

Draft Transport Access Strategy – response from RDA Tasmania

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Launceston, Tasmania courtesy of Tourism Tasmania Visual Library

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Hobart from Mount Wellington courtesy of Tourism Tasmania Visual Library

1. Background - Regional Development Australia (RDA)

Tasmania

Regional Development Australia (RDA) Tasmania is part of the national network of RDA committees fostering regional economic development. RDA Tasmania works with all three tiers of government, regional business and the wider community to boost the economic capability and performance of the region.

RDA Tasmania facilitates policies, programs and projects designed to strengthen human capital, productivity, infrastructure, access to markets, regional comparative advantage and business competitiveness; leading to increased economic activity and the creation of new jobs, along with improved standards of living and working conditions.

RDA Tasmania:

- Undertakes regional planning that takes into account the unique characteristics, opportunities and challenges of a region, and aligns with the plans of all levels of government, and tailors responses accordingly.
- Engages with stakeholders to identify initiatives that will deliver economic growth that make a lasting difference to their communities.
- Builds partnerships, harnesses local leadership, directs support, and encourages cooperation between stakeholders to drive regional priorities.

RDA Tasmania positions itself as an independent organisation that understands the challenges and opportunities of access to transport in a highly dispersed and rapidly ageing population.

The State Government's Draft Transport Access Strategy aligns specifically with RDA Tasmania's priorities for the region to:

- Expand and grow economic activity in Tasmania, and
- Address the needs of Tasmania's changing demographic profile

It is for this reason that the RDA Tasmania Committee is pleased to provide this response to the Draft Transport Access Strategy.

2. RDA Tasmania and regional transport

RDA Tasmania partnered with TasCOSS in 2014 to consult across the State's public transport providers. Consultations included conversations with bus companies, taxi drivers, community transport providers and with community members in remote and rural locations. This process gave RDA Tasmania a more in-depth understanding of the complexity of transport challenges.

RDA Tasmania was a member of the assessment panel for the State Government Wheels for Work program in 2015 and RDA Tasmania has assisted with and funded regional planning such as the:

- Northern Regional Futures Project; and the
- South East Regional Development Association (SERDA) Economic Infrastructure Plan

The SERDA Economic Infrastructure Plan identified major investments in the SE region and considered the overall impacts of these known investments and developments. Through this process it was identified that traffic movements through the Hobart Airport Roundabout would significantly increase from factors including the Hobart Airport expansion and residential expansion in Sorell. The Airport Roundabout upgrade is now a State Government priority and has had a funding commitment from the Australian Government.

Challenges

Dispersed Population - Tasmania is characterised by a dispersed population in low density settlements. Greater Hobart is one of the least densely settled Australian cities with some of the highest levels of low density housing stock. Of all the states and territories, Tasmania had the highest proportion of its population residing outside of its greater capital city (58%) at June 2012¹.

Ageing Demographic - Tasmania's population is ageing at a faster rate than any other state or territory. Over the next 20 years, the proportion of Tasmanians aged 65 years and over could grow by almost 60 per cent. Population ageing presents a number of challenges, including maintenance of sufficient workforce numbers, managing increased demand on health and social services and providing appropriate infrastructure such as transport and accommodation.

While the proportion of the Tasmanian population with a registered motor vehicle in 2014 was only 60 per cent, compared to the Australian average of 75 per cent; we are more reliant on motor vehicle travel with 70 per cent of Tasmanians rely on a car to travel to work, compared to the national average of 66 per cent².



Hobart Bus Mall – RDA Tasmania image

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, Cat No. 3218.0 Regional Population Growth, Australia, 2011-12, April 2013

² ABS National Regional Data Summary 2014.

3. Draft Transport Access Strategy

Tasmania's dispersed and ageing population creates even more challenges than in other regions of Australia to providing access to transport. It is pleasing to see that the draft strategy:

'favours a holistic, collaborative approach to addressing transport issues and gaps.'

