

## WESTERN REGION DEMAND RESPONSIVE TRANSPORT (DRT)

PILOT STAGE 1 – TOTTENHAM TO NARROMINE TO DUBBO, NEW SOUTH WALES

Country: Australia

### OVERVIEW

Both the NSW Long Term Master Plan 2012 and the Western Regional Transport Plan 2013 highlight the potential that on-demand transport has in solving public transport issues in transport disadvantaged areas in regional NSW. The dispersed nature of regional NSW makes providing effective public transport services practically and economically difficult to become viable and remain sustainable. In response a DRT pilot service was introduced in May 2017 between Tottenham, Narromine and Dubbo.

An evaluation of the DRT pilot has been undertaken by Transport for New South Wales (TfNSW) with support from the University of Sydney and the University of Aberdeen.



Figure 1. Tottenham, Narromine and Dubbo.

Source: [www.abc.net.au/news/2017-06-01/pilot-bus-service-to-provide-public-transport-for-rural-areas/8576014](http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-06-01/pilot-bus-service-to-provide-public-transport-for-rural-areas/8576014)

### Main aspect/issue addressed by the good practice

The Western Region is facing issues relating to an ageing and declining population as well as social disadvantage and is on the 25th percentile on the Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) index.

The Western Regional Transport Pilot (WRTP) has been implemented as a possible way to respond to challenges facing an ageing and socially disadvantaged population and is the first of its kind in regional NSW.

### Main objectives of the good practice

The key aims of the WRTP are:

1. To provide an improved (and adequate) level of public transport in areas of the Western Region, which includes some of NSW's most disadvantaged communities;
2. To improve customer outcomes from new and existing public transport services (including Community Transport);
3. To make better use of existing transport resources and deliver an improved value for money transport proposition;
4. To develop a viable model of flexible and/or DRT that can, with appropriate modification, be deployed across regional NSW;
5. To use a procurement approach that enables flexible and/or DRT services;
6. To use the Pilot to test, alter and refine service models so that they may become successful state-wide service templates.

## DESCRIPTION OF THE AREA

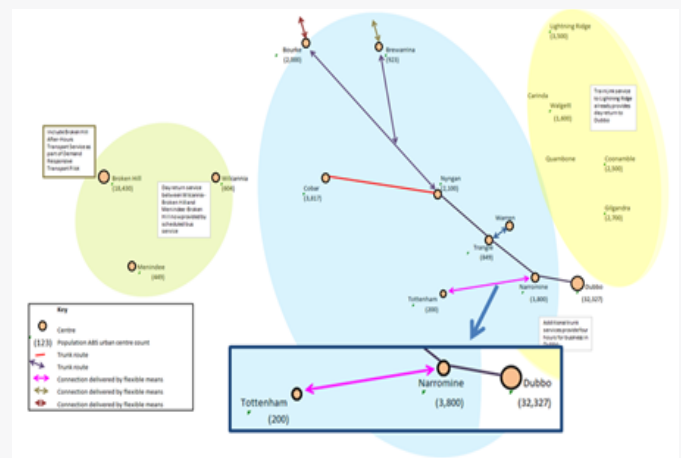
The Western Region of NSW is located east of the border with South Australia and north-west and west of Dubbo (see **Figure 2**). Tottenham is the geographical centre of NSW and is about 145 kilometres from Dubbo and about 500 kilometres from Sydney by road.

Region	Target area	Population	Population density
Western Region, NSW	Tottenham, Narromine and Dubbo.	300 inhab.	0.2 [inhab. /Km <sup>2</sup> ]

### Other

The dispersed nature of the region makes providing effective public transport services practically and economically difficult to attain viability.

Additionally, the region is facing issues relating to an ageing and declining population as well as social disadvantage (WRTP, 2013<sup>1</sup>). Places that are highly disadvantaged were specifically targeted.



**Figure 2:** Geographical scope and services scope. Note that this figure is not drawn to scale.

Source: TfNSW (2017)

1 - Transport for New South Wales (2013). Western Regional Transport Plan. Transport for New South Wales. Sydney, NSW.

## Target user groups and needs

The Western Region is in the 25th percentile on the Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) index and Lachlan Shire Council (Tottenham’s jurisdiction) is in the 19th percentile; this means that only 25% and 19% of Australia’s suburbs have a lower SEIFA index score.

The NSW Western Region can therefore be described to be ‘transport disadvantaged’<sup>1</sup>. Additionally, the region is facing issues relating to an ageing and declining population as well as social disadvantage.

