



# **“You might as well just stay at home”**



## **Young mums and transport in Victoria**

October 2007

Jess Fritze, Transport and Disadvantage Policy Officer

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# Executive summary

This research aimed to document the transport experiences, and suggested improvements to the transport system, for one potentially transport disadvantaged group - young mothers and their children. Focus group interviews and surveys were conducted with 45 young mums from around Melbourne, Albury-Wodonga and Whittington, Geelong.

When we asked young mums what it is like to get around they typically responded 'horrible' and 'hard'. Transport difficulties create significant barriers to accessing services, social networks and community participation for young mums and their children.

Participants in this study reported a much lower car ownership rate than the wider community - 50 per cent did not have a car, compared to 12 per cent of all Victorian adults. In addition, one in three of those who did have a car had only limited access to it. This resulted in 67 per cent of participants being largely dependent on public transport, taxis and lifts to meet their transport needs.

Those reliant on public transport reported very high rates of difficulty accessing services and social networks:

- 74 per cent had difficulty getting to social activities;
- 70 per cent had difficulty visiting family and friends;
- 56 per cent had difficulty getting to medical appointments;
- 30 per cent had difficulty getting to their local shop and the supermarket;
- 30 per cent had difficulty getting to work or study and Centrelink; and
- 26 per cent had difficulty getting to a play group or activities for their kids.

The most significant transport issues identified by study participants related to the physical inaccessibility of the public transport system. The barriers presented by inaccessible vehicles were exacerbated in many cases by policies in some areas requiring parents to fold prams before entering the bus, and by bus drivers failing to provide assistance. These issues in particular were the cause of a great deal of distress, and in some cases, decisions not to use bus services at all. Given the heavy reliance on buses for public transport service delivery to most of Melbourne, as well as rural and regional areas, these are important issues to be addressed.

*They need to make it better...not just for mums, but for everyone... so you can walk on and off easily... pram on, pram off, wheelchair on, wheelchair off, people on, people off. (Yarraville)*

Other significant transport issues raised by participants included the lack of child restraints in taxis, inability to travel on weekends due to limited public transport operating hours, poor quality toilet facilities and limited 'baby' parking at important destinations.

This report recommends:

1. that the needs of carers with young children be considered as part of accessible transport planning, including the design of public transport vehicles, buildings and facilities;
2. increased funding for accessible transport infrastructure being prioritised to areas of high need, including areas with high numbers of young children;
3. continued expansion of public transport hours of operation and service frequencies on weekends and in the evenings;

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*When we asked young mums what it is like to get around they typically responded 'horrible' and 'hard'. Transport difficulties create significant barriers to accessing services, social networks and community participation for young mums and their children.*

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4. development of policies to increase the usability of transport services for carers of young children including:
  - a. designation and publication of when accessible bus and tram services are timetabled;
  - b. removal of bus operating policies that require prams to be folded;
- c. more assistance from drivers to assist women with prams or small children to board vehicles - including to fold prams where required; and
- d. more involvement of drivers in ensuring that pregnant women and women holding young children have access to priority seating.
5. investigation of options for carrying child restraints in the taxi fleet, including the mandated carrying of child restraints by a guaranteed percentage of the taxi fleet and the development of incentive schemes and driver education to facilitate the safe use of child restraints;
6. new planning guidelines for toilet facilities at stations and on long distance trains to accommodate the needs of mums travelling alone with young children, including space for prams and places to safely seat young children; and
7. increased provision of wider 'baby' car spaces at key destinations such as shopping centres.

# 1. Background to the study

## 1.1 Introduction

The ability to access services, employment and education is critical to participation in community life and is essential for health and wellbeing. The Social Exclusion Unit in the United Kingdom defines accessibility as the ability to 'get to key services at reasonable cost, in reasonable time and with reasonable ease'.<sup>1</sup>

This is a significant problem in Victoria, with one in five Victorians reporting that they have difficulty accessing services.<sup>2</sup> The centralisation of service provision, urban forms that separate residential areas from services, socio-economic disadvantage and lack of access to affordable and accessible transport all impact on accessibility.

While policy interest in addressing transport disadvantage in Victoria is increasing, there is little information about transport difficulties experienced by different groups in the community.

The aim of this project was to document young mums' experiences of public transport, transport costs and the build environment, and the effects these have on their ability to engage with services and participate in social networks.

## 1.2 Why ask young mums about transport?

Young women with children have several characteristics associated with transport disadvantage<sup>3</sup> – they are young, female, carers and are more likely to be on low incomes.<sup>4</sup> Young women who experience disadvantage are more likely to have children earlier than their peers<sup>5</sup> and young motherhood remains a strong indicator of disadvantage.<sup>6</sup>

Parents' connections to community, social and cultural networks are also important for the well-being of themselves and their children. Young mums' access to and engagement with services, education and employment is the focus of several health, family support and education programs in Victoria. For example, young parenting is identified as a risk factor for children under the *Every Child, Every Change* strategic framework for family services, as is parental isolation.<sup>7</sup>

It is important therefore to understand how young mums experience transport issues and use their local knowledge to develop transport solutions which will work for them. The views of young mums also reflect the issues that many carers with young children experience in getting around.

## 1.3 Literature review

A brief review of available literature on young motherhood in Australia and transport disadvantage experienced by women travelling with children was undertaken as part of this project.

General studies on young motherhood in Australia include Bradbury (2006), who provides an overview of socio-economic disadvantage of young mothers in Australia.<sup>8</sup> Health impacts of young motherhood are assessed by Lee and Gramotnev (2006) in their investigation of the long term health impacts of early motherhood through analysis of data from the Australian Longitudinal Study on Women's Health.<sup>9</sup>

Gender equality issues in transport have been investigated over a number of decades highlighting issues, such as: women's different travel patterns, reliance on trip chaining (completing multiple tasks within a single journey) and the importance of safety (see for example Hamilton et al, 2005). However, limited research has been

undertaken on transport issues for women travelling with their children.

Most of this limited literature emanates from the UK. Bostock (2001), for example, has undertaken qualitative research documenting the impact of walking with children as the primary form of transport available for low-income mothers. She found that for many women who used walking with their children as their main form of transport, walking was far from being a source of recreation, but instead caused considerable physical and emotional stress.<sup>10</sup>

Reid-Howie Associates (2000) undertook research on women and transport in Scotland which included looking at travel with children. Interestingly, the findings of this research strongly mirror the major issues found in this research, namely that accessibility of transport infrastructure presents the greatest barrier to getting around.<sup>11</sup>



Young mums in the Roxburgh Park focus group.

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*Parents' connections  
to community, social  
and cultural networks  
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In the US, McCray (2000) investigated transport barriers to low-income women accessing ante-natal and post-natal healthcare for themselves and their babies and documented health programs which trialled the inclusion of transport support as part of service provision.<sup>12</sup>

## 1.4 Methodology

Six focus groups were held between March and June 2007 around Melbourne and in Albury-Wodonga and Whittington, Geelong. These focus groups were held as part of existing young mums' groups based within community organisations. The focus groups discussed a series of broad questions developed after consultation with workers within the Choices program at Anglicare Victoria [Appendix A]. Young mums attending focus groups were reimbursed \$25 for their participation.

An initial focus group was conducted through the 'Connecting Young Mums' program in Albury-Wodonga. The issues raised by this group were used to develop a survey that was then distributed to all focus group participants [Appendix B]. Services were also invited to distribute the survey more widely, however responses came largely from focus group participants.

A number of interviews were also conducted with young mums' group facilitators, team leaders and representatives from other community service organisations.

*Rural young mums are likely to experience greater transport disadvantage than young mums in urban and regional areas as a result of the extremely limited transport options and higher transport costs due to longer travel distances.*

## 1.5 Limitations of the methodology

It was initially hoped that this project would document the experiences of young mums in rural as well as metropolitan and regional areas. However, using existing young mums' groups based in community services as a basis for focus group research did not, in the end, easily facilitate the inclusion of rural young mums.

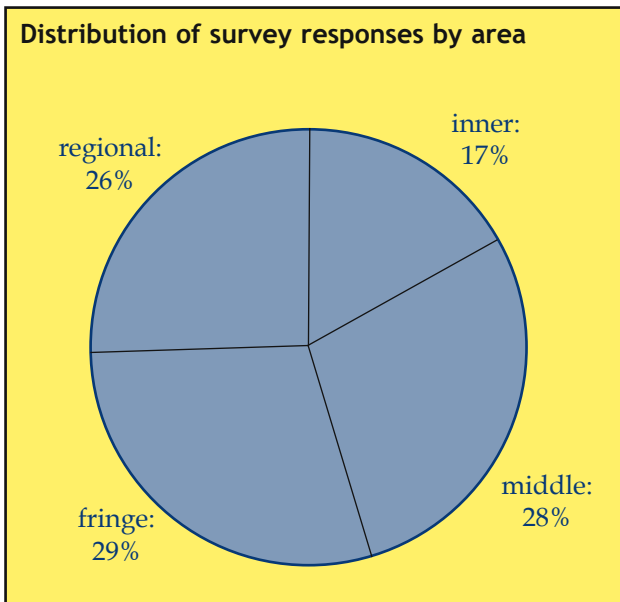
Future research in partnership with rural Maternal Child Health Services may prove more successful in reaching these young people. Rural young mums are likely to experience greater transport disadvantage than young mums in urban and regional areas as a result of the extremely limited transport options and higher transport costs due to longer travel distances.

