



**Northern Territory Council of Social Service Inc.**

*Working for a fair and inclusive Northern Territory*

# **NTCOSS Submission to the Northern Territory Government Integrated Transport Planning and Investment Roadmap’.**

Email to: [policy.transport@nt.gov.au](mailto:policy.transport@nt.gov.au)

<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>P 3</b>
<b>TRANSPORT – A CRITICAL SOCIAL ISSUE NATIONALLY AND INTERNATIONALLY</b>	<b>P 3</b>
<b>TRANSPORT IN THE NT: THE CONTEXT FOR LOW INCOME AND DISADVANTAGED TERRITORIANS</b>	<b>P 3</b>
<b>RECENT AND CURRENT GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES</b>	<b>P 4</b>
<b>NTCOSS POLICY AND ADVOCACY WORK RELATED TO: TRANSPORT</b>	<b>P 5</b>
<b>FOCUS OF THE CURRENT SUBMISSION</b>	<b>P 6</b>
<b>PASSENGER TRANSPORT SERVICES AND INFRASTRUCTURE NEEDS</b>	<b>P 6</b>
Public Transport	P 6
Minibuses and Taxis	P 8
Bush Bus Services – central Australia & Katherine regions	P 9
Greyhound Bus	P 11
Trains	P 11
Aviation Services	P 12
<b>TRANSPORT EXPENDITURE BY LOW INCOME HOUSEHOLDS</b>	<b>P 13</b>
<b>WHO IS MOST IMPACTED BY GAPS IN TRANSPORT SERVICES?</b>	<b>P 13</b>
Medical Service Users	P 13
People with Disability	P 14
Remote Communities, Homelands and Outstations	P 15
<b>TENNANT CREEK AND THE BARKLY - A focus on issues affecting one region</b>	<b>P 15</b>
<b>ALICE SPRINGS TOWN CAMPS TRANSPORT ISSUES – A focus on issues affecting Town Camps in one region</b>	<b>P 16</b>
<b>SCHOOL TRANSPORT FOR CHILDREN FROM TOWN CAMPS</b>	<b>P 20</b>
<b>DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNITY TRANSPORT OPTIONS– The missing piece in the puzzle!</b>	<b>P 18</b>
<b>FUTURE GROWTH IN THE TOP END</b>	<b>P 23</b>
<b>ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS</b>	<b>P 23</b>
<b>ROAD AND BRIDGE INFRASTRUCTURE PROVISION</b>	<b>P 24</b>
<b>MOTOR VEHICLE REGISTRY SERVICES</b>	<b>P 25</b>
<b>CONCLUSION</b>	<b>P 26</b>
<b>Appendix A Town Camps and distances from Bus Stops</b>	<b>P 25</b>
<b>Appendix B: Key service Quality Elements for a Public Transport System</b>	<b>P 26</b>
<b>Appendix C: Guide to Urban Public Transport Quality</b>	<b>P 27</b>

## INTRODUCTION

NTCOSS is a peak body for the community sector in the NT and is a voice for people affected by social and economic disadvantage and inequality. The community sector in the NT is made up of community managed, non-government, not for profit organisations who work in social and community service delivery, sector development and advocacy. The community sector plays a vital role in creating social wellbeing for all Territorians and in building safe and healthy communities by providing services that enable people to access and participate in health services, education, employment, economic development, and family and community life.

## TRANSPORT – A CRITICAL SOCIAL ISSUE NATIONALLY AND INTERNATIONALLY

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)<sup>1</sup>. 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).

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2005<sup>2</sup>), the two main reasons for social exclusion in Australia are linked to access and timing of public transport . *“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”*.

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)<sup>3</sup>. Surveys in Central Australia on transport in 2009, revealed similar findings. 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<sup>4</sup>).

## TRANSPORT IN THE NT:THE CONTEXT FOR LOW INCOME AND DISADVANTAGED TERRITORIANS

Transport and the cost of transport are issues affecting all Territorians, and cut across a range of community service sectors and impact on all geographical areas – urban, regional and remote - 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 and other essential services, recreational and social activities and to fully participate in society. In addition lack of access to transport can add

---

1

2

3 ADD REFERENCE DETAILS

4 ADD DETAILS

to the costs of living. The limited availability of public and community transport impacts on forces many low-income people to rely on other more expensive forms of transport (taxis, minibuses) to meet their everyday needs. 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. Access to transport is clearly an important contributor to the wellbeing of individuals and communities.

Our lack of an adequate transport system for the majority of the Northern Territory simply perpetuates poverty and disadvantage for thousands of Territorians. Affordable transport services must be established which meet the needs of all Territorians, so we all can participate fully in social and community life.

### **RECENT AND CURRENT GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES**

Recent years have seen additional funding for improved public bus services in the Greater Darwin area (with the relatively new semi-express Casuarina-Darwin-Palmerston orbital services improving efficiencies in the public transport system) and some improvement in access to Alice Springs public buses for some town camps in Alice Springs – with 7 of the 18 Town Camps now having bus stops much closer than they were before. In addition, further funding was allocated to construct bus turnaround areas at some Alice Springs Town Camps – which will see further improvements down the track. New school bus-stops were set up near Alice Springs town camps early in 2009, however appropriate support is still required to assist children to access this transport.

There have also been very significant improvements in relation to the establishment (or upgrades) of bus shelter installations (which meets disability standards) and bus timetables (across Darwin/Palmerston and Alice Springs), helping to make catching public transport a more attractive option. This included new school bus-stops which were set up near Alice Springs town camps early in 2009, however supports were required to assist in the transition period to assist children to access this transport.

NTCOSS has also welcomed in the relatively recent additional funding put into the trial of remote passenger transport services in Katherine and Yirrkala; and the expansion of bush bus services across central Australia, with many of these changes part of the *'NT Integrated Regional Transport Strategy - Transport for our regions'*. There are now 16 remote communities, in central Australia (including the Barkly), where regular bush bus routes operate. In the Katherine region, the Bodhi bus now provides transport from Katherine to 5 remote communities as well as to Darwin, including the most recent return services from Katherine to: Borroloola and Katherine to Numbulwar via Ngukurr. In the central Australian region recent advancements have seen the Alice Springs to Yuendumu run extended to allow for Nyirrpri to be covered; as well as additional routes added from Alice Springs to Areyonga via Ntaria; to Santa Teresa; to Titjikala and to Elliott and to Epenarra and Canteen Creek. *(Initially the Elliott run was based from Tennant Creek which meant that it provided a direct service between Epenarra, and Canteen Creek to Tennant Creek (and return), however due to an inability to recruit local drivers the service was altered to be based out of Alice Springs, which means there are no longer the connections between Tennant Creek with Epenarra and Canteen Creek).*

All of these additional services have gone some way towards making transport more accessible (and in some cases more affordable) for more people – and is a vast improvement on what was in place only a few short years ago. However many gaps and needs remain, as some remote communities still have no public or commercial

transport options, so more however needs to be done urgently. Transport for remote community residents, both between communities and into major centres, remains a prime concern, as well as transport within towns and around such as Tennant Creek, Katherine and Nhulunbuy. The population of remote Indigenous townships is increasing at a much greater rate than the larger regional centres, making it imperative that planning for public and other transport infrastructure to ensure timely and affordable transport services be given the highest priority.

## **NTCOSS POLICY AND ADVOCACY WORK RELATED TO TRANSPORT**

Access to transport services for Territorians is an issue which NTCOSS has highlighted over many years, through media and Government submissions and is critical to the health and wellbeing of all Territorians. NTCOSS is particularly concerned about low income and disadvantaged Territorians in this context.

Each year NTCOSS consults with non Government, community based organisations in developing its Pre-Budget Submission. Over the last decade, these consultations have highlighted many issues that are related to the lack of transport services and the issues this has an impact on, such as health, education and employment - which have been highlighted in many of NTCOSS Pre-Budget submissions.

In addition to these annual consultations, NTCOSS conducted a Transport Survey in Alice Springs (2008); conducted Regional Transport Forums (Katherine, Tennant Creek and Alice Springs, 2009), has presented at Conferences in relation to transport issues (NTCOSS Conferences 2008, 2011, 2013; CDU Symposium 2010); and fairly recently, auspiced a Community Transport Project in Tennant Creek (2012). This latter project led to the establishment of Tennant Creek Transport Inc. (TCT), a not-for profit transport organisation<sup>5</sup>.