1 - For relevant further discussion see: Rosier, K and McDonald (2011) The relationship between transport and disadvantage in Australia. Australian Government Resource Sheet. <https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/relationship-between-transport-and-disadvantage-austr>

## DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PRACTICE

### Timeframe(s)

The Western Regional Transport Pilot (WRTP) Stage 1 operated for six months from 31st May 2017.

### Bodies involved

The WRTP comprises of a multi-level governance structure involving a cross section of departments within TfNSW including Freight Strategy and Planning, Infrastructure and Services and Customer Services. The Western Region Pilot Project Control Group (WRPPCG) comprising members from various TfNSW business units was established to manage the operational aspects of the different stages of the WRTP.

### Mobility services provided/addressed

The Western Regional Transport Pilot (WRTP) Stage 1 commenced 31 May 2017 with a weekly (Wednesday) return service between Tottenham and Dubbo via Narromine<sup>1</sup>. The journey from Tottenham to Dubbo is 145 km and is approximately a 2 hour drive each way. Additional pick up and drop off points can be arranged when making a booking (passengers need to book by 3pm on Tuesdays by calling the operator, LiveBetter). For example, pick up points en-route and drop off points such as Dubbo airport, train station or hospital can be accommodated. Passengers are advised that the vehicle type will vary depending on the number of passengers that have booked and that they may travel by car or small bus. The service offers air-conditioning, storage for cold products and other needs including wheelchairs and prams. Fares have been set at \$15 return for adults, \$7.50 for children and \$2.50 for eligible concession holders. LiveBetter, a community service organisation is the contracted operator<sup>2</sup>. Prior to the commencement of the new transport service; no public transport options serviced the Tottenham community. People in this community were reliant on either private transport or, if eligible, the Tottenham Community Car.

1 - <https://transportnsw.info/tottenham-dubbo-service>

2 - LiveBetter is a registered National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) provider and a community service organisation focused on the needs of the people of regional NSW. See <http://livebetter.org.au/> for more information.

### Legal Framework

A Community Transport contract was used as an initial framework for the new transport services contract. However, the contract framework required further adaptation for the purpose of the new transport pilot as the new service was a flexible service. Investigation was undertaken by the TfNSW legal team to procure the new public transport service. This rested on the requirement for community transport services to establish the eligibility of their customers. Considerable amendment was required and the contract was appropriately modified to remove specific community transport sections and to modify KPI's for a public passenger service to be procured under the Community Transport contract. The TfNSW legal team advised that given the clear documentation of the intent of the WRTP, there was no need to advertise a geographical eligibility requirement for the transport service.

### Cost and Financing sources

The new transport service is supported by TfNSW.

The fare is favourable compared to the existing Community Transport options or private cars. Concession fares in particular make the new transport service look very economical from the customers' perspective. Fares are \$15 return for adults and \$2.50 for eligible concession holders, regardless of where you start and finish your trip and passengers pay the driver in cash.

### Organizational set-up

- The WRTP comprises of a multi-level governance structure involving a cross section of departments within TfNSW (see Bodies involved).

### Supporting technologies

- Passengers need to book by calling the operator, LiveBetter.

## INNOVATION ASPECTS

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### ORGANISATIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES AND PARTNERSHIP WORKING ARRANGEMENTS

The WRTP comprises of a multi-level governance structure involving a cross section of departments within TfNSW including Freight Strategy and Planning, Infrastructure and Services and Customer Services.

### LEVEL OF PUBLIC SECTOR FINANCIAL SUPPORT

The new transport service is supported by TfNSW.

### INTERCONNECTIONS BETWEEN SHARED AND PUBLIC TRANSPORT SERVICES

The WRTP Stage 1 commenced 31 May 2017 with a weekly return service between Tottenham and Dubbo via Narromine. Prior to the commencement of the service; no public transport options serviced the Tottenham community.

### ICT CONNECTIONS AND IMPACTS OF THE TECHNOLOGICAL SOLUTIONS IMPLEMENTED

Not applicable.

### OTHER (E.G. SOCIAL INNOVATION, ETC.)

First DRT trial in regional NSW. Considerable amendment to the CT service contract was required and the contract was appropriately modified to remove specific CT sections and to modify KPI's for a public passenger service to be procured under the CT contract. The fare is favourable compared to the existing CT options or private cars.

## ASSESSMENT

Overall, the new transport service (Tottenham – Dubbo) is successful when measured against the specific aims of the WTRP – notably to improve customer outcomes and the level of access to public transport for disadvantaged members of Tottenham, and in testing, altering and refining on-demand transport service models so that they may become successful state-wide service templates. Key learnings from the evaluation of Stage 1 of the WTRP (completed in December 2017) are to be incorporated into the remaining stages of the WTRP.

