

# Transport



An affordable and accessible state-wide public transport system is essential to provide access to employment, education, health and other services and to support participation in community life. Accessibility and coverage of Victoria's transport system is, therefore a critical factor in achieving the goals of *A Fairer Victoria*.

At a time of rapidly rising petrol prices and the urgent need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from transport, all Victorians need access to affordable and sustainable transport options to meet their transport needs.

Melbourne's public transport system is rapidly approaching capacity at peak hour – but this is only the tip of the iceberg in terms of transport issues effecting Victoria's inclusiveness, liveability and sustainability.

The low frequency and poor connection of public transport services in the outer suburbs of Melbourne, rural and regional areas mean many people living on low incomes bare the high cost of multiple car ownership or remain socially isolated and disconnected from their communities. Some rural areas remain without public transport or local taxi services.

## A New Integrated Transport Plan for Victoria

*Meeting Our Transport Challenges (MOTC)* was released in May 2006 and committed significant funding for public transport as well as outlining a framework for Victoria's transport system until 2030.

However, in the two years since *MOTC*'s release:

- Victoria has experienced unexpectedly high population growth especially in Melbourne's outer suburbs;
- petrol prices have increased from around \$1.35 to over \$1.70 per litre and while they

have fallen somewhat they are likely to keep rising;<sup>186</sup>

- public transport patronage has continued to grow rapidly leading to increased congestion across the metropolitan and V/line tram and rail networks; and
- the need to address climate change has become increasingly urgent and there is growing awareness that the implementation of carbon pricing will increase future transport costs.

Victoria needs a new integrated transport plan to respond to these and future challenges.

### **Better coverage and greater capacity**

Peak hour capacity constraint on Victoria's rail network is a critical issue that requires a generational investment in public transport infrastructure.

VCOSS supports the public transport investment outlined in the Eddington Report as essential to address peak hour congestion and allow for future growth. This substantial investment will not only increase peak hour capacity for Melbourne commuters but will improve connections to inner Melbourne for Geelong, Sunbury and the Tarneit corridor.

However, the Eddington Report had a limited scope - east-west travel in inner Melbourne. Without simultaneous substantial investment in public transport services to outer suburban, regional and rural areas, transport will continue to be a major community concern as the effects of higher petrol prices and carbon pricing are increasingly felt. Peak hour commuting to inner Melbourne, which is the focus of the Eddington Report's recommendations, is only a small proportion of the travel Victorians need to undertake each day.

Employment in Melbourne is highly dispersed with a significant percentage of people working locally or in neighbouring areas.<sup>187</sup> Melbourne has substantial suburban employment hubs including industrial areas, suburban retail precincts and business parks.<sup>188</sup> Public transport access to these areas is often poor yet is critical to support access to apprenticeships and ongoing employment, especially for young people and people with disabilities attempting to enter the workforce. Most non-employment related journeys also occur within or between local areas.

Urban and regional public transport services that efficiently connect communities, such as the developing orbital SmartBus network and local services, are essential in increasing mobility and participation for those who rely on public transport, as well as increasing public transport mode share and reducing the high cost of car ownership.

Many rural communities lack appropriate public transport access to local regional centres

<sup>186</sup> Future Fuels Forum, *Fuel for thought: the future of transport fuels – challenges*, CSIRO, June 2008.

<sup>187</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Census of Population and Housing 2006*, ABS,

<sup>188</sup> Department of Sustainability and Environment, *Melbourne Atlas 2006*, State Government Victoria, Melbourne, 2006, p. 4.2.

or effective connections to the rural transport network. This jeopardises access not only to employment but also to education, health and support services for people living on low incomes, people with restricted mobility and those struggling with high petrol costs.

Without realistic public transport alternatives offering reliability, accessibility and comparable travel times, households struggling with higher costs of living remain dependent on their cars.

As recent research from Jago Dodson and Neil Sipe at Griffith University demonstrates, households in areas with little or poor quality public transport are highly vulnerable to increases in petrol prices as they have limited options to reduce their car use or rates of car ownership.<sup>189</sup>

This is supported by research undertaken by Grahame Currie at Monash University that shows low income households in public transport poor outer suburbs have three times the rate of multiple car ownership than those in inner Melbourne.<sup>190</sup> With the minimum cost of car ownership estimated at over \$100 each week by the RACV, households who have moved to outer suburban areas to access affordable housing are likely to see these cost savings eaten up by higher transport costs.