While the project scope included young fathers, all participants in the research were young mothers. This was reflective of the makeup of young parents groups and also, to an extent, reflective of the distribution of parenting responsibilities in young families. For example, the partners of many focus group participants were at work during the day. Many of the workers interviewed also indicated that their service had difficulty engaging young fathers.

Survey responses were categorised according to geographical area as either 'inner', 'middle' or 'fringe' for metropolitan areas based on definitions used by the Department of Sustainability and Environment in the Melbourne Atlas.<sup>13</sup> Responses from participants in Geelong and Albury-Wodonga were categorised as 'regional'.

The focus groups were digitally recorded and responses from the participants were transcribed and thematically analysed.

Program/Organisation	Location	No. of participants
'Connecting Young Mums': Upper Hume Community Health Service and Retro Youth Cafe	Albury-Wodonga	9
Young Pregnant and Parenting Program (YAPP): Melbourne City Mission.	Sunshine	7
'Starting Out': Connections Child, Youth and Family Services	Ringwood	17
'Choices' program: Anglicare Victoria	Yarraville	4
Whittington Young Mums Group	Whittington (Geelong)	3
Orana Family Services	Roxburgh Park	5
	<b>Total</b>	45



In total, 50 per cent of research participants did not have a car they could drive. This is compared to 12 per cent of the wider adult community in Victoria.<sup>14</sup> Of the young women surveyed who had a car, 29 per cent had limited access to this vehicle. This was often due to the car being used by their partners to get to work.

Some of the participants also reported periods of reliance on public transport when their cars had broken down. As a consequence, almost all participants were able to comment on issues of using public transport and relying on lifts, in addition to half commenting on the costs and issues associated with driving.

## 1.6 Research participant demographics

All the young women who participated in focus groups and completed surveys were under the age of 25. The majority of participants had one child (69 per cent) with another 24 per cent having two children. The average age of their children was 23 months.

## 2. Young mums' experiences of getting around

### 2.1 Accessibility

Accessibility of public transport vehicles was the most significant barrier to using public transport identified by the young mums. Inaccessible vehicles not only made travel physically difficult and emotionally stressful but also in some cases prevented young mums from travelling at all.

*Trains are not so bad because you can get the pram on, but trams when they've got small doors and especially when they're busy and no-one will help you get the pram up and then you've got to get it up yourself*

*and buses... they're just no go for me... unless they are the [low] floor ones, but most of the time I miss the [low] floor ones (Ringwood)*

#### 2.1.1 Bus accessibility

The most significant reported difficulties in using public transport related to the physical inaccessibility of buses. Given that buses are the only form of public transport available to the majority of Victorians, especially people living outside of inner Melbourne, it is not surprising that issues to do with buses featured prominently in focus group discussions.



*“Getting in and out of the older trams is impossible without help. On a few of them we were not even able to use the front or rear entry and had to use the middle doors. The steps are high and the babies seemed to almost fall out as they were lifted on and off.”*

While over 50 per cent of the Victorian bus fleet is accessible, low floor vehicles are not evenly distributed - with some routes now fully accessible, while others have no accessible vehicles. In addition, where a route uses some low floor buses, these are rarely marked on the timetable.

Older style buses with steps and central poles in their stairwells were seen as almost impossible to use when travelling with young children.

*Where I live, the buses are the old ones, and I actually had to buy a stroller that was skinny enough to get up the steps, because bus drivers only help sometimes. If I have anyone helping, I still have to lift the stroller over the bar in the middle of the steps. (Ringwood)*

Mums travelling with double prams in particular had enormous difficulty using older non low-floor buses.

*I've got the side by side pram, and I wasn't even going to bother trying to get on the bus. Unless someone would drive me, I didn't go anywhere. (Ringwood)*

By contrast, the newer low floor buses were seen as much easier to use.

*The wheelchair accessible buses...they're fantastic, the doors are wide enough to get the pram on, and the whole bus is wide enough to wheel your pram down. (Ringwood)*

*Some of the buses that I've been on have those things at the front that lower for you if you've got the pram...I think all buses should be like that, because if you do have the pram, instead of the driver having to get out to help you they can lower it and it can make it easier for you to get the pram on, and then if you still need any help they can help you. (Ringwood)*

Young women relying on bus routes that were not serviced by low floor buses, or where low floor buses were irregular, reported much

greater difficulty in getting around. This could in turn have significant impacts on their ability to access important services.

*I have to do VCAL and that starts at 9 o'clock. The 8:30 bus to get there on time doesn't have pram access. So I have to be at least 20 minutes late every day because the 9 o'clock bus is the only one that has pram access in the morning. (Albury-Wodonga)*

*The only transport around my area is a bus to the train station, and all the buses have steps. I used the low rider buses where I used to live. (Yarraville)*

*I had to get a lift to make it here...I'd be able to come here if there was a low rider bus from my house. (Yarraville)*

Issues with bus accessibility were exacerbated in some areas by policies of requiring mums to fold up their prams before entering the bus.

*It's just too hard for us to fold up the prams and get on the bus with a baby and bags and shopping, with them looking at you like a twit and the bus starts driving before you even get to pack up. (Albury-Wodonga)*

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*The most significant reported difficulties in using public transport related to the physical inaccessibility of buses ... the only form of public transport available to the majority of Victorians, especially people living outside of inner Melbourne*

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An indication of the impact that the physical inaccessibility of buses has on mums attempting to travel with their children is illustrated by the following response.

As part of the research for this project, a notice was placed in *The Scarlet Letter*, the newsletter of the Council of Single Mothers and their Children, asking young mums to contact the researcher to share their transport experiences. One respondent described her experiences of using buses in the Frankston area 10 years ago when her twin daughters were around a year old, which still causes her distress:

*I had recently moved to Melbourne from New Zealand and needed to catch the bus with my twins to get around. I asked the driver for assistance in getting them on the bus but he refused. I had to fold up my pram and leave one baby on the nature strip while I carried the other baby onto the bus with the pram. I couldn't leave her on the seat because I was afraid that she would roll off so I had to put her on the floor while I stepped off to get my other daughter.*

*I thought, "I just can't survive in this community".*

*How are you going to pick up a baby and fold a pram up and carry the pram with the one arm and carry the baby plus your baby bag? (Sunshine)*

This was seen as a particular issue when travelling with young babies, or with more than one child.

*It's easier because she walks before me and I follow her up with the stroller... but when they're like small or newborn what are you going to do? Put them on the floor?... and then you have the baby bags... (Sunshine)*

This policy seemed to be inconsistently applied. In some areas, being required to fold up prams was a significant concern. For example all young mums who used buses in the Albury-Wodonga and Sunshine focus groups had been asked by the driver to fold up their pram before they got on the bus. However, the Ringwood focus group reported that they had not experienced these requests.

In some cases, when confronted with inaccessible older style buses or requests to fold their prams before boarding, young mums in the focus groups reported waiting for the next service or simply turning around and walking home.

*I actually asked the driver whether I had to like fold up the pram because if I had to fold up the pram I wasn't going to catch the bus. (Albury-Wodonga)*

The indignity and difficulty associated with this issue was strongly voiced by a number of young mums as they told their stories:

*I wasn't allowed on with a double pram... because it takes up room in the aisle and that causes a danger so I had to fold it up which meant I had to put two babies down to do that. I haven't taken a bus since then... A guy who came down from the back of the bus helped me holding the kids while I folded it up. (Roxburgh Park)*

The policy to insist on prams being folded was seen by some as discriminatory against mums with children, as people boarding the bus with shopping trolleys and mobility devices, which also take up room in the bus, were not similarly asked to fold them up.

*The bus driver doesn't tell them 'take out your shopping and fold it up because it's not going to fit' when they tell us take your baby out ... what's the difference? (Sunshine)*

The reasoning behind the need for prams to be folded was also not clearly explained with several young mums questioning the safety and usefulness of this policy.

*It's not safe anyway... at that age, if you've got two of them, they're not going to stay on the seat. They'll want to get up and walk around while the bus is moving, and they can fall and hurt themselves. (Ringwood)*

*You'd think they'd want you to have your kids in a pram, because then they'd have more spaces for people to sit. The pram does take up room...but they can sit sideways, and have the pram there so there's still a couple of seats available, instead of having the kids taking them up. (Ringwood)*

Given that buses are the only form of public transport available to most Victorians, the serious accessibility and usability issues reported by participants in this study are a cause for concern.

### **2.1.2 Role of bus staff - the need for assistance and support**

*What are you supposed to do? Stop looking or get off and help! (Sunshine)*

Difficulties in boarding and alighting from inaccessible buses and the need to fold up prams created a corresponding need for assistance using bus services. Current occupa-

tional health and safety 'no-lift' policies, in place to protect bus drivers, have unintentional impacts on the ability of young mums to use bus services.

*I asked one day because I had bags of groceries, a nappy bag, bottle bag, pram, my child and a couple of other things and I couldn't get up there [on the bus]. I ended up not getting on the bus because he couldn't help me. (Ringwood)*

*I guess it depends if they're in a good mood or not...if they're in a good mood they'll help you, but if they're in a foul mood they won't help you. (Ringwood)*

Many of the focus groups reported relying on assistance from other passengers. This was a cause for concern as those who offered to help were often elderly. In addition, in situations where young mums were asked to fold their prams they had to rely on strangers to hold their babies for them or put them down on the nature strip or pavement.

