

Northern Rivers Trains for the Future Inc.
(NRTF)

Response

Cross-Border Transport Taskforce Discussion Paper

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Overview

Northern Rivers Trains for the Future Inc. (NRTF) is a community organisation advocating the maintenance and upgrading of the Casino-Murwillumbah rail line, the operation of a commuter rail service and freight services on the line as well as the extension of the line across the Queensland border. The group has wide community support throughout the Northern Rivers.

NRTF welcomes the release of a discussion paper on cross-border and regional transport issues, however we are disappointed with the limited scope of this document as well as the process involved in the development of a document that rushes to conclusions and recommendations with little presentation of any empirical data.

The document's basic premise appears to be that the Casino-Murwillumbah rail corridor is to be abandoned. NRTF supports the community vision for a transport system that builds on what we have, on the investments that preceding generations have made, rather than starting the whole thing from scratch and delivering little if any benefits in the short term. This means developing transport solutions that incorporate the Casino-Murwillumbah line.

The Casino-Murwillumbah rail line already directly links most 'regional centres', many of the 'support towns' and a host of villages and rural locales including Casino, Bentley, Tuncester, Lismore, North Lismore, Bexhill, Eltham, Booyung, Nashua, Binna Burra, Bangalow, Talofa, Byron Bay, Ewingsdale, Tyagarah, Mullumbimby, Billinudgel/Ocean Shores, Mooball, Burringbar, Stokers Siding, South Murwillumbah, Murwillumbah and Condong. The line was built to serve regional needs as a way of moving people and goods to and from the seaport at Byron Bay and river ports of Lismore and Murwillumbah. Originally built as the spine of an integrated transport system for the region, the line remains well placed to resume performing that function.

NRTF is concerned that viable options for an integrated regional transport system incorporating the Casino-Murwillumbah rail line as a spine connecting inland and coastal communities have not been canvassed.

A survey conducted by Southern Cross University found that 72% of respondents would use a commuter train service at least once a month and 91 % of respondents stated they would use a rail service linked to the Gold Coast at least once a month. More information can be found at http://www.scu.edu.au/news/media.php?item_id=866&action=show_item&type=M
An indicative breakdown of this demand is provided in the *Needs Analysis* at Appendix A.

NRTF and the community strongly believe that abandoning the Casino-Murwillumbah line would be another step in the wrong direction, away from delivering public transport services to a region experiencing significant levels of transport disadvantage.

Failure to utilise the Casino-Murwillumbah line will also mean that opportunities to deliver an intra-regional transport network for Northern Rivers communities in the short-term will be more difficult.

Furthermore, the proposed lengthy timeframes proposed for delivering substantive sustainable transport improvements for Northern Rivers communities fail to consider the urgent need for action to address an established unmet demand for intra and inter regional rail services as well as growing community concern regarding climate change and peak oil.

NRTF also believes that the lack of consultation with stakeholders to identify local and regional transport needs and potential solutions prior to the development of this document has resulted in a compromised process.

Part A - Northern Rivers Trains for the Future Inc. (NRTF)

Who are NRTF?

NRTF is a community group formed in January 2003 by residents throughout the Northern Rivers concerned about the reduction of rail services on the Casino-Murwillumbah line and to advocate for increased rail services in the region. NRTF has been acknowledged as representing the community's interest in the NSW Upper House Inquiry into the closure of services on the line (2004)¹ and in the PriceWaterhouseCoopers feasibility study into the potential for light rail on the line conducted in 2004².

The NRTF community campaign is **TOOT (Trains On Our Tracks)**.

NRTF Mission

Working in partnership with governments, operators, regional councils and other interested parties, Northern Rivers Trains for the Future Inc. (NRTF) aims to be the recognised voice of the community in promoting the social, economic and environmental benefits of rail services as part of an integrated regional public transport system.

NRTF Objectives

1. Advocate the establishment of commuter rail services on the Casino-Murwillumbah line.
2. Promote the long-term maintenance and upgrading of the Casino-Murwillumbah line.
3. Negotiate the return of the XPT (or similar interregional) service to the line.
4. Advocate the extension of the Casino-Murwillumbah line to Queensland.
5. Work with operators, regional councils, governments, the community and other interested parties to return freight to the Casino-Murwillumbah line.

