

A young girl with blonde hair, wearing a pink and white striped sleeveless top, is smiling and looking towards the camera. She is standing on a metal bridge or walkway. In the background, there is a large concrete dam with a reservoir behind it. The sky is blue and the overall scene is bright and sunny.

CountryLinkUp 2010

Report from Penny Sharpe MLC Parliamentary Secretary Assisting the Minister for Transport

26 October 2010

Forward

Dear Minister Robertson,

I am pleased to present to you the report and recommendations arising from the state wide community consultation called CountryLinkUp that I undertook on behalf of the NSW Government throughout July, August and September 2010.

CountryLinkUp consisted of 13 public meetings across the state, online submissions via the CountryLink website and a written submission process. Individuals were also able to participate in the review via twitter and by contributing to a blog on my website.

Over 330 people took the opportunity to attend the public meetings and 408 submissions were received via email, the online survey, social media and post.

CountryLinkUp provided an important opportunity for people across New South Wales to talk directly to the NSW Government about what they want from their CountryLink Services.

This report consists of 62 recommendations.

50 recommendations focus on:

- Better data and information provided to passengers
- Improved coordination, timetabling and connection of transport modes in local areas
- Improvement of customer service across the entire CountryLink journey
- The future design, features and facilities on any new rolling stock
- Improving access to CountryLink services for those with mobility difficulties or other special needs.

There are also 12 recommendations that seek further detailed investigation of the provision of new services and/or changes to existing services.

I would like to record my appreciation to all who participated in the CountryLinkUp by attending the public meetings and/or making a submission. This report seeks to reflect the suggestions, comments, criticisms and community desires that were raised throughout the process.

I thank the local councils who assisted the CountryLinkUp by providing venues and inviting local community members to participate.

I would also like to thank the CountryLink staff who took the time to talk to me about their work and shared with me their suggestions about how to improve CountryLink services.

During the CountryLinkUp I was greatly assisted by the CountryLink central office staff, in particular I wish to thank Greg McLeod and Rodney Hawke who accompanied me to the public meetings and grappled with my many questions. I am indebted to Vanessa Van Den Nieu who undertook the enormous logistical task of coordinating the thirteen public meetings and moving three people over 6000km by train, coach, car and plane.

CountryLink is a highly valued and vital transport service that links people and communities across New South Wales. It was a privilege to spend time talking with people who are passionate about their communities and who share the desire to improve transport services within them. I look forward to your consideration and implementation of the recommendations within this report.

Yours sincerely,



Penny Sharpe MLC

Parliamentary Secretary Assisting the Minister for Transport

Parliamentary Secretary Assisting the Minister for Roads

Parliamentary Secretary Assisting the Premier on Social Inclusion

Introduction

CountryLink is a vital transport service that links people and communities across New South Wales. CountryLink trains and coaches carry almost two million passengers to 365 destinations every year.

In recent years CountryLink patronage has been increasing. This is a result of a number of factors including special tourism promotions, abolition of the booking fee for pensioner travel, \$1 fares for children, refurbishment of the XPT and Explorer train carriages, upgraded CountryLink service centres and improved online and call centre booking systems.

In May 2010, former Transport Minister David Campbell requested the Parliamentary Secretary for Transport, Penny Sharpe MLC undertake a community review of CountryLink Services across NSW.

The review, called CountryLinkUp, was implemented to provide an opportunity for people across New South Wales to talk directly to the NSW Government about what they want from their CountryLink Services. In particular, community members were asked about what they liked, didn't like and wanted changed in relation to CountryLink. The terms of reference were specifically linked to:

- Service frequency
- Service connectivity
- Onboard facilities
- Ticketing systems

CountryLinkUp consisted of 13 public meetings across the state, online submissions via the CountryLink website and a written submission process. Individuals were also able to participate in the review via twitter and by contributing to a blog on the Parliamentary Secretary's website, www.pennysharpe.com.

All public meetings were advertised in local newspapers. The advertisements also included information about how people could make written submissions. All local councils where meetings were held were invited to participate and to recommend individuals and/or groups that should be invited to the meetings.

Information about CountryLinkUp was also advertised onboard trains, in CountryLink customer centres and at stations and coach stops across the state.

Throughout the CountryLinkUp process a number of issues were raised that were outside the terms of reference for this review. All of these issues have been recorded and are incorporated in Appendix 1.

Participation in CountryLinkUp

Summary of participation

Type of participation	Number of participants
Attendance at public meetings	331
Online survey's completed	352
Email and letter submissions	56
Comments on the blog	4
Comments via twitter	6

Public Meetings

Location	Date	Number of participants
Young	19 July 2010	45
Albury	20 July 2010	9
Wagga Wagga	21 July 2010	15
Taree	26 July 2010	32
Port Macquarie	27 July 2010	23
Lismore	28 July 2010	16
Grafton	28 July 2010	14
Bathurst	2 August 2010	22
Orange	3 August 2010	14
Dubbo	4 August 2010	7
Tamworth	4 August 2010	35
Broken Hill	10 August 2010	26
Jindabyne	3 September 2010	73

All meetings were attended by Penny Sharpe, Parliamentary Secretary and Rodney Hawke Executive Manager, CountryLink Projects. Greg McLeod, General Manager CountryLink attended all but the Broken Hill meeting. Area Managers, local staff and others attended as required.

Member for Bathurst Gerard Martin, Member for Dubbo Dawn Fardell and Member for Monaro Steve Whan were also in attendance for meetings held in their electorates.

Mick Veitch MLC was in attendance at the public meeting in Young.

What the Community told the CountryLinkUp

In every forum and throughout the submissions there was universal acknowledgement and support for the services provided by CountryLink. The opportunity to give direct feedback was also welcomed.

The community values CountryLink highly and recognises CountryLink as a vital service that connects individuals to their families, their friends, health services, employment, education, sport, arts, culture and other recreational pursuits.

