

CENTRAL COAST NIGHT OWL BUS

BIOGRAPHY

Allan Snelson has 13 years experience in the field of traffic engineering and road safety at Gosford City Council. He is a qualified Road Safety Auditor and has developed a sound knowledge of road safety engineering strategies.

Kirsty Taylor has a Bachelor of Social Science and has been involved in project management and behavioural change within the Government structure for 6 years. She has also been part of the Local Government Road Safety Program as a Road Safety Officer at Wyong Shire Council since 2002.

As Councils Road Safety Officers, Allan and Kirsty focus on education and behavioural issues associated with a wide range of road user safety concerns including drink driving, speed, vehicle occupant restraints, driver fatigue and safety around local schools.

ABSTRACT

This paper looks at the notable high incidence of drink driving among patrons attending late night licensed venues on the NSW Central Coast which led to research aimed at determining why this was occurring. This study also examined options to find a solution to the problem, such as considering the transport alternatives that were available in the area and the need to provide suitable education to modify the behaviour of the target group.

The initial research identified a significant lack of late night transport services available. Additional research indicated that although the majority of the patrons had the right attitude towards drink driving, they were often not prepared to follow this through with the desired behaviour due to a lack of other transport options. This led to the development of a late night transport alternative to be known as the Night Owl Bus service.

This project took an integrated approach to the issue working in conjunction with other agencies/projects including the NSW Police, NSW Roads and Traffic Authority (RTA) and media outlets.

The Night Owl Bus steering committee, comprising State and Local Government representatives as well as participation from local business and the community, was involved in the development of the routes and services.

There was a need to educate the patrons, not only on the dangers associated with drink driving but to also make them aware of the Night Owl Bus service. Enforcement was also enhanced to give maximum exposure in order to change behaviour. The Night Owl Bus service now provides patrons of licensed venues with a genuine alternative to drink driving.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ROAD SAFETY PROGRAM – NSW AUSTRALIA

The RTA is responsible for developing, implementing and monitoring road safety strategies and policies. The RTA promotes safety in the NSW road system through initiatives and programs relating to human factors (drivers and other road users), road environment and traffic systems, and vehicle and personal safety equipment.

The RTA also administers the Local Government Road Safety Program (LGRSP) within local Councils across the state, in which the NSW Government has committed to 50:50 funding until 2010. A document developed by the RTA, Road Safety 2010, sets a strategic framework for improving road safety from 2000-2010 and sets a target to halve the NSW road toll by 2010. The aim of the LGRSP is to increase the involvement of local Government and local communities in road safety planning and activities in order to contribute to the State-wide effort to reducing the incidence and severity of crashes.

Local Councils are in the position to work closely with their communities by educating a wide range of people, implementing strategies and changing road safety behaviour through engineering, behavioural and other community based education initiatives.

Local Road Safety Officer behavioural and education programs are supported and enhanced by State-wide RTA campaigns and Police enforcement.

INTRODUCTION

The Central Coast Night Owl Bus concept was developed due to the high incidence of drink driving in the area with this being a major cause of local road crashes. There were a number of young males being killed or seriously injured with Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC) of 0.05 or more. These statistics along with the lack of late night transport options on the NSW Central Coast led to the development of the Night Owl Bus and its subsequent expansion.

This transport project provides a safe alternative to drink driving on the Central Coast. The service was first piloted over the summer months of 2000/01 and has since expanded to a year round Friday night / Saturday night service. In brief it could be described as a system of public transport designed to cater for patrons of major licensed venues providing a service to deter patrons from driving either between venues or from venues to their homes.

Whilst it does not provide a door-to-door service, the service is designed to deliver patrons as close as possible to central business districts or residential clusters, so they may select alternate forms of transport or walk with ease to their residences.

It has a secondary effect, by removing the patrons from gathering outside licensed premises and therefore reducing street offences such as malicious injury, assaults & noise complaints.

The number of buses required to operate this service has increased from one to four due to the additional bus routes that have evolved.