The TOOT Vision for a Regional Integrated Transport System

(a) Short-Term

We suggest that a great step forward in linking existing public transport services, increasing patronage and providing a major boost in viability of local services can be achieved by running regular passenger trains on the Casino to Murwillumbah rail line.

We propose that up to 16 services a day can be run with the following major benefits:

- Use of existing infrastructure that links most major centres in the Northern Rivers and acts as the spine of an integrated transport system.
- Significantly expands the range of potential destinations for passengers using localised bus and other services providing opportunities to increase passenger numbers as well as enhanced viability of such services.
- Boosts access to services for those without private transport access and helps make service delivery more efficient.
- Environmentally friendly - reduces greenhouse gas emissions.

- Reduces need for massive road infrastructure development that damages the environment and disrupts communities.
- Provides links between local labour markets expanding job opportunities and promoting vibrant local economies.
- Potential to be the basis of a sustainable tourism strategy that moves visitors and tourism dollars around the region.
- Links the region to XPT services to Sydney, Brisbane and elsewhere through connection with the main line at Casino, assuming that those services are not discontinued.
- Reduces the community's dependence on decreasing oil supplies.

(b) *Medium to Long-Term*

Future developments that would increase the range of benefits significantly include:

- Build a rail link between Murwillumbah and the Gold Coast to provide direct links to Coolangatta and Brisbane airports, provide links for cross-border commuters, reduce traffic congestion created by cross-border tourist traffic in local towns such as Byron Bay, and cater to the generally high level of demand for interregional rail travel.
- Consider developing light rail infrastructure to link the existing line with other regional centres, including services between Lismore, Ballina, Lennox Head and Byron Bay as well as a Tweed Coast line connecting with heavy rail at Murwillumbah, Coolangatta or elsewhere. The latter perhaps being an extension of the proposed Gold Coast Rapid Transit system.
- Develop freight services and create a freight hub at Casino with the potential to reduce the level of heavy road transport using local roads.

Feasibility and Costs

In 2004 a feasibility study conducted by PriceWaterhouseCoopers estimated the cost of upgrading the line and running a 16 service a day railmotor commuter train to be \$55.3 million over 20 years or an average annual cost of \$2.65 million or \$662,500 for each local government area serviced.

NRTF believes the savings from reduced motor accidents, road repairs, environmental (especially reduced greenhouse gasses) and other costs as well as the benefits to communities and local economies make such a proposal worthy of serious consideration in the search for a sustainable transport strategy for the region.

Part B - Commentary on Discussion Paper

‘Background’

Discussion is based on underlying premise that rail is a ‘future’ option only, yet a key task of the Taskforce is to ‘review existing transport links’ and ‘identify short term options for improved co-ordination’. One obvious example of a short term option to improve co-ordination is to utilise existing infrastructure such as the Casino-Murwillumbah rail line to act as the spine of an integrated regional transport system for the region.

In the short term, co-ordination of cross border services would be improved by providing commuter rail services on the Casino-Murwillumbah line and providing cross border bus links from Murwillumbah.

The paper is also premised on any future rail line coming ‘from South East Queensland to Northern NSW’. This would seem to preclude any consideration of the Casino-Murwillumbah line being part of ‘short term’ solutions given that on current timeframes any ‘future’ rail link into NSW could not be expected for at least twenty years.

The paper refers to ‘building a strong public transport commuter base [in Northern NSW] which will sustain any future rail service’. There is significant evidence that the best way to achieve this is to build an integrated public transport system across the Northern NSW LGAs using commuter rail services on the Casino-Murwillumbah line as the ‘spine’.

NRTF believes that the Casino-Murwillumbah line should be brought back into service as soon as practicable, and should be viewed as the backbone of the regional transport system, with future infrastructure and other modes of transport services linking into it. This would ensure maximum value-for-money for taxpayers, by making maximum use of the infrastructure established with the investments of preceding generations. To abandon this corridor, but one day build an entirely new line through this region, will be seen by the community as wasteful public policy.

‘Current services’

(a) Road and Rail in NSW

The ‘more frequent’ coach services which have replaced the XPT service are less effective at meeting regional transport needs than the rail services they replaced. Accessibility issues remain a barrier to meeting the needs of commuters.