Demographic change, changing travel patterns, changes to population centres, different ways of working, a preference for train travel over car travel and concern for the environment were new reasons given as to why individuals used CountryLink services

Singled out for special praise were the staff of CountryLink. With few exceptions station staff, customer service staff, coach drivers and passenger service attendants onboard the trains were highly valued and considered an essential part of the CountryLink experience.

Structure of the Report and Recommendations

There were issues that were raised in the public meetings and throughout the submissions that apply to CountryLink generally and there were suggestions that were made that were specific to a particular location. The report is formatted to address the issues applicable to CountryLink across the state followed by a summary of the issues raised in specific locations.

Recommendations that need further detailed investigation because they require new service provision and/or services changes are asterisked.

Recommendation 1: That CountryLink review current opportunities for customers to give feedback with a view to incorporating customer feedback surveys, in person and online feedback on a regular basis.

Term of Reference Number 1: Service Frequency

Throughout consultations and submissions, issues regarding service frequency were driven largely by what was already available within any given community.

Overall the desire from all communities was to have as many services as possible with the option of at least one day and one night service connecting to larger centres, with day return provided to negate the need for overnight accommodation.

General issues were raised in relation to timetabling and service frequency included:

- The timing of services departing a given location. Individual requests are discussed further in the report but late night and very early stops were not favoured by individual communities

- Stopping patterns for some trains were questioned, with not all services stopping at all stations on route
- In almost all the areas visited there was a desire for a greater number of services – especially a day and a night service

Of particular concern were the issues raised in relation to on time running on some routes:

- On time running on the southern line incorporating the Sydney – Melbourne services and those that connect on and off those lines
- On time running effecting CountryLink services entering the CityRail network

Issues that impact on time running include major unforeseen events such as floods, fire and security incidents, priority given by the Australian Track Corporation owned track to the competing priorities of freight verses passenger services and the priority given within the CityRail network to commuter services over long haul CountryLink services.

The poorest on time running performance is on the Southern Line. This is due to issues relating to track work in NSW, track work in Victoria, the emergence of mud holes on some parts of the track, particularly in Victoria and speed limitations put in place as a result of safety concerns around level crossings.

Track work in NSW and in Victoria is due to be completed in 2011. Remediation is underway on the mud holes. The lifting of the speed limitations where safe to do so has been progressively rolled out across the network. All of these measures, once completed will improve on time running and service times for the Southern Line.

On time running information is currently provided in an aggregated format that does not demonstrate the different performance of the lines and the current issues that may be impacting on individual lines.

Recommendation 2: That information about on time running for CountryLink Services be disaggregated and provided by individual train routes on a daily, weekly, monthly and yearly basis and be publically available on the Countrylink Website.

Recommendation 3: Consideration be given to adjusting on time running figures that recognise factors outside the control of CountryLink including flood, fire and other unavoidable events such as state emergencies, gas leaks, incidents with other rail operators or security incidents from being included in the overall on time running figures.

Term of Reference Number 2: Service Connectivity

The consultations and submissions all pointed to the need for CountryLink services to connect smaller centres to larger centres and to connect where possible to other forms of transport, including local bus services, coach services and taxis.

Connections across the state via Sydney were also considered important.

The consultations and submissions also wanted CountryLink services to be considered more broadly than for tourism and recreation. CountryLink plays a vital in providing access to health services, education and employment and should be considered when reviewing timetables and routes, especially coach routes.

Recommendation 4: That when reviewing timetables and coach routes, consideration be given to maximising connectivity to larger centres where ever possible that includes transport connections to health services, education and employment.

Recommendation 5: That CountryLink work with Regional Transport Coordinators and Transport NSW (bus contract division and taxi division) to identify opportunities to integrate local bus and taxi services connections with CountryLink services.

Term of Reference Number 3: Onboard facilities

Community members who participated in the CountryLinkUp universally acknowledged the value, helpfulness and professionalism of CountryLink Staff. They commented positively on the upgrades and improvements that have been made to the XPT and Explorer train carriages.

Comments and suggestions about onboard facilities are set out below.

CountryLink Staff

CountryLink staff whether booking staff, onboard staff, coach drivers or station attendants are at the centre of each individuals' experience of travel via CountryLink.

The issues raised by community members for improvement centred on the need for a more proactive and engaging approach to customer service, a greater awareness of passengers with special needs, a desire for more visibility of staff, timing and style of public address announcements while on board, proactive management of difficult passengers and the need for onboard staff to assist passengers on unstaffed stations on and off the train and with their luggage.

Recommendation 6 : That CountryLink involve staff in a review of the recommendations arising from this report to implement the suggestions made by customers throughout the CountryLinkUp.

That the review specifically look at ways to improve the current the role of passenger service staff visibility, interaction with passengers, proactive approaches to passengers with special needs and how passenger service staff can better assist those with mobility issues on unstaffed stations.

Train Carriages

The NSW Government has invested \$42.8 million to refurbish and upgrade sixty XPT trailer cars. Twelve XPT power cars have also been refurbished and the final three will be completed in 2011. \$27 million has also been spent to upgrade the CityRail Endeavour and CountryLink Explorers.

Suggestions made during the CountryLinkUp for future upgrades and new rolling stock included access to wireless internet access and battery charging facilities, a desire for entertainment devices similar to what is available on aeroplanes (games/films/tv), passenger attendant buttons, access to pillows and blankets, issues with air-conditioning/heating, reintroduction of the children's goodie bags and changes in seating to allow for better reclining. The reintroduction of a dining or lounge car was raised in several meetings.

Recommendation 7: That installation of wireless internet access and battery charging facilities be investigated for the current XPT and Explorer trains. For future rolling stock, internet access and charging facilities be included.

Recommendation 8: That entertainment devices similar to those used on aeroplanes (games/films/tv) be made available to passengers. For future rolling stock, investigate the inclusion of entertainment devices within the seating of the trains.

Recommendation 9: That CountryLink investigate the provision of portable passenger attendant buttons be provided to passengers with special needs. For future rolling stock, include attendant buttons throughout the train.

