

Fair Transport – How do we get there?

FAIR TRANSPORT HOW DO WE GET THERE?



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Introduction

Transport and the cost of transport are issues affecting all Territorians, and which cut across a range of community service sectors in the NT. Transport issues impact on all geographical areas of the NT – whether urban, regional or remote areas - but disproportionately affect people who experience social disadvantage. Lack of access to transport, whether due to cost, availability or physical access issues impact on the ability of people to access work, health services, recreational and social activities.

The limited availability of public and community transport, forces many low-income people to rely on other more expensive forms of transport (taxis, minibuses) to meet their everyday needs. Limited transport options for seniors and people with a disability (because of cost and availability) are a significant concern as they reduce people's independence, and can have an impact on the cost of living and employment opportunities. Limited access to transport in rural and remote areas also affects people requiring transport to attend medical appointments – particularly older people and people with disabilities.

This presentation attempts to highlight a number of transport issues identified by Non-Government service providers and consumers in the Central Australian region. The presentation also identifies responses to transport issues in other States/Territories (e.g. community bus models) which attempt to address issues of poverty, disadvantage and social exclusion. It also highlights the importance of fair transport to build a Territory where all individuals and communities have the resources they need to participate in and benefit from social and economic life.

The paper will raise a number of questions for workshop discussion, and aim to identify some practical solutions which the Northern Territory could put in place.

In preparation for this paper, Jodie Satour (Social Work Student, Deakin University, Geelong) developed a transport survey which was sent to 20+ organisations in Central Australia (primarily Non Government Organisations). 22 questionnaires were completed (covering 22 separate programs across 17 separate agencies), including one agency in Tennant Creek. In addition interviews were held with two other organisations, and reference was made to work done by NT Shelter and the Barkly Regional Transport and Accommodation Group (BRAG) looking at accommodation and transport issues in Tennant Creek. *Time and resource constraints meant that it was only possible to survey agencies from Central Australia.*

SEE ATTACHMENT A OF SURVEY QUESTIONS



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LITERATURE SEARCH

A literature search was undertaken looking at the issue of transport and social inclusion.

Transport is an important contributor to the wellbeing of individuals and communities because it is a means by which people can access a range of human activities for work, social events or other essential services. Transport, however can also be a significant barrier for different groups to fully participate in society.

International studies, particularly those conducted in the United Kingdom, provide a strong evidence base that a lack of suitable and affordable transport can be a significant barrier as many groups within society continue to experience, and be subjected to, what can only be termed as **'transport disadvantage'** (Hine 2006, SEU 2003, Hine and Mitchell 2001).

In Australia, **'transport disadvantage'** is described as, people not having access to community services or where the costs associated with transport for low income households, or their physical location to access public transport services, is prohibitive. Australians who are most likely to experience transport disadvantage are from marginalised groups, such as those on low incomes, women, the elderly, Indigenous Australians, and people with disabilities (Dodson et al 2004).

Research in the United Kingdom found a relationship between transport and social exclusion. Social exclusion is a concept used in contrast to the term poverty and was adopted by the Blair Government which was central to the UK's welfare reform agenda (Saunders 2005).

To tackle socially excluded people and places, in 1997 the Blair Government, established the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) in the cabinet office. The SEU defined social exclusion as:

' a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, low skills, poor housing , family breakdown, high crime rates that lead people or places to be excluded from the mainstream' (SEU 2003).

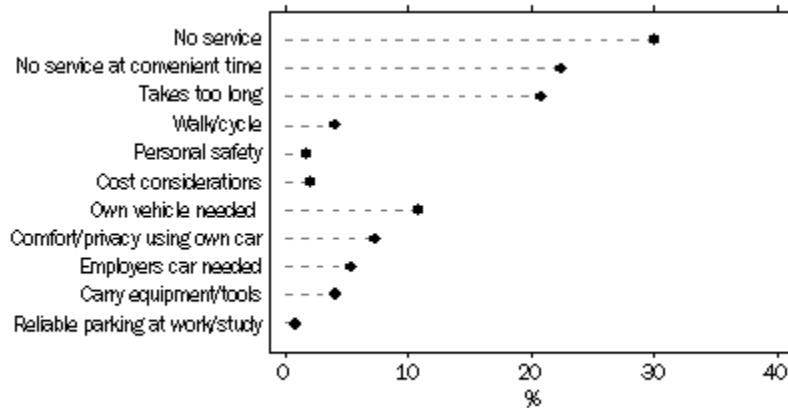
During the SEU's research they found transport problems linked to social inclusion for people on low incomes. This is associated with problems of poor education and physical barriers which prevent people from fully participating in society. They concluded that poor transport therefore, can be a result of or reinforce social exclusion (SEU 2003).