- The coach service does not permit travel for distances under 40 kms, so unlike the train that could be used to commute short distances between centres, local commuter patronage is not catered for.
- A reported incident of a mother nursing a child denied the ability to take a baby’s feed and nappy bag onto the bus and was then denied service when she complained.
- The majority of the coach services are required to travel through the same ‘inland’ and ‘coastal’ corridors that the trains travelled through and are not able to do so any faster than the train.
- As the buses connect to the XPT they run late whenever the XPT runs late. With the poor on-time running record of the XPT this results in the coach timetable being extremely unreliable, and thus unsuited to many local travel requirements.

Patronage levels of the former XPT and current coach services provide no indication as to potential patronage levels for local commuter rail as they cater to different markets. A survey conducted by Southern Cross University found that 72% of respondents would use a commuter train service at least once a month and 91 % of respondents stated they would use a rail service linked to the Gold Coast at least once a month. More information can be found at http://www.scu.edu.au/news/media.php?item_id=866&action=show_item&type=M

An indicative breakdown of this demand is provided in the *Needs Analysis* provided at Appendix A.

A more detailed examination of the existing transport networks linking the main population centres reveals the following features.

- In addition to the north-south Pacific Highway, the main east-west route through the region is the Bangalow-Lismore Road--Bruxner Highway linking Casino and Lismore to the Pacific Highway .
- The east-west link runs in the same corridor as the Casino-Murwillumbah rail line which links the towns of Casino, Lismore and Bangalow (Inland Corridor).
- The rail and road corridor continues north from Bangalow to Tweed Heads (Coastal Corridor), except it is the rail line that directly links the communities of Byron Bay, Mullumbimby, Billinudgel, Mooball, Burringbar, Stokers Siding and Murwillumbah.
- An overview of the road network on a map of the region indicates a denser network of roads than would normally occur in 'rural' areas. This is because population densities are high for a rural area and also because the main settlements are not as 'widely dispersed' as suggested by the paper.
- While a good base roads infrastructure is in place, many of these roads are of minimal pavement width or not paved at all as the capacity of local authorities to maintain and expand such a network is severely constrained and is likely to remain so for the foreseeable future. The capacity to expand effective road based transport solutions is limited due to these constraints.

(b) *Queensland Rail Network*

The paper notes that when the rail link to Coolangatta Airport is completed, residents in South East Queensland will have access to rail services. This would be better stated as at that time, residents will have access to *direct* rail services as most would have access to those currently available by way of a bus link or other linkage. Similar effective linkages to Queensland services from NSW do not currently exist and this suggests that an urgent need exists to invest in substantial links within Northern NSW and across the border.

It is noted that the South East Queensland Plan only commits to an extension of the Queensland Rail network as far as Coolangatta and from then 'investigate whether demand warrants an extension into Northern NSW'.

The South East Queensland Infrastructure Plan and Program lists the delivery timeframe for the extension of the line from Elanora to Coolangatta as 2025-26 (page 29). Clearly there will be no opportunity for an 'extension' into Northern NSW until then.

(c) *Bus Network and Services in NSW*

It can be noted that the majority of bus services are local school bus services, most of which feed into the main population centres, as do most of the non-school commercial services.

There are limited services connecting centres across the region to other centres and regions.

The level and scope of bus services reflect patterns of local travel that are mirrored by a road network that feeds to the same centres.

(d) *Current Service Networks and Future Services.*

The observations made above in relation to current services in NSW and QLD provide valuable insights into the type of future services and the factors that affect viability. These are discussed further below.

'current and future population growth'

The analysis of current and future population growth and its relationship to transport services misses some important points.

- Population in the Northern Rivers is dispersed, but not as 'widely' as suggested in the Discussion Paper, because there are multiple regional centres and a large number of population centres, it means the distance between centres is not that great. Most of the '110 small villages and numerous rural communities' are within a relatively short commuting distance of one or more of the regional centres or towns.
- Of the 'regional centres' and 'support towns' within the Taskforce investigation area, Kyogle, Casino, Lismore, Bangalow, Byron Bay, Mullumbimby, Billinudgel/Ocean Shores and Murwillumbah ***are currently directly connected by a heavy rail line.*** This accounts for eight of the ten main population centres across the region. Dozens of 'villages' and 'rural' communities ***are also currently directly connected to the rail network.***
- The network of local bus services that provide services to these centres from smaller population centres means that most people have access to a nearby town with a rail connection to other points within and outside the region.

