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Local Bellingen Transport Project, 2006

*Final Report- Recommendations for public
transport improvements in Bellingen Shire based
on consultations and current transport services -
Deliverable 2*

December 2006

Recommendations for public transport improvements in Bellingen Shire based on consultations and current transport services

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1 Major Findings and Recommendations

In undertaking this project it has been revealed that:

- There are distinct transport services operating within the three planning areas of the Bellingen Shire, each with a unique mix of local, community and public resources and services.
- Most service providers and groups consider the current level of the local transport resources and services as mostly meeting the community's current transport needs. Community Transport's extended funding base, enabling it to respond to transport disadvantaged and/or geographically isolated groups within the Bellingen Shire is critical to this expressed satisfaction.
- Poor knowledge and understanding within the community about transport resources and services available is very widespread. Comprehensive, easily-accessed and comprehensible information about service and resources available is a critical need.
- The public transport service from and to Bellingen /Coffs Harbour is lumpy with services concentrated primarily at the beginning and end of day. There is evidence to support the need for additional and better linked-up services.
- Youth, especially older teens (15-17), are very heavy users of public transport and hence are strongly affected by service gaps.
- There is a common and widespread perception across the community of inadequate transport services for which the underlying reasons are complex. The provision of more services will not necessarily address these underlying issues. Responses may need to equally focus on addressing attitudes, affordability, cultural norms and expectations as much as improving services.
- Bellingen community's transport needs need to be addressed at various levels: in the 3 planning areas level, shire wide, regionally and state wide.

2 Introduction

2.1 Background to Project

The Bellingen Shire 2004 Social Plan identified as a key issue, the lack of accessible and affordable public transport faced by people living in the Bellingen Shire.

Lack of public transport remains one of the biggest issues for the Bellingen Shire as it is for the rural North Coast of NSW. Without adequate transport people are unable to access services, employment, work training and tertiary education. The bus timetable current for the Bellingen shire at the time of publication of this profile for example does not meet the needs of people without private transport who live in the Bellingen Shire and study out of school hour courses at TAFE and University at the Coffs Harbour Education Campus. [Bellingen Shire Council Social Plan (2004), p.21]

The Social Plan Committee¹ identified transport as an appropriate starting point for implementing the plan for two reasons, firstly because transport was a key issue identified in the plan and secondly because the Committee were confident positive improvements could be made within existing resources. The Committee believed that solutions to the community's transport needs could be found through current transport resources usage and facilitating communication and information amongst transport stakeholders. The Committee believed that what was needed was a solution focussed facilitation process amongst transport users and providers to identify needs and map existing transport resources.

To achieve this it was decided to undertake a small, time limited, transport needs project. Funding of \$2,000 was provided by the NSW Ministry of Transport, Community Transport Division and was matched by Council.

2.2 Terms of Reference

In January 2006, the Bellingen Shire Council called for Expressions of Interest for a suitably qualified contractor to take a facilitator role to assess the local transport needs of the Bellingen Shire community.

The terms of reference (TOR) for the consultancy were as follows:

- identify transport resources available to the community;
- facilitate a roundtable discussion between transport providers and community stakeholder representatives; and
- provide a written report to Bellingen Shire Council's Social Plan Committee outlining findings, outcomes and recommendations.

The review was to be steered by Bellingen Council's Social Plan Committee.

3 Consultant's Proposal

In response to the TOR, the consultant submitted a project proposal which was accepted by Council.

3.1 Project Description –extract from Proposal:

GOAL OF THE PROJECT

The purpose of the project is to facilitate better understanding and communication between transport stakeholders (both users and providers) with the aim to improve public transport in the Bellingen Shire.

¹ Established in 2004 to assist council staff in review of the social plan and the plan's implementation.

REVIEW OBJECTIVES

Objective 1 *To determine the level of resources, efficiency and appropriateness of current public transport services in the Bellinghen Shire in terms of community needs.*

Objective 2: *To work with providers and consumers explore options for improving public transport services in the Bellinghen Shire*

The consultant, Cath Cosgrave, was engaged by the Bellinghen Shire Council on June 30th 2006 to carry out the Local Bellinghen Round Table Transport Project pursuant to the details and commitments made in the proposal submitted.

The proposal stipulated a deliverables contract under which the consultant would submit by email to the Social Plan Committee (via Josie Robinson) two reports: an interim report on completion of Objective 1 (DELIVERABLE 1) and a Final Report on completion of Objective 2 (DELIVERABLE 2) – See 4 below- Project Methodology for more on Objectives

It was anticipated that the project would commence in July 2006 and be completed by mid December 2006.

The project commenced with the consultant meeting with the members of the Bellinghen Transport Project's Sub Committee on 27th July 2006 at which the background to the project was explained and outcome expectations expressed.

The consultant was encouraged to consult widely and interview as many stakeholders as possible. Interviews were to be conducted face-to –face wherever possible.

Subsequent to this meeting Council staff supplied some transport documentation, mainly extracts from the Social Plan 2004. In addition a basic list of transport stakeholders and their contact details was compiled and provided to the consultant as a starting point for consultation interviews.

4 Project Methodology

The consultant used a logical Framework matrix methodology for development of the project's work program.

4.1 Work Program

OBJECTIVE 1

1.1 Briefing meeting with Social Plan Committee: meet to present methodology, Q&A and refine timeline.

1.2 Review documentation: Collect, review and summarize all Council documents relevant to transport availability/community needs.

1.3 Ascertain transport resources: Identify key personnel in organisations that provide transport to the Bellingen community, make contact and conduct interview to:

- Ascertain the service's transport resources – current usage and any surplus availability
- Explore any perceived unmet needs and gather evidence to support
- Collect any relevant transport documentation
- Introduce and explain purpose of forthcoming roundtable forum

1.4 Conduct Needs assessment: Identify and make contact with key personnel in local community organisations/groups/services and introduce project; conduct semi-structured interview focused of current transport usage and unmet needs. Consultations to include: schools, welfare and social services organisations and community group services operating in the Bellingen Shire.