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (2005) reported that the two main reasons for social exclusion in Australia are linked to access and timing of public transport (see graph 24.8). *"Almost a third of people not using public transport (30%) reported that there was no service available in their area. Nearly a quarter (23%) said the public transport service did not suit their time schedule, while a fifth (21%) reported it takes too long to reach work or study via public transport"* (ABS 2005).



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24.8 REASONS FOR NOT USING PUBLIC TRANSPORT — March 2003



Source: *Environmental Issues: People's Views and Practices, 2004 (4602.0)*.

The United Kingdom revealed that people also hold as important not only the proximity of a bus stop or railway station but the directions the buses travel in, their ability to reach a variety of destinations directly or indirectly, the cost of bus travel, the quality of the experience, the conditions of waiting and interchange locations, and above all the service's frequency, reliability and punctuality. Temporal availability of transport was also a concern for many people reported transport affected them when there was no 'public' transport available before or after working hours (Gray et al 2006). Recent surveys in Central Australia on transport revealed similar findings.

Similarly, researchers in the UK identified seven categories of issues that impact on access to transport for people, these include:

- Physical exclusion
- Geographical exclusion
- Exclusion from facilities
- Economic exclusion
- Time based exclusion
- Fear based exclusion and
- Space exclusion (Church et al 2000).

Results in a report from community consultations and telephone polling in all States and Territories on what Australians think are the essentials to make Australia Fair, revealed that twenty five percent of Australians ranked transport as an essential element of a fair society (ACOSS 2006).

So how does the Northern Territory fare?



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PURPOSE OF NTCOSS TRANSPORT SURVEY

The survey attempted to draw out information from organisations in terms of the modes of transport frequently used by clients, barriers to use of certain types of transport and solutions to address the transport issues raised. By no means was this an exhaustive survey – however it does provide a timely snapshot of the issues and barriers facing service users.

It must be noted that the Department of Planning and Infrastructure (DPI) conducted a comprehensive review of public transport services across the Northern Territory in 2007. A number of organisations contributed to this review – and NTCOSS looks forward to outcomes as from this review. While the NTCOSS Transport Survey also covered public transport issues, it had a much broader intent to look at a whole range of transport modes.

Agencies surveyed came from the following sectors:

Aged care
Youth Services
Childrens'/Families' Services
Indigenous Services
Disability Services
Housing Services
Accommodation Providers
Housing Services
Employment Services
Legal Services

Reasons clients require transport services include the following:

Education and transport to school
Medical within town
Medical - remote areas to town centre
Employment
Shopping
Accessing Centrelink, Income Management for food vouchers
Social/recreational use
Other- Mail
Other - Funerals
Other – Interstate Travel

KEY THEMES

A number of themes emerged throughout the survey responses – common to many organisations and client groups including cost, limited operational hours, time waiting for services, lack of accessibility for people with disabilities.

PUBLIC BUS SYSTEM

Service issues identified

- Quote from Service Provider “Bus routes are insufficient to meet the actual need of the community.”
- Limited operational hours during week e.g. runs from 7am to 6pm Mon – Fri; 7am – 12 pm Sat. No public transport on Saturday afternoons, Sundays or evenings
- No public transport in the evenings for outings after 6pm, or for sporting and recreational activities and for Young people who work until after 6pm in the evening, does not allow for shift workers
- Infrequency of buses - Buses run very infrequently during the day with some buses having a 2 hour delay between connections from North to South of town and vice/versa.
- Large distances between stops
- Individual bus routes end at CBD - unless people access a second bus (people can use the same ticket if they get on their final bus within 2 hours of purchasing their ticket)



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- Buses do not travel to industrial areas at all - This has implications for people who need to access the range of social services in the area – to access money/food vouchers/blankets etc)
- Buses do not stop near town camps – this has significant implications for getting town camp children to local schools which don't have their own bus. Refer to the Education section.

Quote from a service provider: “Buses appear to avoid these population groups or communities”

- Bus routes also do not go past major services such as Tangentyere Council or Centrelink, e.g..
- Not enough public transport routes to outlying communities and between remote communities and town - one bush bus trip per week.
- Tennant Creek has no public bus service

Accessibility Issues

- Lack of bus services for people most in need and least likely to have access to a phone or transport - especially those on town camps.
- Costs associated with all means of transport is prohibitive to persons on Disability Support Pension (DSP) or other related benefits – this especially effects elderly clients
- Lack of education and support around utilising public buses in town/concession rates, bus stop locations.
- Time schedule for the bus is not widely known or understood. Some people are unable to read the timetable – which is not user friendly.
- Lack of appropriate signage on transport infrastructure, including informational brochures & timetables.
- There is not enough information about the use of public transport and how to access it, costs and the process of getting concessions and how to utilise it.
- Limited wheelchair anchorages on public buses.
- Transport is required that provides services for the elderly to shop and socialise at reasonable times.
- Town Camps and Public housing residents require education and support around utilizing public buses in town.
- Accessibility for those with agility problems

Quote from a service provider: “My experience is that people are scared of town buses and will not use them.”