'opportunities for bus reform'

The paper notes that the negotiations to bring about rationalisation of bus services and bus reform is likely to be 'lengthy'. There are other reasons why bus reform is unlikely to provide an efficient and effective solution to regional transport needs.

- The state of the roads network as referred to above is likely to decrease efficiency of services. For example, traffic routinely comes to a standstill on the main roads in and out of Byron Bay and it can take up to half an hour for a vehicle to travel the last two kilometres into the town centre. Geography constrains the development of new or expanded roads and an increase of buses onto the roads around Byron Bay will only decrease travel times even further. Similarly, the road servicing the 'inland corridor' and linking with the 'coastal corridor', the Bangalow to Lismore Road, currently runs at capacity during peak periods.
- Given the patterns of settlement and local travel patterns across the region, any rationalisation of local bus services in favour of longer distance services, will likely result in either some smaller centres losing services or lengthy, inefficient services required to criss cross rural locales.
- The travel and settlement patterns in combination with the current road network mean that services providing longer bus journeys will have to share the same customer base along the main 'coastal' and 'inland' corridors when moving around the region, duplicating services, leading to underutilisation and decreased viability of individual services

- Buses are consistently rated as less accessible by a range of commuters with special needs and are less capable of providing services that integrate with other transport links. Wheelchairs, bicycles and prams can be easily carried on trains by commuters wishing to continue their journey by cycleway or walking track.

A more efficient approach to a ‘bridging strategy’ that results in ‘higher patronage and fare revenue’ would be to encourage a single carrier along the ‘coastal’ and ‘inland’ corridors. That carrier to be a rail service as it links more directly with most of the larger current and future population centres within these corridors, dramatically reduces the amount of greenhouse gasses produced compared with multiple bus services and avoids the issue of overcrowded and dangerous roads. The role of buses within such a network would be to continue to provide more regular feed services to the main centres on the rail line. Increased patronage for local bus operators could be expected to increase as the operators would be able to capture intra and inter regional commuters due to integration with rail services and this would help to improve fare revenue and overall viability of bus operators.

‘securing the corridor’

This part of the discussion paper seems to have ‘reconciled’ the tension between ‘current coastal population’ and ‘growth projections under the Regional Plan’ in favour of the coastal population as the comments appear to be premised on protection of a coastal corridor. The following extract in particular needs to be further examined.

The currently dispersed nature of the Northern NSW population – 50 percent live outside the regional centres – means that a heavy rail line will not serve the majority of residents well for intra-regional travel. Three of the four major regional centres identified by Department of Planning are inland towns. Only Ballina is on the coast so a rail service through the major population centres is likely to be of limited use to tourists. [p. 5]

As noted above, the pattern of current road and rail infrastructure as well as current bus services mean that most of the population **are currently capable of being serviced by a heavy rail line.**

Three of the four regional centres identified by the Department of Planning may be inland towns (Murwillumbah, Lismore and Casino), but **they are all currently located on a heavy rail line.**

This comment assumes that Ballina is the only place that has a tourism industry. Byron Bay attracts 1.7 million tourist annually **and is located on the existing heavy rail line**, as are many other coastal and inland centres frequented by tourists. It can be noted that the current opportunities to use existing rail infrastructure to move tourist visitors around the region has not been canvassed by the discussion paper.

Given that infrastructure costs are the major impediment to the development of new public transport systems, the use of the existing Casino-Murwillumbah line as the main corridor for the region would be by far the most appropriate option.

The Casino-Murwillumbah line is also ideally situated geographically to serve as a backbone of a regional transport network. Other centres not on this corridor can be linked to it far more simply than developing an entirely new corridor. A network approach would utilise the existing heavy rail corridor with further development of bus and light rail networks to link other centres.

NRTF believes that the corridor is largely secured in the form of the Casino-Murwillumbah rail line. The remaining corridor protection that is required is principally for a rail link between Murwillumbah and the Queensland Rail system, but also for future construction of a Tweed Coast line and a possible Byron Bay-Ballina-Lismore loop.