While some advancements have been made in recent years, with an increase in bush bus services in terms of geographic coverage and frequency; increases in public bus routes, with routes more accessible to more town camps, and changes to the Patient Travel and Assistance Scheme - there are a number of outstanding issues which non-Government organisations have brought to NTCOSS' attention over a long period of time, which we believe will provide useful information to feed into the Roadmap consultation.

*This submission has a heavy slant towards issues in central Australia (and particularly Tennant Creek), which reflects the amount of policy work and consultation which has been done there. But it is our belief that many of the examples provided have resonance across the whole of the Northern Territory.*

## **FOCUS OF THE CURRENT SUBMISSION**

NTCOSS appreciates the complex nature of the development of appropriate transport services across the NT and welcomes the opportunity to provide some input into this consultation process in relation to transport issue. While the roadmap will incorporate a number of focused strategies, plans, reviews and reforms covering

---

<sup>5</sup> The purpose of Tennant Creek Transport Inc is to:

- Address transport disadvantage in the Barkly region in whatever form it takes through the provision of passenger transport services;
- Assist people, who have no ready access to private transport, to access services and take part in activities of their choice;
- Encourage healthy, active transport options such as walking or cycling; and
- Facilitate the development of suitable transport infrastructure such as transit centres or bus stops

TCT will also work to establish a vehicle register and driver pool and provision of information about transport options. TCT website: [www.tennantcreektransport.org](http://www.tennantcreektransport.org)

five broad areas, given NTCOSS' role in addressing poverty and disadvantage in the Northern Territory, this submission will primarily address one of the focus areas; namely:

- **Passenger transport services and infrastructure needs including aviation, public transport and commercial passenger vehicle requirements**

However the submission will make some (limited) comments about the following two focus areas

- **Road and bridge infrastructure provision**
- **Motor Vehicle Registry services**

## **PASSENGER TRANSPORT SERVICES AND INFRASTRUCTURE NEEDS**

### **Public Transport**

Public transport in the Northern Territory has improved significantly since 2010, with increased services, expansion of routes, and installation of shelters in both the Top End and Alice Springs – as noted above. A few Town Camps, not previously on public bus routes, now have bus stops and shelters in close proximity – which has seen a significant increase in the use of public transport by Aboriginal people. It is not uncommon, where a town camp has a bus stop right outside its camp entrance, to see a bus stop fully occupied with people waiting for the next bus. There are, however, further developments which could take place to further improve public transport access for all Territorians, and a number of issues are raised here.

### Issues identified

#### Alice Springs Public Bus Services

Despite recent improvements and developments, outlined above:

- There appears to be a lack of coordination in terms of bus arrival times with some of the bus routes. While there are good links generally between Route 500/1 (Town – Hospital etc), and the other 4 routes; and reasonable connections between the North (Route 100/1) and East (Route 200/1) for example; the West Route (400/01) has very poor connections with the East route (200/1), with waiting times between connections close to, or well over an hour between 8.30 am and 2.30 pm.  
*This creates a major disincentive, for example for someone wanting to catch a bus from the West route to attend Charles Darwin Uni in the East; and makes using a car, if available, a much more attractive (or the only) option.*
- A number of bus 'runs' in Alice Springs do not directly link in with and between number of crucial social services and shops required by people to access banking/food vouchers /emergency relief and general social support services - e.g. Tangentyere Council (no service and therefore no direct link to the Milner Road Food Town, accessed by many Tangentyere Bank clients); and Waltja, both located in industrial areas of the town.
- There are often long periods between bus runs – e.g. there is a gap of at least 2h40 between services on one Routes 100/1; 200/1; 400/1 and 500/1 – however on Route 300/1 the largest gap is one and a half hours. The new Town/Hospital/Convention Centre route – while welcomed, provides a relatively infrequent service, with gaps of at least one and a half hours between every run.
- Many residents of Town Camps still live beyond the general bus routes, and as a result, have to spend scarce funds on taxis and mini buses –diverting money from food, clothing and other essentials.

See separate section on Town Camps [PAGE NO]

- There are gaps in links between Public buses and other transport modes – e.g. there is no bus service which runs to the Ghan Train for arrivals or departures
- The lack of evening and Sunday bus services which reduces options for people returning from town after shopping, visiting hospital at night, a social night out with friends, tourists returning to their accommodation or weekend Sunday access to services (shopping; appointments which fall on weekends – e.g. Family court ordered access visits. Bus services into the night would help improve public safety.

#### Darwin & Palmerston Public Bus Services

- Darwin's public bus service is reasonably effective at transporting people between focal points like the city terminal and the Casuarina shopping centre during daylight hours on business days, and has been improved in recent years with the introduction of the semi-express Casuarina-Darwin-Palmerston orbital services.
- The buses are all accessible, but large scooters and large wheelchairs can find it hard to get on buses. And on some occasions passengers find that seats are down in the disability spaces, and this impacts when someone in a wheelchair or scooter is needing to use that space and requires assistance to move the seat
- There are still some old buses where the disability seats/spaces are in the middle of bus, and the passenger has to go halfway up the bus, and has to negotiate people already sitting in their seats in the first half of the bus
- Distances to bus stops can be an issue for people with disability
- Many people express concerns about travelling on public transport around Darwin, particularly at night time, because of safety concerns.
- Getting from Palmerston to Royal Darwin hospital works well for people who can access a special medical transport system, if people meet eligibility criteria (e.g. someone with cancer appointments), but for those reliant on the public transport system, they need to catch three buses and the trip takes over an hour (for what can be a 25 minute car trip). If someone lives further out, such as Humpty Doo, it would take them four buses).
- The connections are poorly timed and does not connect with other essential services. **CHECK CURRENCY**

#### General:

- Many people may not be aware of low prices of public bus, and availability of concessions. Some NGO's have raised concerns about clients not attending programs as often because they cannot afford the bus fares since the prices were increased
- There is also the general issue of **transport inequity across the NT**. Where public transport does exist (Darwin, Palmerston, Alice Springs) passengers can pay as little as \$1 (pensioners) and \$2 (Health Care Card Holders) to access essential services in those towns. However, where public transport does not exist (e.g. Katherine), a trip of a similar distance could cost 20 times more (e.g. return trip in a taxi), for pensioner on a very limited income.

#### What is required?

Review of routes and timetables to facilitate a more effective service. Specifically:

#### Alice Springs Public Bus Services

1. Revise bus runs to ensure coordination between routes to ensure timely connections between all routes
2. Revise bus routes to take in crucial social services and shops regularly frequented by people who access - Tangentyere Council, Waltja, (and links with existing stops e.g. Milner Rd shop)
3. Revise bus runs to reduce waiting periods between bus runs
4. Revise bus runs to ensure accessibility to all Town Camps – see Appendix A
5. Revise bus runs to accommodate Ghan Train arrival and departure times to link with route to Town interchange (two days per week)
6. Increase bus runs to cover evenings and Sundays

#### Darwin & Palmerston Public Bus Services

1. Improve frequency of bus runs on the fringes of the city of Darwin
2. Consult with organisations who work with people with disability to assess barriers to travel on public buses and consider changes that can make access easier
3. Improve timing of the Palmerston bus run to the Royal Darwin Hospital to improve the various bus connections
4. Increase services between Darwin and the planned City of Weddell

#### General:

1. Examine current communications strategy re bus services, prices and concessions and further promote public bus services through provision of education and information on the routes, and concessions. Include information at major town services – e.g. Centrelink, Territory Housing, Tangentyere etc
  2. Address the equity of transport service for regional areas outside of Darwin/Palmerston and Alice Springs and plan for transport services to meet the needs of residents in those areas (see also Community Transport Section)
- \* **Of crucial importance is that increasing use of public transport will have positive environmental impacts, and is part of the answer to addressing the issue of global warming,**

Significant improvements in the Territory have been put in place in recent years to address what had been inadequacies with the public transport system, and these are best practice initiatives, as per the international literature<sup>6</sup>) e.g.

