



## **Submission to the Inquiry into the investment of Commonwealth and State funds in public passenger transport infrastructure and services.**

Wellington Shire Council

### **Introduction**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to the Inquiry into the investment of Commonwealth and State funds in public passenger transport

### **Focus of submission from Wellington Shire Council**

The focus of this submission is on equitable access to transport as key dimensions of liveability and quality of life.

Wellington Shire Council covers almost 11,000 sq km of Eastern Victoria so we have a strong interest in issues relating to transport and liveability in rural and regional Victoria.

Wellington Shire has a large geographic area, a widely dispersed population, low average income, low formal qualification rates, and relatively high unemployment rates.

Another aspect of our local context is the **ageing of the population**. Across Victoria the number of people over 80 years of age is expected to increase by 60 % by 2021. In Wellington and East Gippsland this group will increase by 90 %. A high percentage of this group will have limited mobility and will no longer be able to drive.

Liveability issues must be considered within this rural context. Wellington Shire faces a number of diverse and complex challenges associated with the geography and demography of such a large rural area, where the majority of communities have little or no public transport.

**There is no one organisation or industry group that has an overview of all transport provision** - the system is extremely segmented, taking into account the provision of private, public, community and school bus transport.

Solutions to address identified issues require working at all levels of government, collaboratively, with communities and service providers to develop innovative ways to address issues.

### **Rationale for improving and investing in public transport in rural Victoria/Australia**

#### **Livability and Connectivity**

The lack of transport infrastructure impacts significantly on many dimensions of liveability, such as access to education, health services, goods and services and recreational opportunities. This lack of infrastructure also has an impact on economic development within the region. 'Liveability' needs to be attractive both to businesses and potential residents alike.

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The lack of public transport infrastructure is a major 'risk factor' that must be addressed. Therefore, transport, communications and social infrastructure must be provided to help dispersed communities connect with each other, business and government services.

Much of Gippsland faces diverse and complex challenges associated with the geography and demography of such a large rural area, where the majority of communities have little or no public transport. Transport is critical in enabling connectivity and participation within and between communities. It is a key dimension of liveability and is one of the 10 social determinants of health (World Health Organization).

It is essential to examine the issues of access to public transport in rural areas as a factor in liveability, especially given that ageing of the population in many rural areas is greater than the state average. The ageing issue has major implications for liveability in that many people living in areas with little access to public transport have aged related disabilities and are no longer able to drive.

### **Retaining young people in rural communities**

Access to public transport is also a major issue for young people and people unable to afford private transport. For many young rural people transport needs frequently dominate their plans for work and access to education and training. At a local level young people in Wellington Shire are already reporting that access to part-time jobs is being affected by their inability to access transport. Mum and Dad are no longer willing to drive them into town because of the rising cost of petrol. Households are being increasingly forced to curb their travel activities which could have a detrimental affect on community participation.

The newly announced VicRoads Graduated Licencing System is also expected to have an unintended consequence in rural areas as peer passenger restrictions will limit the option of car pooling to TAFE, University and employment.

A recent Wellington and East Gippsland rural youth transport survey received over 800 responses from young people in East Gippsland and Wellington Shires.

Nearly two-thirds (63.2 per cent) of the respondents claimed that lack of transport stopped them from doing something that they would like to do. For example approximately 50 per cent said lack of transport stopped them from going out i.e. to town or parties, to the beach or out of town, 21 per cent said it stopped them from visiting friends, 13 per cent from shopping and approximately 12 per cent from sport and recreation activities. (O'Neill et al. 2007).

### **Access to education, training and work**

A recent report prepared by the Wellington Shire Council has highlighted the disconnect in public transport provision between Sale and Traralgon for people to access essential regional services such as Latrobe Regional Hospital, Monash University and the Regional Railway Station at Traralgon. The scenarios are similar across all LGAs in Gippsland. A copy of Council's report to government on the Sale-Traralgon Corridor can be downloaded from the Wellington Shire Council's website: [www.wellington.vic.gov.au](http://www.wellington.vic.gov.au)

A study of transport in Warrnambool also found that young people had difficulty undertaking education and employment opportunities. Students found getting to work placements difficult and their options for relevant work experience limited. A lack of transport often stopped young people from taking up apprenticeships. For university students, the lack of frequent public transport and services that aligned with university hours meant the only form of transport was driving or getting lifts with others (Stanley & Stanley 2004 cited in Harris & Tapsas 2006).