Recommendation 10: That CountryLink trains consider making pillows and blankets available to customers, especially those travelling on night services.

Recommendation 11: That the needs of children travelling on trains be planned for with a view to providing affordable/complementary activity bags.

Food & Beverage

The food service on CountryLink services was generally regarded as having reasonable variety at a reasonable cost.

Suggestions for improvement included more regular rotation of the main meal options, better tea and coffee, reintroduction of croissants, provision of soy milk and whether more healthy options could be introduced.

Some individuals raised concern with the provision of alcohol on board services.

Criticism of running out of hot food on longer journeys was raised in some consultations, as was the length of time for staff changeover meaning that the buffet could be closed for long periods.

Recommendation 12: That CountryLink undertake a regular onboard survey to gain feedback about food and beverage services.

Recommendation 13: That CountryLink review the individual suggestions made as part of the CountryLinkUp including more regular rotation of the main meal options, better quality tea and coffee, reintroduction of croissants, provision of soy milk and whether additional healthy options could be introduced.

Recommendation 14: That CountryLink examine closing times for the buffet car could be reduced, especially when those changeovers are due to occur during main meal times such as lunch and dinner.

Security

CountryLink is generally considered a safe way to travel with few security incidents across the network. CountryLink passenger attendant staff are the first port of call to deal with any security incidents. The consultations revealed most passengers believe that CountryLink staff deal with security on board the train in an efficient and non confrontational way. Transit officers are deployed where required on the network based on intelligence and the history of security events.

The CountryLinkUp consultations, especially in locations where night services operate, raised the issue of security for passengers. In particular, older female passengers, those travelling with children and those with disabilities indicated a concern about security on stations at night and also during journeys where there were passengers on board who were disruptive.

Recommendation 15: That CountryLink review the use of Transport officers across the CountryLink network to ensure that their deployment is intelligence based and reflects the reporting of incidents.

Recommendation 16: That all stations ensure that lighting is adequate for passengers getting on and off trains on night services.

Recommendation 17: That signage on information phones on stations indicates that passengers can be connected directly to assistance if they wish to speak to CountryLink staff if concerned about security on the station.

Seating

The CountryLinkUp submissions and consultations raised several issues relating to seating including: whether it is possible to book particular seats, how to book the ventilator seats and the issue of people being in seats that they are not allocated.

Finding a seat during the night trains was a particular issue for passengers as cabin lights are generally off due to people sleeping. It was suggested that staff turn on the reading lights above booked seats prior to arriving at a station allowing boarding passengers to find their way directly to their seat. This would also alleviate any problems with people being in seats that they are not allocated to.

Recommendation 18: That booking arrangements for passengers take into account any special needs of individual passengers and where necessary allow passengers to book specific seats.

Recommendation 19: That prior to passengers boarding on night services, passenger service staff turn on the overhead lights to assist passengers find their seats.

Recommendation 20: That passenger attendant staff review procedures to ensure that passengers are seated in their allocated seats.

Recycling on Board

There is currently no provision for onboard recycling. Staff and participants in the consultation were interested in how newspapers and cardboard carry trays could be recycled. Separation of rubbish such as drink containers (glass, plastic and aluminium) was also raised.

Recommendation 21: That CountryLink work with passenger service staff to review opportunities for onboard recycling of paper, cardboard, glass and plastic and provide recycling facilities at terminus points to allow recycling to be implemented.

Toilets

Consultations and submissions revealed that passengers found the refurbished toilets on the trains much improved to the previous arrangements. The issue remains how the cleanliness of the toilets is inspected and maintained throughout the longer haul journeys.

Recommendation 22: That CountryLink review the current arrangements for the inspection and maintenance of toilets during journeys to ensure that toilets remain in clean working condition.

First Class, Economy, Sleepers

The difference between first class and economy was raised by participants. Some suggested that there was not enough differentiation between the classes. Other suggestions to improve first class included access to free drinks and snacks, newspapers, other reading material and entertainment options.

Some consultations and submissions wanted CountryLink to look to future rolling stock that placed first class rail travel as a premium product similar to some of the services across Europe and private services available in Australia.

A couple of passengers travelling on pensioner vouchers raised the issue of the four free annual trips only being available in economy.

The sleepers are favoured by some passengers for the privacy and ability to sleep. Some of the issues raised with sleepers include the desire for single rooms, some noise issues in the compartment of some sleeper cars and individual instances of poor maintenance of the sleeper.

Recommendation 23: That CountryLink consider opportunities to differentiate first class travel including free food and drinks, newspapers, reading material and entertainment options.

Accessibility

The ability to get safely on and off trains was raised by many participants in the public meetings and through the submissions. Suggestions included a more proactive approach from staff to assist those with mobility issues, assistance managing luggage on and off (especially on unstaffed stations), with more attention given on night trains when lighting is low as well as more frequent use of the ramps.

Suggestions also included more opportunities via booking to indicate on the passenger information given to staff that assistance was needed to board and while on board.

Passengers with disabilities were mostly very happy with the professionalism and assistance given by CountryLink staff however some particular issues arose for those with vision impairment and hearing loss including a suggestion for an attendant call button while on board for assistance.

Recommendation 24: That CountryLink work with station, booking and passenger service staff to implement a proactive approach to dealing with passengers with mobility issues. In particular to examine how passengers can be encouraged at booking to indicate whether they need specific assistance.

Luggage Handling

The luggage handling for CountryLink passengers works well for most people. The submissions and consultations found some issues that require further attention including prebooking of luggage where a station is unstaffed, assistance with unbooked luggage on and off trains for those with mobility issues and whether there is the ability to be more flexible around the 30 minute requirement for booking in luggage.

The handling of bicycles on trains was raised in several meetings. Participants noted that bike touring was increasing as was use of bikes within the community. They reported that there was limited luggage space for bikes and that the requirements to purchase a \$12 box and dismantle the bike onerous.

Recommendation 25: That luggage handling procedures be reviewed in relation to how luggage can be better managed for passengers on unstaffed stations including the ability to prebook luggage, assistance with unbooked luggage and assistance given to passengers with mobility difficulties.

