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TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

O/N 60926

THE ALLEN CONSULTING GROUP

REVIEW OF THE DISABILITY STANDARDS FOR ACCESSIBLE PUBLIC TRANSPORT

HEARING CONDUCTED AT: ALICE SPRINGS

DATE: 8 AUGUST 2007

MR BELL: I'm John Bell from the Allen Consulting Group, and I have with me Jessie Goldsmith, and we're doing this review on behalf of the Australian Government Minister of Transport and Regional Services, and I think you all know it's the first five-year review of these disability standards. Some of them are to be implemented over quite an extended period, over 25 years, but this is the first such review, and I think you're aware that we've got a discussion paper and we have a website. So I should say about the website, that we are posting up on the website a transcript of these hearings, and that's because there are lots of people who are not able to be here and who are interested in what is being said. So what we will do after today is – it will take about a week, but you will be able to see what is said by other people.

I should say that there are other people coming today. Some of them will turn up later in the day. So there's a bit of a list that goes through to the afternoon, but I thought we should get started now since you're here. I should tell you also that we're doing hearings in all the State and Territory capitals, and we're also doing them in some regional centres, of which Alice Springs is the last, so today is the last hearing day. And as you may also know, we're hoping to get written submissions from quite a number of people. Now, not everybody is in a position to give a written submission, so anything that you say today we will obviously take into account when we're working on our report. So there's no obligation to put in a written submission if you've come along today, but obviously we're hoping to get some written submissions, and they're due by 24 August, so that's not very far away now.

Then we will be analysing the material that we've received and what people have said, picking up on some research that we've done, and preparing a report for the Minister. So I think that that's all I need to say. These are going to be very informal, these hearings, and we hope that they'll be fairly relaxed and we'll have some quite useful discussions. So, Cliff, you're first up. Do you want to come and sit over here so that we can pick you up?

MS GOLDSMITH: These microphones don't amplify obviously, they - - -

MR BELL: Yes, I should have explained, they don't amplify, but are just for recording purposes. Anyway, there's not so many of us, so I'm sure everybody will be able to hear. So Cliff, you're from - - -

MR ALEXANDER: I'm representing the Disability Advocacy Service.

MR BELL: Is that just an Alice Springs organisation?

MR ALEXANDER: Urban area of Alice Springs, Tennant Creek, plus a little bit in between.

MR BELL: Okay.

MR ALEXANDER: But generally urban areas. So I won't specifically address the point, or dot-point questions, but some of those will be incorporated into what I

present. So the presentation content is from my work as the disability advocate and personal understanding of transport issues within the area that I work within. So first I'd like to just give a brief overview of the public transport issues that we come across within Central Australia.

5

I'll start off with train access. Train access is very restricted at both ends, this is Alice Springs and Tennant Creek. There are no platforms providing suitable access at either location. The train station at Tennant Creek is about seven kilometres from the town centre and there is no public bus service in Tennant Creek, so there's a bit of a gap. The train generally arrives late at night or early in the morning, and it's also worth commenting that when the northern line was completed, or constructed – I think it was completed in February 2004 – at that time it didn't comply with regulations under the Disability Discrimination Act.

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15

Air transport. A major change to air travel since 2005 within Central Australia has seen a single carrier and change of aircraft type that flies to Alice Springs, and there are no commercial flights now from Alice Springs to Tennant Creek. At DAS we've worked on two access complaints with air travel originating from this end. They arose from the type of plane they use, which is the 737, and restrictions on the size and weight of wheelchairs that can be transported. Both these concerns were addressed through the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission. One complaint was resolved satisfactorily and one was resolved partially satisfactorily.

20

25

MR BELL: Do you know what the nature of the particular complaints were?

MR ALEXANDER: The complaints were about the people wishing to travel, the size and weights of their wheelchairs didn't comply with the occupational health standards of handling and these sorts of issues, door sizes to get into holds on aircraft.

30

MR BELL: At some of the other hearings we've had some quite extensive discussions about this issue because some of the larger mobility devices certainly cause some difficulties.

35

MR ALEXANDER: Yes.

MR BELL: So while they're very useful to get around because they've got bigger wheels and more capacity and are probably more comfortable, they certainly pose some problems when it comes to loading them, in some types of aircraft anyway.

40

MR ALEXANDER: I believe the issue that was resolved part satisfactorily – the reason it was part satisfactorily was that that particular person had access to two wheelchairs, so the transport went ahead, but it wasn't seen as – like, not everyone has that luxury. I'm unaware how big an issue this is for people wanting to come to Alice Springs because I don't know when or if this issue arises or how it's resolved, but I suspect there would be some people that don't travel to the Northern Territory because of it.

45

Coach access. We have lots of inquiries about coach accessibility from both prospective tourists and people requiring medical attention that need to come in from Tennant Creek and remote areas. From our observations, if the major coach companies are introducing coaches with suitable access, it's not apparent with the coaches that come to Central Australia. Also, as previously mentioned, there are safety issues considered in Tennant Creek for coach travel as arrivals and departures are generally late at night or early morning and there is no other public transport systems available to transport people from the terminals.

5
10 MR BELL: Are there special taxis at Tennant Creek to take people in wheelchairs, for example?

MR ALEXANDER: No.

15 MR BELL: Nothing?

MR ALEXANDER: No. My understanding is at the moment there's only one taxi at Tennant Creek.

20 MR BELL: Only one taxi?

MR ALEXANDER: Yes.

25 MR BELL: And it's not one that's able to take people in wheelchairs?

MR ALEXANDER: No. That's my understanding. All council-operated buses – public buses in Alice Springs, to my understanding, are readily accessible. There is a bush bus service. I can't comment on that. I don't have information about the types of vehicles they use. It's generally considered that the routes travelled by the buses aren't satisfactory or regular enough, as in the areas they go to.

30 MS GOLDSMITH: Is this for the local buses, or for the bush buses?

MR ALEXANDER: Yes, the local. Local council-run, general public buses. There's definitely an express shortage of accessible taxis in Alice Springs, and no accessible taxis in Tennant Creek, as mentioned, and also there's no access to the taxi subsidy scheme in Tennant Creek. That's a scheme where - - -

40 MS GOLDSMITH: Yes.

MR BELL: Yes, we're familiar with the scheme, but I guess if there's no taxi there that's able to provide that service - - -

45 MR ALEXANDER: That might be why.

MR BELL: - - - then there's no vouchers.

MR ALEXANDER: And the response time in Alice Springs for accessible vehicles is usually longer than for other vehicles.

MS GOLDSMITH: Do you know how many accessible cabs there are in - - -

5

MR ALEXANDER: Alice Springs?

MR BELL: Alice Springs.

10 MR ALEXANDER: Not offhand, no. There are a few. And as mentioned for Tennant Creek and other outlying areas, all these issues have serious consequences, or can have serious consequences for people travelling to Alice Springs and back home for medical services or other support. As mentioned, people having to get on to the train or coach, or depart from the train or coach late at night or early in the
15 morning, there's no other public transport available and often there's no one there to pick them up. So that does create a problem. It can be escalated specifically for people with mobility problems or intellectual disabilities, or any types of those issues.

20 I'd just like to comment on the current – the data collection for monitoring the progress, I guess, against the standards. We've looked at the Northern Territory Department of Planning and Infrastructure website. It appears very hard to interpret information. One question we're sort of asking ourselves is, does the data actually show any increase in compliance, or does it just show that the current situation is the
25 same as it was in 2002 when the standards were brought in from – the data on the site, we couldn't really get information. So I believe there's a substantial argument for national standards for data collection and display.

30 Also, if the data isn't regionally identified, there's a possibility that it's biased towards the larger population areas. The data on the site appears to be identifying Darwin predominantly, but we don't know if that is the case. And readily comparative data within Australia would be useful to do comparisons, and perhaps be appropriate to specifically incorporate regional areas into the equation, specifically if there's any redevelopment or further implementation of the standards
35 monitoring.

Another concern of ours is that it appears that people generally have no real understanding of what they can expect from public transport and don't know how to complain. From the issues paper, it appears that the complaints process isn't arduous
40 once the specific targets and standards are implemented. It's a matter of identifying a breach of standard, not having to go through a full personal anti-discrimination case, and perhaps this understanding needs to be built upon within the community, along with improved access information, I guess, on access to the complaints process.

45

However, the way the data is presented at the moment, I think it probably is pretty hard for people to easily understand what is expected and when. Also, from our point of view, I guess with an extended timeframe, however – for example, as

mentioned, full compliance by about 2032, some common compliances, 50 per cent by 2012 it says for the timeframe. I would anticipate it's going to be a long time before a lot of complaints can be determined purely by the applying to standards.

5 MR BELL: Your argument is that some people will be able to respond and say, "Well, we had a target of, say, 25 per cent by this particular year and we've met that target by providing a service or a facility somewhere else."

MR ALEXANDER: Yes.

10

MR BELL: Yes, I understand that argument. The targets have been set in fairly broad terms, but we'll see.

MR ALEXANDER: Yes.

15

MR BELL: I think your point about data is a very good one, and we're hoping to get some disaggregated data so that we can see how the implementation has gone in different municipalities, for example. If we're able to get that, that would be very helpful, and I expect we'll find that some municipalities are doing quite well and others are not doing quite so well. But, yes, those targets are – you are quite right, are expressed in very broad terms. You can't say – it looks as though, from the way that the standards read, it isn't sort of 25 per cent of the bus stops in Alice Springs should be wheelchair accessible.

20

25 MR ALEXANDER: That's correct, yes.

MR BELL: Yes, I noticed that.

30

MR ALEXANDER: So as mentioned, without regional, I guess, representation, it could be – you know – biased towards the - - -

MR BELL: The bigger centres.

35

MR ALEXANDER: - - - high-growth areas, which you would probably expect to address those issues soon, I guess. I don't know whether we should expect it.

40

MR BELL: I guess there will be a tendency to – when it comes to investing in infrastructure – for example, fixing bus stops – the State and Territory Governments are probably going to spend money where there are the greatest number of people using a facility.

MR ALEXANDER: I see.

45

MR BELL: But then, if you think about the train, the train is a problem because it's the only train. There's only one train service. So having no accessible platform is definitely an issue.

MR ALEXANDER: Yes, so while it's reasonable, you know, to have timeframes, long timeframes for high-cost solutions, it does still mean that until they're being met, people are still going to be discriminated against and put up against it. It would be appropriate from our point of view, from our observations and feedback that we get, to hasten the timeframe for compliance for taxis, for example. This is often expressed within the community and as taxis are replaced more regularly than high-cost investments such as aircraft and trains, it might be appropriate to have a shorter timeframe for compliance with those sorts of vehicles.

10 So just in closing, I guess, over the last five years there has been little to indicate that these strategies have had a positive effect in Central Australia. Perhaps they have in larger areas and we'll eventually benefit from the flow on. And I believe that this is the current situation within Central Australia as we hear about issues that are brought to our attention in the work we do.

15 MR BELL: What is the state of bus stops in Alice Springs in terms of tactile surfaces and accessibility to these low-floor buses? Is that reasonably good?

MR ALEXANDER: My understanding is it's reasonably good, but I haven't sort of actually gone round – I'm assuming that because we don't necessarily hear about that - - -

MR BELL: You don't hear complaints.

25 MR ALEXANDER: - - - as an issue.

MR BELL: Yes. And is there a bus service at Tennant Creek at all?

MR ALEXANDER: Not at all, no.

30 MR BELL: No public bus at all?

MR ALEXANDER: No.

35 MR BELL: Yes.

MR ALEXANDER: My understanding is – I guess Tennant Creek has got a population at the present of about 4000.

40 MR BELL: So it is quite small.

MR ALEXANDER: It is quite small.

MR BELL: Yes.

45 MS GOLDSMITH: Do people access school buses? Do you get travel between some of the - - -

MR ALEXANDER: Round locally, or - - -

MS GOLDSMITH: I was thinking more people coming in from smaller - - -

5 MR ALEXANDER: Communities?

MS GOLDSMITH: - - - communities, yes. Do they use school buses at all?

10 MR ALEXANDER: I don't know of school buses that go out to communities, but - - -

MS GOLDSMITH: Oh, okay.

15 MR ALEXANDER: I'm not saying that necessarily is the case.

MR BELL: School buses are - - -

MR ALEXANDER: I believe it would be an issue.

20 MR BELL: School buses are a whole separate issue in this area, but I have to say we were very impressed yesterday. We went and visited one of the bus depots in Darwin and checked out the way that those buses can be adapted; in one case to take eight wheelchairs in the one bus, which was quite amazing. There was an internal lift, because the floors were on two different levels. Very impressive. And the fleet
25 of buses in Darwin is quite a new fleet, so we'll have a look at Alice Springs and see how the buses - - -

MR ALEXANDER: My understanding is they are a relatively new fleet.

30 MR BELL: Yes. So they're more likely to be low-floor buses if they're relatively new.

MR ALEXANDER: Yes.

35 MR BELL: As you know, buses can last for quite a long time, too.

MR ALEXANDER: Yes.

40 MR BELL: In some cases more than 20 years. And that's, I suppose, why the standards were given a longer timeframe. But if you take, for example, the railway, as the usage of the rail – of the Gann grows, there will probably be a need for more rolling stock, and you would think that that would be perhaps a good time to produce some rolling stock that was more accessible. Do you know anybody who has managed to use the Ghan and is wheelchair bound?

45 MR ALEXANDER: Not personally, no.

MR BELL: It seems that getting on the train is just one of the problems, but manoeuvring inside it is also a problem.

5 MR ALEXANDER: We checked it out on the website. We couldn't find much – well, we couldn't find anything on the website about accessible facilities on the train.

MR BELL: So I guess your comment then about tourists is that tourists are unlikely to travel to Alice if they feel that they – if they look at the website and they can't see that the Ghan is going to be accessible.

10 MR ALEXANDER: Yes.

MR BELL: Now, having that information – this comes back to your point about information so that people know what they're entitled to expect.

15 MR ALEXANDER: Yes.

MR BELL: If the information is not there, then it's probably hard to get.

20 MR ALEXANDER: I would imagine, yes.

MR BELL: Yes.

MS GOLDSMITH: With the airports, you said that there's now only one carrier?

25 MR BELL: That's Qantas isn't it?

MR ALEXANDER: That's Qantas, yes.

30 MS GOLDSMITH: And none of the – you haven't got any large planes any more coming into Alice?

MR ALEXANDER: No. They only use – from my understanding, they only use 737s.

35 MS GOLDSMITH: Yes.

MR ALEXANDER: And I think the smaller planes that they use - - -

40 MR BELL: It was a 717 this morning.

MR ALEXANDER: - - - go to Perth and Cairns, I think.

45 MR BELL: It was a 717 from Darwin to Alice Springs this morning and that was flying on to Perth, and that's quite a – it's a small plane in the sense that it's not a wide-bodied aircraft.

MR ALEXANDER: Yes.

MR BELL: So that limits what you can put in the hold.

MR ALEXANDER: I think they're regular flights to Perth, yes, I think the 717s.

5 MR BELL: Yes.

MS GOLDSMITH: Okay. So people can't necessarily fly in or out of Alice.

10 MR BELL: If they've got a bigger wheelchair.

MR ALEXANDER: Yes.

MR BELL: Or bigger mobility device.

15 MR ALEXANDER: The cases that we've worked on, they have been resolved by contact the airlines, in their favour, but it is sort of ongoing.

MS GOLDSMITH: Okay. Is this something that has gotten worse, or better, or is it fairly - - -

20 MR ALEXANDER: Well, I suppose up until then the issue hadn't cropped up, to my knowledge, yes.

MR BELL: It's probably a more difficult issue with the 717 than with the 737, so it
25 can be a problem with specific aircraft type.

MR ALEXANDER: I guess you've probably got more people flying for holidays
and for business to places like Melbourne and Sydney than you would have going to
30 Perth.

MS GOLDSMITH: Okay.

MR BELL: Yes. I imagine the service to Sydney is a 737 from Alice Springs.

35 MR ALEXANDER: That's correct.

MR BELL: Yes. So that should - - -

40 MR ALEXANDER: And Melbourne and Adelaide.

MR BELL: Yes. Okay. All right. Well, look, I don't think there was anything else
I wanted to ask. Did you have anything else you wanted to add?

45 MR ALEXANDER: Not specific.

MR BELL: Let me just ask a couple of questions. With the Disability Advisory
Service – Advocacy Service – do you have a sort of a known number of clients that
you work with, or is it just the people come to you when they have an issue?

MR ALEXANDER: Generally it's people that come to us when they've got an issue.

MR BELL: Yes.

5

MR ALEXANDER: We do have some clients that regularly have issues, I guess, but it's generally we work with individuals, individual advocacy when they've got an issue or something they want resolved.

10 MR BELL: All right. Look, thank you very much and thank you for coming. We do appreciate this. Every presentation adds more value to this inquiry, and we really do appreciate your effort. Thanks a lot.

MR ALEXANDER: Thank you.

15

MR BELL: So Lindy do you want to come and – sorry, bring another chair up, yes. So it is Lindy Cameron?

MS CAMERON: That's right.

20

MR BELL: And your colleague is?

MS CAMERON: Barry Sams.

25 MR BELL: Welcome, Barry and Lindy, thanks for coming. Now, you are from CASA Central Australia. Would you like to tell us what CASA - - -

30 MS CAMERON: I am here today actually to represent the residents of CASA Central Australia Incorporated. CASA is an accommodation service here in Alice Springs that caters for a number of clients with intellectual disabilities. We provide two main areas; one is independent living options programs, helping people that live independently whether in their own homes or with their family members and the other is group home accommodation, which is a more permanent structure and we currently have an office – we have just relocated into town to be more accessible to all our clients.

35

40 Prior to that we were in the Sadadeen area, which really a lot of our clients just couldn't get to us so there was a need to move into town. We have been providing this type of support for about 25 years now and unfortunately not much has changed in the way of public transport over this time. We have been forced over the years to purchase our own vehicles, which is a self-funded exercise on our part and which really takes away from other resources in our organisation. But if we don't there's just been no way of clients being able to get from A to B. Because we are an accommodation service we try not to offer much in the way of a day program.

45

There is a huge need for a day program in town at the moment but we have another service in town, Bindi Incorporated, who offer a – sort of like a sheltered workshop type set up and also day activities for the clients, but unfortunately there is no public

transport that actually targets that area, so again there is, you know, no way of – other than taxis or us supplying transport for our clients to actually get to the day activity or employment.

5 MR BELL: So you are providing some transport to get them to the day activity?

MS CAMERON: Yes, we have assistant vehicles just so, yes, our clients can get from A to B. We, you know, get them and we take them and drop them off and you know, we are there to pick them up in the afternoon as well. Just as a bit of a case
10 study we did last year, we had a young man who is currently living with his elderly parents, he lives no more than 3/5 kilometres away from Bindi and because of the public transport issue with the lack of there is a need for him to catch taxis. Now, his taxi bill for 18 trips to and from work for the month came to a total of \$362.90. Now, he doesn't earn – he earns about \$2 an hour. It is nowhere near going to cover
15 his taxi costs. He does get taxi vouchers, but of course they're not going to last for 12 months, so at some stage he is going to have that whole bill. It is just too costly.

MR BELL: Yes, this is a case where the opportunity to be able to participate in a program like that is just so important socially and - - -
20

MS CAMERON: It is. It is so important because it offers a number of things for him and his family which is – you know, respite for Mum and Dad for him to be able to go and do something meaningful during the day. It offers a social network for him and stimulation and growth within his own development.
25

MR BELL: Yes. So how many vehicles to you have?

