

Letters

Strong support for the romance of rail

■ Ian Kilgour and his grandchildren may have been delighted and enthralled to view and travel to Mullumbimby on Becton's beautiful little two carriage train, but for those of us attending Seed-savers annual conference that weekend what we experienced was very disruptive: a lot of noise as the driver made sure no-one was caught on the crossing as the train sped through the residential area on Old Bangalow Road, as they presumably sped through other residential areas, with no thought for anyone other than those already 'onboard' the Becton wagon.

If that's the way they drive their train, perhaps that's the way they intend to drive their development.

Bronwyn Sindel
Mullumbimby

■ What the Dickens? Ian Kilgour asks 'Please sir, may I have some more' local rail services (November 4).

Oliver Twist's request to the master for food to alleviate hunger was met with 'horror... depicted on every countenance' even though his need appeared obvious and reasonable. Ian states, 'North coast rail is a definite necessity', but the efforts of many citizens over a long period have failed to convince our political and bureaucratic masters, who have yet to acknowledge this community's obvious and reasonable need. In many cases the response has been one of horror at our temerity to ask for more (local) services while they are busy withdrawing the one service we do have. An artful dodge if ever there was one.

A few words on the twisted logic of Messrs Vaughan and Cummings who also want more: more cars at the expense of rail services. Somehow traffic gridlock in Byron Bay will be overcome by ensuring that only road transport options are available. What next? Will pedestrians be barred from crossing the street as cars are required to stop at pedestrian crossings? To retain its magic, the Bay needs fewer cars, not more.

When it comes to public transport, it seems we are in the services poorhouse and that the distance between the Northern Rivers and Sydney shields decision makers from discovering our poverty. With the bean counters too busy counting dollars to listen to people, the time for meekness has past. Like Oliver, we can be more assertive in stating 'please sir, I want some more' and we can escape the services poorhouse through action and loudly proclaiming 'claim the train'.

Basil Cameron
Goonengerry

■ Is everybody shaking in their boots with fear after reading the letter in *The Echo* of October 21?

The very thought of the rattle and shake of thundering, screaming engines blowing their piercing whistles at every opportunity, whilst dragging long heavy trains at great speeds and then coming to a crashing halt straddling every crossing. Mile long freight trains, end to end, crawling across the road, holding up the fuel efficient, fast flowing, motor cars, buses, trucks and semis that are patiently waiting for the vast queue of patrons to board the steamers anchored off the pass. Wow!

Come on! Come on! Who's living in the past?

Fast modern rail, with a toot at every station and siding, providing quick comfortable access to health care in the bigger centres for families and older folk, a safe means for the young ones to get to (and more importantly) back from their evening venues, a quick trip for happy families going to the beach and a comfortable journey home for tired kids and stressed parents after a wonderful outing. And a new breath of life for local villages when visitors enjoy a trip by rail, stay for coffee, sightsee, and visit the gift shop.

By the way, reducing the number of vehicles on our roads reduces the number of deaths (especially of young people), eases congestion, reduces pollution, etc, etc - and that's no exaggeration.

T Chandler
Mullumbimby

■ It's surprising that some people still think building more roads is the answer to the traffic problems of Byron Bay despite the evidence from all over the world to the contrary. All the roads and freeways do is increase the numbers of cars on the roads and take up more precious space in our towns and cities. Which is exactly what we have been experiencing since the completion of the Chindera to Yelgun section of the Pacific Highway and it will only get worse as more of the highway is upgraded. Not to mention the B doubles and the increased noise. Quality of life is going down the toilet at rapid pace.

At the same time the State Government, without any consultation with affected communities, seems certain to replace the XPT train service from Sydney to Mullumbimby with buses to and from Grafton. Terrific idea! Just what we need, more large vehicles on our roads, more lives put at risk! As if there hasn't been enough carnage on that section of the

highway in recent months.

The argument is that buses will be cheaper and more efficient. Well the people who think that obviously have never tried to get on a bus in a wheelchair, or with small children, prams and all the associated baggage. Trains are much more accessible, comfortable, safer and do much less environmental damage, especially when we already have a line going right to the centre of so many towns through some spectacular scenery. What a waste.

We need a comprehensive study of the real transport needs of the Northern Rivers. The distance from Ballina to Brisbane is around 200km and we need a rail connection to this major city. People who are seriously injured in road accidents are transported to Brisbane and families face the difficulty of having to travel to and fro, and the patients themselves, and most are not able to drive, often have to travel for ongoing medical treatment to Brisbane.

Tourists and locals would have direct access by rail to Coolangatta and Brisbane airports. The Manager of Economic Development and Tourism for Lismore Council has estimated 4850 trips per day could be generated if the Queensland and NSW systems were connected. That would mean a lot less cars on our roads and in the towns and a much better quality of life. If managed and marketed correctly, the line could even be financially viable.

The Queensland Government is extending its rail system to cope with increased population and tourism as they know the roads can't cope. Planning is well underway to extend the line from Robina to Coolangatta airport and on the Sunshine Coast they plan to build a branch line from Beewah to Maroochydore.

We must not let our one lousy service be cut and this valuable piece of public infrastructure go to rack and ruin or the corridor will be sold off. At the very least there needs to be extensive community consultation before any changes are made to services.

Public meetings are being organised by Northern Rivers Trains for the Future in Byron Bay and Lismore at the end of November or early December. The Minister for (no) Transport, Michael Costa, is being invited. When the dates are definite the meetings will be advertised in the Echo. It is important that everyone turn up and take this opportunity to have their say on public transport and be heard before it's too late.

Louise Doran
Ocean Shores

■ Affordable and accessible transport is a key issue for the youth, families and older residents of Byron Shire.

Regionally coordinated transport solutions will result in vastly improved access to health services, educational facilities, employment and training opportunities, government services and recreational, social, and cultural needs.

The recent train trial showed how well patronised a train service could be and that retention of rail services, infrastructure and rail corridor ownership is essential. Having a train line being able to drop passengers in the middle of towns is perfect and the calls from a few, often with vested interests, to scrap the rail line through Byron Bay verges on stupidity.

The NSW government needs to call the SRA into line and force it to cooperate with Byron Council.

The Queensland government is building new rail networks in the SE of the state including early planning for a passenger (not freight) rail line to Coolangatta Airport.

On October 21 NRTF, Northern Rivers Trains for the Future, addressed the first interregional rail forum instigated by Lismore and Tweed Councils.

It successfully brought together NSW and Queensland government representatives, Gold Coast Airport, business groups and many councils wanting better rail services and construction of the 20 km 'missing link' between Murwillumbah and Coolangatta. Calls were made for the federal Government to fund a cross-border public transport study.

This region now has the population to demand and deserve innovative, flexible and affordable transport including trains, buses, cycleways, walking paths or park and ride areas with shuttle transport links.

Should I be elected to Byron Shire Council I will continue to be an outspoken advocate for all planning and development to be linked with transport solutions.

Peter Westheimer
Myocum

PS. NRTF has received a costing of \$18,000 + GST of hiring the same rail motors that Becton brought up and I have passed this info on to Peter Noble, Blues Festival director, who has expressed initial interest. It might relieve some traffic congestion and bring music as well on to the trains!

COME AND HAVE YOUR SAY ABOUT THE NEEDS OF ARTISTS IN THE BYRON AREA

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