- 2000/01 Summer Service - Gosford to Terrigal (via Green Point). 1 bus.

- 2001/02 Summer Service - Gosford to Terrigal (route change via Springfield/Erina). 1 bus.
- 2002/03 Summer Service -Gosford to Terrigal; The Entrance to Terrigal. 2 buses.
- 2003/04 Year Round Service - Gosford to Terrigal, The Entrance to Terrigal, Woy Woy Peninsula Loop. 3 buses.
- 2004/05 Year Round Service - Gosford to The Entrance, The Entrance to Gosford, Woy Woy to Gosford, new Northern Route to The Entrance. 4 buses.
- 2005/06 Year Round Service - Gosford to The Entrance, The Entrance to Gosford, Woy Woy to Gosford, Northern Route to Bateau Bay (servicing additional suburbs). 4 buses.

The Night Owl Bus has financial support from the State Government, Wyong and Gosford Councils and local licensed premises along with the funds generated through ticket sales to the community also assist.

TARGET GROUP

The target group for this campaign is all motorists within the Wyong and Gosford LGAs, specifically 18-49 year old drivers and those who attend late night venues.

PROJECT RATIONALE

The Central Coast Night Owl Bus was developed after it was determined that there was a notable high incidence of drink driving among patrons attending late night licensed venues on the NSW Central Coast. This led to research aimed at determining why this was occurring and also examined options to find a solution to the problem, such as considering the transport alternatives that were available in the area and the need to provide suitable education to modify the behaviour of the target group.

In 2000 when the initial statistical data was being analysed it was found that 10% of all fatal and injury accidents were alcohol related along with 6% of all non-casualty accidents. With 235 people over the previous 3 year period (1998-2000) being killed or injured on Central Coast roads as a result of drink driving something had to be done.

LATE NIGHT TRANSPORT OPTIONS ON THE NSW CENTRAL COAST

The initial research identified a significant lack of late night transport services available.

The geography of the Central Coast means that the population is spread widely, with residents living in corridors along the coast and towards the National Motorway 1 (F3). These living areas are often long distances from the late night venues, which are clustered into the CBD areas of many suburbs. When the service was developed in 2000, the key late night areas of the Central Coast were Gosford, Terrigal and The Entrance (see appendix A for map of Central Coast).

Two major bus operators and one train line service the Central coast:

- Busways – Gosford to Terrigal via Wamberal and Woy Woy to Umina
- Red Bus - The Entrance to Gosford (The Entrance Rd)
- One train line that runs only the western border of the Central Coast - Wyong to Gosford to Woy Woy

Research found that late night services were lacking between the late night hubs (Gosford, Terrigal, The Entrance) with the last services ranging from between 5.14pm and 11.43pm. There were no services after midnight on any day of the week (see appendix B).

Central Coast Taxis are the only supplier of Taxis to the Central Coast. The area between the Hawkesbury River and Lake Macquarie (an area of approx 1855 square km) was covered by 65 taxis with generally just over half of these working on a Friday or Saturday night.

From the analysis of services available it was determined that the corridor between Gosford and Ourimbah was suitably serviced by the train line and therefore a bus service was not required. However the area between Gosford and The Entrance was severely lacking in services. It was decided that a pilot service was to be developed (Gosford to Terrigal) and then extended based on its initial success (Terrigal to The Entrance).

From this research it was determined that additional late night services were required during the peak accident and drink drive offending times being Friday and Saturday nights between 10pm and 5am. Peaks in accident and drink driving offences are found between 10pm and 1am and again between 3am and 5am indicating the main time periods that movement occurs to and from licensed premises.

This project took an integrated approach to the issue working in conjunction with other agencies/projects including the NSW Police, NSW Roads and Traffic Authority (RTA) and media outlets.

CENTRAL COAST NIGHT OWL BUS

The Night Owl Bus steering committee, comprising State and Local Government representatives as well as participation from local business and the community, was involved in the development of the routes and services based on the research and knowledge of the community and their requirements.