However, there was also positive feedback about the availability of assistance from the wider community in some cases.

*Passengers that want to go on...all the guys, they always help me, especially when there's buses where there are steps and I'm like 'oh my god'. (Ringwood)*

*My bus driver knows who I am because I catch the same bus every week at the same time and it's the same old guy every time.*

*I just stand there and he just knows automatically to get off and help me because I had a go at him once because I'd had a caesarean and he said "are you getting on the bus" and I said "I've just asked you for help" and he said "can't you get it on" and I said "well, I'm not allowed to lift my baby let alone a pram and a baby up the three stairs and they're like "well I can't help you" and I said "is there anyone on this bus that can help me lift up my pram?" and three guys came out of the bus. He hasn't said anything to me ever since."*

Does he help you now?

*"Yep, every time... he made me cry and everything." (Albury-Wodonga)*

Difficulties that young mums reported in getting the assistance they require to use public transport were sometimes seen as part of broader community discrimination against young parents.

*When I'd catch a bus and they'd say... hold your baby then fold up your pram or do whatever, but then they'd help an old woman walk on or help another woman that looked older than me. (Albury-Wodonga)*

*And especially because we're young they look at us with the filthy look, like you shouldn't have had a kid in the first place. (Sunshine)*

For example, the experience of being refused assistance and then seeing the driver assist another passenger was reported by nearly half the focus group participants in Albury-Wodonga.

Driver assistance with other issues such as transport information and assistance with enforcing priority seating were also seen as important but inconsistently available.

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*"... because we're young they look at us with the filthy look, like you shouldn't have had a kid in the first place." (Sunshine)*

*The experience of being refused assistance and then seeing the driver assist another passenger was reported by nearly half the focus group participants in Albury-Wodonga.*

*I find that bus drivers...when you ask them whether they stop at such and such, some of them are really rude. (Ringwood – there was much agreement with this statement!)*

While many buses have priority seating for passengers with special needs, including pregnant women, there was concern that drivers did not enforce this priority.

The young mums in focus groups reported a reluctance or lack of confidence to ask other passengers to stand, even when they were heavily pregnant.

*They will not ask anybody to move for you, like, you just have to stand there pregnant, holding a baby, whatever, and nobody moves for you, you know, that is your dedicated seat it says 'this is for expectant mothers or disabled people' and the bus driver will never enforce it. (Albury-Wodonga)*

While the allocation of priority seating is a positive recognition of the additional needs of some passenger groups, it relies on the good will of passengers to relinquish their seats or on the confidence of passengers with special needs to request them to do so. Realistically, this does not guarantee access to these seats for those who need them.

## 2.2 Trains and stations

The gap between trains and station platforms was mentioned as a concern in many of the focus groups. Safely negotiating this gap with a pram or young children was seen as stressful and difficult. Most groups were able to identify particular stations that had gaps perceived as unsafe.

*You know what used to freak me when I used to take the pram, because we used to catch the train to Melbourne...the gap getting onto the train. I always used to get concerned that I'd get the wheels caught. (Whittington)*

A variety of issues were raised concerning the accessibility of VLine trains, including the narrow width of the aisles and doors on some

“The gap between the trains and platform can be large and small wheels can easily get stuck. Not to mention tiny feet learning to walk.”



“Escalators are everywhere with signs saying ‘no prams’, but no directions as to where you should go.”



“There are no real spots for prams on the train, and so we rode in the doorway. It makes it an unstable ride for mum.”



“Lifts and pathways to them are often out of the way, dimly lit and seemingly unsafe—especially at night.”



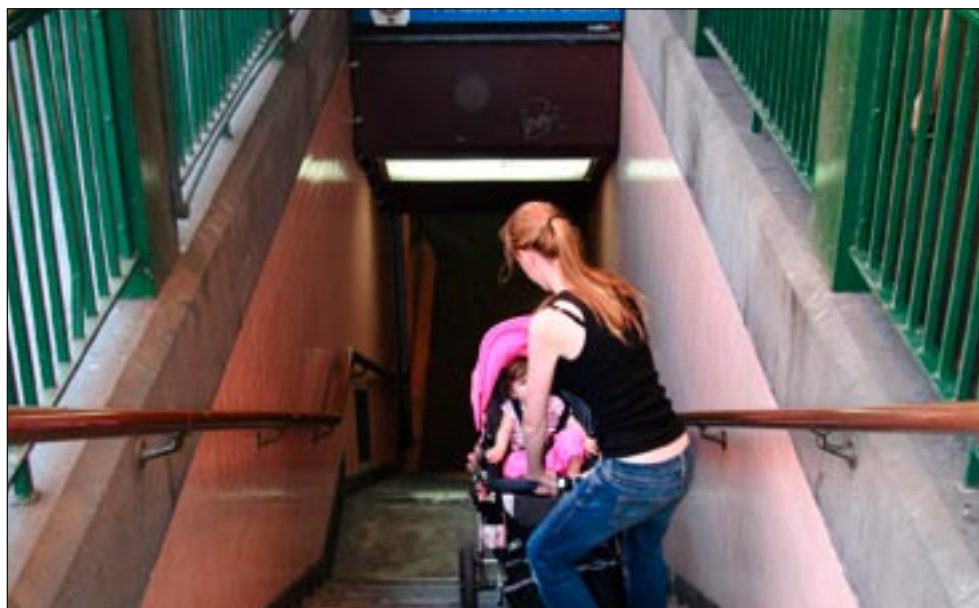
“Lifts are cramped.”



“There was often a problem trying to exit as passengers who didn’t need the wider exit would flood through leaving us to stand and wait. We don’t fit through 90% of the doorways.”



“Getting into various areas of the station required that we use the stairs, which means we had to either leave one baby alone by open stairs, or ask a stranger to help us. Accidents can happen easily as stairs are not only steep but prams heavy. Once you are down you have to find a way up.”



services and a lack of appropriate storage space for prams.

The lack of suitable toilet facilities on long distance Vline trains was an issue of particular concern – especially the limited number of baby change facilities and difficulties of travelling alone with young children.

*I sat on the toilet and I went with him in my arms because I couldn't leave him. (Albury-Wodonga)*

*There is only one baby change place on the XPT and you have to carry your baby all the way down the train to get to it, which is not safe. (Albury-Wodonga)*

## 2.3 Trams

Most of the young mums participating in this study lived in areas beyond the limits of the tram network, so tram travel was rarely discussed within the focus groups. However, the inaccessibility of the majority of the tram fleet, especially outside the inner city, was noted.

*I can't even get on to a tram, so I wouldn't know. (Yarraville)*

*There's the new trams with wheelchair access in the city which are great, but the*

*ramps are only in the city. I haven't used them, but I don't know whether they're out in the suburbs. (Yarraville)*

## 2.4 Cost of public transport

In general, concession public transport fares were seen as reasonably priced, however, some young mums were not eligible for a concession due to their partner's income. For this group the cost of travel was seen as too high.

*It's not bad if you've got a concession card. (Ringwood)*

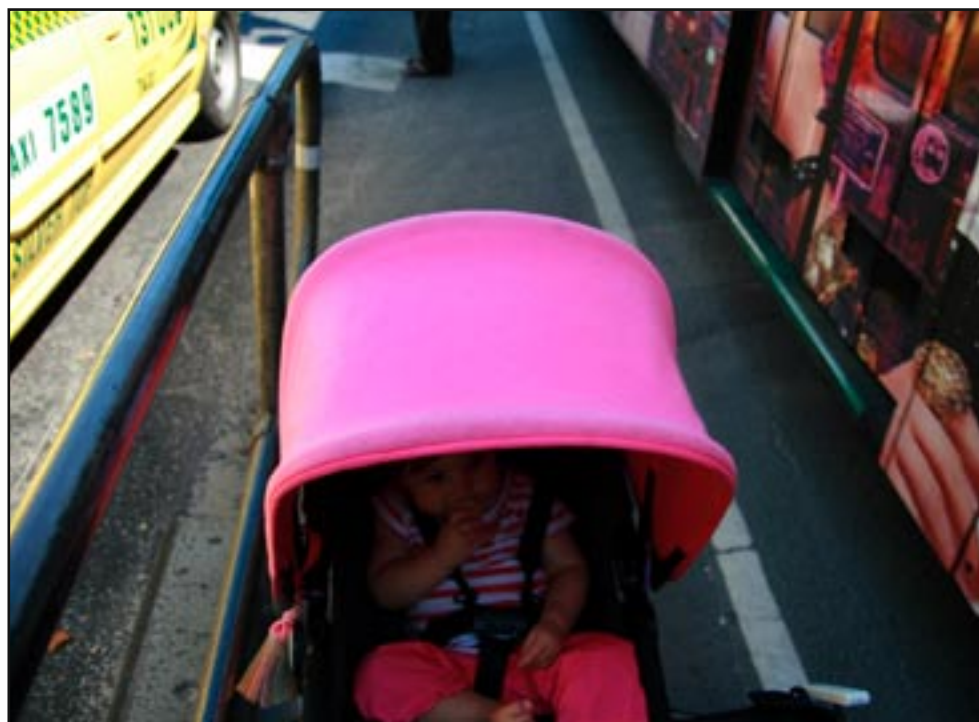
Issues with needing to buy tickets close to pay day when money is tight were raised.