NRTF agrees with the need to begin securing land for a future rail corridor as soon as possible. This corridor should connect the Casino-Murwillumbah line with the southward expansion of the Queensland rail system. Numerous concepts exist for the potential route of this corridor, potential interchange points, and methods of addressing the difference in gauge. Various engineering and other challenges affect the feasibility of these concepts, and it is clear that a detailed analysis of potential routes will need to be carried out. This detailed analysis should be initiated as soon as practicable, and should involve appropriate community consultation and consideration of community-generated concepts.

Tourism

This discussion paper fails to consider the current impacts of tourism or the potential to increase fare revenue or patronage by developing transport services that appeal to tourists. In a region with very high visitor numbers, tourism accounts for a large proportion of current travel, and contributes greatly to road congestion, particularly in Byron Bay, where road is the only current access mode, despite the presence of the rail line offering direct access to the town centre.

The significant numbers of day-trippers to Byron Bay and other Northern Rivers towns from South-east Queensland offer significant potential for hybrid tourism/commuter trains to reduce traffic congestion, pollution and delays by transferring this visitor traffic from road to rail.

In the short-term, commuter rail on the Casino-Murwillumbah line may also offer significant potential for visitors to coastal centres such as Byron Bay to make journeys to inland centres, spreading tourism dollars and benefits further around the region. A local rail journey along the scenic Casino-Murwillumbah line would be a very attractive activity for many of the millions of annual visitors to the Northern Rivers.

The extent to which tourists would comprise a significant proportion of patrons for both a local commuter and a cross-border rail service must be taken into account. Failing to consider tourists when assessing potential rail service patronage is likely to lead to massive underestimation of potential patronage. Visit Byron Bay or other coastal centre on any weekend if you want a firsthand look at the numbers involved.

Consultation

NRTF is disappointed with the level and type of community consultation involved with the development of the discussion paper and the process outlined in the paper.

NRTF believes that a key step in developing any strategy to address the array of varied and often unique intra- and interregional transport needs for this region would be to talk more broadly with communities about what their needs are and what solutions may be suitable. Community representatives, local residents and Chambers of Commerce have many well-informed ideas for addressing these needs and their views should be sought.

A more worthwhile approach would have been to meet with the Public Transport Working Groups of the region's councils (5 of the 6 Northern Rivers councils covered by this report currently have one). These working groups can provide informed local advice on transport needs and appropriate value-for-money solutions. Information compiled from these groups and other local sources could then be used to develop the most appropriate transport models to suit the needs of individual communities and the region as a whole.

A transport model imposed upon this region is likely to be ineffective and win little acceptance from the community. A model developed with community consultation and informed local advice will ensure the best transport outcomes for the region and the most cost-effective outcomes for governments.

'Recommendations'

Due to the lack of consultation in the development of the process and the paucity of empirical data to justify the recommendations NRTF does not believe that this is an appropriate stage at which recommendations should be made.

NRTF believes that detailed stakeholder consultation and research needs to be conducted so that an informed process can be progressed. Greater emphasis on the social, environmental and economic costs and benefits of proposed schemes are recommended so that communities are better able to participate in the process in an informed manner. Recommendations that provide for a more complete range of options should then be reformulated based on the enhanced information which will then be available to the community.

NRTF does not support the tenor of the recommendations for the reasons outlined in this response and in light of the alternative approaches that have also been suggested in the submission.

Part C - Conclusion

A process for addressing cross-border transport issues and intra-regional transport for the Northern Rivers and South East Queensland is urgently needed, however NRTF believes that this discussion paper has failed to adequately move this process forward.

In particular the failure of the discussion paper to adequately 'review existing transport links' provides the catalyst for the failure to 'identify short term options for improved co-ordination' NRTF believes that the process should be recommenced, and must include community and stakeholder input from the start. Utilising local knowledge in this way will ensure the best and most appropriate outcomes.

NRTF believes that the Casino-Murwillumbah line should be brought back into operation and regular commuter services developed as the most appropriate way to build 'a strong commuter base in Northern NSW'. Work should commence on extending the line to link with the Queensland Rail network. This will enable intra-regional rail services for the Northern Rivers in the short-term, and interregional services for the whole region in a far shorter timeframe than would otherwise apply.

Through not being based upon appropriate consultation and research, analysis contained in the discussion paper has faltered on several unsound premises, missed key issues such as tourism, not undertaken any cost benefit analysis and failed to recognise existing opportunities. NRTF, other stakeholders, and the community are eager to engage in a genuine and appropriate process to develop an integrated transport plan for the Northern Rivers, and tackle cross-border transport issues.