Because transport is an integral part of how the community and region functions, an overarching strategy is vital to guide public funding, infrastructure investment and planning.

The draft strategy lists and references past projects and documents such as the TasCOSS Transport in the Community Report, however, there is no evidence of supporting statistical data or mapping of transport services, spatial population patterns, employment, education, community and health services locations and other drivers of transport use. A successful strategy needs to be underpinned with relevant and objective data to support and guide policy and priorities.

For innovation and changes to occur in the way transport is supported by government policy, resources and budget allocations must be made available. The draft strategy does not cover budget or resourcing requirements.

The listing of responsible departments throughout the strategy initiatives is a reflection of the complexity and extent of the impact of transport access. However, it is difficult to tell from the document how this cross-departmental responsibility will be communicated and enforced.

Recommendation 1: That cross-departmental responsibility be clearly articulated and agreed to with identified timeframes, budgets, measurable outcomes and lines of responsibility.

4. Priority areas

4.1 Living closer: Improved opportunities for people to live closer to employment, education, services, recreational opportunities and key transport corridors

The data and comments in relation to priority one is compelling and reflective of other regions such as Melbourne where the rapid growth of outer suburbs occurred without the requirement to consider transport and traffic congestion. However, the initiatives listed seem to only suggest that transport should be considered, rather than outline a strategy to ensure an effective outcome.

Increased residential density will make transport provision more effective. However, the location of education, key employment hubs and services are also an important part of the strategy that is not clearly mentioned. How are the impacts of new developments that will impact traffic movements such as Macquarie Point, and the University of Tasmania inner city expansion in Hobart, Launceston and Burnie being considered as part of this strategy? RDA Tasmania strongly supports an investment into data and mapping of transport movements and needs that can be incorporated into and support policy and planning decisions. While zoning and planning can guide private development, state government has influence and control over state funded education, training and health services.

Recommendation 2: That further initiatives are developed under this priority to reflect not only urban planning and residential density, but the location of government funded activities such as education, training and health services in relation to transport accessibility by target clients.

4.2 Working together: Stronger collaboration and partnership between governments, key service providers, and public, private and not-for-profit transport providers

An alternative to addressing transport gaps is to consider strategies that minimise the need for transport movements. Increased collaboration between levels of government and the private sector could mitigate some transport challenges by decreasing transport demand. A significant portion of inner Hobart commuter traffic is from public servants. Having employment opportunities near residential population centres and working from home options, minimises the need to commute. The strategy could include initiatives to encourage more employer participation through considering opportunities such as flexible hours, working from home and or piloted programs such as employer funded transport. For example, coordinated transport for seasonal workers by Youth Futures (youth) and for Oak Industries employees (disability sector).

For instance, only 27 per cent of Sorell residents and 32 per cent of Clarence residents work in their 'home region', which contributes to high traffic movements and expenditure leakage from the local economy. There is a correspondingly high reliance on motor vehicles for transport to work, with higher reliance in more rural and remote locations. The primary method of travel is car for 80 per cent in Sorell and Clarence, compared to the Tasmanian average of 75 per cent. By comparison, only 56 per cent of Hobart residents drive a car to work. In addition, a greater proportion of people work from home in Tasman and Glamorgan Spring Bay (11 per cent and 12 per cent respectively), compared to the Tasmanian average of 5 per cent³.



Tasman Bridge courtesy of Tourism Tasmania Visual Library

It was unclear how the strategy would integrate local government policy and priorities. 'Outer suburb' municipalities such as Sorell and West Tamar Councils are experiencing significant growth in residential approvals and developments. It is likely that a high proportion of these new residents will commute into the city, but there does not seem to be a mechanism where this growth in population

³ SERDA Economic Infrastructure Development Study 2015.

and traffic movement is communicated through to the department responsible for impacted services such as roads, schools and public transport.

Adding to transport demand is high numbers of out of zone school students. Minimising the numbers of children travelling to out of zone schools will decrease transport demand and assist schools to meet local demand.

