

CTO Submission to the NSW Government Response to the Disability Royal Commission Final Report

While the CTO, in principle, agrees with the scope and detail of the Recommendations handed down in the Final Report from the Disability Royal Commission (DRC), the role of transport as a critical enabler of many of the Recommendations, is overlooked. It is therefore vital that in implementation of the 222 Recommendations, the role that transport plays is embedded within the Government response. While transport is a commercially available public utility, it is a mistake to assume that it is accessible and inclusive for all. A thorough consideration of accessibility in NSW must consider the span of abilities with which people live. The role of transport, particularly supported, care-based transportation must be prioritised, where mainstream services do not meet an individuals' needs.

Community Transport exists across all areas of NSW with the core mission of providing inclusive, accessible, and equitable access to supported transport solutions. The industry is an existing resource that must be considered in the NSW Government response.

A common theme through the Recommendations in the Final Report, is inclusive access to mainstream services, and strengthening choice in the way people with a disability live their lives. This is particularly present in Volumes:

- Volume 5: Governing for Inclusion
- Volume 6: Enabling Autonomy and Access – Adaptations and Supports
- Volume 7: Inclusive Education, Employment and Housing,
- Volume 10: Disability Services

What is not identified, is the role that transport plays as a key enabler to inclusion and full participation in society. Transport is an agency for independence and self-determination regardless of ability, age, gender, economic status or where people live. It supports quality of life with a direct link to determinants of health, economic, and social inclusion. Transport insecurity on the other hand, has a detrimental effect on how people experience their life, including their social, economic and cultural participation. To consider improved participation and choice within the context of any of the Disability Royal Commission Final Report Recommendations, without also considering transport as an enabler, is to miss the full picture.

Volume 5: Governing for Inclusion

Recommendations 5.1-5.4 speak to the need for agreement and strategy alignment between Commonwealth and State Governments, and clarity on responsibilities of each arm of government on areas relating to disability supports which fall outside the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

The CTO strongly supports this recommendation and the requirement for a stronger framework which responds to people who fall outside the NDIS, yet need to access services.

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People with a disability seeking to access services currently sit into two groups being those who qualify for the NDIS, and those who do not. The outcome being a very well serviced, but small community of people participating in the NDIS, and a larger community of people assumed to be able to access mainstream services.

Within the context of NSW, it cannot be assumed that mainstream services are meeting the needs of everyone. Many 'accessible' solutions still present barriers. 'First mile, last mile' distances to public transport are commonly a barrier. The ability to independently navigate a busy transport interchange with numerous bus stops at one location, and confusing signage. Comprehending unscheduled changes to timetables, pickups/stops made mid-journey. Autonomy and choice in selecting a train carriage to ride in as a wheelchair user. Concerns for ones' safety amongst other passengers. Or relying on maintained tactile markers to navigate a journey. All these barriers can, and do, result in individuals deciding to not take a necessary journey. In the case of Community Transport, there is a sector already in place which can provide supported transport and help overcome these barriers. It is also the case however, that outside of the NDIS, the service is virtually unsubsidised for people with a disability who may need access to it.

Volume 6: Enabling Autonomy and Access – Adaptations and Supports

Recommendation 6.32 Increase capacity to provide supports and adaptations through improved guidance, funding, and accessible information.

Recommendation 6.32, acts as an enabler to Recommendation 6.31, embed the right to equitable access to health care. To deliver on this right, it is essential that the necessary supports are in place, available, and funded to ensure health services are accessible. Access to transport is a recognised determinant of health across the spectrum, from prevention and health promotion, diagnosis and early intervention, and rehabilitation services.

Disability does not preclude a person from having the right to self-determination, dignity, respect or autonomy in decision making, access however, does. Integrated, equitable and accessible transport can go a long way to supporting independence and autonomy. Therefore, transport must be included as a cornerstone within any response or framework of supports.

A large portion of people, particularly in rural, regional, and remote areas, experiencing unmet need in transport options, often face a compounding experience of inaccessible health care services. A person must therefore travel greater distances to access healthcare, that also has limited transport options available to them, which further impacts health outcomes within the population.

In metro locations, where public transport options are more readily available, transport is still an important enabler of access to healthcare for those who find public transport inaccessible. People with a disability are as diverse as all other parts of the population, as are their needs. Therefore, despite all efforts and intentions to make public transport accessible, there will always be people for whom it is not a viable option. The human factor is often overlooked in accessibility and is the gap which the Community Transport industry exists to service.

It is important that when Recommendation 6.32; adaptations and supports in enabling access to healthcare, is being considered, transport and more importantly, supported, care-based transport, is a part of the discussion.

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The *Isolated Patients Travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme (IPTAAS)* is a NSW Health initiative that subsidises travel over 100km (one way) to a medical appointment. It is a program that recognises the significant barrier that distance provides for all people needing to travel for medical appointments. Yet the options for transport under this scheme remain as an individual's own car, or a taxi. Community Transport sits outside of this scheme and is therefore not able to utilise the substantial and accessible resources available across the Community Transport industry, to support people who need to travel but who are also frail, living with a disability, or who use a wheelchair.

