INQUIRY INTO LIVEABILITY OPTIONS IN OUTER SUBURBAN MELBOURNE

April 2011

VCOSS Submission
About VCOSS

The Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS) is the peak body of the social and community sector in Victoria. VCOSS works to ensure that all Victorians have access to and a fair share of the community’s resources and services, through advocating for the development of a sustainable, fair and equitable society. VCOSS members reflect a wide diversity, ranging from large charities, sector peak organisations, small community services, advocacy groups and individuals involved in social policy debates.

VCOSS is committed to living out the principles of equity and justice, and acknowledges we live in a society where people are interdependent of one another. VCOSS respects the land we live in and recognises the Indigenous custodians of the country. VCOSS is committed to reconciling all injustices with Indigenous Australians. The VCOSS vision is one where social wellbeing is a national priority, and:

- involves all people as equals, without discrimination; and
- values and encourages people’s participation in decision-making about their own lives and their community.

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INTRODUCTION

VCOSS welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Outer Suburban Interface Services and Development Committee Inquiry into liveability options in outer suburban Melbourne. VCOSS member organisations that deliver community services in outer suburban Melbourne have expressed concern about the lack of assistance available to meet the demand from households in these regions and the levels of financial stress they are encountering.

VCOSS also notes that this committee is running a concurrent inquiry: Growing the Suburbs: infrastructure and business development in outer suburban Melbourne which will investigate infrastructure capacity and provision in outer suburbs. Physical and social infrastructure are interdependent and VCOSS hope that the two reviews will be considered in tandem as physical infrastructure and economic development are necessary to support liveability.

In the discussion of liveability throughout this submission VCOSS refers to:

the degree to which a community’s physical and social environment equitably and sustainably supports the wellbeing of its members.

In order to create and sustain liveable communities it is essential that they provide:

- opportunities for social, cultural and economic participation,
- access to quality basic services,
- affordable living, and
- sustainable planning and infrastructure.

While the Committee’s Terms of Reference for this Inquiry do not cover the entirety of services and infrastructure required to deliver liveable communities, the remainder of this submission will discuss the extent to which these needs are meet in outer suburban Melbourne, within the context of the Committee’s Terms of Reference.
PLANNING FOR AFFORDABLE AND SUSTAINABLE HOUSING

The Inquiry requests information on the impact of state housing policies on private housing. Public and community housing also play a critical role in the housing system by providing affordable housing to middle to low income households. Therefore VCOSS will address the impact of planning on both private and social housing.

A widely used measure of housing affordability is for housing costs to not exceed 30 per cent of income for households with the lowest 40 per cent of incomes. Planning legislation in Victoria has no explicit reference to affordable housing and planning policy and practice has not been used to address housing affordability in a systemic way; that is, in securing affordable housing across tenures and throughout the city.

Melbourne 2030 outlines the intent to secure “a fairer city” through: increasing the supply of well-located affordable housing; a more equitable distribution of social infrastructure; improving the coordination and timing of the installation of services and infrastructure in new development areas and developing a strong cultural environment and increased access to the arts, recreation and other cultural facilities. However, the lack of an implementation plan, particularly on affordable housing, means that these policy outcomes have not been achieved.

Securing a better distribution of affordable housing across the city can help to relieve the pressure on outer suburban Melbourne and, as such, the distribution of affordable housing across the metropolitan region should be addressed by this Inquiry.

To better coordinate the delivery of services and infrastructure in outer suburban areas, the Victorian Government in 2005 released A Plan for Melbourne’s Growth Areas. This paved the way for the 2006 expansion of the Urban Growth Boundary and established the Growth Areas Authority (GAA), which was tasked with coordinating infrastructure and services provision in growth areas through the preparation of Precinct Structure Plans. This emerged from concerns about rapid urban expansion in the absence of coordinated planning for infrastructure and services.

While new suburbs with Precinct Structure Plans approved by the Growth Areas Authority will have improved access to commercial spaces, employment opportunities, schools, services and transport nodes, residents of outer suburban regions built before 2006 still struggle to access critical services and transport infrastructure.

