

THE N.S.W. COMMUNITY TRANSPORT PROGRAM: CONCEPT AND REALITY IN THE  
CONTEXT OF THE FUNCTIONS OF THE URBAN TRANSIT AUTHORITY.

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ABSTRACT: This paper describes the N.S.W. Community Transport Program in relation to concepts, practical achievements and the Urban Transit Authority of N.S.W. (UTA)'s transport planning functions. The Program is aimed at addressing inequalities in mobility and access; addressing the needs of "transport disadvantaged" people, which includes both those who cannot use conventional public transport through age or disability and those for whom public transport is not available. Community managed project Programs have been funded by the N.S.W. Department of Youth and Community Services (Y.A.C.S.) since the 1981/82 FY., with supplementary funding coming from a number of other sources. The U.T.A. has employed a Community Transport Team of four people since mid 1983 to act as advisers to the Program. Various service models have been developed by the Program including shared ride taxis, charter buses and minibus brokerage services. Projects have also conducted a major transport survey and various smaller transport studies, and set up a regional transport information service. The Community Transport Team's community liaison role offers an opportunity for community input into transport planning and this has resulted in a number of modifications to route bus services. It is intended that the Ministry of Transport take funding responsibility for the Program from the 1986/87 FY, thus fully integrating it into the transport administration.

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### THE COMMUNITY TRANSPORT PROGRAM IN CONTEXT

#### Diversification of Transport Needs and Inequities in Mobility and Access

The concerns that led to the setting up of the NSW Community Transport Program are a reflection of a general acknowledgement that transport needs are changing and diversifying and that new transport initiatives must be explored to meet them. It recognises that the transport needs of sections of the population have not been met by an existing transport system designed primarily to meet the needs of commuters and shoppers; it recognises that new patterns of travel generated by the geographic spread of our cities and towns, the decentralisation of jobs and creation of regional centres have not been met by a transport network orientated towards the Central Business District (CBD); and that the transport needs of a rapidly growing part time workforce have not been met by services that concentrate on peak hour travel, etc. It is worth exploring these trends in more detail and their implications for public transport, as it illustrates the strong link between land use planning and transport planning. I will use Sydney as an example, dividing trends into two: demographic changes; and structural change and locational shifts.<sup>(1)</sup>

The size structure and distribution of Sydney's population is changing dramatically. Sydney's population is expected to grow from 3.25 million in 1981 to 4 million in the year 2000, an increase of almost 20%.

All of this growth and more will need to be accommodated in new areas, since the current decline in household sizes will probably continue and therefore the population of established urban areas will not increase.

In spite of urban consolidation the overall population of the inner suburbs is likely to decline by 50,000 people, and the "middle ring" suburbs by 30,000 people between now and the end of the century. At the same time the population of the outer suburbs will increase by almost a million people.

This loss of population in established areas will most likely lead to a decline in public transport patronage in those areas.

The population is ageing. The number of people over 65 years of age increased by a third between 1971 and 1981. In the 1980's and 1990's the fastest growth will be in the "old old" group - the population over 75. This will double before the end of the century.

The ageing of the population will have a considerable impact on travel patterns and travel demand. Public transport planning will need to not concentrate too exclusively on the journey to work and providing travel for large numbers of people to major destinations, mostly at peak times. Rather, it needs to become more concerned with off peak, local travel for people with lessened physical agility.

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<sup>1</sup> This analysis is based on Carolyn Stone's (1984) paper entitled "Public Transport Prospects for Your Community".

Besides demographic changes there have been considerable changes in the location of activities in Sydney. Industry, warehousing, retailing, offices are no longer focused on the CBD. Rather they are in decentralised or dispersed locations.

Industry and warehousing has been relocated to low density industrial areas remote from commercial centres where conventional public transport might be viable. Industrial jobs are increasingly private car oriented. Retailing has been suburbanised with an associated decline in the "corner shop". Office development is being dispersed; sometimes to suburban centres accessible by public transport, but there is pressure for the development of "freestanding" offices which are accessible only by private transport. There has been a corresponding drop in office jobs in the CBD from about 225,000 in 1971 to 200,000 in 1981.

Thus it being increasingly difficult to provide for the more complex travel patterns by a public transport system centred on the CBD. A reduction in the proportion of journey to work trips provided for by public transport affects the economic viability of public transport and thus the standard of services. This has most effect on those who do not have access to private transport; those who depend on public transport for all or most of their travel needs.

The present tendency is, therefore, towards increased mobility for those with access to private transport and decreased mobility for those who do not have that amenity. The aged, youth, the handicapped and others without access to private transport may well have more difficulty now in getting to jobs and services than they have in the past.(2)

#### Responses: Planning

The context described above has led to planning responses by the State Government. The growing inequity in mobility among sections of the population is one of the major arguments for concentrating jobs and services into urban centres given in the Department of Environment and Planning's recent Discussion Paper entitled "A Centres Policy for the Sydney Region". Another Government initiative was the issuing of a s.117 Direction under the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act, directing local Councils to get the Urban Transit Authority's (U.T.A.) advice on planning for efficient bus services when preparing Local Environmental Plans.

2 The Bureau of Transport Economics (1983a), for example, has demonstrated that "Unemployment levels vary throughout the Melbourne metropolitan area in a manner consistent with the proposition that the incidence of unemployment is at a maximum in areas where transport and locational conditions combine to produce greatest average journey to work times" and that the strongest correlation was with "accessibility indexes relating to public transport".

