

Fleurieu Regional Development

RESPONSE TO:

Senate Inquiry into the investment of Commonwealth and State funds in public passenger transport infrastructure and services

Agency:

Fleurieu Regional Development Inc.



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Terms of reference

On 4 December 2008 the Senate referred the following matter to the Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Committee for inquiry and report by 18 June 2009:

The investment of Commonwealth and State funds in public passenger transport infrastructure and services, with reference to the August 2005 report of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Environment and Heritage, Sustainable Cities, and the February 2007 report of the Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Committee, Australia's future oil supply and alternative transport fuels, including:

- a. an audit of the state of public passenger transport in Australia;
- b. current and historical levels of public investment in private vehicle and public passenger transport services and infrastructure;
- c. an assessment of the benefits of public passenger transport, including integration with bicycle and pedestrian initiatives;
- d. measures by which the Commonwealth Government could facilitate improvement in public passenger transport services and infrastructure;
- e. the role of Commonwealth Government legislation, taxation, subsidies, policies and other mechanisms that either discourage or encourage public passenger transport; and
- f. best practice international examples of public passenger transport services and infrastructure.

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Our Region

The **Fleurieu region** encompasses the Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Alexandrina, Victor Harbor and Yankalilla.

The Fleurieu region has a relatively old **population profile**, with above average proportions of people aged 50 and over. The region has high proportions of couple without children, reflecting its reputation as a retirement destination. There have been above average population increases over recent years, particularly in the Alexandrina Council area, and the population is projected to continue to grow at a rate higher than the State average.

Key **labour force** indicators for Fleurieu show below average labour force participation rates, and above average levels of unemployment. Fleurieu residents are represented highly in Managerial, Associate Professional, Trades and Labourer occupations. Just over 35 per cent of Fleurieu residents work in areas outside the region, an indicator more of the close proximity to the Adelaide metropolitan area and central business district rather than a shortage of jobs within the region.

The general level of **education and qualifications** in the Fleurieu region is below the State average, with comparatively low levels of school achievement and post-school qualifications. This may be a reflection of the relatively high proportions of older people in the region.

Despite growing levels of unemployment and relatively low workforce participation, the population of the Fleurieu region maintains reasonable indicators of **economic** security, with high rates of home ownership and below average levels of income support recipients.

The Fleurieu has an older than average age profile, and high proportions of couples without children, reflecting its growing appeal as a retirement destination. Significant population increases are expected in the future, primarily in the older age groups.

Significant population characteristics include:

- Above average middle-aged to older (45 years or older) population and relatively small population of younger adults (20-39 years)
- High proportions of couples without children, consistent with the older than average age profile
- Above average population increases over recent years, particularly in the Alexandrina District Council area
- Projected continued increases in population

The population of the Fleurieu region has steadily increased over recent years, at a rate higher than the State average. Between 2003 and 2006 the region experienced an annual average population increase of 3.3 per cent. By comparison, South Australia recorded an annual growth rate of 0.9 per cent for the same period. The Alexandrina council area has shown particularly strong population growth in recent years.

The age profile of the Fleurieu region contributes to a relatively high death rate and low birth rate. Continued migration into the region in recent years (averaging almost 1,200 people per year) leads to a growing population, particularly in the Alexandrina local government area.

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The level of total employment within the Fleurieu region has grown over the past few years. In addition, the region has continued to experience higher than State average unemployment rates and lower than average labour force participation rates.

Significant labour force characteristics include:

- *Below average participation rates for all key populations*
- *Growing unemployment*

Above average employment in Managerial, Associate Professional, Trades and Labourer occupations

Moving People

Australia, like most developed nations, needs to invest in public and active transport, to ensure our urban centres are redesigned to support Transit Oriented Development – and to ensure that regional residents are not isolated from the services they need to live productive economic lives and fulfilling social lives.

Improving public transport services and infrastructure in regional areas such as the Fleurieu Peninsula, would assist the creation of more sustainable and connected communities. It would promote social inclusion, improve the well being of our communities and help protect the environment.

Australia faces significant transport and social equity challenges due to sprawling cities, climate change and depleting oil supplies. We need a sustainable transport system in which public and active transport – walking and cycling - become real options for all Australians.

