

Transport and Mobility in Tennant Creek and the Barkly

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- The Barkly Region Alcohol and Drug Abuse Advisory Group (BRADAAG)
- CatholicCare NT
- Central Australian Aboriginal Family Legal Unit (CAAFLU)
- Anyinginyi Aboriginal Health Corporation
- The Sidney Myer Foundation
- The Northern Territory Government – Department of Transport

Your very generous contributions have made this project possible

Thanks also to David Denmark for his willingness to take on this project. His energy, enthusiasm and expertise have helped contribute in a major way to the developments which have taken place as a result of this project.

*Wendy Morton, Executive Director
Northern Territory Council of Social Service*

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Executive summary

The lack of transport options in and around Tennant Creek and its surrounding areas and the resulting impact on residents' ability to access a range of essential and every day services is explored in this report. A range of creative solutions utilising existing resources within the area, using a social enterprise approach, are proposed. The establishment of Tennant Creek Transport Inc. has provided the momentum and 'vehicle' for progressing these solutions.

The report profiles the town of Tennant Creek and surrounding areas and explores the challenges to improving mobility in the area – challenges compounded by a sheer lack of services such as no public buses and a minimal taxi service. These issues particularly impact on the ability of people to attend health services, affect the mobility of people with disability and have a bearing on other activities such as shopping, particularly during the hot summer months. The lack of transport services contributes to health and social service agency resources being diverted away from their core business in order to respond to unmet transport need. Other issues related to transport need are also explored – including housing and overcrowding, the lack of a mail service and issues around information and coordination.

The report also explores transport issues specific to regional and remote areas, where there are no formal transport services and where many people depend on informal transport options such as finding a lift with a private car going into town. The need for improvements in services is clearly evident by the high incidence of people from remote communities being stuck in Tennant Creek and by the high costs associated with travel to and from regional and remote areas due to high fuel prices and the damage vehicles suffer from travelling on rough bush roads and tracks.

The issue of long distance travel is also a significant one for people in the region, with people having difficulty accessing services such as the bus, train or plane due to timetabling and cost issues. The challenge of aligning appointments together so that people could travel down in a group to visit Alice Springs Hospital in order to reduce travel costs is explored, as well as the issue of people having to access accommodation, which can add to costs for patients.

The report author consulted widely in Tennant Creek and across the Barkly region with non-Government organisations, Government agencies, commercial transport providers, local business and other interested stakeholders in order to identify potential local transport solutions. A number of possible solutions were put forward by the participants in two workshops and during other consultations. These included: service coordination (vehicle/driver pool); planning and advocacy; town transport services; use of bicycles; transport services for isolated regional communities; a new Transit Centre; and a postal delivery service. The author also drew on his extensive experience as a Transport Consultant in providing potential models for structuring the development of transport services and examples of local solutions developed nationally – taking a mobility management approach where the passenger is the focus of attention and the available resources are used to satisfy passenger needs and wants.

Given that many of the issues and suggestions identified could not be introduced in the short term as funding and other supports are needed first, it was agreed that the best way forward would be to ask individual residents and others to come together to form a non-profit incorporated association under the NT Associations Act, to work immediately on resourcing issues and to progress various

transport solutions. This led to the formation of a new association, Tennant Creek Transport Inc, to act as a 'vehicle' to address transport disadvantage for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in the Barkly region in whatever form it takes through the provision and coordination of passenger transport services.

SECTION 1. Background Information

1.1 Study Participants

The staff of a wide range of agencies agreed to take part in this project. We thank the staff of the following agencies and individuals who were interviewed for this report:

<p>Anyinginyi Aboriginal Health Corporation – CEO, Clinic Manager, Clinical Director, Regional and Remote Staff, Clinic Bus Driver, ALO, Sports and Recreation Staff</p> <p>Barkly Arts – Coordinator and Staff</p> <p>Barkly College – Executive Principal</p> <p>Barkly Shire – President, CEO</p> <p>Barkly Region Alcohol and Drug Abuse Advisory Group - Manager</p> <p>Bush Bee – Operations Manager</p> <p>Central Australia Aboriginal Family Legal Unit^T</p> <p>Centre Bush Bus - Assistant Director^T, Operations Manager^T</p> <p>Catholic Care – Manager, Staff</p> <p>Council of Elders and Respected Persons</p> <p>Central Land Council - CEO</p> <p>Community Corrections - Manager</p> <p>Elliott McAdam - Former Member of Parliament and NT Government Minister</p> <p>Frontier Services - Pulka Pulka Kari Nursing Home and Community Care Staff</p> <p>Gerry McCarthy - Member of Parliament, Minister for Transport</p> <p>Great Southern Railway – Operations Manager^T</p> <p>Greyhound Buses – Customer Service Manager Darwin^T, Customer Service Officer Tennant Creek</p>	<p>Julalikari Aboriginal Corporation - CEO, General Manager, Community Care Staff, Respite Care and Employment Transport Coordinator, CDEP Coordinator</p> <p>Life Without Barriers – Coordinator^T</p> <p>NT Department of Health – CNC/Child & Family and Health Nurse, Remote Health Coordinator, Aged and Disability Coordinator</p> <p>NT Department of Planning and Infrastructure - A/Senior Transport Analyst^T</p> <p>Pappalu-Aappar-Kari Language Centre – Manager and Staff</p> <p>Patta Aboriginal Corporation - Coordinator</p> <p>Rebecca Healy - Candidate for Country Liberal Party</p> <p>STEPS - Site Manager and Youth Connections Officer</p> <p>Tangentyere Council – Social Services Manager^T</p> <p>Tennant Creek Hospital – General Manager, Clinical Director, Social Worker, Aboriginal Liaison Officer, PATS Clerk, Renal Unit NUM</p> <p>Tennant Creek Night Patrol – Manager and Staff</p> <p>Tennant Creek Rotary Club</p> <p>Tennant Creek Taxis</p> <p>Tour Company Owner</p> <p>Womens Refuge - Manager</p> <p>Youth Service Providers</p>
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^T indicates telephone interview

1.2 Background to the development of the project

In April 2011 the NTCOSS Conference in Darwin had a particular focus on Community Transport options, with David Denmark, an independent transport planner and formerly CEO of the NSW Community Transport Organisation giving a presentation about community transport. Much discussion ensued about the topic of community transport, and there was enthusiasm among conference participants from both non-Government and Government agencies about working towards some tangible solutions. At the conference there was a specific recommendation made that there be funding for a short term Project Officer to develop a plan for the establishment of community transport initiatives in the NT – with initial trials to take place in Tennant Creek or Katherine.

Transport has been a long term issue in Tennant Creek, with many organisations and clients experiencing the impact of a lack of transport options within the town. This project was established to explore new and creative opportunities for the coordination of existing vehicles and resources which could form a part of a community transport system for Tennant Creek. It builds on work undertaken as part of the development of the NT Integrated Regional Transport Strategy and in particular to develop a community transport development program to assist communities with addressing their transport needs.

The project was funded by agencies from Tennant Creek, the Northern Territory Government, NTCOSS and the Sidney Myer Fund.

The project has also greatly benefited from NTCOSS's participation in the Desert City Partnership¹, involving Desert Knowledge Australia, the Menzies Foundation and the Ian Potter Foundation. In particular, NTCOSS' participation in the Grant Seekers Workshop, and subsequent advice and support from the Ian Potter Foundation and Our Community was instrumental in the framing of the project and the successful acquisition of project funds from a range of sources.

1.3 Process of Project Delivery

The project was divided into three phases:

1. Phase one involved background reading and interviews with the study participants indicated on the previous page. Most of the interviews were face to face. The notes from the interviews were entered onto a spreadsheet, coded and sorted into key subject areas. The first draft of the Background Report and the Summary Report were written using this material.
2. Phase two comprised two workshops held a week apart at which participants discussed the preliminary findings and explored ways to address the issues involved. Material from the workshops was used to develop Section 6 "Project Outcomes", of this report which discusses the various responses described by participants.

¹ The Desert City Partnership aims to foster sustainable relationships between funding organisations and community organisations of desert Australia to support social, education, health and economic opportunities in our remote regions

3. In phase three of the project practical steps were commenced to implement the suggestions that came out of the Project Outcomes. The project is now a work-in-progress and its work is to be carried forward by a new agency, Tennant Creek Transport Inc. which was formed for that purpose. NTCOSS and Transport Planning and Management (TPM) will continue to support the work of the project, the former in terms of providing mentoring through the NTCOSS Sector Development Project, assisting with funding applications and continuing to lobby for better transport and mobility in Tennant Creek and across the Territory and TPM's David Denmark as a mentor for staff of the new agency.
4. Outline of NTCOSS role in the project.
NTCOSS has been involved in the project from the outset, developing the project brief, meeting with local agencies, advocating for funding from NGOs, philanthropic and Government sources, and auspicing the project. NTCOSS has provided regular input into the project, and assisted with the development of documents, reports and applications for funding. NTCOSS has also liaised with donor organisations, providing updates. In addition NTCOSS has briefed NT Government and Ministers in relation to the project to engender broad support.

1.4 Tennant Creek and the Barkly Region – Contextual Issues

Tennant Creek, with a population of approximately 3,500, is the fourth biggest town in the Northern Territory and is in the geographical centre of the Northern Territory. It is the main town of the Barkly region and used to be a significant gold mining centre. The region stretches from Barrow Creek in the south to Elliott in the north and east to the Queensland border. It is well known for its cattle production and is the home of some of the largest cattle properties in Australia.



According to the 2011 ABS Census of Population and Housing, Aboriginal people make up 57% of the population and non-Aboriginal people 36% (6 % not stated)² although anecdotal evidence suggests that there remains very significant undercounting of the Aboriginal population³. The population of Tennant Creek is relatively young with a median age of 33 years and with 45% of the population under the age of 25. The median age of Aboriginal people in Tennant Creek township is 25 years compared to 41 years for non-Aboriginal people.

35% of the population speak Aboriginal languages at home (down from 40% ten years ago) the most common language being Warumungu followed by Warlpiri and Alyawarr.

The proportion of households with no motor vehicle in the township of Tennant Creek is 17.4% Compared to 11.7% in the Northern Territory and 8.6% in Australia as a whole.

² Based on place of enumeration (ABS 2012)

³ From interviews with project participants.

The most common way of travelling to work is by car as driver or passenger (60%) with the next most common walking (18.5% compared to 3.7% in Australia as a whole) Only 0.8% of people use public transport (there is no bus service only one taxi in town).

Over half of the population live in rented accommodation with the biggest growth being among people living in properties owned or rented by a Territory Housing Authority (from 5% in 2001 to 25% in 2011). Thirty percent of households have six or more residents.

The traditional landowners are the Patta-Warumungu people who have retained their culture and many of their languages. They hold Native Title over about 27 square kms of the town, the first native title determination in the Northern Territory to be fully reached through a negotiated agreement rather than litigation⁴.

Many Aboriginal people also live in communities scattered across the region. The most significant of these are Ali-Curung, Epenarra, Canteen Creek and Alpururulam (Lake Nash). Other smaller communities include Corella Creek, Mungkarta (McLaren Creek) and many outstations. People move constantly in and out of these communities and between the communities and Tennant Creek.

The community of Ali-Curung, the village of Elliott and Borroloola have all been designated growth towns by the Northern Territory Government.

The population of the town fluctuates all of the time with big increases in the number of people visiting from regional communities at weekends or when there are events. This increase also occurs during the wet season when many regional communities can be cut off due to roads becoming impassable because of rivers being too deep to cross or the softening of the road surface. Some communities can be cut off for weeks at a time, particularly the community at Lake Apururulam in the east of the region. Even significant communities such as Epenarra and Canteen Creek regularly have access disrupted.