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### Responses: Conventional Transit

It was the situation described previously that led to the setting up of the U.T.A. The Authority has been delegated the responsibility under the Transport Authorities Act, 1980 to promote within the available financial resources, the provision of efficient, adequate and economic urban passenger services as related to Government and private bus and ferry services in Sydney, Newcastle and Wollongong. It also has the responsibility to make general policies which will enhance the ability of all transport operators to meet the needs of transport consumers.

The U.T.A. has fulfilled this responsibility in several ways:

- It has improved the operations of both government and privately operated bus services (3) in terms of route, regular interval timetables, logical route numbers, frequency, and services in low demand period. This has been achieved by increasing the revenue generating kilometre per unit of labour through improving the rostering of drivers by changing routes and timetables, and by adjusting frequency of service to the level of patronage demand.
- It has planned for bus services in newly developing areas. This has been facilitated by the Minister for Planning and Environment's direction under S.117 (2) of the Environment Planning and Assessment Act, 1979. This states that local Councils on the Sydney, Wollongong and Newcastle Transport Districts "shall consult with the U.T.A. and take into account any recommendations which it makes, to ensure that the local environmental plan allows for the provision of an adequate and efficient bus route system".
- It has arranged for the provision of cross regional travel by the introduction of "Red Arrow" services, which in some instances involve two private bus operators.
- It has improved rail - bus interchange through timetable co-ordination, and the Interchange Improvement Programme which has already improved the physical facilities at over 20 rail - bus interchange locations.

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3 Government bus services operate in the "inner" and "middle ring" suburbs of Sydney and Newcastle. Bus services in Sydney's outer suburbs, Wollongong and all other areas of the State are privately operated.

## HYDE

- It has improved the quantity and quality of timetable information available on public transport, especially the design and printing of private bus operators' timetables, and also the preparation, installation and maintenance of Transport Information Displays at railway stations and major centres. The U.T.A. has recognised the complexity of travel patterns in Sydney through the recent introduction of the "Metro Trips" Telephone Information Service on rail, bus and ferry services, both government and private. This service is available between 7.00am and 10.00pm seven-days per week.
- It has introduced services that use conventional public transport vehicles in innovative ways.

The latter includes the Taxi Transport Subsidy Scheme for the Severely and Permanently Disabled, the Ambarvale taxi bus, and the Community Transport Program. These will all be described in more detail in the next section.

### Responses: Non-conventional transit

The diversification of transport needs described previously has also provoked initiatives, some local and some by the Government, in alternative forms of transport in N.S.W.:

#### Privately owned minibuses

Many community organisations own and operate minibuses for the benefit of their members. These vehicles are frequently underutilised.

#### Community access minibuses

Many Councils and some community organisations (e.g. neighbourhood centres) own community access minibuses, usually bought using government funding of one sort or another. These vehicles are made available to community groups who do not own their vehicles on a self drive basis. The owners of the vehicles are responsible for garaging and maintaining the vehicles so that the cost to borrowers of the vehicles is merely that of the fuel they use. Sometimes a small charge is made to cover the costs to owners of vehicles in lending them (e.g. for maintenance, wear and tear)(4). The advantage of community access minibuses compared with privately owned minibuses is that they are fully utilised (usually demand exceeds supply), and accessible to the most disadvantaged sections of society.

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4 Such vehicles, and vehicles used in minibus brokerage services described later, provided the charges made do not include a profit-component, can be privately registered and insured under the N.S.W. transport regulations and are not licensed. The U.T.A. has issued Guidelines on the usage of these vehicles to ensure that they do not compete with licensed transport operators.

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### Volunteer driver schemes

Volunteer driver schemes, also known as "community aid" transport services, are commonly provided by organisations such as neighbourhood centres, and thus indirectly government funded. The neighbourhood centre keeps a register of people who are prepared to use their cars to transport disadvantaged people. On receiving a request for transport the neighbourhood centre organises an appropriate driver. Not only is there the indirect cost of his/her time by the volunteer but the volunteer is involved in a direct cost for fuel. Passengers may make a "contribution" towards fuel but strictly speaking this is illegal.

The advantages of such schemes are that they are flexible, and volunteer drivers can provide a highly personalised service (e.g. assisting the passenger, waiting for the passenger between forward and return trips) which cannot be obtained from licensed transport operators. On the other hand they have considerable disadvantages. They are labour intensive for the co-ordinator of the service in developing and maintaining an adequate "pool" of volunteers and in matching a volunteer driver with a particular trip. Volunteers are "unreliable" in comparison with paid labour precisely because they are volunteers who can withdraw their services temporarily or permanently at any time. The co-ordinator is entrusting the safety of the passenger to a driver whose driving ability is unknown and there is the ethical question of whether and when the service is exploiting the generosity of the volunteer.

On balance, therefore, these services are only suitable, and are generally only used for essential trips (e.g. medical appointments) for people who need highly personalised door to door cheap or free transport. Although such services satisfy a transport need they are usually small in terms of the number of people carried.

### Taxi Transport Subsidy Scheme for the Severely and Permanently Disabled

The N.S.W. Government introduced the Taxi Transport Subsidy Scheme for the Severely and Permanently Disabled in November 1981. Under this Scheme eligible users pay 50% of the metered taxi fare, and the Government pays the other 50%. The Scheme is administered by the U.T.A.

In return for the Taxi Subsidy Scheme being introduced into an area and the resultant government subsidies, the local taxi company has to purchase at least one taxi modified for disabled people. (Special purpose taxi, or SPT). These are usually Nissan Urvans modified to have a wheelchair lift and the ability to clamp wheelchairs to the floor, but several "stretched Fords" and a London taxi are also in service.

## HYDE

The current Eligibility Guidelines specify that

"Disabilities covered by the Scheme must be permanent and fall broadly into the following groups.