MS CAMERON: We have six.

30 MR BELL: Six?

MS CAMERON: Yes and we are not funded for them, so it is a real stretch on the organisation and their own resources.

35 MR BELL: So what is – can I ask, what sort of vehicles do you have?

MS CAMERON: We have a couple of Toyota Corollas, which are basically – can only transport, you know, probably two clients comfortably at any one time. We have a few of our clients in wheelchairs so we need to make sure that those
40 wheelchairs fit in the back. We have a Mitsubishi Hi-ace van, which caters for wheelchair clients; it has a lifter on the back but it is in the repairers more than it is actually on the road because of the hydraulic lifter is playing up a lot of the time. We also have a - - -

45 MR SAMS: Star wagon.

MS CAMERON: - - - Star wagon, that too, yes.

MR BELL: Okay.

MS CAMERON: It can get people – I think about eight clients to and from where they need to go as well. Part of our responsibilities I guess too is making sure our
5 clients are integrated into the community. I mean, what you and I take for granted is, you know, a huge struggle for them on occasions and community access is extremely important to them.

MR BELL: So do you employ drivers to drive these vehicles or do you have
10 volunteers?

MS CAMERON: They're our support workers that are actually on duty at the time.

MR BELL: Yes.
15

MS CAMERON: So they will actually drop them off to where they need to go prior to their shift ending, yes. Otherwise we are often dragged out of the office to do a pick up or drop off. I mean, the taxi company do try and help when they can. I
20 guess the issue with the taxis is that they are so costly for our clients.

MR BELL: Yes.

MS CAMERON: We have clients that are – that have been assessed and they are able to catch public transport but of course the public transport isn't there for them to
25 catch, so again they're going back to the taxis and they are not eligible for taxi vouchers. We have got a young man who lives out at Larapinta, which is probably seven Ks out.

MR SAMS: Yes.
30

MS CAMERON: And then we have – it is too far for them. He is in a wheelchair; it is too far for him to come into town and it is \$25 for a one way trip in a taxi; that's what he is being charged at the moment. He does get taxi vouchers but if you put in a medical appointment and a trip for shopping and maybe a social outing and then
35 that is, you know, \$150 a week he is booking out in taxis. I guess the problem with the bus service we see at the moment is that it is not targeting the areas that we would like it to target and if you want to go out after 6 o'clock week days or Saturday afternoon and forget Sundays, the bus service just doesn't run on Sundays, so our clients are very limited to where they can and can't go and they are basically
40 housebound from Saturday afternoon through till Monday morning if they can't catch a bus. Is there anything that you wanted to - - -

MR SAMS: Looking at the bus service, the current local bus service runs about every one to one and a half hours, which means if you have got any appointments
45 you have got to get there way early to get there on time. The routes are north, south, east and west and there is an - up to a one and a half wait at the interchange to go out the other side of town, so you have this big wait beforehand, then a wait at the interchange to get there which makes it really hard for any of our guys to attend

medical appointments, work, courses, because there is a TAFE out one side, there are TAFEs around town but to catch buses in and out to them it's just not feasible.

5 Like, we have got clients who we have to go and run around to TAFEs because they just can't get there and it makes it very difficult. On Monday to Friday there is only between seven and eight services per day, you know, in any of the directions. On Saturday there's three services; the route doesn't enter the industrial area. Like she said there is no service after 6 pm on Monday to Friday, no service after 12 noon on Saturday and no service on Sunday. The timetable is hard to read; the one that we
10 have got and the stops have different numbers on different sides of the roads which can be very confusing if you have a disability. Even without a disability, I have got support workers that support the clients catch a bus and even they couldn't figure out the timetable, we had to explain the timetable for him.

15 There's two buses that have wheelchair access and there is like two wheelchair anchor points on the buses and these are also used by parents with prams, even though like wheelchair people get preference but it is a bit rough if you get on a bus and you have got to get the person with the pram to like either move off the bus; I just can't see how that could work. And we have got a client who would like to go
20 out to RDA, which is out one side of town, and by this timetable there's only three bus services on a Saturday morning, it means he can catch the bus out there at 9.30, come back at 10.30 and if RDA don't fit him in that – in between, he can't go.

MR BELL: Sorry, what is RDA?

25

MR SAMS: Riding for the Disabled.

MR BELL: Okay.

30 MR SAMS: So it is like the service is that Alice Springs has around town – like, say someone is going to Bindi and you have got – Bindi gives you, like - you have got to be here at a certain time, if you get there too early, too late, they don't accept it, so it makes it very hard to be able to have some – if the bus gets there – you have got to get there an hour and a half earlier just to get to that place on time, it makes it very
35 difficult for clients, especially because in Alice Springs it gets really hot. Like we had a month where most days it was peaking up around 40 degrees and if you have got all these one and a half hour waits, people in wheelchairs can't maintain their body temperature the same as non-wheelchair people, which means they overheat really easy. So this just adds to their hardship.

40

MR BELL: Yes.

MS CAMERON: Well, I guess we do need to point out too, I mean we do have clients that – and it is not all bad, that we have clients that actually do catch the bus
45 into town when they are coming into town for certain things and we have been able to work with them and, you know, juggle their times around that they do certain things so it actually fits in and it works, but there is a lot of areas I guess in town that aren't catered for with the public bus service and that's probably our biggest concern,

because the costs of living is quite high for these clients as it is and with the disability support pension there is not a lot of room to move, you know. They all budget and their budgets are really tight and I guess with the public bus service if they were able to use that more than their taxis then it would just – it would really help.

MS GOLDSMITH: Have you had any feedback on the quality of the bus stops?

MS CAMERON: No, because the - - -

MR BELL: In accessibility?

MS CAMERON: Because our clients haven't really – there's a number of our clients that there's just no way they've ever actually got on the bus; the service hasn't been there to use. I have a couple of non-wheelchair clients that actually use the bus service and they are okay. We had a young man who was in a wheelchair that was catching the bus and like Barry said, it is okay if there is nobody else on it, you know, on the bus but I think he sort of felt bad too if he had to get on and you know, push a mother and child off the bus, but I mean that's unfortunately the way it happens, but yes, look with non-wheelchair clients we haven't had any concerns. I guess also there's a school pick up factored in here as well and as you can probably appreciate there's a few disability clients that really, that's not a good time to get on the bus, yes, it is too busy and too hectic for them and kids unfortunately can be quite cruel.

MR BELL: So do you help some of your clients to get to school?

MS CAMERON: No, we are an adult service.

MR BELL: So just an adult service, yes.

MS CAMERON: An adult service, yes.

MR SAMS: It is just that TAFE courses start in the morning.

MR BELL: Yes.

MR SAMS: So if you want to go to the TAFE and it starts at 9, and the buses after 9 o'clock run like every one and half hours you have to catch a bus during the school period to get there, which then when you try to encourage a client to attend a course they are all willing up until the part when they realise having to catch the bus.

MR BELL: The difficulty of actually getting there.

MR SAMS: Yes.

MR BELL: Yes.

MR SAMS: And some anxieties they can have regarding that.

MR BELL: Yes.

5 MS CAMERON: As long as we've got enough pre-planning we can actually get
people to – like into town for an appointment. We can make an appointment at a
certain time and make sure they can get the bus and whether they come to the office
for a while first or – and wait; there is usually a waiting period, but there's no
options to actually – for any of them to go and visit a friend or, you know, a relative
10 on a weekend or, you know, even be invited out for dinner. It is just not possible
because there is no way, you know, of getting home. We had a young man that
visited the Casino the other night for dinner and he had over a two hour wait for a
taxi to get home. He was a wheelchair client that had to of course wait for a suitable
vehicle to pick him and that was over a two hour wait and it got down to about three
15 degrees at night, so you know, that stuff is really hard too.

MR BELL: Accessing TAFE is actually quite an important issue. It was raised in
the Dubbo hearings, because the opportunity to go to TAFE may make the difference
between getting some skills that generate some income and not having that
20 opportunity. It's really quite an important issue and unfortunately some of these
TAFEs are not quite as accessible – they are not built in places that are as accessible
as you'd hope and that's perhaps not a surprise because they needed land and the
land was available somewhere out of town, so they're often not in town. In the
Dubbo case we were looking at people who were coming some distance from a
25 neighbouring town and the distances were quite large, but you'd think there that
there were – would have been better bus services, but they were not.

MR SAMS: Some of the organisations around town do try and factor transport into
theirs, so you will find that the local schools – some like – like St Phillips, they'll
30 have their own - - -

MR BELL: Bus.

MR SAMS: - - - bus to go and pick up their own clients – I mean students. The
35 local Congress Medical Centre, they have their own bus that they go out to pick up
people. You can ring them if you are indigenous to get in to attend the medical
centre there. The aboriginal – that has got wheelchair access. The Aboriginal
Institute and Development, which is like an indigenous TAFE, it doesn't – it has
coaster buses and trip carriers, but no wheelchair access, so we were able to almost
40 organise a client to go to a course up until the part where it turned out that he
couldn't get into any of their vehicles and it becomes a - like an OH & S issue if you
try to manhandle a client into the cars of stuff like that.

MR BELL: Yes, it's a very awkward lift.
45

MR SAMS: Yes. So even if the can partly assist himself to get into vehicles it is
not quite appropriate to fit in with other organisations OH & S, because there's

always a risk that if you are trying to manhandle someone into a car you are at risk of that going pear shape.

5 MR BELL: Yes. And I guess it is unusual for TAFEs to have much in the way of their own transport; they're just not set up to run those sorts of things. I mean, they will have the odd bus that they use for field work or getting around but as you say they are not likely to have wheelchair access.

10 MR SAMS: With the indigenous TAFE, you know, they are funded differently.

MR BELL: Yes.

15 MR SAMS: And it gets more involvement when they have their own vehicles and stuff, so they're structured different to like – compared to the Charles Darwin University, which doesn't have – provide that sort of service.

MR BELL: No.

20 MR SAMS: It is just that we – you know how you can go through so much effort to try and set something up and then the transport part just – it puts this big hiccup in between.

MR BELL: Yes.

25 MR SAMS: Like when you were saying, we have one client, it worked out that he earns like a couple of dollars an hour and your times out per day and the amount he was earning was covering his taxis there and back because the day service is pretty crowded he's only getting a couple of hours. So not only does he only get service three days a week for a couple of hours each time but all the money that he makes
30 pays for his taxi fare and back which is kind of - - -

MR BELL: Yes, there is no net benefit to him - - -

35 MR SAMS: No.

MR BELL: - - - in terms of dollars?

40 MR SAMS: It's just appreciative that he doesn't focus on the money, it is more about enjoying himself going to work and mixing with his friends and stuff.

MR BELL: Yes, it makes it very hard.

45 MR SAMS: Yes. The only advantage we have is there is – compared to our taxis and our private hire, we also have a Red Heart Taxi Service, who charge significantly less than the local taxis and hire cars. The only problem is that they are so hard to book that you can't always use them.

MR BELL: So are they staffed with volunteers or - - -

MR SAMS: No, no, they're a paid service, it is just that they are always – I don't know, about 20 per cent or more cheaper.

MR BELL: I see. So therefore they in demand.

5

MR SAMS: Yes.

MR BELL: Yes.

10 MR SAMS: They're more in tune with people with disabilities so they are more helpful because you turn over people in the local taxi industry; they are not all so polite and co-operative to help our clients. You notice how it makes it even hard catching taxis because a lot of these organisations, if they say, "Don't turn up before 9 o'clock," you can't turn up at say, ten to or quarter to otherwise your client's sitting
15 outside and you know, duty of care and all the other issues that you have, which means it feels transport is not the easiest. That's why it is easier so much for us to run them around but then it makes – you are taking away from other services you provide, becoming a transport that's not funded for.

20 MS CAMERON: So I guess our biggest issue today - I mean, the reason why we sort of put our hand up to come along was to really see if there's anything we can do to help re-look at the routes that the bus service does take and see if it can, yes, just cover more of Alice Springs to then be more accessible to clients with a disability.

25 MR BELL: Well, I'm sure that the Northern Territory Government will be looking closely at the transcript and giving this some thought when they prepare their submission, so I think that will be the way that your message gets through. Look, I don't think I have any questions on all that. It strikes me Central Australia perhaps is more difficult than some other parts of rural Australia in that the population densities
30 are quite low and the distances are great and the roads are not always that good, so that once you get out of the – out of Alice Springs and Tennant Creek isn't that far, the – it is really quite difficult to provide these sorts of services.

I mean, maybe one solution is to fund organisations like yours better so that you can
35 provide the service, but – because you'd appreciate that bus services are a whole issue in themselves in terms of their economics, but – yes, well, that's – I mean, those comments that you have made this morning are very helpful and we really do appreciate that you have come along to talk to us and we will obviously give that some careful thought. Can I just ask one question? Where is Bindi?

40

MS CAMERON: It is in Elder Street, which is in the industrial section of Alice Springs.

MR BELL: Okay.

45

MS CAMERON: I guess too you will probably hear more about that section later on today but I guess that section offers a lot of employment in town and to not have a service that sort of goes anywhere near there is an issue for all of Alice Springs.

MR BELL: Yes. All right. Well look, thank you very much and thanks for coming.

MS CAMERON: Thank you.

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ADJOURNED

[10.50am]

10

RESUMED

[11.28pm]

MR BELL: Okay, well, we will start again. Just a few words of introduction from me and Michelle. Just to take you through what I have said earlier, that this is the first five-year review of the standards since they were implemented in 2002, and some of them are implemented over a 25-year period, so this is the first one. I think you are probably aware of our website. And we are putting up on the website a transcript of these discussions, so that people who are not able to be here can see what was said. And a lot of the transcripts are already up. This is actually our last hearing. We have done hearings in all the capital cities and in a regional centre in just about every State and Territory, so it is really quite an interesting spectrum of different locations. For example, regional centres have included Dubbo and Kalgoorlie, which are really quite different in nature. And of course Alice Springs is different again. We are going to informal, so there is nothing formal about this.

25 MS CASTAGNA: That could be a relief.

MR BELL: It's not a Royal Commission. So look, Michelle, you're from Disability Services. Do you want to say a little bit about what your role is?

30 MS CASTAGNA: I'm a Disability Services and Liaison, which is part of the Department of Health and Community Services, so it's a NT Government-funded position. I guess my services was established to be a focal point for people in families with disability, and to be part of a multidisciplinary team within the Age and Disability program. So a lot of my work is to do with community, and the other is my responsibilities as a team member of a clinical side, that looks at case management and other issues of that nature.

MR BELL: Okay, well, that's very helpful. Now, I gather you would like to make some comments about the disability standards on public transport?

40

MS CASTAGNA: Well, yes. I am wondering how to go about it as a process, I guess, because I was looking at all the questions, and I am preparing at the moment a submission that I did hope that I would have finished and bring today. However, I must have been half-asleep and thinking far too fast for my admin person, because it needs quite a bit of doing up, shall we say, and the grammar is – leaves a lot to be desired. So I would like to go through some of those questions I guess that are asked there.

45

MR BELL: Yes.

MS CASTAGNA: But then I've also have comments on the local scene of the current situation in terms of transport in general.

5

MR BELL: Yes.

MS CASTAGNA: Now, I don't know if you want those, because they're very parochial.

10

MR BELL: Yes, no, that's fine.

MS CASTAGNA: But that's where it hits our town or central Australia, which is what – who I'm representing, because in my role as coordinator, Tennant Creek is also part of my responsibility. A big ask. Now, some of it I've written, so I'm sorry about that.

15

MR BELL: Go for it.

20 MS CASTAGNA: And I can talk to the – I'm going to start with the local one first.

MR BELL: Yes.

MS CASTAGNA: And then perhaps if we could look at some of the things about the introduction of the five years and what's happened in the five years and all of those sorts of things. And I'd really like you to ask me questions, because that's my best mode of responding to issues. So I'd just put disability transport in central Australia is in need of a significant boost and injection of commitment by the industry to improve transport. The disability sector has identified and highlighted transport infrastructure as a priority area for many years, and it was emphasised as a significant component of need in the NT disability review, which was currently undertaken by the department.

25

30

Limited transport options exist within adequate infrastructure. There is no doubt about that. Irregular timetabling and accessible bus routes – because I'm mentioning that is because in one way, that's the most accessible public transport that we have. Really, we can't discuss much of the other, but I've got a lot to say about. Whether extremes can also impact dramatically on accessing public transport in urban areas, while there is no limitations or nil – weather can impact dramatically on assessing public transport in urban areas, while there is limitations to nil support in remote areas and Aboriginal communities. So while they are not the public domain, they are serviced by people. And I guess what I'm trying to highlight here, there are some opportunities for transport that is currently being developed, like bush buses that go to communities and out. None have accessible – a vehicle.

35

40

45

MR BELL: So how are the bush buses funded?

MS CASTAGNA: I believe they're fee-paying.

MR BELL: Okay.

MS CASTAGNA: They're probably subsidised by Government because it's an endeavour to encourage people to go back to their communities and home lands
5 when they become stranded in town, which could be from social reasons or medical reasons or lots of reasons. But they come in and then they have no way of getting back. And some of this can be, you know, 250, 300 K out. Much of the current transport system relies heavily on the subsidised taxi concession scheme funded by the NT Government, which is the Department of Health and Community Services
10 who manage the scheme. And the general taxi industry is of an unreliable and expensive in the urban area.

And while we have the taxi scheme available, it has never managed to keep up with the taxi industry's increase in petrol prices. And as you will see here in Alice, and
15 further up the track, it gets more rip-off. That can be considerable, and there can be five increases in fares over a year, or there has been in the past. It is an understatement to point out that people's ability to live independent and mobile lifestyles is severely restricted and compromised. I've mentioned that because in your paper, you're referring the standards back to ensuring the human rights issues
20 are of – access and equity, so I'm saying no, it's not, because you cannot live an ordinary life that citizen Joe Blow would.

The impact of living a full community life, a true participation, especially in relation to accessing employment, employment opportunities, education, recreation, as
25 community activities is always at risk. So any of those things that the normal citizen would use, public transport, is compromised here because of lack of, and lack of alternatives. Tennant Creek, as a regional and more remote part of central Australia, it's 500 K away, but there's a lot of traffic that go between Tennant Creek and here on a regular basis. Services, Centrelink, health, legal are always up and down the
30 tracks, and they do that trip in a day quite often or overnight, if business is brisk.

Now, these people in Tennant Creek suffer very severely as a result of less transport infrastructure than what we even have, and transport services. I mean, quite
35 realistically, there is none. It's too small to have a public transport system. There is no subsidised taxi scheme. The ones who are eligible for it use their vouchers to come to town to access community here. In Tennant Creek there's only, I think at the time of investigation, two taxis there who do not have accessible transport and have no intentions of providing it and it doesn't appear to be expected, so the only transport that's offered to those people are two HACC funded - that's Home and
40 Community Care - buses that are run by two indigenous organisations. It used to be the town council, but they've gone into a shire-type of arrangement now, so that was passed on and I only heard it yesterday because I was checking facts, to the aged care facility to run.

45 Now, figuratively speaking services stop at 4 o'clock in the daytime, so there are no alternatives for night socialisation or activities and of course the weekend is – you can forget it. I will just explained about that. Now, the other thing is bus or coach travel to or from Tennant Creek, because I'm now speaking of Tennant Creek, for

medical, family, business or any other matter, is an impossibility if one is a wheelchair user or has a high mobility restriction. No buses or coaches – and I’m using them together because one I see is used in the tourist industry is a coach and the other is the bus, because of Greyhound or McCaffertys or something of that.

