



PARLIAMENT OF NEW SOUTH WALES
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

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Private Members' Statements

9 August 2022

REGIONAL SENIORS TRAVEL CARD

Ms SONIA HORNER (Wallsend) (20:53):

After nearly three years of raising the issue, I cannot believe I have to talk about the regional seniors travel card again. Even in its most recent budget, the Government has not fixed its 2019 mistake of rolling out the regional seniors travel card. The scheme provides a \$250 prepaid Visa card to seniors who live in regional areas to help with travel costs—great idea. The announcement was very welcome news to seniors across the electorate of Wallsend, but as it turned out only a fraction of our seniors in the electorate were eligible.

The Government made the inexplicable decision to include the Lake Macquarie local government area in the rollout and exclude Newcastle city. That resulted in a bizarre situation where 2,000 local seniors were deemed eligible but over 12,000 seniors in my electorate were not. Furious locals contacted my office, demanding to know why they had been left out while their friends, family members and neighbours in Lake Macquarie had not been. All I could say is that the Government does not classify Newcastle local government area as regional, despite the fact that it was before. For Government members who are not familiar with the geography of Wallsend, I will explain. Wallsend is the western end of Newcastle and the northern end of Lake Macquarie. The suburbs of Minmi and Black Hill have semi-rural properties and the suburbs of Beresfield and Taro are at least 25 kilometres from the Newcastle CBD. They cannot be described as metropolitan areas, but they are in the Newcastle local government area.

Local residents were left bewildered and so was I. Why are Beresfield and Taro seniors ineligible for the regional seniors travel card when they are so far away from transport hubs, while residents of suburbs like Charlestown, which is located near one of the region's most well-served public transport hubs, are eligible? In other areas, residents of Rankin Park, Elernmore Vale, New Lambton Heights and Cardiff Heights were told that they are not eligible because they happen to live in Newcastle. Yet residents on the Lake Macquarie side of the street, sometimes their own neighbours, were deemed eligible. One side of the street gets a card while the other side gets punted.

Adding insult to injury, Beresfield and Taro residents were turned away after they visited the Maitland Service Centre to apply. They were initially told that they were eligible and received confirmation that their applications had been received, but a few weeks later they were told that they were rejected. Newcastle is smaller than both Lake Macquarie and the Central Coast in size and population, but Newcastle was the only one excluded. Why? In the year since, I have received no clarification about how the Government determines regional and metropolitan areas. Newcastle does not seem to be either regional or metro. It is left in a strange limbo by a government that cannot get its story straight.

When I write about Newcastle issues on behalf of my constituents or submit questions on notice to the transport Minister, they are directed to the Minister for Regional Transport and Roads. The Government classifies Newcastle as regional in that circumstance but suddenly considers it metropolitan when it comes to the travel card. That bizarre classification also excludes Newcastle from applying for significant funding pools for key infrastructure. Newcastle is defined as metropolitan under the Regional Growth Fund but as regional under the Resources for Regions program. That inconsistency makes my constituents wonder what the Government is thinking. They are not happy about it, and I do not blame them. Give all the senior constituents in the Wallsend electorate a travel card. I call on the Government and the Minister to fix this silly mistake that they have not rectified.