1.5 Report on transport resources: Based on findings report on transport resources to be written. Interim Report submitted to Social Plan Committee for tabling at their October meeting.

INTERIM REPORT – DELIVERABLE 1

OBJECTIVE 2

2.1 Plan Roundtable transport forum:

2.1.1 Book venue

2.1.2 Develop Agenda

2.1.3 Invite stakeholders

2.1.4 Organise catering

2.1.5 Notify media

2.2 Conduct roundtable transport forum

2.2.1 Manage 'housekeeping' and running order of day

2.2.2 Facilitate roundtable discussion - (Contractor may elect to sub-contract this service)

2.3 Write report on roundtable forum with recommendations for improving public transport. Based on outcomes of forum write report including summary of key discussions at the forum, solutions canvassed, any agreements made and based on this formulate recommendations for future actions to improve provision of public transport. Submit Final report reports to Social Plan Committee for tabling at their December meeting.

Final Report – DELIVERABLE 2

4.2 Changes to the Work Program

A major finding of the consultant undertaking the needs assessment (1.4 above) with a broad range of organisations and groups across the Bellingen Shire (see appendix 8.1) was that transport needs primarily focused around issues such as: affordability; access; information. No specific services needs/ gaps were expressed. Based on this feedback the consultant recommended changes to the project's methodology and work program outlined in a Progress Report tabled at the Committee's October meeting. The Committee agreed to the following changes to the project's methodology and work program.

Objective 1-

- Refocus report under 1.5 on transport services using material already gathered from interviews and documentation, and making contact with transport providers as envisaged under 1.3
- Complete Draft Report in 2nd week of November in time for November Social Plan Committee meeting.

Objective 2 –

- Cancel round table forum. (2.1 & 2.2) and instead conduct focus group interviews and further research on high needs population groups (e.g. youth).
- Write Final report under 2.3 with recommendations for improving public transport services outlining for each recommendation its achievability; conditions needed and next actions required. Completed Final Report by 3rd week of December

5 Current Transport Services

5.1 By Location – Dorrigo. Bellingen Urunga

There are three planning areas within the Bellingen Shire these are: the Seaboard (Urunga, Yellow Rock, Mylestom, Repton and Raleigh), the Valley (Bellingen Town and Thora and Kalang valleys) and Dorrigo plateau (Dorrigo & rural plateau). Public transport provision within the Bellingen Shire is centred within the townships of these three areas: Urunga, Bellingen & Dorrigo.

5.1.1 Dorrigo

18% (7.9% in Dorrigo and 10.35% in rural plateau) of the Shire's population live on the Dorrigo plateau². The town of Dorrigo is located half an hour's drive from Bellingen and is accessed by a single steep and winding road, Waterfall Way which is 29km in length³. Regular services include, as is also the case in the other two areas, an extensive feeder school bus service into the Dorrigo township, currently provided by Steinhardt's and operating morning and afternoons during school terms and servicing the outlying areas. A school bus also comes down the mountain to service students attending schools located in the Thora Valley, this service also links up to other services in Thora travelling to Bellingen. A daily bus run to Armidale and Port Macquarie also operates. There is no taxi service or local town bus service.

Dorrigo's relative geographic isolation has meant that its residents have not been able to easily link into Bellingen and Urunga's public transport services. As a result of this isolation, unique community based and supported solutions to Dorrigo's public transport needs both on and off the mountain have been created these solutions include:

- **Dorrigo Pub bus** – provided by publican Peter Feros as a community service. Seats 21. Available for booking by any charitable organisation. Cost – petrol only. Requires drivers to have light rigid licence – volunteer drivers available if required. Heavily used by sporting clubs.
- **Community Transport –Dorrigo – Coffs (Park Ave & Park beach Plaza) - Dorrigo-** Community transport subsidized, return prices \$10 full & \$5 concession, Service runs Mondays during term, Mondays & Thursdays during school holidays. Drop off in Bellingen possible but no pick up from Bellingen as Busways services the valley and seaboard areas.
- **Dorrigo Community Bus -Dorrigo Support Centre.** Seats 18 + 2 wheel chairs Bus is available for hire to disadvantaged/ youth groups, sporting groups @ 85cents per km includes fuel. (Previously 50 cents per km). Preferred use within Dorrigo Township. There is a list of volunteer drivers if needed. Requires drivers to have light rigid licence and undertake a 10 minute orientation to learn how to use the hoist system.
- **Dorrigo Courtesy Bus -covers both Dorrigo Hotels & Dorrigo RSL.** Service runs Friday & Saturday nights. Pick-up & drop off service. Service run by Dorrigo bus service (Ian Steinhardt) Free service (cost covered by participating businesses).
- **Community Transport- Dorrigo Soccer Club 2006 away games.** Dorrigo Soccer Club approached CT in early 2006 for support for their away games for the 2006 season – service was provided and costs were fully absorbed by CT.
- **Community Transport feeder bus to outlying areas** – Operated in conjunction with Clarence Valley CT, during the summer school holidays of 2003/04 & 04/05 a feeder bus

² Source ABS 2001 Census data from census Applications Pty Ltd 2002 in Bellingen Shire Social Plan (2004) p.9.

³ Bellingen Shire Social Plan (2004) p.8

service to connect with CT's Monday & Thursday service to Coffs from Dorrigo picking up AM, dropping off PM from/to Dundurrabin, Tyringham, Hernani and Ebor⁴.