The aim of the committee was to provide a reliable and safe late night bus service operating on Friday and Saturday nights all year within the Gosford and Wyong Local Government Areas.

The committee developed a set of clear cut objectives to guide the project and ensure its success. These were:

- To provide a service for people who have consumed alcohol, that is safe and secure
- To encourage patrons/community to plan their trip
- To increase community awareness about the Night Owl Bus service
- To encourage community use of the service, continually improving patronage figures
- To obtain stakeholder involvement and gain sponsorship towards the project so that it can continue in the future.

The success of the service was greatly dependant on the level and quality of the promotion that was undertaken. From the onset, promotional strategies included educating patrons on the dangers of drink driving and the transport options available to them prior to going out as well as reminding them about the availability of the Night Owl Bus service whilst they were out. Promotional items used included

- Coasters & posters of the service distributed to participating venues, bus companies, relevant community sites, council locations & businesses
- Timetables distributed to local businesses, Tourist Info Centres, Council outlets & other appropriate outlets
- Bus Identification - digital display board, bus advertising through sponsorship
- Radio and newspaper advertisements
- Council and participating venues websites
- Community service announcements on local radio
- Media releases and photos in local papers

ATTITUDES TO DRINK DRIVING

Following the development of the route for the pilot program the service commenced in December 2000. A high profile media campaign was implemented to promote the service and encourage regular passenger usage of the service. Once the service became established among patrons, additional research was carried out to gauge community satisfaction, the suitability of the service and passengers attitudes towards drink driving being the main reason behind the development of the service.

This additional research supported the continuation of the service indicating that although the majority of the patrons had the right attitude towards drink driving, they were often not prepared to follow this through with the desired behaviour due to a lack of transport options available.

Surveys conducted in 2002 of patrons on the bus found that more than 93% said they had been drinking with most being aged between 18 and 21 years. It was found that 30% said that without the Night Owl Bus service they would have otherwise driven themselves home despite being affected by alcohol, or travelled as a passenger with someone possibly in a similar state. Passengers recognised that drink driving was wrong but due to the lack of services available were willing to take the risk, driving home.

SURVEYS OF PASSENGERS ON THE NIGHT OWL BUS

Through community consultation it was determined there was a high proportion of regular patrons to licensed premises that had not heard of the Night Owl Bus, or had heard about it but didn't know how to catch it or where from/what time. It was decided research was needed to be carried out to determine what promotional strategies were effective so that a better use of promotional funding being explored.

In October 2003 as the Night Owl Bus continued to grow and expand, surveys were undertaken with passengers on the Night Owl Bus so that the committee could evaluate the success of the promotion tools being used. The questions asked in the 'promotional' survey were:

1. What is your age?
2. Is this your first time on the Night Owl Bus?
3. How did you find out about the Night Owl Bus?
4. Have you seen/heard any of the following promotional items
 - * Timetables
 - * Posters
 - * Drink Coasters
 - * Advertising on the back of buses
 - * Newspaper articles or photos
 - * Radio advertising or news stories
 - * TV advertising
 - * Councils website

Results

The promotional survey also provided useful evaluation data for the committee to make changes to the promotional items being used. The promotional items being used in 2003 were evaluated finding that the most successful, recognised and useful items were coasters, posters and timetables at participating venues and distributed through bus companies, bus identification digital display board, along with media releases, radio news items and photos in local papers.

The least recognised and therefore least effective were radio and newspaper advertisements. Council and participating venues websites were not significantly recognised but a free form of promotion that when highlighted can provide people with a great deal of information. Community service announcements on local radio were few and far between but again a free form of promotion that may act as a reminder to the community.