Recommendation 26: That for current XPT and Explorer services CountryLink review storage requirements for bicycles to make it easier for passengers to book, store and move bikes on and off trains as part of their journey. For future rolling stock include appropriate storage systems for bicycles that make it easy for cyclist to book, store and take bikes on and off CountryLink trains.

Ticketing/Booking/Information Systems

Tickets on CountryLink can be booked and purchased in person at CountryLink travel centres, train stations and via ticketing agents, by telephone via the call centre and online via the CountryLink website. It is also possible for passengers to purchase tickets onboard in emergencies.

The consultations suggest that these systems are working well. The general issues raised about ticketing and booking were whether it was possible to move to a ticketless system (although for some passengers they prefer to have a physical ticket), some confusion about cross border pensioner entitlements on tickets and what could be done at the point of booking to provide information about the special needs of passengers.

CountryLink puts in place a number of booking restrictions on some routes to try and manage journeys across the network. Passengers affected by these restrictions requested that they be reviewed.

Recommendation 27: That CountryLink review booking restrictions placed on each route across the network with a view to removing the restriction where possible or provide a rationale for why this booking restriction is in place. Any booking restriction and its rationale should be publically available on the CountryLink website.

Up to date information relating to services was an issue raised at many of the consultations. Participants wanted to know whether CountryLink services could be included as part of the 131500 transport information system. Information relating to changed services e.g. replacement of trains with coaches and/or likely delays due to track work or safety requirements needed to be provided at booking and after booking if possible.

Recommendation 28: That CountryLink be included in the 131500 Transport NSW information system.

Recommendation 29: That CountryLink review systems to improve information given to passengers in relation to track work, service delays, replacement of trains with coaches. This information should be provided wherever possible at booking. Post booking systems need to be in place to alert passengers by phone, email or text about changes to services if possible.

Other Issues: Station Facilities & Coaches

Station Facilities

Many of the stations across NSW have been upgraded with new facilities.

Issues relating to individual stations are dealt with below but generally there were suggestions made about lighting on stations especially for night services, ensuring that staff are visible and accessible to passengers, the location of seating and telephones inside and outside stations, whether secure parking could be built at some stations, whether children's toys could be provided in waiting rooms and the need to improve signage for the information phones that are on every station.

Recommendation 30: That CountryLink ensure that procedures are adhered to ensure that lighting on stations for night services remains on and that staff when present at station are wherever possible visible to passengers should they require assistance.

Recommendation 31: That CountryLink review and replace the signage for the information points on stations to make sure that these points are highly visible and provide information about what the points can be used for – eg to get up to date information about train arrival and departures, to book a ticket where no ticket facilities are available, to report vandalism or graffiti, to reports concerns about security.

Coaches

Coaches have the potential to be the most flexible and responsive part of the CountryLink network. They reach 307 communities and carry approximately 480,000 passengers per year. The consultations and submissions contained mixed comments about Coaches.

In communities with very limited public transport options, CountryLink coaches are the only transport option. The submissions and consultations were keen for CountryLink to look for opportunities to better meet the needs of these communities through the possibility of altering services or implementing new services.

There was praise for the drivers, the condition and comfort of the coaches and for their connections to the rail network.

There were however a number of issues raised and suggestions made about coach services including individual routes, issues with particular drivers, questions about fatigue management, entertainment on coaches, comfort of coaches and removing the restriction on food and beverage consumption.

Of particular concern were the comments made at nearly every consultation that the coaches are very hard for those with mobility difficulties to get on and off. While all the coaches are able to "kneel" or lower themselves closer to the ground the 3 -5 steps for many passengers is very difficult. It is noted that all coaches have a wheelchair lift however there were issues reported about the willingness of drivers to use it and that especially for non wheelchair passengers, the lift is really not suitable. Longer term coach specifications will need to address this issue.

Recommendation 32: That CountryLink design and implement customer service standards for coaches similar to what is in place for train services.

Recommendation 33: That access for those with mobility issues on current coaches be reviewed to see how current procedures could be improved. In the future commissioning of coaches, the issue of access be a primary consideration.

Recommendation 34: That for the current coaches drivers take a "people first - luggage second" approach to assisting passengers on and off coach services.

Recommendation 35: That the regulations regarding the ban on food and beverage consumption be reviewed with a view to removing these restrictions. In particular ensure that the rules for people with medical and other special conditions are sufficiently flexible to give passengers certainty about their ability to bring food onto the services if required.

Recommendation 36: That the online booking system for coaches removes the booking number that appears on tickets as it causes confusion about allocated seating within coaches.

Specific Locations – what the public meetings and submissions told us

As part of CountryLinkUp , there were 13 public meetings held across the state. 331 people attended these meetings. Submissions were also made through the online survey, via email or via mail. 408 submissions in total were received.

Any issues, suggestions and comments that were of a general nature and could apply to the whole network have been picked up in the section above. Below sets out issues that were raised throughout the CountryLinkUp and any recommendations that are specific to a given location.

Young

45 people attended the CountryLinkUp in Young. The issues raised at the meeting and through the submissions included:

- The need for a transport service from Boorowa and Temora
- The service connection time lag from Cootamundra and Young
- The importance of access for an ageing/less mobile passengers on coaches, trains and stations themselves (especially at Harden)
- CountryLink getting people to health appointments in both Canberra and Sydney
- Timetabling suggestions
- Difficulties in local transport since the loss of one of the bus companies
- Problems at Harden Station

The lack of transport options for people in Boorowa was an issue that has been raised on several occasions by the Boorowa community. This is also an issue for the Temora community.

