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Level 10, MLC Court, 15 Adelaide St BRISBANE QLD 4000

PO Box 13038 George St Post Shop BRISBANE QLD 4003

Tel:1300 308 420 Fax:(07) 3503-1199

Email: orders@auscript.com.au Website: www.auscript.com.au

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TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

O/N 58856

THE ALLEN CONSULTING GROUP

REVIEW OF THE DISABILITY STANDARDS FOR ACCESSIBLE PUBLIC TRANSPORT

**HEARING CONDUCTED AT: DUBBO RSL
CNR BRISBANE & WINGEWARRA STS
DUBBO**

DATE: 11 JULY 2007

MR JOHN BELL: With these sorts of events there's always a risk that somebody doesn't turn up when their scheduled. So I think we'll just see how it goes. So my name is John Bell. I'm from the Allen Consulting Group. I actually head up the Canberra office of the Allen Consulting Group and my colleague who's out looking for missing participants is Jessie Goldsmith, also from the Canberra office. We're conducting this review on behalf of the Australian Federal Minister for Transport and Regional Services and I think you're all aware of the Disability Discrimination Act, I think quite a milestone piece of legislation when it was passed and we are focusing on the disability standards for accessible public transport which were implemented in 2002.

So the implementation of these standards is scheduled to take place over a 25-year period and this is a review at the five-year mark and so the purpose of the review is to see the extent which the standards have been effective in improving accessibility of public transport to people with disabilities and the evidence that we've seen so far suggests there's been a lot of progress made. Now, to do this review we are conducting sessions in a number of centres around Australia – as you would expect, the capital cities – but at the suggestion of the Minister and the Minister's department we are also going to some regional centres and obviously we can't go to all of the regional centres in Australia but some regional centres have been selected to give us a cross-section of different sorts of centres and to get some feeling for the issues that arise in some of these locations and it happens that Dubbo is the first of these.

Now, just let me say a little bit about the hearing – and I put the word “hearing” in quotes because it's going to be fairly informal and it, I hope, will be useful for the people who wish to say something to us. I'm hoping that subsequently some of you will go away and write a submission. As you know, submissions are due on 24 August and we're hoping to get some things in writing but we do understand that some people will be happy just simply to talk to us. Now, what's said today is being recorded as you will see and the plan is to put this up on our website as a transcript and the reason for that is so that people who couldn't be here at Dubbo and who want to know what the issues were that were discussed in Dubbo will be able to read about them on the website.

I think you are probably aware of our issues paper which has been around for a little while and that's also available off the website. So we're actually going to seven regional centres and as I mentioned, Dubbo's the first. So we really do want to keep it fairly informal. We do have a timetable but of course these things never quite work out as they're intended but we're going to invite people who are going to speak to us to come and sit at the little table out the front there that also has a microphone, just to help us with the recording of the session. Now, there's some tea and coffee outside. The plan is to stop at 12.30 for lunch; we might see how that works. We appreciate that all of you are busy people and that you haven't got all day to spend here unnecessarily. If we get finished early, so be it but we've allocated about 45 minutes for people who wish to speak and we have a little bit of flexibility around that.

So I think that's probably all I need to say by way of introduction. Just let me check – is Marilyn Ward here? No. All right, and I think that Val and Peter Cannon are not here either. So just let me ask Geoff Ferris and Jeff Neill – do you want to talk now? You're happy to talk now?

5

MR NEILL: Yes.

MR BELL: All right. Well, you want to come and sit over behind this microphone and we'll get started talking about buses.

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MR. NEILL: This is Merilyn now.

MR BELL: Okay, all right. Well, you just arrived at the right opportunity, moment, Merilyn, so come and grab a seat up the front here. If you like you can sit behind the microphone and I'll explain why the microphone's there in a second. We are recording this – and just let me recap for a second – we're recording it so that people who weren't able to be here and who want to know what was said can actually be able to read the transcript on our website. So that's why the microphone is there and just let me introduce myself: I'm John Bell and this is Jessie Goldsmith and we're ready to talk. So I've done the introduction. So tell us, Merilyn, you're from Break Thru People Solutions.

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MS WARD: Break Thru People Solutions. Is this on?

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MR BELL: Yes, you won't hear any amplified sound but that's on.

MS WARD: Good – and Frank Newman. I'll just introduce Frank. He assists in coordinating our community access State programs. So he knows probably much more than I know so he might just join in at different times.

30

MR BELL: Okay.

MS WARD: Break Thru People Solutions, we provide programs for people with disabilities in the Orana region. We've got two offices, one here in Dubbo and one in Coonabarabran. We cover the towns I suppose in a circle: Trangie, Coonabarabran, Baradine, Coonamble – sorry, I'm going a bit backwards there – Coolah, Dunedoo, Yeoval and all the smaller communities in between like Mendooran and Binnaway, Collie, Stuart Town. We provide two types of services; one is a Commonwealth-funded program under the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations and that's a DEN – which is a Disability Employment Network program looking for work for people with disabilities in open employment and then we have the Department of Ageing and Disability community access programs which are transitional work and community participation.

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So we've actually been providing services in this region since 1992 so we've had a little bit of experience with transport. Our focus is in integrating people with disabilities into the community in all aspects of their lives. So we're looking at community access, them actually participating just as anybody else would in the

community and also looking at employment and things like voluntary work, etcetera. So I suppose the two key areas that we identify is, number 1, the lack of transport and I suppose in that, particularly in the smaller town such as Narromine, Coonabarabran, Gilgandra and all the little places in between and the lack of services
5 to access programs and services in Dubbo. So it's Dubbo and the region. So I suppose (1) the lack of transport and then probably some of the areas of lack of access where there is transport such as in Dubbo.

10 In our employment program, as I say we've got clients located across the Orana region and so for clients at Wellington, Narromine, Gilgandra, Warren, Coonamble, etcetera, they've got quite a distance to travel to actually, to come to, say, services in Dubbo. We do outreach to towns but where it comes on a regular basis it's very difficult for them to actually get to Dubbo unless they've got their own transport. They're also – and I suppose because it's cheaper to get accommodation in places
15 like Mendooran and Binnaway – to try and find employment there is very difficult but with the Commonwealth Government saying, you would have seen all the advertising on the TV, that welfare to work, you're meant to be finding work. It's very difficult if you're living in a place like Mendooran to get employment but then to try and access somewhere like Dubbo or even Coonabarabran to get employment
20 if it's available in those towns.

So I suppose that's a big need. Also living in those smaller villages, well, there's just no public transport and I would think most - - -

25 MR BELL: There's just no public transport full stop.

MS WARD: No, and I would say most of them wouldn't even have taxis as they're smaller.

30 MR BELL: Because they're too small.

MS WARD: Yes, they're too small. Most clients do not have access to private transport and if they do, the cost of actually travelling if you're on a pension – petrol, all those things. Also mostly they may not have reliable transport if they've got to do
35 it themselves and it's not easy to access buses such as school buses and those sort of, if they are available. Actually in the employment service, clients, there's an actual Centrelink 90-minute rule that they've got to access or travel or look for employment within 90 minutes' travel distance. So that obviously becomes an issue when you're talking about transport in rural areas. Then, yes, so sometimes because of the
40 Centrelink system the times are actually booked and so if there was any sort of transport it's very difficult to actually access appointments at that time. Just probably looking at the Dubbo area, you know there might be buses in Dubbo, but it's very hard to match the buses with appointment times.

45 In our day program, we have clients, as I said, Trangie, Yeoval, Dunedoo and they, I suppose, virtually find their own means of getting here, some do use community transport, some can get school buses, but others can't get school buses and our clients in Coonabarabran all rely on school buses, so that means that they can't

access programs in their school holidays. So, the clients actually, we do actually I suppose, explaining what we actually do, we actually do go to Narromine to do some programs, but clients like to come to Dubbo because there's more to participate in, there's more to do and there's more social activities as well and I suppose they need
5 the access opportunities just as other young people would be doing.

As I said before, we use community transport as much as we can and I suppose the difficulty there is the regularity from the smaller towns with the community
10 transport. It might only be the bus once a week or once a fortnight and that doesn't always fit in with TAFE or whatever they might be going to and also their times, by the time they get into Dubbo, it's 10.30, so part of the day is gone. Countrylink train times, I might bring that – yes, I'll bring that in later. So that's probably the issues with access where there's actually lack of transport and I would just go into existing transport and I suppose some of this comes into educating our clients as well.
15 Sometimes buses might not run on time and obviously clients get agitated and because they've got a disability they can sort of really be thrown with a lack of routine.

Buses don't always cover the areas where they're required and I know that's sort of
20 nearly impossible but, yes, there's probably a little bit of improvement that can be done in relation to the areas covered by buses in Dubbo. Bus stops not probably – a number of them wouldn't be accessible in the design of them because basically it's the bus just pulls into the kerb.

25 MR BELL: Stops on the side of the road, yes.

MS WARD: Now, some footpaths if they come into the footpath, they might be the right height, sometimes they're not the right height, then the other thing is there's
30 other areas in Dubbo where, and probably these are all council issues, where the water, when it does rain, the water can be two foot out from the kerb, so it's very hard to access. So access can be an issue, that would be for anyone, but particularly for people with disabilities. We've got vision impaired people catching buses, so that would be one area. One of the issues has also been bus stop safety, particularly in the CBD. We've actually had instances when it's outside Woolies where clients
35 have been, I suppose, teased, tormented, one got their bag, they didn't actually get the bag, did they? But at any rate, those sorts of things, so there's a safety issue with public transport.