1. Permanent inability to walk.
2. Total permanent dependence on a wheelchair.
3. Severe permanent ambulatory problems.
  - (a) resulting from paralysis e.g. hemiplegia
  - (b) necessitating permanent use of large complex walking aids e.g. walking frame, crutches or splints. Walking sticks or 'quad' sticks do not qualify.
4. Total loss of vision. Please note that vision loss must be TOTAL.
5. Intellectual disabilities causing behavioural problems, i.e. socially unacceptable behaviour.

It should be noted that some persons unable to use public transport because of a permanent but non-qualifying disability will not be eligible to participate in the Scheme.

Generally speaking, persons suffering from degenerative conditions due to the aging process resulting from e.g. arthritis, heart ailments, respiratory problems, senility etc. do not come within the guidelines of the Scheme".

These Eligibility Guidelines are currently being reviewed. As they stand the Scheme is restricted to the most severely disabled and does not include everyone who cannot use public transport through disability.

The Scheme currently operates within the Sydney, Newcastle and Wollongong urban areas plus the "country" areas of Albury, Inverell, Central Coast, Tamworth, Wagga and Blue Mountains. The condition that the Scheme only be introduced into an area if the local taxi co-operative purchase an SPT is a barrier to its introduction into country areas. This is because many country areas will not have sufficient numbers of people who need the SPT (most disabled people using the Scheme can use conventional taxis), and the local taxi co-operative is too small to afford the capital cost of the SPT. Also, low density of population can cause a great deal of "dead running" of the vehicle.

Currently there are over 13,000 eligible users.

A number of other states, notably Victoria, have or are introducing a similar scheme.

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### Ambarvale taxi bus

The Ambarvale taxi bus was developed by the U.T.A., N.S.W. Taxi Council, Bus & Coach Association and locally operated bus company. The Taxi Council and local bus company jointly subsidised the service. The scheme provided for the introduction of the licensed route service using a vehicle appropriate to the demand in a developing area, initially using a taxi which has subsequently been replaced by a bus service.

### Community Transport Program

The rest of the paper concentrates on community transport.

Before describing the N.S.W. Program I will describe the concept of community transport.

### THE CONCEPT OF COMMUNITY TRANSPORT

The concept of "community transport" is based on a number of principles:

- equity;
- flexibility
- decentralised planning and control; and
- low technology solutions

and it is linked with other concepts:

- transport disadvantage;
- paratransit;
- transport systems management; and
- brokerage

### Equity and the Concept of Transport Disadvantage

Transport needs are predominantly "derived needs", because most travel is not undertaken for its own sake but as a means of gaining access to "opportunities" (eg., work, education, recreation, health services, shops, social contact with friends and relatives, etc.). It makes more sense, therefore, to talk about people's mobility (i.e. their ability to get around) and their access to opportunities than "transport" per se.

"Transport" is important to all members of the community because mobility and access to opportunities is fundamental to social well-being. However, some people have more mobility and access to opportunities than others. In other words, there is a lack of equity within the community with regard to peoples' mobility and access to opportunities.



We refer to people who have mobility and access problems as suffering from transport disadvantage.

Obviously, one could not consider people who own or have regular access to a car, as transport disadvantaged, due to the comfort and flexibility of the car as a transport mode. The transport disadvantaged are, therefore, among those who do not have access to a car when they need it, either as driver or passenger. It is estimated that about half of the population do not have assured access to a car.

In a particular area the transport disadvantaged may include the physically and mentally handicapped, the aged and frail, adolescents after school and at weekends, working or unemployed youth without car access, homemakers without car access, the resource poor and the information poor.

Of course, there is a relationship between transport disadvantage and economic disadvantage in that those who can easily afford a car will use this in preference to public transport anyway so that the latter's absence is irrelevant (with the possible exception of the journey to work). On the other hand, people who can ill afford to do so may be forced to buy a car due to the lack of public transport.

It can be seen that the transport disadvantaged fall broadly into two groups of people:

- those who cannot use public transport regardless of its provision and efficiency, such as those handicapped through age or disability; and
- those who can potentially use conventional public transport but are unable to do so due to its absence, such as residents of new estates or where there is a lack of off-peak services, or where services do not go to desired locations.

Community transport is directed towards giving transport disadvantaged people the access to work, recreation, shopping, education, medical care, social services and social contact that other citizens have. Intrinsic to the concept of transport disadvantage, therefore, and thus to the concept of community transport, is the principle of equity.

The above description of transport disadvantage means that community transport cannot be divorced entirely from conventional public transport services. Service deficiencies may appear in the areas of services for people who have special physical needs, "crosstown" journeys, services in low density outer suburban areas and rural areas, and weekend and late night services in urban areas. This is exemplified in Western Sydney where the major concern is for the improvement of route bus services rather than supplementary community transport services.

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### Flexibility and the Concept of Paratransit(5)

Traditionally the provision of transport services and transport planning itself has been based on a conceptional dualism. On the one hand there is the private car (and taxi) involving a highly personal travel pattern where timing, origin, destination, routing, etc. are all very individualised, diffused and resistant to aggregation, and on the other hand is "public transport", comprising of trains and buses which are provided on fixed routes. Since it is generally acknowledged that for "public transport" to be viable a certain minimum threshold of demand must exist, this has meant in effect that many smaller communities gain lesser consideration and possibly be left to deal as best as possible with a car (and taxi) only situation.

Paratransit represents a new way of thinking about transport services. Instead of the transit user being treated as a unit which is to be aggregated and acted in a general way, users are segmentalised, (eg. main line commuters, reverse flow commuter, "suburb to suburb" work trip, part time worker, non-peak work trips, students, youth, housewife/shopper, leisure user, elderly, those handicapped to various degrees), and matched to the most appropriate service from a spectrum of options.