The case for national investment in sustainable transport options is compelling on economic, social and environmental grounds. Without this investment, the increase in car transport during the next ten years will lead to increasing environmental degradation. The temptation is to build more roads to cope with the predicted increase in car volumes – our solution is to design, fund and build effective and efficient public transport infrastructure.

The benefits from investment in better public and active transport options, especially in regional areas include:

- reduced traffic accidents and fatalities;
- the potential to build on a buoyant tourism industry
- reduced health problems which arise from increasing inactivity;
- less land lost to roads which reduces loss of agricultural lands;
- decreased habitats for our native flora and fauna;
- additional demands for expensive road infrastructure;
- less social isolation for people trapped in areas with no public transport;
- support to cope with the ever increasing demands of the “sea change phenomenon” and
- decline of communities that results from individual car use.

Australians need an opportunity to reduce their carbon emissions, save fuel costs and boost their community spirit.

There is no single answer – a mix of options will be needed.

Long term strategic level changes must be combined with short term solutions such as community transit and more ‘active’ transport measures such as cycling and walking.

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Targets should be set, for example:

- To double the number of trips taken on public transport
- To double the number of cycle trips made within ten years
- To increase the percentage of people who use public transport as a first option, rather than as an option of last resort

On the South Coast we are part of the Sea Change movement and inland in towns such as Strathalbyn and Mount Compass, the trend is towards Tree Change. Each brings a need to radically upgrade the public transport system from one of token effort, to a vibrant and flexible system that helps the wellbeing of our people and allows the community to grow and prosper – both at an economic and social level.

To date, local government does not have the financial funding capacity to invest the required money and the State Government has not shown the same commitment to Regional areas as it has done to Metropolitan areas.

Our region supports nearly 40,000 people spread over 5 major urban towns and several smaller rural communities. Combined they would qualify for some State Government help – individually they don't. Their close proximity and the daily movement of people between the towns to access services and employment, especially on the South Coast, is ignored. So too is the fact that the population swells three-fold during peak tourism seasons.

In towns such as Victor Harbor, Port Elliot, Goolwa and Normanville, the population can treble during holiday periods. These regions can have houses that are listed as “holiday homes”, and as such are missed during the ABS Census, and are not considered when governments consider generic funding formulas for grants.

As with many regions, most of the services are centred on one or two major town. On the South Coast, Victor Harbor is home to the hospital, most allied health services, TAFE, High School, major shopping precincts and government agencies. Inland, Mt Barker services towns such as Strathalbyn, Langhorne Creek, Milang and Clayton Bay. There is very limited public transport to cater for this growing demand.

In some ways, when it comes to public transport, regional areas are “third world”. When compared to the tax-payer funds which are expended on city dwellers, the effort spent on rural residents is minuscule. In many cases, a single passenger trip in the city, is subsidised by up to \$10. Some people in rural areas would not get that level of subsidy in a year.

There is no equity of public transport services between the city and regional taxpayers. Tom Magrath, UITP Commission on Transport and Urban Life says that “where there is mobility there is social inclusion – personal mobility is a basic requirement to access economic and social opportunities.” Whilst these opportunities can be accessed by city residents, a similar opportunity is being denied to residents in the Fleurieu. The Federal Government spends millions of dollars on road infrastructure yet ignores the potentials offered by investment in public transport - an investment that would support and enhance their broader socio-economic policies.

Clearly when it comes to the delivery of social inclusion programs in regional Australia, public transport is insufficiently integrated into the national and state strategies. This is leading to a major catastrophe in social exclusion - a process of disinvolvement from the economic and social structures of society.

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The mobility to access jobs, schools, libraries, health services and recreation facilities is a key factor in social inclusion. Don't provide access to reliable and regular public transport and we have social exclusion. We promote inequality between city and country. This leads to a poorer standard of life for those excluded and the wellbeing of a large part of our society is threatened.

Social exclusion describes the consequences of barriers that make it difficult for people to take part fully in society. We must develop solutions that take away those barriers – to ignore this will lead to a “third world” situation for a significant proportion of our country.