There's probably limited wheelchair accessible public transport in Dubbo,
40 particularly with the buses. I know we've got a couple of buses, but it's working out which direction they go. One of the things is and I'll say this for Geoff, assistance for people with disabilities with the bus company has been just amazing. Even today we've had someone vision impaired get off a bus and was disorientated so the bus driver rang the bus company and they rang us and so the co-operation is really good
45 in relation to our clients, but yes, some people with disabilities do need assistance getting on and off transport and I suppose one of the other issues we have is we put some clients on Countrylink buses at 2 o'clock after the train comes to go to

Narromine and Trangie and that has basically worked but if they're not met at the other end there can be safety issues in relation to that.

5 One of the suggestions we, I suppose this is more a suggestion, is bus passes for
people with disabilities. It eliminates the money, maybe having a shortage of money,
money handling and, I suppose, there's two ways to look at this. We do try to help
our clients, but say if they go down to the Centrelink bus to line up and it's the time
everyone is trying to get their tickets or we try to get there early or whatever and
we've got a client fumbling in their pocket, there's sort of not the same amount of
10 patience. So if there was some sort of bus pass, sometimes that would help. So one
of the key things, I might get Frank to just reiterate this a bit, is particularly with, and
this becomes an access thing, some intersections, you might have a wheelchair ramp.
So do you want to just expand on that, Frank?

15 MR BELL: Frank, you might come and sit in that chair there.

MR NEWMAN: We've recently moved into new premises on the corner of Bultje
and Darling Streets and it has become very apparent with the intersection which is
controlled by traffic lights outside our premises that it's fairly inaccessible for people
20 with disabilities, I guess particularly sight impaired or wheelchair bound people - - -

MR BELL: Frank, you mentioned Darling Street, what's the cross street?

25 MR NEWMAN: Bultje, B-u-l-t-j-e.

MS WARD: It does happen at other intersections, so this is probably just an
example.

30 MR NEWMAN: Yes, I guess with Dubbo City Council, they are aware of it and
they're aware of the age of a lot of the infrastructure of the intersections in town, but
the approaches are very uneven and the footpath, there's some nice plain trees along
there, but the tree roots unfortunately have come up under the footpath, raising the
footpath, creating cracks and the like, particularly on the four corners themselves, the
utility covers Telstra and Power and the like are not level with the asphalt. Over the
35 years, they've probably been re-asphalted so it's fairly uneven there, even some of
the utility covers are a bit wobbly and not particularly safe.

Probably one of the main aspects is there has been wheelchair ramps put in at some
stage there on each corner, but unfortunately they're in the middle of each of the
40 corners aiming directly to the centre of the intersection.

MR BELL: So they're on the diagonal?

45 MR NEWMAN: Correct, so if a wheelchair bound person is to come out there,
they're aiming directly into the centre of the intersection, they're probably outside a
pedestrian crossing. They've got to access out and then turn to line up with the
intersection, but maybe probably a bit more serious is for the sight impaired people
who we train a lot with the Guide Dogs Association or Vision Australia now and

they come to the power pole or the traffic light pole, they press the button, but then they've got to reorientate themselves over to the wheelchair ramp to walk down the wheelchair ramp and then orientate themselves again back over into the pedestrian crossing and it's quite a dangerous situation really and it's also very difficult and time consuming for, say, wheelchair bound people to press the button and then get over into position to go out. If there was a crowd of people there they would be jostling and shuffling around trying to get through people, which does happen at school times. Basically, that covers the main aspects of that particular intersection but there are a lot of other intersections in town like that.

10 MR BELL: Do you think, though, that around Dubbo things have gotten better in recent years in terms of public accessibility to footpaths for people who are disabled.

15 MR NEWMAN: I think so, I think there has been a very concerted effort by the various organisations, of council and the like to improving it, yes. Probably more so in the direct CBD area and I believe there is one set of rules apply within the CBD and another outside the CBD. Just what the differences are, I'm not aware but there has definitely been improvements, yes.

20 MR BELL: Yes, I mean, I suppose that there are more people in the CBD so it's easier to justify spending money on redoing some of the footpath work and putting these ramps in. Although, obviously one ramp is cheaper than two and if - - -

25 MR NEWMAN: I guess this particular intersection, because of all the utilities that are underground there it would obviously be a very major works to rectify and probably a lot of intersections are going to be in the same situation. But the time is coming where these are obsolete and with our current thoughts on safety and people with disabilities and access and all of this, you know, it's becoming more and more apparent that these – when upgrading does occur, these have all got to be taken into
30 consideration.

MS WARD: I think the interesting thing about that situation was that we actually got the bus stop just around the corner and that was approved by council with working with Dubbo Bus Company ourselves and now we're finding that – going
35 back to accessibility a bit, we've got the bus stop but even to get from our office to the bus is a difficult process. So that's probably why we brought that one up. Wheelchair taxis, you know, they can be running early or late due to the high demand at various times. I think one of the issues would be availability and cost. We sometimes have found that, I suppose, the drivers mightn't have the people skills
40 required for, you know, dealing with people in wheelchairs and that sort of thing, the patience or the personality. Also, we've had issues with them not really happy to fill out one of the taxis thing if the client can't do it themselves – the taxi docket for the subsidy.

45 School buses, I don't know where that fits into all this but some of our clients, as I said before do access our programs via school busses. Some get it for free, some have to pay a considerable cost. There seems to be no consistency, whether you can access a school bus when you're not a school person. So, yes, there is probably a

variety of things there. Also, I suppose one of the things with school busses is that you and I might not have to travel on the school bus because there's no other transport and then when people with disabilities do they can get tormented and all those sorts of things with other clients like school kids on the bus. So that doesn't
5 always work.

CountryLink train times, going to the trains. It's an issue, I suppose, from all aspects of society but if you actually get on a train to go to Sydney, you arrive under three hours of the night and for people with disabilities that's really difficult. So people
10 wouldn't use the trains, like, if they had to find their way around after getting off the train. If they're picked up by someone it's probably okay. If you wanted to even go to Orange, it's got to be an overnight stay. So the CountryLink train times, in general, probably don't suit people but particularly for people with disabilities. Probably another area that I've got down here is people using accessible parking
15 areas without having a proof on them and I suppose that's an issue that's everywhere. So they would be the main things that we thought we would bring to you today and
- - -

MR BELL: Okay, thank you for that. Who issues the stickers for disabled parking?
20

MS WARD: That's the RTA.

MR BELL: It's RTA, yes.

MS WARD: So you have to make an application and then – they're quite big now, if you've got one, to put on the car but you find, you know, that people who haven't got them – there's a vacant spot so you park there.
25

MR BELL: Yes. Some of the issues you've raised are, sort of, a general issue about
30 public transport or the lack thereof in rural areas. I think those are issues that are really quite difficult around Australia. I mean, for example, in terms of Narromine, how many times a day would there be a bus between Narromine and Dubbo? I wouldn't - - -

MR FERRIS: Four times.
35

MR BELL: Four times, well, that's better than I would have – I would have guessed, perhaps, two. This is a fragmentation issue - - -

MS WARD: And we can understand too, that you can't have an individual service for individual people.
40

MR BELL: No, I mean there's some economics come into play here. So it's quite difficult. Okay and of course some of these issues you've raised are really issues that
45 are for State Government agencies to address. Some of them are for the Dubbo Council to address but there's quite an interesting spectrum of matters there. Even the taxi dockets, I hadn't appreciated that a disabled person would need to complete a special piece of paper for the ride but I understand the logic of it. It comes back to

your point about having a pass. Perhaps if you had the right pass then you could avoid the paperwork. Even the taxi company might be pleased to avoid some of the paper work.

5 MS WARD: That's right, yes.

MR BELL: I mean, coming back to the people who are trying to get to work, they're looking for job access. Presumably many of those get themselves to work by finding someone else in the area who is going to be able to take them.

10

MS WARD: Yes, particularly in Dubbo, that's easier. In those smaller communities it really just depends.

MR BELL: It's hard.

15

MS WARD: It's hard because you might be the only person. I would say for a lot of those people it becomes just nearly impossible to get them into work.

MR BELL: So their only choice then is to move into Dubbo but probably, as you point out, the reason that they're not living in Dubbo is that it's cheaper to live in some of these smaller villages.

20

MS WARD: Yes.

25 MS GOLDSMITH: Just backing up a little bit. There are four busses, for example, that go to Narromine.

MR FERRIS: There's probably more than four busses. There's busses that come in from Narromine everyday with school children. We take a bus from Dubbo to Narromine which comes back empty, it goes back out in the afternoon. There's probably about six services a day run by three different operators.

30

MR BELL: Hang on a moment, Geoff, I don't think we're picking you up over there.