### Paratransit: Changing Perceptions of Public Transport

Besides conventional public transport, paratransit throughout the world (some of which are available in N.S.W) include:

- demand responsive bus services of various types,
- shared ride taxi services of various types, including feeder services to transit network,
- van and bus pools,
- car pools,
- volunteer driver schemes,
- jitneys (by which I mean unregulated transport systems outside the formal transport structure such as those found in S.E. Asia),
- community buses,
- subscription bus services, and
- contract bus services.

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5 For those unfamiliar with or wishing to develop further their understanding of paratransit an excellent starting point is the Bureau of Transport Economics (1980) collection of papers.

Paratransit services are, therefore, usually somewhere between fixed route (eg. route bus services) and completely demand responsive services (eg. taxis) in terms of demand responsiveness and cost. Community transport services are similar in this way to paratransit services.

#### Decentralised Planning and Control

How community transport services differ from paratransit services is by the former having an appreciable element of community involvement in the planning, management, operation and/or evaluation of the services.

This is achieved by community transport projects being managed by management committees comprised of people who live, work or study in the geographic area of the project. Such projects are often funded by the State or Federal Governments to provide services, and the control of funding provided rests with the funded projects.

The geographic area of community transport projects varies from sub local government area, to local government area to regions comprised of several local government areas.

In contrast to traditional transport planning which is highly centralised, therefore, community transport planning and control is highly decentralised. This enables the services provided to be targetted specifically at the needs of a particular geographic area, so is more flexible in response to specific needs than conventional public transport.

#### Low Technology Solutions

The traditional approach to improving public transport is by massive capital investment; in new rail rollingstock, buses etc. In contrast community transport concentrates on low cost "low tech" solutions involving a Transport Systems Management or brokerage approach. This is essentially the development and use of low cost methods to make efficient use of existing transport resources in a co-ordinated way: the matching of existing transport resources with transport needs.

Having given a brief explanation of the concept of community transport (6) I would like to describe the N.S.W. Community Transport Program.

6 For those wishing to read further on the theory of community transport I suggest papers written by Carolyn Stone, now a lecturer at Macquarie University's Centre for Environmental and Urban Studies, such as (1981) Community Transport; An Explanation of the Concept with reference to New South Wales.

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The most important features of the NSW Community Transport Program are the funding of community managed projects, the use of licensed transport operators and the advisory service offered by the U.T.A. through its Community Transport Team. In being implemented as a programme "community transport" has taken on a specific character in N.S.W. To understand the nature of the Program in N.S.W. one must understand the historical development of the Program and the factors impinging on it.

### A Brief History of the Program

The N.S.W. Government's Community Transport Program has been funded through the Department of Youth and Community Services (Y.A.C.S.). Funding of the Program has increased steadily - from \$35,000 in the 1981/82 financial year to some \$127,000 in 1984/85. Eleven projects are currently funded by Y.A.C.S. compared with five projects in the initial year of funding. It is likely that the Ministry of Transport will take over this responsibility in 1986/87.

In addition the Federal Government's Community Employment Programme (C.E.P.) has also resulted in a considerable increase in the funding and number of community transport projects. C.E.P. has funded eleven projects for a total of about \$600,000.

At this stage, it seems likely that \$400,000 will be allocated under the joint Federal - N.S.W. Governments' Home and Community Care Program for community transport.

Funding for community transport has come, therefore, from a variety of sources. As well as funded projects there is a large number of non Government funded community transport groups comprised of local community workers and residents who are concerned to do something constructive about perceived transport needs in their area.

The U.T.A. appointed a Community Transport Team of four people in mid 1983 to augment the planning and service development expertise of the Authority's Development & Co-ordination Branch.

The Team's work can be described under three headings:

- acting as advisers to community transport groups,
- representing the U.T.A. on the management committees of funded community transport projects, and
- community consultation.

### Why the Program was started

The Government's interest in community transport originated from concerns expressed within two government departments.

## HYDE

Within Y.A.C.S. was a concern that sections of the community were disadvantaged in access to services due to lack of appropriate transport. There was also concern that funding for other program (eg. for neighbourhood centres, aged services, etc.) was being used to satisfy the transport needs of disadvantaged sections of the community, but in an uncoordinated and potentially inefficient way.

Within the transport administration, concern was being expressed by licensed transport operators that community groups purchasing and using minibuses were undermining the financial viability of their operations and, therefore, of public transport by not making proper and efficient use of existing capital and labour resources.

It had long been recognised that if the public transport system does not adequately cater for people's needs then they will be forced to find private solutions to these needs. This may mean the purchase of a second "family car", even though this may cause financial hardship. It may mean a community group setting up a volunteer driver service or purchasing a minibus to serve its own transport needs.

Inherent, however, in a public passenger transport system has been an acceptance that not all transport requirements can be met: in particular it is not expected that passengers must have their choice of shopping centre or of activity centre for that matter.

In some cases, therefore State Government Departments or local government have seen no acceptable solution to the problems of transport disadvantaged other than such measures as assisting in the purchase of minibuses. Such measures taken by individuals and groups could mean a loss of patronage for public transport, reduced "financial viability" and possibly a reduction of services. Reduction in public transport services, of course, forces more people to private solutions to their needs.

The Community Transport Program arose, therefore, from the desire of the Government that the needs of transport disadvantaged sections of population be made in a way that is planned and integrated with the existing transport network and thus maximise the use of existing resources. Community transport has been seen by the Government as a means by which the needs of the transport disadvantaged should be met, where possible, by licensed transport operators.