Gaps in links between Public buses and other transport modes

- The Alice Springs Train station location does not connect with a public bus service
- People have to travel some distance on foot to get to the Greyhound bus as no public buses run during some of these times.

COMMERCIAL TRANSPORT OPTIONS - A FOCUS ON THE BARKLY REGION

There are particular issues for residents of the Tennant Creek/Barkly Area in using the commercial bus service. Specific issues arise for people from remote communities who travel into Tennant Creek on their way to larger centers such as Alice Springs or Adelaide for medical appointments/treatment.

Service issues identified

- The combination of a lack of short term/ hostel accommodation and the lack of a plane service, public transport or a taxi service (after hours) means that people are regularly forced to use the Greyhound Bus Service – which leaves at 3.10 am (to Alice Springs).
- Many people have no choice but to wait in the lounge room of the Tennant Creek Hospital from the evening until 2am, in order to be taken to the bus stop to travel to Alice Springs
- Figures from the Tennant Creek Hospital indicate that for a one month period (Oct/Nov 2007 - total of 47 patients, careers and children. This is a far from satisfactory arrangement – as there is nowhere in the lounge room to sleep, no meals are provided and it is very difficult for parents to



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contain small children for long periods in such a setting. Particularly unsatisfactory arrangement for antenatal mothers from the Barkly Region (including Town and remote) who have to go to Alice Springs for medical appointments and childbirth.

- The return bus journey from Alice Springs to Tennant Creek is also problematic, returning at 2.10 am. Clients at times are forced to wait at the BP Petrol Station until daybreak, because of a lack of available accommodation and transport – which raises issues of safety and security.
- Lack of transport arrangements from communities precludes clients traveling back, from being picked up along the highway, which could save the further trip to Tennant Creek and the subsequent wait to return home.

- *Quotes from a service provider: “People catch Greyhound buses and generally are comfortable [but] the timetable of the greyhound bus is not very safe for our clients traveling back to Tennant Creek”*
- *“People are left wandering around town until they catch the evening bus back to Tennant Creek – which also arrives back there at 3.10 am. No taxis available at that time”*

- “Most people prefer Bush Bus [travels to Tennant Creek 3 times per week) which is very accessible” for general users of the service – but there is no wheelchair access on the bush bus. There is also no wheelchair access on Greyhound buses – which has implications for people with disabilities
- The train arrives in early hours of the morning in Tennant Creek when coming from both Alice Springs and Darwin - hours are too late and it isn't really a train stop for passengers
- The train has limited access for people with disabilities. Problematic moving from carriage to carriage. No station at Tennant Creek (or Katherine) with appropriate facilities for embarking & disembarking. No platform. Costly.
- In the Barkly region, NGO use their own vehicles to cover gaps, as there is nothing in town or across the Barkly that caters specific to transport needs of individuals or families.
- Lack of agencies in Tennant Creek who can generally assist with costs for transport

TRANSPORT FOR SCHOOL CHILDREN

Transport for school students is an issue which has been identified in successive NTCOSS Budget Submissions as a major barrier to school attendance for many Indigenous children. This is particularly the case for children from town camps and from outlying communities and outstations”. In some areas, there are no public transport options at all.

Service issues identified

- Lack of access to public transport for school children living on town camps, and outstations west or north of the town - these students are denied access to school.
- Difficulty for families to have their children attend local schools which may offer the appropriate supportive learning environments for the individual child if public buses do not cover town camps
- Public school buses cater for Government schools and largely the non Indigenous areas of town - they do not cater for the most disadvantaged Indigenous children in the town camps/outstations.
- One independent school currently provides transport to 200 children - but is not specifically funded to do so – which detracts from spending on other education areas. (Also: Barriers to accessing Government assistance to Indigenous parents or to the school for transport to the school).

Recommendation 7.2 from NTCOSS PBS 2008-09

Allocate funding responsibility for education transport to specific Government Departments
Provide funding to an Indigenous community organisation to transport children to school, particularly those from town camps. [This would ideally be delivered through an Indigenous organisation which is already working with the children and families in a family-support role]
Actively promote flexible funding options for remote school transport funding— e.g. through use of conveyancing funds.



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These recommendations would support a premise of the Education Act 6. (b) which states that the Minister may: “in such manner and to such extent as he thinks fit, provide or arrange for the transport of children to and from any school and may pay the whole or any portion of the cost of transporting any children to an from any school.” However it appears at present that no Government Department has responsibility for school transport. Planning and development of further transport options is essential to ensure that all students can access their right to an education.