** Recommendation 37: That CountryLink investigate the deviation of the existing CountryLink coach service that operates from Queanbeyan to Cootamundra to go via Boorowa and Murringo at least two days per week. This would provide the community of Boorowa and Murringo with:*

- *A twice weekly return service to Young allowing for 4 hours in Young*
- *Connections to the XPT at Cootamundra to Melbourne and to Sydney*
- *Connections at Cootamundra with other coach services through to Griffith, Mildura, Bathurst, Dubbo, Condobolin, Canberra and Tumbarumba*

** Recommendation 38: That CountryLink investigate a two day per week service that links Temora – Young – Boorowa – Yass and Canberra. This would provide these communities with:*

- *A twice weekly return service to Canberra allowing 5 hours in Canberra.*
- *Connection with the Explorer at Canberra through to Sydney.*
- *Connection with coach services in Canberra through to Cooma, Bega, Eden and Merimbula*

Harden station has had problems with umbrella grass, accessibility, vandalism and graffiti. The review team visited the station after the public meeting. Some improvements to Harden station were already planned, others have been completed after the public meeting including:

- The subway: lighting has been replaced and is now on 24 hours a day in the subway, handrails have been installed along the ramps, visibility mirrors have been replaced, subway cleared to deal with the umbrella grass. Painting of the subway is being investigated to make it lighter
- The waiting room has been refurbished including repairing damage from vandalism, new seats, replacement heater, repainting due to graffiti, new signage for the information point
- Agreement has been reached with Harden Council to improve garden maintenance. Harden Council has also agreed to become a ticketing agent.

Recommendation 39: That the subway be either painted in a light colour or additional lighting be installed at Harden Station.

Recommendation 40: That leasing of the vacant rooms at Harden Station be investigated to try to find suitable lessees to better improve passive surveillance of the station and provide community space.

Albury

9 people attended the Albury meeting. The issues raised at the meeting and through the submissions included:

- Service connections to Goulburn, South Coast, Yass and the North Coast
- On time running from the Melbourne end while the track work continues
- Connections for students attending boarding school from the smaller communities
- Safety and security on the night train
- The possibility of extra capacity in the system
- Healthier food range on board
- More promotion of the service
- The options for wireless devices and charging of electronic devices
- No local buses stop at Albury station

- The ability to use smaller trains to provide more services
- Timing of services in smaller communities like Henty and Culcairn

Recommendation 41: That future timetable reviews investigate if timetable connections to the South Coast and via Yass for coaches can be improved.

Recommendation 42: That future timetable changes being devised after completion of the track work and lifting of safety restrictions on the southern line include a connection in Sydney to the North Coast.

Wagga Wagga

15 people attended the public meeting in Wagga Wagga. The issues raised at the meeting and through the submissions included:

- On time running and the impact on other connections
- How notification of late running trains could be improved via SMS, or via the call centre or via the information buttons on the stations
- Notification of service changes when special trains are running e.g. the Elvis train to Parkes for people near Leeton and Coolamon
- Different charges charged by agents for pensioners on the \$2.50 ticket
- Access to ticketing in Junee and the importance of weekend ticketing
- Connections to the north coast and Canberra
- Safety at stations in the night/early mornings and the need for staff to be visible
- Some issues with the taxi rank at the station when being shared by those leaving pubs and those getting off the train
- How passengers could get on and off the train at night more easily
- Extra seating outside the station at Wagga Wagga

Since the meeting a new seat has been installed at the front of Wagga Wagga station. CountryLink is investigating the installation of a direct taxi phone outside the station.

Ticketing at Junee has improved with Countrylink hours at the station increased to 6 hours per day. Ticketing on weekends can be done via the call centre and passengers are able to pay when they board the train. The information point at the station can also be used to assist to book tickets on weekends.

Recommendation 43: That signage at Junee station indicate how tickets can be purchased via the call centre or with assistance from the information point on weekends and outside of regular hours.

Taree

32 people attended the Taree meeting. The issues raised at the meeting and through the submissions included:

- How services could be improved for those with mobility and other disabilities
- The desire for the four free pensioner tickets to be for first class and not economy
- Connections to Newcastle, Sydney, the north west (Armidale and Tamworth) the North Coast and Brisbane
- How taxi's could be booked for those getting off the night train
- How track work changes can conveyed to passengers, especially if the delay's are substantial so there do not have to wait for long times at the station
- How seat allocation works and could be improved
- Boundary issues when accessing the \$2.50 ticket
- Booking restrictions on Casino - Sydney but not Grafton or Brisbane to Sydney trains
- What's happening/possible with new fleet?
- What consideration is given to the environmental benefits of rail?
- The possibility of having mobile attendant call buttons for passengers with disabilities
- Issues with luggage and toilets at Wingham station
- The desire of the community to have the Casino to Murwillumbah rail line reopened

Recommendation 44: That the next timetable review, consideration be given to improving the connections between Newcastle and Taree.

Port Macquarie

23 people attended the meeting in Port Macquarie. The increasing population in and around Port Macquarie as well as the ageing of the population were two features that the meeting wanted the CountryLinkUp to take on board. The issues raised at the meeting and through the submissions included:

- Bus connections to the daily trains at Wauchope station and the lack of integration with the local bus service
- The need for CountryLink information at the new Gordon St bus terminus
- Service connections to Brisbane, Sydney and Newcastle, especially a need for those
- Accessing medical appointments
- Service connections to local towns up and down the coast
- The possibility of secure parking at Wauchope station
- Issues with boarding and leaving on the night train
- Is it possible to have smaller but more frequent services
- Concern about the priority of freight over passengers and the delays this causes - especially if not able to notify those at the other end

- Connections to the North West (Gunnedah, Coonabarabran, Armidale)
- Improvements to the announcement system and use of the train info point
- Possibility of pensioners having additional free trips per year
- Luggage arrangements for the night train at Wauchope
- Bookings of special seat if you have a specific medical reason
- Bus connections in Tweed

Currently CountryLink provides two coach services per day between Port Macquarie and Wauchope. These connect with two of the four XPT services. There are two other XPT services that currently do not have a coach connection to Port Macquarie.