### Aims of the Program

The overall aim of the Government's Community Transport Program is to increase the mobility of "transport disadvantaged" people. A distinctive feature of the program is community involvement in investigating transport needs and planning solutions to those needs.

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The distinction made earlier in this paper between transport disadvantaged people who cannot use conventional public transport in any circumstance and those who cannot because of its absence is important, as it indicates different solutions to the problem of transport disadvantage. For those who could use public transport if it were available, the first solution to be looked at would be to make the services available and only secondly would a specialised transport service be considered (eg. in urban fringe or newly developing areas where patronage would not justify a conventional bus service).

There will also be handicapped people who could use public transport if it were modified for their use (eg. lower steps on buses, wheelchair accessible trains and railway stations, etc.).

Finally, for those who cannot use public transport in any circumstances the solution is obviously a specialised transport service.

It can be seen, that under the N.S.W. Program community transport does not necessarily mean the provision of new specialised transport services. Rather, the approach is one of the development and use of low cost methods to make more efficient use of existing transport resources by matching with "transport needs", that is, a "transport systems management" or "brokerage" approach.

It can also be seen therefore that community transport and conventional public transport are complementary rather than in competition. Community transport is a means by which unmet transport needs can in most cases be met by licensed transport. It is a means by which conventional public transport can become more responsive to community needs. Community transport can discourage the purchase of new transport hardware by private individuals and groups in the community by the pooling and co-ordination of existing transport resources. It is a means by which all the existing transport hardware such as buses and taxis can be used in innovative ways. Perhaps more importantly, community transport is a means by which transport providers and users can work constructively together to the mutual benefit of both.

In summary, community transport in N.S.W. is an approach to transport planning and service provision. Because community transport cannot be divorced entirely from conventional public transport services, it cannot be divorced from the planning of those services.

### The Activities of Funded Community Transport Projects

As has been outlined, essentially the Community Transport Team is a means of liaison between community and U.T.A. The Team's function is, among other things, to ensure that the Program is congruent with and complementary to the other activities of the U.T.A. through community consultation, acting as advisers to community transport groups, and representing the U.T.A. on the management committees of funded community transport projects. Thus the team also ensures that the activities of individual projects are congruent with the aims of the Program as a whole.

## HYDE

In the event that transport needs cannot be met by regular service modalities it is the added responsibility of the Community Transport Team to explore, together with community transport groups, the possibility of introducing new services.

The approach adopted by the community transport projects is, therefore:

1. to prepare information about existing services;
2. to identify cases in which existing services do not meet needs;
3. to adjust or modify these services to meet identified needs; and where there is not possible;
4. to introduce new services.

It is important to emphasise once again that this is a planning process, and one that acknowledges that the provision of specialised services is not necessarily the most appropriate way to meet the needs of all transport disadvantaged people, although this may be the final outcome for some projects. The emphasis is on "brokerage", or the matching of need to existing resources.

Individual projects emphasise different stages of this process. Indeed some of the earlier funded projects concentrated exclusively on implementing new services based on identified need. The experience of the Program has been however that the development of transport plans documenting all existing transport resources and current transport needs are necessary to ensure that any community transport service initiatives are consistent with the aim of achieving low cost improvements to public transport.

I would now like to describe the activities of individual community transport projects in terms of the stages of this process. This is not a comprehensive description of every project, but uses examples of individual projects to describe the scope of the Program.

### Preparing information about existing transport services

The most comprehensive example is the Illawarra Transport Information Service which received CEP funds to set up computer based data bank on the full range of transport services provided in the region, to be used in the answering of travel enquiries. On a smaller scale the Leichhardt Community Transport Group is compiling a register of all transport resources in the area and several other projects are using a similar approach to Leichhardt. It is worth noting that although the bulk of the transport services in an area are route services provided by licensed operators, in compiling a list of resources community transport groups consider the full range of resources available, which includes community minibuses, volunteer driver schemes etc.

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### Identifying cases in which existing services do not meet needs

The Illawarra Transport Information Service used its data base and transport enquiries it received to identify cases in which existing services do not meet needs. A different approach is the use of surveys. The Western Sydney Community Transport Research Group for instance conducted a large transport survey of the Hawkesbury, Blacktown and Liverpool municipalities to identify unmet transport needs in the region.

### Adjusting/modifying these services to meet identified needs

Examining transport services and identifying cases in which these do not meet needs has led to modifying/adjusting regular route bus services to meet identified needs in some areas. The Northcott Community Transport Group has successfully negotiated the deviation of one of the local U.T.A. bus services to run past the Northcott Housing Commission Estate in off peak hours (route 304). This means that elderly residents have level access to and from a bus service. In Manly Vale a shopping service (route 145) has been introduced, going to Warringah Mall on three days per week. This was introduced to serve people, particularly elderly residents, who were more than an acceptable walking distance from existing bus services and also acts as a "feeder" to other U.T.A. services going to Manly Wharf and the City.

It is to be noted that all of the adjustments to U.T.A. services have been introduced at minimal cost using unproductive time in the rosters. Thus they are consistent with the aim of the Government bus rationalisation programme to increase efficiency of operations in terms of getting more revenue generating km per unit of labour.

### Introducing new services

With regard to introducing new services, these fall into three types:

- a. shared ride taxi and hire car services;
- b. hiring spare capacity to trial new bus routes;  
and
- c. greater use, through co-ordination of existing community minibuses.

### Shared ride taxi and hire car services

Six shared ride taxi services and one hire car service have been introduced under the Community Transport Program. One example is the service provided by the Blacktown Community Transport Co-ordinating Committee. The Committee hires taxis to take frail aged and disabled residents of Blacktown local government area who cannot use public transport from their homes to any destination in that area.