- Availability of schedules/maps at stations/stops
- Availability of shelter and benches at stations/stops
- Physical condition of stations/stops

However there are still further developments required. International literature suggests that, among other aspects, the following are crucial components of a quality public system and support a number of the above recommendations as to **what is required** to improve the current public transport system in the Northern Territory; namely (see also Appendix C):

3. Frequency of service on Saturdays and Sundays
4. Frequent service so that wait times are short
5. Having station/stop near destination

---

<sup>6</sup> From Guide to Urban Public Transport Quality, printed in 'qualitypublictransport Briefing Number 3 (Jan, 2012): What do good public transport services look like?'

6. Having station/stop near ...home
7. Hours of service during weekdays
8. Short wait time for transfers

## **Mini Buses & Taxis**

### Minibuses

- Minibuses are costly, particularly for those most isolated in society, but often the only mode of transport available for the people with disabilities/or elderly. (at the same time these service may be a marginally cheaper option for some passengers (compared to taxis) due to shared costs between a large group of passengers.
- Wait times for mini buses are often long
- Many mini buses are not equipped for people in wheel chairs (NTCOSS has been informed that in Alice Springs, there are no wheelchair accessible minibuses)
- Mini bus drivers are able to charge a 'fee by negotiation', however, for many people with English as a second language they may not have the negotiation skills to obtain a fair minibus fare, and there are no consumer protections for this type of situation, as minibus fare prices are not subject to regulation.

### What is required?

1. Alter requirements for minibuses, so that fares are regulated

### Taxis

- Taxis are very expensive and costly for low income and disadvantaged consumers (if people are not eligible for the subsidised taxi scheme).
- The increase in the lift incentive for providing transport for a person in a wheelchair from \$10 to \$20 per trip, is significant – however some people with mobility issues, who are not in a wheelchair, can take a long time to get into a taxi, and the meter keeps running, with no extra assistance (such as a lifting fee)
- The response time of the taxi service can be slow. NTCOSS has been informed that the wait time for a wheelchair accessible taxi can be up to two hours in Alice Springs. On weekends, response times can be even slower, meaning some people miss out on events altogether. Services have made regular complaints about taxi services, which sees improvements for a while, but is not always sustained. Wait times were also identified as an issue in Darwin. ***Response times do not only inconvenience the person waiting for a taxi, but also impact carers and family members, who may have their own deadlines and tasks to attend to, but are also held up for significant periods when taxis do not show up. Impacts are also felt by tourists needing to go to the airport or the train or other destinations – and it is not good for local business, when transport services let people down***
- Some older taxis in Darwin cannot carry bigger wheelchairs or scooters, but this should be rectified as older taxis are phased out
- Some people feel comfortable using taxis, however the cost can be prohibitive.
- There is a need for consumer education around taxi fares, with concerns raised in the sector that some taxi drivers do not place their meters on, which is fairly evident, when the taxi tariff lights are not on.

### What is required?

1. *Require taxis to provide a receipt which clearly shows what tariff level has been charged to the customer*
2. *For the Dept of Transport to facilitate regional forums with the Taxi Industry and passengers who require wheelchair accessible taxis – to help make taxi companies aware of the needs of people in wheelchairs and adhering to existing legislation about offering an equitable service to people with disability*
2. Promote use of public bus services for those who can access them (see public transport section above)
3. Develop community transport options (see Community Transport section below)

### **Bush Bus Services – central Australia & Katherine regions**

- Some communities are still missing out on a transport service (e.g. the remote communities of Beswick, Barunga and Manyallaluk in the Katherine region). A bus service covering these three communities was previously in place as part of three year trial which ended early in late 2011, funded by the Federal Government, (using money from the Aboriginal Benefits Account,). The bus service was much needed to assist in getting young people to high school in Katherine; as well as for people attending medical appointments, work and shopping (for cheaper food). This has left the taxi companies as the only providers of publicly available transport in those three communities, meaning people are forced to pay extremely high prices to travel into Katherine. In the East Arnhem region, there is a lack of regional public transport from Gove to the surrounding communities; and in the Jabiru area there are 13 outstations in with no access to public transport.
- Infrequency of Service. When a service is available only once a week (e.g. Nyirripi to Alice Springs on the Bush Bus), it can require people to remain in a regional centre longer than they need to, adding to accommodation costs for service providers or individual – or adding to issues like overcrowded houses.
- Difficulties in catering for people who are in a wheel chair for transport from remote communities to regional centres has been a long standing problem. There have been improvements made over/in recent years with the Centre Bush Bus (central Australia) having four disability accessible vehicles in its fleet. Several weeks is/are? required when booking to ensure that vehicles can be swapped around to accommodate the accessible vehicle on a particular route. If it is unavailable, then the passenger will be booked on the next available trip.

The Bodhi Bus Service in the Katherine region does not currently have a suitable wheelchair accessible vehicle, despite obtaining a specific vehicle with a wheelchair lifter. This vehicle could not handle the road conditions on the corrugated roads with maintenance issues continually required for the lifter. People with disability can still travel on the Bodhi Bus as long as they can negotiate steps up, with assistance from the hand rails.

- The availability of day transport services would reduce the financial costs for individuals and reduce pressure on accommodation services in town .This 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 to family and work life. The development of bus services offering day trips to and from communities for essential medical appointments, for example could also reduce pressure for accommodation (and reduce costs) where travel and appointments could be completed in a day.
- The cost of bush bus transport is high, and requires a significant up front sum, or eats into fortnightly budgets when people pay for their trip through Centrepay. The Centrepay option does mean that people can partake in the travel they need to, without a significant up front outlay, but it does arguably mask

how expensive travel is for remote commuters. The longest trips could cost a family of four up to \$1300 for a return journey (e.g. Elliott to Alice Springs trip).<sup>7</sup>

To put the costs of remote travel into perspective, as a comparison, a family of four could fly from Alice Springs to Melbourne return for \$880 (\$129 out and \$89 back, per person) plus taxes and booking fees – well under the \$1300 for a return trip to Alice Springs from Elliott on a bus. A key issue is that a family travelling to Melbourne may make such a trip once or twice a year, **but for remote residents, trips are a far more common occurrence so that transport costs constitute a far greater proportion of their incomes, for many people who are low income earners.**

*Continue to support commercial bus services (e.g. Centre Bush Bus, Bodhi Bus) to ensure existing services remain, and can expand to increase regularity of services and establish services where none currently exist*

*Specifically:*

1. Expand bush bus services to locations such as Beswick, Barunga and Manyallaluk, who have no service. Establish transport services in East Arnhem, as well as in Jabiru.
2. Increase the frequency of services
3. Ensure all bush bus fleets have some vehicles with wheel chair access, with appropriate anchor points
4. Explore options for the development of a day bus service between remote communities and major centres (e.g. Ntaria, Santa Teresa, Papunya and Yuendumu), which are within reach of a day visit. Such a bus service could also be used by organisations visiting the remote communities, rather than travelling individually by cars- creating efficiencies, and saving on carbon emissions
5. Independent assessment of pricing structure – taking into account that the majority of users of the service are on extremely low incomes

### **Greyhound Bus**

- The timing of the Greyhound Bus is a big issue
  - The bus departs Tennant Creek for Alice Springs at 3.10 am; and returns from Alice Springs at 1.50 am
  - From Darwin the bus arrives in Tennant Creek at 1.50 am; and leaves Tennant for Darwin at 3.15 amLittle can be done about the arrival and departure times in Tennant Creek, because of the flow on effect of any change on every other destination.
  - Passengers travelling from Darwin to Mt Isa on the Greyhound service must travel via Tennant Creek, and spend a significant time waiting - ranging from 20 hours (from 1.50 am until 10 pm that night); to a 44 hour wait, if there is no bus from Tennant Creek to Mt Isa until the following day (buses only go from Tennant Creek to Mt Isa on Mon/Wed/Fri/Sat).
- Bus Terminal/Shelters - in Tennant Creek there is no bus terminal/shelter; In Darwin, concerns have been raised publicly, recently, about the new Greyhound bus terminal built out of an outdoor shade shelter on gravel at the back of a CBD service station in Darwin City. This has meant

