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press clip

Public transport probe

Students, elderly missing out in our region

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ARM Newstak

A PARLIAMENTARY inquiry into regional transport access has heard Kyogle TAFE students are missing classes because bus timetables are a mess and that disadvantaged groups are being stranded.

The Northern Rivers Social Development Council's submission said updating public transport routes to better encompass major service and employment areas could be a fix, along with running smaller commuter buses.

"Currently, students cannot get to TAFE via public transport because a connecting service leaves 30 minutes before the arrival of the service from Kyogle," NRSDC transport development officer Alex Lewers wrote.

"This put students in this area at a significant disadvantage to students who live in Lismore."

TAFE students were not alone in their commuting difficulties.

Northern NSW Local Health District health promotion manager Jillian Adams said the North Coast had "significant transport disadvantage", with households on average earning a third less than their city counterparts.

She called on Transport for NSW to reconsider its recent rejection of funding for a trial of the group's

Commuter Bus Plan 2016 that focused on improving public transport options for tertiary students and elderly people.

The Lismore Base Hospital and health precinct, Lismore City centre and TAFE campus and Southern Cross University East Lismore Campus all fell under its scope.

"The plan proposes to add two express bus lines for commuters, from Lennox Head via Ballina to Lismore return, and from Casino to Lismore return," Ms Adams said.

Northern Rivers Guardians president Scott Sledge advocated for a move towards light rail to reduce fossil fuel reliance.

"We believe that light rail is a viable and safe option for the future of transport in our region," he said.

Tweed, Byron and Ballina Community Transport chief executive officer Phil Barron said renal dialysis patients' transport needs had gone unmet on routes between regional towns and hospitals in Lismore, Ballina and Tweed Heads.

The inquiry is ongoing with a report due to come before parliament by November 30.