## HYDE

Another example is the Leichhardt Community Transport Committee which hires a Special Purpose Taxi (a Nissan Urvan modified for use by disabled people) to take frail aged residents of the Elliott Street Housing Commission estate to the Rozelle and Balmain shopping centres. The estate is at the bottom of a steep hill which isolates the frail aged residents, and the narrow street preclude the introduction of a bus service.

These shared ride taxi and hire car services have some common features. The hirer is the community transport group, which purchases taxi services at the hourly contract rate stipulated in the transport regulations. Passengers are expected to pay contributions at an agreed rate which are generally collected by the taxi driver and deducted from the community transport group's monthly account with the taxi company. Passengers make their bookings in advance with the community transport group, which organises shared rides and informs the taxi company. The taxi industry has co-operated fully in the introduction of these innovative services.

The shared ride taxi services introduced have operated in one of three basic ways:

- "Route Service", whereby a taxi runs along a fixed route. This can also include deviations on request to provide a limited door to door service.
- "Many to one" service, whereby a taxi collects people from diverse points (eg. their homes) and takes them to one central point (eg. shopping centre) and vice versa.
- "Many to many" service, whereby a taxi collects people from diverse points and takes them to diverse points, thus providing a door to door service.

### Hiring spare capacity to trial new bus routes

A number of examples of hiring spare capacity to trial new bus routes have been introduced under the Program. The first example was the Bathurst Community Transport Group which has been contracting privately owned buses to run route services to outlying villages since 1978. It currently operates five services on a weekly or fortnightly basis. The longest route is over a distance of 100km. These are route services which will deviate to outlying farms etc. Contracts are let on a tender basis for six month periods. Cost recovery has gradually improved over the years by adjusting service provision and at the present time fare, donations and concessions pay for the contracting of buses.

Another example has been that of the La Perouse Community Development Project which chartered a U.T.A. bus to operate a weekly shopping service between Little Bay and Maroubra Junction, (route 333) particularly aimed at aged residents of Housing Commission estates.

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Part of the intention of the service was to facilitate "cross municipality" travel. With the rationalisation of government bus services in the area in October 1984 the service was incorporated into regular route services and other services were altered to incorporate a part of its route.

### Greater use through co-ordination of existing community minibuses

Unlike the other types of new service described, the greater use, through co-ordination, of existing minibuses does not involve the use of licensed transport operators. While the Authority discourages the purchase of new minibuses by community groups such a service is suitable for group travel.

An example is the St. George Community Transport Project which aims at matching unused capacity of existing community based vehicles with currently unmet demands of community groups within the Hurstville, Kogarah and Rockdale local government areas. This is done by the pooling and co-ordination of usage of these vehicles.

I will now describe the relationship of the Community Transport Program to other government programs, other levels of government and the transport industry.

### RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHER PROGRAMS, LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT AND THE TRANSPORT INDUSTRY

#### U.T.A.'s Transport Planning Functions

The U.T.A.'s initiatives in transport planning were described in some detail earlier; improvement of the efficiency of government and privately operated buses; planning for efficient bus services in developing areas; the development of cross regional bus services; the improvement of bus-rail co-ordination and interchange facilities; and the improvement of the standard and availability of timetable information.

The Community Transport Program is complementary to these other initiatives. Essentially it is the interface between public transport planners and operators, and public transport users. It uses the process of community consultation in an endeavour to ensure that this full range of development initiatives is successful and well founded. It offers an opportunity for constructive liaison between community and public transport providers on transport issues in a way acceptable and productive to both parties. For example, the community consultation that the Authority's Community Transport Team is engaged in and its knowledge of community transport groups can be used as an information base for private bus rationalisation programs, and other program initiatives.

The network of contacts in the community that the Community Transport Team and community transport groups have established can be used to disseminate information on other U.T.A. initiatives such as the Taxi Transport Subsidy Scheme, Metro Trips, etc. Because Community Transport Program lies at the interface of public transport planners, operators and public transport users, it provides another process for the expression of changing consumer needs. The solutions to these needs call into play all aspects of the U.T.A.'s transport planning functions.

Seen in the broadest sense the Community Transport Program, when located in the broad structure of the U.T.A.'s other initiatives, represents a new way of thinking about aspects of public transport provision. The better use of existing transport resources rather than massive capital expenditure programs is emphasised, and there is a recognition that people will most readily use public transport when they see it as meeting their needs. To ensure the latter, transport planners and operators must be prepared to take the community's expressed needs into account and to provide a transport system that is responsive to changing needs. There is an associated concern to ensure that consumers are provided with the appropriate vehicles to meet their needs. Such initiatives as the bus rationalisation programs and the Taxi Transport Subsidy Scheme for the Severely and Permanently Disabled, together with the Community Transport Program are indications of the ways in which this new thinking is working in practice.

#### Other Government Department's Programs and Policies

In addition to direct service improvements there is also recognition within the transport administration that other government departments have policies that have some impact on transport. Indeed they are sometimes sizeable transport providers.

A prominent example is the N.S.W. Health Department, which provides transport through the Ambulance Service, hospital based transport systems, the use of Health Department vehicles (eg. by community health workers), and the purchase of services from public transport operators (eg. taxi). The activities of the Health Department also generate transport needs: for patients and relatives attending health facilities (eg. hospitals on an in or out - patient basis), for staff and for people attending community health programs.

As other government departments for specific reasons have and can implement policies without necessarily co-ordinating these with the policies of the transport administration, one aspect of the Community Transport Team's work is to remain sensitive to the actions and needs of government as a whole as well as non government sectors in order that transport implications can be anticipated and provided for. Accordingly, the Team has been liaising with the Health Department over three major changes in policy: the new Ambulance Transport Guidelines; the implementation of the Richmond Report; and the creation of Area Health Boards.