The 2008 planning update Melbourne@5million focussed on the development of a ‘polycentric city’ with five key activity centres and the provision of greenfield land for housing development. While the increase in the supply of land has kept land prices steady, other costs to households in these suburbs are high, particularly transport, as residents have inadequate access to public transport services and must run multiple cars and travel long distances to access employment, shops and services. The cost to government of these developments is also high as it requires significant new capital investment in additional schools and transport services, rather than fully utilising the capacity in existing areas.
Changes to planning to support affordable housing

The Victorian planning system could be used to much greater effect to foster the development of affordable housing. The Victorian planning strategy Melbourne 2030 and its subsequent update, Melbourne @ 5 Million, do not set targets for affordable housing nor do they identify plans to secure affordable housing. In order to secure more affordable housing through the planning process the strategic and legislative instruments of government must support this.

Both the New South Wales Environmental Planning and Assessment Act and the South Australian Development Act include the provision of affordable housing as an objective of the Act. This legislative support enables a range of planning mechanisms to be used to secure affordable housing and ensures that housing affordability is prioritised by both state and local government planning authorities. A similar objective should be included in the Victorian Planning and Environment Act 1987 to support local councils and social housing providers to use the planning system to increase the supply of affordable housing.

In addition to high level legislative support in the Planning and Environment Act, the addition of inclusionary zoning mechanisms to the Victorian Planning Provisions would allow local councils or governments to require developers to provide a certain proportion of affordable housing in their developments. Models of inclusionary zoning vary in size, percentage and type of development and often provide incentives such as density bonuses or reduced parking requirements to offset added costs. If introduced over time, the added costs of inclusionary zoning can be absorbed by decreased land prices rather than increased property prices.¹

Including inclusionary zoning within the Victorian Planning Provisions would allow councils in areas of high demand to implement affordable housing requirements; this may be particularly useful when rezoning land for residential development from previous uses. While this would assist in providing affordable housing across the city, specific measures should also be considered for growth areas in particular, increasing average residential densities to at least 30 dwellings per hectare in order to encourage a diverse mix of housing types, and provide for more dwellings within the current Urban Growth Boundary.

Higher residential densities are required not just to secure a diversity of housing types and sizes but also to encourage active transport, such as walking and cycling. The Healthy Spaces and Places design guide recommends that growth areas plan for a “variety of destinations (such as schools and shops) within walking or cycling distance, and high residential densities (such as over 30 dwellings per hectare) to support these”².

Currently the GAA’s Precinct Structure Planning Guidelines define ‘high’ density as 30 dwellings per hectare. However, this is still substantially lower (almost half) the dwelling density of inner city suburbs of Richmond or Fitzroy, that have a diverse mix of housing from dethatched family dwellings to townhouses and apartment blocks, and much closer to middle ring suburbs of Hawthorn or McKinnon and .. VCOSS considers this should be the average dwelling density for growth areas. Setting such a low bar for high density development simply locks in what have been unsustainable and economically inefficient patterns of urban development across Melbourne.
Affordable housing programs

As well as supporting housing affordability through a more diverse range of housing types and sizes, growth area councils need the tools to secure affordable rental housing within their municipalities. There is currently no mechanism by which councils can enforce a requirement for social housing, partner with a particular community housing provider to ensure it is delivered in the designated areas, or secure government funding to construct public housing.

In order to facilitate the provision of affordable housing, councils in growth areas should set targets for at least 5 per cent of all properties in new growth areas to be affordable rental housing. This requires a dedicated strategy at the council level to partner with community housing providers and a dedicated funding stream from the State Government.

The cost of providing this additional housing should be budgeted for and included in the upfront cost of any future expansion of the Urban Growth Boundary.

Integrated transport and land use planning

Liveability is directly affected by how well transport is planned and provided for. While numerous Government documents, including the Victorian Transport Plan, the Transport Integration Act 2010, and Melbourne @ Smillion incorporate the idea that land use should support the development of public transport corridors, in practice transport provision attempts to respond to past land use decisions. Planning for new growth areas provides the opportunity for this process to be reversed, so that the provision of public transport is not always racing to catch up with urban growth.

Timing the delivery of new public transport services is critical to support households in new development areas. The early delivery of frequent, well connected public transport services which operate from early morning to late night in new communities can help to relieve the need for households to purchase or operate multiple cars in these areas. The RACV has estimated the average cost of running a new car at $154-$231 (depending on car size) per week.3 The cost of living savings to households that are able to avoid this additional cost are significant.