5.1.2 Bellingen

Over half the Bellingen's population 51.52% live in the Bellingen Township (22.28%) or in the Kalang & Thora valleys areas (29.21%)⁵. The town has sealed roads and is the main hub for the valley's bus services. The Kalang and Thora valleys are each serviced by one road Kalang Rd (40K) and Darkwood Rd (39k) respectively; both these roads are partially unsealed in their upper reaches⁶. An extensive feeder bus service operates into Bellingen from outlying areas and out from Bellingen to schools operating in Thora Valley and Urunga areas. The school bus contracts are held by: Keogh's Bus service (Promise Land, Gordonville, Darkwood Rd), Baldwin's (Darkwood Rd, Thora, Waterfall Way, Boggy Creek & Horseshoe Rd) and Sampson's (Kalang Rd). A public bus service is provided by Busways providing services Mon – Sat from Bellingen town directly to Coffs Harbour and indirectly via connecting services in Urunga to Coffs Harbour, Bowraville, Macksville and Nambucca Heads There is also a Saturday's only service servicing Repton, Bellingen and Urunga. There is a local taxi service including a maxi taxi for wheelchair customers. There is no local bus servicing the township area.

The public bus service operated by Busways is the key service for people living in Bellingen Shire reliant on public transport for accessing Coffs Harbour. The key groups reliant on this service are young people, particularly those attending the School, TAFE or Sothern Cross University at the Coffs Harbour Education Campus (CHEC) and to lesser extent older people and householders that have no motor vehicle (8.7%).⁷ There are currently 3 services that run directly from Bellingen to Coffs Harbour and 3 services from Coffs to Bellingen (Route 361⁸) See Appendix B-9.2 for timetable. There is also 2 daily indirect services from Bellingen connecting in Urunga to Coffs Harbour and 1 service from Coffs connecting in Urunga to Bellingen (Bellingen –Urunga -Route 360 interchange at Urunga for Coffs Harbour- route 351) See appendix B -9.1 for timetable.

Many community groups, service provider organisations and schools operating in the Bellingen shire have regular and ad hoc transport needs and all interviewed were very proactive in finding solutions. Some examples of transport solutions developed to date include:

⁴ CT are currently considering continuing their subsidy to run the Monday service again during 06/07 summer school despite service usage in past being low. Very low service usage figures of Thursday service over 04/05 period did not support CT's continuing subsidy.

⁵ Source ABS 2001 Census data from census Applications Pty Ltd 2002 in Bellingen Shire Social Plan (2004) p.9.

⁶ Bellingen Shire Social Plan (2004) p.8

⁷ Source Table B29 CASAS in ABS 2001 Census data from census Applications Pty Ltd 2002 in Bellingen Shire Social Plan (2004) p.21.

⁸ Morning service for route 361 to Coffs and late afternoon service from Coffs are school bus services and operate during school terms only.

- **Bellingen and Seaboard Youth Services** – Volunteer chaperoned bus service to monthly Hot House parties in Sawtell subsidized by CT, CT brokers service out to a local bus provider.
- **Bellingen Shire Family & Children's Services**- Out of school hours Care (OOSH) program running at the Elliott Close, North Bellingen Site. Since May 2006 CT has provided service with an 11 seater bus at \$10 per day to be used for daily pick up of children from St Mary's bus site and Bellingen Primary School. The bus is garaged at the service. During school holidays CT also provides directly or broker' out transport services to meet the needs of the service's school holidays vacation care outings program.
- **Bellingen Shire Support Network** – This service provides a range of outreach services across the Shire. Transport is a significant budget item for the service taking up 15% of its budget. Since 2002, various initiatives have been undertaken to allow the Network to sustainably address its transport needs. As a result of these initiatives the service has been able to purchase two vehicles out of its own funds and another two from a one off DADHC grant. Replacement and usage cost are now charged to each service at a rate sufficient to covers usage cost and future vehicle replacement.
- **Bellingen High school** – In 2006 for students in Year 11 & 12s students attending TAFE classes in Coffs Harbour the school organised with Nambucca and Macksville High Schools a partially subsidised bus service.
- **Schools** – local schools generally use the local private bus services operators (Baldwin's, Keoghs, and Sampson's) to charter buses for large student group excursions. Bellingen High School is also a very active client of CT.

5.1.3 Urunga

Just under a third (30.11%) of the Bellingen Shire population lives on the Seaboard, 22.13% in Urunga (including Yellow Rock & Newry Islands) and 3.12% in Mylestom and 4.84% in Repton.⁹ There are a significantly higher proportion of persons aged 65 years plus living on the Seaboard and in Urunga than elsewhere in the Shire.¹⁰

There is an extensive feeder school bus service operated by Busways servicing the outlying areas (Mylestom, Raleigh, Repton, Bundagen, Raleigh, Fernmount and Northbank Rd) running into and out of Bellingen town.

A public bus service is provided by Busways providing services Mon – Sat from Urunga to Coffs Harbour, Bowraville, Macksville and Nambucca Heads. The public bus service currently runs 4 services from Urunga Township to Coffs Harbour (including hospital stop) and 5 services from Coffs

⁹ Source ABS 2001 Census data from census Applications Pty Ltd 2002 in Bellingen Shire Social Plan (2004) p.9.

¹⁰ Source ABS 2001 Census data from census Applications Pty Ltd 2002 in Bellingen Shire Social Plan (2004) p.10.

to Urunga (Route 351). There is also a Saturday's only public bus service covering Repton, Bellingen and Urunga (route 3610. This service connects in Urunga Township with Route 351 to Coffs Harbour and Macksville. (See Appendix B -9.1& 9.2 for current services).

A local taxi service also operates. There is no local bus servicing the township area.

Since July 2006, CT has been running a service targeting Aboriginal people living in the Urunga area to assist aboriginal persons with access to Coffs Harbour and to attend medical appointments. This service operates fortnightly on Thursdays, the opposite week to pension payments. Usage of the service to date has been very low.