There are only two major roads in the region, the Stuart Highway which allows access to Alice Springs 500 kms to the south and to Katherine (650 kms) and Darwin (1,000 kms) to the north. Just north of town at Three Ways, the Barkly Highway stretches east past the Barkly Homestead to Camooweal just over the Queensland Border and Mt Isa (650 Kms to the east).

There is also a sealed road which runs north from the Barkly Homestead via Cape Crawford to Borroloola near the Gulf. Unformed roads out to many of the more remote communities such as Canteen Creek are very rough in places and travel may involve creek and river crossings. The terrain can be very hard on vehicles.

⁴ See <http://www.aiatsis.gov.au/ntru/docs/rntbc/profiles/Patta.pdf>

The weather is hot and wet in the summer which can make travel off the bitumen, on gravel or sandy roads, difficult. In the winter there are cool mornings and bright sunny days but the winds can be biting and cold.

One of the most pressing problems in Tennant Creek is that of a shortage of housing which results in chronic overcrowding which exacerbates and even creates a range of social problems. Many of the Aboriginal population live in ten Town Living Areas of various sizes, which are special purpose leases, on the edges of town. While the infrastructure in these areas has recently been upgraded the number of houses is not adequate for the normally resident population. Public Housing waiting times range from 41 months for 1 bedroom pensioner accommodation to 77 months for 1 bedroom non-pensioner accommodation. Larger houses average 65 months. The housing shortage affects both the non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal populations to varying extents⁵.

Issues of distance, isolation and limited access to services affects both the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations. The general shortage of accommodation also affects businesses and services which have difficulty in attracting staff. Government and other agencies seek to take housing on long term head leases which leaves little accommodation for other renters. The town's private rental accommodation has had a 0% vacancy rate for the past two years. It could be argued that the town's population is restricted to a significant degree by there being a limited number of places for people to live.

Another significant problem is the lack of a mail delivery service. Town residents either have a Post Office Box or have to call at the Post Office to collect mail. This makes it difficult for health transport providers to inform patients about appointments or to let them know that a bus or car will be picking them up on a certain day. The issue is exacerbated by the low literacy rates among many town residents, as for many people, English is a second or third language. This affects the ability of agencies to provide efficient transport services.

Mobility

Mobility issues for residents can be divided into three major categories:

- within the town;
- within the region (mainly to and from Tennant Creek); and
- long distance travel.

In addition there are some other contiguous issues that affect people's mobility or the delivery of transport services, which are also outlined here.

Mobility issues do not just affect Aboriginal people in the town, but there are non-Aboriginal people in particular parts of the town area (including the caravan parks) who face transport disadvantage.

All of these issues have been described to us by staff of local agencies, local groups and local people. References to other reports have been made where they usefully confirm the opinions expressed.

⁵ Source: NT Department of Housing

SECTION 2. Mobility and transport issues within the town

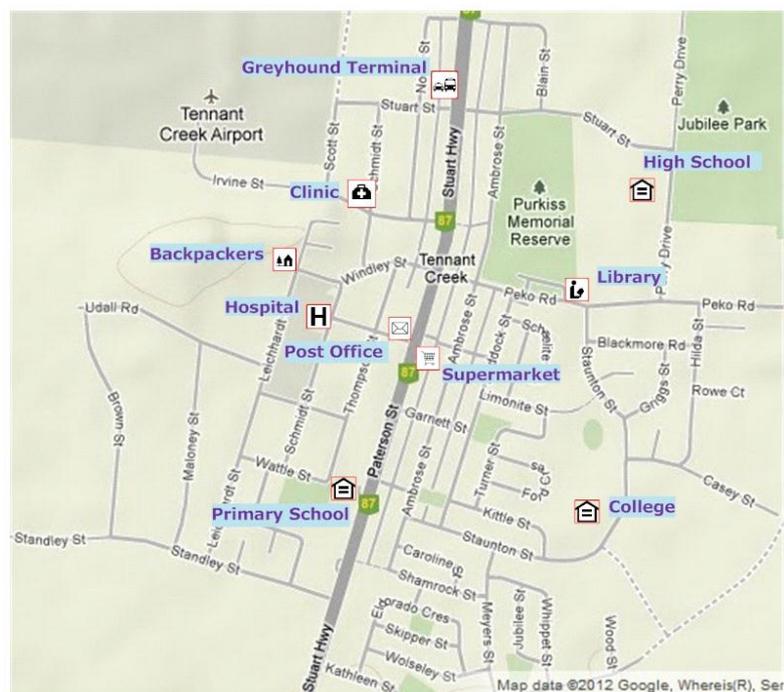
2.1 Where people travel

The town is relatively compact, not more than 3 kilometers from the northernmost town living area at Wuppa to the southernmost at Karguru (see map below).

Most of the retail businesses are concentrated along the main street, Paterson Street. The main health destinations are the hospital and the Anyinginyi Clinic which are a couple of blocks to the west and the Anyinginyi Regional and Remote office which hosts periodic physiotherapy and podiatry service at the southern end of the main street. There is also a private GP clinic at the RDFS venue near to the hospital.

The only supermarket (the Food Barn) and Centrelink are also in the main street and the NT Government Centre and Barkly Shire Council offices, library and swimming pool are also close to the CBD in Peko Road. Schools are located on Paterson Street (Primary) and on Staunton Street (Secondary) and both Batchelor College and the Charles Darwin University also have facilities on Staunton Street. The other significant destination is the Barkly Work Camp to the east of the town.

Transport connections include the Greyhound Bus Terminal at the northern end of the main street, the airport which is a kilometre to the north-west of the town and the BP service station used by the Bush Bus. Bush Bus Express services also call at Peko Park and the Hospital (on request). Their Route Service will pick up and drop passengers anywhere in town if notified at the time of booking. The railway station is 5 kilometres to the south of the town.



2.2 How people get around town

The only public transport is a single taxi despite there being two taxi licences in town. A licence for a Multi Purpose Taxi is not currently used. The present taxi operator charges a flat fare to get around town. Some consider the service to be expensive but it is reported to be very busy. The taxi is commonly used by people to transport their shopping home from the Food Barn. The lack of alternative options impacts on the ability of people to make planned trips to the shopping centre, can exacerbate waiting times to get home and has an impact on food security issues.

The taxi does not operate late at night which presents problems for people joining or leaving the Greyhound Bus which passes through in the middle of the night. This issue is discussed in detail in a later section.

On occasions the taxi may provide a service from an outlying community. When this happens there is no taxi left in town.

Transport is also provided by a wide range of community and government based services with Julalikari having the biggest fleet of buses for a variety of programs and activities. While there is some limited cooperation between agencies, in terms of sharing buses when they are off the road for maintenance or repair, there are no formal joint services or attempts at service coordination.

Both of the town's clubs, Sporty's and the Memorial RSL Club have small buses which are used to transport patrons to and from the venues. The Memorial Club bus is used every day until the club closes.

Many people walk as their primary method of transport. Parents are often accompanied by a number of children. However for many people this is not an option, particularly for people attending medical appointments (there is a large renal unit at the hospital), older people who are becoming frail and people returning from the Food Barn with shopping bags. Carrying shopping home can be difficult for many people during very hot summer days and in the when it is raining. Central Land Council staff told us that in the hot weather people will come in to sit down in their office, to get out of the heat and get the benefit of the air-conditioning.

The substantial use of mobility scooters and electric wheelchairs is evident, however, problems can arise if the power in the house runs out and people cannot charge them. Renal patients and others sometimes charge up their batteries at the hospital when they visit.

Sharing cars and giving lifts is common, however we heard that many people with cars in the Aboriginal community are expected to use them to constantly provide transport which puts stress on the car owners. It was suggested that family or friends may ask for petrol money if they provide transport. However, it was thought that the number of cars among the Aboriginal community is increasing. 'Humbugging' or asking for lifts out to the town living areas also happens regularly.

Some people cycle and the town is well suited to this form of transport. However, stolen bikes were indicated as one disincentive to this mode of travel.

Travel to sporting events such as swimming and 'little athletics' is generally provided by families and friends in their own vehicles. Football is very popular and people come from far and wide when

there are games or tournaments on. For town dwellers transport to the footy does not seem to be an issue except when there are tournaments in other regional centres.

There are a variety of events and activities organised for young people, often designed to keep them fit and active and engaged in positive behaviours. The Sport and Recreation service provides a great deal of transport including taking young people home at night to ensure their safety.

A number of agencies provide a transport service to bring people in for appointments or activities.. The Womens' Refuge, for example, provides an in-house run to get clients to appointments, Julalikari Aboriginal Corporation provides transport for employment, respite care, shopping and outings and the Anyinginyi Clinic provides bus transport for patients.



There used to be a community transport service operated by the Senior Citizens and funded by the Home and Community Care program (HACC), however it stopped operating when the funding expired. It ran for two years until 2007 and had 30 passengers on its books. Two HACC funded agencies currently provide transport for eligible people.

2.2.1 Agency resources diverted from core business in response to unmet transport need

Many service providers reported that staff members are constantly asked for lifts even though it may not be their primary role: some providers do and others have policies that prevent them from doing so. When staff members do provide transport it can be because programs cannot run successfully if participants cannot get to them or because people have mobility needs that cannot be satisfied in any other way (they cannot afford the taxi for instance). A wide range of services including the Women's Refuge, the Language Centre, the Sport and Recreation Service, Catholic Care, Barkly Arts, the Central Land Council, the Night Patrol, BRADAAG and Community Health workers all reported being asked for transport by residents. There appears to be a constant pressure on agencies to provide transport even if it is not their main purpose.

It was noted by some interviewees that acceding to such requests sets a precedent, making it difficult to refuse requests in the future.

Julalikari Community Support Services also receives requests from clients for transport to the hospital Renal Unit and the Anyinginyi Clinic but they only take those who require personal assistance from staff.

2.3 Travel to and from the hospital and clinic

2.3.1 Current Demand for health related transport

Anyinginyi staff told us that the Clinic is too big and busy to be able to effectively cater for the transport of patients with its present resources.

The Anyinginyi Clinic arranges many recalls, which are generally follow-up appointments or check-ups with clinic staff. We were told by staff that while people will come to the clinic if they are feeling unwell, getting people to attend for recalls is a challenge. Other reasons for non-attendance that

were suggested included long waits at the clinic at times because there are no formal times for appointments, not wanting to be in other people's country and there being some shy reserved people who find clinics confronting. If patients have a long time to wait, and they sit in the local



park, we were told that they may be humbugged by other people.

We were told that the Anyinginyi Clinic drivers often get requests to provide transport to other destinations such as the Hospital. Other agencies have also requested Anyinginyi to pick up people for other destinations.

The Hospital Renal Unit has a small bus which is used six days a week to bring patients in and home again on two shifts, morning and afternoon. However, the bus can only carry one wheelchair at a time. This means that it can take three trips to pick up eight people. This will become more problematical when the number of dialysis chairs is increased in the near future. Many patients also use wheelie walkers. If they cannot mount the bus steps they have to use the hoist which can be dangerous as there is not enough headroom as they are designed for people sitting in wheelchairs. Hospital staff indicated that they could make use of an additional vehicle to cope with the demand for transporting patients.

Only about half of the Hospital renal patients are independently mobile which presents challenges in providing transport.