The ABS 2001 Census Journey to Work data provides an overall view of work trips in the Wellington Shire.

*14,648 persons were employed within the Wellington Shire (ABS Census 2001). Of these people, approximately 11 per cent or over 1,500 people lived outside and commuted to Wellington Shire for work. The main sources of this labour were the nearby towns of Traralgon and Morwell. Of Wellington Shire's resident working population, 15 per cent or over 2,300 people work outside the region (ABS Census 2001). As with the inbound travellers, labour leaving Wellington Shire for work is mainly destined for Traralgon and Morwell.*

It is probably reasonable to assume that two-thirds of the work trips travel in the Traralgon-Sale Corridor yet there is no public transport provision that would enable workers to commute.

### **Attracting and retaining jobs**

The RAAF is a major employer based in Sale. Consultations have indicated that travel between Sale and Melbourne by non accompanied personnel is a common occurrence. This results from partners and family having jobs and school links established from previous postings. Connectivity to Melbourne's Defence headquarters for training and operational matters is also a consideration. The potential enhanced pilot training will also require an increase of short term visiting staff and students, with clear transport issues requiring resolution.

Present V/Line passenger rail services beyond Traralgon are limited to three trains per day, which is unsuitable for business travel to Melbourne and the Latrobe Valley and makes Sale a less desirable posting for the reasons outlined above.

While Traralgon currently has 18 train services per day, with nine trains remaining overnight at Traralgon in a stabling yard, Sale has but three services and has capacity at little extra cost for trains to be 'stabled' at Sale. This could provide additional services utilizing existing trains and track.

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Ideally however there needs to be passing lanes installed to facilitate a shuttle service between Traralgon and Sale.

The recent addition of a trial bus service from Sale to Traralgon arriving at 8.50am and departing Traralgon at 5.30pm assists those who wish to live in Sale and work in Traralgon. It does not however assist people living in the Latrobe Valley and wishing to work in Sale.

### **Access to Medical Services**

Rural councils are very concerned about the lack of Government investment in patient transport services in rural areas.

Wellington Shire Council recognizes the significant impact of transport disadvantage for rural people needing to travel long distances in order to attend medical appointments and the difficulty in accessing appropriate transport services.

An analysis of Gippsland community transport data (mainly HACC) from the Victorian Patient Transport Assistance Scheme back in 2004 showed the total number of trips by the 11 participating agencies during the pilot period was 2,358, equivalent to an average of 470 trips per month or an estimated 5,650 trips per annum.

The estimate of 5,650 trips per year should be considered an under estimation of the total trips undertaken by HACC agencies. Several HACC agencies did not participate in the pilot, therefore the number of trips would be increased substantially had all agencies been included.

It is important to note that these figures do not include trips associated with local service provision such as planned activity groups.

#### Total Trips by Community Transport Organisations in Pilot Period

Agency	July - November		Annual Equivalent
	Total	Monthly Average	
Bass Coast Shire Council	44	9	108
Baw Baw Shire Council	187	37	444
South Gippsland Shire Council	382	76	912
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>613</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>1,464</b>
Bass Coast Community Health Service	91	18	216
Bass Coast Regional Health	275	55	660
Central Gippsland Health	97	19	228
Gippsland Lakes Community Health	135	27	324
Latrobe Regional Hospital	748	150	1,800
Orbost Regional Health	50	10	120
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>1,396</b>	<b>279</b>	<b>3,348</b>
Inverloch Red Cross	133	27	324
Foster Red Cross	69	14	168
Traralgon Red Cross			
Yarram Red Cross	147	29	348
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>349</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>840</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>2358</b>	<b>471</b>	<b>5,652</b>

#### *Gippsland HACC Transport Pilot Strategy Evaluation 2004*

The table above shows the monthly distribution of the total trips recorded by all participating organisations.

Many of these trips were to the larger statewide medical providers in Melbourne with numerous agencies duplicating travel to various Melbourne destinations on the same day. The services were uncoordinated, with a single occupant and a volunteer driver. The health sector also reported that with the demand for supported patient transport increasing rapidly, ageing community vehicles and a shrinking ageing volunteer base this type of service is no longer viable nor sustainable.

Access to medical services is essential to all parts of our community and needs to be addressed.