6 Transport Needs

6.1 General feedback on transport needs

- Many interviewees expressed that the view that affordability, convenience and an entrenched car ownership culture in Australia were issues affecting usage of public transport that were as significant as the level of services. *"The reality is that the current public bus service operating in the Bellingen Valley and Urunga Seaboard is under utilized"*.
- Many organisations, particularly service providers, felt there was a reasonable range of transport services (public, school bus service, community transport, taxis and other services) currently operating across the three areas of the Bellingen Shire, but these services were often not widely known or easy to find information about, which made it difficult to access and navigate the system, especially for the occasional user.
- A number of organisations also expressed the need for community education as many believed residents held unrealistic expectations about what constitutes a reasonable public transport service for a small regional Shire such as Bellingen. Some interviewees expressed belief that many Bellingen residents, especially those that had relocated from urban centers, had an unrealistic expectation that a 24/7 public transport service should be available.
- There was also some skepticism expressed by interviewees about what was a real and ongoing community need. A number of services had experience of responding to expressed community needs and starting up new services only to subsequently have little or no take up of those services. Service providers were unsure as to the reasons for this but various opinions were expressed, including:
 - That community needs change rapidly and may no longer be relevant especially if there is significant lag in response. And this was especially so with youth.
 - That those expressing needs were often the most vocal and active community members and their views were not necessarily representative.

- Any new service, and especially transport services, needs to be promoted well (formally and informally) and given sufficient time to catch on.

Despite a range of views about the reasons for poor take up of new transport services, it was generally held amongst interviewees that before new services are started a thorough needs assessment should be undertaken.

- Youth were generally seen as having the greatest unmet needs; Youth's leisure options were seen by several interviewees as being severely curtailed by lack of public transport. *"If kids wish to go to Coffs on weekends or after school they are dependent on parents to drive them"*.

6.2 By Location – Dorrigo Plateau, Bellingen Valley, Urunga Seaboard

6.2.1 Dorrigo Plateau

A commonly expressed view in the interviews undertaken was that for many Dorrigo residents transport needs were not so much about availability but affordability. In all interviews it was expressed that transport usage was very affected by affordability given the high number of Dorrigo households of low socio-economic status. In planning trips, excursions groups for school aged children, youth, sporting groups and pensioners, all interviewees cited cost as a key 'limiting' issue.

Ian Willis, Dorrigo High School's Principal, advised that even if there were more transport provision, he questioned the ability of Dorrigo youth to use it regularly, 'it would be cost prohibitive for many families'. Anecdotally this view was also supported by Rhonda Warwick of Coffs Harbour, Bellingen and Nambucca Community Transport (CT) who advised that Dorrigo High School approached CT in early in 2006 to looking at transporting 4 students undertaking TAFE electives in Coffs Harbour on Wednesdays, a quote of \$8 per student was given but the service was not taken up. Later in 2006 the High School again approached CT this time about an excursion for 6 children to Grafton and a quote of \$20 per child was given but again the service was not taken up. Whilst no explanation was given, cost was believed to be a significant factor in the lack of take up. Dorrigo Youth services also advised that it since increase in usage charges it now finds the Dorrigo Support Centre's community bus prohibitive for the service to use. Ian Willis expressed that the needs of Dorrigo youth around education are complex and he did not believe they would be easily answered by the provision of more transport services down the mountain.

Lack of information about current services was also mentioned. Greater understanding of the school bus system and awareness of timetable was commonly cited as the best solution for residents living in outlying areas for Transport to Dorrigo town. Some interviewees had an incomplete knowledge and understanding of the full range of transport services available. One service advised that they were unaware of the existence of the Dorrigo Support Centre's community bus. Nor was it well known that CT's service provision extended beyond the CT HACC population group to include "transport disadvantaged" individuals and communities living in the Bellingen Shire. Dorrigo's remote location is

viewed by CT as a transport disadvantage and is therefore a service that community groups and organisations operating in Dorrigo plateau can approach to discuss transport needs.

6.2.2 Bellinghen Valley and Urunga Seaboard

There was no community group or organisations interviewed who expressed current unmet transport needs. All community groups and service providers who have ongoing transport needs advised that they had found or crafted solutions to their transport needs.

Several services interviewed expressed their inability to respond to transport needs of their clients, because their service had only very small or non-existent funding for transport, making it very difficult for them to provide or support any regular transport services. Service provider's lack of transport funding has the potentiality to seriously limit the transport options available in the Bellinghen Shire. However the broadened funding based on CT has enabled to respond to many of these community transport needs.

CT is generally seen by services that regularly work with it as being very approachable and open to looking at providing transport and/ or subsidizing transport costs of various groups/services. However not all services /organisations interviewed were aware of CT's broadened service mandate. Some service providers also expressed need for general criteria as to what and whom CT will consider assisting.

6.3 By Group – Children, Youth, Older People

6.3.1 Children

The extensive school bus service that runs morning and afternoon to outlying regions across the Bellinghen Shire means that most primary school aged children attending school within the Shire have their transport needs for education purposes adequately met. The extensive nature of the school bus service coming both into and out of Bellinghen town also affords families some choice in school selection.

As mentioned above at 5.1.2, the transport needs of children participating in after school or vacation care programs are also being met. Within each of the three local townships, the sporting and recreational needs of children are also fairly well provided with a broad range of organised activities being provided by community organisations, clubs and private operators.

In a focus group conducted by the consultant with a young parent's group of pre-school aged children, all 6 parents interviewed saw their transport needs as best addressed by motor vehicle ownership. None viewed public transport as a viable alternative. "It's just too difficult to juggle a buggy and kids on a bus". A commonly expressed view was that support should be directed at assisting unlicensed parents to overcome the significant barriers (affordability, time, childcare, access to a fully licensed driver for mandatory driving practice) facing young parents to obtaining their driver's license.

Parents who did not own cars advised that they managed their transport needs by shopping locally and using local services, although all expressed the intention to get a car as soon as possible.

