



Route 623 Coolum to Nambour bus trial

Background

Sunshine Coast Council received requests from residents for a direct service between Coolum and Nambour without the need to change buses. Previously residents were required to catch two buses. The journey and travel time was inconsistent, ranging from 60 minutes to about 110 minutes.

As a result, council in partnership with TransLink designed a trial service providing a direct link between these two destinations and connections to existing services for onward journeys. The trial included four return services daily with a saving of up to 50 minutes travel time.

During the trial, council and TransLink assessed the level of demand, community feedback and passenger numbers to ascertain its viability for continuation.

The Route 623 Coolum to Nambour bus trial was a Sunshine Coast Council initiative, funded by the Public Transport Levy.

The trial service was launched on 31 October 2011, to operate initially until 30 June 2012. This trial was extended to 30 October 2012. Due to insufficient patronage, the trial service ended on 18 November 2012.

The service was designed to provide a public transport connection between Coolum and Nambour without the need to change buses. Key elements of the service included:

- operated four return journeys a day, seven days a week,
- reduced travel time and the need for passengers to change buses,
- connected with existing scheduled public transport services for onward journeys; and
- an all-stop service running from Springfield Avenue, Coolum via the Sunshine Coast Airport terminal and Bli Bli onto Nambour Hospital and Nambour Rail Station to connect with train and bus services.

Community consultation prior to implementation

In January 2011, council invited residents to provide feedback on the proposed Coolum to Nambour trial route and timetable. The feedback received helped form the final schedule and a more useable service for residents.

Prior to implementation, the service was promoted through:

- media releases and advertising in local papers and radio,
- posters and flyers distributed to local businesses along the route,
- Sunshine Coast Council and TransLink websites; and
- timetable and poster displays at Visitor Information Centres, libraries and council administration offices.

Promotion

Advertising and promotion of the service before and during the trial was undertaken including:

- media releases
- newspaper advertising
- mail-out to 12,000 residents along the route
- council and TransLink websites
- facebook posts
- external decals on the bus
- bus stop notices
- face-to face promotion to businesses along the route
- stakeholder emails.

Survey analysis

In February and March 2012, surveys were mailed to 12,000 property owners and residents living within approximately a one kilometre radius of the bus route. The survey sought feedback on residents' public transport awareness, current use and suggestions for improvements. More than 450 responses were received. Feedback indicated:

- 72% of respondents were over the age of 40,
- 80% were aware of the service,
- 58% had used the service;
- 50% of respondents utilised the service for either recreation (26%) or shopping (24%), and 20% used the service for work purposes;
- the most popular locations travelled between were:
 - Nambour Hospital (65%);
 - Sunshine Coast Airport (37%);
 - Nambour Rail Station (29%); and
 - Birtwill Street, Coolum Beach (18%).

Due to receiving a low (3.7%) response rate to the survey, the analysis was inconclusive as to how the service could be improved to increase patronage and better service the community at large.

Passenger data

Throughout the first 11 months of the trial, the service carried over 11,000 passengers and at 1 October 2012 was averaging 1,300 trips per month.

The level of usage was approximately five passengers per trip. Had the number consistently exceeded seven passengers per trip, the service may have been viable to receive ongoing council funding. For the service to have met existing TransLink guidelines for establishing and incorporating a permanent service, passenger numbers needed to reach a minimum of fourteen passengers per trip.

Decision to end the trial

The trial service was implemented on a 'use it to keep it' basis to assess the level of demand for a permanent direct service between Coolum and Nambour.

After a 12 month trial period, the service had not reached required passenger numbers to be considered for a permanent service, and as such, the trial service ended on 18 November 2012.

Alternative services

Passengers that utilised the route 623 trial service are encouraged to use the journey planner on translink.com.au for alternative travel options. Travel between Coolum and Nambour can still be made using public transport on the following services:

- via Maroochydore on routes 610 and 620,
- via Noosa Junction on routes 630 and 620, or
- or via David Low Way, Bli Bli on routes 612 and 622.