The Hospital Aboriginal Liaison Officer (ALO) also spends a great deal of her time picking up patients. This may be for patients to see visiting specialists or for family conferences. We were told that when she is not available the number of people attending appointments drops. This has a number of effects – the visiting specialists' time is not fully utilised, the patient may have to wait a long time for the specialist to visit again and this can result in them being subject to an emergency evacuation. This results in poorer health outcomes for the patients and a very significant financial cost to the Hospital and Health Service.

The ALO also effects discharges, takes patients to the pharmacy in the main street (there is no pharmacy at the Hospital or the Clinic), delivers appointment letters and takes inpatients shopping or to Centrelink. When there is a wheelchair user to be transported the Renal Unit bus is used.

When specialists come to town the ALO will deliver the appointment notification to the patients beforehand so they know to be ready to be picked up on the day. This takes up a great deal of her time and leaves less time for her liaison work which is her primary role.

A number of interviewees suggested that the demand or need for transport to health facilities is steadily rising particularly for patients to access the Renal Clinic and for appointments related to diabetes.

2.3.2 Lack of postal delivery and the effect on transport services

There is no postal delivery service in town and people have to call at the Post Office to check for mail. We were informed that many people do not want to do this, possibly because the mail may contain negative news or they may have difficulty getting there, particularly on a regular basis.

The lack of any effective way of informing people about appointments through the postal system leaves the Anyinginyi Clinic bus drivers with a very difficult task. On a morning run, where we joined the Clinic driver, we called at 13 houses and managed to pick up only 2 patients. The main reasons were that people were not there, not ready to leave and one did not want to go. One patient was a wheelchair user and the driver had to return to the clinic to swap to a wheelchair accessible bus. What would appear to be a straightforward task is actually a very difficult one as the driver has to schedule in additional pickup points and double back to collect people who may not have been ready the first time around.

The issues around the lack of a mail delivery service are discussed further in a later section of the report.

2.3.3 Economic cost of DNA's (did not attend)

While the primary concern about patients not attending appointments is the effect on their long-term health status there is also an economic aspect to consider. This can be viewed in two ways:

1. At a macro level the cost of additional, often in-hospital, treatment a patient may have to undergo because of undiagnosed or untreated conditions can be very substantial. Such treatment may include more frequent and intense outpatient treatment or admission to hospital. It may also include additional transport costs such as ambulance transport or emergency air evacuation.
2. There will also be an economic effect at a local level. Clinics such as Anyinginyi have to forgo income from Medicare for consultations that do not take place. This may far exceed the cost of providing a more effective information and transport service.

2.4 Other destinations within town

2.4.1 Shopping – Access to Food

Getting home from the Food Barn with bags of shopping was reported as being a problem by a number of interviewees. Fresh and frozen food may spoil during the very hot months if people have to walk home with their shopping. The taxi appears to be used but is limited as to the volume of services that can be provided. It seems that many people take shopping trolleys home and they can be seen abandoned around the town. This must reflect an economic cost to the supermarket in terms of recovery costs and the loss of trolleys. Unsurprisingly on busy shopping days many people can be seen outside the Food Barn waiting for or trying to get lifts back home.



Apparently there used to be a shopping delivery service but it has been discontinued.

2.4.2 Youth activities

Transport for young people at the weekends is reported to be a problem by youth workers. A new program for young people on Friday nights is another positive initiative but we were told that finding drivers to take kids home could be a challenge.

Barkly Arts reported that some kids need transport in order to encourage them to attend holiday programs and when it is provided more people attend. There is also a need to get young people to Sport and Recreation facilities at lunchtimes during school holidays.

2.4.3 The Barkly Work Camp

The work camp which houses 50 low-risk prisoners focuses on education, training and eventual employment. While the camp has its own buses which are used to transport prisoners around town to do work, there are issues about how people get to camp for visits. Older people in particular may wish to visit the younger ones and children their parents. There is currently no transport for visitors to the camp.

SECTION 3. Regional mobility issues

3.1 Transport issues in regional and remote communities

A number of our interviewees thought that the most pressing mobility issue facing the region is transport between remote communities and Tennant Creek. There are a number of significant communities in the Barkly region. The larger ones may have a school, shop or health clinic but there are generally few permanent services and many town based agencies deliver services to where they are required.

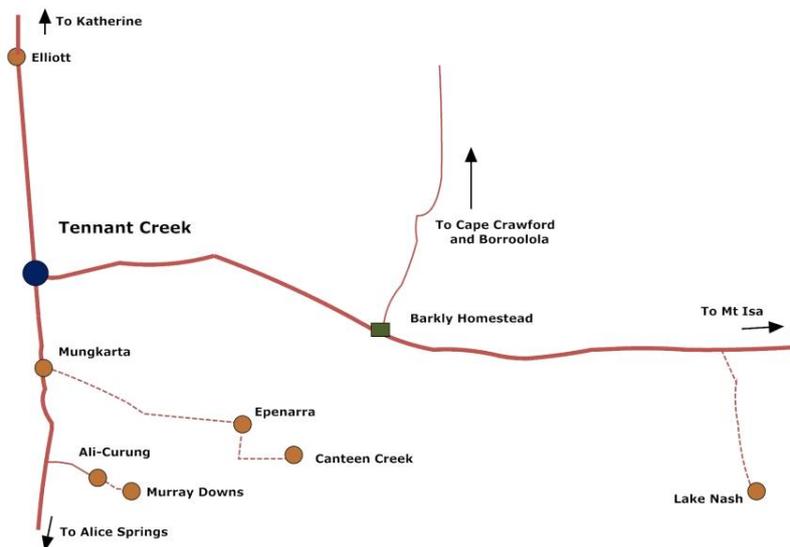


Table 1. Key features of regional communities

Community	Alternative name	Shop	Clinic	School	Ambulance	Distance from Tennant Creek	Distance from Highway
Elliott		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	253	0
Mungkarta	McLaren Creek	No	No	Yes	No	75	6
Epenarra	Wutunurrurru	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	206	131
Canteen Creek	Orwatjilla	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	266	191
Ali-Curung	Warrabri	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	174	20
Lake Nash	Alpurrurulam	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	567	165

In addition there are many outstations or homelands in which the population may only be one or two families and which may also be transient. In general these communities have no local services available to them.



While some communities are located on bitumen roads, others depend on gravel or sandy roads for access. Transport in and out of these communities is therefore subject to the state of the roads at the time and whether they have been recently graded. They can become very corrugated through use, sandy in some places and there are often dangerous bends, dips and crests. When it rains many roads become impassable for weeks or months at a time.

A number of interviewees stressed how hard these roads can be on vehicles which makes transport more expensive than in other areas. One bus operator who runs charter services in and out of Alice Springs told us that they have to charge twice the per kilometre rate to some communities because of the heavy wear and tear on the buses. The same operator also explained how difficult it is to obtain vehicles suitable for this type of work. This means that any bus service to remote communities is going to be very expensive, not only because of the distances and times involved (travel is much slower on dirt roads and tracks) but also because of the higher cost of keeping vehicles roadworthy.

Communities can also be cut off due to bushfires. If there are no vehicles available the Central Land Council told us that they would often be contacted for assistance.

There are also times during the wet season when some communities such as Lake Nash can be cut off for weeks at a time. Wet weather can quickly affect the poor roads out to places such as Canteen Creek and Epenarra by softening of the road surface, making the roads slippery and dangerous and cutting the roads where there are creek crossings. During these times the population of Tennant Creek will swell.

The limited regional transport options impacts upon both the Aboriginal, and non-Aboriginal members of the community, for example people on stations, hundreds of kilometers from Tennant Creek, who need to travel to Tennant Creek or another major centre to access services such as medical facilities, shopping or commercial businesses.

3.2 Where people travel

Many of our interviewees indicated that a great many of the Aboriginal population are relatively mobile and move between home communities and other places regularly for a wide range of reasons and purposes.

There is constant movement of people between remote communities and Tennant Creek for a variety of reasons including cultural obligations, sporting events, sorry business or for safety reasons. Sometimes there are problems in communities and people have to leave to go to Tennant Creek or another community. It was suggested to us that the population of Tennant Creek will typically grow by 400-500 at weekends.

Many people do not have one “home” or usual residence but may move between houses and communities according to what they need to do at the time. A recent study of remote Aboriginal communities, including Alpururulam in the east of the Barkly region, found that:

“...participants were highly mobile in their day-to-day lives over the previous year. The trend was for people to travel to visit one or more places for short periods of time and then return to their home community, a form of circulation. (Mommott et al. 2006)

Where there are bus services, such as Ali Curung, the transport operator reported heavy patronage between the community and Tennant Creek.

We were told that football matches in Tennant Creek create a big demand for transport and this is mainly provided in private cars some of which may not be safe.

Older people may need to come into the larger communities or to town for meetings but there may be few transport resources in the outstations and smaller communities.

Barkly Arts staff told us that they go out to communities to bring artists in to Tennant Creek because there is no other transport available.

Ambulances based at the Epenarra Clinic may take passengers half way to Canteen Creek where it is met by the Canteen Creek vehicle which completes their journey. Sometimes the vehicle is shared to get patients in to Tennant Creek or to the Stuart Highway to catch buses to town or south towards Alice Springs. We were told by residents that such transport to Tennant Creek from Epenarra might happen twice a week.

While there is a program of visiting medical staff to many communities, community members also come in to town when specialist clinics are operating. These include the Eye Clinic and the Dental Clinic.

As in all Aboriginal communities, funerals are very important occasions and people will travel large distances to attend them and will make use of whatever transport resources are available to do so.



People may also travel from their home communities to Tennant Creek or other communities because of floods, fires or because of other safety issues.

3.3 Identified issues

The community at Mungkarta, 75 kilometres south of Tennant Creek, in which about 60 people live, has no shop or clinic. Although it is much closer to town than many other places, the residents may be more transport disadvantaged because of a lack of local services. Since the bus ceased coming in to the community they have a six kilometre walk to the Stuart Highway to access the bus. They told us during a community discussion that having got to the highway they were not guaranteed a seat and may have to walk home again. The residents (there are about 60 people regularly living there) said that getting food, especially fresh food, was one of their biggest problems.

Even where there is a bus service, it is not possible to get to Tennant Creek in the early morning from the south unless people catch the night-time Greyhound service. The Bush Bus from Elliott arrives in Tennant Creek at 10:15 but the earliest service from the south arrives early afternoon.

It was noted at consultations held during the development of the NT Integrated Regional Transport Strategy that there is no around town bus service in Elliott, nor any air service for the town. Consultations in Ali Curung also noted a lack of any transport services around town or to the outstations.

Service providers travel out to communities but few actually live there. They tend to travel out independently in the ubiquitous “white Toyota”. This is not necessarily efficient but many services have told us that it can be difficult to get people to come into town, particularly for health checks and treatment. While there may be issues around people not wanting to attend medical appointments if they do not feel unwell, a lack of suitable transport is also very likely to be a contributing factor.

Some health staff in Tennant Creek were of the opinion that Troop Carriers (a very common form of transport in remote communities) are not a safe form of transport as people have to sit sideways and do not have the full protection of seatbelts: also because of the vehicle’s high centre of gravity they are more likely to roll on steeply cambered and gravelly or slippery roads.

3.3 Regional and remote transport services

3.3.1 Formal transport services

There are few formal transport options for people in remote communities wanting to get to Tennant Creek.

Bus services

People who live in Elliott can use the nightly Greyhound Bus or the daytime Bush Bus which operates two days per week. The latter service has been subsidised by the NT Government between Elliott and Tennant Creek for two years. The subsidy has about 18 months to run and may not be permanent in which case the service will have to prove to be commercially viable in order to be retained.