*If it's the day before pay day and you have to go somewhere...I got busted on the train on the day before pay day. I was 30 cents off having a ticket, and rather than saying I'll buy a ticket tomorrow or not catch a train I have to pay \$158. (Ringwood)*

Different ticketing systems which allow credit to be stored, such as the new Myki ticketing system, may be beneficial for some young mums.

*They should do it so that you can get a card or something and you can use whatever you need to and then at the end of the month you*

“Tram ‘safety zones’ are very narrow and dangerous for prams and parents. There is barely a foot between the pram, a car and a tram. It’s unsafe.”



“Getting on the tram we had to make eye contact with a passenger to help us...which she did and then she dobbed in a fellow traveller to help us off. The angle to carry the pram on is downright difficult.”



“Trams are crowded and there is often no place to put the prams. We stood in the stairwell a great deal, which causes a problem when passengers need to get on and off. If you have to balance a pram and get a ticket you’re in trouble.”



*pay it, instead of having to pay it up front every time...because who knows if you have to rush off the day before pay day and you don't have enough money. (Ringwood)*

*I live in Lavington so I need to catch a bus from Lavington to Albury, and Albury to Wodonga and then back so it's like a \$15 bus trip. (Albury-Wodonga)*

The removal of Zone 3 made travel more affordable for focus group participants who lived in the outer eastern suburbs.

## 2.5 Hours of operation

*It's cheaper now without Zone 3, especially going from here to Box Hill Hospital. It's just one ticket, one zone, it's a lot easier...I think it was almost \$5 to get a daily ticket to get from Ringwood to Box Hill and back. (Ringwood)*

*You don't go out or you don't go home. (Sunshine)*

In terms of relative costs, there was general recognition that the cost of public transport is cheaper than running a car, although the annual costs of insurance and registration were not always taken into account.

Limited hours of operation of public transport services were less of a concern for focus group participants than accessibility issues. Focus group participants reported that they largely did not travel much at night since having their kids. However, the need to access services after hours, particularly medical services, was a concern.

*I think in the end, it works out cheaper if you're travelling on public transport every day. It would be actually cheaper for the whole year buying a ticket than running a car. (Ringwood)*

*If you've missed it [the last bus], you're stuffed. (Albury-Wodonga)*

Specific cross-border issues with public transport pricing were reported in Albury-Wodonga where different operators provide transport services on the NSW and Victorian sides of the border.

Lack of evening services were also reported as an issue for partners of focus group participants in accessing employment.

*I don't reckon they run late enough. My partner's lost his license...I need the money that he brings in and he has to leave work early to make it home, or pay for a taxi. He works afternoon shift and doesn't start till 2.30pm...he finishes work at 11.30pm*

*and by the time he gets into the city the last train's gone. (Ringwood)*

In many focus group areas, weekend bus services only ran infrequently on Saturdays and did not run at all on Sundays. These limited weekend services affected young mums' ability to participate in community activities and spend time with their social networks.

*It's shocking because you think people do go out on Sundays and stuff because no one's working... it's like a family day for us and there's no public transport so there's nowhere to go. They've got all these events on for the kids but how are you going to get there? (Sunshine)*

*Say your partner works on weekends...and you want to catch public transport...it doesn't run often enough for you to go to see family and stuff...it only does that during the week. It should be more frequent on the weekend for mums. (Ringwood)*

Lack of weekend and evening services also increased reliance on lifts, which limited the ability of young mums to undertake weekend activities.

*Saturday they don't run that often and they finish at 5pm...my mum's home but I don't expect her to drive me everywhere, she's got things to do. Sundays there's no buses, so it's quite hard to do things (Ringwood)*



“Often, I’d rather plan an extra hour and walk than hop on a tram with a pram. It’s hard to rely on strangers and sometimes you just don’t get help. Even the new trams are hard to get on and off and so I just limit my travels in Melbourne.”

## 2.6 Frequency and reliability

Public transport travel was often reported as being long and arduous, especially with young children in tow, due to lack of connectivity between services and long waiting times as well as a lack of direct services in some cases.

*If I went to Knox City I'd have to get on a bus, a train, then another bus...with the waiting time in between...I find that I'm on transport most of the day. (Ringwood)*

*The bus I catch on Canterbury Road only comes once an hour, and for the four years that I've been catching it, not once has it come on time. It's usually 20-25 minutes late, no matter what time of day. (Ringwood)*

*I find the price is OK, but what I find with transport is a lot of the time is wasted. Like in a car you'd get to your destination quicker but with transport you've got to prepare like two hours in advance to get to your destination.... Half the day has gone by while you're trying to get here and there, whereas you could do it in a couple of hours with a car. (Ringwood)*

## 2.7 Facilities and service amenity

The lack of availability of baby change and toilet facilities of an acceptable standard in and around public transport was reported as a significant issue.

Young mums reported preferring to change their babies in their prams or cars rather than using public toilet and baby change facilities that were seen as unsafe and unhygienic. In some cases, baby change facilities were simply unusable or unavailable.

*Half of them aren't even open. (Ringwood)*

*The toilets at the train stations are dirty. There's needles and lots of things lying around. (Ringwood)*

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*Young mums reported preferring to change their babies in their prams or cars rather than using public toilet and baby change facilities that were seen as unsafe and unhygienic. In some cases, baby change facilities were simply unusable or unavailable.*

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There was a general preference for baby change and toilet facilities within shopping centres as these were seen as cleaner and safer. In some cases participants were unaware if there were toilet or baby change facilities at their local stations.

Lack of space for prams in public toilets was also a difficulty.

*It sucks at the station if you have to go to the toilet and you've got the pram because you have to really go into the disabled one to fit the pram in. (Ringwood)*

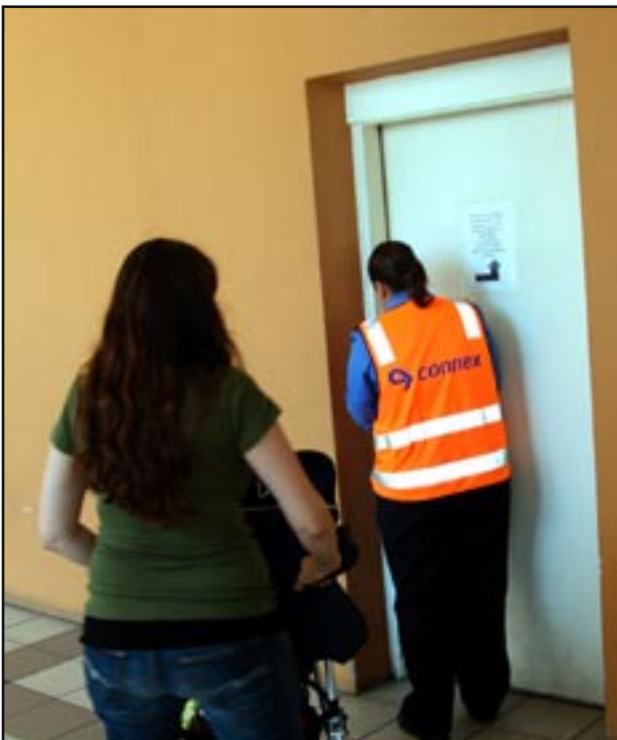
*That's not good too just in case a disabled person comes in and you're using it...you'd feel really bad. (Ringwood)*

*But you have to do it...like you can't leave your pram out, and you can't sit your baby on the floor! (Whittington)*

The lack of appropriate facilities created stress for some participants as they felt unable to change their children while on long public transport trips.

## Nappy change at Flinders Street Station

*Train station baby change stations were unmarked on both the facility wall and the map at Flinders Street. The change rooms were very dirty, paint chipping, exposed pipes and the nappy bin was in a separate room. The feeding chairs were dirty, torn and the bin overflowing. The change table was a counter that offered no support for a baby and they could easily slip off. The rooms are locked and not clearly marked on how to have them opened.*





*I feel like a bad mum when my kids are stuck in a poeey diaper for two or three hours because I'm on public transport. There's no way to change your child on the train when it's packed...people look at you, and it's embarrassing. Then you feel bad because your kid's crying. (Ringwood)*

## 2.8 Public transport information

Generally the level of public transport information available was seen as sufficient and relatively easy to use. Young mums in the focus groups used many different strategies for locating information about public transport services, including phone information, calling transport operators and using timetable information available at bus stops and stations. Those who were aware of these information services and used them felt that they provided a good level of service.

However, lack of availability and legibility of bus timetables were raised as concerns.

*It's really hard. I sat there for a couple of days trying to work it out on the timetable... I finally got it. (Albury-Wodonga)*

*The timetables on the actual bus are always out of date and graffitied or broken. Or they just don't have them. (Whittington)*

*I find buses don't have timetables. I hardly ever see them on there. (Ringwood)*

Recent improvements to bus stops, which included displaying timetable information, were seen as very positive as this allowed for better planning of trips and somewhere to sit while waiting for the bus.

## 2.9 Taxis

Taxis were largely seen as too expensive to be used on a regular basis.