5 None are accessible at all.

10 So people if they need to come down have to make other arrangements and quite often they miss out on their appointments because there is no alternative, or family have to do it, or they’ve got their own vehicle. Whatever the way there is no choice about it. All this impacts very detrimentally on person’s lives in Aboriginal remote communities as they come in to Tennant Creek for service and if they need to come down here for medical or whatever reason, again there is no opportunity for those persons to do so. So that really is a major issue I would like to speak on more later.

15 The other one I’m looking at is tourism and I’m doing that in particular because we are a significant, as you will know, tourist destination for overseas travellers and the nation’s travellers for holidays. Now, the tourist – and I’m very pissed off about this industry – and in the five years since this has been introduced, and I have to be cynical and say I see no changes. I cannot believe that any changes will occur in the
20 next 10 years with this industry. It’s sadly lacking and undeveloped in the provision of transport accessibility and availability. People with disability with exception of a small commuter bus stationed at Uluru, Ayres Rock is the only thing that’s around.

25 That belongs to AAT King which does pick up people with disabilities if they’re flying out to be picked up from the airport and they can have a drive – have a guided tour I guess around the rock. But in town, no way, there is nothing at all, not one miserable little transport service. And one cannot be hired here at the moment. There have been a couple of occasions where there is Wheelabout in Queensland and they were trying to bring a vehicle over, but the cost and the usage of it was not a
30 business viable. And they envisaged that someone from Alice Springs would use it and then if someone in Darwin wanted to utilise it, they would get backpackers or someone to drive the blessed thing up there and back.

35 Well, it’s a good concept but it doesn’t work, therefore it wasn’t being used often enough and it’s been taken off. So it means the people with disabilities when they come, they do want to go to the rock, everyone does, there is no vehicle in which they can hire to do that. Taxis are prohibited and, yes, they can visit by plane, but that’s not quite the same thing either, because it means they can’t get around to look at anything. I think this is a deplorable situation and I’m not sure here – and I guess
40 that’s why I’ll go back to your questions in your paper – who is supposed to make some of this happen, or ensure that people are meeting their obligations, because from our perspective it is not being met at all.

45 Also the lack of these buses, accessible buses, excludes local people with disability from exploring and visiting their own environment and also their homelands and country which would be feasible for some if you could catch an accessible bus from here to Mutitjulu and down through Docker River and down all that way. The

average car sedan or four wheel drive vehicle is not an option and has occ health and safety implications for the person being lifted and for the lifter of the person.

5 Then I've got commercial air travel and I know I thought after reading the paper I
thought, yes, you're going to say but they're really exempt and yes, that's true and I
understand that. But I think that that was at the beginning five years ago, I believe
there needs to be some move about looking at and reviewing that current status and
seeing if something else can be built in to encourage more development to occur to
10 make light aircraft in the bush more accessible in some way. Only because light
aircraft there are used for – that is the infrastructure of the bush. It's used for
medicos obviously, it's used for the mail run, it's used for fruit and veg, all of those
sorts of things it's used for. It's used for health staff who come and go and visit, who
are not part of the clinic. And other government bodies like Centrelink, dentists,
15 teachers and visitors to people visiting either the Aboriginal community of their
family, or the families of the people who are providing services.

So I said well, it's lack of access. Where does the DDA and the Transport Sanders
figure in this scenario? I'll just leave that one as a question there, because I think
maybe as this is a review I thought it was an opportunity to raise the bar a bit in
20 relation to light aircraft. Especially you know this is the third millennium and when
are we going to begin to do anything about that? Now, what are the obligations
under the Act or the Act itself to take that up and do something with it?

And I guess I think can the matter of light planes and lack of access be given an in-
25 depth review as a human rights issue instead of an economic rationalist approach,
because as we know all of this stems from industry who thinks that it creates a
heavier burden, financial burden in implicating some of these expectations. Now
Qantas airline I just want to mention fairly briefly, but in Alice Springs it has a high
significance because we're a thousand miles from anywhere in every direction and I
30 guess the dilemma for Territorians here is that the only aircraft passenger carrier that
comes in is a 737.

Now, that is the biggest one. And it's a 737 that's one of those that have – that the
policy applies about height and width of wheelchairs when travelling. Now, it is a
35 valid argument that they have and they use occ health and safety also as a rationale
as to why they have introduced it. Except that the 737 has been coming here for a
long, long time and I've done a lot, a lot of travel and why is it that the chair could
always fit then, but can't do now. The issue is the now, rather than the future,
because I'm trying to be fair here, that the future will look after itself in terms of the
40 manufacture of wheelchairs and there will be an expectation that there will be
removable parts from a chair so it can conform and comply with the expectation and
policy of an airline.

45 However, at the moment there's an awful lot of chairs out there who do not do that
and for some there is an issue of expense if they're on benefits or there's an expense
of the lack of maybe appropriate expertise to do modifications that doesn't put the
user at risk or impair the standards – the Australian Standard that goes with the chair

in the first place, because as you know if you start messing around with it you lose that sort of quality. So I'm told and I believe that.

5 The policy states that if the right aircraft is not there then we will put you on another.
You might have to wait longer – well, that's okay – however, we're going to be
waiting a long time here because if anyone believes that they're going to put on an
airbus for one person with a disability to get where they want as an alternative, then
we're not being very realistic because it's not going to happen. Now, the
10 significance of all of this is what are the alternatives then if you cannot access
aeroplanes? Well, they're limited. I've put there are no alternatives, be it train,
coach, bus, private car and I have to say not even a horse or a camel because I was
trying to use a bit of levity to get an idea across.

15 Now, I did check out the train yesterday and I have to say I was a little bit impressed,
because we need to keep up to date with our own infrastructure in town as we go
along ourselves and it is not always the internet that provides the best information.
It's usually ringing up and talking to someone who's in the know, because the
internet did not have this information on it in relation to the Ghan travel. In fact I
20 guess the rolling stop from here to Darwin when they put it in might have improved
and accessed somewhat, so now they have – they called and I thought, “Oh my God,
I'll have to go and try this” a cherry picker to get you on board in Alice Springs and
in Darwin because there is no platform.

25 Tennant Creek, of course, and Katherine do not have any cherry picker, but she did
say that if that was the case then maybe they could make arrangements for that to
occur. So there was a move there to be obliging and accommodating. Here what's
not known is they have now developed a wheelchair of some type – I've not seen it,
but I will be doing that in the next couple of weeks – that does go down the aisle of
30 the train as it does down the aisle of a plane, so that you can be placed in wherever
you're sitting and I believe that there are toilet facilities available in the lounge/bar
area of the train and it's called Kangaroo Gold, you know the upmarket one in a
sleeper, that also has a certain amount of accessibility.

35 Now, of course, accessibility from their point of view and mine might be quite
different, but they're saying that those facilities are there. Not always with the
appropriate grab rails but they've got – they have made some consideration. The
other one I'd like to just mention in terms of accessing public transport is the scooter
as a wheelchair option or as a mobility aid. The scooter can be, if you know them at
all well, can be rather large, heavy and cumbersome and then you'll get the more
40 neater type. Now, some of that may be dependent on battery weight for extra
mileage I don't know, or it's also because a lot of men require a larger one because
they're heavier weight obviously.

45 Now, the footprint of the scooter is not able to match the footprints of a wheelchair
that are taken into consideration when the buses are made accessible. So there are
many scooters that you will hear complaints from, that say they cannot access public
transport. And that's very true, they cannot, they're too big and large. So I guess it's
an interest as if the standards are being delivered, what sort of determination do they

want to bring down about scooters in general in terms of the industry and access, otherwise there are going to be an awful lot of complaints in the future. At the moment although the increase is rising for people with disabilities, in the past that particular mobility aid was seen to belong to the aged domain and that's fast not becoming true.

I guess just in terms of the Alice Springs perspective that the lack of public transport in general does place an enormous strain on the community system if it's not available, on parents and carers, support workers and spouses. The community services and infrastructure is compromised or ill-used when public transport should be used, instead it's replaced by subsidised taxis and I have to say that many service providers do believe themselves that that is the answer and panacea to the problem.

I have to point out quite often that, no, it's not it's a special service and we're not asking for special services, we're asking for generic public services to be accessible so we can be the same citizens. It does affect employment and housing, and the government funding, it affects medical services and disability organisations and the non-community based organisations that are – I don't like the word welfare – but that's where, you know, are disadvantaged if they cannot utilise it.

Now, it would be fair to say that the four buses here in town are fully accessible. It's great. Have you seen them? They are wonderful looking, they've got bees on them. I'm on the side of one. All the indigenous kids say, "Hey, you're on the bus aren't you? Is that you?" I have to confess it is me, a bit of a shame job we'd say up here, but there you go. But what it doesn't have is auditory augmentation or any signage for vision impaired and hearing impaired people. So you will find that the Territory concentrates unfortunately a bit too much on wheelchair use as the denominator of access and they forget about those other disabilities that need to have the same attention, tactile – those TG - - -

MS GOLDSMITH: Tactile grounds.

MS CASTAGNA: TGIs, tactile ground indicators, I think it stands for, they are becoming more obvious in town and around, but on public transport no, not really, it's not well utilised and you don't hear government talking about those very much. But they will about wheelchair people because the most active disability type, if you want to use that yucky word, are the wheelchair users who get up and say something, or some of us do. That's the local scene in a general sense, so I'm not sure what other people have been saying here while I haven't been here.

MR BELL: You'll be able to read it on the - - -

MS CASTAGNA: I shall, I tell you, I shall and I meant to do that myself because there's probably lots of issues that I've not looked at because transport is one of my many duties and sometimes you overlook it. But these are the ones that do come to my mind on a constant basis in relation to, no we're not eligible for subsidised taxis because that's a mobility related issue, it's not for intellectual disability or a sight

disability, etcetera, etcetera, so those people are greatly disadvantaged by not having any access to public transport.

5 I don't know – and just as an off-line thing I suppose, a lot of training doesn't go into some people with bus drivers on how to manage people with disabilities and they do get treated rather badly. Now, not usually here, but there are instances where that does apply here too, be it the public transport or the subsidised taxis. And I notice the exemptions in the paper that was put out that had to do with limousines and hire cars, and that sort of thing and I guess in a more rural and remote area they become
10 part of what is seen as public access to vehicle travel if you don't have your own car, or an option for - - -

MR BELL: So you're questioning whether they should really have an exemption?

15 MS CASTAGNA: Yes, I am. Yes, because in the cities you have a lot more options, here the options are very, very few and I'm saying there is a great deal of traffic with what is called mini buses here. And mini buses are not taxis because you can negotiate a price. Not one of those are accessible or with a hydraulic ramp at the back and yet the amount of disability in the Indigenous community and in the town
20 camps around here is very high, which excludes those persons from utilising and coming in with family which is the want.

Umungana is a little community about 10 k out of town, 12 k. Lot of traffic, lot of taxi traffic between there and here, but not for people with disabilities unless they
25 want to pay the extra cost. I think it's significant that what I'm trying to say in all of the transport options here because public transport cannot be accessed, there is a huge cost to getting around. There were a lot of questions in the paper about data collection. Well, I think that's a funny one. I'm not sure who is supposed to collect the data and who has access to that data. We got something off the web that came
30 from the government. Now, while I'm not going to sit and argument with government statistic keeping, I would say it's totally inaccurate about what the true story is.

It was a bit difficult to read or extrapolate. It would appear that it's top end loaded in
35 terms of resources and I don't think it gives a real picture of what is really accessible in the Territory and I think it's very questionable. And I'm not sure again in terms of that expectation who and what department has ever been asked to collect data and what they collect it on. I think that's a bit suss. What was the other one? Information flow was another very interesting question I found and I found it
40 interesting from the point of view that information flow on the transport standards in general is not good here. It's very much reliant upon a service such as myself to get out and about. It's also very dependent I think on the internet as a means of getting the message out.

45 In rural and remote areas broad banding aside, that is not the best method of getting what people are trying to say. So they're rights as users of, because that's the way you put it in the paper as well – of public transport, most people would not know

about a lot of that. Have you got some questions of me instead of the other way around?

5 MR BELL: No, I'm listening to this with great interest. I guess you're right some of the issues you're raising have been raised in other forums. The data one for example is quite a difficult one. Data is collected at different points by different organisations. I mean the ABS, the Bureau of Statistics collects some data, but at the moment there is data being collected by Territory and State Government people on things like bus stops, accessible bus stops and the like. So I'm hoping that one of the 10 outcomes of this review will be that we'll have on the public record more data than we've had in the past, because obviously if we're trying to look at the extent to which the standards have been adopted and you know that there are some targets, then we can only form a view about that if we've got some data.

15 So that's obviously something we're going to spend a bit of time and effort on. And perhaps by the time the next five year review is done, we'll have much more transparency, much better accessible data. I take your point about the internet. The internet is a great invention. But it of course has it's own limitations. Somebody was telling us about the difficulties of reading a timetable on the internet if you have 20 a sight impairment and although there's some software which will convert a column of figures into words so that you can hear them, if a file has not been set up in a particular way that doesn't work.

25 So reading timetables is difficult for most of us, but it's even more difficult for people who have a sight impairment. So you're touching on some issues that we've certainly heard quite a bit of before. I think that what makes this hearing a little different is that we're in central Australia and the challenge is perhaps bigger. So we're hearing about some things that we haven't heard about before. I mean for example the issue of getting to and from Aboriginal communities is an issue.

30 I was going to ask you about one thing: we've talked about the buses, these low floor buses and they're good, but you've still got to get to the bus and from the bus to where you're wanting to do, so you've still got to have the access.

35 MS CASTAGNA: That's very true and here I have to say that the buses are very large, they're very good, but for a small town it means that if the funding is not provided by the NT – it's funded by the NT Government and managed by the Alice Springs town council. But what it doesn't do is – the routes are irregular and it doesn't stop often enough and therefore people do have a distance to walk before 40 they can access the public transport. Now, that happens everywhere I'm quite sure, but these buses perhaps if they were smaller and were more mobile they could stop at more places so people can do it.

45 I mentioned the extreme heat or the cold because they are real factors here. Forty degree heat you've got to walk from home to there, then perhaps wait and that might be a half an hour, especially if you're not a good timetable person and I'd be one of those, you're waiting in the heat for up to an hour, it's quite plausible for you to do that. So that's a systemic thing in operating a bus service I guess, but they are

significant factors in why people can't access it as well as. If only a certain amount of funding is given to run a bus line then Government surely has some responsibility to be able to make it more accessible under the terms of what we're talking about today, because that is a barrier, a major barrier for people accessing public transport.

5

There was the good question about what improvements have we seen? Nil, none, yenti, forget it; all of those could be used here because, yes, other than we've got the buses, but all of those others, not really at all. Can I ask you a question in relation to the coaches and the tourist buses? I mean when are they obligated to be getting to demonstrate at least some coaches on route somewhere, or is that not part of what this was all about? That would be a public carrier surely.

10

MR BELL: My interpretation is that the coaches have a target just like any other bus service. Now, tourism is – the tourism sector is perhaps a little different, but when we're talking about coaches between, say, Alice Springs and Darwin, I think that – my interpretation is that there is a target. So I was really interested in what you – I think it was you that said about AAT Kings.

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MS CASTAGNA: Yes.

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MR BELL: Yes.

MS CASTAGNA: See, they have a little commuter one down at the bus – down at the Rock, and I guess they've learned that that's an advantage, because what's not being said or what's not evidence-based at the moment, 'cause stats are also not being kept is the number of people with a disability from overseas and interstate that visit Alice Springs. And how do I know that? I'm not a tourist bureau, because I also loan out equipment and they ask me advice about what's accessible and what's here and where to go and all of those sorts of things. And so it's a major issue.

25

30

We had an example of a lady from ACT. She had gone to a lot of planning and a lot of organisation and expense to come up here, because she had been up here prior to – she was a car-accident injured person, and she had organised with Wheelabout in Queensland to have a vehicle here. Now, somewhere along the line the communication got very muddled, and when she got here the vehicle was not here. And in fact the vehicle was not even in the Territory. And that meant that she couldn't do what she wanted to do, so she chose to – and I rang, and I got him, he was in London after a medical appointment. I thought that was quite cute. But she cut her losses and went back home and is waiting now for the viable transport to be done, which I think I can get – offer her this time. But she lost out all of that money because she was under an understanding it was available, and it wasn't.

35

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MR BELL: Yes, well, this venue here, for example, where we're having the hearing is used for some quite major conferences. And so the question is if somebody wants to come to a conference here, how are they going to manage? Well, this venue is nicely set up, so it is fully accessible, as are the facilities next door. But people who come to a conference want to also have a look around the town, and that is when I think we start to run into some of these issues. And then if they want to go to Ayers

45

Rock, they have another set of problems. So I think we have to be more concerned about that because we have an aging population, and I think we have a new generation of people who have disabilities but who now expect to be able to do the sort of things that able-bodied tourists are able to do and go the same sorts of places.
5 And so we had some discussion about that in Darwin of course, because the folk in Darwin are quite interested in that issue.

MS CASTAGNA: Well, I have a personal example with Darwin, because I wanted to go to the wildlife park. There wasn't one vehicle available. I had to, and it was
10 my choice, but it cost a lot of money to do it, I had to catch a taxi there and then hang on to him while you went and did your thing, 'cause you're very nervous about taxis coming back and getting you in Darwin, 'cause I've been there too.

MR BELL: Yes, we heard about that.
15

MS CASTAGNA: Did you? I'm sure you're - - -

MR BELL: But let me ask you, was it - the wildlife park itself was quite accessible?

20 MS CASTAGNA: It's very accessible.

MR BELL: You see, so we have this situation where we have a hotel that's accessible, a park that's accessible - - -

25 MS CASTAGNA: Exactly, yes, yes.

MR BELL: - - - some difficulties about getting between the two. And I think that's really very much what we're concerned about with this and - - -

30 MS CASTAGNA: It's very patchy. And the improvement or things happening is not obvious on the ground to people with disabilities or service providers assisting and supporting people with disabilities.

MR BELL: Certainly before the standards came into force, there was some effort in
35 a number of places to sort of anticipate the standards. So if you go back in history, you can see steps being taken – back in the mid-'90s even, but this is an issue about maintaining momentum. And it's sometimes the case that when something new like this comes in that the easy things are addressed first. And I'm not saying the bus service is necessarily an easy thing to address, 'cause it obviously costs money.

40 MS CASTAGNA: I don't think it is.

MR BELL: But you would appreciate that it probably takes the council, for example, longer to address kerbs and gutters and things like that, because this is all
45 built, and it's expensive to alter. And I think that some of that thinking lay behind giving the time period of 25 years to get some of these things fixed. And so what we're seeing is that where councils are starting to address some of the accessibility

issues in terms of footpaths and road crossing and things, they're looking at the points at which there is most traffic.

5 So one jurisdiction was telling us, for example, they were concerned to make sure that around the movie theatres there was good wheelchair access, and that low-floor buses were available on that particular route. They weren't necessarily available on all the other routes. So progress in this area is not easy to measure, and we will be having a difficult time to measure it. But obviously we will be trying to make some assessment of progress.

10 MS CASTAGNA: I think in defence of the Alice Springs Town Council here, it does have its own access advisory committee that's made up of not just people with disabilities but, you know, the other relevant Government departments, like Planning and Infrastructure and all of those sorts of things. And at the local level, things are
15 very – can happen very well, and can do it – I guess it's just that I'm a bit cynical, 'cause I've been around a fair while as well, and I guess I was growing up, and I grew up, in a time where there was none, so you fight harder for those sorts of things. But I really do believe that 25 years is a long time for people to take seriously that they've got to move and make a change.