** Recommendation 45: That CountryLink investigate a bus connection between Port Macquarie and Wauchope station for XPT services.*

Lismore

16 people attended the public meeting in Lismore. The main issue raised at the meeting was the desire to have the Casino - Murwillumbah rail line reopened. Issues that were specifically raised at the meeting and the submissions that relate to CountryLink included:

- Integrated transport plan being developed with funding from a range of sources
- The 40km rule and its impact on local travel and connectivity for local residents in and around Lismore
- Difficulties with cross border service
- Access to health services especially via the Gold Coast
- The desire to have the 131 500 number extended to this region
- Options of getting CountryLink coaches into the city
- Whether it would be possible to introduce a Rainbow Train run on bio diesel for tourists
- The accessibility of coaches

Recommendation 46: That CountryLink have discussions with Lismore Council to allow CountryLink coaches going to Lismore to stop at both the station and at the Lismore bus interchange.

** Recommendation 47: That CountryLink investigate a Lismore to the Gold Coast coach service.*

Recommendation 48: The 40km rule for CountryLink services in the North Coast region be reviewed with the aim of removing where possible restrictions that unnecessarily limit the ability of passengers to use existing services.

Grafton

14 people attended the meeting in Grafton. The issues raised at the meeting and through the submissions relevant to CountryLink included:

- The desire for a second bus to connect to the night train and that would run through Iluka, Wombah and Maclean.
- The desire for some better connections from the Pinnacles and Copmanhurst
- The timing of the trains to get better access to Sydney and in particular Brisbane
- Secure parking at Grafton station
- Some travel agent booking fees
- The sleeping car
- The need to enforce no smoking on the train and in and around the station - especially in covered areas
- Options for timetabling and other changes to the Casino train
- Whether missing smaller stations would speed up the train journey

** Recommendation 49: That CountryLink investigate the option of providing a coach connection from Ballina via Iluka, Wombah and Maclean to Grafton station for the XPT service. Further community consultation is required to determine whether demand for this service would be most for the day or the night service.*

Bathurst

22 people attended the meeting in Bathurst. That Bathurst meeting raised the broader issues of population growth, the environment and regional development needing to be taken into account when considering rail services. The issues raised at the meeting and through the submissions relevant to CountryLink included:

- The previous submissions and work done by the Bathurst community to try and have a day return service from Bathurst to Sydney
- Whether CountryLink coaches could run via the university for pick up and drop off

There is currently not the rolling stock available nor the train path to provide a day return service from Bathurst to Sydney

** Recommendation 50: That CountryLink investigate in planning for future rolling stock and timetabling the feasibility of a day return service from Bathurst to Sydney.*

Orange

14 people attended the meeting in Orange. Issues raised at the meeting and through the submissions relevant to CountryLink included:

- Wanting staff on board trains to be more active in their approach to customer service
- Being able to take food onto coaches
- Accessibility of coaches for those who are elderly
- What can be done to make the trains faster
- The website does not always provide every trip the most efficiently
- Need to have more differential between first class and economy
- Coach connection to Lithgow on Sunday
- Could CountryLink service go via the new hospital

** Recommendation 51 : That CountryLink investigate the viability of a coach leaving Parkes via Orange to connect to Lithgow on Sundays.*

Recommendation 52: That CountryLink investigate providing another set down and pick up location at Orange Hospital.

Dubbo

7 people attended the meeting in Dubbo. Issues raised at the meeting and through the submissions relevant to CountryLink included:

- The desire to have the timetable "reversed" so that it leaves Dubbo in the early morning and comes back from Sydney each evening
- Could smaller trains be operated more frequently
- Could the Dubbo XPT run 30 mins earlier to provide a link from Maitland to Brisbane?
- Community transport trialling a new service to provide a connection to connect Merriwa and Muswellbrook to connect with north and south train services
- Merriwa does not currently have a CountryLink agent to sell tickets

** Recommendation 53: That for future rolling stock and timetable planning that consideration be given to "reversing" the Dubbo train to provide an early morning departure time. In reviewing this option attention must be given to the impact on those passengers connecting from the further west via Dubbo.*

Recommendation 54: That CountryLink pursue a replacement agent for CountryLink ticket sales in Merriwa.

Tamworth

35 people attended the Tamworth meeting. Much of the discussion at this meeting focused on the need for CountryLink to provide services that were commuter friendly as many people now living in the country want services that provide day return to larger centres for employment related reasons. Eco tourism and the role of rail was also discussed. Issues raised at the meeting and through the submissions relevant to CountryLink included:

- Is it possible to limit the stopping at smaller station such as Werris Creek to make the journey faster?
- Sleeper cars be introduced for the North West
- Secure parking be introduced at Scone station
- Need more space for bikes on trains and should not have to pay \$12 to put them on
- Differences in pensioner tickets
- The desire to have Tamworth become part of the CityRail network

** Recommendation 55: That CountryLink investigate the submission regarding the extension of the CityRail network to Tamworth and provide a response on the issues raised.*

**Recommendation 56: That future rolling stock purchase investigate expanding the use of sleeper cars for north west services.*

Broken Hill

26 attended the meeting in Broken Hill. The focus of the discussions was on the importance of CountryLink to provide access to Broken Hill for tourists and to provide links for local people to access health and education. Issues raised at the meeting and through the submissions relevant to CountryLink included:

- The introduction of a second train service to operate ex Sydney Thursday and ex Broken Hill Friday, especially given Great Southern Railways (GSR) reduced service
- CountryLink fares availability on GSR services
- Can CountryLink trains be extended through to Adelaide and coaches to Mildura and Wentworth
- Options for timetable be improvement after concrete resleepering is finished by Australian Rail Track Corporation
- Connections from Broken Hill service if late into Strathfield mean that connection to central coast is lost
- Connection time from XPT at Dubbo to the coach to Broken Hill is too long
- Coach entertainment needs to be reviewed for long services such as those from Dubbo to Broken Hill
- CountryLink staff position remaining at Broken Hill
- In future could a commuter service from Broken Hill to Orange, Bathurst and to Adelaide be considered

Broken Hill is currently serviced by one CountryLink return service a week and in the peak season two Greater Southern Railway services. Greater Southern Railway have reduced their service to once a week in the off peak season. This change is having a large impact on tourism and transport access for locals at a time when patronage on the CountryLink service remains high.