Recommendation 3: Investigate options to integrate local government data on residential and development approvals into population and transport demand projections and to rebalance student numbers between in-zone and out-of-zone schools.

Recommendation 4: Develop initiatives to increase employment options near large residential populations as well as encouraging Transport Access Plans and development of innovation transport solutions by key employers.

Recommendation 5: Include initiatives to encourage more employer participation through considering opportunities such as flexible hours, working from home and or pilot programs such as employer funded transport.

4.3 Connected transport system: A focus on frequent, accessible, affordable, efficient and reliable services to connect people to employment, education, services and recreational opportunities

Government funded transport should be provided based on demand and need. Reviewing and updating bus procurement services will be difficult to do effectively in the absence of objective data. Analysis of current and projected population and settlement changes and corresponding destinations such as education, services, employment and recreation will be vital in understanding and planning for transport movements. Given this, initiative 3.7 would benefit from being higher in the priority to ensure that planning, policy and contractual changes are based on current and relevant data. Likewise, initiative 3.1 has a timeframe of 2019 for completion. However, it seems more practical for state-wide public transport service standards to be developed prior to the 2018 bus procurement project being completed and transport contracts locked in for a further five or more years.

Sense-T at the University of Tasmania is exploring the ubiquitous use of real time sensors and 'big data' by industry and consumers to drive innovation in services and production. Perhaps big data managers such as the Sense-T project could assist in mapping traffic and transport movements across the population.

The comments and content under this priority are strongly focused on bus transport. A range of options should be considered as part of a connected transport system. With developments in technology and booking services, integrating options such as Uber travel, community cars, smaller buses, ferries, and light or passenger rail should be considered as current or future solutions as the population grows in line with the State Government's Populations Strategy.

Tasmania has experienced a rapid increase in tourism visitation over the last few years the latest Tasmanian Tourism Snapshot (March 2016) showing over one million interstate visitors for the first time in the state's tourism history and the highest number of international visitors ever recorded and nine per cent more than the same period a year ago. Tourists are a further potential user of public transport and thought should be given in the strategy to the accessibility and practicality of public transport services for tourists⁴.

Recommendation 6: That initiative 3.7 be amended to 'Review existing data, identify gaps and undertake new data collection to improve public transport services' and brought forward to completion in 2017 prior to the 3.5 initiative action of bus procurement policy is undertaken.

Recommendation 7: Include an initiative to ensure collaboration with tourism policy development and planning in relation to public transport needs and priorities.

Recommendation 8: Include an initiative to ensure a wide range of transport options be considered to meet current and future demand.

4.4 Better integration: Ensuring public transport is easier to use through better coordination and integration of services

Existing investment, resources and effort could be more effective and beneficial if it were better integrated and connected. As such, initiative 4.3 should be extended and combined with 4.5 to ensure that private transport contractors do not invest in ticketing systems for their area of coverage that cannot be integrated with surrounding services for a more seamless commuter experience.

Bus service operators are required to invest in accessible vehicles; however, many small towns have bus stops that lack basic curbing and infrastructure to enable the accessible features to be used. Historically, there have also been mismatches between funding and subsidisation of Home and Community Care (HACC) funded travel and private bus operators' fares that have resulted in HACC or community cars driving the same route as a public bus because it is cheaper for the client and carer. This practice ties up the HACC vehicle and volunteer driver for long trips that are partially or wholly covered by public bus services.

Major events that attract large crowds such as AFL football, national cricket matches and MOFO and Taste of Tasmania on the Hobart Waterfront that do not always have tailored public transport options. There is an opportunity to attract new patrons through providing services to major events where people who rarely or never take public transport may be encouraged to travel by bus and could use public transport as an option more regularly as a result.

Recommendation 9: That initiative 4.3 should be extended and combined with 4.5 to ensure that private transport contractors do not invest in ticketing systems for their area

⁴ http://www.tourismtasmania.com.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0004/41764/CEO-Commentary-for-Tasmanian-Tourism-Snapshot-year-ending-March-2016.pdf

of coverage that cannot be integrated with surrounding services for a more seamless commuter experience.