20 I think in more rural and remote areas, it's a harder world and it's a man's world in a way that it's tough, and I think that they ride the edge about what their obligations are and push it to the max. If it's not monitored, if it's not kept an eye on, then I think things can slip by. So while I'm happy to make allowances for some excuses
25 for all of that, at the end of the day I think the long time span from the five years to the whatever is far too long, in some circumstances in some issues. So I'm not being black and white, 'cause I do believe that there are enormous areas of grey, and I take your point as well and I'm aware of – but a lot of people are changing their stocks because technology is improving what the facilities of buses and trains and whatever.

30 And also people's expectation of having a more luxurious way to travel is taken on board, and therefore that is a pre-empter to me for people to change their stocks. Otherwise, they're using old buses. The old buses come to the Territory, or the old buses get utilised for businesses. Therefore they don't have to be changed or altered.
35 We're going to miss out, and we are missing out already, because, you know, the southern people will try and get buyers. Well, if there was a proviso, yes, well, if it's re-sold into another State or something, then it should be accessible. I just want to see a bit of it done.

40 MR BELL: Yes.

MS CASTAGNA: I'm not going to live that much longer. I want to see something.

45 MR BELL: Well - - -

MS CASTAGNA: This is a mechanism to see that happen.

MR BELL: No, you're quite right. And that's exactly the purpose of the review. It's to take stock of where things are at and get some measure of progress. And that's certainly our job. Okay. Well, now, was there anything else you wanted to cover? I might have a few questions, but - have you tried going on – getting on the
5 Ghan?

MS CASTAGNA: Well, after I heard about – I knew about – I thought it was like a ramp-type thing, and after checking it yesterday I thought, “Oh God.” Yes, I've been meaning to get there. I'm going to. And it's going to be, like, in the next seven
10 days. I'm going to try the cherry-picker. You want to think of a cherry-picker to sit your butt on and go up off the ground?

MS GOLDSMITH: With that, you were talking about – have they manufactured a particular wheelchair to use in the Ghan? I didn't really understand what - - -
15

MS CASTAGNA: Not in the Ghan. It's like the plane. You transfer on to a chair that is narrow. It never suits any bum that I've ever seen in existence.

MS GOLDSMITH: Right.
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MS CASTAGNA: And I'm at a level where I've seen lots of bums, and I'm telling you, you don't. So you get on to that so that you can be taken down the aisle and placed in your seat or transferred to your seat as many are capable. So at the moment, it's probably fair to say that the facilities on the Ghan at the moment are
25 more for paraplegic persons and wheelchair-users than for a quadriplegic or high support person needs. It wouldn't fit, and they told me that, so - - -

MS GOLDSMITH: Because it would mean then - if you were to take the full trip, it takes three days or something?
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MS CASTAGNA: Well, it takes about, yes, two and a bit.

MS GOLDSMITH: And that would mean every time you wanted to go anywhere else on the train, like to - - -
35

MS CASTAGNA: Yes. I would say - - -

MS GOLDSMITH: - - - you would have to get some people to - - -

MS CASTAGNA: I would say that's right. Now, I didn't even ask would they do that while travelling, or whether it's just - - -
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MS GOLDSMITH: At the station.

MS CASTAGNA: Yes.
45

MR BELL: Yes, 'cause you've got to get to the restaurant car.

MS CASTAGNA: Yes, you've got to go – and they will deliver the meals, and that's what they'll tell you.

MR BELL: Right.

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MS CASTAGNA: So they are making alternative arrangements for that to happen, but it's not the norm.

MS GOLDSMITH: No.

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MS CASTAGNA: And it quite often means that if they have paid money for a good bus – a train adventure, then they're not going to be meeting anyone 'cause they're stuck in their cabin, sleeper or Kangaroo Gold - - -

15 MS GOLDSMITH: Right, so you're stuck in the one spot.

MS CASTAGNA: - - - which is for upmarket people, and people on a benefit would not be travelling there unless they happen to be working persons or have a lot of money in the first place.

20

MS GOLDSMITH: Okay, so it's not quite - - -

MS CASTAGNA: It's not equitable - - -

25 MS GOLDSMITH: No, no.

MS CASTAGNA: - - - is the issue. So yes, John, I will go and try the cherry-picker, not for you but for the community I will do it for, and check it out. I get into some very interesting situations doing this, I have to tell you, scary ones, too.

30

MS GOLDSMITH: The only thing I was wondering about: you were saying that – have you come across any coaches in the Territory that – I'm talking about the high - - -

35 MR BELL: High-floor.

MS GOLDSMITH: - - - high-floor coaches that have the external wheelchair loaders?

40 MS CASTAGNA: No.

MS GOLDSMITH: Is that the right terminology?

45 MS CASTAGNA: None of those. The only thing I've ever seen, and it would be now at least eight years ago, there was a bus that came that was accessible for wheelchair users, inside the bus, and I know they're around, but they're very - in short demand I would say, so – and they had a group of people with disabilities who were travelling around, so they had hired the bus, the coach - - -

MR BELL: I see.

MS GOLDSMITH: Specially.

5 MS CASTAGNA: - - - because it was more of a coach, I guess, than that. So that's the only time, but no.

MS GOLDSMITH: No.

10 MS CASTAGNA: But there is a lot of traffic between here and Darwin in terms of McCaffertys and Greyhound in general for people. So it is still an option for people if there was something available that was accessible in a bus line, big or small, but it's not available. I mean, sometimes we're looking at – we don't think outside the square, and maybe what could be done is that at least they had a couple of times a
15 week or even once a week a trip that went from here to Darwin that was accessible, and if it had to stay overnight – but they whiz along much faster than those big ones anyway, or at the same rate.

20 So it is not extending the journey at all, and that's something that people can take on board when they're travelling, which they do. We only think of big things because that's what's out for the general public. But the general public, you know, is quite happy to go on commuter buses. A lot of the tourist industry tours here arrange for those four-wheel-drive, high off the ground or commuter buses doing other places where you don't need that sort of four-wheel drive. So there's lots of options already
25 here, but not accessible.

MR BELL: Do you have school buses in Alice Springs?

30 MS CASTAGNA: Yes, we do, and probably Paul from council will talk about that later.

MR BELL: Okay.

35 MS CASTAGNA: A lot of them also use the public buses as well.

MR BELL: Yes.

MS CASTAGNA: But they do have those, and they are not accessible, no.

40 MR BELL: No. Well, they are not currently required to be accessible.

MS CASTAGNA: No.

45 MR BELL: But the issue of school buses has been raised in a number of hearings.

MR WATERFORD: The schools are not even very accessible.

MS CASTAGNA: No, that's improving - - -

MR BELL: We just got a comment that the schools are not very accessible. Well, that's a whole other issue, of course, and we have done some work in the past in that area. I guess it takes time, and schools that were built in a different era – you know, I went to school in a two-storey building that was no way accessible to people in wheelchairs, and I just - - -

MR WATERFORD: There are not many schools that were built when you were going to school.

10 MR BELL: No. Unfortunately we can't pick you up back there, because you're out of range, but – so there are some interesting issues around this. But the point's been made that it doesn't matter whether you're going to school or whether you want to go shopping; you want to be confident that you can get all the way there and all the way back and not get stranded. And so there's still a lack of confidence. When all of
15 your buses are low-floor, well, that's a big start, 'cause in some jurisdictions you sort of have one chance in four that you've got a low-floor bus. But then you've still got to deal with the other parameters. And that uncertainty factor is still serious enough that it causes – it discourages some people from even trying.

20 MS CASTAGNA: Just picking up on the school buses, and I will use the example again of Umungana, which is out from here, there are quite a lot of people – students and students with disabilities who can't regularly access school because there's no accessible bus to bring them into town. So that has serious ramifications on their development and their ability to be educated anyway. Now, I'm sure that happens in
25 some other rural areas. So again it's a bit like our light aircraft issue; it needs to be looked at in terms of where it's relevant too, whether it should be accessible or not. You know, if you're – well, in some places I thought they did have to have accessibility in some areas, if it was so far out of town, or not?

30 MS GOLDSMITH: The school buses?

MS CASTAGNA: Mm.

MR BELL: Not that I recall.
35

MS CASTAGNA: Right.

MR BELL: But the issue about getting kids with disabilities to school is something that's obviously of concern.
40

MS CASTAGNA: It's a big expense to Government, because they have to - - -

MR BELL: Correct. And different States and Territories do things differently.

45 MS CASTAGNA: Differently.

MR BELL: Yes. But you're right, it's a big expense. And there are interesting problems, which – you would understand that if you arrange for a service and then it's not continued right through the year, you have employment problems - - -

5 MS CASTAGNA: Yes.

MR BELL: - - - for the people who provide that service in the school holiday period. We were having a discussion in Darwin yesterday about their bus with the eight-seater and how they could use it for the U3A people to go out to Kakadu in the school holidays. I am watching to see if there's some progress there, because it's a way of keeping the bus utilised.

MS CASTAGNA: Yes.

15 MR BELL: And of course from the bus company's view point, it's not a big deal because they can put seats in that bus if they want. It's got a special floor of the sort that you see in aircraft, I mean, it's just got pins that you can lock in.

MS CASTAGNA: Yes.

20

MR BELL: So you can put seats in and use it as an ordinary bus if you want to. But there's still an issue about keeping people employed. And obviously if – it's better if you can keep people employed continuously if they're a bus driver. So that's what's behind some of that. Okay. Paul, did you want to say some things too? Do you want to come and sit over here?

25

MR BARREAU: Yes, thanks. My name's Paul Barreau. I'm from the Alice Springs Town Council. I've just got a few points. Most of the things have been addressed that I was spoken – has been heard from both Barry and his cohort there, I'm not sure what her name was, sorry, and Michelle. But I sort of come from a council point of view. And I must admit, council is probably a little bit reactive rather than proactive in addressing some of the situations, 'cause I mean, as Michelle said, we've got the Access Advisory Committee, and where issues are raised that we try and address those, so that's what we try and do. And sometimes it takes a bit of time, because you need funds and if it's a big job it becomes fairly significant and council budget is a bit limited unfortunately. But I'll just read through what I've written.

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The council area has only buses, trains and taxis. Trains and taxis are privately owned, so we have no control over them. There are three taxis and one hire vehicle with wheelchair facilities. And there's of course the airport, which is controlled by the Federal Government, so the council has no control over the airport. And as Michelle said, there's no disabled public transport facilities for tourists, so Uluru, MacDonnell Ranges or any of the tourist spots around town. So anybody with a disability, with a wheelchair, simply can't go to these places unless they can get private people to make them get into a car, which is not always easy for those people.

45

As Michelle again said, even disabled people from the Aboriginal communities have to travel 200 kilometres or more, and sometimes they're stuck in the back of a troop carrier, which is not very comfortable. A lot of these people have to get treatment at the Alice Springs Hospital, and that's the only way they can get there. Some of the
5 medical problems they have doesn't allow them to fly, or if they do fly they need a carer, and the carer, they can't fit in a normal light plane that is going to land at these areas. The council of course has no power to enforce and tour operators to provide disabled facilities, and any remote community access is the responsibility basically of the NT Government, through perhaps legislation.

10 I know for instance that Buslink, the operator, they're attempting to alter some of the bus routes, but only to pick up tourists, not disabled people. And we know for a fact that the Bindi Centre is – there's no bus drop-off at the Bindi Centre, which would be advantageous. The trouble is with the Alice Springs, it's got a – we have got a funny
15 system here, because the buses are managed by Buslink with the Northern Territory Government. Council is caught in the middle. What happens is Buslink send their invoice to council, council pays them and then sends invoices on to the Northern Territory Government to get refunds. So and council is trying to address that, 'cause we don't really want – see the need of us being caught in the middle of it.

20 But council does have the obligation under the agreement to supply the bus stops, and we do that, and we also provide shade structures for some of the bus stops where there's room on the footpath area to put them. And a lot of the bus stops do not have disabled access, because when you've got – we got that low-level bus, we got four of
25 those. The low-level buses, you need to have a kerb, so the bus floor drops down to a kerb level. Some of the bus stops, like on the Northern Territory Government roads, like Larapinta Drive, etcetera, where there's no kerb, there's only a table drain, there is no kerb so there's no – people can't board the – people with wheelchairs can't board the buses in those areas.

30 MR BELL: So the buses don't have a ramp up to the - - -

MR BARREAU: No, no, the whole – when the bus stops, the whole floor drops down - - -

35 MR BELL: Yes.

MR BARREAU: - - - to kerb level. And you have to mount it at kerb level. If it's lower than kerb level, you can't get on. And - - -

40 MS CASTAGNA: And you have to be pretty good to get up that, 'cause I tried it once and I got a bit of a nifty chair here and the front wheels lift up and you just about go to do a somersault. It's a bit steep. The gradient is just too great.

45 MR BARREAU: I think Michelle enjoys these challenges at times.

MR BELL: Yes, the Darwin buses have ramps, and so after they've dropped down there's still a little bit of a slope, but it depends on the camber on the road as to - - -

MS CASTAGNA: Yes, exactly.

MR BARREAU: Yes.

5 MR BELL: - - - how feasible that is to get up the ramp. I must say the Darwin ramps were pretty good, I thought. But there's some quite nice engineering design there, and very quick to deploy.

MS CASTAGNA: Which is important.

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MR BARREAU: Now, as I was saying, council has very little input on the bus routes, like, and I said that Buslink is trying to address that and come up with a more practical way of doing things.

15 MS GOLDSMITH: Sorry, just to clarify, at the moment does the Northern Territory Government specify the routes and the timetables for Alice?

MR BARREAU: Yes, the Northern Territory Government pays \$X, and it has – there's a specified number of kilometres you can travel in a bus for a 12-month
20 period. So you've got to stick to your X number of kilometres. I'm not sure what the number is, but it's several hundred thousand kilometres per year. And that's all you get funded for. You don't get any more. So you can't go a little bit extra further distance or you can't make a slight detour to drop somebody off, although some of the bus drivers, like, with older people, they might pick them up in between stops or
25 drop them off near where their house is, but I think it's roughly about \$2 million was what the Government's been spending.

MR BELL: So the funding formula has some degree of inflexibility in it - - -

30 MS CASTAGNA: Some – huge, John.

MR BARREAU: Some - it's totally inflexible. You cannot vary it by more than about one kilometre per year.

35 MR BELL: Yes.

MS CASTAGNA: 'Cause we have tried to negotiate with Buslink to change that for several years now, and it looked promising at one stage, and has fallen in a hole. So it meets no one's needs as a consequence. So there's pretty – some very strange
40 thinking going on at Government level, because the other argument is they're bug buses with very few people in them. And if they were more flexible in what they could do, the usage would increase tremendously.

MR BARREAU: Yes. No, Michelle's quite right. Most of the time you see buses
45 one or two people in, if any, and one of the points I've written here is that due to the small area and short distances to most facilities in Alice Springs, it's only five Ks mainly to most places, every – to me it would be far cheaper and more convenient for disabled and anybody else to have an on-call system, where people can ring up, say,

“Can you pick me up,” maybe subsidise for disabled people and maybe the normal commuter as well. I think it’s about \$2 million that the NT Government spends, and I think for that sort of money it could introduce a really good dial-up system, at-call system. And it would probably be far better used, I would say, and far more
5 convenient for all people, including disabled people.

MS CASTAGNA: Can I respond to that?

10 MR BARREAU: Yes, yes.

MS CASTAGNA: I would prefer to see that if there was a dial-up system it is the same for all. Having a disability is immaterial. The same is what we want, not more. And therefore if it was a dial-up system, then you could pay a fee, but the fee that we all pay would be the same, ‘cause we’re talking about generic services here, and we
15 are just part of a human body with something a bit wonky somewhere.

MR BELL: I think there are some experiments being done elsewhere in Australia on exactly these lines, so I think there’s room to explore some differences.

20 MS CASTAGNA: Yes.

MR BELL: Paul, I was going to ask, does the Territory Government give the Alice Springs Council any assistance, for example, in providing services and facilities for people with disabilities? Is there anything that’s - - -
25

MR BARREAU: No, no specific - - -

MR BELL: Nothing specific?

30 MR BARREAU: No, no.

MR BELL: And what about from the Commonwealth Government? Is there any assistance from the Commonwealth Government? I guess the Family and Community Services has some things to get people to medical appointments.
35

MR BARREAU: Yes. We don’t get any specific money. We could apply for grants. If something came up that was big enough to ask for a grant for we could do that, but most times council just does it as part of their ongoing program.

40 MR BELL: Yes.

MR BARREAU: We have, like, for instance I was just going to sort of go away from the transport system very slightly and I was going to say, we’ve got disabled parking around town in key locations, we hope. There’s always more demand for it because this time of year, with a lot of tourists, a lot of people use and abuse, I must
45 say, disabled parking bays. Council has, for instance, in the last – a couple of years ago, realigned some of Todd Mall so that there is disabled access – wheelchair access

into shops, and this year we got \$100,000 allocated to do part of the mall, Todd Mall, so that there's wheelchair access to all shops.

5 MS CASTAGNA: And we're going to keep that money, Paul, aren't we, and it's going to get done this time, isn't it, Paul?

MR BARREAU: It's getting done this year.

10 MS CASTAGNA: Good man. I knew it was.

MR BARREAU: It's been delayed for two years. It's just that we didn't have enough money before. It came in a lot more expensive than what we thought.

15 MR BELL: I must say, I do like your little mobility access map. I think that's a great idea. I'm going to take that back with me.

MR BARREAU: Yes, we actually went around – one of the engineers and myself went around about four years ago, I think, and we actually physically measured the grade on all the footpaths in Alice Springs and located all those places. It's a bit out of date now, but we want to update it and get it - - -

MS CASTAGNA: The Access Advisory Committee, of which, surprise, I'm on, will make sure that it stays up to date and something happens.

25 MR BELL: I think it's very useful.

MR BARREAU: In many instances – I think Barry mentioned it during the break – a lot of the slopes on footpaths are far greater than what is allowable, and that goes back to years and years and years ago when these buildings were built with no thought whatsoever to that sort of situation, and it's almost impossible to fix them. You've just got to live with that, unfortunately. You're stuck with it.

30 MR BELL: Yes. It's a bit like some of the underground railway stations in Sydney which would cost hundreds of thousands to raise by just 50 millimetres, and yet that gap up to the train is a major problem.

MR BARREAU: Yes. And if you try to fix them in one spot, they would create bigger problems in other areas as well. So that's basically all I've got to add.

40 MR BELL: Okay. Well, thanks for that, because it's interesting to get a perspective from Local Government. We have had people from Local Government in a number of the other hearings who are out counting bus stops and looking at how accessible things are. There are some real challenges for Local Government in this. I mean, some local Governments don't even know how many bus stops they have got. So

45 we'll be doing some – although this is a progress report, there's not a lot of sort of base data from which to say, "Well, that was the situation in the year 2002."

MS CASTAGNA: That's what I was amused about, the evidence based upon - - -

MR BELL: Yes, that's right.

MS CASTAGNA: How can you start with something when you have nothing, to move five years down the track?

5

MR BELL: Yes, when you're not quite sure what was there in 2002.

MS CASTAGNA: Exactly.

10 MR BELL: But at least if we do a good job on this one, we'll have some good data for the next one. So the next one will be a much tougher hurdle in all sorts of ways. But we have been able to get some – we know some Local Government areas have got data on what they have invested and how much effort they have put in. For example, I mean, the work on Todd Mall is all about public accessibility.