SURVEYS OF PATRONS AT LICENSED PREMISES

With the introduction of an additional service in November 2004 a high profile promotional campaign took place. This involved promotional staff wearing Night Owl Bus shirts and hats attending participating venues during peak times to gather information, undertake surveys and promote the Night Owl Bus. At this time patrons at local licensed premises were surveyed to obtain details on how many people knew about the bus, if they used it regularly and if they didn't, why not. The aim was also to educate people one on one promoting the service and allowing potential passengers to ask specific questions that they may have about the service. This was carried out

on Friday and Saturday nights for 6 weeks. The questions asked in the 'knowledge' survey were:

1. What is your age?
2. What suburb do you live in?
3. How are you getting home tonight?
4. Have you ever used the Night Owl Bus?
5. If not, why not?

Each person that said they hadn't heard about the service was given a timetable and had the service explained to them.

Results

Surveys conducted in 2002 showed that most people using the Night Owl Bus were aged between 18 and 21 years. Data analysed in October 2003 showed a change in demographics of passengers which now included a large range of age groups. 18-21 year olds still accounted for 64% of passengers however the ages ranged to over 60 years. See appendix F for details.

Of 527 people surveyed 59% said that they had used the service, 39% had not used it with no answers accounting for 2% of those surveyed.

With 39% of people saying they hadn't used the service the 'why not' question provided very useful information. The majority of people (28%) haven't needed to use the service having organised other transport prior to going out, 27% said that the service didn't go to their suburb, 21% said that they didn't know about it, or didn't know the times and routes and 13% saying that they lived in Sydney. The remaining 11% provided useless answers reflective of their level of intoxication at the time. See appendix G for a representative graph.

This information was valuable in the development of new routes and changes to the current routes but also enabled the promotional staff to provide timetables and detailed information to the 21% of people that didn't know about the service.

This type of research has been considered extremely valuable and will be used again in the future as it provided the opportunity to collect useful data, evaluated current services and to educate more people through the high profile promotion of the service.

POLICE INVOLVEMENT IN THE SERVICE

(information contained below was provided by NSW Police in September 2005)

There was a need to educate the patrons, not only on the dangers associated with drink driving but to also make them aware of the Night Owl Bus service. This was undertaken through Community Road Safety Programs, Traffic Offenders, community festivals and through the local Licensing Police and Police Youth Liaison Officer.

Enforcement was also enhanced through high profile RBT nights to give maximum exposure in order to change behaviour. The Night Owl Bus service now provides patrons of licensed venues with a genuine alternative to drink driving.

Police Intel shows that in general terms crashes were increasing across the Central Coast towards the end of 2003, however since that time there has been a gradual turndown in total crashes recorded. This could be attributed to the commencement of the year round Night Owl Bus in November 2003.

Alcohol Linking Project:

This is a program adopted by the NSW Police in recent years. It is a process whereby events and people are linked to particular licensed premises. It was initially designed to benefit Licensing Police however has applications for other sections of the force and when read in conjunction with other data can assist in traffic analysis.

It allows Police not only to identify venues where persons of interest are originating but it also provides information as to whether the persons involved had been at a hotel, club, restaurant or private premises.

The existence of the Night Owl Bus has allowed patrons to plan alternative transport home, before going out drinking, therefore leaving the car at home. Traffic Offence data revealed that at least 2 out of 3 offences resulted from drinking at licensed premises (see appendix C)

Whilst the program provides the names of all licensed premises in each command where offenders or persons of interest have been, we consider for the purpose of this survey to highlight the major licensed premises in each command, or premises that have a more than average representation in total events resulting from their premises.

Street Offences:

Whilst the alcohol linking project shows that there is a moderate street offence activity around certain licensed premises, data from the police computer system shows a substantial downturn in all street offences in both the Brisbane Water and adjoining Tuggerah Lakes commands since the end of 2003. Since that time the reported offences have levelled, some spikes have been identified however these are during the holiday & summer periods when it is reasonable to expect a slight increase in reported incidents.

Summary from NSW Police:

In general terms it could be stated that the Night Owl Bus project has had a significant impact on reducing the amount of general crime, originating from or around licensed premises on the NSW Central Coast.