Planning for the Principal Public Transport Network (PPTN), including on-street transit-way components (such as light rail systems or dedicated bus-ways) should take place as early as possible, in order to inform the location of significant activity centres, social infrastructure and smaller neighbourhood centres. This will provide a catchment large enough to secure high frequency and quality service.

The location of major activity centres should be driven by the availability of good public transport connections, rather than trying to develop circuitous or poorly aligned public transport routes to connect disparate locations. In the growth areas, the location of significant urban centres (such as principle and major activity centres) should be at the confluence of PPTN routes, preferably at a major interchange of heavy rail and on-street PPTN components. PPTN routes should be as direct as possible and connect as closely as possible at modal interchanges, especially between heavy rail and buses/trams.
Accessible housing

Only 1 in 25 houses in Victoria are accessible to people with a disability. While some buildings will have been retrofitted at great expense to the owner, the lack of accessible housing regulations in the Victorian building code mean that the majority of private residences are not accessible.

Accessible homes provide safer environments for children and families, and are essential through episodes of frailty, disability and temporary impairment. Accessible housing regulation will provide a step-change in the accessibility of housing in Victoria and make sure that future housing construction meets the needs of an ageing population. To make sure new communities are liveable and inclusive to all residents, accessible housing regulations should be introduced for all new dwellings.

To properly plan for affordable and sustainable housing, VCOSS recommends the following:

- Include the provision of affordable housing as an objective of the Planning and Environment Act 1987, and amending the Victorian Planning Provisions to allow councils to implement Inclusionary Zoning.
- Require councils in growth areas to set targets for at least 5 per cent of all properties in new growth areas to be affordable rental housing.
- Increase residential densities in growth areas to 30 lots per hectare with a diverse mix of housing sizes and types.
- Ensure that any future review of the Urban Growth Boundary is accompanied by a budget allocation that covers the costs of infrastructure and service provision, including public transport services and affordable housing programs.
- Ensure that the planning and delivery of public transport infrastructure coincides with the development of new suburbs.
IMPACT OF HOUSING ON THE COST OF LIVING

One in five households Melbourne’s growth areas councils experience housing stress; that is, they are paying more than 30 per cent of its income in rent.

Just three of the nine outer suburban councils in Melbourne have rates of affordable rental housing above the Victorian average and, while there are fewer rental properties in these regions than across metropolitan Melbourne, there are a higher number of households receiving rent assistance.

Housing prices in outer suburbs and peri-urban areas are among the lowest in metropolitan Melbourne, however this does not necessarily equate to housing affordability. As shown above, high numbers of households in these areas are experiencing housing stress.

**The cost of private transport**

High housing costs place a huge strain on other areas of the household budget. In outer suburban Melbourne, an estimated 20,831 households have an income below $500/week and run two or more cars. Based on average household expenditure on car travel, these households spend 27 per cent or more of their income on running a second car.

The level of dual car ownership in low income households is strongly correlated with the availability of public transport and the location of activity centres. Or put another way, if households are able to get around on public transport and meet their daily needs in their local community they will be less likely to be forced into owning and running a second car. The extent of second car ownership by low income households can be seen in the map below.

![Map showing distribution of low income dwellings with 2+ cars](image)


Each year households in outer suburban areas running two cars spend approximately $1.5 billion on running that second vehicle. That is an enormous private cost that could be alleviated by greater provision of efficient public transport services in these areas.

**Availability of employment**

There are fewer jobs available in outer suburban areas of Melbourne than in inner and middle suburbs. This reduces liveability by increasing the time that people spend travelling to work, and by reducing their opportunities for employment. It also decreases the opportunities for part time work that often supplement household income for two parent families and places increased financial pressure on households in these areas.
The lack of employment opportunities in outer suburban areas is particularly critical given the extent of socio-economic disadvantage in these areas. The map below highlights local areas high socio-economic disadvantage on red and orange, and jobs accessible within 30 minutes drive in blue and green.