** Recommendation 57: That CountryLink investigate an additional weekly service to Broken Hill.*

Recommendation 58: That passengers on the coach trips from Dubbo be surveyed about entertainment options

Recommendation 59: That the current CountryLink staffing arrangements in Broken Hill remain.

Jindabyne

73 people attended the public meeting in Jindabyne. The need for a commuter day return service to Canberra and the need to consider the tourism industry and good local transport in the snow fields was the focus of the meeting. Issues raised at the meeting and through the submissions relevant to CountryLink included:

- Limited transport between Cooma and Jindabyne (rely on a school bus service that only operates during school terms and times unsuitable)
- Want to be able to book through to Jindabyne (and Sydney and Canberra) online
- Lack of transport hinders tourist operators being able to cater for international visitors and need to understand growing tourism outside of snow season
- Ageing community needs better access to Canberra, very important for access to specialist health services
- Cooma airport is now privately owned and no local transport allowed to pick up or drop off
- Need for better advertising of existing services
- Are there opportunities to improve the service between Cooma, Jindabyne, Dalgety and Bombala with the upgrade of the Snowy River Way
- The desire for a commuter service from Cooma to Canberra

** Recommendation 60: That CountryLink investigate a service from Jindabyne to Cooma that connects with the CountryLink service Cooma to Canberra, south coast services and the Explorer service to Sydney.*

Recommendation 61: That in future timetable reviews of the Cooma to Canberra service that consideration be given to providing a service that would allow employment based commuting.

Recommendation 62: That CountryLink examine what improvements to coach services can be made to the connection between Cooma, Jindabyne, Dalgety and Bombala as a result of recent road upgrades.

Summary of recommendations:

Note: recommendations with an * indicate the need for detailed investigation as they involve potential new services and/or changes to existing services.

Recommendation 1: That CountryLink review current opportunities for customers to give feedback with a view to incorporating customer feedback survey's , in person and online feedback on a regular basis.

Recommendation 2: That information about on time running for CountryLink Services be disaggregated and provided by individual train routes on a daily, weekly, monthly and yearly basis and be publically available on the Countrylink Website.

Recommendation 3: Consideration be given to adjusting on time running figures that recognise factors outside the control of CountryLink including flood, fire and other unavoidable events such as state emergencies, gas leaks, incidents with other rail operators or security incidents from being included in the overall on time running figures.

Recommendation 4: That when reviewing timetables and coach routes, consideration be given to maximising connectivity to larger centres where ever possible that includes transport connections to health services, education and employment.

Recommendation 5: That CountryLink work with Regional Transport Coordinators and Transport NSW (bus contract division and taxi division) to identify opportunities to integrate local bus and taxi services connections with CountryLink services.

Recommendation 6 : That CountryLink involve staff in a review of the recommendations arising from this report to implement the suggestions made by customers throughout the CountryLinkUp.

That the review specifically look at ways to improve the current the role of passenger service staff visibility, interaction with passengers, proactive approaches to passengers with special needs and how passenger service staff can better assist those with mobility issues on unstaffed stations.

Recommendation 7: That installation of wireless internet access and battery charging facilities be investigated for the current XPT and Explorer trains. For future rolling stock, internet access and charging facilities be included.

- Recommendation 8: That entertainment devices similar to those used on aeroplanes (games/films/tv) be made available to passengers on a fee for service basis. For future rolling stock, investigate the inclusion of entertainment devices within the seating of the trains.*
- Recommendation 9: That CountryLink investigate the provision of portable passenger attendant buttons be provided to passengers with special needs. For future rolling stock, include attendant buttons throughout the train.*
- Recommendation 10: That CountryLink trains consider making pillows and blankets available to customers, especially those travelling on night services.*
- Recommendation 11: That the needs of children travelling on trains be planned for with a view to providing affordable/complementary activity bags.*
- Recommendation 12: That CountryLink undertake a regular onboard survey to gain feedback about food and beverage services.*
- Recommendation 13: That CountryLink review the individual suggestions made as part of the CountryLinkUp including more regular rotation of the main meal options, better quality tea and coffee, reintroduction of croissants, provision of soy milk and whether additional healthy options could be introduced.*
- Recommendation 14: That CountryLink examine review how closing times for the buffet car could be reduced, especially when those changeovers are due to occur during main meal times such as lunch and dinner.*
- Recommendation 15: That CountryLink review the use of Transport officers across the CountryLink network to ensure that their deployment is intelligence based and reflects the reporting of incidents.*
- Recommendation 16: That all stations ensure that lighting is adequate for passengers getting on and off trains on night services.*
- Recommendation 17: That signage on information phones on stations indicates that passengers can be connected directly to assistance if they wish to speak to CountryLink staff if concerned about security on the station.*
- Recommendation 18: That booking arrangements for passengers take into account any special needs of individual passengers and where necessary allow passengers to book specific seats.*
- Recommendation 19: That prior to passengers boarding on night services that passenger service staff turn on the overhead lights to assist passengers find their seats.*

Recommendation 20: That passenger attendant staff review procedures to ensure that passengers are seated in their allocated seats.

Recommendation 21: That CountryLink work with passenger service staff to review opportunities for onboard recycling of paper, cardboard, glass and plastic and provide recycling facilities at terminus points to allow recycling to be implemented.

Recommendation 22: That CountryLink review the current arrangements for the inspection and maintenance of toilets during journeys to ensure that toilets remain in clean working condition.

Recommendation 23: That CountryLink consider opportunities to differentiate first class travel including free food and drinks, newspapers, reading material and entertainment options.

Recommendation 24: That CountryLink work with station, booking and passenger service staff to implement a proactive approach to dealing with passengers with mobility issues. In particular to examine how passengers can be encouraged at booking to indicate whether they need specific assistance.

Recommendation 25: That luggage handling procedures be reviewed in relation to how luggage can be better managed for passengers on unstaffed stations including the ability to prebook luggage, assistance with unbooked luggage and assistance given to passengers with mobility difficulties.

