

# Minis back in fashion: private bus plan for city

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THEY are the iconic form of transport throughout much of Asia. Jitneys – with their colourful decorations and often musical horns – wend their way through cities and towns picking up locals who flag them down at roadside stalls and markets.

In the more exotic locales of the Middle East and South-East Asia, you may find yourself sitting next to someone nursing a chicken or a duck.

Now a leading transport expert has suggested a similar network of jitneys, or shared taxis, could be established throughout NSW – albeit in a more sedate, conventional style.

Professor Corinne Mulley, who holds the State Government-funded chair in public transport at the University of Sydney, says they could be introduced to serve rural, regional and the low-density outer suburbs of Sydney.

Addressing a seminar yesterday at the University of Sydney's Institute for Transport and Logistics Studies yesterday, Professor Mulley said a shared-taxi network should be based on successful schemes in continental Europe. They would be linked to train and bus routes and charge more than the local bus fare but a lot less than a standard taxi fare.

Community groups, such as welfare providers, and councils already run mini-buses for the frail and aged, and Professor Mulley suggests expanding the service for people who live in villages and neighbourhoods off the main bus routes and rail lines. "We already have little schemes in NSW but should be thinking about bringing them all together and building on that for people who live in areas where it is not profitable or viable to have a bus service," she told the *Herald*.

Professor Mulley's proposal could also fit in with the State Government's move to establish bus corridors, concentrating the buses along main roads with dedicated routes, by dropping commuters near major stops.

She says that in Switzerland shared taxis serve "the deepest rural areas and the urban fringes". They also could also increase patronage on public transport by integrating with train and bus timetables.

Professor Mulley's research shows that travellers will avoid public transport if there is more than 12 to 15 minutes between services: "Basically, people who need to consult a published timetable, as opposed to just turning up at the station or the stop, tend not to use public transport."

The NSW Community Transport Organisation, which represents grassroots transport providers, estimates there are about 1500 small vehicles licensed to carry passengers

but the group's executive director, Peter McLeod, says many would only be available outside peak hours.

But he has endorsed Professor Mulley's idea, saying many community buses were equipped with onboard technology that would allow them to pick up passengers, who would call a dispatcher, at short notice. "This technology is the key," he said. "It allows you to have a flexible booking system."