Energy and water efficiency

Increasing energy and water efficiency of homes can decrease the long term cost of living. Victoria currently has five star energy rating standards for new buildings and a commitment by the Coalition Government to meet the COAG agreement on introducing six star standards for new buildings and renovations as well as a commitment to bring all existing properties up to a five star rating.\(^\text{10}\)

Current five star standards for new buildings in Victoria are not based on the operating efficiency of the building, compromising the benefit they deliver in reducing greenhouse gas emissions or energy costs. The National Strategy on Energy Efficiency proposes national performance-based building standards with the flexibility to respond to local climatic conditions. This helps to ensure that properties are not only thermally efficient but also operate efficiently. VCOS supports this outcome-based model for building standards as this will help to reduce the long term living costs in these properties.
Unfortunately there are no similar standards for existing buildings and, in particular, currently no standards for rental housing in Victoria. This places a high cost on tenant households as they are not able to make their properties more energy efficient and bear the cost of high bills - in some cases as much as $600 extra a year due to poor energy performance\textsuperscript{11}. This is particularly an issue in the outer suburbs where there are high numbers of renters on low incomes.

Integrated water management can help to reduce infrastructure development costs by managing stormwater flows and improving environmental amenity. This in turn reduces household water bills. VCOSS supports the Living Victoria Roadmap proposals to introduce “planning and building regulations to improve the application and integration of integrated water cycle management across all planning scales”\textsuperscript{12}.

To reduce the impact of housing on the cost of living, VCOSS recommends the following:

- Introduce minimum standards for rental properties to improve energy and water efficiency and reduce the cost of living for tenant households.

- Ensure that any future review of the Urban Growth Boundary is accompanied by a budget allocation that covers the costs of infrastructure and service provision, including public transport services and affordable housing programs.

- Ensure that the planning and delivery of public transport infrastructure coincides with the development of new suburbs.

**DELIVERING HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES IN OUTER SUBURS**

Demand for health and social services is affected by a range of socioeconomic factors. The provision of social and community services and preventative health measures can help to reduce demand on acute health and medical services and lead to healthier communities.

With this in mind VCOSS supports measures that address population health in accordance with the Victorian Healthcare Association’s definition:

> Population health aims to improve the health and wellbeing of whole populations, reduce inequities among and between specific population groups and address the needs of the most disadvantaged.

> Effective population health requires community, inter-sectoral and whole-of-government engagement and collaboration to address the broad range of determinants that shape health and wellbeing\textsuperscript{13}.

Community health centres are a key platform for addressing the social determinants of health and provide access to a range of primary health care services that can reduce pressure on the hospital system. Unfortunately the State Government has not made capital funding available for new community health services to be established as Melbourne grows.
Given the population health needs of new communities in the outer suburbs (higher numbers of families with children), the availability of health services, particularly for women, children and young people is critical.

**Mental Health care**

Community health centres can also provide an effective platform for early intervention mental health services. The annual impact of mental illness in Victoria is estimated to be $5.4 billion and research has shown that “the risk factors associated with poor mental health are over represented in the interface municipalities” particularly for young people.

Early intervention can help to reduce these costs in a range of areas, from acute care to reduced productivity. The Because Mental Health Matters strategy highlights the importance of early intervention at all stages of mental health issues including initial onset, in an episode of mental illness and in age. However, inner suburbs have ten times the number of private psychiatrists than outer suburban and rural areas. As shown below, with the exception of Dandenong, there are also fewer public mental health providers in these outer suburban areas.

**EXHIBIT 11 • DISTRIBUTION OF CLINICAL PROVIDERS ACROSS LOCAL AREAS IN VICTORIA**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inner West</th>
<th>Inner SE</th>
<th>Inner Urban</th>
<th>Middle East</th>
<th>North East</th>
<th>North West</th>
<th>West</th>
<th>South East</th>
<th>South West</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Ringwood</th>
<th>North East</th>
<th>Gippsland</th>
<th>Baw Baw</th>
<th>Latrobe Valley</th>
<th>Outer Urban</th>
<th>Inner Urban</th>
<th>Outer</th>
<th>Rural</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No of BDMH trained GPs/100,000</td>
<td>No of Private Psychologists/100,000</td>
<td>No of Private Psychiatrists/100,000</td>
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[1] Includes BPs who have achieved Level 3 BDMH [Better Outcomes in Mental Health Services] training for 3 step mental health referral process

In addition to the need for community based health services, the availability of office space and current funding models constrains the availability of health and community service organisations to deliver services in outer suburban areas.