### **Better Minimum Standards**

The minimum public transport standards outlined in *MOTC* and the bus services upgraded through this commitment have made a significant difference to people living on low incomes. However, these minimum standards (hourly services until 9:00pm) reflect a critical transport lifeline, but not a genuine transport alternative.

For sections of the community with limited access to private transport, such as young people, many older people, people with disabilities and those living on low incomes, more frequent services with longer hours of operation support greater social and economic participation.

As Victoria moves away from an economy based around traditional working hours, evening and off-peak public transport is becoming increasingly important.

VCOSS has welcomed the 2008-09 budget investment in improved Night Rider services as an important service upgrade, especially for young people. Ironically, this improvement now creates more frequent public transport services in the middle of the night on Friday and Saturday in some areas than during the evenings when many people need to get home from shift and casual work and education activities. Recent rapid public transport patronage growth outside peak periods across Melbourne's public transport network demonstrates the need for increased off-peak service levels.<sup>191</sup>

189 J Dodson and N Sipe, *Unsettling suburbia: the new landscape of oil and mortgage vulnerability in Australian cities*, Research Paper 17, Urban Research Forum, Griffith University, August 2008.

190 G Currie and Z Senbergs, 'Forced car ownership in metropolitan Melbourne', paper presented at the Australasian Transport Research Forum, Melbourne, 25-27 September 2007.

191 M Bolling, 'Commuters' fit of peak', *Herald Sun*, August 29, 2008.

Higher public transport frequencies and longer operating hours increase patronage and provide a genuine alternative to increasingly costly car use. Analysis undertaken by the Bus Association of Victoria demonstrates that routes, which have been upgraded to minimum standards see a patronage growth of 15 per cent, while those upgraded to SmartBus standard see significantly higher growth representing real transport options.

## Planning in Partnership with Community

Local communities are often the best source of information about local transport needs. VCOSS has welcomed the Government's commitment to community input into transport planning and to strategies to address transport disadvantage through the Local Area Bus Review process and *Transport Connections* program.

Innovative transport solutions that meet community transport needs while making better use of resources, such as the Gannawarra Non-Emergency Transport Service (GNETS), are essential in addressing transport issues. There is a need, however, to ensure that sufficient funding is available to implement and maintain the recommendations of these programs to meet both community expectations and the high level of need for innovative and locally-grounded transport solutions, especially in dispersed rural areas.

While local planning is essential to guide targeted investment to meet local transport needs, strong regional and statewide planning, which integrates transport with land use is also critical.

VCOSS has welcomed the Government's renewed commitment to transport within *Melbourne 2030* in its response to the *Melbourne 2030 audit expert group report*. Implementation of *Melbourne 2030* is crucial to avoid and repair the social, environmental and economic costs of poorly planned development.

The development of growth areas in both Melbourne and regional areas with poor public transport access and broken commitments to extend the metropolitan rail network continue to affect residents of these communities.



Throughout Victoria the location of essential community services such as education campuses and health services as well as retail outlets on green fields sites without adequate public transport access creates a short-term financial gain, but long-term community cost as people struggle to access these locations.

Land use planning strategies and investment are also required to ensure that affordable housing is located near public transport services, which provide links to employment and services.

## Transport is an Essential Service

For people on low incomes, even concession public transport fares are difficult to afford. For example, a Zone 1 and 2 daily Metcard (concession) already represents 20 per cent of the daily income of a young person relying on Youth Allowance.

Additional financial difficulties can easily make transport unaffordable. It is critical that the cost of transport and risk of fines should not prevent people from accessing essential services and maintaining connection to informal social support networks at times of financial crisis.

This is recognised by community sector organisations, many of which provide transport assistance including emergency relief to their clients with limited financial support to do so. Adequately funded programs and policies that provide access to transport for people in financial difficulty are essential to assist people in getting back on track.

## Accessible Transport for Lifelong Participation

The Victorian Government has made substantial investment in accessible transport through the implementation of the *Accessible Public Transport Action Plan 2006-2012* and initiatives providing incentives to the taxi industry to improve the service standards of Wheelchair Accessible Taxis (WATs).