The CTO calls for the expansion of IPTAAS to include access to Community Transport.

Volume 7: Inclusive Education, Employment, and Housing.

The CTO provides in-principle agreement to inclusive education, employment, and housing options. More specifically, with a focus on education and employment as areas where a lack of suitable, and accessible transport is a barrier to access. Transport insecurity constitutes the first barrier to access. If the means of physical access to a service, ie, how an individual gets to the location of service, is not considered, any other adaptation, support, inclusion, or accessibility measure is redundant.

In the context of the NDIS, transport is convoluted and underfunded, and doesn't currently meet participants needs

In the case of NSW, the Community Transport Program (CTP) is a scheme in place to support individuals who are transport disadvantaged owing to physical, social, cultural and/or geographic factors. However, CTP excludes transport for the purpose of attending education or employment. Like transport, education and employment initiate connection, promote engagement, growth and wellbeing. The CTO deems the CTP as too limited in scope, and in many cases, an unsustainable solution due to underfunding preventing any regular or consistent access.

Where public transport is inaccessible, or simply not available, supports must exist to enable people living with a disability, who do not qualify for the NDIS, to access transport for the purpose of attending education or employment.

The CTO identifies that CTP must be expanded to include transport for purposes of employment and education.

For the people who are participants of the NDIS, there needs to be greater coordination between state and federal government programs to ensure that NDIS participants are not left behind and unable to access education, and employment programs.

Access to transport is a driver of productivity. Education and employment are agreed upon quality-of-life measures that support economic independence and social mobility. Disability should not preclude an individual from this.

Volume 10: Disability Services

The CTO strongly supports **Recommendation 10.10**, provider of last resort.

Within NSW, Wheelchair Accessible Taxi (WAT) access is at crisis level. Of the only 300+ registered WAT vehicles, only a small percentage are available for service at any one time, across the state. The recent de-regulation of the Point to Point Industry has decimated supply of these modified vehicles and has commercialised their role in community, rendering wheelchair work not sustainable within the marketplace. Anecdotally, cases are reported of individuals forced to wait 4+ hours for a WAT within metropolitan Sydney. In regional and remote areas, the service is simply not available.

In the case of wheelchair accessible taxis, the de-regulation of the Point to Point industry has created a state-wide thin market and urgent action is required. People who use a wheelchair have a right to dignity, respect, and self-determination. Access to their social, economic, civic, and cultural lives is being impeded. It is imperative that wheelchair accessible transport is considered within this Recommendation from the Disability Royal Commission.

The Taxi Transport Subsidy Scheme (TTSS) is Transport for NSW funded and aimed at providing subsidised transport to people with a disability across NSW. The subsidy, however, is not currently open to the Community Transport sector. The Scheme is limited and outdated for supporting the needs of people living with a disability and especially those using a wheelchair.

In the CTO's Position Statement ['Eliminating Transport Insecurity in NSW'](#) the CTO *calls for Government to expand access to the Taxi Transport Subsidy Scheme (TTSS) to allow the Community Transport industry to be deemed eligible for the subsidy.*

This thereby will expand the possible transport options for people who use a wheelchair. The NSW Community Transport sector has a fleet of wheelchair accessible vehicles available state-wide, yet currently they remain underutilised during the evening and over the weekend due to funding restrictions.

The CTO encourages the Government..

to work with the Community Transport industry to build an aspirational supported transport program for ALL people living with disability across NSW. The CTO urges the Government to recognise the role that supported transport can play in a person's life and to see the transport eco-system as an integrated and seamless response to not only ability but consumer choice.

Within NSW, supported transport solutions commonly exist but they are siloed, lacking cross industry coordination, underfunded, or misunderstood. In short, not able to reach their potential value for the people of NSW.

The CTO has written two Position Statements that outline Key Requests that would support greater integration of the Community Transport fleet into the wider transport marketplace. This would maximise utilisation of existing infrastructure, to better service the needs of a population of people who are currently missing out.

- [Eliminating Transport Insecurity in NSW](#)

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- [Inclusive Transport for all People in NSW](#)

The 2 focus areas within the papers, most relevant to this discussion are:

- That the Community Transport Program (CTP) funding program, administered by Transport for New South Wales, be expanded to include transport for purposes of employment and education.
- That the Community Transport industry be deemed eligible for the Taxi Transport Subsidy Scheme.

The implementation of these two key requests would maximise utilisation of existing infrastructure, to better service the needs of a population of people who are currently missing out. This would reduce the divide between those who can access the NDIS, and those who cannot. It would support a marketplace of dignity and choice in transport options and enable many of the critically important Recommendations made by the Disability Royal Commission Final Report.

The CTO looks forward to continued engagement on the role that supported transport can and should play in the accessible transport eco-system.