TAXIS

Service issues identified

- Taxis are very expensive and costly for low income and disadvantaged consumers.
- Reports of people are often taken advantage of by taxis drivers taking their key cards from them to pay for their fare.
- Taxi vouchers are limited and not accessible to all people.
- The response time of the taxi service can be slow.
- There are numerous examples of inconsistent pricing on some trips.
- Some people feel comfortable using taxis however the cost can be prohibitive.

Quotes from Service Providers: “Anecdotal stories of passenger exploitation have been difficult to prove, although these concerns are consistently being voiced to our agency”

“High cost and people are abused, key cards are taken etc”

MINI BUSES

Service issues identified

- Costly particularly for those most isolated in society but often the only mode of transport available for the people with disabilities/or frail aged – but these service can be a cheaper option for some passengers (compared to taxis) due to shared cost arrangements.
- Often mini buses are unavailable.
- Often people do not have phones to access mini buses so they rely on other services to phone.
- Need to have mini buses that are equipped to have access for people in wheel chairs as this is often the only mode of transport available for people with disabilities or frail aged - to better meet community and clients needs.

- *Quotes from Service Provider: “The cost of the fares and issues of passenger exploitation and the attitudes by some of the mini bus drivers towards their passengers has been voiced as a concern anecdotally to our agency.”*

“Some bad practice anecdotal stories from our clients of mini bus practice have been grog running, key card holding and art dealing. “

“Driver attitudes, Access for wheelchairs, cost prohibitive”... “lift fee”

TRAIN

Service issues identified

- Station’s location (Alice Springs) does not connect with a public bus service
- Distance from and lack of service provided to get to town from the train station
- Expensive - but people generally will choose the train over the bus due to space and comfort. More people using the train to Darwin (from an Alice Springs service provider)
- Late hours is an issue
- Some wheelchairs are too large to use on the train and costs of the Ghan for travel to Adelaide or Darwin



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- Trains are too expensive for someone on a pension
- Limited access on train for people with disability. Problematic moving from carriage to carriage.
- No station at Tennant Creek or Katherine with appropriate facilities for embarking & disembarking. No platform. (it isn't really a train stop for passengers)
- If required for travel interstate to access medical support it can be very long and tedious journey for the aged, frail or people with disabilities.

BUSH BUS

Service issues identified

- Bush bus is currently the only transport available for NPY communities.
- Bush Bus is not frequent enough with it's service - it needs to service more communities.
- Bush bus often won't take a client unless a carer accompanies them.
- Bush Bus does not cater for people who are in a wheel chair for transport from remote communities to Alice Springs.
- However, Bush Bus does allow people to have fares deducted from Centrelink payments

FURTHER GAPS

Regular plane services to communities in Central Australia have ceased since local company collapsed two years ago. Without reliable cars that can cope with bush roads most people cannot plan for events that involve travel. People have to rely on family, or community workers to give them lifts - any form of transport is costly.

ISSUES FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

- Mini buses cannot be accessed because of disability access issues.
- The Taxi service is often poor & slow to respond to client need. Waiting times can sometimes exceed an hour period.
- Some wheelchairs are too large to use on the train
- Costs of the Ghan for travel to Adelaide or Darwin too expensive for people of a pension
- Plane travel too expensive & restrictive due to Disability Support Pension (DSP) income
- Wheelchair access to aircraft travel is dependant on size, height & width of wheelchair and also dependant on the structural size of the aircraft accessing certain routes across Australia.
- Smaller type aircraft can not carry wheelchairs as baggage due to the size of the hold.
- Air travel for people in wheelchairs is difficult. For people with other disability types e.g. Autism, it can be very costly when having to pay two fares.
- Tennant Creek has no public bus service – and there is no wheel chair access on bush bus or Greyhound – which has implications for people with disabilities
- For some client groups, organisations have no other choice but to purchase vehicles and assist clients in from getting from a to b. Such organisations are not funded for vehicles so ultimately resources are stretched to allow for this – but without it, many clients of the service would not even be able to do their grocery shopping or get to medical appointments.
- Access to prison for visits is limited to mini bus services or specific times and days – this has implications for people with disabilities
- Costs associated with all means of transport is prohibitive to persons on DSP or other related benefits.

REMOTE COMMUNITY TRANSPORT ISSUES

- No regional public transport strategy. Limited services only e.g. Bush Bus, Tangentyere - return to country. Need to acknowledge mobility as a legitimate social demographic pattern.
- Availability to remote communities, infrequent services and costs and the timing of particular services.
- Children traveling with our clients over long distances is difficult and expensive.
- No regular services to most remote communities - e.g. example of Bush Bus leaving on one day to return to the community 8 days later – which leaves clients with accommodation issues.