---

<sup>7</sup> As an example, a family of 2 adults (\$195 p/adult each way) and 2 children (\$135 p/child each way), taking a return journey from Elliott to Alice Springs will be paying \$1300 for the round trip. No concessions are available for the Elliott fares, however for a similar distanced trip to Pipalyatjara, concessions are available (\$15 discount p/adult each way). These prices, while high, are comparable with the Greyhound Bus (although 2 adults (both concession) and 2 children could pay \$1174 from Alice Springs to Elliott/return). The most expensive trip on the Bodhi Bus (Katherine region) is from Katherine to Lajamanu (\$170 p/adult one way; \$160 concession; \$100 p/child), which would equate to a \$1040 return trip for 2 adults (both concession) and two children. On the Ghan, a family of two adults/2 children (no concessions) would be paying \$1216 return from Alice Springs to Tennant Creek (there is no stop in Elliott)

passengers have been forced to wait for the bus in driving rain within insufficient cover to cater for passenger numbers

- The Greyhound Bus can be inappropriate for people who are sick, or a person with a disability (no disability access)
- Issues for some passengers when there is no one to meet and greet them, at the other end, if unfamiliar with their destination, or if they have mobility issues

### **What is required?**

1. Exploration of options to provide a more efficient service from Darwin to Mt Isa seems warranted
2. Provision of a bus terminal and shelter in Tennant Creek, with appropriate amenities  
Provision of appropriate bus terminal/shelter in Darwin to replace the existing one recently established
3. Improve disability accessibility on all Greyhound buses.  
Utilisation of other options for people who are sick, or for people who have disability
4. Some passengers have difficulties, when there is no one to meet and greet them, at the other end, if unfamiliar with their destination, or if they have mobility issues

### **Trains**

#### **Issues Identified**

- A lack of connections between bus and train services  
-It is over 1.5 km from the Ghan Station to the public bus depot in Alice Springs. There is no service for non-tourists to get into the town upon arrival, nor any service to allow local residents to catch a bus to the Ghan for departure (when often they have extensive luggage)  
-In Tennant Creek the train stop is around 5km from the town centre and there is no connecting transport, and the railway stations in Katherine and Darwin are located some distance from the town/city centre as well. The stations in each of these areas are designed principally as freight terminals.
- Lack of platform at Tennant Creek and Katherine for embarking & disembarking
- The Ghan is expensive - but at times people will choose the train over the bus due to space and comfort. (Agencies have raised that it is particularly expensive for someone on a pension)
- Limited access on the Ghan for people with disability – e.g. some wheelchairs are too large to use on the train; and it can be problematic moving from carriage to carriage. If required for travel interstate to access medical support it can be a very long and tedious journey for the aged, frail or people with disability
- The Ghan train arrives in early hours of the morning in Tennant Creek when coming from both Alice Springs and Darwin. The journey can be very tiring for passengers, especially those on a medical trip
- Little can be done re arrival and departure times, due to flow on effect to other stations/stops

### **What is required?**

1. Establishment of a courtesy bus into town/or suburbs of Alice Springs and Tennant Creek, Katherine
2. Establish a platform at the Tennant Creek and Katherine stops for embarking & disembarking.
3. Consider concessions for Territorians travelling on the Ghan – on top of pension concession
4. Improve access on the Ghan for people with disability

### **For Further Consideration – Opportunity for the Territory to develop a Light Rail system**

A fast efficient, light rail with clean, well-lit carriages linking Darwin, Palmerston and Weddell would be a great boon to all three cities. Services could be funded to run frequently and punctually, and fares subsidised to ensure that they are affordable for those on low incomes. A government with the vision to invest in such a development would see Greater Darwin united economically and socially. It would provide exciting new opportunities for people on lower incomes to play their part in developing the prosperity of the Northern Territory. The Northern Territory was built by Indigenous Australians of resilience and forbearance and by pioneers with indomitable spirit and grand dreams. We must draw again on these qualities to ensure that the people of Greater Darwin will have a transport service which will enable everyone to contribute to, and share in, the future prosperity of the Northern Territory.

## Aviation Services

### Issues

- There are limited regular plane services to communities in Central Australia, with the majority of remote communities having no regular plane service
- Planes are very expensive (especially for pensioners) but sometimes may be the only option (e.g. \$600 one way, Tennant Creek to Darwin). Where people have to rely on air charters, the costs considerably higher
- Wheelchair access on planes is difficult as is dependent on size, height & width of wheelchair and also dependant on the structural size of the aircraft accessing certain routes across Australia. Smaller type aircraft cannot carry wheelchairs as baggage due to the size of the hold. It appears that significant restrictions are imposed by plan companies as to who they will allow to travel (or travel unaccompanied) – with one of the restrictions imposed by a particular company is that a passenger needs to be able to independently walk away, in the event of a plane crash (which seems somewhat of an anomaly if someone is injured in a plane crash and therefore cannot walk away). Even if an organisation charters a whole plane, they are still restricted in which passengers can travel.

As a result of the severe restrictions, agencies find themselves having to pay a staff member for 2 days fly with the passenger with disability, and accompany them on their whole trip.

**One agency cited an example of being unable to book a passenger (with disability) on to a plane to travel from Karlgoorlie to Warburton, which is a two day road trip. Instead they obtained a quote for disability accessible taxi to do the trip – which would have cost \$7000**

**In addition, it appears that the Angel Flight service, which services the Top End, does not cater for people with disability TO DOUBLE CHECK**

### What is required?

1. Investigate increases in plane services to communities in Central Australia
2. The NT Government should also explore options for restoration of the air link between Darwin, Katherine, Tennant Creek, and Alice Springs. **CHECK FOR CURRENCY**
3. Explore strategies for safely overcoming restrictions on travel for people with disability

## TRANSPORT EXPENDITURE BY LOW INCOME HOUSEHOLDS

A number of the transport services noted above are used extensively by low income households, often based in remote parts of the NT. As highlighted, the fares are quite expensive, and make up a regular component of many

households weekly budgets. Australian Bureau of Statistics figures (see Table I below) demonstrate that low income households spend 12% of their weekly income on transport, and while lower than the other income quintile categories, it is still a significant part of the weekly budget. This figure also represents a NT-wide average, and does not take into account regional differences (regional breakdowns are not available). The proportion of household income being spent by remote low income households in the Territory, is likely to be significantly higher than 12%.

**Table1: Transport Expenditure by Household Type, Northern Territory (2009-10)<sup>8</sup>**

	Transport Expenditure (NT) 2009-10	
	Av. Weekly Expend \$	% of H/hold Expend
Lowest Income Quintile	\$62.54	12.06%
Second Income Quintile*	\$120.59	14.65%
Third Income Quintile	\$208.19	14.64%
Fourth Income Quintile	\$266.01	16.30%
Highest Income Quintile	\$356.21	16.14%
All households	\$234.18	15.62%

Source: ABS, Household Expenditure Survey, Australia: Summary of Results, 2009–10 (Table 3)

Note: The Expend figures have not been indexed to reflect 2014 expenditure as the % of H/hold Expend do not need adjusting for currency

\* Second Income Quintile figures - estimate has a relative standard error greater than 50% and is considered too unreliable for general use

### WHO IS MOST IMPACTED BY GAPS IN TRANSPORT SERVICES?

Those who suffer most from the lack of public transport are marginalised groups: people on low incomes, those with a disability, Indigenous Territorians, women, and older people. The critical needs of these groups must command the attention of those charged with the task of shaping the Territory into the future. For example, it can be particularly hard for mothers and their babies to get into town for shopping and accessing services, when they do not have access to public transport, and there is a lack of transport options for people escaping violence on remote communities

<sup>8</sup> ABS, 65300DO001\_200910 Household Expenditure Survey, Australia: Summary of Results, 2009–10

PO Box 1128, Nightcliff NT 0814 • 1/18 Bauhinia Street, Nightcliff, NT 0810.

Ph 08 8948 2665 • Fax 08 8948 4590 • Email: [admin@ntcoss.org.au](mailto:admin@ntcoss.org.au) • Website: [www.ntcoss.org.au](http://www.ntcoss.org.au) ABN: 19 556 236 404

The needs of people using the medical/health system, people with disability, residents of town camps, and the needs of people in remote parts of the NT are particularly paramount and are highlighted here.