Recommendation 10: That initiative 4.4 should be extended to include that major rural and remote bus stops/transfer points have an agreed basic level of suitable infrastructure including curbing and shelter.

Recommendation 11: That initiative 4.6 is given greater priority and that it form part of the 2018 bus procurement project.

Recommendation 12: That an additional initiative be added to formalise that major events in the state be required to incorporate transport planning and budgeting.

4.5 Closing transport gaps: Developing innovative approaches to enable those members of the community who are transport disadvantaged to overcome transport barriers

The introduction of legislation to make it legal for ride-sourcing businesses in Tasmania is an exciting development and the pilot projects listed should provide some answers to the first and last mile and other identified transport access gaps.

The initiatives under priority 5 are supported on the understanding that clear responsibility, timeframes and measurement of success are detailed in the final strategy and that Recommendation 8, to consider a range of transport options and alternatives, be incorporated into the final strategy.

4.6 Innovative pricing: Developing innovative pricing mechanisms to support the greater use of public transport in order to make it more viable

RDA Tasmania supports examining the potential for removing or reducing the government subsidy for students to travel beyond local schools. Better integration of information such as streamlined online journey planning and integrated ticketing (covered under priority 4) will make public transport easier and more convenient to use and is an important cornerstone to this priority.

Public transport provision for major events (mentioned above in comments under priority 4) is a further opportunity to attract and maintain increased patronage. Thought could be given to fare structures such as providing discounted travel to events for green card holders and selling pre-paid green cards at the park and ride points. People who have never or seldom used public transport may be encouraged to buy and use a green card with a higher probability that they may use public transport more regularly once they have successfully used the system.



Road cyclists courtesy of Tourism Tasmania Visual Library

4.7 Improved infrastructure: Providing more opportunities for people to walk, cycle and use public transport by making sure infrastructure is safe, accessible and attractive to use

Our regions comparative health indicators show that Tasmania has below average fitness and health outcomes. Built environments that encourage safe and accessible active living opportunities are an important investment in the long term health and wellbeing of the community.

An integrated journey planner such as an extension to the current Metro App to cover all public transport options across the state will make planning and using public transport easier and more accessible. RDA Tasmania has advocated since 2013 that Tasmania needs a central, web-based source of passenger transport information to help members of the community and visitors to identify, link, compare and access all available services and travel options. In many instances, adequate services and concessions do exist, but people lack information on the range of transport available and how to access those services.

Recommendation 11: That initiative 4.6 is given greater priority and that it form part of the 2018 bus procurement project.

4. Summary of recommendations

Recommendation 1: That cross-departmental responsibility be clearly articulated and agreed to with identified timeframes, budgets, measurable outcomes and lines of responsibility.

Recommendation 2: That further initiatives are developed under this priority to reflect not only urban planning and residential density, but the location of government funded activities such as education, training and health services in relation to transport accessibility by target clients.

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Recommendation 11: That initiative 4.6 is given greater priority and that it form part of the 2018 bus procurement project.

Recommendation 12: That an additional initiative be added to formalise that major events in the state be required to incorporate transport planning and budgeting.

5. Conclusion

The long awaited Draft Transport Access Strategy is a visionary document that articulates many of the challenges and issues in providing effective public transport options to the Tasmanian community. RDA Tasmania strongly supports an investment into data and mapping of transport movements and needs that can be incorporated into and support policy and planning decisions. In addition, an integrated journey planner such as an extension to the current Metro App to cover all public transport options will make planning and using public transport easier and more accessible.

This draft strategy is a good foundation on which the influence, status and implementation of this strategy can be further defined. Because transport connects and impacts a range of government activities such as education, training and health services, the involvement of other departments will be imperative to the strategy's success. Lines of responsibility, timeframes and measurements of outcomes will be vital to ensure that the vision becomes a reality.