



**Northern Rivers
COMMUNITY TRANSPORT**

**History
1987-2007**

Northern Rivers Community Transport Inc History 1987-2007

Northern Rivers Community Transport (NRCT) first germinated in 1986. Very early records are hard to find and in tracking the history we rely on the memories of early drivers and coordinators.

Pamela Ashton remembers CEP (Commonwealth Employment Program) funding instigating the first brokered bus service as a one year pilot program. There were 4 bus companies in Lismore and NRCT rotated all of them. Pamela worked at the Rowing Club building doing administration for the Richmond Tweed Regional Council for Social Development. On Fridays she was on the bus helping the clients. She said,

“it was a glowing success right from the start”.

The Richmond Tweed Regional Council for Social Development (RTRCSD) ran with what was obviously a high community need:
Community Transport.

Using results from the pilot they succeed in attracting recurrent funding through the Department of Aging, Disability and Home-Care. Peter Hicks, the first coordinator, provided brokered bus services over 7 local government areas. These included Lismore, Kyogle, Casino, Richmond River, Tweed, Byron and Ballina.

It soon became apparent however that the area was too large for one service to cover.

In February 1988 The Development Council committee members, Pat Martin, Andrew Walker and Janelle Saffin interviewed candidates and employed Mick Maloney and Jenny Hicks to coordinate what was to be split into the Tweed/Byron Ballina Community Transport (TBBCT) and Northern Rivers Community Transport (NRCT).

Pat Martyn remembers NRCT starting out sharing an office with the RTRCSD at what is now the Canoe Club building on the river at Molesworth St. Initial funding \$35,000 provided brokered bus runs with no wheelchair access.

The first Office.



Early Days

Judith Gooden, now the Regional planner for DADHC, said that she was involved with NRCT from the early days and the organisation has always been very political. NRCT has a history of advocating for better public transport options for elderly passengers and passengers with disabilities. Judith remembers when sleepers were taken off train carriages and the lengths NRCT went to in an attempt to prevent this. Mick Maloney confirms that the early focus was on development work.

A profile report from 1989 describes NRCT as owning a 14 seater Nissan Urvan with a rear hoist; this was apparently based at Bonalbo and the hospital managed the bus. There were brokered regular services for Lismore, Kyogle, Bonalbo and Evans Head. Client contributions were 70 cents. There was a paid coordinator and 19 hours of administration per week. Volunteer coordinators ran Kyogle and Casino and a few drivers in each area offered transport to medical appointments in their cars.

There was a quick succession of coordinators in the early years, Peter Tenner, Jenny Hicks 1988
Lois Colman 1989, Andrew Walker 1989-1990
Dianne Podlick 1990-1991, Pattie Monro 1990-1991,
Carel Kaper 1991-1993, Rhonda Cox 1993-1994
(acting manager). The service stabilised with
Judene Wallace 1994-1998 and Colleen Thomas
1998 - through to today 2007, (she hopes to be
there for some time to come).

Some things don't change

Patti Monro coordinated in the early days and she recalls securing the first funding for a bus. The bus was apparently to be shared between Kyogle and Lismore, when Pattie asked 'the powers that be' how this was to happen, the response from Sydney was that Lismore to Kyogle "did not look very far on the map"! Eventually the issue was resolved by the purchase of a second hand bus for Kyogle. Health transport issues were as challenging then as they are now with demand outstripping capacity and Health not providing any assistance at that time.

The Inaugural Annual Report was presented in 1990/1991 by now NRCT owned 3 buses and provided 9,650 passenger trips. There were several volunteer coordinators, Shirley Moll, for the Mid-Richmond, Peg Constable in Kyogle, Beverly Brown for the Westerly region, Noeline Olive for Casino.

It is depressing to read that the major issues then, are the same as the major issues now.

"It is of some concern that the State government still seems to be wavering about the role of the Department of Transport in Community Transport. Of further disappointment is the government's indecision about accreditation for Community Transport. Another area of ongoing concern is the issue of Health Related Transport."