Whilst there have been some spikes in various periods which can be attributed to seasonal factors and increased usage in venues, all reportable issues connected with the Night Owl Bus functions and principles have decreased considerably since its inception.

Police from this command certainly applaud the efforts of all persons involved in the management & administration of this program and support their efforts to reduce road trauma & other alcohol associated offences.

SUCCESS OF THE SERVICE

From November 2003 to the end of August 2005, the Night Owl Bus carried over 40,000 passengers home safely.

The average number of people using the service has been on the increase (see appendix D) with figures in the past month (19th August – 10th September 2005) spiralling to an average of 555 per weekend.

Average number of patrons per week

2001-02	137 (8 weeks)
2002-03	290 (11 weeks)
2003-04	429 (33 weeks)
2004-05	412 (52 weeks)
2005-06	467 (11 weeks to 10 Sept 05)
	555 (last 4 weeks 19.8.05 – 10.9.05)

Monthly passenger numbers remain fairly constant throughout the year peaking in months that have long weekends. The graph at appendix E shows the peaks and troughs for the period November 2003 – August 2005.

THE FUTURE OF THE SERVICE

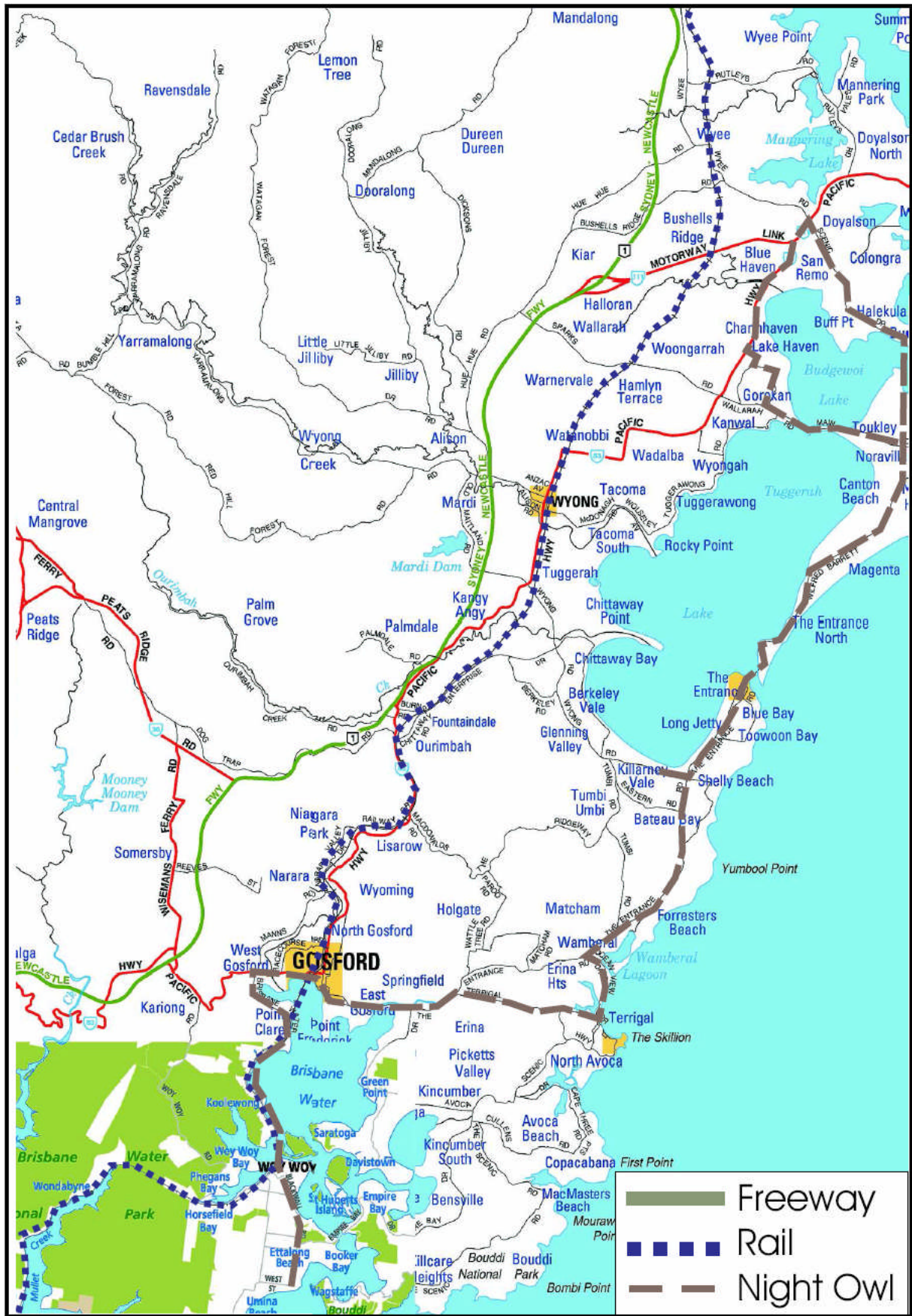
Since its inception, the Night Owl Bus has grown to become a recognisable and highly valued alternative transport service. However, it requires an on-going and substantial funding commitment to meet the demands of providing this worthwhile service to the public.