## **Providing for an Ageing Population**

Similarly, public transport services are vital for an ageing population. One of key challenges of ageing is that as residents become incapable of driving a car, they become increasingly reliant on other means of transport. In many cases the transition for an older person from driving to non-driving means that they can no longer age in place. It often means selling the family home and moving closer to family or areas where there is better public transport and access to essential services. As these residents are more likely to require medical treatment, it becomes increasingly important to ensure adequate public transport connectivity exists to and from key medical destinations.

## **Community Transport**

In the State of Victoria there is no coherent policy framework around the role, function and operation of community transport – not even an agreed definition.

There are a lot of transport resources in local communities that are often termed community transport, however there are also significant systemic barriers that need to be addressed before these resources can be fully utilized as has been highlighted through the Transport Connections Program. These challenges include: appropriate funding, accreditation of vehicles, insurance and liability and better coordination with public transport so that it fills the gaps and avoids duplication.

Demand for community transport is growing rapidly in the absence of alternative public transport options. Despite this in rural Victoria community transport is *unfunded, unaccredited and unsustainable*.

## **Accessible Public Transport in rural Victoria**

Public transport is currently not a genuine travel option for many residents of rural Victoria, due to most services, especially V/Line, being predominantly focused on timetables running between 10.00am and 2.00pm. ~~Nonetheless, public transport could be a genuine alternative to car travel,~~ if services can be provided that meet the needs of people needing to travel during peak periods, such as those traveling to work or education.

Areas beyond the Regional Centres across Victoria (ie >150kms from Melbourne) are totally reliant on poorly timetabled V/line and Department of Infrastructure contracted service provision with no incentives for local bus operators to provide peak hour services or accessible buses within their fleets.

For example, up until recently there were no low floor buses in the commercial bus fleets within the Wellington Shire even though the Shire has large bus companies operating in the region.

As a result of the Let's GET Connected Transport Project in Wellington and East Gippsland there is now one low floor bus in each Shire but little or no incentives for local operators to invest in accessible infrastructure. Much more is needed to address transport disadvantage in rural areas. The lack of accessible bus services in rural communities only increases the need for the disability and non-profit sector to fill the gaps with targeted community transport, resulting in restricted eligibility criteria for their particular agency or program area through limited funding guidelines. Whereas the introduction of accessible mainstream public transport options in rural communities would benefit everyone in the community, particularly those with disabilities, young mothers with prams, the frail aged and those with other mobility problems.

## **Relevance of transport infrastructure to economic development**

Lack of public transport comes at a cost to small communities which are left isolated or unable to attract investment.

Transport isolation impacts on the community in a number of ways, including socially, economically and culturally. It can affect the health and well-being of communities as there is a strong link between poorer health and isolation, including a low level of community interaction (World Health Organisation's 'Social Determinants of Health')

Transport is perhaps the critical issue in allowing participation and connectivity within and between communities.

'Liveability' needs to be attractive both to businesses and potential residents. Because of low population density, 'traditional' public transport may never be viable in many areas – there simply is not the critical mass to sustain significant services. Innovative and flexible transport solutions are required where access can be provided according to need as opposed to having to be limited to solvent demand.

Wellington Shire Council has recently completed a Population Analysis study that identifies the importance of maintaining and increasing the population of the shire and some strategies that need to be pursued as a matter of urgency to strengthen the economic and social development of the municipality.

The lack of public transport infrastructure within our Shire has been identified as a major 'risk factor' that must be addressed if economic development is to succeed.

## **Community Participation**

Social connectedness provides greater opportunity for the production of community social capital. ~~Social capital impacts on community wellbeing producing benefits for community members.~~ Social capital has been shown to provide critical input in the process of building the socio-economic wellbeing of communities (BTRB, 2005).

Social cohesion relates to the level of social inclusion and or exclusion within a community. In this context social inclusion refers to the full participation in the social and economic life of the community. Therefore access to public transport influences social cohesion because it either enables/constrains the participant or community member in the social and economic life of the community.

## **Accessibility Planning**

Measures to address transport disadvantage in regional and rural areas requires a significant shift in all levels of government policy which currently identifies need and service provision by the number of passengers carried rather than the impact on people's lives and their ability to access services and participate in community life.