References

1. *Closure of the Casino to Murwillumbah rail Service*, NSW Parliament's Legislative Council, General Purpose Standing Committee No. 4, Nov 2004.
2. *Feasibility Study for Passenger and/or Commuter Services on the Murwillumbah to Casino Line*, Price Waterhouse Coopers, Sept 2004.

Appendix A: Needs Analysis – Transport for the Casino-Murwillumbah rail corridor

NRTF believes an integrated system of passenger and freight traffic that gives people options and provides for the efficient delivery of human services is essential for a future that is environmentally, socially and economically sustainable.

1. ‘Short term’

In the ‘short term’ we need to be better able to utilise existing infrastructure such as the Casino-Murwillumbah rail line to meet local needs

We note that the region’s councils are in full support of addressing the transport needs of the region through the development of commuter rail services that provide the spine of an integrated regional transport system. Current providers of local bus services would have an incentive to adjust and expand timetables to connect with such services thus linking currently isolated services.

Incorporating a ‘rail experience’ into tourism strategies as a method of moving visitors around the region with fewer impacts also provides a means to move the economic benefits of tourism around the region and decentralise the demand for tourist infrastructure and services from coastal zones to those around rail stations in each town on the line. In turn the need for high levels of infrastructure in coastal towns such as Byron Bay would be moderated and traffic congestion may ease.

Set out below is a needs analysis and user profile for each centre on the Casino-Murwillumbah line.

2. Needs analysis

Looking at the main centres currently linked by the rail line, it is possible to demonstrate profiles of likely users. Integration with local feeder bus services potentially expands service to cover a wide area where little or no public transport currently exists.

Description – Casino

- Closest to typical rural profile
- Rail and road transport hub able to connect passengers and freight with Sydney-Brisbane rail services
- Agricultural service town drawing workers and students from surrounding area.
- Strong labour market linkages with Lismore and region generally.
- Primary and Secondary schools.

Current unmet needs -Casino

- Employees travelling to work in Lismore and other locations on the line
- Students travelling to University, TAFE and schools in Lismore.
- Jobseekers wishing to expand access to employment opportunities across regional labour market.
- Young people, families and others without access to private transport travelling to coastal locations for sport and recreation
- Aged and disabled travellers
- Providing access to retail and services (including specialist medical)in Lismore for anyone without access to private transport.

Description – Lismore

- Regional hub for retail, financial services, education, health, aged care and government services

- Draws large numbers of workers, students and consumers from surrounding areas, particularly Richmond Valley, Byron and Ballina shires.
- Base hospital, St Vincent's hospital and various aged care facilities
- Primary, secondary schools, TAFE and University.
- Centre of regional labour market with linkages to Casino, Byron Shire and Ballina local labour markets as well as the Tweed/Lower Gold Coast regional labour market.

Current unmet needs -Lismore

- Mainly inbound traffic as described from other centres with especially high numbers of students, workers, tourists and consumers.
- Jobseekers, particularly young and/or without private transport to expand employment and training opportunities to all locations on the line.
- Young people, families and others without access to private transport travelling to coastal locations for sport and recreation.
- Aged and disabled travellers.
- Inability to access retail and other services (including specialist medical) for those in other locations without access to private transport.
- Potential to link services throughout Lismore City covering suburban and outlying areas of Nimbin, Coraki, Goonellabah and surrounding districts.
- Connection for local tourism features including Nightcap ranges, Rainforests, Lismore and village markets, sporting and cultural events and historic villages.

Description -Bexhill

- Village approx. 8 km east of Lismore with potential to connect workers, students and others from Corndale, Numulgi and Rosebank valleys with all points on the line.

Description -Eltham-Booyong

- These locations provide considerable scope to connect workers, students and others with all points on the line through one of the busiest corridors on the line.
- Potential to service Clunes, Nashua and surrounding districts.
- Booyong was previously a junction for a spur line to Ballina.

Description -Bangalow

- Market town popular with tourists for its restaurants, shops and monthly markets.
- 10 km from Byron Bay.
- Geographic centre for overlapping local labour markets of Byron Bay, Lismore and Ballina.

