



Northern Illawarra Chamber of Commerce Inc.

PO Box 396, Helensburgh, NSW 2508

Email: info@nicc.net.au

Website: www.nicc.net.au

ABN 48 736 796 032

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Gareth Ward MP
Parliamentary Secretary to the Premier for
the Illawarra and South Coast
102 Terralong St
Kiama NSW 2533

Dear Gareth

A pleasure to meet with you in your Kiama office last Monday on issues affecting small business and the general community in the Northern Illawarra. You are aware that the Northern Illawarra Chamber of Commerce ("NICC") covers the region from Helensburgh to Thirroul inclusive. We see two prominent issues in our region, as follows:

1. Internet connectivity reliability and speed

A major issue for small business in our region is reliable internet connection and speed now with Telstra and into the immediate future with the NBN. Small business in our region is clearly now in a competitive disadvantage, particularly those located North of the Sea Cliff Bridge (the 2508 postcode), compared with neighbouring areas such as Wollongong or the Sutherland Shire.

The demographic of our region is such that we would estimate that as many as 1 in 2 households run small businesses and, in many instances, multiple businesses such that access to latest communications technology is vital.

We know of instances where business owners have had to travel out of our region to obtain reliable service to operate their business or simply been without connection for days. With the push to more "cloud" based resources for some businesses such as online accounting (Xero, MYOB), the ATO requiring online access and the Commonwealth Government requiring online connectivity to carry out interactions with many departments via AUSKey, the unreliability and slow speed of internet connectivity is having a negative impact on business. Most processes with Wollongong City Council are now on-line too.

For example:

Local building supply company in Helensburgh needing to upgrade their server facing a choice between a full hardware replacement at around \$30000 or a cloud solution at around \$10,000 but cannot consider the more cost effective cloud solution due to the unreliability of internet connectivity and speed. The cost of the full system will force the business to increase pricing to help cover costs which will not only negatively affect the ongoing viability of the business but drive local residents and trades people to stop buying locally for their building supplies.

An import/exporter of resin products forced to relocate their office from home in Stanwell Park to an office in the Sutherland Shire again due to unreliable and slow internet connectivity that impacted on their communications to overseas suppliers. The additional costs in travel time and rent of office space impacts competitiveness and may mean that less staff are employed.

An international freight forwarding business has at times had to travel to a more reliable internet connection area of Sutherland or Wollongong to submit online tenders.

From the community perspective, students are having to leave the home to research, complete and submit assignments. We are aware of an instance where a student left the family home in the 2508 area to stay with extended family to properly continue their education due to the inability to get reliable internet connection to carry out research and submit work online.

The majority of the local cabling is copper, is direct in ground and not in conduits, and it is felt in the local community that Telstra do not want to upgrade the copper cabling as NBN will own it when NBN comes to the area and then have to upgrade the copper cabling to meet the current required specification. The 2515 area has recently been announced as being included in the NBN roll but the 2508 area has not. Both areas need the NBN as soon as possible for both businesses and residents to come up to what is currently expected to be available in other areas – to remain competitive.

We request that in your role as Parliamentary Secretary to the Premier Illawarra and South Coast that you represent this issue to the Federal Government; specifically that the 2508 postcode be immediately included in the NBN roll out.

2. Transport timetable changes

The current train timetable and restrictions on bus route contracts with Transport NSW have impacted on the businesses and residents in Thirroul and all along the Northern Illawarra area up to and including Helensburgh in ways that the timetable creators and Transport NSW did not see as ramifications.

The concept of Thirroul and Helensburgh as “hub” stations has not worked as there are not the feeder trains and buses meeting the express trains at the hubs causing residents to drive to the hub stations thus limiting or totally removing the availability of parking at those hub stations. This reality fills parking spaces in and around the CBD of Thirroul in particular during the day with the consequence that local shoppers and visitors to the area cannot park, cannot get reasonable access to shops and drive on. Full parking also dictates that business people, tradies and residents who might use public transport during the day do not, choosing to drive to their workplaces or destination.

At Helensburgh, the fact that buses have to leave the railway station to a strict timetable that clearly does not allow for late running trains leave passengers stranded at the station either trying to sort out a lift home or waiting considerable time to the next bus. There has been cases over the past few years of school children left at the station as the bus company must leave according to their timetable else be fined. In other cases the southbound train has departed Helensburgh followed by the departure of the local bus and then the northbound train arrives within a minute or two, with passengers wishing to catch the local bus having to wait for some time for the next bus as one has just left.

The business and residents of the Northern Illawarra need changes to the train timetable on the South Coast rail line to create more scheduled stops at stations such as Austinmer, Bulli and intermediate stations to Helensburgh to reduce the negative affect of clogging of parking.

We also need flexibility in the bus timetable contracts to allow for delays in the arriving connections and better integration of the modes of public transport.

Yours sincerely



Gregory Watts
President
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