35

MR FERRIS: Services between Narromine and Dubbo, operated by Fraser's Buslines who run the school services from Narromine to Dubbo. There is a service operated by us, Dubbo Buslines, we operate from Dubbo to Narromine. Then we bring our bus back empty at 9 o'clock. Likewise, ours go back at 2.30 and comes back in at 3 o'clock, with the Narromine children, back into town and Fraser's operate – the Narromine residents order it from Dubbo back at 3.30. On top of that there is CountryLink that goes through whatever the CountryLink timetable is. So there's three different operators running about four to six – I would have to go and count exactly how often.

40

45

MS GOLDSMITH: So there's quite a few?

MR FERRIS: But there's quite a few. The hardest thing is knowing where to look for that information and how we put together – there's a lack of a coordinated timetable and information system.

5 MS GOLDSMITH: Okay, would everyone write - - -

MR FERRIS: And I'll be - - -

10 MS GOLDSMITH: Sorry but I was just thinking with regards to work and stuff. Particularly, this sounds a bit too complicated for me to navigate, particularly for people who are vision impaired or have an intellectual disability. Is there some way of presenting this – do you think that there would be some way of presenting this information that would make it easier?

15 MS WARD: Right, yes.

MS GOLDSMITH: I mean, is part of the accessibility issue that it is very difficult to work out.

20 MR BELL: Presumably, Marilyn, you help your clients.

MS WARD: Yes, yes, but there would be other clients. You know like I can't imagine that, you know if they were vision impaired obviously that is a difficulty. But the Dubbo timetable is quite complex, but from Dubbo to Narromine shouldn't be that complex if all those on a form – and I think really it probably does end up like agencies having to assist people to understand, or bus companies helping people to understand timetables.

30 MS GOLDSMITH: Is there anything – I mean, maybe it is not something you can answer right now, but may be something you could think about for a submission – is there anything that can be done with the timetables that would make it easier for them to understand? So that they can – if there is the service available they have the capacity to know it is there and access it?

35 MS WARD: Yes.

40 MR BELL: So we have mainly talked about buses and taxis and the footpaths and the trains you have mentioned, so that probably covers it. Nobody has said anything about the air side of things. Now I guess that that small Dash-8 is exempt from the standards because it takes less than the minimum number of passengers. But obviously that must be a problem in that you cannot get a wheelchair, for example, into the hold of a Dash-8.

45 MS WARD: Not all Dash-8s are - - -

MR NEILL: The bigger ones - - -

MR BELL: There are some Sabres as well. I don't think you can get a wheelchair into the hold of a Sabre either.

5 MR NEILL: I have seen them, this is just anecdotal, but I have seen them load wheelchair bound people. At the airport they have a lift and then they - - -

MR BELL: A forklift, yes.

10 MR NEILL: - - - and then they place them in the first seat and then they are met at the airport with someone with another chair. They can't carry their own chair though.

15 MR BELL: No, they can't take their own chair, although there are some new designs of chairs around so that there are some that will now fold down. But then, of course, we run into some other interesting problems because – and we will talk about this with the taxis – these wheelchairs have to be rigid enough to meet transport regulations for seats in vehicles and it is not easy to achieve that and at the same time have something that folds up. So sometimes you can get conflicting requirements between one set of rules, in this case motor vehicle safety rules, and rules for saying
20 that people with wheelchairs should be able to have access. Perhaps that will just take time to resolve.

MS WARD: And may be people, I suppose depending where you live, may be people in Dubbo who need to access flights don't. Don't because just the thought of it is too difficult.

25 MR BELL: It is just too hard.

MS WARD: Mm.

30 MR BELL: Which means that then the train and the bus become more important. I think that we will get a submission later in the piece from the New South Wales Government and presumably Countrylink and people like that who will have something to say about it. Obviously if you are running a bus that runs halfway across New South Wales it is quite difficult to have a loading point at every – all the
35 different loading points to be, for example, wheelchair accessible. But certainly the New South Wales Government has been working on trying to improve the accessibility of public transport. I mean, for example, the train station here, how are the ramps and things at the train station? You can get up there in a wheelchair? I haven't checked out the train station. I know the airport and perhaps we will go and
40 have a look at the train station when we have finished today and just see how - - -

MR NEILL: There are no steps.

45 MR BELL: No steps. So it is just straight up. Well there you go, you see, that is an improvement I suppose. And the little dots on the footpath that can be felt with a walking stick – I notice there are some up in the main street. Is it Macquarie.

MS GOLDSMITH: Macquarie.

MR BELL: Macquarie Street. I notice there are some of those up there that seem to be quite well placed. I haven't actually done the experiment to see how well they work in practice, but you have to put on a blindfold and try it.

5 MS WARD: Yes, Council is using those.

MR BELL: Yes, I think there is a reasonable effort being made there. Okay, well are you going to be able – are you planning to give us a submission or are you happy just to have this on the record?

10

MS WARD: I am just happy to – yes, probably. Just to bring those things.

MR BELL: Well, thank you very much for coming along. It was very interesting to hear those points. I think we are probably going to hear them repeated - - -

15

MS WARD: Time and time again.

MR BELL: - - - in some of the other regional centres, but I think it is important to hear these things firsthand. How many people would you be working with at any one time, in terms of people with a disability?

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MS WARD: In employment service?

MR BELL: Yes.

25

MS WARD: We have got over 100 in the region and that is a wide range of disabilities. Right to the point, you know, some can actually – would be driving their own vehicles, right through to highly, ones that need a lot of support. In our department of aging and disability programs, the community access programs we have got now 40 – 42 I think it is, that is within the region.

30

MR BELL: Yes, within the region. It is quite a sizeable region.

MS WARD: Yes, yes.

35

MR BELL: It is really quite sizeable. I drove from here to Dunedoo a couple of weeks ago, it is further than I expected.

MS WARD: Yes, and so if you live in Dunedoo it is not easy to get – we have a client in Dunedoo and he uses all forms to try and get here, you know to our day programs. Because he was coming on the bus, wasn't he, at one stage? But that was costly, wasn't it?

40

MR NEILL: Very expensive. It is \$10 each way and one of his carers was paying for that and she is on a pension, so it becomes a very, very expensive thing. Also he tried to find some respite in Dubbo, either with relations or through one of the respite centres which there again has put an onus back on other people as well.

45

MR BELL: Well, thank you very much, we really appreciate your coming along and talking to us. Now, we were expecting to have Val and Peter Cannon talk to us today, but they are obviously not here. So the two Geoffs, do you want to get started? Thank you. Very good. Geoff Ferris has just given us a little PowerPoint
5 outline of his – of what he is going to say and that’s very helpful. Go for it.

MR FERRIS: Thank you, John. My name, for those people who don’t know, I am Geoff Ferris. I am the group operations manager for Buslines Group. Buslines Group is a company. We own – we work out of eight different bus depots across
10 New South Wales. We operate approximately 130 busses of which Dubbo Buslines is one of our eight depots. At Dubbo we operate 26 busses on regular route services, school services and some charter services. We operate in other large regional centres similar to Dubbo, in Ballina, Lismore, Tamworth, Dubbo, Orange, Picton, the Southern Highlands and Griffith doing the same kind of work, regular route service,
15 school service, charter operations and we have one long distance service operating between Brisbane and Lismore three times daily return.

We operate wheelchair accessible route services in all those operations and as a public transport provider, we commenced buying ultra low floor wheelchair
20 accessible vehicles back in 1999 and when we first took on our challenge of meeting accessible transport, we developed an action plan across our group of how we would meet out the targets and our obligations to the travelling public. We have – approximately 75 percent of our timetable services are wheelchair accessible across our whole group. In Dubbo here we are running somewhere between 60 and 70
25 percent at the moment of all timetabled services are fully wheelchair accessible, an ultra low floor vehicles, air-conditioned. We have been working on improved lighting standards as a bus industry. As our new vehicles come on board, they have got increased lighting standards to meet the DDA requirements.

30 Likewise, signage upgrades and information – we have – I think one of the issues we will tackle at the end and following of what Merilyn said will be – I think the big problem is the lack of information of what is there. It’s not all there, but people don’t know what is there. So we have all our timetables accessible on the internet and we are just doing some work at the moment to upgrade that into the larger font to
35 be able to be read by vision impaired and we are doing some work on that at the moment.

MR BELL: Can I just interrupt for a second?

40 MR FERRIS: Yes, John.

MR BELL: Can I ask you, in New South Wales, if you see a new route opportunity, can you just move in and start operating a bus service?

45 MR FERRIS: We operate in New South Wales under contracts with the Ministry of Transport and if we take the likes of Dubbo, there is two types of contracts in Dubbo. We are what’s called a commercial operator. So we are given a region which is bound by the town boundary of Dubbo. We are given that region, the right to carry

school children, and with that right to carry school children, we have to provide minimum levels of service for regular route services within that area. Outside Dubbo then, there is what's issued – a non-commercial contract and that might be from Dunedoo to Dubbo. We run from Peak Hill to Dubbo. It's a non-commercial
5 service. It's a charter service to the Ministry of Transport where they tell us go to Peak Hill at 7.15 in the morning, pick up – at the moment, this semester, 23 children, pick up another here, another here and that's a charter service to the Ministry of Transport to be conveying school children.