Wheelchair accessible buses are available on these services if notification of the requirement is given by the passenger at the time of booking.

Table 2. Bus services between Tennant Creek and Elliott

Services to Tennant Creek from Elliott											
Service	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	Leave Elliott	Arrive Tennant Creek	Duration	Fare (o/way)
Greyhound	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	23:00	01:00	04:10 hrs	96.74*
Bush Bus Elliott Express			X			X		07:00	10:15	03:30 hrs	\$95.00
* Cheaper fares with service restrictions are available from \$71.74											
Services to Elliott from Tennant Creek											
Service	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	Leave Tennant Creek	Arrive Elliott	Duration	Fare (o/way)
Greyhound	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	03:15	06:05	02:50 hrs	96.74*
Bush Bus Daylight Express		X			X			14:00	16:30	02:30 hrs	\$95.00
* Cheaper fares with service restrictions are available from \$71.74											

Those who live south of Tennant Creek and close to the Stuart Highway or at Ali-Curung can catch one of the Bush Bus services to Tennant Creek although the earliest service arrives in town at 12:45 p.m. However, the Bush Bus no longer serves the community at Mungkarta (McLarens Creek) which is 6 kilometres west of the highway. We understand that this is because the vehicles that are currently used cannot negotiate a dip in the dirt road just off the main road.

We were told that the taxi will come from town to collect people on request but that people consider that it is expensive.

Bus services to and from Mt Isa

Communities in the east of the Barkly region such as those near Rockhampton Downs or Corella Creek can access the Tennant Creek – Mt Isa Greyhound bus service but they have to meet the bus at the Rockhampton Downs turn off, Barkly Homestead, Wunara, Soudan, Avon Downs or at Camooweal just across the border in Queensland. This can involve a long journey just to reach the bus stop. The service only travels four days per week in either direction. To the east, the service travels as far as Townsville.

Air services

There is also an air service, funded by the Remote Air Services Subsidy (RASS) which allows people in Epenarra and Canteen Creek to travel to Tennant Creek.

The Epenarra/Canteen Creek service originates in Alice Springs and travels to Epenarra then Canteen Creek arriving in Tennant Creek at 10:17. It starts the return journey at 13:30 thus giving passengers just over 3 hours in town. A one-way flight between Epenarra/Canteen Creek and Tennant Creek costs \$80-100.



Table 3. Chartair Services to Canteen Creek and Epenarra

Chartair Service T L890		Operates weekly on Wednesdays				
	Alice Springs	Canteen Creek		Epenarra		Tennant Creek
Outward journey	Dep	Arr	Dep	Arr	Dep	Arr
	7:00	8:34	8:55	9:16	9:35	10:17
	Tennant Creek	Epenarra		Canteen Creek		Alice Springs
Inward journey	Dep	Arr	Dep	Arr	Dep	
	13:30	14:12	14:30	14:51	15:10	16:44

The service utilises a Cessna 208 Caravan so seating is limited to 7 passengers and is also used for mail and general freight. Patronage varies but at the moment there are generally seats available. Passengers are only permitted to travel to and from the two remote communities, not the whole journey between Alice Springs and Tennant Creek.

Other services

Communities with a clinic may make use of the local Ambulance (a modified Toyota Troop Carrier normally attached to a remote clinic) but these have limited capacity as they are designed to carry a stretcher in the back and are not really designed as a passenger transport vehicle. However, we were told that they are commonly used to carry patients to get to town or to the highway to connect with bus services. The drivers are apparently also asked to provide lifts to town by other people.

There are no other transport services to Tennant Creek in the region, even to substantial communities such as Epenarra or Canteen Creek. Even if people take the bus to the turn-off on the Stuart Highway it is another 100 kilometres on gravel road to Epenarra and 150 kilometres to Canteen Creek.

3.3.2 Informal transport

Most transport between communities and town are informal in nature and most transport is undertaken by private car. The condition of the roads and overloading mean, of course, that the cost of using private vehicles in remote communities is much higher than in other centres. Some of the vehicles used may be relatively robust 4x4 vehicles but many are standard 2 wheel drive sedans or station wagons, the remains of which can be seen abandoned in communities or along the road, not being fit for either the road conditions or the heavy use they are put to. This has knock-on effects on the family budget as noted in the Desert Transport report:



Questions about personal debt and car ownership, including the wider costs of vehicle ownership and total levels of expenditure on vehicles, will become of increasing concern. In addition, whilst older vehicles based on 'simple' vehicle technologies have been amenable to servicing and maintenance by untrained but interested people, more modern vehicles which

have increasingly complex engine, fuel, transmission and braking systems require higher levels of expertise and equipment to perform servicing and maintenance tasks. As such vehicles age and are passed along the chain of vehicle ownership in society, so existing problems of vehicle reliability will be exacerbated and new problems will emerge (Raicu et al 2009).

Others also note that the average car in a remote community has a very short lifespan. We were told that when vehicles are used they often come to town overloaded. This is not only dangerous but reduces vehicle life and raises the cost of getting around in the long term. The overloading comes about due to individuals' lack of access to private transport. For the same reason individual vehicles may be used much more than might be the case in other locations or circumstances.

Generally the view expressed by interviewees was that while there are vehicles in communities there is a lack of people with valid driving licences. Many vehicles are in poor repair or are unregistered which limits their use. People avoid using unregistered vehicles on the highway as there are police checks and vehicle inspectors so they use back roads and tracks and sometimes drive in the dark, both of which undermine safety.

Service providers including the Central Land Council, Patta Aboriginal Corporation and Barkly Arts reported that if people find out they are going to communities they will inevitably be asked for lifts and we were informed that Aboriginal Health Workers commonly have to provide transport for clients.

It is also not uncommon, interviewees indicated, to come across a car load of people stranded on the side of the road having run out of petrol or with some mechanical problem. On a trip back from a remote community the author was in a vehicle which picked up a family of four and their dog from the side of the highway who had run out of fuel just as it was getting dark.

3.4 "Stuck in Tennant Creek"

Many interviewees told us that while people seem to be able to get into town from regional communities they can find it much more difficult to return home. For example, someone may come in for a football match but by the end of the weekend may not have enough money for a bus ticket or enough fuel left in their vehicle to get home.

As the amount of housing in Tennant Creek is severely limited, people who come to town have to stay with relations or friends, or if that is not possible, to camp in the bush. We were told that the town's population can increase by 400-500 over a weekend and is consistently higher during the wet season when some communities become cut off due to flooding and the high levels of water in the creeks which cross the roads. People also come in for events like the Carnival or Show and end up staying. It was suggested that some people have to wait until their next pension day to get money to go home.

This can happen to people from regional communities such as Epenarra and Elliott but also from as far away as Ti Tree, Borroloola, Katherine or Mt Isa.

This creates further stresses and strains on already severely overcrowded households. We were told that the visitors may stay up late and can disrupt getting up and going to work or school for the normal residents. They may also outstay their welcome when the money runs out causing friction in the household.

The problem of people being stuck in town with no way to get home was a very common theme during our discussions with service providers. Many reasons for this were provided including:

- people coming to town with no petrol to get home again;
- their vehicles have broken down;
- people having no money to go home because they have spent it on alcohol or gambling, this happens in some cases because people are not allowed to drink at their community;
- people come in for medical services but other community members humbug them for their money and they have none left to get home; and
- there being no transport services to most communities.

Emergency relief services may provide money for bus fares but most communities have no bus service.

Renal patients in most communities have to come and live in town to receive their treatment which is three times a week. This leaves them little opportunity to get back to their country, particularly if they live in a community with no transport.

People who are released from Prison in Alice Springs are transported only as far as Tennant Creek and may have no way of getting back to their community. Similarly if people are arrested in the region they may be released by the Court in town with no way to get home.

We were also told that people have problems in returning to their communities after spells in the Treatment Centre.

SECTION 4. Long distance travel

Tennant Creek is located on the Stuart Highway, 500 kms north of Alice Springs, 670 kms south of Katherine and 660 kms west of Mt Isa. While it has a number of local services including a hospital, many residents have a need to travel to other centres to access goods and services, particularly Alice Springs.



4.1 Demand for long distance travel

The most common destination we were told about is Alice Springs which is the main business, government and population centre in Central Australia. Katherine and Mt Isa are both further away from Tennant Creek and do not have the range of services to be found in Alice.

Many people travel to Alice for medical appointments much of which is funded through the Patient Assistance and Travel Scheme which is administered by an office at the Tennant Creek Hospital. These appointments range from visits to medical specialists, for diagnostic procedures, for surgery or longer term hospital treatment. There is also no birthing centre in Tennant Creek so women have to travel to Alice Springs to have their babies.

People also travel to Alice for Court appearances and to visit friends or relatives in prison.

4.2 Bus Services

4.2.1 Greyhound Bus

There are a number of long-distance transport services including the nightly Greyhound services to Alice Springs and to Katherine/Darwin which both arrive in Tennant Creek at about 2 a.m. in morning and leave again about an hour later. This service stays on the Stuart Highway and does not deviate into communities off the main road although there are stops at the relevant turn-offs.

The Mt Isa service, which runs four days a week, is scheduled to arrive just before 3 a.m. so that it can connect with the Alice/Darwin services. The service towards Mt Isa leaves at 10 p.m.

4.2.2 Factors that impact on the use of Greyhound Service

On-time running

A number of people reported that the Greyhound bus regularly runs late, particularly if coming from the north. This means that people have to wait around for long periods of time in very uncomfortable circumstances (see section below on the bus terminal).

One reason for this is that the service makes connections with other services from Broome (at Katherine) and from Mt Isa (at Tennant Creek). If either service is running late, the service to Alice Springs has to wait until it arrives. This can mean a 2 to 3 hour wait for passengers at a terminal which has no facilities.

We also note that people travelling from Alice Springs to Mt Isa have a long scheduled wait in Tennant Creek. This service leaves at 22:00 but other services arrive from Alice much earlier - 01:45 on Greyhound, 12:45 Monday Express Bush Bus, 13:30 Friday Express Bush Bus and 17:15 on the Wednesday and Saturday Bush Bus Route Service (these passengers will have already have had 10 hours on the bus from Alice Springs).

Access issues

It was suggested to us that the Greyhound bus is not wheelchair accessible (although it does have kneeling suspension). However, Greyhound informed us that they do have accessible buses and will allocate them to particular routes if requested, however 48 hours' notice is required.

Some people who normally use a large electric wheelchair may not be able to take their chair and may travel with a fold-away wheelchair instead. However, this means that they are dependent on other people for mobility when they get to Alice Springs.

The Greyhound bus does not carry baby capsules as they have no anchor points. Infants under 2 years old can be nursed however.

Transport to late night Greyhound bus services

A common complaint among our interviewees was the difficulty passengers have in getting to and from the late night Greyhound bus. The main issue is that the taxi does not operate at that time of night and there are no other transport options in town. People have to depend on lifts or walk home which we were told can be dangerous and is difficult if the person has baggage, children in tow or has a mobility restriction.



If community service or health agencies have clients that need to catch or be collected from the bus, their staff either have to get up in the middle of the night to do it or arrange with another agency that has all night staff to provide the service. Both BRADAAG and the Julalikari HACC service do this occasionally although it can leave them short of staff at their accommodation. Frontier Services take people to Julalikari if they need to get to the Greyhound bus. Julalikari staff stressed that they are not funded to do this, but only do it out of necessity.

It was reported that the Backpacker Hostel will provide transport if there are customers using the Greyhound service. The security service used to take people home for a fee but no longer do so.

