03 December2017
The Hon. Andrew Constance MP
Minister for Transport and Infrastructure
GPO Box 5341
SYDNEY NSW 2001
Dear Minister

Future Transport Strategy 2056
The Border Rail Action Group (BRAG) is pleased to provide the attached submission on the Future Transport Strategy 2056.

BRAG, formed in late 2014, is the pro-public transport voice for Albury Wodonga.

BRAGs representations and prosecution for improved public transport rests on four pillars:

1. The Victorian North East track
2. Aged rolling stock
3. Advancing a train shuttle proposal
4. Advancing transport system implementation across Albury Wodonga

The NSW’s Government Draft Future Transport 2056 – a strategy for planning and delivering public transport within NSW and adjoining jurisdictions ticks many boxes for the twin city of Albury Wodonga and the broader Riverina Murray Region.

We applaud the NSW Government’s commitment to delivering from early 2020 new passenger rolling stock for regional services. We seek to work with your Government in developing inter-regional services based on trains and coaches and superior customer-driven point-to-point service solutions based on city buses and taxis.

Yours faithfully

Per D E Toohey
Bill Traill
Chairman
Cc Greg Aplin Member for Albury.
Submission – Future Transport 2056 A draft strategy for the next 40 years

Draft Regional NSW Service and Infrastructure Plan

The Border Rail Action Group (BRAG) submission is of four parts:

1. Rail Infrastructure Improvements
2. Replacement of Regional Rail Fleet
3. Policy Planning Initiatives
4. Public Transport Service Initiatives

1. RAIL INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENT INITIATIVES

Recommendations

1. For the Strategy to give higher priority to the inclusion of strategically selected sections of The Southern line for track improvement works. Further, these be included in the 0 – 10 year Initiatives for Investigation.

2. For the Strategy to extend reinstatement of the full length of the Blayney – Demondrille line. The investigation be undertaken in the 10 – 20 year Initiatives for Investigation.

Benefits that arise

- Commuting times substantially cut for travel between regional centres and with capital cities.
- Regional and local tourism boosted through connecting the Western and Southern Lines bringing visitors to festivals and events.

The Southern Line connects Australia’s two largest cities of Sydney and Melbourne. Over the years there have been a number of papers written on rail track improvement post investigations, e.g. The Australian Rail Track Corporation across the years of 2001-2005 examined reconstruction of sections of The Southern Line, (Laird P, 2009).

Laird, (2009) summarised the investigations of three sections: Goulburn to Junee; Goulburn to Yass including Canberra; and Bowning to North Cootamundra. See Figure 1.

Laird, (2009) repeated a conclusion he had presented in a 2008 article in the same journal, of a potential halving of the travel time between Menangle and Goulburn with this quote:
‘As well, straightening out Menangle–Goulburn track would allow new passenger trains—conventional or tilt—to cut the present four hour multi-modal Goulburn-Sydney journey to just two hours’.

It is these on-going savings – time and fuel – plus the efficiency gains achievable through passenger trains operating at their optimum speed that over time are three of the metrics for business case development.

**Figure 1. Sydney to Melbourne rail improvements 2009**


**Blayney to Demondrille.** Restoration of this link between the Western and Southern Lines is based on improved freight efficiencies. Reinstatement of a section of this line is underway between Maimuru and Demondrille.

Train-based tourism is a potential opportunity along this fully restored line bringing tourists from Sydney and Canberra thereby bolstering the business case for the full restoration of the line.

This line is an example of a piece of link line restoration entirely consistent with the Hub and Spoke model presented in the Strategy of ‘creating efficient north-south connections between Regional Cities...whilst also opening up tourism and trade connections to the inland regions’.¹

¹ Future Transport 2056, page 8.
2. REPLACEMENT OF REGIONAL RAIL FLEET

Recommendations

1. For an announcement at an early date on the delivery schedule for replacement trains. This information is seen as a catalyst for community-based planning for new regional services. See also Public Transport Service Initiatives.

Benefits that arise

- The new fleet’s enhanced performance measures of reliability and punctuality of services are critical components for building patronage.
- A fleet supporting other public transport modes in the delivery of customer-centric regional connectivity services.

