

DEPUTY PREMIER

MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT & MINISTER FOR POLICE
JOHN WATKINS MP**NEWS RELEASE****COUNTRYLINK CUT CLAIMS COMPLETELY FALSE**

Wednesday, 22 November 2006

Deputy Premier and Minister for Transport and Police John Watkins said today the Lemna Government had secured the future of country rail services.

Mr Watkins said it was unclear why the Lachlan Regional Transport Committee would seek to confuse rural communities with such misleading claims.

"This is an unfounded and irresponsible attack by the Committee which will only serve to needlessly concern country residents," Mr Watkins said.

"CountryLink services are assured and secure under the Lemna Labor Government.

"The \$32 million CountryLink reforms announced in September 2005 secured the future of CountryLink.

"This Government has been very clear about its commitment to retaining all CountryLink services.

"The Parry Report into the sustainability of country rail services strongly recommended we replace trains with buses in a number of locations - but we weren't prepared to do that, and communities around NSW supported that decision."

Mr Watkins said that the Committee should direct its attention to the Opposition which would decimate country rail services if elected.

"CountryLink services would be in grave danger under the Member for Vaucluse," Mr Watkins said.

"The Nationals would be unable to stop the Liberals taking an axe to rural rail services if the Coalition ever holds office.

"Andrew Stoner and the Nationals will have no choice - because their Sydney Liberal mates will demand CountryLink is shut down or sold off on day one to pay for their \$25 billion black-hole of commitments.

"The Nationals Leader - with the Liberals riding roughshod over his party - has to answer these questions about what he would do with CountryLink:

1. How would you secure the future of CountryLink services?
2. Will the Nationals rule out replacing rail services with buses?

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3. Will Andrew Stoner fight the Liberal Party when they move to sell off CountryLink?"

Mr Watkins said the Liberals have clearly expressed their intention to involve private companies in public services, and it seemed the Member for Vaucluse sees CountryLink as a prime target:

"The NSW Liberal/Nationals will work with the private sector to get these projects delivered"

Greg Pearce MLC, Shadow Minister for Infrastructure – 23 Oct 06

"THE LIBERAL NATIONALS APPROACH WILL BE VERY DIFFERENT. Kickstarting New South Wales will be the number one priority of my government, starting with a series of fiscal measures to rein in spending, cut taxes, and make us competitive again."

"We believe there is much greater scope to involve the private sector in public infrastructure and its planning."

Debnam, Infrastructure Speech, 5 May 06

Mr Watkins said consultation over CountryLink reform revealed that users were prepared to pay slightly higher fares, if their services were upgraded.

"We've now embarked on a \$32 million refurbishment of CountryLink's XPT carriages. We're also spending \$1.5 million on upgrades at Broken Hill, Casino, Junee, Wauchope, Armidale, Tamworth, Kempsey and Taree," Mr Watkins said.

"The Xplorer fleet is also undergoing an upgrade, with \$10 million invested to refurbish these trains

"It would make no sense to refurbish the **entire CountryLink fleet** if there were any plans to cut services.

"Fares were increased by 8 per cent, representing increased fuel costs and inflation. Countrylink also introduced a booking fee for the free Pensioner Travel Vouchers to recognise similar systems used by Virgin Blue, Jetstar and Greyhound.

"The Government's commitment to CountryLink is clear - the plan was announced in September last year and is being implemented.

"It's time for the Nationals to be honest with country rail commuters and tell them what their secret plans are.

"And the Lachlan Regional Transport Committee should listen very closely to what those plans reveal."

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