

# Southern Mallee Transport Connections Project

*Providing Transport Solutions for the Buloke, Gannawarra and Swan Hill Shires*

---

11<sup>th</sup> May, 2007

The Secretary  
Senate Community Affairs Committee  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Sir or Madam,

## **Submission - 'Inquiry into the operation and effectiveness of Patient Assisted Travel Schemes'**

The Southern Mallee Transport Connections Partnership (SMTCP) has been working closely with 30 small communities from three municipalities (Buloke, Gannawarra and Swan Hill) over the last four years, in order to address the increasing transport disadvantage experienced by people living in rural Victoria.

The health and well being of people living in rural Victoria continues to be challenged by large distances to regional and city services, with many people unable to link in with timely health care as a result. SMTCP has been actively promoting the Victorian Patients Transport Assistance Scheme over the last four years, in order to increase the community awareness of this form of assistance, however there continues to be many barriers to this particular scheme. Some of these barriers include:

- Ineffective government marketing of the scheme – many people still don't know of the scheme.
- Inconsistence in the payment of the subsidies – many people complain that they don't always receive a refund, even if they travel the same direction, distance, etc.
- Criteria of the 'closest' medical specialist is unfair – due to lengthy waiting lists and general practitioner referral patterns – Doctors don't know how to complete the form, in order to overcome this criteria.
- Subsidy for accommodation is too low – many people need to stay overnight in the city in order to catch public transport back the next day (so accommodation adds a huge expense to their specialist's appointment). Some people in rural Victoria only have one bus service to Melbourne per week, which means that they have to stay in Melbourne for a whole week before they can return to their home town.
- The travel subsidy is too low due to the long distances that people need to travel from rural Victoria, and high petrol prices.
- Criteria that only includes specialist appointments omits all of the people who need to travel for: rehabilitation, medical tests, allied health, dialysis, etc.

SMTCP has also been actively lobbying the Department of Infrastructure, in order to develop more flexibility into the licensing criteria of special purpose vehicles and hire car vehicles. SMTCP has developed a number of community transport proposals which would provide low cost assisted-transport for people living in rural areas, however current government policy continues to create barriers to further development. We are happy to provide more details, and can be contacted on the telephone number below.

Yours truly,

PAULINE THORSON  
SOUTHERN MALLEE TRANSPORT CONNECTIONS

---

*Proudly supported by: the Buloke Shire Council, Cohuna & District Hospital, East Wimmera Health Service, Gannawarra Shire Council, Mallee Family Care, Northern District Community Health Service, Swan Hill District Hospital, Swan Hill Rural City Council & the Southern Mallee Primary Care Partnership.*

**PO Box 22, Koondrook Vic 3580**

**Ph: 03 545 333 89**

**Email: pauline.thorson@bigpond.com**

---

*Proudly supported by: the Buloke Shire Council, Cohuna & District Hospital, East Wimmera Health Service, Gannawarra Shire Council, Mallee Family Care, Northern District Community Health Service, Swan Hill District Hospital, Swan Hill Rural City Council & the Southern Mallee Primary Care Partnership.*

*PO Box 22, Koondrook Vic 3580*

*Ph: 03 545 333 89*

*Email: [pauline.thorson@bigpond.com](mailto:pauline.thorson@bigpond.com)*