Dianne Podlick. 1990-1991 Inaugural Report.

Drivers

Drivers are the heart of the service without whom there would be no service. They go out in all conditions and spend long hours patiently waiting in fun places like hospitals and doctors surgeries. They get little for their pains but great satisfaction in helping elderly and people with disabilities live independent, healthy lives.

Stan Goulding, who today still drives for NRCT remembers attending the first meeting for drivers in 1988/89, he was one of three drivers. Stan says he has enjoyed every moment of it, loves meeting people and helping out. He has covered over 60,000 kilometres in the course of his NRCT driving.



Faye Sherfe, a Nimbin driver started in 1990 and is also still driving. Faye said she has loved it, she remembers special days where she and a client have gone to nurseries in between the client's appointments and had a lovely day. Other days were not so relaxed, like the day an emergency occurred halfway to Nimbin, in an area of no phone reception. This necessitated a quick dash to the Nimbin Hospital with 4 clients in the car!

Roy Hughes started in 1991. He was the first bus driver.



Special Mention to the following drivers for their long standing, they joined between 1990-1992 and are still with NRCT in 2007!

Alva Sandor: drives for Nimbin, has been a Committee member and works in administration.

Barry Rapp: Volunteer bus driver.

Toby Bodley: Volunteer Coordinator for Coraki.

Sue Bodley: drives for Coraki.

Norma Wise: drives for Coraki and ex-Committee member.

Margaret Smith: long term Coraki driver (ex-coordinator).

Jack Pressick: many years driving and fleet assistance.

Graham Warburton: bus driver for Kyogle.

Many, many drivers have served for well over a decade and have retired, and whilst not all are mentioned in this brief report their immense contribution is no less appreciated. Perhaps we will all be in the next historical update.

Special Mention

There are some members who have retired or who have moved on, who have contributed an outstanding long term dedicated effort. They have made the service what it is.

Basil Cooper joined NRCT in 1991 and has worked as a driver, a treasurer, an assistant on the school bus and an assistant on the access buses.

Don Morrison, Kyogle, drove from 1990-2004.

Bill Dixon, Casino, drove between 1991-2004.

Hal Bodley, 1992-2004, Volunteer driver and co-ordinator for Coraki all those years.

Sylvia Scarborough drove for Casino 1991-2002 and was a committee member in 1994.

Margaret Shirley 1990-2004. Bruce Shirley started a little later and is still driving for Kyogle.



*Hal Bodley receiving an award from Elvis
at the 10 year celebration 1997.*

Records are not always available or accurate so sincere apologies for any errors or if anyone has been left out.

Presidents

Presidents:

Robert Weatherby 1990-1994

Peter Moller 1995

Sue Eaton 1995-1998

Jill LeMessurier 1998-2001

Maria Melrose 2002

Peter Leslie 2003- today 2007

the longest standing president



Mr Peter Leslie

It is very interesting to read the annual Presidents' reports. Robert Weatherby describes the first independent year as

“a story of rapid and sometimes hectic growth in service provision”

Lismore, in fact, had to restrict new clients in the first year. Robert Weatherby reports that during 1990-1991 NRCT achieved incorporation and secured a suitable premises off Carrington St.



On the Move

Over 20 years NRCT has had a few changes of premises, starting out with RTRCSD at what is now the Canoe Club building on the river at Mollsworth St, to a dark stairwell in Carrington St, to a shopfront in Carrington St, to a wooden house on a busy Uralba St, to an upstairs premise in Conway St, and finally to the Goonellabah Community Centre in 1995.



Fleet



Very early buses of NRCT & TBBCT



Warren Bell and Jill LeMessurier with the first cars.