The Victorian government's 'Melbourne 2030' and 'Meeting our Transport Challenges' have gone some way to addressing transport needs in Melbourne and Victoria's regional centres. However once you go beyond what is sometimes called 'the magic circle' defined by the edges of the fast train network in Melbourne, the picture is very different. Rural communities are expected to be content with 3 poorly timed off-peak Vline services a day to Melbourne and little or no connectivity to their service centres or regional hub.

At present transport services are developed with insufficient attention to accessibility, particularly in regional and rural areas where regional health services, major education facilities and employment opportunities are being centralized without consideration or planning for mainstream public transport services.

The introduction of an Integrated Transport Planning framework in Queensland has enabled all transport sector planning and delivery of services to come together at a statewide, regional and local government level.

Integration focuses on integrating transport planning, land use planning and planning for other areas, such as economic development, education and health. This involves making sure decisions made in one sector complement and do not compromise decisions or interests in another. Ways to plan for this include ensuring consistent land use decisions are made across local government boundaries and consistent and complementary policy decisions are made across sectors and agencies<sup>1</sup>

A collaborative approach to planning has been adopted in Queensland which coordinates land uses, infrastructure, transport and other planning to achieve whole-of-government outcomes.

The transport system there plays a key role in contributing to other planning priorities such as :

- Supporting economic development by providing efficient infrastructure and services to connect areas of economic activity
- Supporting employment by connecting people to places of employment, education and training or providing jobs for a local community
- Supporting tourism by providing safe and convenient access to tourism destinations
- Providing access to essential services, such as doctors, emergency services and education, for people in rural and remote locations
- Supporting better health outcomes through active modes of transport that lead to increased physical activity in the community and lower transport emissions
- Minimising impacts on the environment by influencing people's travel choices and supporting more sustainable travel options.

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**A Whole-of-Government** approach is needed to ensure that car travel is not allowed to become the only viable mode of rural transport.

- Public transport, walking and cycling must exist as alternatives to car travel in all areas of Victoria and there are many government initiatives that promote that, such as Supportive Environments for Physical Activity, TravelSmart and the local government Environments for Health framework.
- We must ensure Land use and transport planning are integrated at all levels of government and that the role of local government in regional and local transport planning is supported and clarified.
- By contrast there are government policy areas that conflict with these ideals, ie Community Bus funding in the past has not supported better utilisation of existing resources or encouraged agencies to 'purchase' transport services from existing operators.
- The Commonwealth government's Fringe Benefits Tax which financially penalises business and organizations for not reaching car mileage targets works in direct opposition to encouraging employees and the business community to use Public Transport, ie TravelSmart initiatives.

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<sup>1</sup> Queensland Integrated Transport Planning Framework 2003

## Recommendations

1. Extension of three daily passenger rail services (which currently terminate at Traralgon) to Sale. This would also benefit large numbers of the wider community who commute to Traralgon by private vehicle;
2. A duplication of the Caulfield to Dandenong line with passing lanes at Drouin, Rosedale.
3. Morning and evening shuttle trains between Sale and Traralgon would be possible if passing loops were installed at approximately Rosedale to facilitate both freight and passenger trains sharing the line at the same time.
4. Develop an integrated planning framework and strategies that contribute to a wider vision and objectives for economic development, education, health, employment, social inclusion and liveability in rural and regional Australia.
5. Link community transport with the principal public transport network in all States
6. Set Minimum standards/guidelines for rural and remote transport passenger services
7. Equitable investment in accessible infrastructure, ie low floor buses, accessible trains/trams
8. Develop Protocols for whole of government use of vehicles
9. Develop Protocols for use of Volunteer vehicles
10. Develop whole of government fleet management strategies including insurance and risk management
11. Foster partnerships and innovation in rural areas

## Conclusion

It is vital that the Commonwealth Government contribute to public passenger transport infrastructure and services in partnership with the States and it is encouraging to see a move in that direction.

Wellington Shire Council remains committed to advocating on behalf of its residents to address access to public and community based transport and support improvements to services and infrastructure in the region for all citizens.

Wellington Shire Council requests that the issues raised by this submission be considered by the Inquiry.

Wellington Shire Council would be pleased to provide you with further information relating to the issues we have raised. For more information please contact Sheryl McHugh (Transport Project Officer) Phone: 5142 3478. Email address: [sheryl.mchugh@wellington.vic.gov.au](mailto:sheryl.mchugh@wellington.vic.gov.au)

Yours sincerely



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