There was a high level of concern expressed about using taxis with young children, as taxi operators in Victoria do not provide car seats

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*"I've used a taxi but that's when I've been taken into hospital by the ambulance and there's no transport back, so I've had to hire a taxi to get back home with the kids...and no, there wasn't any car seats in there. Two of them were sitting and I had to hold one in front of me...it wasn't really safe." (Yarraville)*

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for children. Focus group participants had a high level of awareness about the dangers of children travelling in cars without appropriate restraints and felt that it was inappropriate for taxis to be exempt from these requirements.

Victorian Taxi Directorate policy places responsibility for the provision of car seats on parents travelling with their children. However, for young mums who have very limited transport options and occasionally rely on taxis, providing their own car seat is difficult to impossible.

For example, young mums in the focus groups gave examples, such as needing to use a taxi to return home from hospital appointments which had run late, leaving them stranded after buses had ceased operating.

Often taxi use was reported as a last resort response to a difficult situation. The need for mums to provide their own car seats is incompatible with this type of use of taxis.

*[Taxis are for] an unexpected situation...like where they've wet themselves right through*

*their clothes or they've chucked up, and you just have to get them home quickly to get them changed. (Whittington)*

*I've used a taxi but that's when I've been taken into hospital by the ambulance and there's no transport back, so I've had to hire a taxi to get back home with the kids....and no, there wasn't any car seats in there. Two of them were sitting and I had to hold one in front of me...it wasn't really safe. (Yarraville)*

A smaller number of participants reported using taxis on a regular basis, especially if their own cars had broken down.

*I have to use a taxi when I go grocery shopping. (Ringwood)*

The requirement to provide a car seat was seen as totally impractical and unrealistic for the majority of trips which young mums make with their children in taxis.

*It's too hard to carry a car seat around anyway on a pram...like where do you carry it when you've got to push a pram and a baby and a baby bag? (Whittington)*

Many had travelled with their children inappropriately restrained in taxis as a consequence. This was the source of a great deal of stress and concern.

Focus group participants also reported unclear and differing information being provided about rules around child restraints in taxis. Some young mums reported that drivers had refused to pick them up.

*He said that because we didn't have a car seat we were not allowed in. (Sunshine)*

Others reported refusing to travel without a car seat and therefore being unable to make trips where taxis were the only available mode of transport.

*I said 'look, we're going to need a car seat... and they said 'oh no we don't need a car seat' and I said 'if you don't put him in a*

*car seat he will be crawling all over the car' and he said 'just hold him' and I said 'he's nearly two there's no way I'm going to hold him'. (Albury-Wodonga)*

*At the hospital...I didn't have a car seat in the car, and they said that they'd let me go home in a taxi, but they wouldn't let me go home in a private car without a car seat... but I trust my step dad's driving before I'm going to trust some random stranger that I don't know.*

*I went against their advice and went home with my step dad, because I'm not getting in a cab with a guy I don't know how he's going to drive with my baby. (Whittington)*

## 2.10 Getting lifts

Getting lifts from family, friends and support workers was a strategy employed by many of the young mums to meet their transport needs.

A number of workers interviewed spoke about the need to provide lifts to young mums to ensure that they could attend support groups and other activities. They also raised concerns about the financial impacts on young mums with their own cars being called upon to provide lifts to their peers.

Using lifts to get around was reported as being substantially more difficult for young mums with more than one child, especially if they were getting lifts from people who were also transporting their own children.

Some reported that lifts were therefore easier to get with their first child but more difficult once they had their second. This is concerning given the increased public transport accessibility difficulties reported by young mums with more than one child.

*It's harder for me because I need three car seats...lucky for Anglicare, who always have car seats. I can get a lift through them, but anyone else I can't. (Yarraville)*

Generally, focus group participants who relied on lifts indicated that they felt comfortable requesting lifts when needed. Lifts were usually provided by family members.

## 2.11 Driving

*I have to admit that with my first kid using [public] transport was alright, but when I had my second kid, using [public] transport was hard. Then I thought well I've got a car now, it's much easier...I don't care if it's going to cost me a bit more money, but hey, if it keeps your sanity...it's just much easier, you don't stress as much. Even though you have to pay that extra bit of money...whatever's good for you and your kids. (Ringwood)*

As mentioned above, while 50 per cent of young mums surveyed had a car they could drive, 29 per cent of these young women did not have guaranteed access to this vehicle, typically because it is used by their partners to get to work. This severely limited the benefits of vehicle ownership.

*My partner takes the car to work everyday and doesn't get home till 6pm so I have to wait for him to get home before I can do anything. (Yarraville)*

The cost of petrol was raised as a concern by a number of participants, especially those who had to travel longer distances.

*The petrol price is disgusting at the moment...I don't like to pay \$1.40 (per litre). (Whittington)*

Participants who had LPG powered vehicles or largely travelled in the local area did not find the price of petrol prohibitive.

The annual costs of car ownership, especially for young mums not entitled to a registration concession, were seen as a significant financial burden. The ability to pay these costs periodically was seen as beneficial.

*Registration is astronomical, and that's the pain because I'm not on concession because my partner earns too much and yet I can't ask him to get a lower paying job because that's just stupid. I'm paying through the nose with that, and also with insurance. (Ringwood)*

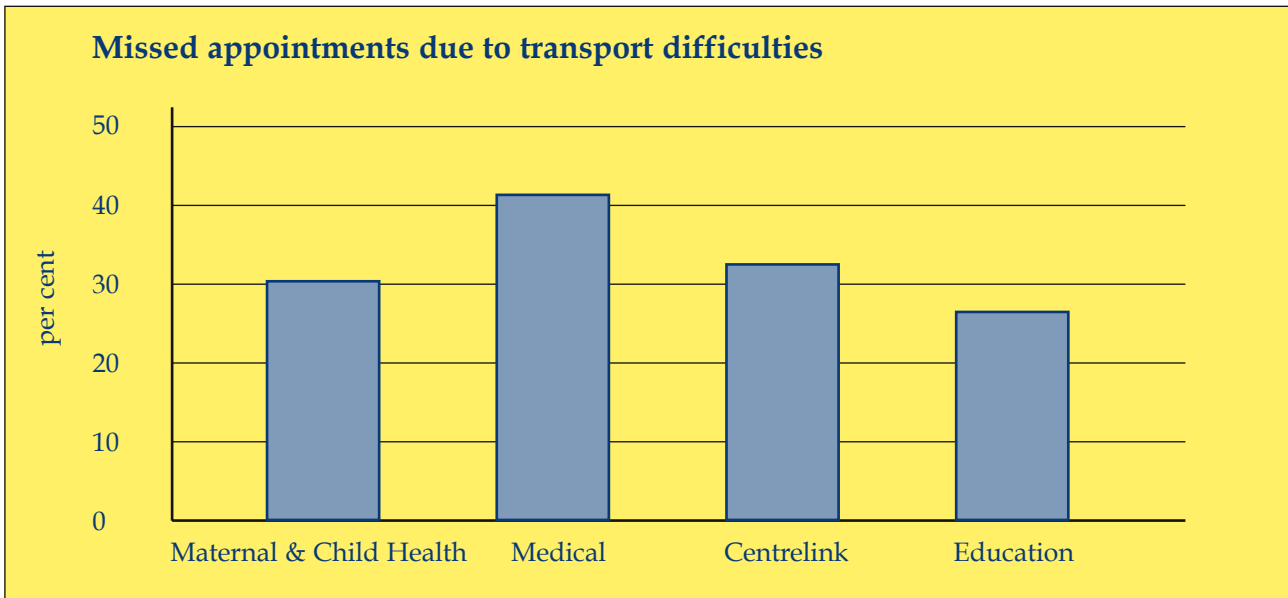
*It's good now because you can do it six monthly for the rego...only if you've got a concession card...but you can also pay your insurance weekly, which is what I do. (Whittington)*

An issue which raised a lot of discussion among participants was the availability and quality of reserved parking at shopping centres and other popular destinations. Many participants complained that the baby parking is not enforced and therefore is often not available.

*Some places have the wide pram parks, which is great, but some places still only have the normal size pram parking bays, and so it's not really more beneficial, the only benefit is that they're closer to the doors. (Yarraville)*

*The hardest thing with shopping centres is that they don't accommodate enough for mums with strollers...there's only four or eight spots...you've got to find a spot where you can only open the door a bit before hitting the other person's car. The most frustrating thing for me is trying to find one. There are more people than that out there with strollers. (Ringwood)*

### 3. Effects on young mums: access to services



Both the focus groups and surveys aimed to document the impact of transport issues on young mums' ability to access services and participate in community life.

This quantitative evidence is supported by anecdotal evidence from the interviews with service providers who indicated that transport presents a major barrier to young mums engaging with a range of support services.