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- 3am departure from Tennant Creek to Alice Springs is tiring for clients and the bus system seldom takes peoples needs into account.
- Planes are very expensive but sometimes it is the only way services can get clients into Alice Springs.
- Costs of sending drivers to collect clients is very high i.e. driver wages, accommodation and fuel. Limited access to vehicles for people with a disability.
- Bush Bus is not frequent enough with its service. It needs to service more communities.
- Bush bus often won't take a client unless a carer accompanies them.
- Both bush bus and the plane do not cater for people who are in a wheel chair in the remote community to come to Alice Springs.
- Western Australian medical patients, living in Alice Springs, who return to their WA community to visit, and are subsequently medically evacuated are taken to Perth Hospital – rather than Alice Springs. Once discharged from Hospital (Perth), they cannot be returned to Alice springs, unless there is a direct RFDS flight returning to Alice Springs. People are then stranded in Perth until they can find a ride home.

PATIENT TRAVEL ASSISTANCE SCHEME (PATS)

Issues/Barriers

- PATS reimbursement scheme prohibits many from utilisng scheme (if they do not have money up front in their budget)
- Nightly assistance cost of \$33.00 per night, totally inadequate in today's current economic climate, not realistic & creates a considerable burden on consumer as well as family. (The \$33 per night does work well for Indigenous clients as full cost of accommodation at Aboriginal Hostels is covered by PATS fee.) But other accommodation much more expensive.
- Often accommodation for people with disability is twice as expensive due to the need for wheelchair access which is often not available at cheaper rental accommodation places.

Quotes from Service Provider: "Generally PATS appears to work for our clients however some family members often require additional support but are unable to have another person accompany them e.g. mother of a sick child will be required to travel interstate without her partner or other children."

- PATS don't pay for family members to be with the client (unless they are deemed a medical escort). If an escort is not provided for, a family member may find themselves paying \$80-120 per night in accommodation costs in Adelaide, Alice Springs or Darwin.
- Actual costs not covered if individuals take their own cars (Tennant Creek Service Provider) - 15c per km reimbursement for car travel. And patients have to wait significant periods for reimbursement of costs (up to 2 months). If people have insufficient funds for a subsequent trip – then treatment is compromised.
- PATS don't always cover costs for the entire trip i.e. taxis from and to the airport not covered – but taxis trips to and from Greyhound bus are subsidised.
- Lack of accommodation facilities for non-Aboriginal people in many centres
- Specific issues for Barkly residents:
- The PATS Scheme is mainly limited to the use of buses, which have an unsuitable timetable.



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- Government services have expectations that people leave Tennant Creek at 3.10 am to attend medical appointments in Alice Springs the same day and travel back to Tennant Creek late in the evening.
- Winter time is another big issue as people do not want to travel and the worry is that they won't come back to Tennant Creek - but people may not have anywhere safe to stay in Alice Springs for the day.
- Additional issue – paying for fuel and accommodation in advance and waiting for reimbursement. Some people (particularly seniors) are choosing not to have treatment in Alice Springs because they are not in a financial position to cover costs.

- *Quotes from Service Provider: “Transport is not accessible and is often not taken into consideration by the hospital in Alice Springs. Personal situations not taken into consideration.”*

Things that work well with PATS

- Some services felt that the PATS scheme works well generally – but obviously it would be better if people did not have to travel for health care.
- Where flexible support arrangements are allowed i.e. support persons for interpreting/emotional support, it works well.
- The \$33 per night works where accommodation is charged at this same rate – i.e. at Aboriginal Hostels

TRANSPORT ISSUES - SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS/IMPACT ON COST OF LIVING

- Buses do not travel to industrial areas at all - This has implications for people who need to access the range of social services in the area – to access money/food vouchers/blankets etc)
- Many clients live in town camps beyond the general bus routes. This means money is spent regularly on taxis rather than food essentials.
- Buses do not stop near town camps, which limits people who are most isolated to access town/shops etc, therefore rely on taxis.
- There are not enough public transport routes to outlying communities and between remote communities and town – there is only one bush bus trip per week for many communities.
- Because there are very few options that provide day trips to town for people from remote communities – people traveling in then face accommodation issues in town – which eats into scarce finances (especially people on restricted incomes with young children)
- People missing medical appointments because of transport difficulties
- People may choose not to have particular medical treatment because of transport difficulties/costs/logistics – e.g. patients may choose not to undergo chemotherapy if it means a 5 hour trip on a bus from Tennant Creek to Alice Springs; and a five hour return journey
- When people cannot get into town, they simply miss out on town based service which are not available on their communities.
- A gap exists in transport costs for funerals - No one assists with this and it is beyond the scope of Emergency Relief services.

