



Shauna McIntyre  
22 Cathcart Street  
LISMORE NSW 2480  
Telephone: (02) 6622 3053  
Fax: (02) 6622 3302  
Mobile: 0416 277 244  
Email: [ptdp@nrsrc.org.au](mailto:ptdp@nrsrc.org.au)

Monday, 16 June 2003

Taxi, private bus and private ferry reviews  
Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal  
PO Box Q290  
QVB Post Office NSW 1230

## **Northern Rivers Public Transport Development Project's Submission to the 2003 Review**

### **Introduction**

The Public Transport Development Project (PTDP), auspiced by the Northern Rivers Social Development Council and funded by the NSW Department of Transport welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to IPART.

The PTDP has been operational since 1993 and is a regional initiative working towards increased access and opportunities for all residents of the region by developing relevant, effective, accessible and publicly available transport services and infrastructure. The PTDP is active in policy development, raising community awareness of public transport and improving the service development capacity of all sectors of the public transport industry. The project covers the Northern Rivers Region inclusive of 10 Local Government Areas of Tweed, Ballina, Kyogle, Richmond Valley, Pristine Waters, Grafton City, Lismore City, Byron Bay, Maclean and Copmanhurst.

The views expressed in this brief submission, while informed through the wider debate with key stakeholders, are those of the PTDP and the Northern Rivers Social Development Council, and do not necessarily reflect those of individual members of the Advisory Committee.

The PTDP welcomes the opportunity to comment on the following issues contained within the IPART discussion paper.

### **4.2 Advantages and disadvantages of the cost index approach**

#### **Alternatives to the fare box revenue**

Providing comment on the review of fare structures remains outside the scope and expertise of this submission. However, PTDP encourages the exploration of alternatives to supplement fare box revenue when considering public transport funding. The focus needs to be broadened to include an exploration of other options and innovations.

Rather than fare increases, which place further pressure on transport disadvantaged people in rural and regional areas, PTDP would like to see an extension of Transport Demonstration seed funding to improve access and efficiencies in public transport. Transport Demonstration projects were initiated by the former NSW Ageing and Disability Department (ADD) in late 1996. A central concern was for the projects to demonstrate the potential for operators to develop services with the capacity to become viable without the need for ongoing financial support. This meant that all proposed projects needed to have the full commitment of the operator concerned, and that only those projects with good prospects of success, in economic terms, could be considered.

### **Case Study:**

An example of this was a bus operator on the Northern Rivers, who through the assistance from PTDP's Transport Development Worker, received transport demonstration funding to extend an existing town service to include a nearby village. The service was to provide a village bus service as well as a connecting service to the town. The patronage was so strong that the service paid its own way from the beginning. No Government subsidy needed to be paid to the operator to cover losses.

This is an excellent example of how a small amount of guaranteed "seed" funding could be all the incentive needed to encourage private bus operators to take risks to provide a new service that meets community needs. The program enables improvements in service delivery to customers, increases patronage and increases revenue to the operator, at no actual cost to Government. Unfortunately, under current Minimum Service Levels there is no incentive for private operators to take such risks to extend services, particularly in towns that are below the MSL threshold for a town service. The success of such a venture requires the commitment of an operator, and conditions favourable to a sustainable bus service, however, it does demonstrate what is possible if Government offers additional incentives.

This initiative if re-introduced could address one of the stated disadvantages of the cost index approach (**It ignores potential improvements that might have been achieved, or should be achieved** p. 23) and acts to supplement it. It also has the potential to respond more quickly to the community's needs for access and mobility experienced by people in rural and regional NSW.

## **5.2 Ticket products**

Private operators provide bus services within the Northern Rivers Region. Most operators stay with the single journey, one ticket trips, with no variation for off-peak services or for high or low season (particularly relevant in the coastal towns). Rural and regional passengers are disadvantaged compared with their metropolitan counterparts in this regard, and operators could be encouraged / supported to make more use of the multi-journey and off peak discounts to increase patronage.

The Transport Data Centre collects data on ticket products for metropolitan areas, but there is nothing comparable for non-metropolitan NSW. The absence of sound data on travel patterns and ticket products in rural areas makes it difficult to understand and plan for services to meet community need for transport. PTDP would urge the Department of Transport to broaden the data collected by TDC so that accurate information can be gained from areas outside the metropolitan centres.