**Human services**

Current funding arrangements for human services vary according to the type of service being delivered. These funding models are largely based on historical allocation, with some mechanisms for allocating funding to areas of highest demographic need. For example, the child protection and placement support output applies an equity resource allocation formula to funding, which is based on the Commonwealth’s Family Tax Benefit A.

Human services are also funded on an ‘output’ basis, whereby the department or agencies are funded to deliver a particular number of services to a region, rather than on the basis of work done. This approach can lead to service rationing (in the form of waiting lists) for these services. Long waiting lists means problems can worsen and become entrenched, even after people have sought help to address them.

Almost all human service agencies run waiting lists and do not receive sufficient funding to respond to demand. There is also a disparity in the way in which established and new services are funded. Existing services in established areas are funded under agreements which are renegotiated every three years under existing funding parameters. Funding for new services, to meet the needs of growing populations, requires specific departmental budget bids and funding processes, making the delivery of these services less certain.

Funding models that allow services to respond to need, particularly for children, families and young people are critical in outer suburban areas as these regions had lower birth weights than metropolitan Melbourne or rural Victoria, lower rates of breastfeeding, higher rates of post-natal depression, higher rates of child protection notifications and substantiations and protection orders and lower rates of year 12 completion.

**Commercial space**

Outer suburban areas have less office and community spaces than inner and middle ring suburbs. That has an additional impact on the provision of services in these areas.

In established areas, community services are often able to establish themselves in older community facilities, such as church halls or office buildings, at little cost. These older facilities do not exist in outer suburban areas and community services must find alternative office space. Not only do organisations incur substantial costs in securing premises, additional back office infrastructure and administrative costs are required as they are often located further away from central offices.

While the Growth Areas Authority in its Precinct Structure Plans has focussed on providing adequate office and retail space in new developments, those outer suburbs that were established prior to 2006 have few community facilities, nor is there adequate office and commercial space available for services to locate. This means that service agencies often must rent residential properties, or provide outreach services that are not readily accessible.

**Planning for health and wellbeing**

The planning of new communities and the provision of public transport affects population health. Urban environments that support physical activity (for example, through attractive open space) are associated with increased physical activity, while opportunities to interact with others, feel part of the community and have access to open space influence mental health.
The National Preventative Health Taskforce has identified the link between community design and obesity. Communities that have few local destinations and little public transport are dependent on car travel, however communities with a mix of uses spread throughout the urban fabric support walking and cycling and make the provision of public transport easier. The provision of public transport services supports incidental exercise—such as walking or cycling to and from bus, tram or train stops—and helps to gain the recommended daily physical activity requirements20.

As shown below the rate of incidental transport related exercise falls dramatically in the outer suburbs.

![Average minutes of walking and cycling for transport per day — people who travelled](http://www.busvic.asn.au/database/files/BusSolutions2.pdf)

Urban design and more compact development can encourage physical activity and support the use of active transport. These principles of urban design are essential for healthy communities and should be part of all new developments. In particular, average residential dwelling densities of 30 dwellings per hectare can support mixed uses and public transport provision.

To adequately deliver for health and social services in outer suburbs VCOSS recommends the following:

- Fund human services on a full cost recovery model which includes components for population, administration and facilities—this will allow them to deliver community services when and where they are needed.
- Plan for and fund the construction of community health centres in outer suburban areas.
- Increase residential densities in growth areas to 30 lots per hectare to support walking and cycling and increase the catchment for public transport.
MODELS FOR URBAN RENEWAL

There are a number of models of urban renewal internationally that respond to particular problems and contexts. In the United States, inner city areas tend to be targets for renewal strategies, often in response to declining populations and a refusal of credit agencies to lend in these areas (redlining). In the United Kingdom, urban renewal has focussed on areas with high concentrations of public housing and in former industrial areas of London.

In the Australian context, particularly in outer suburban areas of Melbourne, there are similar but not identical challenges. The objective of urban renewal in outer suburban areas should be to deliver social infrastructure, public transport connections and employment opportunities, with a particular focus on areas with high levels of socioeconomic disadvantage.