Current unmet needs – Bangalow

- Worker and student travellers to Lismore, Byron Bay, Mullumbimby, Brunswick Heads, Ocean Shores and Murwillumbah,
- Jobseekers, particularly young and/or without private transport connecting to all points on the line.
- Aged and disabled access to Lismore and other points on line.
- Young people, families and others without access to private transport travelling to coastal locations for sport and recreation.
- Potential to service Brooklet, Fernleigh, Newrybar and surrounding districts.
- Potential for integrated bus services to connect Ballina and district communities for passengers travelling to Lismore or Byron Bay and beyond to all points.
- Providing access to retail and services (including specialist medical) in Lismore for anyone without access to private transport.

Description -Byron Bay

- Coastal tourist town with over 1.2 million staying visitor and 500,000 'day trippers' a year.
- Significant proportion of international tourists are backpackers usually without private transport.
- Limited potential to expand access to town by development of roads due to geographical proximity to wetlands.
- Strong labour market growth with linkages to surrounding local and regional labour markets
- Primary, secondary schools as well a diverse range of private training establishments.
- Centre for arts and light industry
- Gateway for coastal tourism operators and events.

Current unmet needs -Byron Bay

- Inbound and outbound workers, travellers, students and consumers to/from all points on line with most commuter traffic between Lismore and Byron Bay.
- Students and jobseeker traffic accessing training and labour markets at all points on line, particularly Lismore.
- Aged and disabled access to Lismore and other points on line.
- Potential to connect with buses servicing Lennox Head and Ballina.
- Providing access to retail and services (including specialist medical) in Lismore for anyone without access to private transport.
- Huge untapped potential to develop tourist subsidised services to transport visitors to other points on line linking with localised tourism providers and helping to share the wealth effect of Byron Bay's tourism boom. Murwillumbah, Mullumbimby, Bangalow and Lismore are all potential destinations for such traffic.

Description -Mullumbimby

- 'Biggest little town in Australia '
- Main service centre for Brunswick valley
- Location of Byron Shire Council Chambers and offices.
- Primary and Secondary schools

Current unmet needs -Mullumbimby

- Inbound and outbound workers, travellers, students and consumers to/from all points on line with most commuter traffic between Murwillumbah, Byron Bay and Lismore.
- Students and jobseeker traffic accessing training and labour markets at all points on line, particularly Lismore, Murwillumbah and Byron Bay.
- Aged and disabled access to Lismore and other points on line.
- Potential to increase tourism visitors (especially from Byron Bay)through rail 'experience '.
- Providing access to retail and services (including specialist medical)in Lismore for anyone without access to private transport.
- Potential to service communities in upper Brunswick Valley and at Brunswick Heads.
- Connection point for tourism operators servicing the Brunswick Valley.

Description -Billinudgel

- Service town for Pocket area
- Potential to provide rail access for significant population at Ocean Shores.

Current unmet needs – Billinudgel/Ocean Shores

- Worker and student travellers to Murwillumbah, Mullumbimby, Byron Bay, Lismore and other points on the line.
- Jobseeker and youth travellers accessing training and labour markets in Murwillumbah, Byron Bay, Lismore and other points on the line.
- Aged and disabled access to services at all points on line, particularly Murwillumbah and Lismore.
- Provide access for Ocean Shores population historically isolated by lack of public transport.

Description -Brunswick Valley integration.

- As described rail access can be provided to Brunswick Valley communities, particularly main population centres of Mullumbimby, Brunswick Heads and Ocean Shores. This can be achieved through a southern access point at Mullumbimby and a northern access point at Billinudgel with integrated bus services linking the two access points and collecting passengers from Brunswick Heads and Ocean Shores. This could overcome major disadvantage suffered by these communities with generally higher needs (due to socio economic profiles) isolated by a lack of public transport options.

Description -Crabbes Creek - Yelgun

- Rural valley communities in high growth corridors with potential to provide access to students and commuter traffic, particularly to schools and businesses in Murwillumbah.

Description – Burringbar

- Tweed Valley town
- Dormitory suburb for Murwillumbah with increasing tourism development
- Potential student, worker, youth, aged/disabled passengers for training, employment and services access, particularly in Murwillumbah.

Description -Stokers Siding

- Hamlet in high growth corridor with student/commuter potential from surrounding Valleys
- Tourist potential

Description -Murwillumbah

- Main centre servicing Tweed Valley (currently fastest growing region in NSW)
- Terminus for branch line
- Primary, secondary schools and TAFE
- Hospital, health and aged care services.
- Potential to link rail transport with Gold Coast rail and bus services.
- Labour market linkages with regional and Byron Shire labour markets.