According to the Greyhound online timetable, the bus will stop at the hospital on request, however hospital staff have reported having to take people to wait for the bus at the Terminal on the main street.

The Greyhound Terminal

The Greyhound bus uses a terminal in the main street. On the face of it this sounds like a good arrangement, however, we were informed that the terminal is not staffed at night and has nowhere inside where passengers can sit, indeed nowhere to sit at all. There is a pizza shop next door but its seating is for patrons only and it does not open late at night. The drivers are issued with a key so that they can access toilet facilities but this is not available to passengers.

There is also nowhere for passengers to obtain food or refreshments late at night unless they walk to the north end of town to reach the BP service station which they are unlikely to do in the dark or if they have left baggage on the bus. The terminal can also be windy and cold at night.

We were told that the terminal used to provide inside seating, access to toilets, food and refreshments but no longer does so.

A number of interviewees were of the opinion that the area around the terminal is dangerous and that people have been assaulted in the area at night in the past. Other issues that were raised with us included a lack of adequate street lighting for people walking home after dark.

The Greyhound bus used to stop at the BP garage at the north end of town during a period when the terminal was temporarily closed. This opens 24 hours and customers can obtain food and drinks. However its disadvantage is that it is further away for most people which is a problem as there is no transport service available. We were told that passengers had, in any case, to wait outside where there is no shelter.

As noted above, there has also been some confusion around whether the Greyhound bus will call at the hospital on request as well as stopping at the Terminal.

4.2.3 Centre Bush Bus

The Centre Bush Bus operates three services through Tennant Creek. The main difference between the Greyhound and Bush Bus services is that the Bush Bus operates during daylight hours.

Until recently one of the biggest problems was the lack of a daylight service. The advent of the Bush Bus services has resolved this to a degree although some people still prefer to travel at night so that they can be in Alice Springs first thing in the morning. It is also possible, by travelling by Greyhound in both directions to avoid the need to stay in Alice Springs if going for one appointment or event.

The Tennant Creek Daylight Express leaves Alice Springs on Mondays and arrives at Tennant Creek at 12:45 p.m. It returns to Alice at 14:25 arriving at 19:00.

On Tuesdays and Fridays a Daylight service leaves Alice Springs at 07:30 and arrives at 13:30 then travels on to Elliott arriving at 16:30. This service returns to Alice Springs on Wednesday and

Saturdays leaving Elliott at 07:45, arriving at Tennant Creek at 10:15 and departing at 10:45, finally arriving in Alice Springs at 17:00.



In addition there is a Route service which runs between Alice Springs and Tennant Creek, calling at Ali-Curung on the way. It leaves Alice Springs on Wednesdays and Saturdays at 09:15 arriving at Tennant Creek at 17:15. It returns on Thursdays and Sundays leaving Tennant Creek at 08:15 (estimated) and arriving in Alice Springs at 16:00. This service includes a door-to-door pick-up and drop-off service in Tennant Creek, along the main route and in Alice Springs. Consequently it takes a great deal more time than the Express Service.

The hospital will, if necessary, pick up patients from the Bush Bus Express Service and also provide residential drop-offs.

Access

The Centre Bush Bus currently has five wheelchair accessible vehicles and all new vehicles that are added to the fleet in the future will be accessible. If a wheelchair user books to travel, the company ensures that a suitable vehicle is allocated to the service.

4.3 Rail service

In addition there is a rail service, the “Ghan” which operates between Adelaide and Darwin. This provides an evening service from Alice Springs to Tennant Creek arriving at 23:00 and a night service in a southerly direction arriving in Alice Springs late in the morning. According to our interviewees it is not used very much for travel to and from Tennant Creek even though the times are more convenient than the Greyhound buses. This was confirmed by the Operations Manager of Great Southern Rail. A number of reasons were put forward for this.

- while the fares can actually be cheaper than the bus they can be significantly more expensive if tickets are not booked well in advance;
- the station is 5 kilometres out of town – in fact the railway veers to the west north of the station and the line does not run close to town at any point;
- while the station is relatively new there is no platform and portable steps are used which makes boarding and alighting the train difficult and especially difficult if the passenger has limited mobility or heavy baggage; and
- information about the service is not widely available – it was suggested to us that it may be that as the primary purpose of the train is to provide tourist services, commuting passengers are not encouraged.



In relation to the lack of a platform we were told that there is a trolley and ladder available but the only person we talked to who has actually used the service informed us that she was advised to ring

ahead and arrange for someone to open the station but that this did not happen and she was only able to alight with the assistance of other passengers. We note that the railway station is neither owned nor operated by Great Southern Rail but is under the control of government.

The station at Tennant Creek is not wheelchair accessible although there are loading facilities at some other stations including Alice Springs.

This is a form of transport which could have potential if some of the more obvious difficulties were to be addressed including a transport service to and from the station.

4.4 Air services

There is only a limited three day a week air service between Tennant Creek and Darwin which is relatively expensive so many people elect to travel to Alice Springs to access air services there.

A number of agencies told us that their staff regularly travel to Alice Springs for meetings or to access air services but that there is no formal way of sharing vehicles and the driving task.



Commercial air services are provided by Fly Tiwi. As the service commences in Darwin and returns the same day, a trip to the Capital requires at least one overnight stay. This service is relatively expensive at approximately \$1,300 for the return journey.

There is also a limited air service which flies between Alice Springs, Epenarra, Canteen Creek and Tennant Creek but it cannot be used to fly the whole Alice Springs/Tennant Creek sector as it is funded to provide access to remote communities only.

The hospital has a plane which is used for emergency evacuations and to transport staff. Wheelchair users can use it but we were told that access is difficult as the passenger has to negotiate steps with only a chain handrail. The aeromedical plane is pressurised and this excludes travel by some patients who have to travel by road.

4.5 Summary of transport services between Tennant Creek and other major Centres

Public transport between Tennant Creek and Alice Springs is provided by Greyhound, Centre Bush Bus and the Ghan rail service. There are services on every day of the week and daylight services six days a week.

Table 4. Public Transport services from Tennant Creek to Alice Springs

Service	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	Leave Alice Springs	Arrive Tennant Creek	Duration	Fare (o/way)
Greyhound	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	19:15	01:45	06:30 hrs	\$144.04
Bush Bus Daylight Express	X							07:00	12:45	05:45 hrs	\$155.00
Bush Bus Elliott Express		X			X			07:00	13:30	06:30 hrs	\$155.00
Bush Bus Route Service			X			X		07:00	17:15	10:15 hrs	\$135.00
Train	X			X*				18:00	23:00	5:00 hrs	\$224.00
Total number of services	3	2	2	2	2	2	1				

Note that days of the week refer to the arrival and departure times at Tennant Creek

*The Thursday rail service is seasonal and only operates during the winter months.

Table 5. Public Transport services from Alice Springs to Tennant Creek

Service	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	Leave Tennant Creek	Arrive Alice Springs	Duration	Fare (o/way)
Greyhound	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	03:10	09:15	6:05 hrs	\$144.04
Bush Bus Daylight Express	X							13:20	19:00	05:40 hrs	\$155.00
Bush Bus Elliott Express			X			x		10:50	17:00	6:10 hrs	\$155.00
Bush Bus Route Service				X			X	7:00	16:00	9:00 hrs	\$135.00
Train				X*				02:53**	9:10	6:17 hrs	\$224.00
Train							X	01:00***	11:15	10:15 hrs	\$224.00
Total number of services	2	1	2	3	1	2	3				

Note that days of the week refer to the arrival and departure times at Tennant Creek

*The Thursday rail service is seasonal and only operates during the winter months.

**Passengers must board at this time but the service does not leave until 04:27

***Passengers are expected to board at this time but the service does not leave until 06:20

4.6 Cost of transport services

4.6.1 Tennant Creek to Alice Springs

Transport can be very expensive for people unless they qualify for assistance from the Patient Assistance and Travel Scheme. Sometimes an escort will also qualify for support from the scheme as well but if they do not this will represent an additional cost. Some people who are not familiar with relatively big centres such as Alice Springs may not feel confident to go there on their own and need to have someone travel with them.

Bus fares between Tennant Creek and Alice Springs on different services are comparable (\$135 - \$155 one-way) and the railway is similarly priced if Rail Saver or Ready Rail fares can be accessed (\$124 one-way). However, rail fares to Alice Springs can be as much as \$224 one-way and much more if a sleeper is used.

On occasions women may have to take children with them or a whole family may travel together. For a family of four the return bus fares between Tennant Creek and Alice Springs may approach or exceed \$1,000 no matter which service is used.

Fares from other local centres to Alice Springs include:

Table 6. Fares on Services to/from Alice Springs

	Elliott	Epenarra T/O	Ali Curung or Ali Curung T/O
Centre Bush Bus	\$185	\$125 - \$140	\$110 - \$125
Greyhound	\$183 - \$247	N/A	\$117 - \$158

Fares on the Centre Bush Bus vary according to whether the passenger uses the Route or Express Service. Variations on the Greyhound services depend on the type of fare purchased.

Aligning appointments

Staff at medical services have reported that it has been difficult to align appointments together so that people could travel down in a group to visit Alice Springs Hospital in order to reduce travel costs. We were also told that patients may be given an appointment for an X-Ray on a Monday but may have to wait two or three days to see the doctor to discuss the results. This means that they have to find accommodation in Alice Springs which they may not be able to afford.

Accommodation in Alice Springs

There are a number of hostels available in Alice Springs, which are reported to be very good but the hostels are often booked out⁶. There is also the Apmere Mwerre Visitor Park, accommodation for visitors which has cabins, tents and a camping area but it is out of town and not near the hospital or places where the long distance bus services leave from. However there is a town bus stop near the site and visitors can get into town by this means. There can be issues for non-Aboriginal people finding affordable accommodation in Alice Springs, because of a lack of general hostel accommodation, and people are forced to pay high costs at commercial motels.

4.6.2 Tennant Creek to Katherine and Darwin

The Greyhound Bus travels to Darwin via Katherine with a connection to Broome at Katherine. Current fares between Tennant Creek and Katherine are between \$154 and \$207 and between Tennant Creek and Darwin are \$150 to \$282 depending on the fare type chosen.

Flying on scheduled air services from Tennant Creek to Darwin is also relatively expensive with the current fare being in excess of \$650 each way. As the service originates in Darwin a trip from Tennant Creek necessitates at least one night away from home.

4.6.3 Tennant Creek to Mt Isa

One-way fares on the Greyhound Bus from Tennant Creek are as follows: Barkly Homestead \$42.66, Wununa \$68.86 and Mt Isa \$164.54.

⁶ Sid Ross Hostel is a medical specific hostel run by Aboriginal Hostels Ltd. There is also the Stuart Lodge Hostel run by the NTG (Territory Housing) and the Ayiparinya and Akangkentye (Mt Gillen) Hostels, both also run by Aboriginal Hostels Ltd. http://www.ahl.gov.au/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=4&Itemid=6

4.7 Patient Assistance and Travel Scheme (PATS)

This scheme assists Northern Territory residents to access a range of essential specialist medical/surgical services where services are not available locally or from a visiting service. PATS provides assistance with travel and where applicable, accommodation costs to residents of the Northern Territory who are required to travel more than 200kms to the nearest specialist medical treatment. If the person's doctor is of the opinion that the patient requires assistance during their travel or treatment, they may approve an Escort to travel with them. The Tennant Creek Hospital employs a PATS clerk who manages the scheme from an office at the reception area in the hospital.

Unsurprisingly, a great many people in the region qualify for this scheme as Tennant Creek hospital only has a limited range of services and visiting medical specialists.