6.3.2 Youth

For the majority of high school aged youth, attending schools within the Bellingen Shire, the school bus system was viewed as an adequate service meeting most students' needs. However it was expressed that those students undertaking extracurricular activities operating outside of the standard school day were heavily reliant on parents to meet their additional transport needs. It was also observed that generally as soon as students can obtain their license they do, Bob Stockton, Principal of Bellingen High School estimated one third of years 11 and 12 students have their probationary license. Also, as the style and delivery of education to high school aged students broadens (TAFE attendance, out of school hour's classes); it is likely that the school bus service (structured for a traditional 9-3 timetable) will increasingly be unable to meet a growing number of students transport needs. Already a few key groups of students in the Bellingen Shire need to make private transport arrangements: These student groups include:

- **Bellingen High School** – Years 11 and 12 students studying off-line subjects conducted after school up to 6pm living in outlying areas are required to make private arrangements to get home.
- **Bellingen High school**- Years 11& 12 students living in outlying areas returning to Bellingen late on school hired bus after attending TAFE classes in Coffs Harbour on Wednesday 2pm until 6pm are required to make private arrangements to get home.
- **Chrysalis Steiner School** -Yrs 6-8 students have an early start at 8.30 inshore requiring them to take an early bus from Bellingen at 8.00am. Outlying students are required to make private transport arrangements to meet bus in town ¹¹

For students attending schools within the Bellingen Shire but living outside the Shire there are significant challenges to attending school. For example, Bob Stockton advised that there are currently six students across Years 9-12 who live in Coffs Harbour and these students have to either use the Busway's public bus system and miss the first /last 30 minutes of classes or rely on parents to drive to and pick up from Perry Hills at Repton to enable them to linkup with Busway's Northbeach school bus service.

Youth were commonly identified in many in interviews as a significant group with significant transport issues. Two major need assessment studies recently undertaken by Bellingen Seaboard Youth

¹¹ Dorrigo High School is also likely to be added to this list from 2007 if it goes ahead with its current plans to run TAFE certificate courses outside school hours targeting the local adult community, school leavers and its own Years 11 & 12 students.

Services (BSYS)¹² and Southern Cross University (SCU) on behalf of Coffs Harbour Education Campus (CHEC)¹³ concur with this viewpoint. Both studies undertook extensive consultations with youth and the consultant is confident that the samples interviewed were sufficiently large to be representative of commonly held views amongst Bellingen's youth population transport needs.

In the BSYS study 35 out of 91 (38%) respondents aged 12-24 and 17 out of 40 (42.5%) of key stakeholders responded that transport was a major issue. The study identified two main areas of transport need: employment and training and recreational and social activities.

Lack of affordable, timely transport makes it difficult for young people to access entertainment, employment and further training¹⁴.

As most young people who responded to the survey were attending school, government financial support and training opportunities were the main concerns. Of students attending school there is a significant but small group of students in receipt of Centrelink allowances and/or participating in government programs (e.g. Youth Pathways). Involvement in these programs requires mandatory and regular reporting to service providers and/or attendance at Centrelink in Coffs Harbour. This group of students is especially disadvantaged by the lack of a bus service operating during the day returning from Coffs to Bellingen. The current Busway's timetable means an appointment in Coffs Harbour usually ends up taking a whole day.

Subsequent to the study's release, the BSYS has also been exploring solutions to address the identified need for more affordable transport options for improving access to social and recreational activities for youth. Whilst undertaking this project, BSYS has worked in partnership with CT, to develop a project to trial an on demand subsidized passenger pay bus/van service 'Bellingen and Seaboard (BAS) Bus' targeting youth living in the Bellingen Shire. The project is to be a partnership between CT and NSW Department of Transport.

In 2005 SCU undertook a transport survey of 1036 CHEC students attending either: Southern Cross University, TAFE, Coffs Harbour Senior College (CHSC) or the English Language Centre. The SCU study was concerned with exploring youth attitudes to public transport and their opinions about current services and needs for improvements. Relevant findings of this study focussed on satisfaction with current bus service and reasons for not using buses. The most common reason cited for not

¹² Bellingen Seaboard Youth Services (2005); Report on Youth Needs Assessment of Bellingen and Seaboard Areas

¹³ Harrison, J; (2005) Feasibility of evening classes and the need for public transport improvements at Coffs Harbour Education Campus, centre for Enterprise development and research, Southern Cross University. NSW

¹⁴ Bellingen Seaboard Youth Services (2005); Report on Youth Needs Assessment of Bellingen and Seaboard Areas, section 6.

catching buses was a preference for other kinds of transport (57% of sample). Other common reasons were that there were not enough buses at the required times (35%), buses were too expensive (22%) and better bus connections were needed (11%). Qualitative analysis of responses indicated that students are seeking 'fast convenient and flexible transport' and current bus services were often not felt to provide this.

The study also provided information about specific needs of students living in Bellingen Shire. Of the sample of 1036 students, 128 (12.5%) lived in the Bonville, Bellingen, Dorrigo location and 94 (9.2%) lived South of Raleigh. Significant feedback from these subgroups included:

- Better connections and more services especially mornings – buses often overcrowded
- More services needed back from Coffs to Bellingen before 2pm (currently only 1 leaving university at 11.30 am and not a direct service);
- Buses better linked in with timetable
- A late service needed from Coffs to Bellingen after 5.30
- Affordability service expensive if paying full adult fare. TAFE and School campus students only entitled to free travel if catching designated school buses. More bus stops within Bellingen, long distances from North Bellingen to town bus stop
- On Tuesdays Route 361 goes via Mylestom and makes trip takes too long, over an hour.
- Buses running on time¹⁵

6.3.3 Older People

Bellingen Shire's population continues to show an aging of its population curve. There are also a significantly higher proportion of persons between aged 60-85 residing in Urunga and the Seaboard areas of the Bellingen Shire.¹⁶ The Bellingen Shire Community Directory lists a significant number of services specifically targeting the aged operating across the Shire: clubs & groups (5); day & occasional care (3); Support services (3); and home support services (10). As would be expected, some of the clubs and groups are extremely active and experienced in advocating for transport services. CT's Rhonda Warwick advised that CT's biggest client in the Bellingen Shire was the Urunga group of Combined Pensioners and Superannuants Assoc of NSW. CT provides a range of transport services to support this group's extensive program of social activities running locally to Coffs and occasionally trips to Brisbane and Sydney. Rhonda also cited the Mylestom group of Combined Pensioners and Superannuants Assoc of NSW as another major client of CT.