### Ridership and other key metrics/results (through key-indicators, where applicable)

Results from the initial evaluation show:

- In Tottenham there is a high level of awareness for the service, (95% awareness of the service available), it is well received by the community and well used (66% patronage capacity and over 8% population having used the transport over the first 15 weeks at least once) and the new transport service also delivered a positive impact to the community.
- Socially disadvantaged Tottenham residents have been using the service, social access and access to medical services has increased, greater independence has been achieved and there have also been mental health and road safety benefits inferred for the users of the service.

### Good Governance

The WTRP comprises of a multi-level governance structure involving a cross section of departments within TfNSW (see Bodies involved).

### Success factors/strengths

Overall, the new transport service had a positive impact on the Tottenham Community

The service is benefiting the community and residents of Tottenham. The service has improved opportunities for socially disadvantaged residents by giving them improved social access<sup>1</sup>. Access to medical services has increased along with reports of better independence amongst users. The community also reported on-road safety benefits and social inclusion improvements. The new transport service:

- Appears to be having a positive impact on members of the community who have difficulty walking or using public transport.
- Is opening opportunities for many to participate in a range of social activities.
- Is contributing to making the community more independent and associated positive productivity impacts.
- Will assist in strengthening mental health through increased access to medical appointments and increased opportunities for social interactions.
- Is seen as a safer transportation option for those that have lost confidence in their driving ability on dangerous rural roads.
- Communication and marketing of the service is successful. There was a high level of awareness of new transport service with 95% of participants from the wider community survey reporting that they had heard of the new transport service. The majority of users were female, aged over 60 and held a full car licence. Within 15 weeks, the service was used by 8.4% of Tottenham residents.
- The operator reported encouraging levels of occupancy consistently throughout the evaluation period. Average patronage was six passengers, representing an average occupancy rate of 66%. Medical / dental visits were reported as the top travel purpose followed by shopping. The majority of users were female, aged over 60 who held a full car licence and the service appealed to a broad group. Within a short period, 8.4% of Tottenham's population had used the service and there is potential to grow.
- Fares are perceived to be very affordable and a key driver to usage. Fares for the new transport service are favourable when compared to those of the existing community transport option or using private cars. This is particularly so as 90% of customers on the new transport service are travelling on a concession fare. Concession fares make the new transport service more economical than community transport or private transport.

1 - [www.abc.net.au/news/2017-06-01/pilot-bus-service-to-provide-public-transport-for-rural-areas/8576014](http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-06-01/pilot-bus-service-to-provide-public-transport-for-rural-areas/8576014)

## ASSESSMENT

### Difficulties encountered/weakness

Despite the findings being largely positive, there are some levels of dissatisfaction reported.

Complaints of discomfort in the bus, a couple of instances of over booking and some personality differences are the major sources of dissatisfaction. Some competing business owners expressed concern for potential impact on their businesses, but it was found that the service had had little impact to date. Other proposed improvements to the service include the creation of a bus stop to highlight the availability of public transport in Tottenham and better transport connections.

However, there remain barriers to using the new transport service. Potential passengers reported that they are not yet in need of using the transport service and that they are more comfortable using private transport or the Community Car.

Some proposed improvements to the transport service have been outlined including the opportunity to link the Tottenham Community Car with the transport service.

### FEATURES THAT ARE CONSIDERED TO BE GOOD PRACTICE (LESSON(S) LEARNT)

1. This project highlights the potential that on-demand transport has in solving public transport issues in transport disadvantaged areas in regional NSW.
2. A community transport contract was used as an initial framework for the new transport services contract and modified for a public passenger service to be procured under the community transport contract;
3. The fare is favourable compared to the existing Community Transport options or private cars. Concession fares in particular make the new transport service look very economical from the customers' perspective;
4. The service has improved socially disadvantaged residents by giving them improved social access.

## REFERENCES FOR FURTHER DETAILS

### *Contact of the operator and of relevant stakeholders*

**Organization:** Transport for New South Wales

**Person contact:** Virginie Vernin

### Websites

- Transport for New South Wales (2018). Tottenham-Dubbo transport service. Accessed from <https://transportnsw.info/tottenham-dubbo-service>
- Publicity associated with the trial: [www.abc.net.au/news/2017-06-01/pilot-bus-service-to-provide-public-transport-for-rural-areas/8576014](http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-06-01/pilot-bus-service-to-provide-public-transport-for-rural-areas/8576014)
- [www.transport.nsw.gov.au/newsroom-and-events/media-releases/on-demand-transport-comes-to-dubbo](http://www.transport.nsw.gov.au/newsroom-and-events/media-releases/on-demand-transport-comes-to-dubbo)