraged people to bring lanterns, candles, black arm-bands, placards, musical instruments, BBQ food and chairs to the vigil.

"Those joining us at the vigil should ensure they're comfortable and, importantly, that they will be seen and heard on the day."

People who cannot get to Lismore can wear black arm-bands at their local stations. The last XPT train leaves Murwillumbah at 9:50pm, Mullumbimby at 10:28pm, Byron Bay at 10:43pm and Casino at 12.10am.

"We're as mad as hell and we won't take it anymore – we want our train," Ms Kolbe said.

Throughout next week's campaign, Northern Rivers residents – and their families and friends affected by the rail closure - are urged to write letters to politicians and Sydney newspapers, and to ring radio stations. Contact details:

Politicians

NSW Politicians – send to Parliament House, Macquarie Street, Sydney NSW 2000.

Bob Carr, Michael Costa, Don Page, Neville Newell, Thomas George, Catherine Cusack, Melinda Pavey, Arthur Chesterfield-Evans, Ian Cohen.

Federal ALP – send to Parliament House Canberra ACT 2600

Mark Latham, Martin Ferguson (Shadow Minister for Transport)

Newspapers

The Sydney Morning Herald, letters@smh.com.au, fax 9282 3492

Snailmail: GPO Box 3771, Sydney 2001

Radio

Ian McNamara (Macca) Australia ALL Over (Sunday mornings on local ABC radio from 5.30am)

1800 025 555 / australiaallover@your.abc.net.au

Sally Loane

ABC Radio Sydney 9am to 12 midday weekdays

02 8333 1000 / 702@your.abc.net.au

2UE Open Line 13 13 32, **Mike Carlton:** mikecarlton@2ue.com.au **John Laws:**

thefortress@bigpond.com

2GB Open Line 131 873 **Alan Jones**

TV

Quentin Dempster Stateline ABC Television 7.30pm Friday

02 8333 4838 / 02 9950 4914 / stateline-nsw@your.abc.net.au

Additional Information for Media (not for publishing)

Train Sit-In and Vigil

The vigil will start at 4pm Sunday 16th May at Lismore Station.

Passing motorists will be urged to ‘Toot for our trains’.

At 7:30pm the train from Sydney will arrive at Lismore and continue to Murwillumbah where it turns around.

At 11:34pm the train will come through Lismore for the last time.

Contact: Neale Battersby (02) 6624 1187