SOLUTIONS – TO GAPS IN TRANSPORT SERVICE PROVISION

Review the Alice Springs public bus routes, accessibility and timetable

- Increase bus times - run buses on Sundays. Provide a regular hourly service in the evenings until 10pm that is a loop service that covers the Alice Springs suburbs i.e. North, East, South West.
- More frequent bus services that have shorter wait times between bus services.
- Increase bus routes to include all town camps and locations that are used NGO clients
- Visible stops, education and information on the routes, concessions etc. Promote wider community
- Town Camps and Public housing residents require education and support around utilising public buses in town, concession rates, bus stop locations etc.



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Regional public transport network required

- Provision of a regular subsidised (public) bus service to isolated communities in outer regions
- Many remote community buses are under-utilised and could be coordinated to operate regional transport.
- Ensure provision of Community Buses which are appropriate to meet the road conditions
- Bus routes that provided for day trips to communities (such as Ntaria, Papunya and Yuendumu which are within reach of a day visit would reduce the need for accommodation services in town
NOTE: This would greatly assist clients with their needs and remove pressure on services to fund accommodation as a result of infrequent transport options. It would also improve remote area access to town based services for our clients (which are often not available on remote communities) without being too disruptive or expensive.
- (Subsidised) transport to and from communities for sporting events
- Ensure that Bush Bus is adequately funded to keep existing service going and to extend routes and number of runs each week.
- Flexible funding to allow for agencies that travel out to communities, to give lifts and be reimbursed for costs.
- Flexible funding to allow for fuel costs reimbursement for family who bring people into town if purpose of visit is health treatment or to deal with government, etc
- Help people who are stuck in town to get home to remote communities (Tangentyere Return to Country does this but needs adequate funding).

Transport services to and from essential services

- Create a regular community bus service supported by government but on a user reduced fee structure (subsidised). Especially revolving around services to hospital & other NGO & government services as required by the passenger. Could be on a donation basis. There are examples of this type of service currently operating in other states.
- Transport to and from hospital to reduce the burden on other services not funded for this e.g. Night Patrol.
- Integrate outreach health services with existing transport services.
- Align bus services of NGO's with service of other organisations – e.g. medical, shopping, meetings etc.
- An Aboriginal controlled bus service within town camps or extensions of existing town services to include town camps.
- Provision of smaller accessible buses to run more frequently & to widen the bus routes to include other areas to enable improved access to community, especially for employment opportunities.
- Government to provide resources such as a bus and funding for an Organisation to provide this service.
- A transport system for people with disabilities who are unable to utilise mainstream services i.e. access to prison is limited to mini bus or specific times and days.
- Up grade of Vouchers for private Transport (taxis) for those in need of transport to travel to and from the hospital and other medical appointments.
- More services or similar type buses available like Bush Bus to different locations in town.

Education and Transport

- Explore transport options for schools who do not offer a bus service.
- An agreement should be made to fund Yipirinya school to run its school bus services which provide for the most disadvantaged Indigenous students in town. This could be worked out on a per capita basis if necessary related to the contractors costs for the government schools bus run. However allowance should be made for the longer distances and the unsealed roads. It should be noted that Yipirinya school bus runs provide a community service in that Indigenous bus drivers are offered employment and the bus also provides services for parents in need e.g. transport to congress medical centre.
- *Support for flexibility with funding for remote areas – such as options for pooling the petrol conveyancing allowance to create other transport options – need to be promoted.*



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The needs of People with Disabilities

- Transport system for people with disabilities who are unable to utilise mainstream services i.e. access to prison is limited to mini bus or specific times and days.
- Explore possible subsidies for those individuals with a disability - low income (where NT Taxi Subsidy Scheme does not apply)
- Better utilisation of current NGO buses with hydraulic ramps for people with disability to expand their service to provide transport for indigenous persons & others to access services & employment opportunities.

PATS Scheme

- Each PATS application should be considered individually and not be subject to a blanket interpretation.
- PATS Administration staff should meet regularly with Disability, Aged and other community groups to discuss concerns.
- Pre-payment system to be established – where
- Greater flexibility for carers to escort patients – not only based on physical need, but for practical and emotional support
- Guidelines to enable cancer patients to exercise choice, regardless of State/Territory borders, to the specialist centre most suited to their treatment and family support needs

A number of recommendations (18 in all) are made in the position paper developed by the National Rural Health Alliance Inc 'Transport and Accommodation Assistance for Health Patients from Rural and Remote Areas' (October 2005)

While in principle Medicare provides low cost in-patient treatment for everyone, such services are not always provided in rural and remote areas, so patients have to travel. Being able to physically get to the required treatment is an essential component of equitable access. Unfortunately the hidden cost-shift to these patients means that patients with limited funds often choose not to travel, and this reality contributes significantly to the higher mortality rates in rural and remote areas. (National Rural Health Alliance Position Paper, 2005).