### **Medical service users**

- Limited access to transport in rural and remote areas can greatly hinder and at time even prevent people's access to medical care, particularly older people and people with disabilities. Service providers have given examples of people who choose not to have particular medical treatment because of transport costs and logistics - e.g. a 5 hour trip on a bus from Tennant Creek to Alice Springs for chemotherapy
- The lack of frequency of transport services means medical patients may have to stay in a regional centre for several days, and even up to a week, to wait for the next available transport service to go home. The need to remain in large centres impacts on the social cohesion in communities of origin.
- There are significant issues for people getting home from hospital, particularly late at night, who often have mobility issues – due to a lack of public transport (and the Night Patrol service only operates 5 days per week (limited hours).
- NGOs have reported over the years that attendance rates at medical appointments in regional centres for people from remote areas are low, and valuable medical specialist time is wasted when patients cannot attend (in addition to the opportunity cost and the real financial costs of loss of income). Organisations have argued that attendance rates would increase significantly if there were more efficient transport services and supports – rather than situations where patients have to catch a bus on their own (if no escort has been approved).
- Katherine agencies highlighted the need for support for patients when they get off the bus in Darwin and expressed concern about how people were getting transported to Casuarina hospital. This can be compared with the 'meet and greet' service provided by the Nganampa Health Liaison service (Alice Springs) which supports patients from the APY lands, which is a good example of the type of support needed for some remote patients, and further services like this are required across the NT.

**In relation to these issues we note the Highway to health report Recommendation 16**

**“7.138 That State and Territory Governments, in consultation with Indigenous representatives and Indigenous Health Services, identify and adopt best practice standards and develop programs to improve Indigenous patients' access to medical services by:**

- **ensuring continuity of care for Indigenous patients by establishing liaison services and improving coordination in, and between, remote communities and treatment centres;”<sup>9</sup>**
- **NGOs also have reported a lack of support when a bus arrives at its destination and a lack of transport links to get people to hospital.**

NTCOSS believes that it would be prudent of the NT Government to research the cost of missed transport and missed appointments – and explore the financial benefits of improving transport services (in order to reduce missed medical appointments.

---

<sup>9</sup> Highway to Health Report

There are many transport issues related to the Patient Assistance Travel Scheme (PATS), which NTCOSS highlighted in a submission in 2013. See link in footnote below<sup>10</sup>.

## **People with Disability**

### Remote including travel from regional centres to remote communities

- Lack of disability accessible transport to communities is a big issue. An example was given that even the NT Government's dialysis truck does not have disability accessibility. (*See also above section re Bush Bus Services*).
- Transport for people in wheelchairs in remote areas is very limited as transport services are often unable or unwilling to cater for them. Transport services that do exist are still infrequent, and often won't take a client without a carer, which doubles the cost of the transport.
- Wheel-chair users and people with mobility issues find their mobility severely restricted even in the large regional centres due to absence of suitably designed vehicles.
- There is no wheel chair access on either the Bush Bus (Alice Springs) or Greyhound/Pioneer bus<sup>11</sup> – which further restricts travel options for people with disability
- There could be 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.
- Costs of using taxis can make it hard for people to sustain employment, because they end up spending such a large proportion of their income on transport
- A lack of Disability Parking spaces in various parts of Palmerston was identified – i.e. only limited places available at the major shopping centres, Council building, and the old post office, where parcels are collected

### Urban Travel

- Limited access to vehicles for people with a disability. Mini buses cannot be accessed by many people with disability because of access issues.
- The Taxi service is often poor & slow to respond to client need. Agencies have reported waiting times can sometimes exceed two hours
- For some client groups, organisations have no other choice but to purchase vehicles and assist clients from getting from their home community/outstation to a regional centre. 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. It seems grossly unfair to continue to expect organisations to provide transport and bear costs, for which they are not funded for (nor, realistically, have the time for).

---

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.ntcoss.org.au/sites/www.ntcoss.org.au/files/PATS%20Review%20-%20NTCOSS%20submission%2015%207.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> From the Greyhound/Pioneer Website: If a passenger requires assistance to : Transfer to/from the Coach and into/out of the Coach seat, ...then the passenger does not meet the Independent Travel Conditions and must make alternative travel arrangements or travel with a Carer, Personal Assistant or Chaperone.

- The costs associated with all means of transport is prohibitive to people on the Disability Support Pension and other benefits.

### **Remote Communities, Homelands and Outstations**

*A number of issues for remote people are identified above in a number of areas, and some further issues are briefly outlined here*

- The lack of transport links for people on smaller remote communities and the 10,000 Territorians who live on outstations, which makes it hard to access medical treatment, shops and services. NTCOSS consultations have heard calls for the establishment of regional transport networks which link remote communities to regional centres and to each other.
- Due to a lack of transport services in many remote areas, support organisations often take the initiative to provide transport for their service users, especially where linking transport is required to get someone to a major centre to travel further on to a medical appointment. However, the costs for agencies in sending drivers to collect people is very high i.e. driver wages, accommodation and fuel.

### **TENNANT CREEK AND THE BARKLY - A focus on issues affecting one region**

In Tennant Creek, the fifth largest town in the Northern Territory, there are **no** public buses and extremely limited other transport options (now that there is no taxi service in the town). A third of the population receives a primary Centrelink benefit payment and many families do not have their own car.

#### In-Town transport:

- There is one current commercial taxi (not after 6 pm)
- There is no minibus service providing a service within the town.
- There is a lack of disability access in the majority of NGO vehicles
- People in wheelchairs often have to push themselves around town
- Women having to push shopping trolleys 2 kms to their home
- There is currently no way for people to get from home to the Greyhound bus, if they do not have their own vehicle, as there is no night patrol after midnight and no taxi service after 6 pm). Efforts are being made to develop a local solution to this situation in Tennant Creek, with Tennant Creek Transport currently planning to oversee a late night drop off/pick up service at the Greyhound/Pioneer bus stop. *(see section below on Community Transport).*

#### Regional Transport

- 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.
- The lack of access to transport reduces people's ability to access to work, health services, shops, and cultural and recreational activities.
- Getting into town from remote areas for things like urgent dental appointments is highly problematic.
- A lack of formal transport arrangements from remote communities precludes clients who are travelling back from Alice Springs, for example, from being picked up along the highway (close to their

community), which could save the further trip to Tennant Creek and the subsequent time waiting to return home.

- *See also issues raised in section above re Greyhound-Pioneer Bus*

**Residents of larger remote communities like Wadeye and Maningrida - with populations approaching that of Tennant Creek - have even less choices around transport; and in Jabiru there are no public or commercial transport services at all, unless transport is required for a medical reason.**

#### **ALICE SPRINGS TOWN CAMPS - TRANSPORT ISSUES A focus on issues affecting Town Camps in one region**

There is a lack of bus services for people most in need and least likely to have access to a phone or transport. Despite improvements to access for several Town Camps in recent years (see appendix A regarding access to public bus stops for Town Camp residents), many residents of town camps still face significant walking distances between individual Town Camps and the nearest bus stop. Carrying shopping bags such a distance at different at varying degrees is a challenge. The lack of transport is very much related to food access and food security on town camps as the lack of regular accessible transport reduces the financial means and limits the possibility to access food as required. The irregularity of bus services at certain times of the day (e.g. breaks of 2hours 40 between several of the bus runs) - .

There are also matters related to Town Camp amenity which need consideration, as they impact on transport safety. i.e. 'despite the money spent for housing and infrastructure the amenity of the majority of Town Camps has not been improved from the perspective of roads, gutters, traffic control and street lighting. These are all essential to creating safety in town camps.

Below are some quotes from Town Camp resident about what an improved public transport system would mean for them and how it would make their lives better.

*"... if the bus comes to town camps, we don't need to humbug workers for lifts, we can catch the bus at the right time to do things for ourselves, and let the workers finish their work. You could put up a notice telling people the bus times, so we know when we can catch the bus to the hospital, or Congress and town for meetings and shopping. Maybe the bus could go to the Gap and all around the town camps to help people with no motor car and some people really need to go to the bank and to meetings and shopping for tucker. Then the bus could go around and take those people back home again.... and it's really hard for sick and old people to wait."*

*"The mini bus and taxi takes too much money out of our pockets. Money we could be spending on tucker for our families. It would be so good if we could catch a bus, it would be so good. We would really like that."*

#### **DEVELOPMENT OF SELF SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY TRANSPORT OPTIONS– The missing piece in the puzzle!**

While not specifically mentioned in the brief, NTCOSS believes that Community Transport should be considered amongst a suite of approaches required to tackle transport issues in the NT.