Should continuation of the Night Owl Bus be jeopardised due to a lack of funding, there is concern by the Police, as well as Councils Road Safety Officers and local licensed premises regarding a likely and significant rise in the incidents of drink driving, the difficulty in dispersing crowds at venue closing times and the lack of taxis provided in the area.

Statistics indicate that drink driving on the NSW Central Coast predominantly occurs late on Friday and Saturday nights and with this in mind it is intended that this program continue to target the local community who patronise late night licensed venues.

Ideally, the Night Owl Bus could become a route to be taken over and serviced by the local bus companies if the NSW Ministry of Transport proceeds with its intention to draw-up new area operating contracts for bus services on the NSW Central Coast. Councils Road Safety Officers could continue their involvement with the Night Owl Bus by overseeing the promotional aspects of the project.

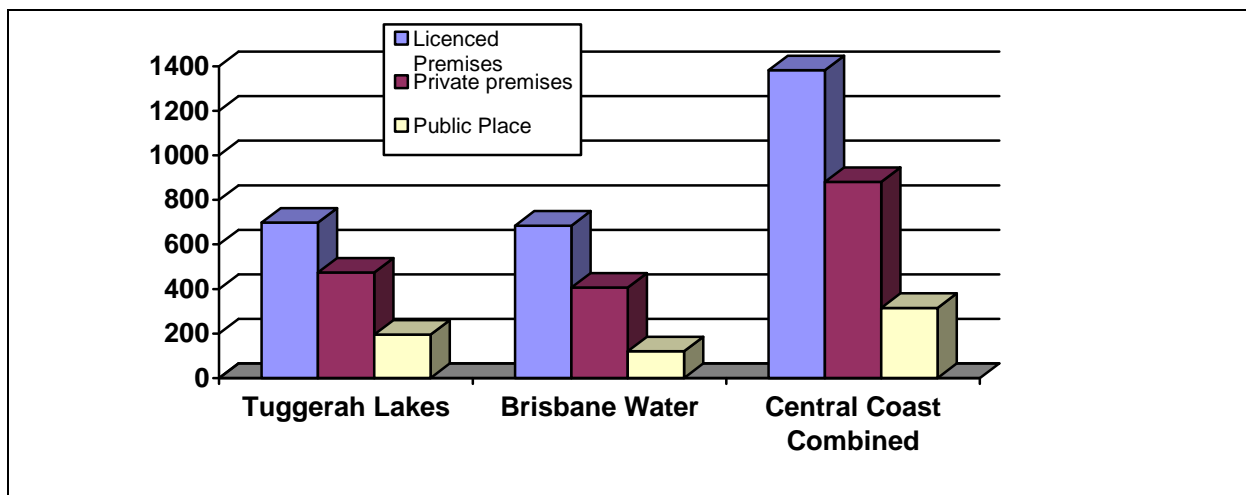
APPENDIX A – MAP OF THE CENTRAL COAST



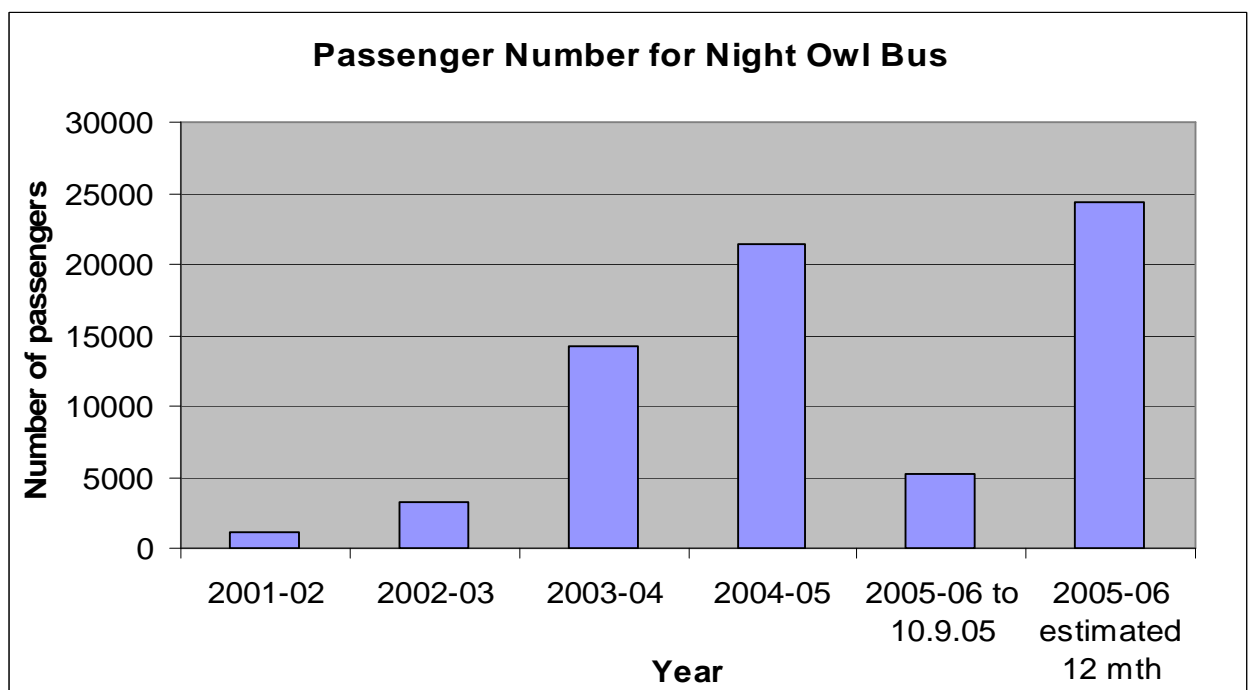
APPENDIX B – LATE NIGHT TRANSPORT OPTIONS ON THE CENTRAL COAST

Provider	Route	Last time Fri	Last time Sat
Busways	Gosford - Terrigal - Wamberal	8.40pm	7.45pm
Busways	Gosford - Terrigal - North Avoca	11.43pm	11.43pm
Red Bus	Gosford - Springfield - Erina	10.38pm	10.45pm
Red Bus	Gosford - The Entrance	7.45pm	10.45pm
Red Bus	The Entrance - Gosford	5.14pm	9.35pm
City Rail	Wyong - Gosford		12.29am
City Rail	Wyong - Gosford - Woy Woy	2.45am, 3.52am, 4.52am, 5.37am	
City Rail	Woy Woy - Gosford	11.29pm, 12.29am, 1.29am, 2.58am	
City Rail	Gosford - Wyong	11.43pm, 12.43am, 1.42am, 3.12am, 4.18am, 4.22am	