10 Now, if there is a new service that is suddenly operated within the town area of Dubbo – if a new area is built, a new sub-division, it is our job as the commercial operator to service that area. We have got the right to that and we service that area. If it's a new route that operate on a new road out of Dubbo, there would need to be –
15 someone who write to the Ministry of Transport and say we have got some children on this road who need conveying. Then the Ministry of Transport works out whether to divert a bus off another road or put a new service on so there are new services operated from time to time but it depends whether it's in that commercial boundary or out on a non-commercial route.

20 MR BELL: And outside the city of Dubbo, do we have any commercial services at all other than CountryLink? I mean, obviously you have got your run to Brisbane.

MR FERRIS: That's in Lismore. But here in Dubbo we run to Narromine non-commercially. We run to Peak Hill non-commercially. All the out of town
25 busses here are non-commercial operations which mean they are chartered for school children. CountryLink is a tendered service. I'll talk a little bit – we don't operate CountryLink but I know a little about CountryLink. So continuing on, our progress in meeting our disability DDA requirements – our priority seating signage in accordance with the regulations, the skid resistant surfaces, the hand rails and grab
30 rails in contrasting colours and at the appropriate heights. We have been doing that as a bus industry.

I'm not saying that Buslines is leading the way as a bus industry. There is an
35 obligation to do this and I think every bus – you know, 99.9 percent of bus operators accept that obligation. That is part of providing public transport and the industry, as such, the bus building industry and the bus industry are meeting those standards as new vehicles come online. Our government contracts say that we have got to have an average age of fleet of 12 years average, so an operation like Dubbo with 26 busses, it means you've got to virtually buy two to three busses every year so you're
40 replacing vehicles with new, latest model vehicles at all times. A continual progression of modern fleet.

MR BELL: And by the time you have been going for 12 years - - -

45 MR FERRIS: 24 years you should have a complete new fleet because 12 year average.

MR BELL: Okay. So 12 year average.

MR FERRIS: Yes. One of the other things we do and I think we'd want to highlight as part of the problem that Merilyn lives in Dubbo and works in Dubbo and talks to Dubbo Buslines but she doesn't know we sell pre-purchased tickets. We've been doing that in our group for 10 or 15 years for people who can't access cash, for
5 people who can't be trusted with cash, whether it's small children, whether it's people who just can't handle cash. We have a variety of agreements with community organisations, with health services, with employment agencies in many of our operations where we pre-sell tickets, vouchers and the get on, give the voucher to the driver, he exchanges them a ticket out of our ticket issue machine and that is
10 equivalent of carrying cash. So it's a pre-purchased ticket. We already do that. We have been doing that for probably 10 or 15 years.

MR BELL: And do they get that pre-purchased ticket from your - - -

15 MR FERRIS: From our bus depot. There's some arrangement – we sell to the local health service here. We sell them some – you know, they might go and buy 50 for their clients that they use over three months or three weeks or whatever that is. In other places, employment agencies do and give each of their clients going to an interview get a free bus ticket there and back so they have a pre-purchased voucher
20 they give the bus driver. It means they don't have to provide cash.

MR BELL: But the important thing here is that the person who is using this voucher doesn't have to be the person who fronted to the - - -

25 MR FERRIS: No. Not at all. Most of them are sold through agencies, community agencies, and community groups.

MR BELL: Okay.

30 MR FERRIS: So that is, and as I said, we need to talk to Merilyn to make sure that that is fully being utilised. That's out – what we are doing as a bus industry, and in particular as Buslines Group to meet our requirements. I suppose we'd also like to address the issues that confront a bus operator in meeting disability, discrimination requirements in the DDA Act. There is a cost to comply and it's considerably high.
35 A low floor wheelchair accessible vehicle is in excess of \$100,000 dearer than our busses we buy for carrying school children. So it doesn't come cheap, but that is part of the requirement. We're not saying we're not prepared to pay that but it's not just another bus. It's a special bus. It's a bus that costs more to operate. They are lower seating capacities because of the low floor entry, not just because of the wheelchair
40 spots but because of the low floor entry.

That means your wheel arches are larger inside the vehicle so you lose seating capacity. We then have an issue where we buy 61 seat school busses to get our capacity of seated children, then we are bringing in 49 seat wheelchair busses which
45 really become an issue to rostering your peak hours. You have to have certain rosters that you can seat 49 people and not 61. It's not a matter of saying tomorrow morning we will just use that bus on that shift, not if I have got 75 children on it and it's only a 49 seater. So it becomes a rostering issue. We work around that but it's

just an issue that by having accessible vehicles - it not just means you put another vehicle in your fleet. They are specialist vehicles that have to be then rostered the right way and you lose some utilisation of your fleet.

5 To do all that and the extra cost and the extra – what disappoints us greatly is the very minimal use of the services. We have paid this money, we would like to pull in wheelchairs and people who are accessed challenged, if you like, to use the services, but very few do and that is one of the issues we would like to talk about. I know in Orange we put our first wheel accessible bus on in '99 and we never carried a
10 wheelchair person until 2003. Not one, and that was in our – why is that, you know, and a lot to do is that I don't think that people in wheelchairs particularly feel comfortable on mainstream transport and that is an education process and a learning curve we have got to put some of those people through as a community, to say that it is an option.

15 So we spend this extra money, we go to this thing, but the utilisation rate is very, very poor. So we see a large cost for very little return by the community. Now, we're not saying walk away from it. We're saying, let's make use of the resource that's there that's cost a considerable amount of money to do. So there is poor
20 acceptance, I think, of mainstream public transport as a viable option and one of the issues we would like to see addressed is how we educate people that these services are available and if we take Dubbo we operate approximately and without reading in it, 59 or 62 services a day in Dubbo, of which 60 to 70 per cent are with wheelchair fully accessible vehicles but who knows that. We have it on our timetable, we have
25 it on our Internet but I think we need to work closer as a community to make sure people fully understand where that access is.

Part of our rules of developing timetables and bus routes in a place like Dubbo is we have to meet 85 per cent of the population within 400 metres of their home, so there
30 are not many areas in Dubbo you can't get to in the town of Dubbo by a bus but by the same token for some people in a wheelchair or with vision impairment may be 400 metres to the bus stop is a challenge and we've got to work with some of those as well but they are the current planning rules for bus operations.

35 We believe there is an over reliance on community transport, that we have issue and not in Dubbo, let me say that this is not in Dubbo, we work very well with the community transport operator in Dubbo but in many of our other operations where the community transport operator sees himself as a bus operator and the easy, from
40 our point of view we see them as taking the easy option of providing community transport is to run a minibus around town and take our passengers who should be catching our bus and because they drop their groceries to the door it is a very attractive service.

45 What they should be doing we think is running from Dunedoo in which we can't do with a large 49 seat bus and I will give you an example. In Lismore we met with the community transport provider and said, you know, what are your issues and I think as I said before, one of the problems is information and they said, "We can no longer carry any more people, our books are full" and I said, "What do you do". They had

11 vehicles. They said, "Well, we run services from here, we run services from Casino and we run a bus in from Casino three days a week". I said, "You know we run from Casino three times a day". They said, "No, we don't". We now run them on a voucher system on our buses, they pulled a bus off that service, it can now be
5 used on other whether they could not handle any more clients, so it is just a matter of exchanging information and working with the community.

Our bus service has been running between Casino and Lismore for 40 or 50 years but no one ever bothered to look at our timetable to say we do that service. We just
10 accepted that they had to use a community bus, where that relieved the pressure off the community transport provider to take that vehicle elsewhere and use it where it could be better utilised where there's no public transport.

MR BELL: Just let me ask you about this community transport, it is something I am not familiar with, although it sounds like I should be. Are these services subsidised by the - - -
15

MR FERRIS: Subsidised by a large variety of Government funded and community funded organisations ranging from health and community, home and community
20 care, Aboriginal Affairs, CTP funding, there is a myriad of funding, State and Federal and one of the problems is I think, it is such a convoluted funding web if you like where various community groups naturally get funding wherever they can to operate a bus for a service and once a bus is operated then people want to make use of it, so it then becomes blurred of what the job is of that vehicle and I think need to
25 better use whatever the resource, whether it's one of our school buses, whether it's one of our town buses, whether it's a community bus run and funded by HACC or whether it's the Aboriginal Affairs bus, whether it's the health bus that's funded by the Area Health Service. It is co-ordination of all the services and that's where I think we as a community stand to solve the majority of our problems, it is by better
30 utilising what is already there than necessarily going to have to go and purchase more.

MR BELL: Just correct me if I'm wrong but these community, these mini buses that I see don't look to me to be wheelchair accessible. Are there some around that are?
35

MR FERRIS: Many.

MR BELL: Many of them are, okay.

40 MR FERRIS: I would suggest, and plucking a figure out of the air, 40 or 50 per cent.

MR BELL: Okay, as high as that.

MS WARD: Community transport is to transport aged and disabled and some use
45 buses, in Dubbo they use volunteer drivers and have a lot of cars so in our fleet of 26 we have five wheelchair accessible ones.

MR FERRIS: So, it's a variety of transport and as I said we work very well with, in Dubbo particularly with the community transport operator and it makes a lot of sense that we do what we can do and they do what we can't do or what else needs to be done. It is no use duplicating services, it is a wasted resource. We can't be
5 everything to everyone in a twelve metre bus. We can't get where the little buses go and we can't get where the cars go but where we can get to that it makes a lot of sense that we don't duplicate services.