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The new Ambulance Transport Guidelines have reduced the number of ambulance trips by 20%. As alternative transport systems are required to carry people no longer eligible for ambulances, this potentially places demand on the Community Transport Program, so is of concern to the U.T.A.

The Richmond Report suggests the movement of suitable patients from institutions to community based facilities and thus assist to normalise their lives to the extent of their abilities. A crucial element in the ability of such people to use public transport is the location of their homes in relation to public transport routes that take them to desired destinations in as simple a way as possible. Obviously there would be advantages in locating these near existing public transport routes rather than to modify an already viable public transport system.

Similarly with the creation of Area Health Boards which will involve the "rationalisation" of health facilities, the amalgamation of previously separate facilities and the provision of new facilities etc., there would be advantages in locating, where possible, health facilities with regard to transport availability.

Thus the Community Transport Program offers a channel of communication, of liaison between the transport administration and other Government departments to ensure that transport planning is considered when policies are drawn up and implemented. There are, of course, precedents and parallels to this in other activities of the U.T.A., such as input into the N.S.W. Government's Urban Development Committee.

A recent significant development is the allocation of \$400,000 for community transport under the Commonwealth Government's Home and Community Care Program (H.A.C.C.) Unmatched Grant for N.S.W. (N.S.W. Government, 1985). The purpose of H.A.C.C. is to provide an integrated range of services to maintain aged and disabled people in their homes rather than institutions. The allocation of funding to community transport acknowledges that adequate transport is crucial to that objective, and has involved extensive co-operation and negotiation between various State Government departments and between them and the Commonwealth.

### Local Government Involvement

The link between community transport and the general planning activity of the U.T.A. is no more clearly demonstrated than by a brief discussion of the co-operation between local government and the transport administration.

Involvement with local Councils forms a fundamental part of the public transport planning process. For their part Councils are directed, under the Environment Planning & Assessment Act, to consult the U.T.A. in instances where local development activity is likely to have transport implications. In this way the Authority can be sure that appropriate physical infrastructure will allow safe and efficient vehicle movements and that any new transport demand will be catered for.

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In turn the U.T.A. is available to examine local council requests for service additions or adjustments which are based on an appreciation of changes in local travel requirements. In these cases the demand may be met by mainstream transport facilities or new service modalities.

In the case of local government then, the emphasis has been on utilising the knowledge of local circumstances within Councils and employing this knowledge to enhance the effectiveness and suitability of transport facilities and services.

As part of its function of improving services to local residents, Councils have had direct involvement in community transport projects in their area. There is a recognition, for example, that it is of little use of Councils to provide Senior Citizens Centres if frail people cannot get to them. Council involvement in community transport projects can take several forms:

1. Monetary contribution. Bathurst Council has contributed \$3,500 annually, and Sutherland Council \$4,000 to the local community transport projects. Other Councils provide support "in kind" by garaging and maintaining vehicles, providing fuel, or providing office space, telephone, electricity, etc.
2. Time spent by Council community workers in managing projects. This is quite extensive.
3. Time spent by Aldermen/Councillors on management committees of projects. For example, the St. George Community Transport Project Management Committee includes an Alderman from each of the three Councils in its area, and Leichhardt Council employed a community transport worker under the Programme.
4. Political support for community transport projects. This might take the form of representations to local M.P.'s and/or the State Government.

The Community Transport Program, therefore, offers an opportunity for local government to be involved in improving transport services for local residents in a way that usually involves licensed transport operators.

### Relationship to the Transport Industry

As part of the range of activities undertaken by the U.T.A. the Community Transport Program obviously bears a close relation to the public transport industry as a whole.

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As stated earlier the Government sees the Program as a means by which the needs of the transport disadvantaged can be met, where possible, by licensed transport operators, in a way that is planned and integrated with the existing transport network.

The benefits to the Government are that it meets its obligation to provide appropriate transport for disadvantaged sections of the community, and that this is done in a planned and consistent way through the Program.

The benefits to the transport disadvantaged sections of community is that their mobility is increased and they gain access to opportunities (work, recreation, shopping etc.) which were difficult or impossible previously. Furthermore, they can purchase transport services in the same way as other members of the community and do not have to rely on the generosity of friends, relatives or volunteers for transport.

As the broadest level, the Program offers an opportunity for constructive liaison between transport operators and community. It is a means by which the transport system can become more responsive to community needs, needs which are not currently being met. Because the services introduced under the Program have Government support, people on fixed incomes can afford to travel more often. The attraction of new patronage to services, whether modification of existing services or the introduction of new services is of obvious financial benefit to the transport industry, both to licensed transport operators and organised labour.

The hiring of spare capacity by community transport groups to trial new bus routes has an additional benefit. It is a means of involving the community in planning and providing services and demonstrating whether there is an actual demand for a particular service. This has the benefit for transport planning of overcoming the unknown of "latent demand".

### FACTORS INFLUENCING THE N.S.W. COMMUNITY TRANSPORT PROGRAM

This paper has described community transport in conceptual terms and its practical implementation in the N.S.W. Community Transport Program.

Obviously there are various factors that affect any program in its transition from concept to reality. It is instructive to examine the factors influencing the implementation of the Community Transport Program, as follows:

#### Funding

As mentioned earlier, there has been only a small amount of funding from Y.A.C.S. for community transport.