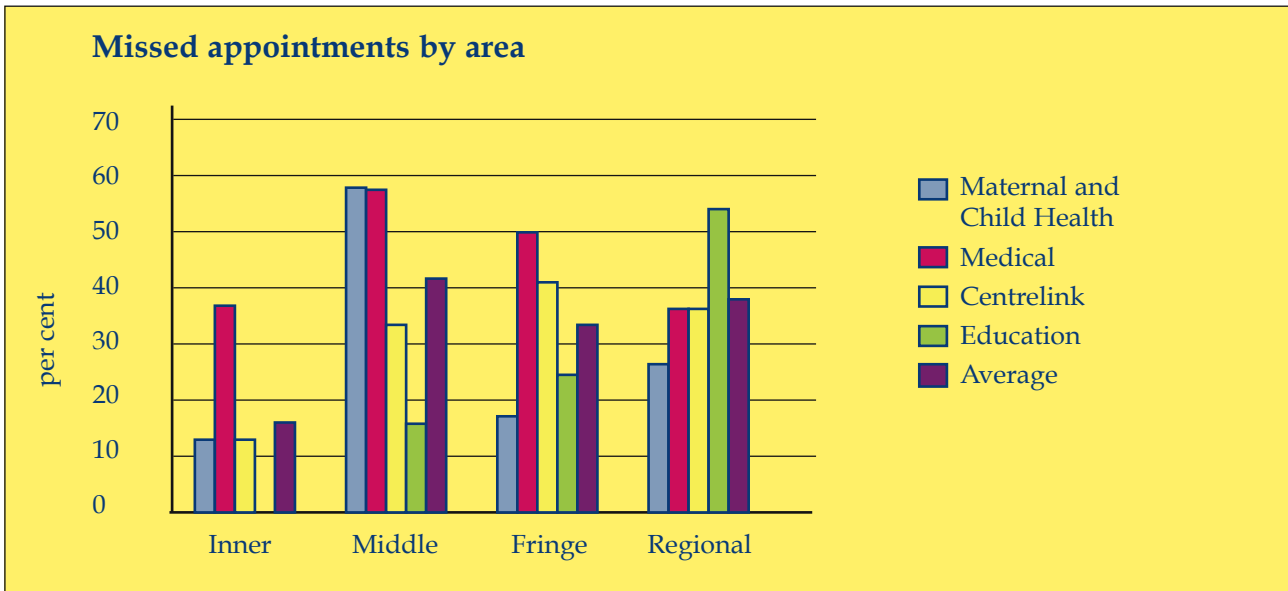
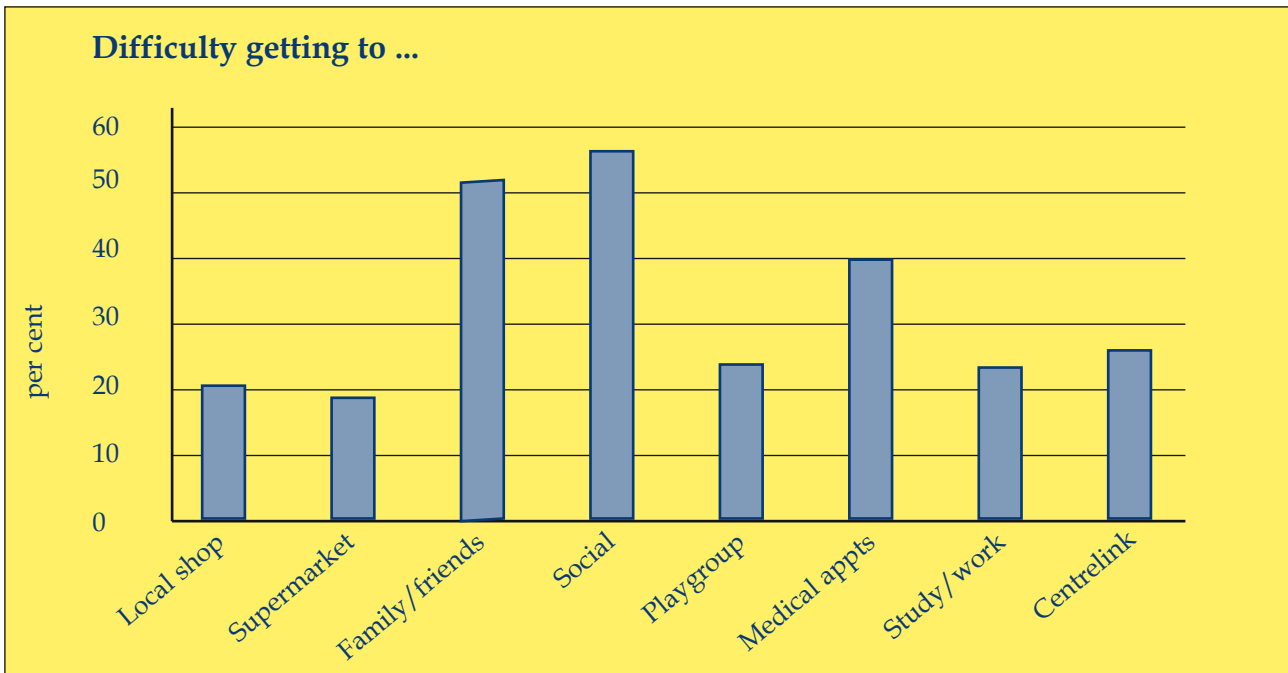
The surveys undertaken for this research attempted to capture both 'once off' missed appointments and ongoing access issues. Young mums were asked if they had ever missed an appointment (Maternal and Child Health, medical, Centrelink or educational) because they 'couldn't get there'.

Forty three per cent of survey participants reported that they had missed a medical appointment because of transport difficulties compared to 31 per cent and 33 per cent for Maternal Child Health and Centrelink appointments respectively. In addition, two young mums responded that they had been unable to attend job interviews because they could not get to them.

A recent evaluation of Maternal and Child Health services in Victoria identified young (under 21) and single mothers as vulnerable demographic groups least engaged with Maternal and Child Health services. In addition, the evaluation found that young mums 'express a distinct preference for engaging with the service directly via the telephone rather than visiting the centre and that this pattern becomes more prevalent as the child gets older when compared to other vulnerable groups'.<sup>15</sup> This may reflect difficulties in accessing Maternal Child Health services due to transport disadvantage.

Survey participants were also asked if they had difficulty in general getting to a number of different services, facilities and activities. Given concerns about the isolation of young mums and increased risks of post-natal depression, it is particularly disturbing that 52 per cent of those surveyed reported that they found it difficult to see family and friends and 57 per cent said it was difficult participating in social or recreational activities.

When the survey responses are analysed by area, it is clear that respondents living outside inner urban areas reported more



difficulty in accessing services and social networks.

It is less clear, in this limited study, what relationship exists between access to a car, residential location and difficulty accessing services. For example, inner urban respondents reported higher rates of access to a car (63 per cent) than respondents living in other areas. However, middle and inner urban areas showed similar rates of car access but very different levels of difficulty accessing services and social networks due to transport issues.

This indicates that the greater availability of public transport, including taxi services

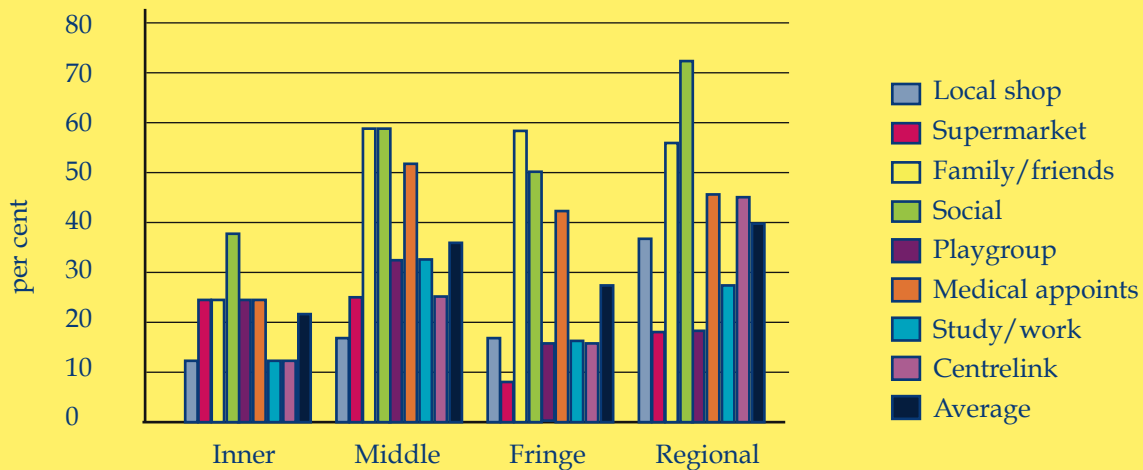
in inner urban areas, reduces transport disadvantage for young mums.

### 3.1 Experiences of young mums without guaranteed access to a car

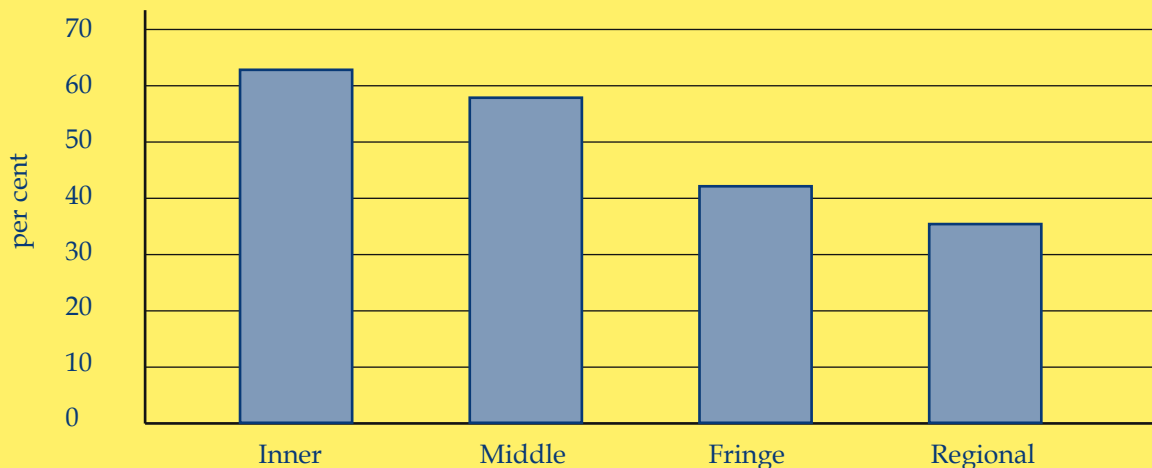
The most significant difference in ability to access services and social networks was reported between subgroups of survey respondents with guaranteed access to a car, versus those who relied on public transport.