10 So, if I can address a few concerns that Merilyn raised with access for her people in the community, the bus pass issue as I said, that is not an issue, we can talk about pre-paid bus tickets, we do it in every one of our operations. CountryLink, I can't speak on behalf of CountryLink but the CountryLink fare is \$2.50, it is not too hard, the cost is not prohibitive but certainly you would have to talk to CountryLink about how they pre-sell tickets.

15 Access to school buses was raised. Let me say that it is every school bus in New South Wales operated by a private operator or a public operator in New South Wales contracted to the Ministry of Transport is able and can carry fare paying passengers, whether it is adults concession, anyone with a disability can access the service, so
20 there is no restriction on doing that. Now, that doesn't mean the person wants to get on with 61 screaming children at 7.30 in the morning but it is under the Act allowed and encouraged. So, a school bus running in is able to take fare paying passengers if you like. The issue of what the cost of that fare is, I know as a company we have a scale of fares which is approved by the Ministry, the non commercial operator who
25 doesn't sell many tickets usually has to comply with some kind of scale agreed to by the Ministry but that should be able to be sorted out with the operator but certainly the Government is not looking for any, how can I say, reimbursement of the cost of running the bus, it is paid for by the school children, so it is only a token fare to represent the journey travelled. It is not looking for cost recovery.

30 So, who can travel on it? Anyone can travel on it who can access the services and that's any school bus service in New South Wales, so those issues should not be in issue and that's where I think if we can work out what is the way forward, we have to have a closer working relationship. Merrill and Frankie are running a business in
35 Dubbo where we do talk to them sometimes but we obviously don't talk enough. The community transport provider is in Dubbo, we talk to them but we don't talk enough. The taxi operators in Dubbo they do an enormous amount of disabled access, more than we do because of the nature of a taxi but we all have to talk together more and many of the problems I think that the community have can be
40 solved if we put our minds together because there's a lot of resource around. It can't be solved a hundred per cent and living in Dunedoo and travelling to work in Dubbo is a real challenge because of the distance and the remoteness of the area but there is answers for some of the problems, maybe not all of them, but we have to build up a dialogue and some kind of form to do that.

45 It was started here with a transport working group that started back in 2001 by the Ministry of Transport and maybe that needs to be continued or revamped or revitalised. We can't solve everyone's problems but at least if we're aware of some

of the problems that people who are mobility challenged, put it that way, whatever it be, whether it be sight, whether it's wheelchair, whether it's some other restriction at least if we all knew what their problems were I think we would have solutions to many of them, no one is saying all of them.

5

So we need better exchange of ideas, we need an increased acceptance in community ownership of mainstream public transport. We run air-conditioned wheelchair buses around Dubbo six days a week and we lose money on them every day. Now, that's part of our contract, we are not complaining about that. What we would like to see is if we're going to run them we would like to see as many people use them as they can because the driver gets lonely, we don't carry too many, but that's part of providing a public transport service but we need people to understand it is there for the community.

10

15 We run down streets that we determine we think the people want to travel on, if that's not the streets people want to travel on and people haven't got access to buses, we will run down where people want to go because we would like to carry people. We're in the business of carrying people. We have to cover the area, as I said, of Dubbo so we have to run in every area, but if we're not in the right place someone
20 needs to tell us that and we're not hell bent on running down the streets we're running down, except they tend to be the main streets where people can get access to a bus stop. So it's not our bus service, it's the community's bus service and the more the community involves itself with us in what they would like, we can never provide everything they want, but hopefully we can provide much of what they want.

25

So all I would finish on is that I think there needs to be across the whole of the country but particularly in Dubbo or any other area a much freer flow of information. If someone has a transport issue where they can't get from somewhere to somewhere, we should be talking to the bus operator, the taxi operator and the
30 community transport operator, the three of them together, and say: what can we do for this person? Maybe it's nothing, but I would think in a lot of cases that something can be done, maybe not at the exact time they want and maybe flexible working hours is becoming more and more a thing of the norm nowadays, but if the school bus is coming from Dunedoo at quarter past seven, well, that might be the
35 best we can offer, but at least it's something. Thank you.

30

35

MR BELL: Well, thank you, that was really very helpful. I'm actually getting a much better understanding of how these things work and I should know a little more about New South Wales because I actually have a residence in New South Wales and
40 I do observe community buses going past empty, but the ones that I see don't look terribly wheelchair accessible and even the ones that are owned by the RSL Club don't appear to be wheelchair accessible.

40

MR FERRIS: I think part of the problem in the community transport provided too, a
45 lot of things are called community transport. I would call that the courtesy bus from the RSL Club, it's not a community transport.

45

MR BELL: So you wouldn't define it in this way?

MR FERRIS: Well, it depends on what you're – I mean it is a service to the community as is our public transport as is a taxi, but it is not a true definition, my true definition of what community transport is which is for people who are access challenged in some way.

5

MR BELL: With special needs.

MR FERRIS: Because they can't afford it.

10 MS MOODY: I would say community transport is for people that are funded through the HACC program, the Health and Community Care program.

MR FERRIS: That is the accepted one.

15 MS MOODY: Which is the community one.

MR FERRIS: Where the RSL Club bus may be providing a service to the community, it's not the true sense of community transport and I think, John, they're the buses you see without wheelchair accessibility because it's generally to take the patrons home from a club like this at various times of the day as a free service and as a way of avoiding random breath, like DUI and things like that I suppose. So community transport is a lot of different things and certainly - - -

20 MS WARD: And usually you would see the bus would have, like, Dubbo Community Transport but you will see the cars Warren Community Transport, so they'll have the name on the sign.

MR BELL: So they're identifiable.

30 MS WARD: Yes.

MS MOODY: And usually you will see an outside community just speaking for the community transport that we all nine towns across from Lightning Ridge to Nyngan, our community transport that comes to Dubbo is usually health related funding to specialist medical appointments. We don't have funding enough to come down for a social trip or an outing like that and we have very limited – we only have CTP which is for isolated people. We only have that in three areas across our region. It's mainly medical appointments that you will see outside community transport people in Dubbo.

40

MR FERRIS: In other areas of the State, it is often a shopping excursion as well. The North Rivers is an area, because it's such a different set of issues, but it does a lot of shopping trips just to give the community access.

45 MR BELL: Okay, well, look that's great. Are you planning to put a written submission in or can I take this to be it?

MR FERRIS: We could make a formal written submission in more detail. Part of the reason of coming today was to see what other issues were out there and we would like to address that. We are also going to attend one of the final sessions in Sydney because our head office is based in Sydney and maybe that's the time to submit a
5 more formal written presentation.

MR BELL: All right, well, thank you very much for that. Thanks a lot. Okay, so we're just on 12 o'clock. We're just going to pause a second because we're expecting somebody right now and we're just going to go and look for them and see
10 whether that's happening.

MR BRYAN: Just to take up something that was just said. I know the Orange taxi service had a problem utilising their wheelchair access vehicle because of the proliferation of other agencies in Orange that were providing wheelchair access
15 vehicles. So that's probably to back up why Geoff was saying that nobody jumped on their buses.

MR FERRIS: We operate in Orange and I think the Orange community transport operator has 13 buses. He's nearly as big as us and that is, you know, there is a job
20 in Orange as in every other town for them to do. Quite often it's easier to top up with ours and the taxi customer because you're there and that's where – you know, we're not in opposition with the community transport operator. They have a task. We have a task and Dubbo is one of our better areas where we do work together and we've had a relationship, but it's often blurred and the need for them to be – to the
25 community transport provider to use them generally to recoup some funds.

MS MOODY: In areas where we have public taxis and that, we use the taxi services and we use our HACC funding to give our clients a subsidised service within that taxi service in those towns.
30

MR FERRIS: Yes, information is a critical thing to the outcome of all this, know what each other is doing and is capable of doing. We can't do a taxi, we don't want to and they can't do what we do and move large volumes and don't want to.

MR BELL: Well certainly that's really quite an interesting insight to this issue about the co-ordination issue between different services. So do we have Alan Peter Cannon? Hi! Since you weren't here earlier, just let me explain, these are very informal sessions and we are recording them because we are going to put up on the internet a transcript of what's said and that's so the people who weren't able to be
40 here can look and see what was said by the folk from the various agencies and services that have come along and talked to us about what their challenges are and what they're doing about them. So look, do you want to move in a little bit closer to that microphone and we'll get you to say a few things?

45 Now, I understand that you're parents of somebody with a disability, is that right?

MRS CANNON: Correct.

MR BELL: So do you want to tell us a little bit about the challenges that you face with transport?

MRS CANNON: Well, we don't have any.

5

MR BELL: You don't have any challenges?

MRS CANNON: We don't have any transport at all.

10 MR BELL: You don't have any transport, okay.

MRS CANNON: Any transport, that's our issue and I don't know whether you people can do anything for our case. Our son has just left school last year and he's been funded to attend Kurrajong Enterprises in Parkes from 9 to 3 five days a week, that's an 80 km one-way trip for us and obviously we can't do that. We can't take him in and out, in and out and go back and get him each day. We have no way of getting him there. Disabilities say it's not their problem. They provide the services, but they don't have any funding for transport. The Transport Department said it's not their problem and all these people have fobbed it onto community transport. Community Transport have an ageing fleet of people who drive for them and they don't have money to cover something like our case.