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE NT MINISTER FOR HEALTH RE PATS SCHEME (13 April 2008)

Subsequent to the collation of the results of the NTCOSS Transport Survey, a \$2 million announcement was made by Dr Chris Burns, Minister for Health – which addresses a number of the issues raised by survey respondents. These reforms are much welcomed, however serious gaps remain in relation to specific transport options for Territorians.

- The \$2 million will enable:
- all Territorians travelling interstate for treatment to travel with a family member, friend or carer
- an increase in the commercial accommodation rate from \$33 a night to \$35 a night – making NT scheme equal top among Australian jurisdictions
- an allowance of \$40 per return trip to interstate patients for travel to and from airports and accommodation
- a new support and coordination officer for the PATS program in Adelaide
- an upgraded IT system and additional administrative staff in the Territory to better deliver the administrative side of the scheme

ISSUES WHICH REQUIRE FURTHER CONSIDERATION

- Prisoner repatriation is an unmet need.
- Better monitoring of private taxi services. Education campaign about rights to do with fares.
- Addressing transport needs brought about by Federal Intervention in the NT. The Income Management scheme has altered the way many town camp and remote community residents meet their shopping needs. Good reliable transport is required to ensure people can access the stores (e.g. major supermarkets - where people spend store cards) - in the major town centres.



Fair Transport – How do we get there?

CONCLUSION

It is clear that a lack of accessible and affordable and regular transport options significantly disadvantages many Territorians, adding to costs of living and limiting access to health, education, employment and other services.

It seems incredible that public buses, for example, effectively bypass the overwhelming majority of town camps in Alice Springs and that towns the size of Tennant Creek (and Katherine) have no access to public transport at all. A lack of transport options forces many low income people to spend excessive amounts of money on transport services such as taxis and minibuses, to meet their basic needs for banking, shopping and food. Money spent on transport reduces money available for essential items, further exacerbating poverty and social exclusion for people who are low income and already face significant poverty and disadvantage.

It is also extraordinary that in 2008 there are students on town camps, attending public schools who do not have the same access to public transport as students in other areas of the town. If we are serious about addressing Indigenous disadvantage, this situation must be addressed as a matter of the utmost urgency! If we fail to see the link between transport and education, then I fear that we will fail to see the educational outcomes that are vital to positive life outcomes for Indigenous children.

A lack of transport to and from remote communities means scarce financial resources are used on travel, or people simply miss out on accessing services and medical treatment in the bigger centres. At times this means that people have to make life choices which seriously compromise their health. When we are talking about a population that already face a 17 year difference in life expectancy, the current state of affairs of transport is totally unacceptable. In a period when the Territory has been experiencing sustained economic growth, it is unfair that many Territorians continue to miss out on access to basic services.

Our lack of an adequate transport system for the majority of the Northern Territory simply perpetuates poverty and disadvantage for thousands of Territorians. We will not have a fair Northern Territory until we establish affordable transport services which meet the needs of all Territorians, so we all can participate fully in social and community life.

We must ask ourselves what will be the long term economic and social costs of not improving the standard of transport services across the Northern Territory.



Fair Transport – How do we get there?

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Fair Transport – How do we get there?

Attachment A: Greyhound Bus times for Travel to and from Tennant Creek:

Tennant Creek to Alice Springs – departs Tennant Creek 3.10 am
Alice Springs to Tennant Creek – arrives Tennant Creek 2.10 am
Tennant Creek to Darwin – departs Tennant Creek 3.25 am
Darwin to Tennant Creek – arrives Tennant Creek 1.50 am

Attachment B: Bush Bus times for Travel to and from Tennant Creek:

Bush Bus travels from Alice Springs to Tennant Creek twice per week – Wednesdays & Saturdays.
Departs Alice Springs 8am approx– Arrives Tennant Creek 4 pm
Travels from Tennant Creek to Alice Springs twice per week – Thursdays & Sundays
Departs Tennant Creek 8am approx– Arrives Alice Springs 4 pm
The Bush Bus picks up and drops off passengers at various stops on the way: e.g.
Ali Curung , McLaren Creek, Barrow Creek, Aileron, Tara, Stirling, Wauchope, Wilora, 6 mile,
(Cost of full trip \$95 cash; \$105 – purchase orders/credit – with a sliding scale for shorter journeys)



Fair Transport – How do we get there?

Attachment C

NTCOSS Northern Territory Community Sector Transport Survey March 08

Name of organisation

Name of person completing this survey

Position

Contact phone number

Contact email address

1	What is your main client base? (Please tick the relevant box)				Any Comments
	Aged	<input type="checkbox"/>	01	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	Disability	<input type="checkbox"/>	02	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	Women	<input type="checkbox"/>	03	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	Youth	<input type="checkbox"/>	04	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	Families	<input type="checkbox"/>	05	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	Men	<input type="checkbox"/>	06	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	Other- please state	<input type="checkbox"/>	07	<input type="checkbox"/>	



Fair Transport – How do we get there?