Recommendation 26: That for current XPT and Explorer services CountryLink review storage requirements for bicycles to make it easier for passengers to book, store and move bikes on and off trains as part of their journey. For future rolling stock include appropriate storage systems for bicycles that make it easy for cyclist to book, store and take bikes on and off CountryLink trains.

Recommendation 27: That CountryLink review booking restrictions placed on each route across the network with a view to removing the restriction where possible or provide a rationale for why this booking restriction is in place. Any booking restriction and its rationale should be publically available on the CountryLink website.

Recommendation 28: That CountryLink be included in the 131500 Transport NSW information system.

Recommendation 29: That CountryLink review systems to improve information given to passengers in relation to track work, service delays, replacement of trains with coaches. This information should be provided wherever possible at booking. Post booking systems need to be in place to alert passengers by phone, email or text about changes to services if possible.

Recommendation 30: That CountryLink ensure that procedures are adhered to that ensure that lighting on stations for night services remains on even in the event of late trains and that staff when present at station are wherever possible visible to passengers should they require assistance.

Recommendation 31: That CountryLink review and replace the signage for the information points on stations to make sure that these points are highly visible and provide information about what the points can be used for – eg to get up to date information about train arrival and departures, to book a ticket where no ticket facilities are available, to report vandalism or graffiti, to reports concerns about security.

Recommendation 32: That CountryLink design and implement customer service standards for coaches similar to what is in place for train services.

Recommendation 33: That access for those with mobility issues on current coaches be reviewed to see how current procedures could be improved. In the future commissioning of coaches, the issue of access be a primary consideration.

Recommendation 34: That for the current coach arrangements that coach drivers take a "people first - luggage second" approach to assisting passengers on and off coach services.

Recommendation 35: That the restrictions regarding the ban on food and beverage consumption be reviewed with a view to removing this restriction. In particular ensure that the rules for people with medical and other special conditions are sufficiently flexible to give passengers certainty about their ability to bring food onto the services if required.

Recommendation 36: That the online booking system for coaches removes the booking number that appears on tickets as it causes confusion about allocated seating within coaches.

** Recommendation 37: That CountryLink investigate the deviation of the existing CountryLink coach service that operates from Queanbeyan to Cootamundra to go via Boorowa and Murringo at least two days per week. This would provide the community of Boorowa and Murringo with:*

- *A twice weekly return service to Young allowing for 4 hours in Young*
- *Connections to the XPT at Cootamundra to Melbourne and to Sydney*
- *Connections at Cootamundra with other coach services through to Griffith, Mildura, Bathurst, Dubbo, Condobolin, Canberra and Tumbarumba*

** Recommendation 38: That CountryLink investigate a two day per week service that links Temora – Young – Boorowa – Yass and Canberra. This would provide these communities with:*

- *A twice weekly return service to Canberra allowing 5 hours in Canberra*
- *Connection with the Explorer at Canberra through to Sydney*
- *Connection with coach services in Canberra through to Cooma, Bega, Eden and Merimbula*

Recommendation 39: That the subway be either painted in a light colour or additional lighting be installed at Harden Station.

Recommendation 40: That leasing of the vacant rooms at Harden Station be investigated to try to find suitable lessees to better improve passive surveillance of the station and provide a community space.

Recommendation 41: That future timetable reviews investigate if timetable connections to the South Coast and via Yass for coaches can be improved.

Recommendation 42: That future timetable changes being devised after completion of the track work and lifting of safety restrictions on the southern line include a connection in Sydney to the North Coast.

Recommendation 43: That signage at Junee station indicate how tickets can be purchased via the call centre or with assistance from the information point on weekends and outside of regular hours.

Recommendation 44: That the next timetable review, consideration be given to improving the connections between Newcastle and Taree.

** Recommendation 45: That CountryLink investigate a bus connection between Port Macquarie and Wauchope station for all XPT services.*

Recommendation 46: That CountryLink have discussions with Lismore Council to allow CountryLink coaches going to Lismore to stop at both the station and at the Lismore bus interchange.

** Recommendation 47: That CountryLink investigate a Lismore to the Gold Coast coach service.*

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Appendix 1: Issues raised during the CountryLinkUp consultations that fall outside the Terms of Reference

Throughout the CountryLinkUp a number of issues were raised that were outside the terms of reference for this review. These issues are referred to the Minister for Transport for further consideration:

Track priority:	Users of CountryLink services questioned the track priority system operated by the Australian Rail Track Corporation and were of the view that passengers should take priority over freight.
Local bus services:	Many participants pointed to issues in their area relating to local bus services. The lack of a town bus services for Young, Boorowa and Temora and the need for additional services in Jindabyne, the Snowy mountains and Dubbo.
High Speed Rail:	Many consultations discussed the issue of High Speed Rail. There was overwhelming support for High Speed Rail in NSW as an option for the future.
Grain Lines:	The closure and/or reopening of grain lines was raised in many consultations with the desire to have as much freight moved by rail rather than road.
Ticket pricing:	The cost of transport and options such as making transport free, greater concessions for pensioners, students and apprentices was raised in some consultations.
Line Reopening:	The reopening of the Casino to Murwillumbah line was raised at the consultations and through the submissions. Reopening part of the line to Lismore was also discussed.
Cross Border Transport Study:	The consultations in Lismore discussed the need for an integrated transport plan for northern NSW. The working group convened by the Northern Rivers Regional Organisation of Councils (NOROC) and the Hon Janelle Saffin seek funding to further develop this plan from federal, state and local governments.
Level Crossings:	The Lismore meeting raised the issue of an additional level crossing in Byron Bay.

Cross Border Concessions:

The differences in concessions types and services for pensioners across state borders was raised by some participants. It was noted that NSW had the most generous arrangements however participants would like these to be extended to other states.

Health Transport: For people having to travel long distance to get to hospitals the lack of public transport, especially after hours remains an ongoing concern.