15
20

MR BELL: And you're living here in Dubbo?

25 MRS CANNON: No, we live 85 km from Dubbo or Parkes, sort of in between – we're south-west of here and it's 85 km to Parkes or Dubbo.

MR BELL: So you're on a rural property?

30 MRS CANNON: Yes.

MR BELL: Okay. The distances, I mean if you multiply 80 by 4 it's a big number.

MRS CANNON: Yes.

35

MR BELL: To do every day would be just - - -

MRS CANNON: Well, while he went to school the Education Department, he was covered, I understand that the transport department provide or – I don't know how it works but between the education department and the transport department, that's how the service is provided. Now, at the moment – well it has ended now – Wade has been using the school service. We take him into Peak Hill and out every day and that's an 80 km trip for us; it's 20 km in, 20 out, 20 in, 20 out.

40

45 MR BELL: Yes.

MRS CANNON: Each day and the education department have said he had permission to travel with the school transport car if we took him into Peak Hill until

the end of this first semester of school. So as of now Wade doesn't have any way of getting there and that car still goes and I have written to the education department – I wrote to them nearly two months ago to the person I was told to write to – asking could Wade continue to travel on that service. There's only one other child using
5 that service at the moment so it's not full and those parents are more than happy for our son to travel with their child; no problem there. So we just want someone to address the problem. It can be solved and as far as public transport, we don't have any in Peak Hill.

10 MR BELL: Roughly what would the population of Peak Hill be?

MRS CANNON: About 1,400 and I've been to our local member and I've had a reply from the Minister for Transport and, again, it's not his problem and see Ageing and Disability or someone else. Everyone just keeps passing the problem.

15 MR CANNON: Can I just say something here?

MR BELL: Yes, please.

20 MR CANNON: The problem I see, there seems to be plenty of people employed in the system but by the time – and it's funded – but it's been eaten up by administration. There's nobody prepared to take on the issue and actually provide the assistance that's required. Look, I don't like being racist but I believe if we were indigenous people, this wouldn't be a problem. Now, this is the problem we've got
25 today. There's not much more I can say. I feel frustrated that our son's just turned 19 and now he's declared an adult, that these services are no longer available.

MR BELL: Yes. So we're talking about the New South Wales State Department.

30 MR CANNON: Yes. There's plenty of promises made in the election period but after the election's over it's all deaf ears and nobody wants to know about it and when they say we're issuing so much money at one, it all breaks down into the system what finances are available, there's very little. Even the Federal Government came out for the children that could be, receive these funding, it's only a thousand
35 dollars a year. Well, a thousand dollars a year to a family.

MR BELL: Well, not if you're trying to cover 320 km a day, then \$1,000 doesn't go anywhere.

40 MR CANNON: I know this but we're talking about the whole problem.

MR BELL: Yes.

45 MR CANNON: It's about time we got fair dinkum. Maybe it would change if these disabled people could vote.

MR BELL: Sorry, let me ask, have you tried calling the education department on the phone to see if you can accelerate a response?

MRS CANNON: I haven't yet. I was giving them time to reply and I don't know whether two months is long enough for someone to reply.

5 MR BELL: I think in the circumstances my suggestion would be perhaps that it was time to give them a call. Especially since you are aware of the space being available on the service, I think, I can imagine that there could be a certain amount of toing and froing between the department and the service provider to check that all this was possible and perhaps that process could be short circuited but it highlights a more
10 general problem, for example, from Peak Hill to – we're talking to Parkes – is there a public transport between Peak Hill and Parkes?

MRS CANNON: No. We don't have any public transport, full stop.

15 MR BELL: So not only do you have nothing in Peak Hill but nothing from Peak Hill.

MRS CANNON: Well, there is a school bus that goes from Peak Hill or maybe it goes from Alectown to Parkes each day – I'm not quite sure – but still that's a long way away and Wade really couldn't be put just on a school bus with everyone else.
20

MR CANNON: He's wheelchair bound.

MRS CANNON: So he really couldn't.

25 MR BELL: So the school bus may well not be able to take wheelchairs.

MRS CANNON: No, no.

30 MR BELL: So it doesn't solve.

MS MOODY: Sorry, how did you say he got to school when he was going to school?

35 MRS CANNON: Well, the vehicle used to pick him up each morning and take him and the other children who were also, there was always one or two with Wade who were picked up also.

MRS MOODY: A special wheelchair vehicle?

40 MRS CANNON: Well, back then he wasn't in the wheelchair. I mean, he can still sit on a normal seat now but you've still got to have the wheelchair to go with him.

45 MRS MOODY: Yes, I'm just thinking as I have a similar client that lives, it takes us 45 minutes to go out and get him, he's a paraplegic in a wheelchair but we just, we don't have a special vehicle. We put him in a Camry sedan. He comes in on the school bus and community transport working outside of the school days and we work into going to pick him up but the majority of the time he comes in on the school bus.

It's only on the holidays that we go out and pick him up but he's in a wheelchair and he doesn't need a special vehicle. We can pick him up within our fleet.

5 MRS CANNON: See, Wade doesn't get to access his full program because when the other child doesn't go to school, if she's sick or away or whatever, the car doesn't run so Wade doesn't get to go and he doesn't get to go in the school holidays now because the vehicle doesn't run. Even though he is funded to go this program, there's no way of getting him there and it's really not as if we, I don't live five hours west of Bourke. It's not like that; I live reasonably close to the Newell Highway.

10 MS GOLDSMITH: So the problem you're running up against in the simplest terms – and I'm imagining you're not the only people in this situation – is once your child leaves school, they lose their services which looks like an accessibility issue.

15 MR BELL: It does indeed and everybody knows that education doesn't end when you leave school. I mean, most of us got our most important qualifications after we left school. So I understand the problem exactly and I think when people read the transcript and see Peak Hill and they think about 1,400 people living in Peak Hill, there are lots of communities in this country of that sort of size that face these sorts of problems and I was certainly not aware that it was as difficult as that.

20 MS WARD: We have the same issue with people in Trangie who come to our service because it's a similar service obviously to where Wade goes in Parkes and they're faced with the same thing. They live at Trangie which is past Narromine and they're driving in of a morning so it's a real issue in the smaller country areas.

MR BELL: But you don't extend out to Peak Hill?

30 MRS CANNON: Trangie's north - - -

MR BELL: Sorry, my geography isn't too good.

MRS CANNON: Trangie is further north from us.

35 MS WARD: You're talking about Currajong. So we're actually west of which is now Break Thru People Solutions so it's a similar service. So I would suppose the thing is that we can cover but obviously if Wade went to school in Parkes that's obviously the place that he knows that he would like to access. To come to Dubbo would be a whole different thing. Still, I think you've got to think of the client and the community that access most. Do you figure what I mean?

40 MR BELL: Yes, I do exactly get what you mean and if a student has been studying in Parkes and wants to continue studying Parkes, I mean, Parkes is a big centre, undoubtedly it offers quite a range of courses. It seems to me not unreasonable that that should be able to continue and it comes back to what we were talking about earlier where Department of Employment and Workplace Relations is keen to help

45 some of these young people get into the workforce but to do that they need

qualifications which they're going to get at a TAFE, something like that, and they need access to do it. End of story. So, well, - - -

5 MRS CANNON: Sorry, can I just say something there.

MR BELL: Yes.

MRS CANNON: Now, someone else had said, like, people have no understanding of anything outside the city circle. They said, well, why did you choose Parkes?
10 Well, Parkes was the closest one. They said, why didn't you choose a closer one? There wasn't a closer place offering the service and also, can I say, Currajong Enterprises, they're trying to have a respite house. Like, they've suggested to me that in time perhaps if they had money to purchase a house, Wade could go in
15 Monday morning and go home Friday. Now, a place the size of Parkes doesn't have a respite house. They had one but some clients went there and they had nowhere else to go; they never, ever left so that house is fully occupied. Now, we don't have any respite at all now. Once Wade turned 19, no respite because our closest respite - we had a beaut service in Forbes but that's closed to Wade as an adult now and our next
20 closest one is Orange and that's a two-hour trip one way for us and no, it's too far and I - yes, no. That's six hours travelling for us to have a day or two off. It's more than that actually.

MRS MOODY: Have you tried accessing - I know through Homecare you can get access to respite through Homecare.
25

MRS CANNON: That's the other problem. People don't want to come out to our place. That's the thing. Like if you live in Parkes or Peak Hill or somewhere, yes, there's people there that will do that, but no one wants to travel out and the travelling time is taken off your respite time as well.
30

MRS MOODY: We have, as I said, this client, his mother gets respite.

MS CORMAN: Can I just say it's not just this area. This situation is right over New South Wales and there's an enormous gap there. Even if the buses do operate
35 and can take people to day activities, that six weeks at Christmas time particularly when the buses aren't running because the kids aren't at school, and a lot of cases where you've got ageing parents that is their rest day, you know, for the child to go these day activities, that's their respite too, so you've got six weeks there even if the bus is available but that is an enormous gap when a child leaves school and goes into
40 a program. There's just nothing there. And Education pass it onto this one and they pass it on and it's just going around in circles. There's people travelling all over New South Wales, 60, 80 kilometres a day, even more and it is a big

MR BELL: I just wanted to ask the lady at the back what your name was, sorry?
45

MRS CORMAN: Sue Corman.