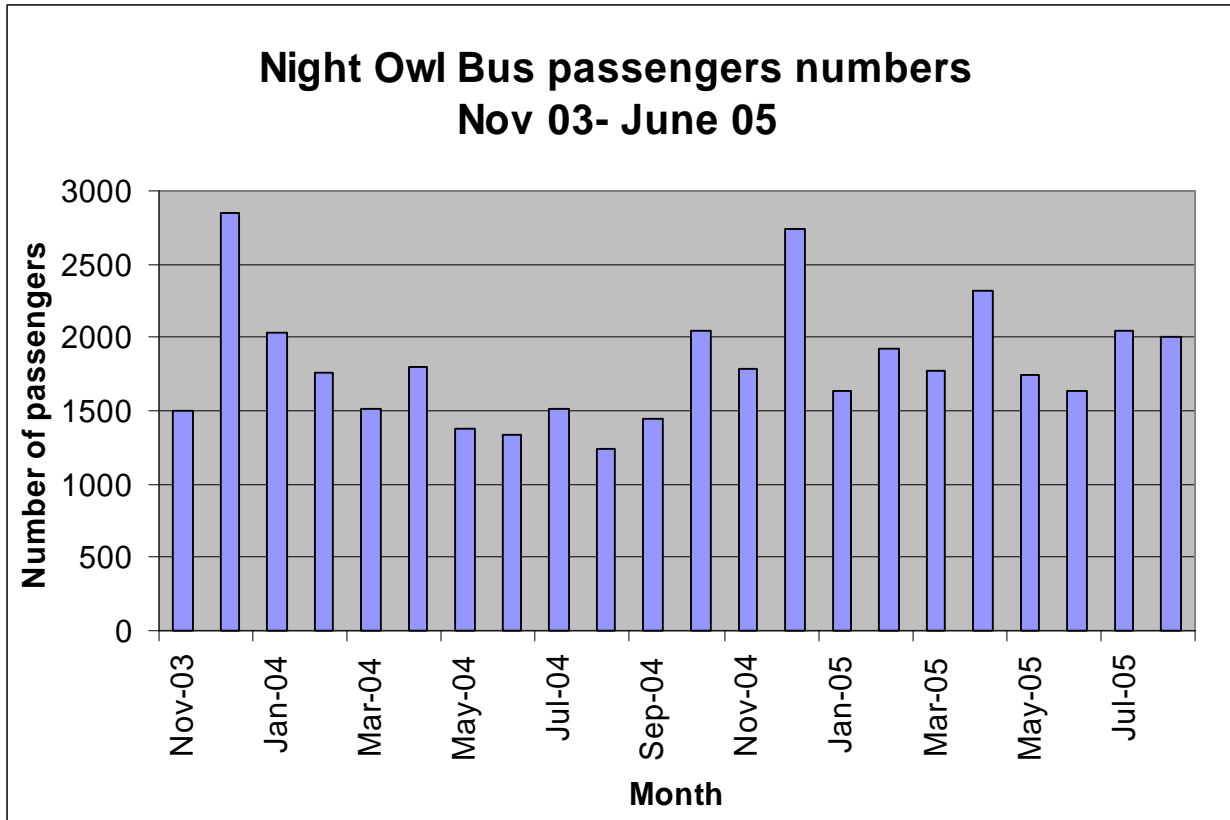
APPENDIX C – Traffic offence data from licensed premises



APPENDIX D – NUMBER OF NIGHT OWL BUS PASSENGERS PER YEAR



APPENDIX E – NUMBER OF NIGHT OWL BUS PASSENGERS PER MONTH



APPENDIX F – Age of passengers October 2003



APPENDIX G – Why people haven't used the Night Owl Bus