CT also runs a range of transport services specifically targeting older people, including:

¹⁵ Harrison, J; (2005) Feasibility of evening classes and the need for public transport improvements at Coffs Harbour Education Campus, centre for Enterprise development and research, Southern Cross University. NSW

¹⁶ Source ABS 2001 Census data from census Applications Pty Ltd 2002 in Bellingen Shire Social Plan (2004).

- Door-to-door return shopping service operating on Thursdays (additional service on Friday's in peak times e.g. before Christmas) from Bellingen via Urunga to Coffs Harbour (Palm Centre and Park Beach Plaza)
- Aged day care door-to-door service operating Wednesdays & Thursdays from Bellingen to Urunga and Wednesdays and Fridays from Urunga to Bellingen.
- Individual transport mainly for health services/medical appointments and hospital visiting. (CT is also the brokered service for North Coast Area Health Service's health transport unit).

Whilst transport needs for older people are very high, there is also a broad range of transport services operating within the Bellingen Shire funded specifically to meet these needs. In addition, as mentioned above, the collective organisation of older person's through group and aged services supports them to effectively advocate for the transport services needed. No older person's social groups or services working with older people expressed any significant unmet needs. However it was expressed, and is relevant for all population groups, there is a need for better communication and information on the transport services and assistance available.

7 Recommendations for Meeting Unmet Needs

7.1 Realities of transport operating environment

- Any transport solutions need to take into account and work within existing regulatory constraints and territory divisions that operate across the Bellingen Shire All transport providers (CT, taxi services; Busways public transport services) to a greater or lesser extent have designated patches and or specific client groups and are all 'touchy' about any encroachment on these
- It is unlikely, at least in the short to medium term, that the school bus system, a heavily subsidized scheme by the NSW Dept of Transport contracted out to private providers, could I run services outside the traditional school day or run additional services unless there were significant numbers to support the need.¹⁷

7.2 Recommendations

Issue: Lack of Public transport services from/to Bellingen/Coffs.

Need for more regular services from Bellingen to Coffs Harbour and return for those users groups most heavily dependent on public transport i.e. youth attending Coffs Harbour Education Campus and significantly disadvantaged groups living in the Bellingen Shire such as older people and persons

¹⁷ In 2005, Baldwin's were successful in negotiating with the NSW Ministry of Transport to run an additional early morning service from Bellingen to Chrysalis Steiner School the need for an additional service was argued on the grounds of student numbers and overcrowding on existing later services.

living in households with no motor vehicles access. Commonly expressed frustrations with the existing timetable by these user groups or service providers representing these groups include:

- that trips to Coffs often takes a whole day as there is no early afternoon service returning to Bellingen;
- an overall lack of services to and from Bellingen making it unattractive to use public transport

The most common reason cited for not catching buses was a preference for other kinds of transport (57% of sample). Other common reasons were that there were not enough buses at the required times (35%), and better bus connections were needed (11%). [Extract from SCU survey]

Recommendations

1. *That consideration be given to running an additional early afternoon Route 361 (Coffs to Bellingen) service¹⁸ (see Appendix C-10.2) for timetable proposal).*
2. *That consideration be given to running additional connecting services (Route 360 - Bellingen – Urunga- Bellingen) to increase overall service provision for Bellingen valley residents travelling to and from Coffs Harbour through improving connections with Route 351 Urunga –Coffs- Urunga)¹⁹. (see appendix C-10.1& 10.2 for proposal)*

Actions:

- Council approach Busways to discuss proposal and its feasibility
- Council and Busways determine whether further needs assessment is required
- Council and Busways jointly approach Ministry of Transport to discuss possible support

Issue: Limited resources to meet transport needs of disadvantaged groups.

Recommendations

3. *That consideration be given to increasing Community Transport's funding from NSW Ministry of Transport's Community Transport program to enable it to increasingly respond to the transport needs of disadvantaged groups living in the Bellingen Shire.*

Actions:

- Council develop proposal and approach Ministry of Transport to discuss increasing support

¹⁸ Example Depart SCU 1.00 pm arrive Bellingen 1.45 pm

¹⁹ Proposal outlined in Appendix X suggests the following to Route 360 from Bellingen to Coffs- 2 new services and a 10 minute change to an existing service. Route 360 from Urunga to Bellingen 5 new services, 1 existing.

- Council discuss with CT the development of a service brochure including criteria for funding and target groups, for broad distribution to service providers and groups

Issue - Affordability

Students attending CHEC and using public transport are also often on very low incomes. As would be expected, affordability is often cited as a significant barrier to using public transport “*buses were too expensive (22%)*” [Extract from SCU survey]

Recommendation:

- 4. That conditions of Busways School Free Travel passes be reviewed to address the flexible timetable of students attending Coffs Harbour Senior College and TAFE***

Actions

- Council to discuss issue with Busways and explore whether any local solution is possible.
- Council to work with other local Council's (see recommendation 8) on developing and implementing a strategy to bring this issue to the attention NSW Ministry of Transport

Issue - Lack of knowledge about transport services currently operating within the Shire.

Recommendation:

- 5. That a comprehensive, user-friendly transport information service be developed and made widely available outlining timetables of regular services and contact details for non-regular – or user group specific services.***

Actions:

- Council develop terms of reference for further planning, consultation and research required for the future provision of a transport information service²⁰.
- Council identify grants and seek funding for a project, further to the TOR, to develop a detailed plan for implementation of the transport information service.²¹

²⁰ TOR should include assessment of key population groups information needs, review of the three planning areas in the Bellingen Shire and research into 'best practice' transport information delivery approaches.

²¹ The model developed for the information project would need to address:

- the range of public transport users and their different needs and usage patterns (regular users-youth, senior citizens, and other persons without cars; and ad hoc users – one-off)
- How to obtain information on ongoing basis from a number of different transport providers
- The cost differentials between providers and changeability in pricing, and bus stops
- The different information needs in each of the 3 Bellingen areas
- The probable need for regular updating of information to reflect changing timetables and services

- Council identify appropriate grants and seek funding to implement the transport information project as per the plan developed.