FRD would offer its services to help develop a public transport model that promotes socio-economic inclusion. This can be done by forming partnerships across the three levels of government and winning the cooperation of the Federal Government to commit significant funds to addressing this issue. We have winners all round – it benefits social inclusion policies, gives recognition to public transport over the car and leads to a healthier society.

The essence of public transport is to connect individuals with key services and opportunities. To avoid further discrimination of regional communities, we need to develop tailored travel solutions and hence public transport systems that meet the needs of those communities. Ultimately this would help federal, state and local governments address priority objectives for combating social exclusion issues such as eliminating poverty and homelessness, enabling access to employment, tackling discrimination and improving access to the best quality of services.

We will need to be clever if we are to introduce mobility solutions adapted to the specific needs of certain regions. The role of public transport in building the capacity to have a mobile society must be integrated into federal government policies and strategies that promote social inclusion and wellbeing.

Many countries throughout the world have addressed these issues and much knowledge has been gained. By working with organisations such as the UITP, Australia could tap into this knowledge to help deliver tailored travel solutions and provide a much needed stimulus to many regional communities and add to our social capital.

A healthy environment

Good public transport is an investment in the future –our people, their safety and their social inclusion. It is also a good investment in our environment.

Better public and active transport options will support sustainable communities and reduce growth in road traffic. This will in turn provide substantial economic, social and environmental benefits to Australia. Road vehicle crashes cost Australians more than \$18 billion per year with 1600 road fatalities, 18,000 seriously injured in car accidents and over 12,000 in serious motor cycle accidents.

These accidents are not only of great cost to the economy but of immeasurable cost to individuals and their families. They all too familiar on roads within our area!

The health of the nation is declining and costing us dearly. Physical inactivity is estimated to cost the Australian community around \$10 billion per year in direct health care costs. Encouraging active transport for short journeys is an evidenced based, cost effective method of making substantial cuts to the obesity and diabetes epidemic.

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Air pollution has massive health costs of some \$2 billion. People who live in sprawling suburbs are more likely to drive their cars and have higher body mass indexes. The likelihood that people are overweight, obese, have inadequate physical activity and spend no time walking is statistically significant for people living in areas of urban sprawl. Transit oriented developments – in regional centres areas are more likely to promote walking and regular exercise.

Reducing car ownership can increase discretionary funds for families by reducing transport costs. Families in regional areas need to spend a high proportion of their incomes on transport.

Planning must ensure that growth centres do not become dysfunctional as their total width sprawls. Limits must be set on to ensure that agricultural land is retained for growing food, with the additional benefit of reducing unnecessary food transport costs. Roads and parking account for one third of urban land use and our best agricultural land is being subsumed by housing. This land can be better used for agriculture or recreation.

Rising fuel costs disadvantage those who need to travel most

Peak oil and our reliance on imports is a strong incentive to cut fuel use. Collective travel is more economical than individual travel and can be a genuine alternative if services are co-located.

Public transport is poor in our rapidly developing towns. Vulnerability to mortgages is on the increase and more people struggle to make ends meet resulting in increasing risk of social exclusion. Inadequate public transport forces car dependency and any savings gained through cheaper housing are lost in travel costs associated with employment, education and essential services.

Higher fuel prices have the greatest impact on people with modest or below average incomes. In 2003-4, the average Australian household spent 16 per cent of their weekly goods and services budget on transport. Almost a quarter of this transport spend was on motor vehicle fuel.

Federal spending on roads is a poor economic, environmental and social choice for households and society. A better balance needs to be struck with far greater investment in public and active transport options. The benefits of public transport on climate change will be significant and we are sure will be addressed by many other submissions.

The benefits of public transport are many and varied – this has been proven around the world, yet we have a segment of Australia that is left out in the cold. It is time to rectify this glaring omission in policy and planning.

Fleurieu Regional Development is keen to work with all levels of government to tap into the available knowledge and deliver a positive outcome for our communities.

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Specific Social Impacts of the Lack of Public Transport on the Community, Families, Aged & Younger Members of the Alexandrina Council Region.