Victoria is, however, currently in breach of its legal obligations under the *Disability Discrimination Act* as timelines to provide accessible services have not been met, in particular for Wheelchair Accessible Taxi (WAT) response times, the tram network and bus stops. In addition, the majority of accessible public transport is remains concentrated in inner Melbourne.

Many Victorians, due to frailty, illness or disability, require supported and affordable door-to-door transport. Coordinated and affordable door-to-door transport options are essential to meet the needs of Victoria's aging population, to reduce the social and health costs of isolation as well as to meet community expectations around the rights and social inclusion of older people and people with disabilities.

Currently, the primary Victorian government response to the transport needs of people requiring door-to-door transport is the Multi Purpose Taxi Program (MPTP), which provides essential but limited subsidies for taxi travel. This program is significantly underspent and is limited in its capacity to meet the needs of transport-disadvantaged people requiring door-to-door services because:

- it is restricted to people with a permanent and severe disability and does not include people who are temporarily disabled (i.e. recovering from surgery) and frail older people;
- it does not take into account whether people have access to public transport;
- the subsidy cap, which is applied to people with some types of disabilities and not others;
- it limits subsidised travel to half the costs of one return trip a week;
- the program only covers 50 per cent of the fare up to \$30 – which discriminates against people who need to make longer trips such as people in rural areas;
- the complexity of the application process acts as a barrier to people accessing the program; and
- some rural communities are too small to support a viable taxi service or do not have access to an accessible vehicle.

Community transport is not-for-profit transport and mobility support that is developed to meet the needs of transport disadvantaged people in the local community. The funding and governance of these essential services in Victoria is uncoordinated and insufficient to meet both current and future demand for services.

Other Australian states, such as South Australia and Queensland, have developed funding and governance models that support efficient delivery of community transport as part of a wider transport system.

Both the MPTP and community transport in Victoria are overdue for significant reform as part of a wider government response to meet the needs of a growing population of people on low incomes who require affordable door-to-door transport.

## Recommendations

1. VCOSS recommends that the Government adopt and fund improved minimum service levels for metropolitan and urban regional public transport including:
  - operating hours extended to 6:00am – midnight, 7 days a week
  - minimum half-hourly frequencies on all public transport modes,
  - bus timetables ensure connection to all train services on bus routes.
2. VCOSS recommends that the Government invest in public transport infrastructure and services including:
  - services to suburban and regional industrial areas and employment hubs including Tullamarine, Dandenong South, Altona, Laverton North and Somerton;
  - inter-town bus services in rural Victoria to create links to regional service centres and the wider rural transport network;

- greater investment in accessible transport infrastructure and vehicles to meet DDA obligations, especially in rural Victoria;
  - investment in extensions to the metropolitan rail network to outer suburban growth areas including Mernda and Cranbourne East, the electrification of the Sunbury and Melton lines; and
  - investment in the public transport recommendations outlined in the Eddington report to address peak hour congestion.
3. VCOSS recommends that the Government develop a sustainable and adequately funded model to deliver affordable door-to-door transport services including:
    - a comprehensive review of community transport services in Victoria;
    - development of a sustainable recurrent funding model for community transport including capital and recurrent costs; and
    - the creation of a Mobility Unit within the Department of Transport to coordinate research, governance, policy development and funding of coordinated and affordable transport services for people who require door-to-door transport.
  4. VCOSS recommends that the Government develop and fund programs that provide subsidised access to transport for people in financial difficulty including:
    - funding for transport emergency relief; and
    - development of programs to prevent vulnerable groups receiving inappropriate public transport fines.
  5. VCOSS recommends immediate reform to the MPTP including:
    - removal of the annual subsidy cap;
    - removal of the \$30 trip cap (to create a 50 per cent concession);
    - extension of the scheme to cover frail older people and people with temporary impairments;
    - simplification of the application process; and
    - broadening of the eligibility criteria to include access to public transport as well as ability to use it.
  6. VCOSS recommends that the Government increase investment to support community-based transport planning and the implementation of *Melbourne 2030* including:
    - coordination and allocation of funds to Melbourne 2030 initiatives and the recommendations of the Melbourne 2030 audit expert group report;
    - a substantial increase to the Transport Connections Flexible Fund; and
    - increased funding to ensure the implementation of recommendations from Local Area Bus Reviews.