Dave Aitken and Doug Neal with a new Bus

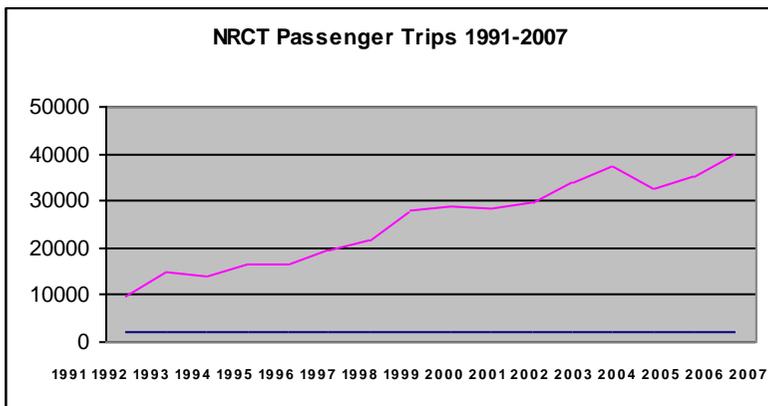
Now Warren looks after 8 buses, 11 cars and 3 trailers.

Clients

Over the last 20 year the number of clients and trips has continued to increase at an expediential rate. Thousands of clients have enjoyed outings, and accessed essential health facilities.



Steep growth, arrested only by closing the books in 2004.



First Outing

Ellie Gava, Italo Day Care volunteer, helped lobby for a bus and clearly remembers the first bus outing.

She said;

“I was on the first ever trip. When we went over the bridge, I cried. The enormity of it hit me, it was so exciting and everyone was so happy”



1st Bus Trip: 6th Sept 1991: Italo Club

Ellie and Roy made a great team. Ellie remembers Roy chasing a couple of chaps who had hit the bus with their bull bar, lucky for them they got away! Ellie still volunteers on the Italo run today.



In 2007 NRCT utilises 11 buses as well as brokered buses to offer a range of flexible options, Flexi Friday being one such run. Regular pick/ups to flexible destinations.

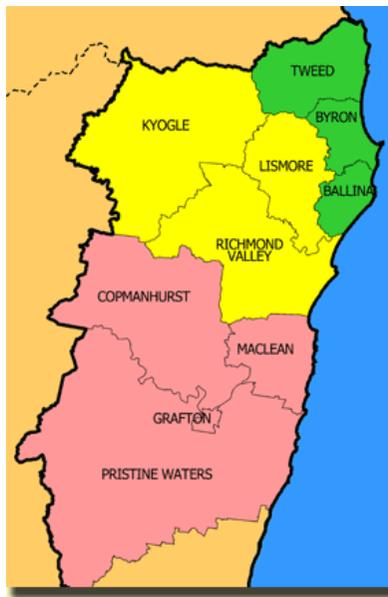
Vera Parmenter & scooter, enjoys the 'Flexi Friday'.

Coverage

In 1988 Tweed Byron Ballina became autonomous leaving NRCT with 4 local government areas. Casino and Richmond River have since combined lga's of Richmond Valley therefore NRCT covers 3 shires today, comprising 7,400 square kilometres.

In 1994 Mid Richmond Community Transport sub-committee broke away from NRCT and combined with the Mid Richmond Neighbourhood Centre. This is still the case today with the Mid Richmond Neighbourhood Centre managing the needs of Evans Head and surrounding areas.

Three Community Transport Services cover the Far Nth Coast: Tweed/Byron Ballina CT, Northern Rivers CT, and Clarence CT.



Staff

Up until 1998 there was still only funding for a full time coordinator, 16 hrs of administration and 8 hrs for a bus driver. The last 10 years has seen huge growth in all areas including funding and staffing levels and services offered.



*Greg, Carmel, Warren and Judene
1996*



*Jack Pressick and Judene Wallace
1997*



*Left: Cedar Wice-Otter receiving the first Nimbin Car.
Right: Julie McFadden, Greg Walley, Warren Bell and Colleen Thomas:
1998.*



We are a much bigger team now! 2007



Aboriginal Transport

NRCT has a strong commitment to providing transport to disadvantaged Aboriginal Communities. Dianne Creighton has been a Board Member since 1998 and was instrumental in securing the first funding for Aboriginal specific services. In 2002 Leonie Watson was employed on a 2 year pilot project. The project was extremely successful and Leonie now runs a program employing 6 Aboriginal workers.