The Revitalising Central Dandenong project is a partnership between the Victorian State Government, VicUrban and the City of Greater Dandenong and is one of few examples of urban revitalisation in an outer suburban area. It involves new housing development, remodelling of urban space including greater pedestrian access and improved road connectivity, and revitalising the civic centre over a 15 year period.

Key features of the project include an extensive consultation process with the existing community, government investment for infrastructure and a strong partnership between the local council, state government and developer.

Renewal projects require a number of factors working together to secure successful development. Developers of the Subi Centro redevelopment in east Perth have identified the following characteristics of that project as critical to its success:

- a relatively large area of land with almost all of it held in public ownership
- land was of a size able to generate a critical mass of new development
- land was also either already vacant or considered to be largely underutilised
- it was located and became attached to an established and diverse town centre that had a distinctive heritage based character
- additionally it was located within proximity to the Perth CBD providing accessibility and convenience
- there was an initial direct grant of public monies
- the developer was the planning authority
- the change of land uses exploited the greatest value uplift
- it caught the boom in property prices
- under public management it was able to absorb a long time horizon before requiring a financial return

Research suggests that commitment and coordination of investment from state government agencies is crucial to supporting renewal activity as “councils are unwilling to facilitate large-scale renewal activity in the absence of greater infrastructure provision channelled through other state departments.”
Government investment in regeneration has the potential to improve the quality of life in urban areas, however improved public space may also result in higher housing costs and displace existing residents. Plans for urban regeneration must address the impacts of gentrification on existing residents and include plans to develop affordable housing options across the housing spectrum, from public and community housing, to affordable purchase options.

**Place based approach**

The Neighbourhood Renewal Program has been a successful approach to urban regeneration in Victoria. This program focuses on improving liveability for residents through a place based approach to addressing disadvantage. Areas with high concentrations of public housing have been targeted for Neighbourhood Renewal which works with the local community to develop an action plan, and provides dedicated funding to deliver the plan and coordinate services in the region.

The latest evaluation of community wellbeing in neighbourhood renewal areas has shown substantial improvements in reduced primary and secondary school absenteeism, reduced crime, improved overall health and improved employment.

This place based initiative has secured excellent outcomes in existing communities, and should be considered as a model for renewal projects.

**Principles for urban renewal**

While there are a range of examples of urban renewal which can provide models for future activities, the approaches used need to vary according to local needs and conditions. However urban renewal must first and foremost involve the resident community and respond to their needs and aspirations for the place.

In order to do this, renewal projects must include:

- concrete measures not to displace current residents, preserve affordable housing and secure new affordable housing
- secure financial commitments to create necessary public infrastructure
- partnerships between government agencies and non-government organisations
- strategies to address social, economic and physical infrastructure needs together.
FULL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LIVEABILITY

In the body of this report, VCOSS makes the following recommendations to the Victorian Government to improve liveability in outer suburban areas and ensure that new communities are places that meet the needs of current and future residents.

- Include the provision of affordable housing as an objective of the Planning and Environment Act 1987, and amending the Victorian Planning Provisions to allow councils to implement Inclusionary Zoning.

- Require councils in growth areas to set targets for at least 5 per cent of all properties in new growth areas to be affordable rental housing.

- Increase residential densities in growth areas to 30 lots per hectare with a diverse mix of housing sizes and types.

- Ensure that any future review of the Urban Growth Boundary is accompanied by a budget allocation that covers the costs of infrastructure and service provision, including public transport services and affordable housing programs.

- Ensure that the planning and delivery of public transport infrastructure coincides with the development of new suburbs.

- Introduce minimum standards for rental properties to improve energy and water efficiency and reduce the cost of living for tenant households.

- Ensure that any future review of the Urban Growth Boundary is accompanied by a budget allocation that covers the costs of infrastructure and service provision, including public transport services and affordable housing programs.

- Fund human services on a full cost recovery model which includes components for population, administration and facilities — this will allow them to deliver community services when and where they are needed.

- Plan for and fund the construction of community health centres in outer suburban areas.

- Increase residential densities in growth areas to 30 lots per hectare to support walking and cycling and increase the catchment for public transport.
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