All of the Y.A.C.S. funded community transport projects received their initial funding prior to the appointment of the U.T.A.'s Community Transport Team. Typically, a voluntary management committee received a grant of \$5,000 to set up a service of which no more than \$1,000 was to be used for administration. Such a committee could not afford to employ a paid worker (or could employ a worker for a minimal number of hours using alternative sources of funding) yet was under pressure to set up services as quickly as possible with a minimum of advice available, and no precedents except for the Bathurst Community Bus (a rural example of limited application in urban areas).

Voluntary management committees tend to suffer from members having insufficient time/expertise themselves to systemically develop projects. This led to the setting up of services to serve a need readily identified by management committee members from their own experience rather than a comprehensive look at the transport needs of the area and prioritising those needs. It also typically meant a service for a specific target group rather than a service for the transport disadvantaged of the area generally. This target group was often the frail aged and disabled as they could be readily identified as transport disadvantaged by their physical inability to use public transport.

The result was, therefore, an ad hoc and localised approach to community transport serving relatively small numbers of people. Also, some services suffered from budget blowouts and have had to be curtailed and/or receive interim funding to last the financial year.

Some community transport groups recognised the limitation of this approach and two groups successfully persuaded Y.A.C.S. to agree to use their grants to employ paid co-ordinators. Also, when larger amounts of funding was made available through C.E.P., community transport groups responded by applying for grants to employ workers to comprehensively examine transport disadvantage and use this to systematically plan services in their area, or by applying for grants for regional community transport projects.

The experience of the Community Transport Program, to summarise, shows that the amount of funding and conditions placed on grants has a significant impact on the practical reality of a program. Indeed it is probably the prime determinant of the "success" or "failure" of such a program.

#### Use of Licensed Transport Operators

As mentioned earlier, a major factor in the genesis of the Program was the intention to discourage community groups from purchasing vehicles by providing them with grants to purchase transport services from licensed

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operators. This has resulted in an emphasis on service delivery (ie. rather than planning) and has dictated the range of service options available to community groups. In some instances the use of licensed operators means that community transport groups have to purchase transport services at, or close to commercial rates with a subsequent effect on the "economic viability" of community transport services operating with limited budgets.

### Cost Recovery

At the outset of the Program it was anticipated that after an initial establishment period (ie. the grants were seen as "seeding" grants rather than ongoing funding) community transport services would pay for themselves through "donations" received from passengers, and by the use of the voluntary labour and fund raising efforts of the community management committee. This has not eventuated and community transport projects have shown a need for ongoing funding, particularly for a paid co-ordinator to develop, implement, administer and monitor services.

This should not be surprising. The longest running community transport project using licensed operators in N.S.W. is the Bathurst Community Bus which started in 1978. The Bureau of Transport Economics (1983 b) pointed out that its "subsidy of about 45% of the total cost of its operation (in the first half of 1981).... is comparable to an average subsidy level of 49.7% for urban public bus and tram operations in Australia in 1979/80".

### Regulatory Constraints

Compared to transport in third world countries and the United States (where there has been a considerable move towards deregulation eg. in the taxi industry), transport services in N.S.W. are highly regulated. The Transport Act, 1930 and the State Transport (Co-ordination) Act, 1931 and Regulations made under those Acts not only set service standards for licensed transport operators, but also protect those operators from competition.

Community transport services have to comply with the transport regulations as interpreted by the Department of Motor Transport and this can be a considerable constraint on the nature of such services.

### Community Transport Team's Work Methods

The U.T.A.'s Community Transport Team is only comprised of four people, who are therefore only available as advisers to community transport groups. As the Team is not directly involved in setting up projects there is a reliance on local community transport groups of limited expertise and resources to do this.



The limiting of the Community Transport Team to the urban areas of Sydney, Wollongong and Newcastle (and Cessnock by Ministerial directive) has led to the primary development of the Program being in those areas. All of the YACS funded projects are in those areas with the single exception of the Bathurst Community Transport Group which started in 1978, well before the Team's appointment in 1983. Similarly, applicants for C.E.P. funding in urban areas have access to the Team's advice whereas those in country areas do not. The State Government department responsible for transport in areas outside Sydney, Wollongong and Newcastle is the Department of Motor Transport which is a regulatory rather than transport planning body.

#### CONCLUDING REMARKS: THE FUTURE

The N.S.W. Community Transport Program is an innovative program, unique in Australia, which has facilitated co-operation between transport administration, operators, and consumers. It has led to some notable and successful changes in the way transport has been provided and increased opportunities for travel for the transport disadvantaged sections of the community. It has ensured that a more efficient use is made of existing transport physical, staff and financial resources. The Program has provided a recognition of the need for all sectors of the community, the government and the transport providers to work together and in so doing work to provide an efficient and effective community transport system.

1986 is shaping to be the turning point in the development of community transport in N.S.W. For the first time the transport administration will have available to it a budget for community transport purposes, through \$400,000 from the Commonwealth Home and Community Care Program. Work is well advanced on the transfer of funding responsibility for the N.S.W. Community Transport Program from Y.A.C.S. to the transport administration. When this is achieved it will enable the transport administration to have a direct influence over Program policy.

By the end of 1986, therefore, the N.S.W. Community Transport Program should be an integral part of transport portfolio, with an assured budget administered primarily by the Urban Transit Authority's Community Transport Team.

The H.A.C.C. Community Transport Proposal indicates directions for the future<sup>7</sup> away from localised projects towards sub regional (ie. more than one local government area) projects; the provision of funding adequate for a full time community transport co-ordinator with a community transport fund; and away from direct provision of one service towards the introduction, improvement and co-ordination of a number of services.

<sup>7</sup> This approach will need to be adapted in the less populated areas of the state where distance between population centres indicates a direct service provision approach.

HYDE  
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