15

MR BARREAU: Yes.

MR BELL: It mightn't be public transport, but the people who are wanting to get to those shops, that's all part of that same equation, so it's certainly of interest.

20

MS CASTAGNA: Was it brought to your mind in Darwin, John, that Local Government in the Northern Territory is of a different ilk to, like, Local Government in other States and Territories, because in the Territory, Local Government does not have responsibility for planning – an infrastructure and town planning and all of those things, which is normally the responsibility of a Local Government. So in some ways those responsibilities have never been devolved to Local Government; they still remain within the realm of - - -

25

MR BELL: With the department.

30

MS CASTAGNA: Yes, of Government per se, and that does impact quite mightily on change being swifter than it could be.

MR BELL: Yes. Does the department have an access committee to talk, because when you start to think about planning for growth in municipalities such as this, the potential to use public transport can be strongly influenced by the way you design the lay-out, by the way you plan for expansion. I just wonder how much interaction there is with people with disabilities.

35

40 MR BARREAU: Council, as Michelle said, has no say in the planning. Well, we do have a say, but not as far as the building itself goes. We do have a say in access to the building from the streets, so council has got control of the streets and stormwater drainage systems and we can ask developers to provide access in various ways – either carpark access or disability access to a building, but we have no control of the building itself.

45

MS CASTAGNA: But certainly not on planning, whereas council has – is part of the planning committee that's set up by Government. But this is where it ends,

because they're representatives in their own right. They don't necessarily have to represent the views of council, and I know that because I used to sit on the council. So you're not having an advantage on having two aldermen on that advisory committee, because if they choose they can go against what could be seen as the opinion of council in the main. So they don't have to go with that.

But in terms of looking at advisory, change has to start at that level, and I guess – this year I have established a relationship with the Department of Infrastructure and Planning and I receive all the planning notices that go out. Now, what that has done is increased my workload – huh, lovely – but I look at all of those and then I question, because they're the planning either for development or actually happening. I love it when I see carparks – carports and stuff or a verandah going up because it means I can mind my own business and I don't have to do anything about it, but when there's something that's like a service point or Tennant Creek, then I ring up and ask questions and put in a submission asking that access be looked at in these areas.

Now, that's a beginning, but that's not good enough because that's only one person doing it, and there needs to be a mechanism where that can happen at a Government level, where that advice is sought. But they have met half way and they are very constructive in their points of view and very quick to respond to my requests, so, yes. And I have been asked to go to a hearing on several occasions in defence of several planning instruments that would have been diabolical had they got through.

MR BELL: Okay. Well, look, I think that's – I don't have anything else to raise. Michelle, have you got anything else you wanted to raise?

MS CASTAGNA: Do you know what's going to happen? I'll get out there and look at my piece of paper and I'll say, "Oh" - - -

MR BELL: That's all right. You can send us a little note. I mean, we are very happy to receive submissions up until the 24th – well, yes, to 24 August, so feel free to write us.

MS CASTAGNA: Well, I am in the middle of doing that and as I said, it looked so woeful today I wasn't going to bring it under any circumstances, because it didn't have quality attached to it, so I thought I had better wait. I'll just rattle my chain and hopefully you'll get the gist of what we're saying - - -

MR BELL: All right.

MS CASTAGNA: - - - and that the implementation of the disability – of the transport standards is really not such a great thing to gloat about in the Territory is the bottom line, and movement from A to the end of year five, not good. The next one would want to be much better, and I want to see some muscle somewhere being applied to a few of these recalcitrant peoples.

MR BELL: All right. We will see what we can do to help.

MS CASTAGNA: That would be good.

MR BELL: All right. Well look, thank you very much and thank you for coming, and, Paul, thank you, too, for your comments.

5

MS CASTAGNA: Thank you for the opportunity.

MR BELL: That was very helpful.

10 MR BARREAU: Thank you.

MR BELL: So, Gerard, I think you're next. Gerard, you're from Social and Emotional Wellbeing?

15 MR WATERFORD: I'm a counsellor with Central Australian Aboriginal Congress. Part of my role is also to look at the development of community capacity and to proceed in Aboriginal communities, Umungana and Santa Theresa, and as part of that I suppose the disability sort of issue comes out. But I'm also previously – one of the reasons I'm here is, I was the program manager for aged and disability services in
20 Alice Springs, what was it, about nine – about ten years ago.

MR BELL: Yes.

25 MR WATERFORD: And a little bit like Michelle, I haven't, and am unlikely really to get the opportunity to spend a lot of time writing submissions - - -

MR BELL: We understand.

30 MR WATERFORD: - - - but will just take the opportunity to talk more generally about the issues. Certainly, like Michelle was saying, there's a perception that not much has changed. In fact, ten years ago it was almost better in some ways. As I was sort of saying earlier, there's not a lot of infrastructure that was actually here when I went to school. All the schools and stuff like that are reasonably new and so are most of the public transport service systems to some extent. There's been some
35 improvements in terms of pathways that the council has sort of done. Very little sort of change in terms of public transport sort of system. Probably some decline in terms of what is privately available transport options for people with disabilities.

40 I remember back when the decision was made to put in the buses here – it must have been about 15 years ago or more – and me and Michelle and others turned up and were suggesting a call system of smaller, accessible buses would suit the clientele. Unfortunately they had all these buses that they wanted to recycle and we got stuck with them. We're looking for public transport infrastructure in remote areas and maybe the buses could go out there. That might be nice – accessible buses out to
45 Santa Theresa could be lovely. We might need a road as well, but we'll work on that later.

I work primarily these days and for the last six years in the Aboriginal community as a counsellor. As part of that we deal with disabilities all the time. The level of – whilst there doesn't seem to be good data or any particular audit on the level of disability among the Aboriginal population that I've seen – although there was some
5 ABSs – the level of disability is much greater in Aboriginal community and that's as a consequence, a whole lot of other public health and the lack of primary and preventative sort of health structures in most communities.

10 MR BELL: Yes.

MR WATERFORD: We've had the town council here. The town council looks extraordinarily good when you compare it to the town camps. There is no public transport access – public transport provided in any of the town camps. Some of the town camps are close to – one of the town camps is close to where you might be able
15 to access a bus. All the others are some distance from public transport. The only access that most of the town camps have to public transport is either through a Commonwealth funded health initiative, the Congress buses, but they're primarily to deliver people to medical appointments or the hospital visits. The rest is operated by mini buses. Tanganjera Council, which is the housing association manager, used to
20 provide some public – or supported accommodation, supported transport. That no longer exists. They run out of money to do anything.

It's good timing, because as you might have heard there's a national emergency sort of happening and as part of that we're hoping to get some infrastructure changes
25 because much of the Aboriginal community is in remote areas, but what's happening in town - which will be sensational. Some of us are a little bit cynical, but we're still trying to sort of keep hoping that it will happen.

Whilst you're not here to look at the sort of accommodation issues for people with
30 disabilities, there is a catastrophe, I suppose, in disability accommodation, particularly in remote communities. As far as I can see there's been no accommodation built in remote communities since 10 years ago, 15 years ago – I suppose since Mutitjula was set up. Because of the lack of any accommodation out there it means that it's very difficult to put, you know – people with major
35 disabilities – Aboriginal people with major disabilities who live in remote communities are either forced to be cared for at home – often with quite high levels of need and without any access to public transport, other than, you know, they need to be able to transport virtually in a private car, if such a car is available, across some fairly rough roads usually, or they use the accommodation – yes, the transport that
40 might be provided through the health clinic, and that's usually only to access clinical services.

What it means is that for people with mobility issues who have chosen to live at home, and they're basically fairly isolated at home in terms of social, recreational,
45 employment, training, any of those sorts of services, even shopping, they basically can't access. It does tend to mean also that a lot of people are forced, pretty much by the lack of transport and the lack of access to services out there, to relocate into

supported accommodation in town, if it exists, which it often doesn't. It often means that they're forced into aged care facilities as well, if they exists, if there's vacancies.

5 On the town camps it's a bit similar. You know, you can access more services on the town camps because Alice Springs is a fairly large sort of service and you certainly can access accessible vehicles. As far as I can sort of see, other than some health clinics that will have accessible vehicles, there's no health accessible vehicles on any of the communities. On the town camps you can get on the Congress buses, and if you can get a taxi to go – with the taxis, you might be able to get the taxi, otherwise
10 it's all mini bus, which does tend to again mean that poor social, recreational, any other sorts of things, Aboriginal people with a disability – mobility disability, don't access them, basically, can't be taken to them unless they can access a private car. It also means that people often can't – you know, from remote communities, or even from town camp, it's an added difficulty and expense to access sort of respite
15 services, to access anything, really.

MR BELL: So the town camps don't have public transport access, with one exception, I think you said.

20 MR WATERFORD: You could say that Old Timers Camp, and to some extent Little Sisters is sort of close enough to a bus stop that they could almost walk to. None of the bus loops – most of the town camps are on the fringes of town.

MR BELL: Yes.
25

MR WATERFORD: The bus routes don't go to the fringes of town. They tend to stop before that, which means there's a fair hike to where you can get to a bus stop.

MR BELL: So somebody with a disability is not going to be able to manage that.
30

MR WATERFORD: No. I suppose, you know, the bottom line is that it means that people's independent living is compromised. It forces them into often to be quite – to having to either live with a very sub-standard sort of quality of life or it places an enormous burden on family; their capacity to sustain their sort of daily living skills
35 gets compromised. They're often forced into higher levels of supported accommodation than they would otherwise be doing and that's primarily because of an access issue.

MR BELL: So basically you are arguing that the community is bearing a – well, the community and the individuals concerned, are bearing additional costs as a result of the lack of access.

MR WATERFORD: Yes.

45 MR BELL: Yes.

MR WATERFORD: There has been very little – it is opportune now, with all this discussion about what is the infrastructure requirements to sort of build the standard

of community life in remote communities, to do something like this and perhaps to do a little bit of an audit of what sort of long-term sustainable public transport infrastructure is required. There is still no bitumised roads to most of the remote centres around Central Australia. There is a recently sort of privately tendered,
5 what's called the bush bus, that can get people to some communities on a fee for service. Prior to that there was very little even of that. The bush bus though, because it goes over rough roads, is a fairly expensive sort of service and is not terribly suitable for people in fragile health or with major disabilities. It can't take wheelchairs as far as I know.

10 MR BELL: So which agency is providing the support for the bush bus, do you know?

MR WATERFORD: I'm not sure. Michelle, do you know?

15 MS CASTAGNA: Gerard, I thought you would know. I was waiting for the answer.

MR WATERFORD: I suspect there has been some support through something like
20 Aboriginal Health, because it allows – it basically allows people to be transported home from hospital and stuff like that, but it's primarily a fee for service sort of arrangement where, because of things like the development of a Centrepay sort of system, where they can – where people can book up and their money comes out of their next cheque.

25 MS CASTAGNA: And perhaps even the Department of Correctional Services can have some input into that, because many people are discharged on a Friday night with no means to go anywhere and then they become a problem in the town area. So there was a vested interest for lots of people, to ensure people get back to their home
30 communities. But the short answer is, I'll have to get my friend in who runs the bush buses.

MR WATERFORD: And I wouldn't be at all surprised if it's primarily a fee for service sort of basis.

35 MS CASTAGNA: Oh, it is.

MR WATERFORD: So maybe the Government departments actually will fund – you know, pay for people's transport a little bit, but I'm not quite sure whether
40 there's a generalised subsidy provided to the bush bus to sort of run it. And it's not a big service. I think they have once a week sort of service up to Tennant Creek and some of the communities in between. Maybe once a week out to the Docker River sort of way. Maybe once a week out to Indamoo. There might be about three buses on the road at any time.

45 MS CASTAGNA: Limited.

MR WATERFORD: It's very limited.

MR BELL: Now, Michelle has just made the point that it's important for some of these people to get back to their family situation, their support networks. I mean, is that your experience too, that these support networks play an important role and having a public transport system that allows them to get back to those support
5 networks is therefore of particular importance in Aboriginal communities? I am just wondering how far I can run that argument.

MS CASTAGNA: I think you could push that as crucial, for offenders, anyway.

10 MR WATERFORD: I think you can sort of say that the Alice Springs Correctional Centre is the biggest provider of supported accommodation for people with disabilities, particularly people with challenging behaviour as a consequence of head injuries and those sorts of things, who actually require some level of – or would
15 benefit from some level of supervision back in their home community, and often come out of Correctional Services with a supervision order.

They also provide an enormous amount of accommodation for people with a major mental illness, or, you know, things that are not major mental illness, but major sort of challenging behaviour. It is, you know – which is one of the reasons, because
20 they're under an order, you know, continuing sort of parole or a good behaviour sort of supervision of Correctional Services here, that they're required – you know, that Correctional Services will pay for their return to their home community, sometimes with conditions that they shouldn't be in town. Sometimes the community that they're going back to wouldn't mind another order that sort of says they didn't come
25 back there either, but that's another issue.

MR BELL: Okay.

MR WATERFORD: I think it was last year, or it might have been two years ago,
30 Aboriginal Airlines went bankrupt here. Aboriginal Airlines used to provide a fairly useful infrastructure – airline infrastructure out to remote communities on, you know, a regular sort of visiting thing. Anyway, with its collapse now there's lots of communities that you can only get to by plane once a fortnight or less. As a consequence, most of the transport is these days by road and the only service that's
35 really provided out there is not a passenger service, it's a mail service, so there's very little access for any passengers on those planes.

MR BELL: So does the mail service take some passengers?

40 MR WATERFORD: Yes, they will take some.

MR BELL: It does.

MR WATERFORD: But it's very limited and it's always booked out.

45 MR BELL: And they're not equipped to take people with disabilities particularly.

MR WATERFORD: A light aeroplane is not terribly adaptable.

MR BELL: Not terribly adaptable, no.

MR WATERFORD: If you've got a couple of strong people, I think you'd need even better than a cherry-picker to try to sort of squeeze people into the - - -

5

MR BELL: Into the seats, yes.

MR WATERFORD: I could tell you some great stories of trying to provide respite using light planes for some big people.

10

MR BELL: It's just really not practical.

MR WATERFORD: It's not practical.

15 MR BELL: NO.

MR WATERFORD: It doesn't work. There's obviously none of the toileting and other sorts of accessibility issues.

20 MR BELL: Yes. It's unfortunate, but small planes - as opposed to light planes, small ones - are really quite difficult for people with a disability to access, a physical disability, and it seems that not many new models are being manufactured. So we are stuck with an older aircraft that will probably last for quite some time but are simply not easy to get in and out of.

25

MR WATERFORD: With - you know, both at the other end and in Alice Springs Airport itself there's a few steps that are required - you know, you have to be able to climb a few steps and go through quite a narrow little passageway to get to - - -

30 MR BELL: In the town camps themselves, how much - how easy is it to get round a town camp if you're in a wheelchair?

MR WATERFORD: You can - there is - some of them have bitumised roads. There's certainly no footpaths in any town camp that I can recall, but you can access the roads between most houses. There's some town camps which have got no houses, mind you, let alone roads or anything else. They're just a series of tin sheds.

35

MR BELL: Yes.

40 MR WATERFORD: You can come and have a look if you want. They're pretty close by.

MR BELL: No, well, I'm just interested. You see if we could get some public transport between say the town camp and the town, that would be fine but then is it still going to be possible to get around the town camp; do you see what I mean?

45

MR WATERFORD: Certainly, Congress buses go into all the town camps on a regular basis and it's easy enough for small buses to get in and out, and I wouldn't

think it would be, you know, except for some of the very small town camps where there'd be no turning circle, most of the town camps would have a turning circle that would allow a larger bus to get in and out.

5 MR BELL: And who operates these Congress buses?

MR WATERFORD: It's funded to AT SIS, Aboriginal Health, Congress itself. Congress is a Central Australian Aboriginal Medical Service.

10 MR BELL: Okay, okay. Now, let me ask you about these troop carriers, who operates these troop carrier things?

MR WATERFORD: Congress itself – troop carriers are a major way of getting large numbers of people around rural and remote communities. They've sort of got bench seats along the sides that allows you to pack people in and shut the doors to travel large distances. Most of the Aboriginal Health Services in remote areas would have access to troop carriers, so do most education department buildings for school kids and stuff like that.

20 MR BELL: So they own these vehicles?

MR WATERFORD: Yes, they'd be owning them or leasing them.

MR BELL: Okay. Again, it's almost like a form of public transport, but it's not quite and it's because it's not accessible to any member of the public, but it's serving to provide what might otherwise have been public transport?

MR WATERFORD: Yes.

30 MR BELL: I think not covered by the standards for various reasons, but nevertheless they're of interest because of the role that they serve.

MR WATERFORD: That's right. And you can fit a large number of people in there. For people in wheelchairs there's a transfer sort of issue because they tend to be - - -

MR BELL: High off the ground.

MR WATERFORD: - - - higher off the ground. But they're certainly good people movers and they're used as such by most remote communities.

MR BELL: Okay, that's helpful.

MS CASTAGNA: There would be many occ health and safety issues in relation to if a person needed to be lifted into those troop carriers. It's been done from like a hill for a young person to go to school, but that is not desirable as a people mover for people with very restricted mobility. It's actually dangerous for all parties.

MR BELL: I can see that. I can see that these forms of transport are really not terribly well suited for people with disabilities.

5 MS CASTAGNA: And the bench seating would preclude some people who are wheelchair users in the main from sitting on those and there are no safety belts, so it would be a totally dangerous situation.

10 MR WATERFORD: They're not very comfortable, they're only just a slight step up from the back of a truck really, you know, or back of the ute, they're really not very comfortable. In fact they're more comfortable the more you pack in, at least you don't get shaken around too much.

MS GOLDSMITH: A lot of padding from other people.

15 MR WATERFORD: That's right.

MR BELL: Okay, well, that's been really quite helpful because we've not had a lot of information on this issue of public transport access to Aboriginal communities and yet that obviously has to be a concern. So you've raised some interesting issues.

20 MR WATERFORD: I mean I suppose I was raising a bit that issue around the lack of accommodation support services out in the remote communities, because if you do have accommodation support services, even if they're outreach to families, then almost invariably you also get a transport service attached to that because, you know, they usually come with vehicles that can transport people in wheelchairs around the place.

30 MR BELL: I thought your point was really interesting about the link between the housing and the transport. And I suppose it works in other ways too, in that if you've got the right housing in the Aboriginal communities then it is possible for them – and you've got the right transport then the two work together to get them to town when they need to be getting into town. But one without the other just doesn't make a lot of sense.

35 MR WATERFORD: At the moment we've got neither.

MR BELL: Okay, well, we've got to start somewhere I guess.

40 MR WATERFORD: Transport would be good.

MR BELL: Yes. All right, well, look Gerard thanks very much for coming along. We do appreciate you taking the time to do this and it's been – I've learnt a few things this morning, so thank you very much for that, that's very helpful.

45 MR WATERFORD: Thank you. It's good of you to come, it's close to my heart and all that, and something that's causing enormous frustration to a lot of us over many, many decades.

MR BELL: I can see that. Well, we're going to stop the hearing at this stage and we're going to resume again this afternoon after lunch.

MR WATERFORD: I don't think I'll be able to get back, but thank you for that.

5

MR BELL: That's all right, somebody else is coming after lunch.

ADJOURNED

[1.12pm]

10

RESUMED

[2.04pm]

15 MR BELL: Okay, we will get started again this afternoon. We'll keep it fairly informal, so it's all yours. This is Katrina?