Surveys conducted by FRD in conjunction with state and local governments have highlighted a range of unmet needs. The following are concerns raised by sectors of our community:

- Currently public transport services to the major towns of the region are inadequate which has a flow on effect to the smaller communities.
- Affordability and access is limited for families and both youth and aged residents, especially if interconnecting services are required to access the main public transport routes
- Larger buses providing transport to & from Adelaide are restrictive for older and disabled residents due to the steep gradient of the access steps.
- The Transport Subsidy Scheme does not adequately meet the needs of our rural population due to the subsidy percentage and its limitations
- Govt funding is inadequate to cover the basic transport needs within the rural region of the Council. Demand for health related transport diminishes the ability to provide access for social activities, shopping and other basic activities. This has a flow on effect creating social isolation that leads to mental and physical ill health.
- Transport services for disadvantage and chronically ill people to access essential health services are limited, especially in the smaller rural areas. Consideration of a roll out of the Health Bus program currently being trialled on the Yorke Peninsula would greatly benefit the region.
- With the cessation of the contracted transport service to the local primary school in Goolwa and the introduction of an annual membership fee by Southern Community Transport Scheme the small Neighbour Aid project has experienced a 28.5% increase in demand in the past 6 months. As a result only crisis requests are now being considered once again reducing transport opportunities for services such as shopping and social programs.
- The Transit Plus mini bus operates one day per week from Clayton, through Milang and to Strathalbyn linking with a bus that then travels onto Adelaide. However it invariably does not match appointment times and is a long day for seniors even though it only allows for 3-4 hours in the city.
- There is no 'cross regional' transport from Langhorne Creek, Milang, Strathalbyn to Goolwa, Port Elliot, Middleton and Victor Harbor.
- Current Taxi costs are prohibitive for most people
- Strathalbyn – the current level of transport (or lack of) is an ongoing issue and with a predicted increase in population of 43% over the next 12 years an efficient and regular transport system needs to be set in place now. (Planning SA figures show that Strathalbyn district's population will increase from 9463 (2006 figures) to 13,537 by 2021.
- There is predicted growth across all age groups and the issue of transport will only be exacerbated as more people rely on public transport because they are no longer able to drive or owning a car is simply out of their reach financially.

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- On weekends there is no bus service from Strathalbyn. During the week (Monday – Friday) the service is intermittent with only two buses per day leaving and returning to Strathalbyn for Mt Barker. An additional bus leaves during school terms.
- The limited service causes difficulties for all people who do not have access to private transport including access to medical appointments, further education and work commitments as well as social events. The current level of transport also has an impact on those wishing to visit the town for events or simply to visit family and friends.
- Youth retention in the region is a pressing issue and has implications for urban growth management strategies aiming to attract and retain young families. Young people report that because of the limited transport they have little choice but to seek greater opportunities away from the regional areas.
- Inadequate public transport options remain a priority issue for young people who have to rely on individual transport and are therefore more likely to have road accidents than their metropolitan counterparts. A recent survey identified that young people engage in a number of risk-taking behaviours including being a passenger in car where the driver is under the influence of drugs or alcohol and that over 70% of respondents would use public transport as an alternative to drinking and driving with approximately 25% of those surveyed reported they had driven without a licence or unregistered and 16% had hitch hiked.
- Lack of frequency, routes and affordability are seen as the major concerns of young people who cited that more frequent services to and from the coastal townships of Goolwa and Victor Harbor and reinstating the more frequent weekend services between Strathalbyn and Mt Barker would be welcomed as many are unable to take up work opportunities due to lack of transport.

Report into youth retention and Public Transport

In 2008, FRD undertook a report into the transport needs of young people in the Fleurieu. One of the key findings was for a "*Better integration between State, Federal and Local levels of government to alleviate disparities between services in the region and those in the metropolitan area*" – **a copy of that report is attached to this submission.**

Recommendations from the Fleurieu Transport Opportunities And Priorities For Transport include:

- Provide coordinated public transport for inter-regional travel
- Adopt a regional view, rather than focusing on individual council areas
- Adopt a holistic view, where transport is one important aspect of a system that includes education, training, Employment and housing. This requires adequate resources
- Address discrimination in not having access to a means of social and economic development
- Be innovative – the Fleurieu region can be pioneers, setting up models for other areas
- Maximise the range of suitable transport choices to promote positive futures for young people, with pathways to independence in the areas of: education, employment, housing and training