***'Community Transport' initiatives are usually run by community based, locally driven, not-for profit organisations which sets out to meet needs that conventional public transport does not, and which tries to provide choice and flexibility to respond to passengers' needs.***

Community transport initiatives represent a core part of the transport framework in other states and territories, and attempt to address issues of poverty disadvantage and social exclusion – by responding to the transport needs of marginalised groups who may find it difficult to access, or be excluded from existing transport systems (sometimes because they simply do not exist in a particular area). This might be the provision of special care based on small group transport for the Home and Community Care target group (e.g. frail aged, people with disability and carers) needing transport; with a fee structure conducive to the financial means of the individual.

Generally, community transport initiatives target groups in the community who do not have their transport needs due to physical mobility; social disadvantage; cultural issues; knowledge; travel requirements – and do not have their own (regular) private transport, are not eligible for specialist transport programs, and for whom public transport services do not exist or are not accessible. Community transport is about addressing this ‘mobility gap’. Generally community transport services are less formal in nature, involve local community control, work in partnership and collaboration and leverages transport capacity from a variety of agencies and programs. As a result they increase service efficiency and return on investment by funders<sup>12</sup>

In its consultations with the community services sector, over the years, organisations have identified a number of transport services required to transport people to and from essential services, which could be met through a community transport model, for example:

- Transport to and from hospital to reduce the burden on other services not funded for this e.g. Night Patrol.
- Assist people from low income and disadvantaged groups to access medical appointments, shopping, social and recreational activities
- Aligning bus services of NGO’s with services of other organisations – e.g. medical, shopping, meetings etc.
- A transport system for people with disabilities who are unable to utilise mainstream services (Shuttle buses from train to major centres) to make better use of the railway line – which is one of the single largest pieces of infrastructure in the Territory
- Transport people to the hospital and non-Government and government services as required by the passenger.

Organisations have regularly identified that community buses which might be under-utilised could be accessed as part of a regional (community) transport approach, which could include agencies using own buses on a rotational basis (requires resources) – link to community bus model). A specific suggestion was made for a that the disability buses used for the special school transport runs, which sit idle for large parts of the day, could be utilised for community transport services to assist people with mobility issues to attend medical appointments and shopping, for example. In addition, organisations have suggested that where no transport exists – e.g. In Katherine, Tennant Creek, East Arnhem, that there is a need for a flexible, reliable, affordable, sustainable bus service - which a community transport system could provide.

---

<sup>12</sup> David Denmark (Transport Management and Planning) presentation....NTCOSS Conference April, 2011 (Darwin)  
PO Box 1128, Nightcliff NT 0814 • 1/18 Bauhinia Street, Nightcliff, NT 0810.  
Ph 08 8948 2665 • Fax 08 8948 4590 • Email: [admin@ntcoss.org.au](mailto:admin@ntcoss.org.au) • Website: [www.ntcoss.org.au](http://www.ntcoss.org.au) ABN: 19 556 236 404

In 2012, an NTCOSS project was established to: “research a sustainable community based transport model utilising existing vehicles managed by a local agency responding to the needs of the community (commencing with Tennant Creek).” A transport consultant was appointed for a four month period<sup>13</sup>, and after community consultation this resulted in the establishment of a not-for-profit transport agency for Tennant Creek being established Tennant Creek Transport Inc. (<http://www.tennantcreektransport.org>), which, using a social enterprise model, aims to:

- Address transport disadvantage in the Barkly region in whatever form it takes through the promotion of passenger transport services;
- Assist people, who have no ready access to private transport, to access services and take part in activities of their choice;
- Encourage healthy, active transport options such as walking or cycling; and
- Facilitate the development of suitable transport infrastructure such as transit centres or bus stops

The group will also work on the establishment of a vehicle register and driver pool and on providing information about transport options to community members.

To date Tennant Creek Transport (TCT) has managed to secure some small seed funding, but is struggling to get sufficient resources to commence and sustain badly needed town based transport services. TCT has developed a plan for establishing a minibus service, to be disability (including wheelchair) accessible – to cater for a number of people who use a wheelchair, walking frame or a gopher or scooter.

### **Community Transport - What is required?**

NTCOSS urges the Northern Territory Government to look beyond public bus systems and commercial transport to address the transport needs of Territorians; and Specifically ,

- to investigate alternative models and support the implementation of community transport systems
- explore resourcing the development of flexible and innovative community transport options across the NT, so local transport/support services can be developed in towns and in regional and remote areas.

### **TRANSPORT FOR SCHOOL CHILDREN**

Transport for school students is an issue which has been on the radar for NTCOSS for many years, having been identified regularly in NTCOSS consultation processes around transport, and NTCOSS has been actively involved in policy discussions with NT Department of Education, non-Government support organisations and schools.

NTCOSS has been very concerned about the decision made towards the end of 2013 for the cessation of several transport services provided by schools who are part of the NTG’s Engaging Urban Students (EUS) reform, set up to address disadvantaged students’ barriers to education, which includes 15 schools<sup>14</sup> across the NT.

---

<sup>13</sup> See the full report from the Tennant Creek Transport Project: Transport and Mobility in Tennant Creek and the Barkly  
[http://www.ntcoss.org.au/sites/www.ntcoss.org.au/files/Transport%20and%20Mobility%20in%20Tennant%20Creek\\_0.pdf](http://www.ntcoss.org.au/sites/www.ntcoss.org.au/files/Transport%20and%20Mobility%20in%20Tennant%20Creek_0.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> Bradshaw Primary\*\*      Centralian Middle\*  
Gillen Primary\*\*      Gray Primary#  
Howard Springs Primary      Jabiru Area\*\*

PO Box 1128, Nightcliff NT 0814 • 1/18 Bauhinia Street, Nightcliff, NT 0810.  
Ph 08 8948 2665 • Fax 08 8948 4590 • Email: [admin@ntcoss.org.au](mailto:admin@ntcoss.org.au) • Website: [www.ntcoss.org.au](http://www.ntcoss.org.au) ABN: 19 556 236 404

It is unclear if the decision was based on the need for reduced government expenditure, as there has been an increase in expense in relation to 19 remote communities in the NT being serviced by new truancy officers (albeit Commonwealth funding) at the same time. Given that money for the EUS reform flows from a Commonwealth initiative, part of the Low Socio-Economic Status (SES) School Communities and Closing the Gap National Partnerships (NFPs), and that to the best of NTCOSS' knowledge, the NFP funding continues throughout 2014 – it is actually unclear why funding for the bus services would be cut at this point in time.

Irrespective of the source of the funding or the official reasons for ceasing the transport, NTCOSS is primarily concerned about the impact the cessation of these targeted transport services will have on the 16 affected schools in the Northern Territory. We believe that there needs to a review of this decision within the first term of 2014, and an analysis made of school attendance rates in the affected schools, as well as an analysis of school transfer figures, as NTCOSS has been informed anecdotally that some families were considering moving their children to other school(s) where transport is provided.

Given the massive task ahead of the NT (and Federal) Governments to 'Close the Gap' on Indigenous disadvantage, and the fact that getting children to school is deemed a crucial part of this by both levels of Government, it seems extraordinary that a support service that helps get children to school is no longer receiving support (regardless of the reasons behind the decision that have been made.?)

NTCOSS acknowledges that the main school bus service for the town has made some adjustments to provide for children from the Trucking Yards Camp, as well as new stops in the Larapinta area. However already there have been difficulties for some children from town camps in getting to school. One Alice Springs organisation has put on extra casual staff casual to pick children up and assist them in getting to school, which is not sustainable, and concerns will remain about the avenues for particular children to get to school.

NTCOSS believes it would have seemed more prudent that a review of the school transport services would have been done, prior to any decision being made for the services to be cut, and that consultation would have occurred with affected families, and support organisations who are now left to pick up the pieces. We urge the NT Government to meet with affected families and agencies to develop a way forward on this crucial issue.