Current unmet needs -Murwillumbah

- Mainly inbound traffic as described from other centres with especially high numbers of students, workers, tourists and consumers.
- Jobseekers, particularly young and/or without private transport to expand employment and training opportunities to all locations on the line.
- Young people, families and others without access to private transport travelling to coastal locations for sport and recreation.

- Aged and disabled travellers.
- Providing access to retail and services (including specialist medical) in Lismore for anyone without access to private transport.
- Tourism potential as linking point for service providers throughout Tweed Valley, as entry point to a rail 'experience' drawing on the tourism hot spots to the north (Gold Coast) and south (Byron Bay). Connecting point for tourist draws including Mt Warning National Park, World Heritage Border Ranges rainforests and historic villages.

Description -Murwillumbah -Gold Coast (the missing link)

- Construction of the missing rail link between Murwillumbah and the lower Gold Coast would dramatically increase commuter rail traffic with Queensland centres, provide door to door connections with Coolangatta and Brisbane airports for tourists and others, further enhance integration with transport systems in surrounding regions, boost sustainable tourism in an area dependent on maintaining its natural beauty as well as being a sound investment in sustainable planning for future growth.

A completed rail link between Murwillumbah and the Queensland rail system would provide the only direct rail link between Sydney, Brisbane and Coolangatta airports.

3. 'Long term'

In the 'long term' we propose an integration of New South Wales and Queensland rail systems by constructing a link between the Casino-Murwillumbah line and the Gold Coast.

NRTF notes that the provision of a rail link with Queensland would provide a safe, attractive and environmentally sustainable alternative to private road transport options within the Pacific Highway/Motorway corridor that connects directly with Coolangatta and Brisbane Airports as well as providing the opportunity to integrate the movement of domestic freight through the Far North Coast and South East Queensland regions.

By providing accessible public transport options for many in our region who do not own or have difficulty accessing private transport, a rail link provides many other benefits to the community.

- Greater efficiency in the delivery of human services.
- Reducing the demand on some human services (eg community transport).
- Reducing the cost of some human services due to access to preventative and better health services.

As a rail link would provide the opportunity for commuters, tourists, airport users, students and many other groups to switch from road to rail, there are a number of potential savings to be made in relation to the maintenance and development of expensive road infrastructure.

* This "Needs Analysis" is adapted from the following submissions made by **Northern Rivers Trains for the Future (NRTF)**..

Northern Rivers Trains for the Future (NRTF) *Response to Interim Report of Ministerial Inquiry into Sustainable Transport in NSW*, 7 October 2003.

Northern Rivers Trains for the Future (NRTF) *Submission to 'Inquiry into Infrastructure Provision in Coastal Growth Areas'*, 6 May 2005.

Appendix B: TOOT's 'Ten Good Reasons for 16 Trains a Day' on the Casino-Murwillumbah line

Ten Good Reasons for 16 Trains a Day:

(compared to a less frequent service or a daily XPT service only)

1. **REDUCES UNSUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT**
Takes more cars off the roads
2. **INCREASES SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT**
Encourages more people to travel by public transport
3. **CONVENIENCE**
Provides services every 1-2 hours throughout the day to major regional towns and some villages
4. **SAFETY**
Maximises use of the rail infrastructure that is safer than travelling by road, especially for younger and older people
- 5 **CAPACITY**
Provides the maximum number of seats per day, more economically than building new freeways or regional roads
6. **EMPLOYMENT**
Provides more permanent employment than road projects
7. **LOW COST/HIGH REVENUE**
Minimises cost per seat provided, and maximises revenue from the line (\$5 av. fare x 100 passengers/trip = \$2.6m pa; \$10 av. fare = \$5.8m pa)
8. **SUPPORTS BUS SERVICES**
Feeds passengers onto connecting bus services and taxis, increasing their patronage
9. **CREATES GREATER EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY**
Facilitates independent travel by less mobile people who can't drive, low-income people, non-car owners and unemployed people – increases their opportunities to more fully participate in society.
10. **SUPPORTS BICYCLE USERS**
Encourages more people to use bicycles by extending their range of travel.