Air and bus travel is paid at the lowest available discount fare (there are no air services to Alice Springs) or an allowance of 15 cents per kilometre is allowed for the use of a private car. Accommodation is subsidised at \$35 per night for commercial accommodation and \$10 per night if the patient stays in private accommodation.

In practice the PATS travel clerk offers the patient the choice of travel by private vehicle, or by the Greyhound Bus or the Bush Bus whose fares are much the same. Some people prefer the night bus as it cuts down on accommodation costs, others prefer to travel during the day.

The Anyinginyi Health Service employs a Patient Travel Officer who assists patients to fill in the application forms. We were told that this can take up a lot of time. For Aboriginal hospital patients the hospital Aboriginal Liaison Officer delivers the forms to the patients and explains the details to them. The PATS Travel Clerk also writes additional instructions on the form to assist the patient some of whom find the process confusing.

It was suggested by a number of people that the PATS scheme strongly underpins long distance bus services through Tennant Creek although the Centre Bush Bus indicated that only about 20% of their business comes through purchase orders.

4.8 Regional services

There was a view expressed by some interviewees that if there were a transport service out to the remote communities that some people would use it, despite the likely high cost. The current fare on the Bush Bus between Elliott and Tennant Creek is \$95 one-way for a 250 kilometre journey. This is on a service which is subsidised by government and which runs along a major sealed road. A commercially viable service to somewhere like Canteen Creek along 250 kilometres of mainly rough



dirt road is likely to cost at least as much and probably more. However, as both Epenarra and Canteen Creek are more than 200 kilometres from Tennant Creek some passengers' fares might be paid for under the Patient Accommodation and Transport Scheme which could underpin the viability of the service to some extent.

In some areas Centrepay is commonly used to allow people to purchase bus tickets. It has been

suggested to us that this means that some people may accrue big debts that they may have difficulty paying off. However, one bus company, Bush Bee, told us that if a person gets themselves into this position they are happy to contact Centrelink to arrange for payment to be suspended until such time as that person can afford to continue payment. Centre Bush Bus also indicated that they monitor repayments and will address the issue once the debt reaches a certain limit.

The taxi sometimes provides transport in from more remote communities and fares of \$95 from Mungkarta and \$250 from Ali-Curung have been reported to us.

There is also a mail flight which goes between Alice Springs, Epenarra, Canteen Creek and Tennant Creek . Passengers can book seats on these flights for relatively low fares. While this appears to offer very good value, the number of seats available is limited. Passengers are not permitted to fly between Alice Springs and Tennant Creek.

The fare between Tennant Creek and Epenarra or Canteen Creek is \$80 and between Canteen Creek and Epenarra \$50. To fly between Epenarra or Canteen Creek and Alice Springs is \$100.

SECTION 5. Related issues which impact on transport needs

5.1 Housing and overcrowding

One of the most pressing problems in Tennant Creek, according to our interviewees, is that of a shortage of housing. This is a chronic problem with waiting lists of two years for public housing and six months for a private rental.

The general shortage of accommodation also affects businesses and services which have difficulty in attracting staff if there is nowhere to live. In order to address this problem, government departments and other agencies seek to take housing on long term head leases which leaves little accommodation for other renters. It could be argued that the town's population is restricted to a significant degree by there being a limited number of places for people to live.

Many of the Aboriginal population live in ten Urban Living Areas including Ngalpa Ngalpa (Mulga), Wuppa and Tinkarli to the north end of town, Munji Marta, the Village, Marla Marla and Sorry Camp on the west side of town and Kargaru to the south east. According to the 2011 Census these residents comprise 18% of the total town population although some of our interviewees were of the opinion that, despite a new approach by the ABS, there is still significant undercounting of Aboriginal people.

These areas are on special purpose leases, on the edges of town. While the infrastructure in these areas has recently been upgraded, the number of houses is not adequate for the normally resident population. This has resulted in chronic overcrowding which creates and exacerbates a range of social problems. The issues are made worse by the constant flow of visitors from more remote communities⁷.

⁷ A recent report noted a number of factors that relate to overcrowding in Aboriginal homes including a shortage of housing in indigenous communities generally, the economical fragility of many Indigenous families and communities, and the prevalence of both primary and secondary homelessness among Indigenous people.

As noted earlier, the town's population can increase significantly periodically and remains higher during the wet season when access to many remote communities becomes difficult or impossible. People also come in to events like the Show or football matches and end up staying for long periods of time.

This creates further stresses and strains on already severely overcrowded households and may lead to other social problems. A number of interviewees noted the high number of people on the streets at night and suggested that many of these will be from out of town with nowhere to stay.

It could be argued that a transport service or range of transport options that assist people to return to their communities would be of some assistance in addressing the most acute overcrowding problem, that of visitors. A return to country scheme operates in Alice Springs through the Social Services Department of Tangentyere Council. Under this scheme the Indigenous Case Management Service holds funding which is used to assist individuals to get home to country from Alice Springs. Assistance might be air fares, bus fares or money for fuel. It is a user pays system and the client has to enter an arrangement to pay the money back at a later date (i.e. through the use of the Centrelink Centrepay system). Problems with unpaid debts can, however, occur.

A recent report has also suggested there may be merit in the notion of a "sweeper service" (a very unfortunate turn of phrase), to allow people who have come to town for events such as football to get home quickly and easily⁸.

5.2 Issues around the lack of a mail service

A major problem in terms of organising and scheduling transport is the lack of a postal delivery service in town. Residents either have a Post Box or they call into the Post Office to check for mail which is time-consuming for both the residents and the Post Office staff.

We were informed that when NT Health send out appointments through the mail, typically about half of them are not picked up at the Post Office and are returned to sender. It was suggested that some people are reluctant to pick up mail as it often contains bad news such as bills, court notifications and so on.

Interviewees generally thought that many households do not have a fixed telephone line. There were mixed opinions about the use of mobile phones with some people telling us that mobile phone usage is patchy and others that most households would have access to multiple mobile phones given the number of people staying at any one time. Interestingly, one agency uses text messaging as a matter of course to inform people about scheduled pick-ups, but issues of confidentiality must be considered, and the use of text messaging may not always be appropriate.

Communication with patients is a particular problem for both the Anyinginyi Clinic and the Hospital. In both cases staff call at patients' houses to let them know when they are due to come in or arrive

Cultural drivers that influence Aboriginal households to become large households included Indigenous people's kin ties and desire for an immersive sociality, women as frequent household heads, and the cultural traits of demand sharing and mobility in Indigenous communities. (Memmott et al. 2012)

⁸ Raicu et al. (2009) p29

without notice to collect them hoping that they are ready and prepared to go with the transport service.

For patients with regular appointments (such as renal dialysis) the pick-ups work quite well and we were told that most will come in without being reminded: but for other appointments the task is much more difficult.

If people are given an appointment at Alice Springs Hospital the notification goes to the Anyinginyi Health Clinic who pass it on to the patient. The appointments are given to the drivers of the clinic bus who distribute them as they do their pick-ups each morning. Obviously this increases their workload significantly. If the patients attend the Julalikari Community Centre the appointment notifications are dropped there and the staff distribute them to the clients as they come in.

The Aboriginal Liaison Officer at the Hospital also provides a similar service. In the absence of a postal delivery service she delivers appointment notifications to patients who are scheduled to see visiting specialists or to come to family conferences. This task is time consuming and leaves less time for her primary work which is liaison with the Aboriginal community.

The lack of a mail service results in the use of transport resources for this purpose thus reducing the volume of transport that could otherwise be provided.

5.3 Issues around transport information and coordination

We found a significant amount of mistaken information and lack of knowledge about transport services in the town amongst our interviewees. While most people are aware of the Bush Bus, the different operations of the Express and Route services appear to be a cause of some confusion.

The lack of one central stop for all bus services does not assist in this regard. The bus terminal is for the use of Greyhound buses only and not for general services.

Workers at the hospital and at the Anyinginyi Clinic also spend a lot of time assisting people to fill in PATS application forms and a lot of effort goes in to informing passengers of travel arrangements. Nevertheless we were told that people who have been given appointments in Alice Springs have turned up to board the bus without a ticket having failed to understand all the steps in the process.

Most people have a general idea about available transport services but there is no one point people can go to in order to obtain the information they require to make a successful booking. Some transport options, such as the train, were generally dismissed out of hand by interviewees, partly because of a lack of knowledge about fares and operating times.

A number of people were of the view that if and when a town bus service is instigated, there will need to be significant education and promotion of the service as people do not have any experience of such an operation in Tennant Creek. In addition consideration must be given to delivering information in the different relevant languages and not just in written form. There is no obvious location for these promotional activities so an information service could be a positive first step.

The provision of information may also be only the first step in making more use of the transport resources in town. A wide range of agencies own and operate vehicles, some of which are only used at certain times of day or days of the week. The second step may be to engender cooperation

between agencies, perhaps the health agencies in the first instance. There would appear to be real potential benefits in coordinating health transport services given the compact nature of the town and the close location of health services. It is worth noting that the 1998 Northern Territory Public Transport strategy recommended investigating the sharing of community sector transport services and trialing a vehicle brokerage system⁹. One approach to this may be the establishment of a one-stop-shop, a concept that will be explored in a later stage of this project.

SECTION 6. Outcomes from Interviews and Workshops

6.1 Local Transport Ideas - Suggestions from interviewees about new services

During the interviews a number of different suggestions were made about the type of service that might be introduced among which a form of fixed route service was the most common.

There was support from staff at a number of agencies for a route bus service of some sort around



town in order to allow people to get to the CBD, the Hospital and the Anyinginyi Clinic for appointments. These included the Council of Elders and Respected Persons, two different divisions of Anyinginyi Heath Aboriginal Corporation, Catholic Care, the Central Land Council, Julalikari Council Aboriginal Corporation, Northern Territory Department of Health, Night Patrol staff, BRADAAG workers, staff at Tennant Creek Hospital and an ex-local member of the NT Parliament. All

thought people would use the service if it were available. It was thought that a town service may free up the time staff spend providing transport.

There was also a strong view put forward by a number of people that implementing a route service would require education among some of the Aboriginal community as well as promotion within the town. It was also pointed out that fixed stops would need to be highly visible, accessible and include bus shelters.

A service that links the Town Living Areas and the CBD (including the hospital and Anyinginyi Clinic) was suggested by a number of people so as not to exclude those people who need the service most, however the affordability of any service for passengers was also raised as a possible issue.

A number of people also highlighted the need for more coordination of transport within the town, in particular to health facilities.

6.2 Outcomes from workshops

In order to verify the mobility and transport issues highlighted by the project and to find ways of addressing them two workshops were held on the 3rd and 8th of August 2012. A total of 37 people from a wide variety of agencies attended these workshops which were held in the meeting room at Anyinginyi Regional and Remote offices in Paterson Street. The agencies represented worked in a

⁹ BAH (1998) p 72

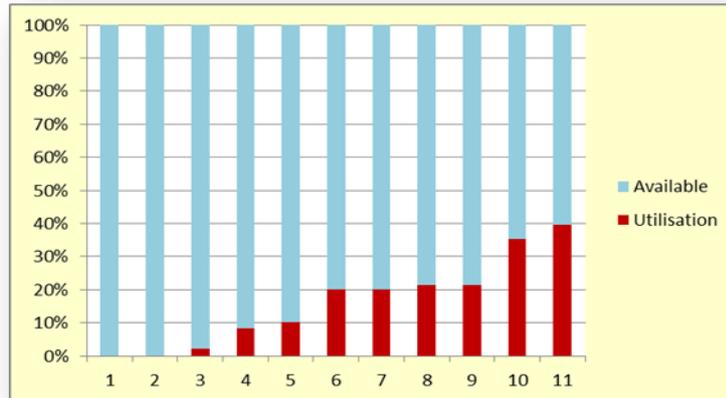
range of areas including health, education, the arts, community services, disability services, youth services and transport.

