

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

**Submission to the Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and
Transport**

**Inquiry into the investment of Commonwealth and State funds in public
passenger transport infrastructure and services**

23 February 2009



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The Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Inquiry into the investment of Commonwealth and State funds in public passenger transport infrastructure and services

1. Local Government Association of the Northern Territory

The Local Government Association of the Northern Territory is the single peak body representing sixteen local government authorities in the Northern Territory.

The Association has an eight member Executive Committee which has overall carriage of the Association affairs as detailed in the Association's constitution and governance charter.

The following policies have been adopted by the Association that relate to the inquiry brief.

- (a) LGANT supports the Commonwealth Government subsidising appropriate public transport in remote areas, recognising especially the transport disadvantages of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.*
- (b) LGANT calls on Commonwealth and Territory Governments to recognise that the key to efficiency in transport and infrastructure provision is the integration of planning and program management at community and regional levels.*

2. The Northern Territory Context

The Northern Territory is characterised by:

- it occupying one sixth the area of Australia
- just over a third of its population of 220 000 persons residing in Darwin
- about another third residing in the major centres of Palmerston, Litchfield, Katherine and Alice Springs
- the remaining third residing in some 50 odd sparsely populated communities throughout the Northern Territory often separated by long distances from the above centres
- a population that has:
 - high birth rates in remote areas resulting in high population growth
 - a high dependence on the motor car
 - a young mobile workforce
 - a high number of people employed in the mining, defence, rural and government sectors
 - about a third of all prison inmates are from remote areas incarcerated for driving related offences
 - a shortage of housing in remote areas
 - little investment in bicycle infrastructure in remote areas
- the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Environment being the

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government agency that has responsibility and carriage of coordinating the provision of public transport services in the Northern Territory

- 11 shire councils servicing in remote areas:
 - the bulk of the communities with local government services
 - the bulk of the area of the Northern Territory since 1 July 2008
 - very limited public passenger services usually linked to specific services such as aged care
 - licensed aerodromes and finding the impost of Australian Government regulations difficult to comply with because of funding.
 - towns with high house occupancy rates
- 5 municipal councils servicing the major centres
 - with local government services and very limited public passenger services
 - with the bulk of the population in the Northern Territory
 - with high levels of visitation to and from remote areas
 - with appreciable numbers of homeless people
- bus services and taxis operating in most major centres:
 - but rarely elsewhere
 - largely by private firms under contract or license
 - largely because of Territory and Australian Government investment
 - largely for transporting students to and from educational institutions
- most cities and towns having access to air transport services although they:
 - vary significantly according to demand
 - are generally very expensive in remote areas
 - have few private firms providing them
 - operate due to private investment
 - all seem to struggle to make ends meet
- air services being the only mode of passenger transport available in remote areas during the 'wet' season due to road infrastructure being flooded or impassable due to its wet condition
- ferry or boat services being:
 - limited to a few locations in the Northern Territory
 - predominantly operating from Darwin
 - run by private operators and due largely to their investment
- rail passenger services operating between Adelaide and Darwin (and major centres in between)
 - on a weekly or bi-weekly basis
 - catering largely for the tourism market
 - operate due to private and government investment
- road traffic congestion only occurring to any great extent in Darwin and Palmerston with government responses to date being to prefer increased road expenditure to that of investing in public transport
- road infrastructure to many remote communities is unsealed which hinders the introduction of public passenger transport services by road
- road expenditure being concentrated in urban areas

3. Some Matters to Consider


The Association considers that the Australian Government could facilitate a number of measures to improve public passenger transport services and infrastructure in the

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Northern Territory. These include:

- broaden the Remote Areas Subsidy Scheme to increase the viability of air services to remote areas and fund councils to meet their compliance requirements
- provide grants to councils to increase the provision of cycle paths in all council areas
- now that much larger areas are incorporated into local government boundaries fund a scoping study to determine the quantum of financial assistance grants that should be paid to local government given impending increased road length responsibility
- undertake studies which could be used to establish the most suitable level of service provision and potential subsidies for bus services within communities and between remote areas and major centres
- assisting the Territory Government to implement a transport plan which would:
 - see greater investment and excellent service provision in public transport infrastructure and services in major centres
 - see less expenditure on new road infrastructure in major centres
 - see a reduction in carbon emissions
 - integrate land use and transport planning such as having land easements for light rail and bus lanes where appropriate
 - encourage people to use public transport in preference to the private motor vehicle by delivering ongoing marketing campaigns

Yours sincerely



Tony Tapsell
Chief Executive Officer
Local Government Association of the Northern Territory