#### **FUTURE GROWTH IN THE TOP END**

The city of Darwin is currently very car dependent. Over the next few decades Darwin's demographic centre will move steadily southwards. The satellite city of Palmerton, twenty kilometres 'down the track' already boasts a population of more than 27,000 people (2011 census), while headworks have commenced on the planned City of Weddell a further twenty kilometers to the south. Thus Greater Darwin will eventually have three main focal

---

Katherine High*	MacFarlane Primary <sup>#*</sup>
Manunda Terrace Primary <sup>#</sup>	Millner Primary <sup>#</sup>
Moulden Park Primary <sup>#</sup>	Sadadeen Primary <sup>#*</sup>
St Joseph's College*	Tennant Creek High*
Tennant Creek Primary <sup>#*</sup>	Yipirinya School <sup>#*</sup>

*# Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan focus schools*

*\* Schools eligible for support under the Closing the Gap National Partnership for targeted students*

points, spread over a distance of forty odd kilometers. As the city grows, we must ensure that we don't leave an underclass of 'forgotten people' in the wake of this expansion.

The Northern Territory has long been development-driven, with cash-strapped governments relying on injections of capital from trans-national corporations seeking to exploit the Territory's abundant natural resources. These corporations provide the Territory with employment opportunities, and an investment in infrastructure that has the capacity to energise our whole economy. However the railway lines they build are, understandably enough, designed to transport ore from mine sites to shipping ports, rather than people from home to work.

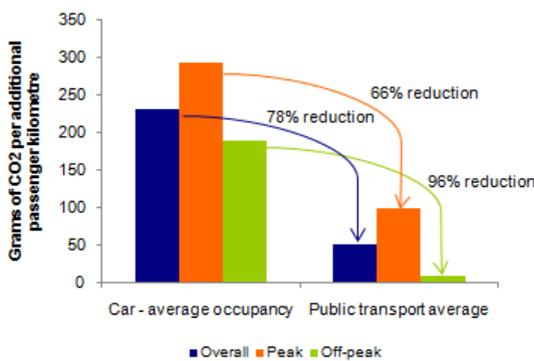
So it is principally the NT Government which must ensure that we have a 21<sup>st</sup> century public transport system which will meet the needs of the community and the environment. People must be able to seek work, travel to and from their place of employment, go shopping, attend appointments, visit family and friends, and take advantage of other recreational opportunities.

Our planners must also look for opportunities to develop an effective network of bicycle routes across the city. As Australia's only tropical capital, Darwin can get 'a little bit warm'. But the land is fairly flat, and 'pedal power' is a genuine alternative, provided that bicycle paths are designed to connect thoughtfully with the road system.

### ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

Improving transport services, especially public transport options, also has the potential to bring about environmental benefits. A well utilised public transport system has the potential to reduce the numbers of cars on the road, and be a significant contribution towards reducing the NTs carbon footprint. According to the Public Transport Users Association<sup>15</sup>, public transport that works, cuts emissions, as it gives people the ability to drastically cut their greenhouse gas emissions and reduce other air pollution such as carbon monoxide and smog.

**Chart: Greenhouse gas emissions from cars and public transport**



Note: Using public transport instead of driving can dramatically reduce carbon emissions.

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.ptthatworks.org.au/lives.html>

In addition, mechanisms must be put in place to further encourage bicycle transport – and it was notable that the Roadmap currently does not make any reference to the use of bicycles. It would seem timely for there to be a review of current city, regional and remote infrastructure which will further promote and support the use of bicycles across the Territory – to reduce emissions and at the same time promote healthy lifestyles and reduce travel costs for commuters. In particular with the development of a new suburb (Kilgariff) in Alice Springs, it is an opportune time to ensure bike paths are an integral part of the infrastructure – including a bike track from the town to the new suburb. While it is some distance from town, there are already many people who commute daily by bicycle from town to their workplace at venues such as the Arid Zone Research Institute (AZRI) and Desert Knowledge Australia (DKA). In addition, the need for improved bike infrastructure has been articulated over a long period, with the Alice Springs Desert Smart Road Map (2005) noting the need to :

- Strengthen/improve the public transport and bike infrastructure<sup>16</sup>

And in its draft “Road Map to a Desert Smart Town”, after its review in 2013, the following goal was set “By 2033, Alice Springs has infrastructure to support 100% sustainable transport around Alice Springs (foot, bicycle, greenhouse friendly public transport and electric cars).”

## **ROAD AND BRIDGE INFRASTRUCTURE PROVISION**

While road and bridge infrastructure are outside of NTCOSS’ area of experience, non-Government organisations have raised issues related to infrastructure, which are noted briefly here

- There have been many calls for the improvement of roads out to remote communities across the NT; as current poor road conditions in many areas causing significant wear and tear on private vehicles which travel in and out on a regular basis. Similar issues are also experienced by commercial vehicles.
- Maintaining motor vehicles is a very expensive exercise, and even more so for people living in remote areas, with limited access to mechanical services and spare parts. Often it is more economical to purchase another vehicle than to put more money into a car which has been ravaged by the rough roads in remote parts of the Territory.
- Without reliable cars that can cope with bush roads most people cannot plan for events that involve travel, and have to rely on family, or community workers to provide transport, which makes planning and certainty problematic.
- There have also been calls to explore the provision of community vehicles (for services) which are appropriate to meet the road conditions
- In addition, poor road conditions also make a significant contribution to the high road toll in the Territory.

## **MOTOR VEHICLE REGISTRY SERVICES**

Lack of access to Motor Vehicle Services in remote communities makes it difficult for many residents living in remote communities to comply with strict motor vehicle licensing and registration requirements. Whilst this potentially impacts on road safety, one of the greatest concerns is the flow-on costs this creates, both to individuals from remote communities and to the Northern Territory community more generally, in enforcing non-compliance with licensing and registration requirements. Aboriginal Legal Aid services assist a large number of people from remote communities charged with avoidable traffic offences, such as driving unlicensed and

---

16

driving unregistered/uninsured. It is not uncommon for clients to have accumulated thousands of dollars in fines for traffic offences, steadily making it more difficult for clients to comply with licensing and registration requirements. Whilst there are broader issues relating to financial barriers, Aboriginal people from remote communities often face in meeting licensing and registration requirements, improving access to motor vehicle registry services in remote communities would remove one of the key barriers to compliance.

Significant police, legal services and court resources are expended responding to traffic offending. Whilst most traffic offences dealt with through the court system are drink driving related offences, about 40% of the adjudicated traffic and regulatory offences, or 16.9% of all adjudicated matters, are driver licence offences (which may include driving disqualified).<sup>17</sup> Many vehicle registration and roadworthiness offences are dealt with by way of traffic infringement notices, however, almost 300 vehicle registration and roadworthiness offences were dealt with by the Court of Summary Jurisdiction in 2011-12.<sup>18</sup>

The vast majority of traffic offences are dealt with by way of fines.<sup>19</sup> The traffic legislation in the NT requires the Court to impose a significant minimum mandatory penalty of \$720 for driving an uninsured vehicle, and \$1440 for the second offence. The court may impose a penalty of up to \$2880 for driving unregistered, or order a term of imprisonment of up to 12 months. If driving unregistered/uninsured is dealt with by way of a traffic infringement notice, the penalty is \$800 (where the vehicle has been unregistered or uninsured for more than one month but less than 12).<sup>20</sup> Accordingly, drivers from remote communities who have not registered and insured their vehicle can, and do, face large financial penalties, yet few are in a position to pay large fines. Dealing with non-compliance with driver licensing and registration requirements through the criminal justice system is therefore ineffective, costly and inefficient. It is important that people in remote communities are assisted to comply with the requirements, rather than just being dealt with via the criminal justice system due to living below the poverty line (punished when they are unable to comply with motor vehicle licensing and registration requirements). Expanding access to motor vehicle registries will assist in addressing some of the causes of non-compliance.

It is noted that the Northern Territory government is seeking to address this issue through its DriveSafe Remote NT program, which has assisted people in 11 remote community to obtain a drivers licence and comply with vehicle safety and registration requirements. NTCOSS encourages the Northern Territory to continue to expand the DriveSafe Remote NT program, and to provide face-to-face motor vehicle registry services in remote communities throughout the Northern Territory.