As mentioned above, while 50 per cent of respondents had a car they could drive, 29 per cent of this group did not have

### Difficulty accessing services and networks by area



### Access to car



guaranteed access to this vehicle (ie. it was not 'available whenever you need to use it').

When the survey responses were divided according to respondents who had guaranteed access to a car, those who relied on public transport or had limited access to a vehicle, the relative transport difficulties experienced by the latter group became clear.

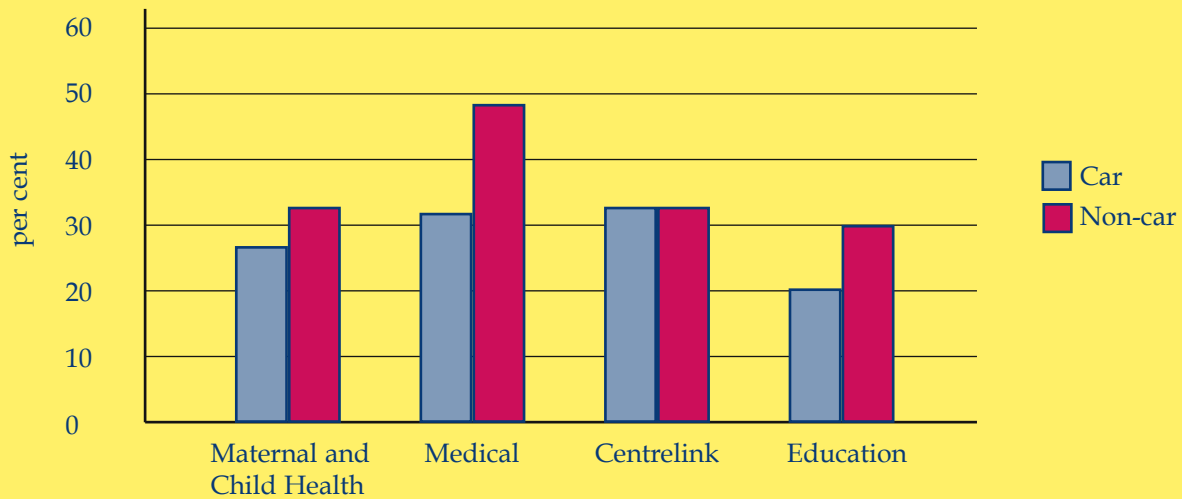
Given the identification of young mums as a vulnerable subgroup who often disengage early from Maternal and Child Health services, it is concerning that 33 per cent of young mums without guaranteed access to a car had missed appointments due to transport issues. However, there are still relatively high rates of missed appointments for young mums

with access to a car. This could in part be due to the nature of the question and that some young mums who had access to a car at the time of the survey had not always had a car available. For example, some young mums in the focus groups reported significant difficulties getting around when their cars had broken down, or prior to getting their licence or car.

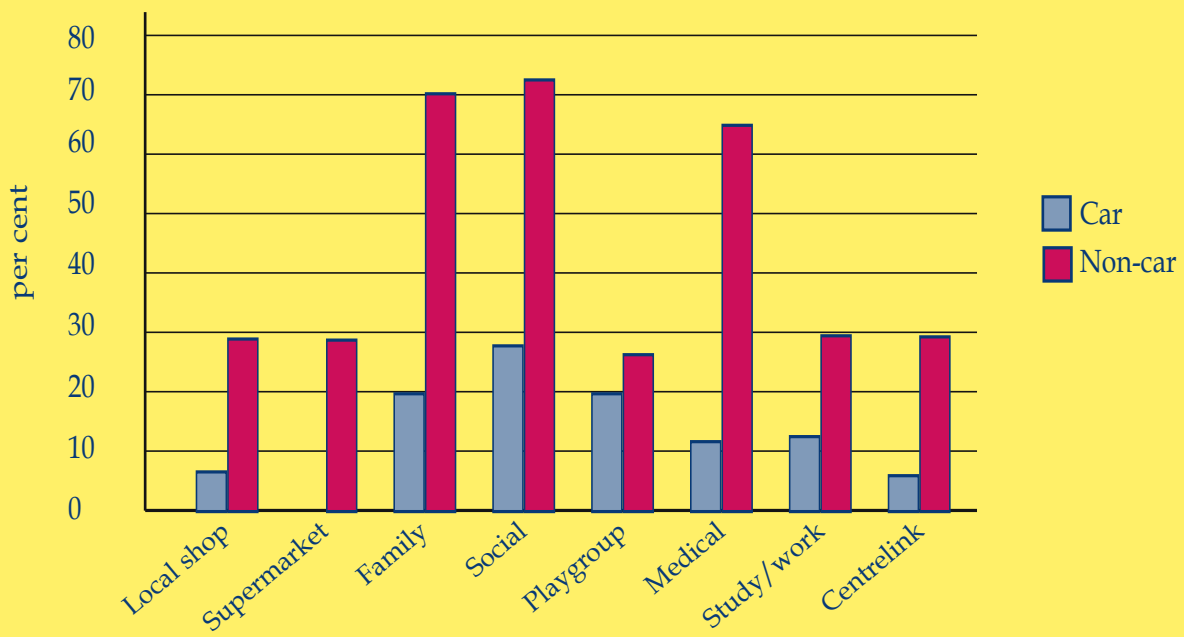
When looking at current transport difficulties, the difference between groups with limited or no access to a car increased dramatically compared with those who had unrestricted access to their own vehicle:

- 74 per cent had difficulty getting to social activities;

### Missed appointments – car vs non-car



### Difficulties getting around



- 70 per cent had difficulty visiting family and friends;
- 56 per cent had difficulty getting to medical appointments;
- 30 per cent had difficulty getting to their local shop and the supermarket;
- 30 per cent had difficulty getting to work or study and Centrelink; and

- 26 per cent had difficulty getting to a play group or activities for their kids.

These findings are especially significant given the importance of social connection and informal support networks in coping with the demands of new parenthood and reducing the risk of post-natal depression.

The fact that 30 per cent of young mums without guaranteed access to a car had

difficulty getting to their local shop or the supermarket is also an exacerbating factor in relation to food security and associated health impacts.

The difficulties that many young mums experienced in accessing health services reflects the location of services away from activity centres and the need for young mums to use hospital outpatient services rather than local health services.

### **3.2 What does this mean for young mums and their children?**

*You stay at home... you just don't go out at all. (Sunshine)*

*There's no sense in trying to get on a train, or get on a bus or call a taxi just to be stressed out - you might as well just stay at home. (Sunshine)*

*I don't get to do what I want to do every day...I don't get to do things when I want to do them...it's always scheduled when I can do things. I can't just get up and go if I feel like it. Unless I want to get up at 5.30 in the morning and drive him [partner] to work. (Yarraville)*

*I didn't go out at all after I had my second child. (Ringwood)*

# 4. Ideal transport solutions: by young mums for young mums

The survey completed by the young mums asked for various changes to the transport system to be rated (1-5) according to what would make the greatest positive difference to the respondent.

Not surprisingly, two of the three highest priorities related to the accessibility of public transport - a 'pram friendly' public transport system and assistance to use public transport. Interestingly, 'cheaper fares' was noted as a relatively popular priority, though it received far less attention than other issues within the focus groups.

Each focus group was asked the question 'if a transport system was designed by young mums, to make it great for young mums to use, what would it look like?'.

A more 'young parent friendly' transport system was seen as incorporating design features and service standards that reflect the realities of travelling unassisted with prams, baggage and young children.

