

**Submission
No 169**

INQUIRY INTO THE CLOSURE OF CASINO TO MURWILLUMBAH RAIL SERVICES

Organisation: Tweed Shire Council
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Position: Manager, Strategic Planning
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Date Received: 04/06/2004

Subject:

Summary

Please Quote
Council Ref: **Casino-Murwillumbah Railway Closure**

Your Ref No:

For Enquiries
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3 June 2004

The Director
GPSC4, Legislative Council
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY 2000

Dear Sir/Madam,

Casino-Murwillumbah Railway Closure Inquiry

The Tweed Shire Council wishes to submit to the Inquiry for its information a Resolution adopted at Council's meeting of 2nd June 2004.

The Council would appreciate any action that can be taken to further the aims expressed in the Resolution.

Should there be any queries, please contact Douglas Jardine, Manager Strategic Planning, on 02 6670 2469.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Douglas Jardine', written over a horizontal line.

Douglas Jardine
Manager, Strategic Planning

Attach – Council resolution

**TWEED SHIRE COUNCIL
MEETING TASK SHEET**

For Meeting held on Wednesday 2 June 2004

User Instructions

If necessary to view the Agenda Item, double-click on 'Agenda Report'
(blue hyperlink above).

Resolved Items Action Statement

Action is required for the following item as per the Council Resolution.

**TITLE: [DS] SUBMISSION TO THE NSW LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL INQUIRY
INTO THE CLOSURE OF THE MURWILLUMBAH-CASINO RAIL
SERVICE**

RESOLUTION:

Councillor B J Carroll
Councillor G J Lawrie

RESOLVED that Council resolves to submit the issues raised in this report to
the Inquiry for its consideration.

Voting - Unanimous

Agenda Report

TITLE: [DS] SUBMISSION TO THE NSW LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL INQUIRY INTO THE CLOSURE OF THE MURWILLUMBAH-CASINO RAIL SERVICE

ORIGIN:

Strategic Town Planning

SUMMARY OF REPORT:

This report explains the background to the rail closure, reviews the implications and proposes a form of submission to the Inquiry (submissions required to be submitted by 3 June 2004).

RECOMMENDATION:

That Council resolves to submit the issues raised in this report to the Inquiry for its consideration.

REPORT:

Background

Following recommendations of the Parry Report last year to review the CountryLink services, the Final Report in December promised that the Murwillumbah XPT service would continue for at least 12 months.

As part of the Mini-Budget in April 2004, a decision was made by the Minister for Transport to close the service immediately, and operation ceased on 17 May.

Reasons given for closure were principally to save expenditure of around \$5m per annum, estimated as \$3.5m 'under the rail' (infrastructure) and \$1.4m 'above the rail' (train operation, allowing for the \$1m cost of replacement buses). There was reference to a reduction of Federal funding to NSW of \$376m.

Evidence from StateRail to the Inquiry is that the 130km branch line has 168 timber bridges totalling 4.5kms in length, equal to 30% of all timber rail bridges in the State. To replace all these bridges is estimated to cost around \$94m over 20 years.

There has been an on-going campaign to save the service, known as Northern Rivers Trains for the Future, and supported by the five Councils along the route. This Council organised a rally at Murwillumbah station on 5 May, and previously made a submission to the Parry Inquiry.

Implications of Closure:

On an average day 214 people use the XPT between Murwillumbah and Casino southbound, and 184 northbound. About half use connecting road coaches to continue to destinations in Brisbane, Gold Coast and parts of the Northern Rivers. Under the new arrangements, five road coaches are being provided in each direction to meet the XPT, which now terminates at Casino. The coach legs to and from Tweed and Gold Coast destinations range from 2-3 hours, compared to 1-1.5 hours previously, with the train leg (subject to speed restrictions) reduced by 2.5 hours.

Of the 214 passengers, 13 are estimated to be paying full fare, 94 free or \$2.20 pensioner fare, and 107 receiving 40-50% discounts. The pensioner travel is reimbursed to a level of 85% of full-fare to CountryLink, and the discounts are to compete with cheap airfares. CountryLink as a whole covers 32% of its costs, compared to 23% for CityRail metropolitan services, which are not being cut.

The train continues to be well used despite air, bus and car competition because it provides a combination of affordability, accessibility, comfort, safety, and reasonable speed that the other forms of transport do not offer. Substitute buses do not meet this range of needs adequately. Disabled, less mobile and frail aged people may be unable to get into a bus, unable to remain seated in a restricted space for long periods, or feel insecure waiting at a bus stop, sometimes after dark, without the security and facilities of a rail station. Although low-floor buses are promised in future, and taxis promised for wheelchair users, this does not meet needs as well as a train service.

Other implications include:

- Northern Rivers is the State's fastest growing region, yet services are being cut and infrastructure is not being maintained. If the line has 30% of all timber rail bridges in the State, this is evidence of a consistent failure to put adequate resources into replacement over a long period.
- The region's road network is under stress, while the rail track is empty. One trainload of people is equivalent to 5 (average load) or 10 (full load) buses, or 200-400 cars. Transfer to the roads will increase congestion, road maintenance and pressure to spend more on road improvements.
- Rail is the most environmentally friendly and safest way to transport people and freight. If calculated costs included external costs of pollution, greenhouse gas, accidents, policing, road maintenance and improvement, rail would be the least cost alternative by a large margin.
- Public transport in this region is minimal and relatively expensive. The rail corridor is an asset owned by the people of NSW that could be used for a regional commuter service. Additional daytime rail services would improve the utility and economics of the line. The promise of a 12-month review of services to improve the economics, which many accept as being necessary, has been broken.
- Millions of dollars have recently been spent on upgrading this line, including extensions at Murwillumbah station and replacement sleepers for the track. It makes no sense to waste these assets.

Submission to the Parliament:

Tweed Shire Council requests the Parliament:

- Not to discriminate against the Northern Rivers Region by causing it to be the only region to lose its rail service as part of the State-wide review of rail services,
- To consider the matters included in this report during its Inquiry, in particular the fact that this region is the fastest growing region and urgently needs to upgrade and develop its transport infrastructure and services,
- To restore the XPT rail service between Casino and Murwillumbah, if necessary with amended fares and marketing arrangements to improve its viability, or
- Alternatively, to lease the rail corridor at a peppercorn rent to a consortium of regional Councils, with an agreement waiving normal track user charges, and authorising them to contract operators to provide rail services on the line,
- To include this rail line along with the main NSW lines in the arrangements being negotiated with the Australian Rail Track Corporation for it to manage rail operations,
- To have prepared a proposal to the Federal Government for this line to be extended to the Queensland border and linked to the Queensland rail system.

LEGAL/RESOURCE/FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

If a consortium of regional Councils were to take on responsibility for the maintenance of the line, there would be financial implications, in particular for maintaining or replacing timber bridges. This responsibility would require a shared maintenance budget to be worked out and contributions made over an extended period. It is unlikely that the levels of expenditure necessary would be as great as those currently estimated by the Government, and Government grant contributions would be likely to meet a proportion of the costs.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS:

The closure of the rail service conflicts with Policy Nos. 99 and 100 of the Tweed Shire Strategic Plan 2000+ (1996) to construct a multi-modal transportation interchange at Coolangatta, and to extend the rail line from Murwillumbah to the Queensland border at this interchange.

UNDER SEPARATE COVER:

Nil.