## 6.1.2 Private buses

A major issue for rural and regional people is access to bus services at times and in areas where there is currently limited or no public transport like evenings, weekends, public and school holidays and peak hours for commuters and for example, people living in villages and outlying communities.

### Case Study:

If a local commuter who lives out of town is reliant on a school bus to access employment, then he or she is not able to access public transport to work during school holidays. An example from a local workplace highlights this difficulty. A young woman lived in a rural community outside the local town and was unable to fulfil her mutual obligation work activities during school holidays because the school bus service, which was her only means of transport, did not operate.

Young people are also very limited in their access to social and recreational activities on weekends in towns where bus services don't operate at this time. Aboriginal communities too, are severely restricted in their mobility options. Aboriginal families and communities living on the outskirts of towns are particularly disadvantaged in their access to services and facilities, as they are usually not serviced by a town bus service. These few examples highlight the barriers to access faced by many in rural and regional communities.

## 7.2 Social impacts: personal and household incomes

PTDP would first like to comment on the difficulty in responding to the Tribunal's Issues Paper on **Social impacts** as all the data under this heading is Sydney / metropolitan based. While the Tribunal has included ABS census data this year, the data still focuses solely on metropolitan information. This highlights an issue raised earlier about TDC's data collection. It is difficult to discuss the social impacts to rural and regional people based on data from metropolitan areas. Variables such as bus trip characteristics, income, family structure, and vehicle ownership rates all have different meanings in the two contexts with vastly differing lifestyles, environments and levels of amenity. PTDP encourages the Tribunal to seek data relevant to rural and regional areas so that a more comprehensive discussion of social impacts can be included in future.

Many people in rural and regional areas will be greatly affected by the social impacts of fare increases, as there is often no 'consumer choice' in their use of public transport. The social impacts, which need to be recognised, are that often those most in need of low cost, efficient public transport are those who have least access to it. Many groups are reliant on public transport because they do not have ready access to a car and live in areas not well serviced by a range of Government services and other facilities including retail, leisure and recreational. This is further compounded by the fact that many areas are currently not well serviced by public transport.

Therefore, in rural and regional areas, the social impacts of fare increases are likely to further restrict the mobility of people to access basic goods and services. These potential social impacts include:

- Reduced access to education, training and employment
- Reduced access to essential services including health, welfare, legal and support services, and
- Reduced access, for some communities, to goods including fresh fruit and vegetables and other necessary consumables.

Clearly, this is not solely a transport issue, and becomes increasingly more apparent that ‘a *whole of government approach*’ is needed when planning for services, particularly in rural and regional NSW. However, where people are already transport disadvantaged, due to no ready access to a car or limited physical access to essential services, employment and education, fare increases will further entrench this disadvantage. This can result in other social impacts like unemployment, social exclusion and risky transport alternatives such as hitch-hiking. Such transport disadvantage in rural and regional NSW is avoidable if access to affordable transport is available to all.

### **7.2.5 Bus and ferry fare changes and social impacts**

Another area for urgent consideration is the need for consistency in fare concessions across the State so that rural and regional pensioners and seniors are not disadvantaged on the basis of where they live. Rural and regional people continue to pay much more for transport than those with access to Government operated public transport in metropolitan areas where a range of concessions and ticket products are offered. Work needs to be done to address the current inequities in transport concessions across the State, so that rural and regional pensioners and seniors are not further disadvantaged by fare increases. TAFE students are also disadvantaged, as they do not attract the same concessions offered by Government operated bus services in the metropolitan area, and so pay more to access education. PTDP is aware of TAFE students who have dropped out because they could not afford the bus fares to and from the Wollongbar campus, which is located between two major towns. Increases in fares will have a direct affect of limiting access to services for some rural and regional people.

Hitch-hiking, as a mode of transport, is more visible in the Northern Rivers than elsewhere in NSW. Hitch-hiking has often been linked to a lack of public transport in the region. However, affordability of public transport is also a significant factor and needs to be considered as part of the social impacts of any fare increases.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer feedback from a rural and regional perspective to the IPART discussion paper.

If you require further information on matters contained within this submission please contact Shauna McIntyre, Acting Project Officer, PTDP on (02) 6622 3053 or e-mail [ptdp@nrsc.org.au](mailto:ptdp@nrsc.org.au)

Kind regards,

Shauna McIntyre  
Acting Project Officer  
Public Transport Development Project  
Northern Rivers Social Development Council