Table 7. List of participants

Jonathan Pilbrow	NTCOSS		David Aanundsen	NT Health
Christa Bartjen-Westermann	NTCOSS		Kelsey Cook	Barkly Shire
Anne Bates	Anyinginyi HAC		Clare Anderson	Anyinginyi HAC
Rosalie Schultz	Anyinginyi HAC		Sylvia Palmer	Anyinginyi HAC
Molly Cobden	Anyinginyi HAC		Olivia Barrett-Ohia	Catholic Care NT
Kathy Muir	Cw DoH/CWA		Barry Suckling	Anyinginyi RRHS
Lee Davis	Cw DoH		Emma Newman	Barkly Regional Arts
Gerry McCarthy	MP and Minister for Transport		Joel Stewart	Anyinginyi Stronger Families
Georgina Bracken	Women's Refuge		Carmel Wolf	Tennant Creek Pre-School
Sharon Morunga	Anyinginyi HAC		Nicole Blankenspoor	Tennant Creek Hospital
Jenny Mitchell	NT Dept Local Govt.		Maureen O'Keefe	Anyinginyi Public Health
Jenni Kennedy	NT Health		Karla Pinkerton	Anyinginyi Public Health
Ben Passmore	Centre Bush Bus		Ian Davey	Tennant Creek Hospital
Eugen Freudigmann	NT Hearing		Christine Davey	Tennant Creek Hospital
Kym Brahim	Julalikari CAC		Christine McKenzie	NT Govt.
Stewart Naylor	BRADAAG		Rovind Kant	Catholic Care NT
Melanie Sutton	Anyinginyi HAC		Adrienne Mackenzie	Tennant Creek Hospital

A number of possible solutions were put forward by the workshop participants. These included:

- Service coordination
 - A vehicle/driver pool
- Sharing the transport load
- Planning and advocacy
- Town transport services with consideration to be given to:
 - Service characteristics
 - Fares
 - Service promotion
 - Other service issues relating to culture
- More use of bicycles
- Transport services for isolated regional communities
- A new Transit Centre
- A postal delivery service



Use of vehicles between 7 am and 6 pm on target day

6.2.2 Sharing the load

Participants thought that agencies in town could start by providing some start-up funding or support in-kind for the coordination approach. It was also suggested that input and action needs to come from agency heads and section managers, local businesses, the Shire and the Minister for Transport.

6.2.3 Planning and advocacy

Work on both planning services and advocating for funding and service provision was mooted by participants.

It was thought that planning should be based on connecting with the community and talking with locals including the people most likely to use the service. Ideas for service models need to be tested with town residents. Planning should also involve mapping and recognising skills available in the town.

There should also be advocacy for funding and for new services and it was suggested that this work should include talking to local organisations, the Minister for Transport and regional coordination meetings.

6.2.4 A town transport service

Participants were keen on some sort of town transport service. While a number of different models were suggested, the most common themes were that the service should serve the CBD including the Food Barn, Post Office, Clinic, Hospital and Pharmacy. It was also thought that service areas should include the town living areas each of which should have a bus stop. There could also be a service to a Visitor's Camp which could be developed similar to the one in Alice Springs.

A number of characteristics for a town service were suggested including:

- The service should be passenger friendly using small buses.
- It could be regular or could be a wiggly bus.
- The service should coordinate with clinic times.
- Services need to be reasonably priced or people will not use them.
- There need to be a variety of payment options, including, bus passes, pay for the week by CentrePay or tokens.

- There will need to be education as well as service promotion.

Possible problems included people not wanting others to know that they are going to the Clinic or Hospital or cultural issues about people travelling on the same vehicle. It was also suggested that it might be difficult to find suitably qualified drivers.

6.2.5 More use of bicycles

It was thought that bicycles could be encouraged as an alternative form of transport given the town's topography and size. There were also suggestions that a pedicab/rickshaw service could be tried by some enterprising person¹⁰.

6.2.6 Regional services

Participants noted that isolated communities including Epenarra, Canteen Creek, Alekarang, Murray Downs and Mungkarta should not be excluded from any new services and that a regular minibus service may be suitable.

6.2.7 New Transit Centre

A new Transit Centre where all services could stop and where passengers can find seating out of the weather and refreshments was seen as a key piece of missing infrastructure in town.

6.2.8 Postal delivery service

This was also seen as a missing service that affects the delivery of transport as it can be difficult to let patients know when they are due at appointments. A suggestion was made that the health service providers could establish a service to deliver appointment letters and that this could be further developed at a later time.

6.2.9 Next Steps

A number of relevant questions were posed by participants in terms of the next steps for the project including what direction the project should go in, who is going to drive it, how will we maintain momentum. There was support for taking a social enterprise approach and seeking seed funding or contributions from a trust or charity as start-up funds. "Let's just do it" was the catchcry from one workshop. It was thought that both the government and non-government sectors should be involved.

It was thought that both economic and environmental arguments could be made for better coordination of transport. There were a number of suggestions that the project should not stop at motorised transport but that active transport such as bicycling and walking should be encouraged.

Some participants thought that it would be a big job and that a committee could be formed to guide the next stage of the project.

¹⁰ A Pedicab service operates in Darwin around the city centre – passengers pay a flat fare of \$5.

SECTION 7. A Plan for the Future

7.1 Immediate Steps

Having completed the consultative phases of the project and in consideration of the proposals put forward by interviewees and workshop participants, a way to implement some of all of the suggestions had to be found.

Despite the project being extended by 4 weeks by NTCOSS in mid-August it there seemed little time available for the original project worker to make significant progress towards implementation before project end. It was obvious that many of the issues and suggestions that were canvassed could not be introduced in the short term as funding and other support would need to be found before progress could be made. It was also recognised that there was currently no “vehicle” through which to seek the support necessary.

While the support of the major government and NGO agencies in town was seen as critical to the future of any transport/mobility project, this could not be achieved in the short term.

It was therefore decided that the best, immediate, way forward would be to ask individual residents and others to come together to form a non-profit incorporated association under the NT Associations Act. This body could then work immediately on resourcing issues with a longer term view towards involving other agencies in its work either through offering membership or formal working relationships towards the end of addressing transport disadvantage in the town and region.

To this end an incorporation meeting was called and held on the 16th of August at which eight residents formed a new association, Tennant Creek Transport. The meeting adopted a range of aims and objectives and delegated someone to apply for incorporation.

A message from NTCOSS was tabled at the meeting offering their support for the new body and indicating that they would provide practical support such as assisting in applying for funding. They also informed the meeting that the original funders of the project were being approached to make a second contribution which would be used to fund the extended contract of the project consultant and that they would underwrite the extension if necessary. Finally they stated that any monies left at the end of the project would be passed on to the new body, Tennant Creek Transport Inc.

7.2 Objectives of Tennant Creek Transport Inc.

The meeting resolved to adopt the following objects and purpose for the new body:

“People’s ability to move around affects how and when they are able to access goods, services, social and recreational pursuits, training, employment and their ability to partake and contribute as members of a community. Those people who have no ready access to private transport or who cannot access public transport for whatever reason are considered to be transport disadvantaged.

The purpose of the association therefore is to provide a public benefit by providing assistance for those people who are in need of relief from sickness, suffering, disability and helplessness within the Barkly region through providing a range of services that:

- *Address transport disadvantage in the Barkly region in whatever form it takes through the provision of passenger transport services;*
- *Assist people, who have no ready access to private transport, to access services and take part in activities of their choice;*
- *Encourage healthy, active transport options such as walking or cycling;*
- *Facilitate the development of suitable transport infrastructure such as transit centres or bus stops*

The objects of these services may include

- *Provision of transport services where this would bring about additional benefits to the community and transport disadvantaged people in particular;*
- *Coordination of passenger transport services in the region;*
- *The development of new transport services in the region;*
- *The coordination and sharing of community and government owned vehicles;*
- *The establishment and maintenance of a driver pool.*
- *The establishment of a coordination or travel dispatch centre or centres in the region.*
- *Provision of information about transport options to the community;*
- *Advocacy for improved transport services;*
- *The development of an access plan for the region;*
- *Conducting consultations and other research in the region about transport disadvantage and ways to increase people's mobility.*

The association will also seek funding and support from the community, the business sector, government and other agencies to assist in its work, and will charge fees for services where it is appropriate to do so."

7.3 Current situation

Members elected office bearers to carry the work of the Transport Project forward and the Public Officer lodged the application for incorporation shortly afterwards.

In the meantime Tennant Creek Transport and NTCOSS have drafted applications for funding to two charitable foundations.

A web site has also been created to keep people informed of progress.



New Transport Group for Tennant Creek

At a meeting held on the 18th of August a group of local residents formed a transport group for Tennant Creek to be called Tennant Creek Transport Inc. The group has lodged an application to become an Incorporated Association under the Northern Territory Associations Act.

Where we came from

The group was set up as a result of a community transport planning project run by David Denmark from Transport Planning and Management, organised by NTCOSS and funded by local agencies, the NT Government, NTCOSS and the Sidney Myer Foundation. The project involved extensive interviews with staff from local agencies and two workshops.

The purpose of the group

- Address transport disadvantage in the Barkly region in whatever form it takes through the promotion of passenger transport services;
- Assist people, who have no ready access to private transport, to access services and take part in activities of their choice;
- Encourage healthy active transport options such as walking or cycling; and
- Facilitate the development of suitable transport infrastructure such as transit centres or bus stops

The group will also work on the establishment of a vehicle register and driver pool and on providing information about

Next Meeting of the Group
 Thursday, 12th Sept.
 5:00 - 8:30 pm
 Community Room
 179 Powerade St
 Tennant Creek

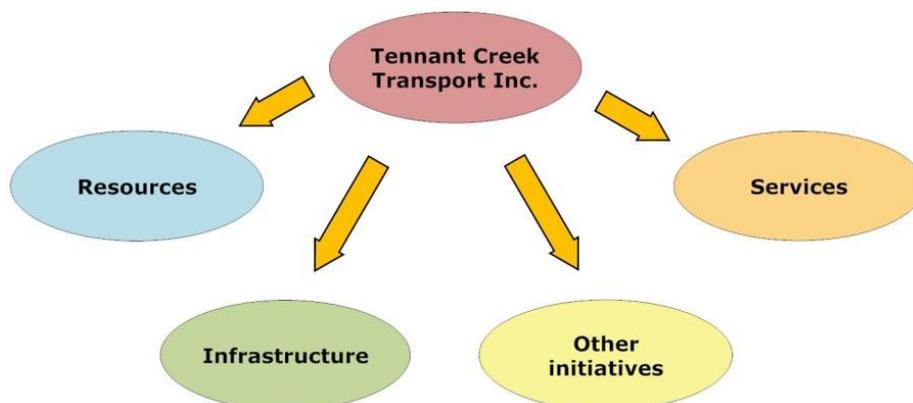
[Go to report](#)
[Go to presentation](#)

Screenshot of www.tennantcreektransport.org

7.4 A Model for Tennant Creek Transport Inc.

A draft model for TCT was then developed by the project consultant. It was based on the outcomes of the interviews and workshops and needed to be flexible enough to address a wide variety of issues and to modify its approach as those issues change over time. Evidently the solution was not to be the establishment of one or two services as the approach needed to encompass issues such as coordinating transport to make better use of resources, information about transport services, the planning and delivery of new fixed and flexible services and finding ways to fund the same.