MS EDWARDS: Yes, Katrina is going to talk.

20 MS WHAN: I'm Katrina Whan. I'm from Steps Disability Queensland, we're a branch of Steps Employment here in Alice Springs. We are a disability employment network, so our main objective is to get our clients into employment, that have disabilities. The whole idea of disability employment network is to work with our clients to be able to get them prepared – yes, prepared for the workplace, to be able to get them into sustainable employment, whether that be eight hours a week or 29
25 hours a week.

They are limited with how many hours that they can work. What we have come across is lack of transport in Alice Springs for our clients that have disabilities and those disabilities are quite a range. We do have clients with a physical disability as well as mental, intellectual, etcetera. The main problem is that especially for example if we have clients that have a mental disability, they have to take medication. Sometimes that medication can make them very sluggish in the mornings, so we look at employment in the afternoon for them. That employment we can get them to work okay, generally, although some of our clients, depending on where that employment is, cannot get there. So we have to take them ourselves.

30 The whole aim of getting our clients into employment is to get them independent and be able to look after themselves, go to work themselves and fully live a life that a normal person would be able to live. Finishing work in the afternoon, some of our clients only work from 3 to 6 in the evening, they can't get home at all unless they are prepared to pay for a taxi. Being on a disability pension it's not always the case, they're not able to, they can't afford it for example.

45 We do assist them with a mobility allowance through Centrelink as well, so that they do have some kind of funding to get assistance by taxis or private hire cars, but you know it's \$26, you know, to get them to work and then home again and doing that

five days a week is – they just can't afford to do that. So being able to catch a bus, for example, is a much better option. What else have I got here?

5 MR BELL: So where would – are these employment opportunities scattered around Alice Springs or are they concentrated in - - -

10 MS WHAN: Yes. No, they are scattered around Alice Springs. We actually did have a client that wanted to work out at the Old Timers which is through the Gap on the way to the airport. There was a bus that did go out that way, but she started work at 4 pm in the afternoon and finished at 8 pm, and the closest to that time was at 2.18 it stopped at the Old Timers, so she then had an hour or so before she could start work, and of course that upset her. That worked her up a bit, you know, because she felt that that was a waste of her time.

15 There was nothing in between the 2.18 and the 4 o'clock start, so it made things quite difficulty for her. She – we did help her with taxi fares and so on to start with, but she just – it traumatised her too much. She likes to be very independent and just, yes, it just wasn't working for her.

20 MR BELL: So this is a case where a lack of public transport is limiting the opportunities for your clients?

MS WHAN: That's right, yes.

25 MS EDWARDS: She doesn't work out there any longer.

MS WHAN: No, she's no longer working there.

30 MS EDWARDS: It was proving too difficult.

35 MS WHAN: Also the buses don't go in the industrial area either, so they will come – they will go around the suburbs, a very basic route. Some of our clients have to – it may take them 20 minutes to walk to the bus stop or to wheelchair to the bus stop, it's very – it's quite a long way really when you think about, you know, getting to a bus stop that takes 20 minutes or so and then being able to catch the bus. We've found that – we've sort of talked to some of our clients about catching buses etcetera, and we've found that the buses are very good, they've modernised all the buses so that they go down so wheelchairs and people with disabilities are able to get on okay.

40 But if that bus is broken down they then send another one with stairs and they can't get on that bus, they then have to walk. So that is a bit of an issue. I guess it needs to be known if there is a problem with a certain bus route for that bus, it's not being advertised, so those clients then are not prepared for that. So that can be a bit of an issue as well.

45 MR BELL: You think that when the – when the bus broke down, if the driver has a passenger who is in a wheelchair or if it's a mum with a pram, that he actually

explains that to the folk at the depot and they would then send a bus that was able to - - -

5 MS WHAN: Yes, especially if it was a regular route and a regular client that bus would pick up.

10 MS EDWARDS: Well, what we're presuming is that they don't have the kneeling buses that come down, they don't have enough spare ones of those. So when one of those breaks down, from what I can gather, they've only got enough in service of the kneeling buses, they don't have any spare ones. So if one of them breaks down, they've got to send out one that has the stairs on it.

15 MS GOLDSMITH: That is similar to the scenario in Darwin, if their wheelchair accessible buses breaks down they don't have any spare, they send the older buses out.

20 MR BELL: Yes, they do sometimes keep the older buses, but if you think if they had somebody on the bus – it would be one situation if that had that sort of bus and there was nobody on the bus who needed a low floor bus, then - - -

MS WHAN: Yes, absolutely.

25 MR BELL: But you'd think that they could swap the one with the stairs for another one on another route just to look after those clients who are, after all, through no fault of their own.

30 MS EDWARDS: Well, a client recently told me that one of the buses it required a part so the stair bus had been used for a number of weeks. I haven't verified that myself, that is what a client has told me, which means wherever that bus is – whatever run it's on it's not accessible during that period of time. And if it's for a number of weeks, that's quite a long period of time that someone needs to make alternative arrangements to access town, or go shopping, to work.

35 MR BELL: And there's an uncertainty factor as well. It's not very satisfactory.

40 MS EDWARDS: See the buses, their length of time between the buses, a couple of hours maybe longer, the routes that they run don't weave in and out of the suburbs, plus they don't go to major points, as Katrina said the industrial area. We have a number of our employees at schools and that and they're not running to the school, or they finish at night time, the last bus leaves town around half past five and it runs straight out to the last stop, but it doesn't run back in as a service, it runs back to depot. If they finish at 6 o'clock in the evening they have no way of returning into town, that bus doesn't come back through as a service bus.

45 MS WHAN: Or getting home, that's right.

MR BELL: Whereabouts is the depot?

MS EDWARDS: Around Elders Street, isn't it, around that area.

MS WHAN: Yes. It is around the industrial area, but they don't seem to do any runs in the industrial area at all.

5

MS EDWARDS: See the school bus service it weaves in and out of the streets, because originally we thought perhaps the bus wasn't going down into all the streets in the suburbs, or a lot of them, because they were more narrow. But the school buses can get down them, so if they can, of course the service bus can then.

10

MR BELL: You are right. Okay. So do your clients get vouchers for taxis?

MS WHAN: No, a lot of our clients are not eligible for vouchers.

15 MS EDWARDS: And the mobility allowance that amount works on the hours that they work, so as Katrina said if you're paying \$26 out a day for a taxi, or for a hire care and you've got to catch five a week at the most mobility allowance is \$104 a fortnight, so it doesn't come anywhere near close to covering the cost of the transport that they need.

20

MR BELL: Is that mobility allowance increased from time to time?

MS EDWARDS: It's maximum is to 104 and it goes down, as I said it depends on the hours that they're working.

25

MR BELL: But has that 104 been increased in recent years?

MS WHAN: Not that we know of.

30 MS EDWARDS: Not to our knowledge.

MS WHAN: No.

35 MS EDWARDS: But it would have to be increased significantly to cover, as I said, \$26 a day and 104 a fortnight and they're working 10 days in the fortnight, that would be \$260 up against 104 a fortnight. Surely it would be easier just to run a more frequent service and increase where the service is running within the suburbs and to the major facilities.

40 MR BELL: Yes. It might be, but let me explain. It depends how you value the benefits of the employment and the benefits of the employment are much greater than the dollars that your clients receive. And it might well be that if you looked at this really carefully you could justify a much great allowance of the value you put on those social benefits, that they're intangible, but they're nevertheless very significant.
45 The problem with the bus service is that you can never get an infinitely flexible bus service, whereas at least if a taxi is available – that's another question – it is a point-to-point service. So the economics are not sort of self-evident, they're all complicated.

MS WHAN: Definitely.

MR BELL: So how many people would you look at assisting in a year?

5 MS WHAN: We have a caseload of 49 clients, although that has just gone up with
the emergency response for the communities, so we actually have an extra 10 clients
on our caseload for communities. Plus we have an unlimited cap – an uncapped
caseload, so we're probably looking at 150 clients a year that would go through our
10 caseload at this stage. Some of those have now gone independent and of course
depending on the situation with our clients whether they can – they've got a driver's
licence or not. We're finding the clients that don't have driver's licence that we're
finding a lot more difficult to keep in that sustainable employment. At the moment
out of 49 we have 33 in employment.

15 MR BELL: And can I just get a feel for the area that you cover?

MS WHAN: Yes, we go - - -

MR BELL: I'm just trying to get a dimension to it.
20

MS WHAN: Yes, the whole area of Alice Springs. We go to Umungana which is
about 40 kilometres east of Alice Springs and with this new emergency we've just
started getting clients from remote communities as far as 750 kilometres, north west.

25 MS GOLDSMITH: So do you have a situation where people from Umungana
coming to Alice for work?

MS EDWARDS: They're supposed to.

30 MS WHAN: No, they're supposed to, although it's too difficult for the – like the
transport once again is another issue. So unless we go and visit them or we can find
employment in the community for them, then there's a problem.

MS EDWARDS: Well, the Old Timers where this other lady was working, it's only
35 five of six Ks out, just past that is a drive-in and in behind the drive-in there's two
camps where we have clients as well. To get them, we have to go out and pick them
up to bring them in. To get them a job that just wouldn't be sustainable to pick them
up every day and to bring them in and then drop them back home after their work.

40 MR BELL: No, I understand it isn't sustainable and yet it's not really that far out of
town is it?

MS EDWARDS: But when you have a lot of people on your caseload, you've got
other clients.

45 MR BELL: No, I realise you can't possibly be - - -

EQUIPMENT MALFUNCTION

5 MS EDWARDS: - - - and you've got to try and get somewhere with that disability, half a kilometre can be just too far.

MR BELL: Too far. Well, I mean even for people who don't have a disability I suspect that the lack of public transport to those camps is a major problem - - -

10 MS WHAN: Yes.

15 MR BELL: - - - in terms of getting yourself a job. Yes, we've just had a little discussion about this over lunch and obviously we don't want to be seen to go beyond our brief, but it does seem to me that if we want to see a higher rate of employment in the Aboriginal population we've got to provide them with better public transport.

MS WHAN: Correct.

20 MR BELL: And your clients are sort of the tip of a bigger iceberg, if you like.

MS EDWARDS: That's exactly right.

25 MR BELL: In that they don't have – some of them don't have the opportunity to have a driver's licence because of their - - -

30 MS EDWARDS: The majority of our clients do not drive. We encourage them to get onto a push bike which isn't always practical because a lot of them don't like to ride at night time. The traffic bothers them and as well they can be quite intimidated by it. Our changing weather patterns, night time comes and we can go very, very cold quickly. We can have a beautiful day during the day and in winter time that cold comes in very quickly. Then in summer time they work – you know, finish a working shift, then they've got to jump on their bike and it might be still in the 40s.

35 MR BELL: Yes, and bikes are great but a mix of bikes and road trains is not a happy one.

40 MS WHAN: No, especially in the town camps situation. And of course a lot of our clients that are in town camps, what's mine is everyone's. So unfortunately we might help them to purchase a push bike - - -

MR BELL: Yes, but they can't rely on that bike being there when they need it.

45 MS WHAN: No, that's right.

MS EDWARDS: That's right.

MR BELL: Yes.

MS EDWARDS: Somebody might have wanted something and sold it on them and things like that occur.

MR BELL: Yes.

5

MS WHAN: And a lot of our clients in the remote, or in the town camps, rely on family members with a car to bring them in, or other service providers to bring them in to town, so then they can walk around Alice and do the bits and pieces that they need to do, come and visit us if they need to, but to get them into a regular appointment to us is quite difficult.

10

MS EDWARDS: Which means we get a lot of walk-ins and then they have to sit there for some time because we're already tied up with other clients or out of the office taking clients somewhere as well.

15

MR BELL: So it makes it hard for you to work efficiently as well.

MS EDWARDS: Yes.

20

MS WHAN: Absolutely.

MR BELL: You mentioned other service providers, I mean who are some of the other service providers here?

25

MS WHAN: Well, Tanganjera, Job Futures used to be here, but they no longer have a contract and they were a job network member. Quite often they would have other services in aged care, that sort of thing, to be able to assist their clients. A lot of the time family could jump on in the car or in the bus with them and come into town. But Job Futures are no longer in Alice Springs, there's a new job network come into town and we really don't know what the situation there is. Tanganjera collect people's mail that's on town camps etcetera, so they have a Centrelink agent there, they have a bank system there for people and so a lot of people will just go to that one spot.

30

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So if they can get on the bus, they will jump on the bus and go there. But if they know that with – like they'll get their mail, they'll have a letter from us to say you have an appointment on a certain date, they'll come straight to us, because they've got no other way of getting in to us for their appointment.

40

MR BELL: I see they're using the opportunity – yes, I see what you mean.

MS EDWARDS: And we also Central Australia Support Accommodation, a number of our clients are assisted by them and they will take out – pick our client up and bring them in to us and things like that as well, so we tried to work in with Mental Health Association as well as CASA and Tanganjera, one's like that, just so we can best service the client and get them around.

45

MR BELL: So from your viewpoint you're doing the best to be efficient in terms of working with your counterparts in other organisations.

MS WHAN: That's right.

5

MR BELL: But you're really not in the business of running a transport service.

MS WHAN: No, that's exactly right.

10 MR BELL: And as the lady this morning argued that the investment in transport services in terms of time and vehicles and dollars, is a distraction away from - - -

MS EDWARDS: Our job, yes.

15 MR BELL: - - - your primary role.

MS WHAN: That's right. See, most of our clients too are voluntary, so they don't have to come in and look for work, but how voluntary they want to work which is fantastic for us because that makes it a lot easier for us to get them employment, but
20 then we've got the barrier of the transport and that seems to be quite a major hold back for our clients.

MS EDWARDS: And when you're voluntary that level of frustration can just say, "Well, I don't want to work. I just don't want to be on the program."
25

MS WHAN: Yes, they'll just give up.

MR BELL: Okay. Well, I don't have any other questions to ask. I think that's been really very helpful.
30

MS WHAN: Yes.

MR BELL: And we really appreciate your coming along. There are some issues in Alice Springs that are a little different to other places, although it's been useful here
35 to sort of focus on the issue of the camps, the town camps, I think that's what's made this a little different. I'm sure there are no easy fixes to any of these, but certainly your firsthand experience with this is very valuable, so we're really delighted you were able to come, because we know you're busy doing other things. So thank you very much and thanks for your time.

40

MS WHAN: Thank you.

MS EDWARDS: Okay, thanks.

45 MS WHAN: Thank you for listening to us.

MR BELL: That's all right. So is it Le Hi?

MS GOLDSMITH: Le Hi, yes.

MR BELL: You're going to be the last one, Le Hi, do you want to come and take a seat over here.

5

MR ARCHIBALD: Is that a good or a bad thing?

MR BELL: Well, it depends on your perspective, from my perspective it's a good thing.

10

MR ARCHIBALD: Cool.

MR BELL: So now you're from Buslink.

15 MR ARCHIBALD: Buslink, yes, we operate the public transport system in Alice Springs.

MR BELL: So now, you are from Buslink.

20 MR ARCHIBALD: Buslink, yes, we operate the public transport system in Alice Springs.

MR BELL: So is Buslink a – it's a company owned by the Government or it's a - - -

25

MR ARCHIBALD: No, we're like a privately owned company that actually is contracted to do certain amounts - - -

MR BELL: Okay, yes.

30

MR ARCHIBALD: - - - like, you guys talked with Aaron yesterday - - -

MR BELL: Yes, we did indeed.

35 MR ARCHIBALD: - - - who is the Darwin branch of Buslink.

MR BELL: Okay, so it is the same - - -

MR ARCHIBALD: Same company.

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MR BELL: Same company.

MR ARCHIBALD: Yes, we've just got an Alice Springs branch. We also have a branch in Jabiru.

45

MR BELL: Okay. So we saw Aaron yesterday.

MR ARCHIBALD: Yes.

MR BELL: And so you source your buses from the same place obviously as Aaron does; they come from Dandenong or somewhere?

MR ARCHIBALD: From Volgren.

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MR BELL: From Volgren, yes.

MR ARCHIBALD: Yes, yes. We have got – at the moment in Alice Springs we've got three Volgren low floors, which have got like wheelchair rounds, etcetera in them, which is the complete fleet, which is quite good actually.

10

MR BELL: Yes. Now, with the – let me ask you a couple of questions.

MR ARCHIBALD: Yes.

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MR BELL: Do you have the same sort of contract to service Alice Springs as Aaron has to do Darwin or are they – or these contracts a bit different? I mean, in Darwin we understood Aaron was sort of troubled – well, here's your timetable, here's the route.

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MR ARCHIBALD: Work it out and stick to it.

MR BELL: Yes, yes, that's right.

25

MR ARCHIBALD: Yes.

MR BELL: Is that what happens here or have you got some flexibility as to where the route is or the timing or - - -

MR ARCHIBALD: We – being contractors we have no control over exactly what's happened, we are basically told, "This is the route, this is what is going to happen," and that's it. We are basically to do what we're told as far as we can't change anything or be very flexible with it. There is a difference in Alice Springs, is the actual Town Council runs the public – like, the public transport is the overall contractor – or contractee. They subcontract down to the Town Council in Alice Springs and then the Town Council then passes that on to me.

30

So it is actually quite different from everywhere in Australia as well whereas contractors that do public transport, you would normally go straight to the Public Transport Division, I actually have to answer to the Town Council first, which makes life really difficult actually because - - -

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MR BELL: I was going to say, is it a plus or a minus.

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MR ARCHIBALD: It is a big minus.

MR BELL: But in one sense the Town Council should be able to give you some sort of local input. On the other hand your problem is you haven't got the flexibility to respond because of your contractor - - -

5 MR ARCHIBALD: Yes, I don't know how much I am allowed to say and what sort of information I am allowed to give or not.

MR BELL: We don't want to press you on matters that are sort of commercial-in-confidence - - -

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MR ARCHIBALD: Yes.

MR BELL: - - - but I mean we are sort of – look, all State and Territory Governments have to grapple with this same issue.

15

MR ARCHIBALD: Yes. Well, basically the situation here is the Town Council was actually trying to hand back the Public Transport Division to public transport but it is a long and sort of, you know, paper work involved process that is not happening straight away. Public Transport Division wants to take it over, therefore they've got control over what happens more than they do now but it is not happening yet, if that makes any sense.

20

MR BELL: No. Yes, I understand all that. Some times sort of unpicking these arrangements is a complex business. So let me just test you a little further, when you get this contract is – at the time that the contract is set up is there any negotiation between you and the other parties as to what the routes will look like or the site - - -

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MR ARCHIBALD: As far as I know, like I have only been in my position for over a – or just under a year now - - -

30

MR BELL: Okay.

MR ARCHIBALD: - - - so I am unsure of – like, the contracts were signed quite a long time ago - - -

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MR BELL: Yes, they were.

MR ARCHIBALD: - - - I think, you know, they're a seven year contract - - -

40

MR BELL: Yes.

MR ARCHIBALD: - - - and we are four years in. But from what I understand it is very similar to Darwin where the Public Transport Division basically says, "This is what we want and this is what we – you know, what routes we want, etcetera," and then it is up to the contract – you know, to us to implement that to actually operate it.

45

MR BELL: Yes.

MR ARCHIBALD: If that makes sense.