MR BELL: Sue, thanks Sue. Obviously we'll be looking carefully to see whether these same problems arise in other states but I certainly understand the problem.

5 MR CANNON: Can I just say something? Why should we be disadvantaged when our livelihood is prime producers in this state, whereas the answers that we get back that we should move to a bigger centre so these services are available. I believe we've been disadvantaged to the point where you just become so frustrated and it's all stress, so the – I believe the system needs a big injection of money and real good overhaul of what services are provided.

10 MR BELL: Yes, it's interesting because as we're discussing this we're going a little beyond sort of strictly the public transport issues, but these other issues are so interrelated and tied together – the access to TAFE and respite - and those sorts of issues are not easy to disentangle from accessibility of public transport.

15 MS WARD: I think it's going back to what we're saying, like one of the that we were saying before, you know, communicate, but I think government departments have to communicate and to make sure that things are accessible I think one of the things is one department says one thing or the lines, you know, are so clear cut to them, but on the ground their policies don't always work and I think that that's one of the things that to get accessible transport, government departments, whether it's federal or state or whoever, need to work together.

20 MR CANNON: Can I just add on to what I said earlier. Some years ago there was a state government upper house inquiry into disabilities. There were members from each political party on the table and the room was completely full of sad stories of how these children or young adults or old adults that had been cared for by their parents, what happens when they pass away, what's going to happen, and as far as I know there was nothing ever come out the other end of that inquiry.

25 MR BELL: I do remember the inquiry but I don't remember seeing any report from it.

30 MR CANNON: It's probably the only time I've ever felt sorry for politicians because they were copping it.

35 MR BELL: Look, thank you very much for coming along and telling us directly what your issue is or your issues are. It's an important contribution to this and we'll certainly be thinking about this issue when we start to formulate some recommendations at the end of this process, so we have appreciated you coming to tell us about it. I'm just looking at the time and I'm wondering whether we stop and have some lunch or whether Dubbo Radio Cabs wants to talk now. What would you prefer?

40 MR BRYAN: We can fit it in before lunch.

45 MR BELL: You would be happy to fit it in before lunch, all right. Do you want to come and take a seat at the table, please.

MR BRYAN: We would just like to preface that what we're talking about is Dubbo; we're not representing any region whatsoever, it's just the situation as it exists in Dubbo as a provider of public transport and for disadvantaged people. To set the scene, figures are always useful and Dubbo Radio Cabs, which comprises 18
5 individually owned cabs and operated cabs and three wheelchair access vehicles, completed a total number of 19,614 jobs for June, last month. Out of that, the wheelchair access jobs totalled 478 and we have a breakdown of each one of those vehicles which shows that the reaction time is pretty good. The maximum we could find there was 18 minutes but that was the maximum.

10 On top of that, of course, there is under this Disabilities Act, it includes anyone with a disability. Now, in New South Wales a lot of people have the TTSS docket not just for mobility and wheelchairs but for sight impairment, for mobility, a number of issues and in our case that averages 350 a month, so out of those totals with the
15 wheelchair and the other TTSS dockets, that's about 828. Then you could add on those jobs that are just picked up that don't go through the system from a rank. It would be less than 5 per cent of our total work is for people with disabilities.

20 Back originally, New South Wales government was always very keen before all this for networks to provide this service and Dubbo had its first wheelchair access vehicle in 1989, followed by a second one in 1992. Dubbo probably led the way as far as a lot of regional areas was concerned, because there was recognition, even in those days, that the need was there and provided the service and it become utilised very quickly. The government then jumped into action, particularly after the Disabilities
25 Act was enacted, and started schemes whereby people could apply to the Ministry for Transport for a plate and get it at no cost to put on a wheelchair access vehicle and the government wouldn't even lend 50 percent of the cost of the vehicle on – yes, up to 25,000 interest free for five years but the industry, not only in Dubbo but other places, found that those people that jumped in were handing those plates back after
30 12 months because they just weren't viable. To complement was Geoff was saying, there is a cost to compliance, and to run a wheelchair access taxi is considerably more than running a normal vehicle. We're looking at sixty to seventy thousand dollars for a vehicle with the wheelchair access facility. We are very concerned that some people are getting the scooters, for example, and there is no Australian standard
35 for these scooters.

MR BELL: These are three-wheel scooters?

40 MR BRYAN: And four-wheel scooters.

MR BELL: Four-wheel scooters, okay.

45 MR BRYAN: We have one vehicle that is large enough to carry them but it was off the road for about a week recently because the driver was made, ordered, bamboozled to lift this person in this scooter which caused over \$1000 worth of damage to the ram on the hydraulic hoist.

MR BELL: Because it's not designed to take that much weight.

MR BRYAN: It's not designed to take it. So one of our concerns is that Australian standards should, perhaps, specify what a maximum weight and maximum carrying capacity for a scooter is because just because someone is obese and has a scooter, they expect the taxi industry to carry it and demand the taxi industry carry. So that's
5 one of our problems. The TTS dockets, you were mentioning that a lot of people have difficulty sorting them out. Well, the state government did have a TTS trial going with a car to replace the docket that went through our electronic - - -

10 MR BELL: A swipe card.

MR BRYAN: Swipe card but the last thing we heard about six months ago it had been discontinued so we'd certainly very much encourage the continuation of that trial because it does help. It helps the client who has no worries about signing things and bits of paper and a lot of people lose their books and don't have them and there
15 is all sorts of problems with that. The card was the answer. It's been discontinued for some reason and on the processing end, instead of having this pile of paper dockets at the end of accounting period, there would just be an electronic printout from Cab Charge or whoever was going to process it. So that would be a help all around if that could be started up again.

20 The problem on the costing, of course, is that there is a very, very low return and we have great difficulty having operators to maintain those wheelchair access vehicles and to get drivers because it's a long day and usually there is two shifts in a day and the return from that means that we don't always get the brightest candle on the cake
25 to come and drive taxis. But we persevere and sometimes it works – invariably it works but there are sometimes where we haven't got the right people. But it's either provide the service or not provide the service.

30 MR BELL: Do you have to provide special training to people who - - -

MR BRYAN: Yes. It's a fairly comprehensive test which everyone who drives a wheelchair access vehicle – there is a particular qualification put on their driver's authority so it's – yes. It's people skills sometimes. Square pegs in round holes
35 sometimes, but nevertheless, in Dubbo we've got the three vehicles and they are staffed by pretty good people most of the time. We've added another gambit to our operation about 10 years ago. We started a seniors club so it's those people that don't fall into the disability group but they are – the qualification is people have to be either an aged pensioner or a veteran affairs holder and for that they pay \$10 a year and can travel anywhere within the 80 k zone for a maximum of an \$8 fare. So that's
40 another help that we instituted as a network and it's been fairly well – there's about 250 members in Dubbo.

MR BELL: Well, it's a very good arrangement.

45 MR BRYAN: Yes, it was. It's very well received. So we understand the problems under the Disabilities Act and we have gone we think in the right direction to solving those delivery standard. By 31 December we are to give wheel chair – no, people with disabilities the same service delivery standards as other passengers and what we

have to do is somehow define all the – these are just the wheelchair jobs, but we have to define all jobs of people with disabilities, TTS docket and by then this network will meet the accreditation standards.

5 MR BELL: Are there issues with anchoring wheelchairs in these vehicles?

MR BRYAN: Yes. Well, there is a requirement to anchor them and this is why it's so important to have a standard where you have got the right anchor points.

10 MR BELL: Anchor points.

MR BRYAN: Well, the right anchors.

MR BELL: Yes.

15

MR BRYAN: The points are there but the right straps and the right design of chair.

MS WARD: Are you experiencing difficulty with that with some of these scooters?

20 MR BRYAN: Yes. Most definitely. Certainly I have seen some of these larger scooters and in fact they – one was so high that you would need a fairly high van to get it in at all but presumably a lot of the weight is in the battery and the batteries because they must need very big batteries to run these larger scooters.

25 MR BELL: Yes.

MR FERRIS: And usually the biggest problem is the passenger.

30 MR BRYAN: Yes, because the passenger is sitting on it when – so you have got to add the weight of the passenger to the scooter.

MR ROBERTS: The DDA Act says we have got to provide wheelchair accessibility which is a cab or a bus up to 300 kilos. Some of these scooters weight 200 plus. So you have only got to put a person of 100 kilos and you're over.

35

MR BELL: And you will be over the limit straight away.

40 MR ROBERTS: But you be the bus driver or taxi driver that tells the person you are overweight, we're not going to carry you, and you know, it doesn't matter what the legislation says, you have got to be on the footpath and say no, I am not going to carry you and cop the abuse. You can't do it.

MR BELL: Well, not only that, but you don't actually take some scales with you.

45 MR BRYAN: No.

MR ROBERTS: You can see the ramp on the bus starting to bow then you know you're over 300 kilos.