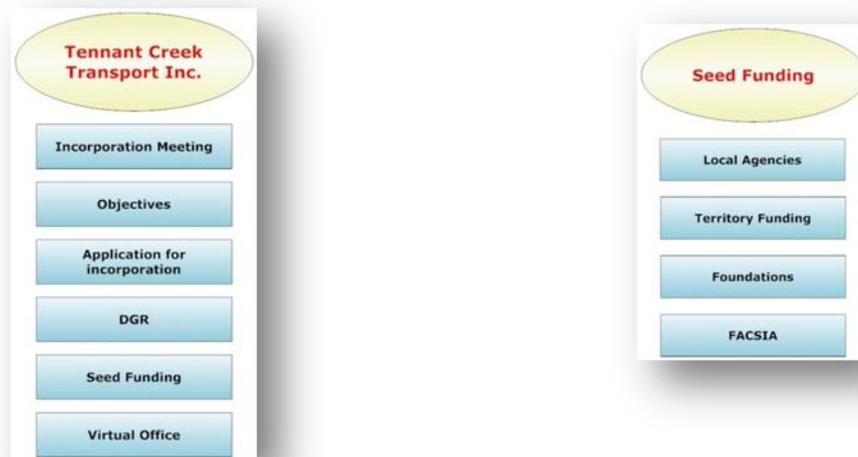
The model envisages activities in four areas: use of resources, development of infrastructure, transport or mobility services and other initiatives.



Each of these activities may be linked to other activities – for example, a transport service may make use of local resources (maybe a community owned minibus) and infrastructure (bus stops).

7.4.1 Agency

There are two aspects to getting Tennant Creek Transport up and running: incorporation and funding/support.



In terms of the incorporation process the first three tasks have been completed and in terms of seed funding local agencies have again been approached to contribute some resources and an application is under development to one significant foundation.

7.4.2. Resources

The key to making better use of existing transport resources in Tennant Creek will be the establishment of a vehicle register and a driver pool.

Vehicle register

The benefits of a vehicle register are threefold:

1. agencies that have a need for access to vehicles can hire them at a reasonable cost through the register;
2. agencies that own vehicles can raise income from them at times they are not being used; and
3. funders can be reassured that vehicles they have financed are being used effectively for a community benefit.

The register is based on a model used by the Eastern Transport Register in Victoria¹¹.

¹¹ <http://www.etr.com.au/index.html>

The way a vehicle register works is as follows:

- Vehicle owners agree to make their vehicles available to the register at times they are not being used. An agreement between the owner and the register is signed.
- Hirers approach the register with a booking and the register administration finds them a suitable vehicle.
- The hirer signs a user agreement for the hire through which they agree to the hire conditions.
- Arrangements are made for the pick-up, drop-off and pre and post hire inspections of the vehicle.
- After the hire the hirer pays the agreed fee. Most of the fee is passed on to the vehicle owner with the register retaining a small proportion to pay for administration.



The whole process is underpinned by a range of policies and procedures which protect both the vehicle owners and the hirers.

The register also takes out non-owned vehicle insurance on the vehicles in the register in order to protect the vehicle owners in the case of an accident. This insurance covers the owners against the following possibilities:

- loss of a no-claims bonus;
- payment of an insurance excess; and
- hire of an alternative vehicle while the vehicle that was hired is off the road for repairs.

Driver Pool



The driver pool has two functions:

1. it allows hirers from the vehicle register to access suitable drivers; and
2. it provides a pool of casual drivers for all operators of community or commercial vehicles in town.

The driver pool may include both volunteer and paid drivers. Administration of the pool is underpinned by a range of policies and procedures.

Drivers are registered in terms of the driving licence they hold and records will be kept on any changes in their licencing status and any additional training, such as an “h” endorsement, they might have successfully completed.

When drivers are matched with an agency the agency pays the driver directly with a small fee being paid to the driver pool as commission. As the driver pool develops, they may employ the driver directly with a fee being charged to any agency that makes use of them.

The Driver Pool may also take the lead in facilitating driver training in order to add to the number of suitable drivers in the pool.

7.4.3. Services

A key service and the first that is likely to be offered is transport information. While there are quite a few transport services in Tennant Creek there is no one place to access information about them. The information service may be delivered in a number of ways including the TCT website, a telephone service and, in the future, information (and possibly booking) available at a shop-front.

Another initiative which will address a current need is the development of travel packages (transport, accommodation and advice on travel and access issues) for individuals. This can be based on a service currently offered by St John Ambulance in Queensland.

Another of the key functions of Tennant Creek Transport may also fill service gaps by facilitating the development and delivery of transport services. This may involve TCT providing transport services itself, contracting services to another operator or being involved in the delivery of joint services with another agency. Two obvious gaps in the service system at the moment are a round-town service and services which link Tennant Creek to more remote communities. Each initiative involves a number of steps.



Other services may include improved coordination of health related transport in town, a late-night transport service to connect to the Greyhound bus and a Back to Country Program similar to the one that runs in Alice Springs.

Health Facility Transport

Transport by health facilities is provided by the Anyinginyi Clinic which utilises two minibuses to bring patients in to the main clinic and also to occasional sessional clinics. The Hospital has a minibus dedicated to the Renal Unit and the Aboriginal Liaison Officer provides a substantial amount of transport for appointments, family conferences and hospital discharges. Given that the Anyinginyi Clinic and the Hospital are only 500 meters apart there would be scope for better coordination and more efficient delivery of services to patients. A trial of a new joint service between the Clinic and Hospital is to take place before the end of 2012.



Getting passengers and from the late night Greyhound Bus and late night rail services was also constantly raised as an unresolved issue. This is another area where TCT could work on the development of a new service – possibly organised by and for agencies that currently use staff to take clients to meet late-night transport connections.

Finally there is the possibility of applying for funding to run a Return to Country program. Such a program operates in Alice Springs through Tangentyere Council¹². Return to Country is a user-pays program that provides up-front financial assistance to people stranded in Alice Springs, enabling them to return to their home community. Travel must be to the person’s home address.



Assistance is provided in the form of bus tickets, fares or fuel vouchers. Where possible the ICMS will assist people to use existing forms of public transport or improve the viability of using private transport.

Clients are required to repay the cost of travel plus 10% for administrative costs. Repayment is made through Income Management or Centrepay Deductions. The program is funded by the NT Justice Department¹³.

7.4.4 Infrastructure

The three elements of infrastructure are the TCT website, physical infrastructure and an Access Plan for the town.

Website

The website will be the primary communication medium for Tennant Creek Transport. The site has already been started and can be viewed at <http://tennantcreektransport.org>.

¹² See: http://www.tangentyere.org.au/services/social_services/community_support/ (last accessed 26/8/12)

¹³ See http://www.safeterritory.nt.gov.au/tackling_anti-social_behaviour/return_to_country.html (last accessed 26/8/12)



The main features of the site are:

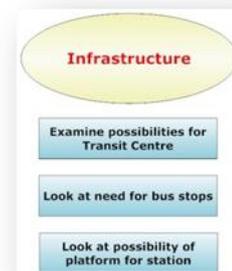
- Background to the project.
- Membership enquiry form
- Information about Tennant Creek Transport Inc.
- Links to pages with the following information;
 - Public transport information
 - Information about community transport services in Tennant Creek
- Other useful links

Physical Infrastructure

There is a lack of appropriate physical infrastructure for public transport in Tennant Creek. Participants in this project have bemoaned the lack of a suitable Transit Centre for long distance buses (both Greyhound and Centre Bush Bus) and there will be a need for bus stops and associated infrastructure if a fixed route bus service is introduced.

As yet, no platform has been constructed at the railway station.

Initial discussions about a possible Transit Centre and bus stops for the new route service have already taken place between Tennant Creek Transport and the President and CEO of the Barkly Shire Council.



Access Plan



The final group of tasks under the rubric of infrastructure relate to the physical accessibility of the town's infrastructure. This may include footpaths, ramps to footpaths, access to buildings, safe road crossings among other things. A first step is to map the town's access and to start developing an Access Plan in cooperation with bodies such as Barkly Shire Council and the Territory Government.

7.4.5 Active Transport

Active transport relates to physical activity undertaken as a means of transport. It includes travel by foot, bicycle and other non-motorised vehicles. Use of public transport is also included in the definition as it often involves some walking or cycling to pick-up and from drop-off points¹⁴.

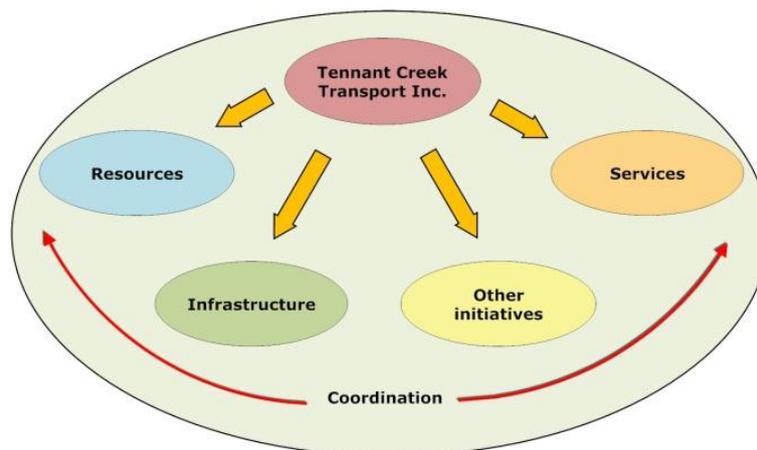
Walking and cycling will improve people's health by promoting better cardiovascular fitness, stronger leg muscles, lower blood pressure, lower risk of heart disease, diabetes, bowel cancer and osteoporosis. Walking is not only good for people; it's great for the environment too.

Two ways of promoting these modes of transport are to develop a Bike Plan and walking initiatives.



7.4.6 Coordination

The final element of the model is one that links and reinforces all of the other elements. Coordination, whether it be the sharing of resources, the development of joint services or planning services to mesh together into a system is the key to the whole model.



By using coordination it will be possible to more with less, to provide additional services for those who require them and to increase mobility and access of residents to goods and services and to assist them in playing an active part in community life.

This is the mobility management approach where the passenger becomes the focus of attention and the available resources are used to satisfy passenger needs and wants. Its strength is in the model's flexibility and responsiveness to need and demand.

In the long run there are a number of benefits to be gained from this approach. These include:

- Transport services that are more responsive to mobility needs in the community – sensitive to the needs of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people who face transport disadvantage;

¹⁴ See <http://www.walk.com.au/wtw/Page.asp?PageID=1265>

- More efficient use of existing and future transport resources;
- Better environmental outcomes through reduced use of fossil fuels, reduced particulate emissions and reduced greenhouse gas emissions.

SECTION 8. Endnote

This report sketches the first steps in what will be a long journey for Tennant Creek Transport and the people of the Barkly region. The issues described in this paper are not static or fixed. Some will be resolved but equally, circumstances such as funding availability, the demographic profile and alterations in Government policy, will inevitably change and consequently so will the issues.

Having established Tennant Creek Transport we have in place an entity that can take ownership of these issues and which can work towards suitable solution.

The key to Tennant Creek Transport's success will be its willingness to be flexible, to be innovative, responsive to external change and its ability to listen to people. The model described here should therefore only be seen as a foundation and not a final "product".

Tennant Creek Transport – *bon voyage!*

Prepared by David Denmark

Transport Planning and Management

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