MR BELL: No, no. That is exactly the impression I had from Darwin. I mean what we're identifying here is where the problem is. You see – I mean - - -

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MR ARCHIBALD: You see, just quickly, Alice Springs is a real funny one, it actually hasn't changed its routes in 15 years. Now, I have been working with Public Transport Darwin in the last couple of months actually to get more information and more input and a better service for Alice Springs. The person that actually did the initial ones 15 years ago is the person re-doing them now and being, like I said, I am only a contract, I shouldn't have much of an input in it but if I have the information then they are quite happy to ring me and sort of we work together to make sure that we get the best information and sort of, you know, work together to make it work.

10

MR BELL: So let me put it to you this way, if I was running a bus service I would be looking at doing some market research to see where there are likely clients would be and where they would want to go, but is the – are the folk in Darwin able to do that here in Alice and sort of work out the nature of the demand?

MR ARCHIBALD: That's where I am unsure.

20

MR BELL: You see I think it would be quite hard.

MR ARCHIBALD: Yes.

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MR BELL: I mean, public - - -

MR ARCHIBALD: Even living in Alice I wouldn't know where to begin to even look at the supply and demand and that sort of thing.

30

MR BELL: No, but - - -

MR ARCHIBALD: Did they explain any of the ticketing system – the new ticketing system that has gone in on things?

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MR BELL: No, tell me about the new ticketing system, I don't know - - -

MR ARCHIBALD: About a year or so ago we used to have an actual computerised system which was very, very well set up and it had all the information you required via the buses. When you got on a bus, it didn't matter, you know, if you were an adult, child, pensioner, concession, all that sort of stuff as you bought a ticket; the computer registered all that and then it was summarised in a lot of information and a lot of data bases in one foul swoop. Now – and December of last year they actually went about 20 years backwards in technology and now just have a pure ticketed system, like it is just a – buy a ticket, it is printed on the date and time you buy it, it gives you three hours worth of travel and then that's it, which means you lose a lot of the information that you actually had.

45

MR BELL: Yes.

MR ARCHIBALD: Now, what I did is actually kept the computer that all the information from the previous four years so that if ever there was a chance of change
5 or something like that the information was still here. So that's what Public Transport has been relying on me to do, is to actually look at the information I have on the computers here that, you know, basically explains what their supply and demand is and where it is.

10 MR BELL: Even – I mean, two things, analysing that data isn't a trivial task, and that just - - -

MR ARCHIBALD: That's where the computer system is fantastic because it does it
15 all for you.

MR BELL: That's true, yes, but that only gives you data on your existing clients and doesn't tell you anything about unmet demand.

MR ARCHIBALD: Yes, they – I know just from titbits that the Public Transport,
20 like the guys that I've talked to, they've got access to a lot more information than I ever have. Like, they'd worked out statistics on say areas of Alice Springs where households of say two people had an average of two cars. There were a town camp south of here he mentioned that, you know, the household average of vehicles per household was like 1.8 compared to in an area in town out west it was only point 5.
25 Things like that, so he had a lot of information that I wouldn't even know where he got or what access he had to it but he could sort of narrow down that, you know, say for example if you have got a suburb that has a family of, you know, on average four and you've got three cars then you probably wouldn't need the public transport system as much as someone that has half that.

30 MR BELL: Yes, I think that some of that data might come from the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

MR ARCHIBALD: I would say so. I don't know, like I said, I only know that just
35 because he's mentioned it in passing when he's been discussing information with me, so - - -

MR BELL: Yes. So at the present time the bus service doesn't go out to the town camps, am I right?
40

MR ARCHIBALD: No, we don't access any of that.

MR BELL: And has there been any sort of discussion about that?

45 MR ARCHIBALD: I know that they're looking into it. One of the other problems that involves here is the actual school system. We actually assist with the school transport system as well.

MR BELL: Yes, I was going to ask you about that.

MR ARCHIBALD: So – pardon?

5 MR BELL: I was going to ask you about that.

MR ARCHIBALD: Yes. So by changing just one little slight thing and say the school system it actually alters the whole system of Alice as well. Because we've only got say three buses an hour tied up at particular areas, if you alter one run it has an on-flow effect and alters quite a lot because the bus actually is committed elsewhere, so it is not a simple thing just to change sort of one area of it.

MR BELL: I understand if you've only got three buses and you - I mean this comes down to also the frequency that you can provide a service on route.

15 MR ARCHIBALD: Yes.

MR BELL: Yes, okay.

20 MS EDWARDS: Can I ask a question? You said the Town Council, what did you say their role was?

MR ARCHIBALD: Their role actually is to run it.

25 MS EDWARDS: To run it, but you have no input about where you run, I mean, you know, as far as you know. So if the Town Council came to you and said, "We've had a lot of people coming in and saying that the bus run isn't sufficient, it doesn't go here and there - - -"

30 MR ARCHIBALD: What, they wouldn't come to me because I only contract to them. What they would do is go to Public Transport Darwin and get them to change it.

MS EDWARDS: Okay.

35 MR ARCHIBALD: So that's where it is very difficult, they're sort of two contractors not just one. Like, normally in Darwin for example we were talking that Darwin basically deals directly with public transport. They say, "Okay, there needs to be a change, people have said this has to happen," so Public Transport will say, like to Aaron, "This is what we need the change done," hand it to them and then it is done. Whereas here it is handed to the Town Council – like, I know – probably shouldn't say it, but the Town Council actually is very, very apathetic in they don't really mind whatsoever because it is not going to be their responsibility soon and that doesn't help much either.

45 MR BELL: Well, I suppose in defence of the Town Council that they are sort of the meat in the sandwich, they're in the middle.

MR ARCHIBALD: Yes.

MR BELL: So they have got limited scope to influence what you do and they don't control the dollars.

5

MR ARCHIBALD: Yes.

MS EDWARDS: So where are the dollars coming from?

10 MR ARCHIBALD: Public Transport

MS EDWARDS: In Darwin?

MR BELL: In Darwin, yes. So that's why I am exploring some aspects of this.

15

MR ARCHIBALD: Yes.

MR BELL: So is there scope to vary the contract during the course of the period of the contract?

20

MR ARCHIBALD: Well, basically if Public Transport turn around and said, "You need to change this and this," and then it went through the Town Council because they can't deal directly with me, then yes, we would change everything tomorrow.

25 MR BELL: You would be able to do it straight away.

MR ARCHIBALD: Yes.

30 MS GOLDSMITH: Do you think – this is just on the other infrastructure, other roads and stuff around Alice are going out to, say some of the camps, are they - - -

MR ARCHIBALD: Accessible?

MS GOLDSMITH: - - - accessible with your low floor buses?

35

MR ARCHIBALD: Some are, some aren't. Like, we – I know a little bit more about it because we actually had another contract dealing with renal patients and delivering them to their dialysis and back, so in some areas we couldn't physically get public buses into some of the areas, simply because you can't turn them around and there is no access for them to actually get in and back out again safely, but there's definitely a huge scope that you could make sure you could access those areas a lot better than they are.

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MS GOLDSMITH: Mm.

45

MR BELL: So – well, that leads me to a couple of questions. How is the size of your bus determined?

MR ARCHIBALD: I have no idea to be honest.

MR BELL: No. I mean maybe if Erin just buys the standard bus from Volgren,
but - - -

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MR ARCHIBALD: They're not really a standard bus but you've got to have a –
like, say for example if you are going a bus service out west, you have got to be able
to make sure that just the one bus, if it is the only bus that operates within an hour
and a half or whatever, can actually handle the amount of people that are going to
10 utilise it. Now, we get runs where we are almost full and our buses are licensed to
carry 80 people at a time, so that's quite, you know, when you look at it from that
point of view.

MR BELL: So then there'd be some of that would be standing?

15

MR ARCHIBALD: Yes, yes.

MR BELL: Yes.

20 MR ARCHIBALD: Yes, thirty, I think, nine seats to the town buses we have but
they're 80 – like licensed to carry 80.

MS EDWARDS: Thirty nine seats and 80, wow.

25 MR BELL: Yes, what's – I understand the rules are a bit complicated about
capacity. I am just thinking my way through. You mentioned the renal patients, but
you wouldn't have been transporting them in buses, would you?

MR ARCHIBALD: Yes, transporting them in Hi-Ace buses.

30

MR BELL: In Hi-Ace buses.

MR ARCHIBALD: Yes.

35 MR BELL: Okay.

MR ARCHIBALD: Yes, eight seats plus a wheelchair for both vehicles.

40 MR BELL: Okay. And with those buses you load the wheelchair from the
back - - -

MR ARCHIBALD: Yes.

45 MR BELL: - - - or from the side? From the back, yes.

MR ARCHIBALD: Yes. With the low floors here in town we do have the ramps
which are, you know, the wheelchair access from the front.

MR BELL: Yes.

MR ARCHIBALD: And the little ramps and they tilt the buses to the side so that it doesn't have such a big - - -

5

MS GOLDSMITH: Incline.

MR ARCHIBALD: Big jump.

10 MR BELL: Yes.

MR ARCHIBALD: There are actually quite a few places around town too that do have – like out at Old Timers, for example, there is a ramp set up so that our ramps sit down to them perfectly well.

15

MR BELL: Yes.

MR ARCHIBALD: Things like that, so - - -

20 MR BELL: I'm just sort of thinking over some of the issues that you've raised.

MS GOLDSMITH: Just while John thinks, I didn't – we have been talking to other people today who said that there were no – there's no coach service between Alice Springs and Darwin that has – is wheelchair accessible.

25

MR ARCHIBALD: That wouldn't surprise me. As far as I know there is only Greyhound that operates between here and there and all those coaches aren't wheelchair accessible at all.

30 MS GOLDSMITH: Yes, because you can – I mean, the high floor coach – you can get high floor coaches that have a wheelchair lift in as part of them.

MR ARCHIBALD: Yes. As far as I know, no. Like I said, I don't know too much about that I only deal with sort of around town - - -

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MR BELL: Just around town so - - -

MR ARCHIBALD: - - - the local public transport, but that would make a lot of sense, yes, there isn't any access at all. I don't even know what companies do to get around that. I know with – because we operate – Buslink actually operates airport shuttle here as well. If we're given prior notice we actually make sure that we have a wheelchair access vehicle out there to assist with wheelchairs and things like that. Even if it be not part of our service we just do it, we've had in the past where people have pre-booked things through say AAT Kings or Qantas holidays or something and if we know there is a wheelchair problem or an access problem then we will either hire taxis for them or actually supply our renal bus if it is not actually on contract, something like that to be able to allow those people to travel. We had one to – about

45

a month ago off the Ghan. I don't know how the access to and from the Ghan was but I know that – I think they craned the person out.

5 MR BELL: Yes. We have been hearing some interesting stories about that.

MS GOLDSMITH: It is very interesting.

10 MR ARCHIBALD: I don't know because I only got the phone call to say I needed a vehicle there, so I sent one of the other – one of our , you know, wheelchair access vehicles down to be able to transport these people and then they let us know when they needed picking and we went and did it again, but I don't know how other companies operate around that, I wouldn't have a clue.

15 MR BELL: No.

20 MS WHAN: Can I say something there? My husband is in the tourist industry in Alice Springs and a lot of the tour operators or local attractions have requested that the tour company look at something with disability access because I mean it is just one thing and they had to have quite a – you know, as an organisation they have to have facility for people with a disability to be able to come to their facility, etcetera, but they can't be picked up and again as is coming through with a lot of people stopping and so on, even again as you said there are major problems with getting people off and onto the ground - - -

25 MR ARCHIBALD: I only know that just from experience in myself, like that we have problems with – or we haven't had problems, we just had to work around it and do it basically, so - - -

30 MR BELL: But apart from that link that you do to the Ghan - - -

MR ARCHIBALD: And to the airport, yes.

35 MR BELL: - - - and to the airport rather – to the airport, you are not really in the tourism business?

MR ARCHIBALD: No, we're - - -

MR BELL: No.

40 MR ARCHIBALD: No, not at all, no. I mean, we are affiliated with all the tourism places and that and we work together with them but airport shuttle is just an airport shuttle, the same as the Ghan link basically and public transport is public transport.

45 MR BELL: Yes.

MR ARCHIBALD: You know, not that it services the public much better than it does the tourists, but yes, that's what it is there for, so – and then you get the other thing whereas your public transport stood in and actually then started going to all the

tourist attractions etcetera, you are going to upset a lot of operators that are actually making – not, you know, good money but money on the fact that they do operate to just those areas.

5 MR BELL: They provide that service, yes.

MR ARCHIBALD: So you have got to be a bit careful of whose toes you want to step on before you start changing into that sort of stuff.

10 MR BELL: No, I understand that. And in any event your specialty – the specialty of your company is where you're positioned now really, isn't it?

MR ARCHIBALD: Yes.

15 MR BELL: And so that's – and so diversifying out of that into the tourist business would be a whole different - - -

MR ARCHIBALD: It's hard enough for us just to actually look after the people in Alice Springs let alone worrying about anything else.

20

MR BELL: Yes. So when is your contract due to be re-negotiated?

MR ARCHIBALD: I think 201, but I couldn't quite be sure of that.

25 MR BELL: It's a long way away, yes.

MR ARCHIBALD: Yes. It is still a while to go, but that is not to say that nothing can change either. Like I said, if Public Transport and the Town Council work out their issues and from what we have been doing with Public Transport, like I in all
30 honestly shouldn't be involved all that much, it is just because I'm actually physically here and I can answer a lot of their questions I do get involved. Then - - -

MR BELL: You have got local knowledge, you see that - - -

35 MR ARCHIBALD: Pardon?

MR BELL: You have got local knowledge.

MR ARCHIBALD: Yes.

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MR BELL: And you're obviously a great asset in that sense that you can give them information that they - - -

MR ARCHIBALD: That we're physically here.

45

MR BELL: Yes, that they are not easily able to get otherwise. So that's – and the Council should be able to do some of that as well, by the way. It should be able to provide some - - -

MR ARCHIBALD: I found the Council is very, very unhelpful.

MR BELL: Yes.

5 MR ARCHIBALD: And that is just my opinion.

MR BELL: I think that there are – with all councils there are people in the council who would like to do more but it is often a matter of resources

10 MR ARCHIBALD: Yes.

MR BELL: - - - and time and other priorities and I mean, bus stops is an issue in point.

15 MR ARCHIBALD: A huge issue.

MS GOLDSMITH: Do you find that your accessible buses are not actually accessible because of the bus stops in a lot of Alice, or - - -

20 MR ARCHIBALD: No, I mean, as long as you can park on flat ground, anyone in a wheelchair or have, you know, walking frames or anything can get in our buses, provided the ramps are working, which occasionally they don't, and provided there's no breakdowns and all three buses are on the road. That's the only - - -

25 MS GOLDSMITH: Are they electronic ramps or manual?

MR ARCHIBALD: Yes, electronic.

MR BELL: They're electronic.

30 MR ARCHIBALD: Just press a button, it slides out, and then you can drop the side of the bus as well, so as long as you're parked basically on flat ground or you don't have a massive drop, you can get anybody to access it.

35 MR BELL: Just coming back to bus stops, does the contract specify where the bus stops will be, or can you put the bus stops where you want to have them?

MR ARCHIBALD: Like I said, it's governed by public transport and by the town council basically where the bus stops are and things. We don't get a say in it. We
40 basically just get handed our sheet, our run sheet, and they're the ones that handle all that sort of thing. We basically just operate; we don't have anything to do with the actual setup or the eventual outcome of things. If we find there's a big problem with, say, a particular bus stop causing hassles, then we approach the council and say, "Look, it's either dangerous," or, "Something needs to be changed." But there's two
45 stops in town I know that have been discussed for the last three years, after reading back through all the meetings and things, and nothing's happened of them since.

MR BELL: Yes.

MR ARCHIBALD: They're still in quite odd areas and things. So even our input doesn't help much in the actual getting things done.

5 MR BELL: And if, for example, Darwin wanted to put in more stops on the route, that would impact presumably on your schedules as well, so - - -

10 MR ARCHIBALD: Can do. I know just with the ticketing system that came in I told you about, they were worried that just that little bit extra time and actually dealing with manual tickets and not an electronic one affected their – so they restructured their whole timetable up there before they instigated it, whereas Alice Springs again was forgotten. And then suddenly the question arose: is it going to affect us all that much, and they said, “Well, run with it and tell us what happens.” And it didn't affect us all that much, so it wasn't a big deal. But it would have been helpful to be considered. But yes, if say for example you wanted more stops put in or you wanted to change it, it's not up to us, and we don't really have any input in it 15 anyway. It is actually public transport or the town council, and the town council would have to then go to public transport to get the funding and the actual, you know, approval for it to happen.

20 MR BELL: Yes. No, well, were you expecting that the Northern Territory Government departments will be giving us a submission in which they will address some of these issues?

25 MR ARCHIBALD: Well, like I said, I know public transport's addressing it now. And like I said, in the last few months - there's been about four months now that we've been sort of working together, getting a lot of information, he'll get to a stage where after analysing a lot of things will ring and ask a few questions, we will spend an hour or two on the phone, making sure he understands, you know, what's going to be helpful, what isn't, that sort of thing. And I think that's going to be the biggest 30 change for Alice, just basically having a service that works. Give you an idea, I live as far as you can east side. I don't know if you know the town very well or not, but the last bus that goes out east is at 3.45, and then the next one's not till 5.45. So if you're a Government worker - - -

35 MR BELL: No, 5.45 is the last bus.

MR ARCHIBALD: Hey?

40 MR BELL: 5.45 is the last bus.

MR ARCHIBALD: Yes. But if you're a Government worker and you finish at 4.21, you can actually walk home, walk all the way back into town and then still catch the bus home, because it's just the – you know, the regularity's not there.

45 MR BELL: No.

MR ARCHIBALD: Biggest thing I've found just in my position is because we assist with the schools and the school buses, 'cause we were around before they

were, all our buses are mainly focused around that area and not around workers, not around the actual general public. Hard to explain unless you've seen a timetable, but that's basically where all the concentration of our buses are, around the school area and that. And nothing's changed since school buses have been introduced and
5 things, like, have changed, and since Alice has grown. But it is in the process of being done, so I don't know if it's going to fix anything or help anything, but it should. I mean, surely a better service is going to be a, you know, better result for everybody.

10 MR BELL: Yes, well, let's hope so anyway. Well, look, thank you very much for coming.

MR ARCHIBALD: That's all right. I don't know if I was very helpful or not
15 though.

MR BELL: No, no.

MR ARCHIBALD: But just sort of to give you an idea of how it's all operating and
20 things - - -

MR BELL: It was useful because, as you know, we spoke with Erin in Darwin, and so we've got a feel for how this works in the Territory.

MR ARCHIBALD: Yes.
25

MR BELL: And Alice Springs is different to Darwin.

MR ARCHIBALD: It is. It's very funny. Like, for example, during school
30 holidays we still operate with our school-designated runs, because nobody's changed - the runs just operate as per normal, and until I'm directed to, I'm not allowed to change. And it's funny, it's just - Alice is below the Berrima Line, and that's as far out as it goes, which is sometimes embarrassing.

MR BELL: Well, let's hope that in this next round we can make some gains there,
35 because, you know, if you can make some savings there that can be redeployed into other ways. In time, we'll see if we can't get some improvements.

MR ARCHIBALD: Yes.

40 MR BELL: No, that's good.

MR ARCHIBALD: Cool.

MR BELL: Well, look, thank you very much for coming. We really do appreciate
45 those who come along.

MR ARCHIBALD: No dramas.

MR BELL: That's great.

MR ARCHIBALD: What time do you – when do you guys do another review or another - - -

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MR BELL: The next one will be in five years, but between now and Christmas we have to write a report and get it to the minister and - - -

MR ARCHIBALD: And see what happens.