2	What are the issues/barriers for people using the following existing forms of transport? (Please provide any comments in the space below)			
	Public Buses		01	
	Taxis		02	
	Mini Buses		03	
	Train		04	
	Other i.e. assistance with costs associated with transport		04	



Fair Transport – How do we get there?

6	Can your organisation offer any suggestions on possible practical solutions on transport? (Please provide any comments in the space below)
	<p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p>



Fair Transport – How do we get there?

Attachment D

Dr Chris Burns
MINISTER FOR HEALTH
April 13, 2008

\$2 Million Boost for PATS (Media Release)

Budget 2008 continues to deliver for Territory families with an additional \$2 million to support Territorians using the Patient Assistance Travel Scheme (PATS).

Health Minister Chris Burns said the changes to the PATS program will deliver extra support to thousands of Territory families this year.

“The Northern Territory Government is making a significant investment into PATS so it better meets the needs of Territorians who have to travel for medical treatment,” Dr Burns said.

The \$2 million will enable:

- all Territorians traveling interstate for treatment to travel with a family member, friend or carer
- an increase in the commercial accommodation rate from \$33 a night to \$35 a night – making the Territory’s scheme equal top among Australian jurisdictions
- an allowance of \$40 per return trip to interstate patients for travel to and from airports and accommodation
- a new support and coordination officer for the PATS program in Adelaide
- an upgraded IT system and additional administrative staff in the Territory to better deliver the administrative side of the scheme

“Traveling interstate or to Territory hospitals for medical treatment when you are sick can be very stressful. I know many patients take strength in having family or friends travel with them,” Dr Burns said.

“I know the taxi travel allowance will also be greatly appreciated by those who find themselves in a strange city with no transport.

“A coordinator based in Adelaide will provide personal support to patients and their families – particularly the large number of patients suffering from cancer or heart problems who travel to Adelaide for specialised treatment.”

Since 2004, the number of people using PATS has increased by 24% and patient escorts have increased by 33%.”

Last financial year more than 20,000 people used PATS at a cost of about \$11 million. “The Henderson Government is committed to investing in what matters to Territory families,” said Dr Burns.

Media contact: Andrea Adlam 0401 119467



Fair Transport – How do we get there?

Appendix E

Additional transport issues raised at the NTCOSS Conference 18 April 2008

General Issues

Suggestion to have a Transport Users Group to identify and represent transport barriers/issues etc.

People with a disability perceive that they are ranked low in terms of needs for public transport

Taxi exploitation for people with disabilities – e.g. of the Victorian Government introducing a ‘cap’ that taxis can charge - this could work in the Northern Territory.

Impact of transport issues on Incarceration rates – a substantial number of Aboriginal people are incarcerated as a result of driving offences e.g. driving while disqualified. (It was suggested that evidence could be obtained from Police Statistics.) Need increased driver education services to remote communities and improved regional transport services.

Environment/Green issues – we must reduce the carbon footprint - People want to use public transport, but are dissuaded because of the poor service

Qn raised as to whether there is a ‘Disaster Welfare’ response in relation to transport in case of cyclones and emergency – i.e. where transport is available for all people to get to safety.

Darwin/Palmerston area

Regular Express Bus Services needed between Darwin – Palmerston – Casuarina

Lack of transport between Darwin and Remote communities - families get stranded in town

Bus Interchanges – Casuarina and Palmerston – commuters cop the hot sun (no architecture considerations in design of bus interchanges)

Distinct drop off in services since privatisation 5-6 years ago (BusLink took over from Darwin City Council)

Palmerston city has no bus stop past the village area - Palmerston residents have been asking for additional bus stops to access mainstream services.

The Palmerston public transport system to the Royal Darwin Hospital is poorly timed and does not connect with other essential services. There are other areas in the Palmerston region where this occurs.

School bus service - Darwin has separate bus services for school bus routes which appear to be a duplication of services.



Fair Transport – How do we get there?

Northern Suburbs

This population has a large number of people who are on low incomes

There is not much transport – people often have to wait in the hot sun for a bus - this can lead to people wandering around – leads to ‘stigma’ (e.g. all teens are trouble) as people are waiting to go back to their community

Jabiru

No transport services unless there is a medical reason (Need to fly into RDH)

There are 13 outstations – with no access to public transport

Lack of transport impacts on education for children

East Arnhem

Lack of Regional Public Transport from Gove to communities

Aboriginal Airlines ceased (Maintenance services are lacking in Gove)

People rely on charters – which cost considerable more