Leonie Watson



Dianne Creighton

Aboriginal Transport provides regular bus services within Muli Muli, Bonalbo, Tabulam, Box Ridge and Coraki Communities as well as individual transport across the 3 Iga's of Lismore, Kyogle and Richmond Valley.



Bruce Murray receiving the first bus in 2001

*Barrie Jenkins
Office Worker*



The Aboriginal Transport Development Workers (all original 4 for NSW) have been an active political group and have achieved an incredible amount of recognition and improvement within the Transport arena.

Dave Kapeen, Leonie Watson, Sharon Spurr & Greg Randall



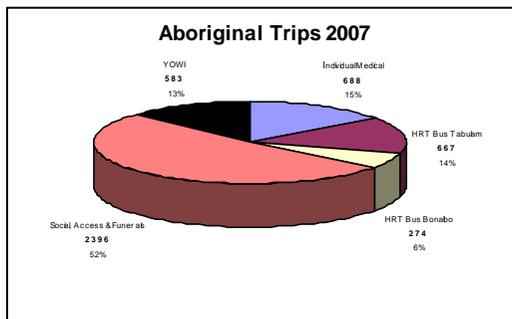
Fred Binge voluntarily coordinates all trips for Bonalbo and Tabulam.



Fred Binge & Ced Walker



Bonalbo/Tabulam Commuter



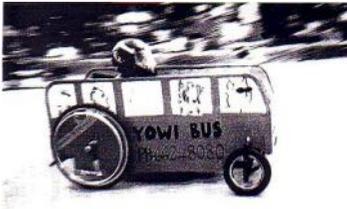
An effort to be proud of, whilst recognising that there is a lot of work ahead.

YOWI

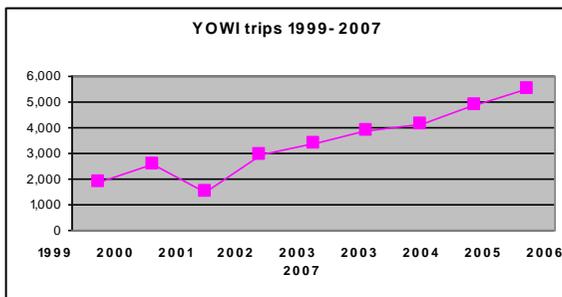
YOWI attracted funding in Sept 1995 through the Area Assistance Scheme to provide group transport for youth in the Nimbin, Channon & Tuntable area. A school competition for a name instated: Youth On Wheels Ink. The Ministry of Transport soon 'picked up' the funding and YOWI runs strongly today.



Michael Abbott was the first coordinator followed by Annemarie Bardell. John Hildebrand coordinated between 1999 and 2006. One of his many highlights was his son winning the Bangalow billycart race in the famous YOWI bus!



YOWI has been enormously successful and has provided thousands of trips with very little funding as the graph below illustrates.



YOWI 2007

Heather Gillard now runs YOWI and has seen us into the 21st Century; just look on our website:
www.yowi.nrct.org



Social Support

Social Support began in Feb 05 with Alison Grealish employed as coordinator. This is a very important expansion for NRCT enabling clients who need that little bit of extra help to move seamlessly into an appropriate service. Social Support provides home visits and helps people stay connected, active and involved. Sheila Pring now coordinates this program and it is always running at full capacity. We hope to attract more funding to keep up with the demand.



Social Support clients enjoying a sunny outing.

20 Years of Operation

Sincere thanks to all the volunteers, clients, staff and Board Members who have made NRCT such a professional, equitable and dynamic service.



Northern Rivers COMMUNITY TRANSPORT

Mission Statement 2007

To provide high quality equitable transport and social support services, information and referral for people who are transport disadvantaged and socially isolated. To address inequities in access and assist in the development of flexible transport options and partnerships that build communities within the local government areas of Lismore, Kyogle and Richmond Valley. To deliver services in a manner sensitive to environmental and social impact.