10

MR BELL: - - - address a whole raft of issues. So some of the things we were talking with Erin about, whether the turning circles on these scooters that - - -

MR ARCHIBALD: Yes, we've got issues with some of them here. We've got one that is actually so large he can't turn around within the actual designated area, and that's with both of the wheelchairs access places up, so the seats are up and everything. But he expects the bus drivers to get out and actually lift him to turn him around. Now, yes, this – I actually went to the council about it. Council contact the Disability Association here and they just said, "Look, no way, he's got to work out another way or get something else." And I left it up to them. I didn't want to be involved, basically. The other thing was is he was holding up the buses for up to five minutes at a time just to get him on, which roll-on - - -

MR BELL: Yes, well, there are obvious O, H and S issues, and then there's a weight – a load limit on your ramp.

MR ARCHIBALD: Very much so.

MR BELL: But the problem is that these mobility devices are attractive, 'cause, you know, they've got capacity to go further and they're more comfortable and - - -

MR ARCHIBALD: Yes.

MR BELL: And some users really need all that assistance and support.

MR ARCHIBALD: Yes.

MR BELL: But they weren't really designed to get on buses.

MR ARCHIBALD: Not at all.

MR BELL: So the standards have specified - - -

MR ARCHIBALD: There's another one I don't know if anyone's brought up with you as well is there's a three-wheeled push bike that someone in town's actually using as a disability device, and that physically doesn't fit on the buses either. And we actually had to refuse the lady and her carer access back on afternoon because, they said it was too hot and they didn't want to ride back in the sun, but we

physically couldn't get it on the bus. And if we did, it created such a hazard that it was dangerous for other passengers on board. So that went to the town council too and that was sorted out through the Disability Association and the town council, and I was just told from now on they know not to try. But that was certainly an
5 interesting one.

MR BELL: Three-wheelers are inherently unstable in my opinion.

10 MR ARCHIBALD: What, sorry?

MR BELL: They're inherently unstable.

MR ARCHIBALD: Yes. This is the, like, you know, the access vehicle that this
15 lady uses, and uses all the time, but she would come in the morning during summer and it got too hot, so they decided that they would catch the bus home. The physical thing was that we physically could not take it. It was just too – we couldn't get on the bus basically, and we couldn't leave it there and take them home, so yes.

MR BELL: There wasn't any solution.

20

MR ARCHIBALD: That was a really interesting one actually, so - - -

MR BELL: There are some three-wheeler scooters around - - -

25 MR ARCHIBALD: Yes.

MR BELL: - - - or some of them are four wheels but the front two are very close together.

30 MR ARCHIBALD: Okay.

MR BELL: And some of those have similar problems.

MR ARCHIBALD: Yes.

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MR BELL: They're subject to tipping, I'm afraid and - - -

MR ARCHIBALD: Yes, this one's just basically a big, long push bike and it's really difficult.

40

MR BELL: But its wheel base is probably too long.

MR ARCHIBALD: Very long and very wide in the back as well, so actually, like, you know, just to get her – like I said, we couldn't physically fit it on board, and you
45 imagine that the buses are quite big, 'cause we can take at least two, three wheelchairs.

MR BELL: Yes, no, I've seen the bus.

MR ARCHIBALD: Yes, you would have.

MR BELL: I had a good look at the bus. So yes, well, we're obviously going to have to address this issue in our report, this dimension problem for mobility devices.

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MR ARCHIBALD: Yes.

MR BELL: And it's not a simple issue. There's been a working party looking at this for a while, and it needs some thinking as to how to cut through this. One of the problems is of course a lot of these devices are made overseas. The electric scooters are mainly I think made overseas. And so when you come along and you buy one of these gadgets, you don't know whether it's going to be able to get on the bus or not on the bus.

15 MR ARCHIBALD: Yes, whether it fits or not. Some of them are very long too.

MR BELL: Yes.

MR ARCHIBALD: Like, just the access around – in a bus is very, very difficult for them. I've – I don't know if someone else has mentioned too: there was another incident we had last year where the gentleman that has a very, very short one but it's very easy to tip over. And so actually getting it up on the ramp - even with the bus knelt on a ramp that's out at the old timers', he was actually to a stage where he had to come up backwards, otherwise he was worried about toppling over, which was another really hard one. So what we had to do was actually be out there – well, not slightly early, but load him earlier than we would leave, 'cause that's where one of our departure points is.

And we would load him backwards, or allow him to come up backwards and sort of go in that way, otherwise it was quite unsafe for him, so that was a really interesting one that came up last year. We haven't had him on the bus for a long time now, so I don't know what happened to him. But yes, that was something that – it was a very, very short wheel-based electric wheelchair, but just any slight angle and basically it was almost going over, which is really scary actually. And the bus drivers had mentioned to me that, you know, they were worried about what to do and that sort of stuff, and we talked with him about it, and then that's why we started loading him backwards. He was safer and he had less chance of falling over. I don't know how or why it was set up like that but - - -

40 MR BELL: High centre of gravity.

MR ARCHIBALD: Eh?

MR BELL: A high centre of gravity.

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MR ARCHIBALD: Must have been.

MR BELL: Yes.

MR ARCHIBALD: And very, very small. Like, it was - - -

MR BELL: Small wheels?

5 MR ARCHIBALD: Yes, small wheels on a small area.

MR BELL: Yes. You sort of wonder about the design of some of these things.

10 MR ARCHIBALD: That one was really strange, 'cause even any – just any normal sort of ramp access he would have problems with unless he was going backwards.

MR BELL: Mind you, reversing one of those things doesn't look to be that easy either.

15 MR ARCHIBALD: No, but he did it quite well actually. I've got to give him credit for that.

MR BELL: I imagine if you've been driving one of these things for a while, you develop a whole bunch of - - -

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MR ARCHIBALD: You would get used to it, yes.

MR BELL: - - - skills in terms of - - -

25 MR ARCHIBALD: But yes, like, you know, we were a bit concerned about his safety, and that's why we sort of, you know, the bus drivers had passed on to me, we went and spoke to him about it and that and worked out the best way to do it, and the safest way for him was to reverse it, so it's an interesting one, that one. But the best thing was is that we could fit him, a walker and another person in a wheelchair, like
30 in an electric wheelchair - - -

MR BELL: All in the one bus.

35 MR ARCHIBALD: - - - on the bus at the same time - - -

MR BELL: Yes, yes.

MR ARCHIBALD: - - - which is quite good.

40 MR BELL: Yes. Yes, 'cause certainly the long wheel-base ones have turning circle problems, and they take up a lot of space.

MR ARCHIBALD: Yes, yes, they do.

45 MR BELL: All right. Well, look, thank you very much.

MR ARCHIBALD: No worries.

MR BELL: Thanks for coming, and that concludes the hearing.

MS WHAN: Can I just say something? Sorry.

5 MR BELL: Yes. It's all right. We will just keep it going for the moment.

MS WHAN: What we have come across is that a lot of people, and especially Indigenous, don't know how to catch a bus.

10 MS EDWARDS: And the drivers aren't very helpful. I've got on with drivers and I've just thought they were quite rude. They just gave the impression, "Well, you should know what to do. Don't waste my time asking me."

MS WHAN: And I'm probably a really good example of that. I was born in Alice
15 Springs, have been very fortunate, have not had to catch buses very often. And for me to catch a bus, I have no idea what the ticket system is, anything like that. And when I go interstate, people laugh at me, 'cause I'm – you know, I don't know what to do either. So being a local girl and not having to catch a bus and occasionally catching a bus, I've got no idea what to do. And when asking some drivers, they are
20 just not very responsive.

MR ARCHIBALD: If a driver's on a run and he's on a time schedule, he won't have a lot of time to be able to explain.

25 MS WHAN: And that's okay, but it needs to be fully explained.

MR BELL: Do you have a brochure or something or other on - - -

MR ARCHIBALD: It's in council releases, not on something on how to catch a
30 bus, just the time schedule, which nobody understands, not even the town council does, and they're the ones that print it.

MS EDWARDS: Well, ask the kids. The kids will tell you. They can read it.

35 MR ARCHIBALD: Yes, well, what they do – town council basically - as soon as someone rings up and mentions the word "bus," it's transferred to me.

MS EDWARDS: That is true. Yes, that's true.

40 MS WHAN: That is very true.

MR ARCHIBALD: And I'm sort of – I only understand it 'cause I've driven the runs. And it is difficult to follow. It isn't something very simple.

45 MS EDWARDS: No.

MR ARCHIBALD: I did up a really simple one myself, just so I could understand it when I took over my position, so I could answer questions over the phone quite

quickly and easily, but the town council haven't – like I said, there's the big – they're not really much interested in it any more, 'cause it's not going to be theirs for much longer, and they can't – they're still responsible for it until it's handed over, and that's sort of where that all stands. As for catching buses, I don't understand - - -

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MS GOLDSMITH: I can give you a good – well, I mean, I grew up in regional Queensland, in Toowoomba. When I moved to Brisbane, I was 17. I moved there for uni, and I had other friends that came from places further out. I don't think I'd ever caught – other than an inter-city bus to Brisbane, I don't think I'd ever caught a bus before I moved there.

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MR ARCHIBALD: Like a public bus or something.

MS GOLDSMITH: I had a friend from Dalby, which is about an hour west of Toowoomba, so she was further out, and I don't think they even had any public buses when she lived there. And she thought – we had the new buses and they have a red – a big red button with “stop” written on it. Now, she thought that was the emergency stop button - - -

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20 MR ARCHIBALD: Oh no.

MS GOLDSMITH: - - - and was amazed that the bus driver always knew which was her stop. She was enrolled in university, she was not a silly woman, but she had never caught one of these, and it was only that one day one of her friends who was – had picked this up went, “No, no, no, that's what you press to tell the driver where to stop.” It was just very lucky that she was at a popular stop. People - - -

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MR ARCHIBALD: I know some people – they might have mentioned in Darwin, something that Public Transport issued, I think it was 23rd of last month, age is a goer and it didn't really effect us in Alice Springs all that much, but in Darwin basically if you are at a bus stop and the buses are driving past that stop to go another area or something like that, if you need to get on that bus you would hail it basically, get up and wave and say, you know, to the bus driver, you need to get on the bus. Now, they issued something – like I said, it is now policy that every bus going past a bus stop, if there is someone there they are to stop, whether they hail the bus, whether they don't hail the bus and that sort of thing.

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MS EDWARDS: Especially if you have an impaired person, they can't read to stop the buses as they come toward them.

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MR ARCHIBALD: Yes, yes, one thing the buses have though now for a long time, is that if there is someone in a bus stop if they just do stop. I know every once in a while the drivers laugh about it, because I get caught out when I drive every once in a while, there's people that do for the space base, sit right next to one of our bus stops getting picked up in the morning and I've stopped and you know, I have been caught out about three or four times. You stop, “No, no, no, I am catching another bus.” You know, “Yes, all right, no worries,” and you forget totally because I don't do it every couple of months if that, but yes, that's something that now, it didn't

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really effect us but it will make a difference to how people can catch the bus and then once you – the bus is stopped in front of you then it is very simple to figure out like the ticketing system and that because the – you know, it is, it is very basic at the moment. I don't know if you know it now or - - -

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MS WHAN: No. I got on recently with a client - - -

MS EDWARDS: We have had to with a client.

10 MS WHAN: - - - and I had no idea how much I had to pay or how much the client had to pay, who had to show a card and that, no idea because we to get into town but we didn't know that, we didn't know if the bus went to town and then we got another bus from town out. Because I knew about the Gillan Interchange and what I didn't know about was just the school buses.

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MR ARCHIBALD: That's just the schools, yes.

MS WHAN: But the driver wasn't helpful at all, he was just looking at me as if to say, well, are you stupid of something, the bus goes into town and then you wait for the other bus and it goes up to where you want to go and that is not very – not helpful at all.

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MR ARCHIBALD: I am surprised, because normally the bus drivers are quite helpful, they will answer questions and things but it depends – I suppose if they are on a time schedule and they're running behind then often they don't have time to explain or whatever. The ticketing system is very basic at the moment; it is basically \$2 for three hours worth of travel for an adult and if you've a valid concession card or anything else then it is 50c. So I mean it is very, very simple.

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30 MS WHAN: We know that now.

MR ARCHIBALD: Yes. I was going to say, one thing - - -

MS EDWARDS: It's like pulling teeth to get the information.

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MR ARCHIBALD: Something quite funny, we had a lady a few months back get on, she was tourist from south and she said – like, you know, it was \$2 for three hours and she was like, "Well, I will give you \$1.50, I only need one hour." It is like, no, it doesn't work like that and she kept saying, "Yes, but I only want an hour's worth of travel so I will give you the dollar or whatever," and the poor bus driver, like – he was saying, "Yes, I understand that but this is the way it works." So it took a while for her to understand because in – down south, I assume it works differently as well. I don't know how to catch a bus down south either.

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45 MS WHAN: No.

MR ARCHIBALD: Never had to. I have only ever lived in Darwin in the Northern Territory and here, so - - -

MR BELL: But I mean the point is that every system is a little different and I must say I use public transport in all sorts of strange places. In St Petersburg I can tell you you actually have to leap out in front of the bus and try to almost stand in its way or it won't stop and in Paris the sign on a funny little metal box next to the bus driver
5 says to compost your ticket and what they really mean is that you insert the ticket in the machine that stamps the time and - - -

MR ARCHIBALD: Yes, to validate it.

10 MR BELL: Yes, validate it, so – and then it turns out, if you are going more than a certain distance you actually put two tickets in together and to find out how all these things work is a big challenge, so I can understand. The Canberra buses now have a little sign that says it is \$3 and if you have got any of these cards, and there is a picture of four of them, we will give you a concession. So it is sort of fairly - - -

15 MR ARCHIBALD: I have been trying to get one out of Public Transport. I have got a very outdated one.

MR BELL: As to what you will accept in concessions?

20 MR ARCHIBALD: Yes, about what is acceptable and what isn't. And I don't think Public Transport has printed one, simply because as long as it is valid they will accept it, which is basically the guidelines we have been told anyway, so - - -

25 MS EDWARDS: Another problem we have is a lot of our clients they will have their card but with a disability there could also be memory problems and they might forget their card. They may have caught that bus every day with the same driver - - -

30 MR ARCHIBALD: Yes.

MS EDWARDS: - - - and the card – pay \$2, they - - -

MR ARCHIBALD: They still do have to show it unfortunately.

35 MS EDWARDS: The same flexibility then is, “No, when I get on the bus tomorrow I will just make sure that I've got my card tomorrow,” but it is at that stage - - -

40 MR ARCHIBALD: We have actually had a few problems with that for the reason that a lot of people that actually have cards – like, two of my drivers are only being new, so they're basically sticking to the rules, whereas beforehand it was very blasé here and there was never actually any – everybody was very, “Yes, I remember you had a card three years ago or whatever.” We've caught people out, like using discount cards and concession cards up to four years old, outdated; they're not
45 entitled to them but they still utilise them.

MS WHAN: That's the frustrating thing, because they ruin it for others.

MR ARCHIBALD: Exactly. And then like, you know, for example, do you just police those people and do you know who is who. Like, for a bus driver, unless you show a card that's valid then, sorry, but you know, it is basically, that's it, you're either an adult or you have a valid card. There are certain times where the bus
5 drivers will actually be a little more diplomatic than that but you know, according to the rules that is basically it because of the other people that do ruin it. We've had other instances where, I know in the past, the buses have actually - for older people that have problems and stuff will actually instead of stopping at the bus stop, will go another hundred metres further so that they have less to walk.

10 Now, it got to a stage where you do it for one person and then you have got to do it for everybody and then, you know, you don't become a bus service you become a taxi service and so we had to basically stop all that and if the people can make it to a bus stop to get on the bus then they can make it from that bus stop to where they
15 need to be. And unfortunately it was other people that were taking advantage of it that ruined it for everybody else, so that's where we have had to sort of stamp on it and actually pull everybody into line and basically say, "This is the way it has to be."

And you know, you'd be amazed how many people – just ladies with prams
20 complain because we don't put the ramps out and if you're running behind, it is a timely process, like you know, but they are there purely for wheelchair access, they are not there for ladies with prams, because if you were say in Darwin, for example, and they don't have a complete fleet of just wheelchair access vehicles, etcetera, like we do here, you have to fold your pram up and climb up a big bunch of stairs to get
25 on some of the buses. And here, like it is amazing, if I have a breakdown and I have one bus off the road, which I do at the moment, I would get 10, 15 phone calls in a week saying - - -

MS EDWARDS: Yes, we know, we have discussed that with him just before you
30 stepped in the room. We got inundated.

MS WHAN: Even without a disability also.

MR ARCHIBALD: Yes, a disability we understand and sometimes we do have a
35 problem with that. I don't know if you know what the public guidelines are, but if you do need a wheelchair access vehicle or something like that we can actually alter the runs but we need 24 hours notice just so - - -

MS EDWARDS: We were told that yesterday by Michelle Castagna.
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MR ARCHIBALD: Okay, no, cool.

MS EDWARDS: She was very honest with them.

45 MR ARCHIBALD: Yes, I mean, Michele and the Town Council work quite well together and I sort of work well with the Town Council as well, so we have sorted out a few things like that. We had a lady catch us out just recently and we actually the run on the spot to allow her to catch the bus back and then we changed a few

things around and she ended up contacting us and saying it doesn't – like it didn't matter, she will just do something else and – so that was fine, but yes, like just the – I suppose the people that take advantage of it, like mothers with prams and things like that, like you wouldn't believe the phone calls you get, like, you know, we had - - -

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MS WHAN: Just people complaining.

MR ARCHIBALD: Yes, and just more taking advantage of, you know, as a courtesy. Like I had a lady hang up on me last week because I said to her, "Look, the ramp isn't there for you and your pram, it is there for wheelchairs and only. We do it as a courtesy, that's it." You know, purely - - -

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MS EDWARDS: But you still kneel the bus though for the prams?

MR ARCHIBALD: Yes. Now, sometimes the buses won't kneel, they are controlled by 27 computers and sometimes they do have minds of their own and there's nothing you can do to make them do what they're supposed to, so - - -

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MR BELL: Yes.

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MR ARCHIBALD: Which is a shame sometimes. I had a lady tell me that she couldn't get on a bus because it wasn't knelt. The ramp was out but the bus driver physically couldn't get it to kneel which was a bit of a problem and worked for us since; addressed that, so we have hopefully got it working again.

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MS EDWARDS: Do your drivers have a policy when they don't get out of their seat?

MR ARCHIBALD: They're supposed to.

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MS EDWARDS: They're supposed to get out or supposed to stay in their seat?

MR ARCHIBALD: Supposed to stay in their seats. They're not supposed to get out for any reason. Again, Alice Springs being small I know a lot of them will actually – when we are using one of the older buses, filling in for the low floors, I know a couple of the drivers will get out and help prams up and things like that. Older people that need it, they will, but they are not expected to. So I know they try; some of them do. All three of them do actually, but yes, depending on the day you get them to and depends who they've had on just before and it depends on their mood as well, I can tell you; grumpy old bus drivers sometimes.

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MR BELL: All right. Well, look I think we might stop it there, but we are not going to be able to solve all the problems of the bus service here in Alice Springs, but certainly we have got some material to work on from your comments.

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MR ARCHIBALD: Good to hear.

MR BELL: Thank you very much.

MR ARCHIBALD: No worries.

HEARING CONCLUDED

[3.13pm]