The establishment of Motor Vehicle Registry Services will improve efficiencies in Motor Transport administration in addition to raising NTG revenue and creating jobs. Placing MVRs within service hubs with a high frequency of patronage would be advisable – as an example, in Borroloola, a local Aboriginal Resource Organisation has built a shopping centre with commercial office space available – which could make an ideal location for a regional MVR.

---

<sup>17</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Cat. No. 4513.0 - Criminal Courts, Australia, 2011-12*, Table 10.

<sup>18</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Cat. No. 4513.0 - Criminal Courts, Australia, 2011-12*, Table 10.

<sup>19</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Cat. No. 4513.0 - Criminal Courts, Australia, 2011-12*, Table 8.

<sup>20</sup> *Traffic Regulations (NT)*, Schedule 1.

The opportunity also presents itself now for the NT Government to also look to provide for road safety education and awareness and driver training and licensing in partnership with the education and training sector, which would complement any expansion of Motor Vehicle Registry Services.

## 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. Towns the size of Tennant Creek (and Katherine) have no access to public transport at all. 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, or attending business or visiting family on other communities. At times this means that people have to make life choices which seriously compromise their health and wellbeing, and can contribute to social exclusion. 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.

The lack of an adequate transport system for the majority of the Northern Territory simply perpetuates poverty and disadvantage for thousands of Territorians. To ensure a fair Northern Territory for all, we must establish affordable transport services which meet the needs of all Territorians, so all can participate fully in social and community life.

In the context of NT's social participation agenda, and the broader social inclusion agenda, a transport strategy for the NT should be concerned with addressing issues of social exclusion. If we are serious about ensuring access in relation to mainstream services like health, education, shopping and other critical services, this must include an efficient and affordable and accessible public transport system, and more affordable regional transport options. This would bring the NT in line with 20<sup>th</sup> century developments interstate and internationally.

## Appendix A Town Camps and distances from Public Bus Stops

Listed here in a) are the improvement in proximity of bus stops to town camps, made in 2010. Further below is b) a list of town camps where improvements are still required, as access to public buses for these camps requires a significant walk, for those who are mobile, and are inaccessible for people with significant mobility issues.

### a) PROFILE OF SELECTED TOWN CAMPS UNDER NEW ROUTE OF TRAVEL (July 2010 approx.)

Selected Town Camps	Current Route Distance to Bus Stop (KM)	New Route Distance to Bus Stop (KM)	Improvement (KM)
Walpiri	1.8	0.5	1.3
Basso	1.4	0.1	1.3
Mount Nancy	1.4	0.1	1.3
Palmers	1.4	0.1	1.3

Anmalyerre	0.6	0.6	0.0
Charles Creek	0.6	0.0	0.6
Little Sister	1.2	0.4	0.8
Old Timer	2.5	0.1	2.4
Drive In	2.2	0.9	1.4
Karnte (By road)	3.3	1.8	1.5
Ilparpa	2.7	0.1	2.6

b) Town Camps requiring increased proximity to town public bus stops

Karnte Camp:

While improvement is noted for Karnte Camp since 2010, the current route distance to the nearest bus stop is 1.8 km, which is the same as or greater than the original nearest distance for 7 other camps that all subsequently gained improvements and are all now at between 0.1 and 0.6 km away from the nearest bus stops.

Anthepe Camp

Currently 0.9 km from bus stop

Larapinta Valley Camp

Currently approx. 0.8 km from Larapinta Drive bus stop (near Blain St), but there may still an additional long walk from deep within the camp for some residents

Whitegate Camp

1.1 km from the Kurrajong Dr stop (East Route)

Ilpeye Ilpeye Camp

0.9 km from the Kurrajong Dr stop (East Route)

Hidden Valley

While the entrance of the camp is within walking distance of the OLSH Sadadeen Bus Stop, there may still be quite a long walk from deep within the camp for some residents.

**Appendix B: Key service Quality Elements for a Public Transport System**

‘**qualitypublictransport**’<sup>21</sup>, a partnership between Public World and the International Transport Workers Federation (ITF), with the support of Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, undertook an international literature review of a number of studies and reports has addressed the issue of quality in public transport over the last decade or so

The service quality elements featured in the literature can be boiled down to 12 key categories:

**Accessibility:** how easy is it for everyone, including people with disabilities, to use the service?

**Affordability:** are costs shared so that services have the resources they need and all can use them?

---

<sup>21</sup> **Qualitypublictransport** is a partnership between Public World and the International Transport Workers Federation (ITF), with the support of Friedrich Ebert Stiftung. Its purpose is to support transport unions in building alliances with passengers and other civil society organisations to promote good services and sustainable transport systems. That means services that enable everyone to travel safely, comfortably and reliably, and employ enough securely employed, properly trained and fairly rewarded transport workers.

**Availability:** does the service go where it is needed at the times and frequency needed?

**Communication:** can you get information where, when and in the form needed?

**Convenience:** how easily can you find out about timetables, and pay fares, and so on?

**Enjoyment:** is the experience of using transport services a comfortable and pleasant one?

**Integration:** is it easy to switch between modes and services?

**Reliability:** does the service keep to schedule and maintain standards consistently?

**Respect:** Are workers and passengers treated with the dignity as human beings with rights?

**Responsiveness:** Are problems and complaints addressed properly in a timely way?

**Safety:** are passengers and workers reasonably safe from harm, both when riding and waiting?

**Speed:** does the service get there quickly enough, relative to private alternatives?

Printed in 'qualitypublictransport Briefing Number 3 (Jan 2012): What do good public transport services look like?'

## Appendix C: Guide to Urban Public Transport Quality

*One of the most comprehensive guides to urban public transport quality has been produced in the United States by the Transit Cooperative Research Program for the Federal Transit Administration (FTA). Its Handbook for Measuring Customer Satisfaction and Service Quality provides an "example list of quality indicators" consisting of 48 items, reproduced here [in qualitypublictransport] (with some changes to vocabulary).*

- 1 Absence of graffiti
- 2 Absence of offensive smells
- 3 Accessibility of trains/buses to disabled people
- 4 Availability of handrails or grab bars on trains/buses
- 5 Availability of monthly discount passes
- 6 Availability of schedule information by phone/mail
- 7 Availability of schedules/maps at stations/stops
- 8 Availability of seats on train/bus
- 9 Availability of shelter and benches at stations/stops
- 10 Cleanliness of interior, seats, windows
- 11 Cleanliness of stations/stops
- 12 Cleanliness of train/bus exterior
- 13 Clear and timely announcements of stops
- 14 Comfort of seats on train/bus

- 15 Connecting bus service to stations/main bus stops
- 16 Cost effectiveness, affordability, and value
- 17 Cost of making transfers
- 18 Displaying of customer service/complaint number
- 19 Ease of opening doors when getting on/off train/bus
- 20 Ease of paying fare, purchasing tokens
- 21 Explanations and announcement of delays
- 22 Fairness/consistency of fare structure
- 23 Freedom from nuisance behaviors of other riders
- 24 Frequency of delays for repairs/emergencies
- 25 Frequency of service on Saturdays and Sundays
- 26 Frequent service so that wait times are short
- 27 Friendly, courteous, quick service from personnel
- 28 Having station/stop near destination
- 29 Having station/stop near my home
- 30 Hours of service during weekdays
- 31 Number of transfer points outside town centre
- 32 Physical condition of stations/stops
- 33 Physical condition of vehicles and infrastructure
- 34 Posted minutes to next train/bus at stations/stops
- 35 Quietness of the vehicles and system
- 36 Reliable trains/buses that come on schedule
- 37 Route/direction information visible on trains/buses
- 38 Safe and competent drivers/conductors
- 39 Safety from crime at stations/stops
- 40 Safety from crime on trains/buses
- 41 Short wait time for transfers
- 42 Signs/information in appropriate languages
- 43 Smoothness of ride and stops
- 44 Station/stop names visible from train/bus
- 45 Temperature on train/bus — not too hot or cold
- 46 The train/bus traveling at a safe speed
- 47 Trains/buses that are not overcrowded
- 48 Transit personnel who know system

**Printed in 'qualitypublictransport Briefing Number 3 (Jan, 2012): What do good public transport services look like?'**