Albury Wodonga is serviced by NSW TrainLink’s twice daily Sydney – Melbourne XPT with pick up/let downs at Albury and northern Victorian cities of Wangaratta and Benalla. The Victorian regional public transport operator, VLine, provides from Albury four week-day services to Melbourne and three on weekends. VLine also has a daily coach service to Canberra.

Customer satisfaction anecdotally collected by BRAG is quite high with the XPT train.

Rolling stock matters raised in this submission on the replacement fleet are:

- What is the duration of the roll-out plan commencing in early 2020?
- Will the fleet better and how much more than the present journey times as exampled of 1hour 15minutes from Sydney to Albury with tilt-train technology?2
- Where, beyond Dubbo are the locations for regional maintenance facilities?
- What are the features of the rolling stock to achieve flexibility in building train sets to meet differing market requirements?
- How to capture and present the economic and social arguments for present and future investments in contemporary train and coach stock and more frequent train/coach services across regional NSW?

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2 Media Release 15 March 2015, ‘New train fleet to transform travel across regional NSW’, Troy Grant and Gladys Berejiklian.
3. POLICY AND PLANNING INITIATIVES

Recommendations

1. Adoption of the ‘Hub and Spoke model for region-wide public transport planning across the Riverina Murray Region and North East Victoria. Planning built on the three regional centres of Albury Wodonga, Wagga and Griffith.

2. Earnest inclusion of community groups in planning initiatives lead by transport agencies of NSW and Victoria and respective local governments.

3. Supporting the full development of inter-modal transport hubs at Albury, Wagga, Cootamundra and Griffith.


5. Resourcing and guiding local governments to enable them to develop integrated transport plans that are in synch with that of the Strategy.

Benefits that arise

- Regional centres will have greatly expanded roles into the future, notably in health services, education and tourism.
- A ‘hub and spoke’ model of connectivity is in synch with these expanded roles.
- Improved cross-border connectivity between NSW and Victoria.
- Improved connectivity with respective capital city.
- Guidance and resources provided to local government on implementing effortless transferring facilities between modes of public transport.
- Planning of transport needs placed on an equal footing to that of metropolitan Sydney.

Local Government transport plans are integral to the implementation of the directions for public transport emerging from the Strategy. Using one such plan that of Wagga Wagga City Council is illustrative of the ‘stepping up’ that will be required. This Council’s plan - Wagga Wagga Integrated Transport Strategy and Implementation Plan 2040 was adopted in August 2017, (Wagga Wagga 2017). A recurrent theme is of preserving transport corridors for implementation of new technologies and that of the City’s economic links to other centres in the Murray Riverina Region. On public passenger the Plan acknowledges improvements required in operation of taxis, buses and community transport.

Communities are seen as integral to the localisation of the directions set out in the Strategy. Using BRAGs experience, achieving implementation of improvements in train, coach and bus connectivity within Albury Wodonga involves processes that build on relations, use of soundly-based investigatory processes, and application of facilitatory and advocacy skills. All this occurring within a group of volunteers!

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3 Hubs incorporating train, coach, bus and taxis.
Albury Wodonga represents a special case for a systemically whole-of-city public transport planning. Some examples of present complexities:

- The purchase of two bus tickets when travelling from a bus interchange in Wodonga to another in Albury.
- Questions as to eligibility for concessional travel on buses for tertiary students across the Border.
- Point-to-point travel services both within and between the cities ripe for development however there are restrictions on taxis operating across the Border.
- Bus services do not service either Wodonga or Albury Railway Stations.
- Albury Railway Station is within a transport precinct with scope for further improvements. Wodonga lacks a central city transport hub, however concept included in future transport plan documents, (Wodonga City. 2014).

Latent support for public transport is a largely unknown component of public transport planning. Acquiring an appreciation of latent demand is seen as an integral step in responding to questions surrounding the transport service offers and of areas for improvement.

In 2016 a project commissioned by four councils with BRAG sought to research existing users of rail services (existing passengers) and non-users of rail services (potential passengers) within the Albury, Wodonga, Benalla and Wangaratta communities (the study area).