Issue: Frequently poor uptake of new transport services despite expressed community need

Recommendation:

- 6. That financial assistance is sought from the NSW Ministry of Transport to assist transport providers to conduct proper needs assessment.*

Actions

- Council to discuss with other local Council's (see recommendation 9) their experience of issue and identify possible low-cost solutions
- Council, possibly in conjunction with other local Council's, to approach NSW Ministry of Transport to discuss support for future in-depth need assessment studies as transport needs emerge.

Issue – Widespread poor knowledge about transport services available and unrealistic expectation as to what constitutes reasonable services

Recommendation:

- 7. That regular campaigns be run that promote transport services and encourage usage – e.g. Travel free bus week*
- 8. That any new transport services be promoted widely.*

Actions:

- Council to explore with other local Council's poor public image issue and identify innovative strategies.
- Council in partnership with key transport providers to develop a public transport promotion strategy
- Council in partnership with key transport providers to approach NSW Ministry of Transport to discuss promotion strategy and seek financial support for its implementation.

Issue- Many transport issues facing Bellingen Shire residents are often region and sometimes state wide issues.

Recommendation

9. *That a local regional transport working group be established with transport representative's from the Bellingen, Coffs Harbour and Nambucca Council's and the group be chaired by Ross Chalmers – NSW Ministry of Transport- Mid North Coast Regional Transport Coordinator, for the purpose of identifying and exploring solutions to regional transport issues.*

Actions:

- Council to explore working group proposal further with other local councils and develop a TOR
- Council to approach Ministry of transport with working group proposal

8 Appendix A- Consultations

8.1 Face to face Consultations

1. Bellingen Seaboard & Youth Services – Anna Joy – 30/08
2. Bellingen Shire Family & Children Services - Randall Peters – 30/08
3. Bellingen Shire Support Network – Andrew Somerville- 6/09
4. Community Transport – Rhonda Warwick -6/09
5. Bellingen Neighbourhood Centre – Charlie Chubb -8/09
6. Nambucca/Bellingen Family Support Service – Denise Olsen -8/09
7. Bellingen High School – Bob Stockton-12/09
8. Dorrigo Support Centre – Elli Luhr- 22/09
9. Dorrigo High School – Ian Willis - 22/09
10. Dorrigo Youth Services – Bill Devine -22/09
11. Mt St John’s Catholic Primary School –Greg Ryan -22/09
12. Urunga Neighbourhood Centre –Leanne Collier-29/09
13. Chrysalis Steiner School – Steve Klipin – 29/09
14. Young Parents Network Project – Eillen Moore 29/09
15. Busways, Greg Miers - Planning and Infrastructure Officer – Central & North Coast, 18/10
16. Busways – Dan Jessup – Depot Manager, Raleigh. 3/11
17. Anne Shearer Road Safety Officer & Rachel Martin – Community Development Officer, Coffs Harbour City Council 19/10
18. Stephen Laidley - Manager – Administration, Coffs Harbour Education Campus. 3/11

8.2 Telephone consultations

1. Urunga Seniors Social Club - Catherine 29/09
2. Urunga Seniors Citizens Day Care – Grace Duggan 27/09
3. Baldwin’ Bus service – Helen Baldwin 2/10
4. Keogh’ Bus Service – Irene Keogh 27/10
5. Sampson’ Charters & tours – Cheryl Sampson 3/11
6. Rowe’ Charter Service – John Rowe 3/11

9 Appendix B - Current Busways Public Transport Timetable

9.1 Bellingen /Urunga to Coffs

MONDAY TO FRIDAY SERVICE

Bus No	361	360	351	360	361 #	361##	351	360	351	361	360	360	351
Service	School Bus	Bello – Urunga-	Urunga - Coffs	Bello - urunga-	Independent	independent	Urunga - Coffs	Bello - Urunga-	Urunga - Coffs	School Bus	Bello - Urunga-	Bello - Urunga-	Urunga - Coffs
Notes					#Mon, Wed &Thurs	##Tues & Friday- via Mylestom							
Bellingen	7.50	7.50		8.45	9.30	9.30		12.30		3.00	3.15	4.20	
Urunga	8.00	8.10	8.20	9.10	9.45	9.45	10.20	12.50	2.00		3.40	4.45	4.45
Mylestom						10.05							
Bonville	8.20				10.05	10.25				3.20			
Toormina	8.30		8.45		10.20	10.30	10.45		2.25				5.10
University	8.35		8.50		10.25	10.35	10.50		2.30				5.15
Hospital			8.55				10.55		2.35				5.20
Park Ave	8.50		9.00		10.30	10.40	11.00		2.40	3.35			5.25
Plaza			9.10		10.45	10.50	11.10		2.50				

360 SERVICE - MONDAY - FRIDAY SERVICE DURING SCHOOL HOLIDAYS

Bus no				360				360				360
Service				Bello - Urunga-				Bello - Urunga-				Bello - Urunga-
Bellingen				9.00				12.30				4.15
Urunga				9.20				12.50				4.30

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SATURDAY SERVICE

Bus No				361	351	361			361	351	361
Service				<i>Bello - Urunga-</i>	<i>Urunga - Coffs</i>	<i>Bello - Urunga-</i>			<i>Bello - Urunga-</i>	<i>Urunga - Coffs</i>	<i>Bello - Urunga-</i>
Bellingen				8.50		10.20			1.45		3.20
Urunga				9.05	9.05	10.40			2.05	2.05	3.40
Mylestom											
Bonville											
Toormina					9.3					2.3	
University											
Hospital					9.35					2.35	
Park Ave					9.40					2.40	
Plaza					9.50					2.50	