MR BELL: Then you know you have got a problem. 300 kilos. I mean, no wonder your hydraulics are struggling at 300 kilos. That's quite a – that would be a challenge.

5 MR BRYAN: Yes.

MR BELL: For a goods lift, it's not an issue, but this isn't a goods lift.

10 MR BRYAN: Well, with the obesity problem increasing all the time, people are getting bigger and the scooters are getting bigger.

MR BELL: And unfortunately people who are disabled sometimes are not able to get the sort of exercise that some of the rest of us can get so they have - - -

15 MR BRYAN: It's a catch 22.

MR BELL: It's more difficult for them in all sorts of ways. Yes. Okay. Well, it's really interesting to hear that you were providing these vehicles so early in the piece way, way before the DDA. I think that's really quite interesting and with an 18
20 minute you might have missed this – 18 minute - - -

MR BRYAN: Well, maximum in a month.

25 MR BELL: Maximum for that month.

MR BRYAN: We'd be happy to leave these with you.

30 MR BELL: Thank you. That would be most interesting. You can wait a lot longer for an ordinary cab in Canberra.

MS WARD: You can wait 18 minutes.

35 MR BELL: If I could be confident that the cab would turn up in 18 minutes I would be quite happy.

MR BRYAN: In Sydney you're lucky.

MR BELL: Well, in Canberra unfortunately it's more difficult still.

40 MR FERRIS: Yes, we've heard about Canberra's problems.

MR BELL: Yes, we might have to edit some of this off the transcript but - - -

45 MR FERRIS: But I mean, we're under the same legislation as they are so it's really a local issue. It's a matter of working together locally to solve these issues. Seeing an opportunity and trying to meet the demand.

MR BELL: So do you experience peaks in demand for the vehicles that take the wheelchairs?

MR BRYAN: Yes.

5

MR FERRIS: Tuesdays.

MR BELL: Tuesday.

10 MR FERRIS: For some reason, Tuesday. One would think it would be the least day but no, Tuesday is the day.

MS WARD: Cheap movie tickets.

15 MR BELL: Yes. A number of issues. One of the issues is how to spread the load and when there is peak demand and it's difficult to meet then that's – I'm fascinated that it's Tuesday.

20 MS WARD: Can anyone inform me, like even places Gilgandra and Narromine, did they have - - -

MR BRYAN: Narromine has got a wheelchair accessible vehicle, yes. Gilgandra, has got a bus. I don't know whether it's got wheelchair or not. He may have. He's got a Toyota bus, I know.

25

MR BELL: Certainly, the financial incentives that the State Government put forward to try and address that issue haven't worked. I think they underestimated the cost of running a wheelchair access service.

30 MR BRYAN: I'm just starting to worry that in this round of regional meetings that we are not going to anywhere quite small enough. In other words, Dubbo has a certain size and I sense from the discussions this morning, as provided services over a period of time but then the moment we step outside Dubbo, to Peak Hill and beyond that we're striking a whole new layer of difficulty.

35

MR NEILL: That's right, the transport working group that meets basically monthly or bi-monthly in Dubbo does look at the region and the problems that are discussed at the transport working group are very seldom Dubbo.

40 MR BELL: Yes, they are outside Dubbo.

MR NEILL: They are very often outside Dubbo and access to Dubbo from the regional areas.

45 MR BELL: Well, that was a very helpful presentation. I am quite impressed with what Dubbo has done in the private sector here. I think that is showing very good promise in terms of achieving the objectives of the Disability Discrimination Act I

think it is quite encouraging. Well, I think now – did we have anybody else who was
- - -

MS GOLDSMITH: Tanya, can I just ask - - -

5

MR BELL: Are you happy to come and talk to us, Tanya?

MS MOODY: I can just tell you a little bit our community transport it will be
different to Dubbo's.

10

MR BELL: Yes, please come and take a seat. We are going to take advantage of
the fact that you are here to learn something about – Tanya, what is your surname?

MS MOODY: My name is Tanya Moody. I am employed by DADAC. I work at
Nyngan. I am Western Plains Home Care. In our region we auspice a lot of
community transport programs that were previously managed under a management
committee. We cover the areas of Nyngan, Cobar, Bourke, Brewarrina, Coonamble,
Walgett, Collarenebri, Lightning Ridge and we administer the funding for the health-
related transport at Warren.

20

MR BELL: That is a big area.

MS MOODY: It is a big area and our funding – we have three types of funding in
which we can provide our community transport. The majority of it comes from
HACC funding – Home and Community Care – which is administered through the
Ministry of Transport but it actually comes from DADAC. So DADAC give
Ministry of Transport the money.

25

MR BELL: DADAC is?

30

MS MOODY: Department of Aging, Disability and Home Care, a State
Government department who we are employed by. So we operate community
transport within these regions. As I was saying before, in the towns that already have
private taxi services like Cobar and Coonamble and that, we will utilise the taxi
services to provide our local transport. Our clients pay a subsidised rate, the taxis
bill us for the difference. In Nyngan, for example, we have no taxi service in a town
of 2500, so we provide a seven day a week local service within that town and our
HACC funding is used within the town. We have health-related transport funding
administered by Greater Western Area Health Service and that is what we use to
bring our clients to Dubbo for specialist medical appointments.

35

We also have in Brewarrina, Nymagee and also in Coonamble we have CTP funding
which is Community Transport Program funding and that is specifically related to
people that are considered isolated or small communities like at Gulargambone. I
know we use our CTP funding to bring the disabled people in from Gulargambone
into the workshop in Coonamble. Our HACC funding can't cover everything, but
because we get that bucket of funding for CTP we utilise that to bring these people
into town.

45

We utilise the bus services wherever we can. And just relating back to the parents of the disabled child, we have a similar situation in Nyngan. We have a disabled, a paraplegic, that lives at a small place called Coolabah, now that is about 75 kilometres from Nyngan. He comes into Nyngan and has access to respite at
5 Yarrabin but on the days that he can't get on by the school bus, in holidays, we work in to go and pick him up in the morning, take him home in the afternoon. But we couldn't do that on a regular basis because the funding that we are given to provide the service we do, if we were to do that on a daily basis we would just- well we have one vehicle, when it is out of town it is not accessing the people that are in town. But
10 we do have good working relationships with the other departments and we try and work in together. Also to community transport relies heavily on volunteers, so we are limited there as well. In a lot of these areas, like at Nyngan, we have seven day a week local transport service and we run to Dubbo five days a week. So you can realise we utilise volunteers for this service so it is dependant on the volunteers.

15 We also have the issue of isolation. When you are covering areas out at Walgett and that, and Lightning Ridge, we have lots of Reserves and people out on these Reserves they don't even have access to telephones let alone public transport. So we try and work in with Aboriginal home care in these areas so that where we can't get a
20 volunteer they might be able to supply us with one of their care workers to drive the bus. We go out to the Reserves and, of course, that will be a high indigenous population but then we do work in with Aboriginal transport to meet their needs out there.

25 Obviously access to isolated areas is the biggest problem I think with public transport and community transport. Because even in community transport your funding can only stretch to do so many trips and so many kilometres and it is the isolation that I believe, in these outlying areas, that is one of the biggest concerns. That having said, people do have to realise – they tend to perceive community transport as being a
30 personalised service and while our carers are very caring people they are not carers to these people and a lot of them will sort of go above and beyond. Yes, they do sort of drop off parcels and things like that, but then clients will get to the stage where they will expect a pretty personalised service and we have got to realise we are catering to a wider range of people.

35 But we do, as I said we work in with Yarrabin. We work in with Greater Western Area Health. We do have a lot of unmet needs still, which we are logging. And we have been lobbying for increase HACC funding and health related transport funding because in the four years that I have been there I can see the need has grown. The
40 use of the service has grown and also the unmet needs. So, unfortunate as it is that we have unmet needs, we then have to log it and lobby to get further funding to reduce these unmet needs. So I have just sort of come today to take in a bit of the
- - -

45 MR BELL: Well that has been very helpful. When you – I live in a city I am not exposed to some of these sorts of issues.

MS MOODY: A lot of our areas don't have access to – as I have said the Reserves, smaller areas might not have taxis or public transport and we don't try to take away from those services, but if we can work in these towns just to reduce unmet needs across the area then that is our aim.

5

MR BELL: Well that was very helpful. Thank you very much. Well, I think we have completed our task unless somebody else wants to say something.

MS MOODY: Are parents able to put in submissions?

10

MR BELL: Absolutely. Yes, absolutely.

MS MOODY: I think we would have a few that - - -

15 MR BELL: Yes, we are very happy to receive just a letter – a submission in the form of a letter would be very acceptable.

MS MOODY: Particularly those who want some care.

20 MR BELL: Yes, absolutely. Very happy to have that. All this evidence will be carefully weighed up. We will eventually produce a draft report. It will go to the Minister and the Minister will consider it. It is up to the Minister whether our report becomes public, but I imagine that we will have some interesting issues to deal with. And, of course, it will probably vary a bit from State to State, as you would expect
25 because not all States work in the same way.

Well, everybody, thank you very much for coming. We have really got quite an interesting cross-section of experience here and we will obviously go away and get to work on this. So, once again, thanks very much.

30

MATTER ADJOURNED at 12.42 pm INDEFINITELY