The overarching objectives of the study were to:

- Understand community needs and expectations with respect to both current and future passenger rail services.
- Understand the travel patterns and requirements of the communities, including inter-regional transport and connections to business, education, major events, health and professional services, domestic and international air travel.
- Identify the latent demand for train services within the community.
- Quantify the potential social and economic benefits derived from improvements to services and increased patronage, (AEC Group. 2017).

On latent demand the report found:

Survey respondents estimated they would take an additional 15.6 trips per person by rail, if rail services were improved by addressing identified issues. This represents an increase of 350% from existing use. This would be considered the maximum latent demand within the community for rail services. However, it is unrealistic to assume all issues can be resolved to the satisfaction of all existing and potential rail passengers and as a result, it is unlikely the maximum latent demand will be realised, (AEC Group. 2017).
4. PUBLIC TRANSPORT SERVICE INITIATIVES

Recommendations

1. The Strategy to develop a generic framework whereby local government and communities may systematically examine revisions to or new public transport services.

2. Through the Strategy, funds be provided to NSW Transport entities of TrainLink and Rural & Regional Service Delivery & Performance Branch for undertaking trials/pilots of revisions to or new public transport services.

Benefits that arise

- A consistency of approach by local government and community groups will enable Transport for NSW to evaluate trials and pilots.
- Community participation as an equal partner in the planning process is a strong insurance policy for undertaking the trials and pilots.

Trains and coach services turn on the key word of ‘connectivity’. Across the Murray and Riverina Region both train operators – NSW TrainLink and VLine – use their trains and coaches conveying patrons from a mosaic of towns.

While the Region awaits the arrival of new rolling stock from 2020 the years leading up are ones for community groups, along with government agencies for exploiting the opportunities for trialling new transport services via coaches. Such trials are seen as laying the foundation for both new and continuing passenger rail services.

In May 2017 Wagga Wagga City Council lent its support for an investigation of new and improved regional rail connections for Wagga Wagga as its response to a paper by Councillor Vanessa Keenan – Feasibility investigation Albury – Wagga– Regional Rail Shuttle Service. The discussion paper set out the potential economic benefits arising from improving the connection between Albury and Wagga.

An idea of BRAGs is for the implementation of a pilot coach service that plies the Albury – Wagga corridor. This corridor has no public bus/coach service. The findings of the pilot to be applied for upgrading the mode from coach to train. Further, use the findings for informing as to the early stage allocations of rolling stock.

Development of the idea is on BRAGs agenda for initiating in early 2018 involving AlburyCity, City of Wodonga and City of Wagga Wagga.

City buses and specialised community bus services rely heavily on subsidies from governments for transporting very low numbers of customers per service. In Yarrawonga Mulwala prior to the introduction of FlexiRide the town bus services were carrying an average of two passengers per trip on a bus with approximately 30 seats, (PTV 2013).

The overriding theme of the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal Draft Report are proposals to get more locals on buses. (IPART 2017(a)). IPART has examined via case studies ‘on-demand’ based services as an option for delivering better transport services, (IPART 2017(b)).
There are no public bus services that connect the centre of Albury with Albury’s Railway Station. Prosecution of this gap in connectivity has been on BRAGs radar since 2015.

**On-Demand services** provision is seen as the leading message emerging from IPARTs Draft Maximum fares for rural and regional bus services to take effect from 1st January 2018, (IPART 2017(b)).

Provision of such a service has been the domain of taxis with some private shuttle services operating at the margins.

Since late November 2013 a flexible demand service, FlexiRide, delivered by Yarrawonga Mulwala Taxis has operated in the twin towns of Yarrawonga Mulwala who have a combined ‘non-seasonal’ population of 9,000.

Normal public transport fares of Public Transport Victoria apply for FlexiRide services, (PTV 2013).

A six times a day service operates Monday to Friday with three on Saturday mornings servicing the sixty or so designated bus stops, (PTV 2014).
REFERENCES


Border Rail Action Group

Bill Traill Chairman E. wjtraill@dodo.com.au
Dennis Toohey Executive Member E. tooheyde@bigpond.net.au

03 December 2017