OTHER - SATURDAY SERVICE

Bus No					361					361	361
Service					<i>Bello - Repton</i>					<i>Bello - Repton</i>	<i>Bello - Repton</i>
Bello					9.25					2.25	4.00
Repton					9.45					2.45	4.20

9.2 Coffs to Bellingen /Urunga

MONDAY TO FRIDAY SERVICES

Bus No	360	360	351	361	351	351	360	361	361	360	351	361	351
Service	Urunga-Bellingen	Urunga-Bellingen	Coffs - Urunga	Coffs - Bellingen	Coffs - Urunga	Coffs - Urunga	Coffs - Urunga	Coffs - Bellingen	Coffs - Bellingen	Urunga-Bellingen	Coffs - Urunga	Coffs - Bellingen	Coffs - Urunga
								#Mon, Wed & Thurs	##Tues & Friday- via Mylestom				
Plaza					9.10	11.10		1.45	1.45		2.50		
Park Ave			8.00	8.50	9.20	11.20		2.00	2.00		3.00	3.45	5.25
Hospital			8.05		9.25	11.25					3.05		
University			8.10		9.30	11.30		2.05	2.05		3.10	4.05	
Toormina			8.15	9.00	9.35	11.35		2.10	2.10		3.15	4.10	
Bonville				9.10				2.20	2.20			4.20	
Mylestom			9.30						2.30				
Urunga	7.3	8.10	8.40		10.00	12.00	12.00	2.30	2.50	2.40	3.40		5.55
Bellingen	7.5	8.45		9.30			12.30			3.15		4.45	

360 SERVICE - MONDAY - FRIDAY SERVICE DURING SCHOOL HOLIDAYS

Bus No		360		360		360	360		360
Service		Urunga-Bellingen		Urunga-Bellingen		Urunga-Bellingen	Urunga-Bellingen		Urunga-Bellingen
Urunga		8.30		10.00		12.00	1.35		3.40
Bellingen		9.00.		10.20		12.30	1.50		4.15.

10 Appendix C- Recommended changes to busways Public Transport Timetable

10.1 Bellingen /Urunga To Coffs

Monday to Friday service

Bus No	361	360	351	360	361 #	361##	360	351	360	360	351	361	360	360	351
Service	School Bus	Bello - Urunga-	Urunga - Coffs	Bello - Urunga	Indepen dent	Indepen dent	Bello - Urunga	Urunga - Coffs	Bello - Urunga	Bello - Urunga	Urunga - Coffs	School Bus	Bello - Urunga	Bello - Urunga	Urunga - Coffs
Notes					#Mon, Wed &Thurs	##Tues & Friday- via Mylestom									
Service Frequency	Before 9.00 - 1	After 9.00 service- 2			Before 11.00 service -3		After 11.00 service - 4			before 3pm service - 5		After 3.30 service- 6		After 5.00 service-7	
bellingen	7.50	8.00	INTERCHANGE	8.45	9.30	9.30	10.00	Interchange	12.30	1.45	INTERCHANGE	3.00	3.15	4.20	INTERCHANGE
Urunga	8.00	8.2 ###	8.20	9.10	9.45	9.45	10.20	10.20	12.50	2.05	2.05#		3.40	4.45***	4.45
Mylestom						10.05	NEW			NEW					
Bonville	8.20				10.05	10.25						3.20			
Torrmina	8.30		8.45		10.20	10.30		10.45			2.30				5.10
University	8.35		8.50		10.25	10.35		10.50			2.35				5.15
Hopital			8.55					10.55			2.40				5.20
Park Ave	8.50		9.00		10.30	10.40		11.00			2.45	3.35			5.25
Plaza			9.10		10.45	10.50		11.10			2.55				

Notes		## move existing service 10 mins later									#Move forward existing service by 5mins			***Existing service	
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10.2 Coffs to Bellingen & Urunga

Monday to Friday services

Bus No	360	360	351	360	361	351	360	351	360	361??	361	361	360	351	360	361	351	360
Service	Urunga - bello	Urunga-bello	Coffs - Urunga	Urunga-Bbello	Coffs - Bello	Coffs - Urunga	Urunga - bello	Coffs - Urunga	Coffs - Urunga	Coffs - Bello	Coffs-Bello	Coffs - Bello	Urunga-Bello	Coffs - Urunga	Urunga-Bello	Coffs - Bello	Coffs - Urunga	Urunga-bello
											#Mon, Wed & Thurs	##Tues & Friday - via Mylestom						
			Before 9.00 am service-1		9.30 service-2	Before 10.30 service-3		12.30 service-4		before 2 service-5	before 3.30 service-6			4.00 service-7		Before 5 service-8	After 6 service-9	
Plaza						9.10		11.10		NEW SERVICE	1.45	1.45		2.50				
Park Ave			8.00		8.50	9.20		11.20		12.50	2.00	2.00		3.00		3.45	5.25	
Hospital			8.05			9.25		11.25		12.55				3.05				
University						9.30		11.30		1.00	2.05	2.05		3.10		4.05		
Toormina			8.15		9.00	9.35		11.35		1.05	2.10	2.10		3.15		4.10		
Bonville					9.10					1.15	2.20	2.20				4.20		
Mylestom			9.30	INTERCHANGE			INTERCHANGE		INTERCHANGE			2.30	INTERCHANGE		INTERCHANGE	4.35		INTERCHANGE
Urunga	7.3	8.10	8.40	8.4		10.00	10.00	12.00	12.00	1.25	2.30	2.50	2.5#	3.40	3.4	4.40	5.55	5.55

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Bellinggen	7.5	8.45		9	9.30		10.2		12.30	1.45			3.25		4	4.45		6.15
myelstom	8.25	9.50							2.55	4.30								
Bello	8.5	10.20							3.20									

11 References

Robinson, J; (2004) Social Plan 2004, Bellingen Shire Council, NSW

Harrison, J; (2005) Feasibility of evening classes and the need for public transport improvements at Coffs Harbour Education Campus, centre for Enterprise development and research, Southern Cross University. NSW

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