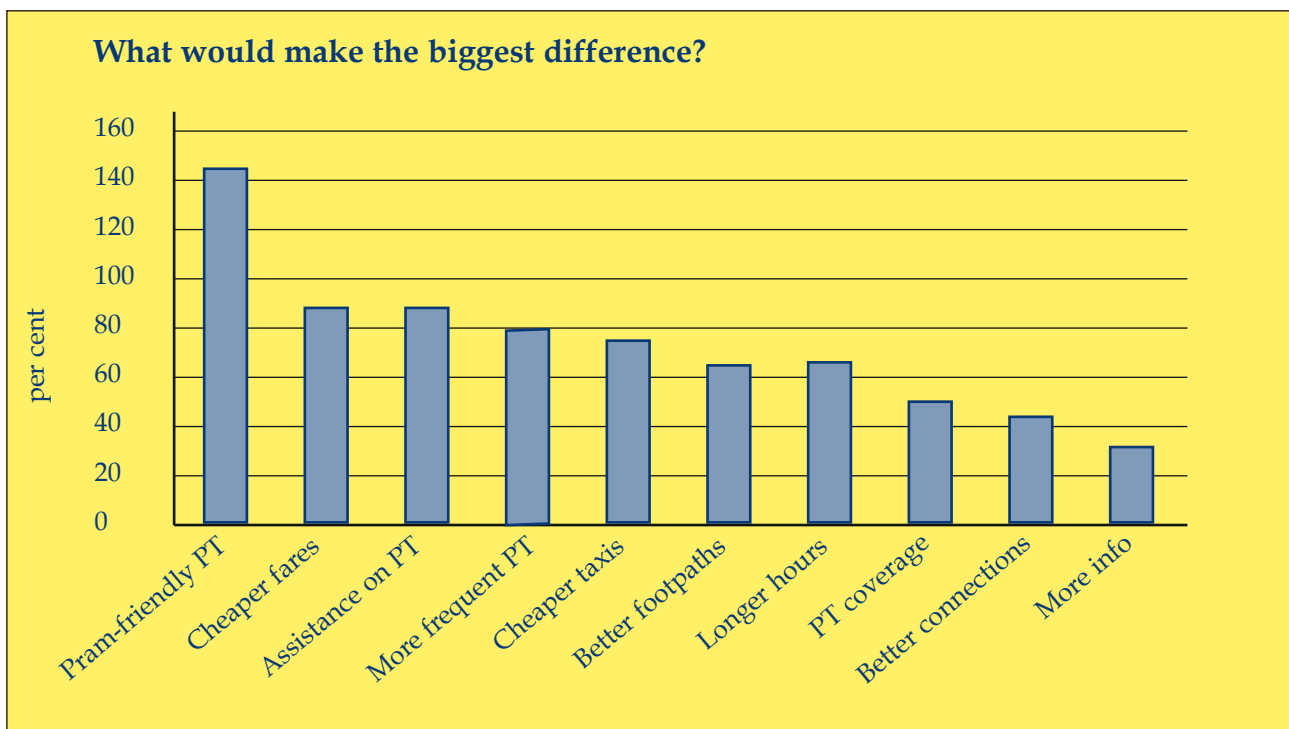
Again, responses to this question focussed on improvements to the accessibility of public transport infrastructure.

As well as greater availability of low floor buses, a number of changes to vehicle design were suggested, including wider aisles, more flip up seats to increase room for prams and, importantly, no steps.

*We should be able to use those ramps at the end of Met trains...there's a spot where you push a button. I'm too scared to do it though because it's for wheelchairs and not prams. (Yarraville)*

*You know how there's room for wheelchairs? You could have the same thing for prams. You could push them there and they'd kind of sit there and stay there and they'd be out of the way of everyone. (Albury-Wodonga)*

*I don't think there should be such a big gap between the train and the platform. (Ringwood)*



*More space in between seats, so you can pull your pram up and have it sitting next to you while you're also sitting down. (Ringwood)*

*All those old buses with the steps...get rid of them. (Whittington)*

Suggestions also included increasing the accessibility of toilet facilities by making them big enough for prams, cleaner and more widely available.

The need to distribute accessible public transport more equally was also identified as an issue by some participants. There was a perception that accessible transport is largely a feature of the inner city.

*Transport has to be accessible not only in the inner suburbs but the outer suburbs as well, because a lot of families are in outer suburbs these days, because that's where they can afford to rent or buy houses...not just in the rich areas. They put all the good stuff, the newer stuff in these areas. People in the outer suburbs use the majority of public transport. (Yarraville)*

Accessibility of public transport was seen as something which would benefit the whole community.

*They need to make it better...not just for mums, but for everyone. With trains... they're level, and you can just walk on. They need to do this on trams and buses as well, so you can walk on and off easily...pram on, pram off, wheelchair on, wheelchair off, people on, people off. (Yarraville)*

Suggestions about increasing the level of assistance available to passengers reflected the difficulties reported in using the current system.

*Two workers in the same bus – one driving and one sitting there waiting for someone that needs help – whether it be an old lady or an expectant mum or someone who's got two kids. (Albury-Wodonga)*

Making child restraints available on request in taxis was also a popular suggestion.

*They should ask you if you need a car seat. (Sunshine)*

Requests for cheaper transport centred around greater access to concessions and raising the age of children who need a ticket from four to 'school age'.

Participants who used cars felt that young parent friendly transport would include greater availability and enforcement of 'baby' car spots at key locations, including shopping centres, and that these should be wider to make it easier to get young children in and out of vehicles.

# 5. Conclusion and recommendations

Transport difficulties create significant barriers to accessing services, social networks and community participation for young mums and their children. Young mums without guaranteed access to a car report much higher levels of transport disadvantage.

The frustrations and safety concerns of trying to use transport systems and a built environment which is not designed for mums with young children make completing daily activities unnecessarily difficult.

There are a number of initiatives and policy changes which could make a significant difference to young mums, and by extension to all people travelling with young children.

This report recommends:

1. that the needs of carers with young children be considered as part of accessible transport planning, including the design of public transport vehicles, buildings and facilities;
2. increased funding for accessible transport infrastructure being prioritised to areas of high need, including areas with high numbers of young children;
3. continued expansion of public transport hours of operation and service frequencies on weekends and in the evenings;
4. development of policies to increase the usability of transport services for carers of young children including:
  - a. designation and publication of when accessible bus and tram services are timetabled;
  - b. removal of bus operating policies that require prams to be folded;
  - c. more assistance from drivers to assist women with prams or small children to board vehicles – including to fold prams where required; and
  - d. more involvement of drivers in ensuring that pregnant women and women holding young children have access to priority seating.
5. investigation of options for carrying child restraints in the taxi fleet, including the mandated carrying of child restraints by a guaranteed percentage of the taxi fleet and the development of incentive schemes and driver education to facilitate the safe use of child restraints;
6. new planning guidelines for toilet facilities at stations and on long distance trains to accommodate the needs of carers travelling alone with young children, including space for prams and places to safely seat young children; and
7. increased provision of wider ‘baby’ car spaces at key destinations such as shopping centres.

# Endnotes

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# Appendix A: Focus group checklist

The purpose of this focus group is to get information about what sorts of transport young mums use, things that make getting around difficult and things that could make it easier and more affordable.

1. What sorts of transport do you use?  
What is your main way of getting around?
2. Can you tell me about what it's like for you when you are travelling around with your kids? Is it easy? Or difficult?

Prompt questions for areas to be covered during the discussion:

- Are there important places you want to go that you can't get to? Do your local transport services go where you need to go?
  - Do you have difficulty visiting family or friends, getting to the shops, getting to work or study or Centrelink, or getting to medical appointments or maternal health with the transport available? Why?
  - Do transport services run at times that are convenient/useful for you?
  - What's it like travelling in the evening or early morning?
  - What's it like getting to and from the bus stop or train station?
  - What's it like getting on and off the bus/train with a pram or pusher?
  - Do you need help to do this and is assistance available?
  - Is it easy to find information about transport services?
  - What about changing nappies or taking children to the toilet when you are on public transport?
  - Is the cost of public transport ever a problem? The cost of using a car?
  - How often do you need to get lifts from people? Is it easy to get lifts when you need them?
3. What do all the things we've discussed mean for you? What impact does transport overall have on your life?
  4. If a transport system was designed by young mums, to make it great for young mums to use, what would it look like?

# Appendix B: Young mums and transport survey

1. What suburb do you live in? \_\_\_\_\_
2. How many children do you have? \_\_\_\_\_
3. How old are they? \_\_\_\_\_
4. Do you have a car that you can drive? \_\_\_\_\_
- a. If yes, is it always available for you to use? \_\_\_\_\_
5. Have you ever missed an appointment with any of the following services because you were unable to get there?
  - a. Maternal and Child Health Service
  - b. A doctors or hospital appointment (or other medical appointment such as counsellor, psychologist or physiotherapist)
  - c. Centrelink
  - d. A class for education purposes
  - e. Other \_\_\_\_\_

6. Generally, do you have difficulty getting to and from the following? If yes, why is it difficult? Please tick in the appropriate boxes:

	Difficult Yes/No	Public transport doesn't go there	Public transport is too expensive	Too far / difficult to walk	Takes too long on public transport	Public transport not 'pram friendly'	Don't know how to get there	Can't get a lift	Using the car is too expensive	Other
Local shop (i.e. to buy milk										
Supermarket										
Visiting friends or family										
Social or fun activities for you										
Playgroup - or fun activities for children										
Doctor or hospital appointments or other medical appointments										
Study or work										
Centrelink										

5. If you use taxis, do taxis provide a child seat for your child? \_\_\_\_\_

6. What five things would make the biggest difference to your ability to get where you need to go?

Please rank your 5 biggest issues from 1-5 with 1 being the most important and 5 the least important.

Cheaper fares	
'Pram friendly' public transport	
Assistance (like a conductor) on public transport	
More frequent public transport	
Better connections between different public transport services	
Cheaper taxis	
Better footpaths	
More information about how to get places on public transport	
Public transport that goes where you need it to go	
Public transport that operates on weekends and later at night	

Please record anything else that you would like to say about getting around or using public transport as a young parent **HERE:**

