

2016/17 State Budget Analysis: Transport

TasCOSS provided advice to the State Government to assist it to work towards the following outcome:

All Tasmanians are able to travel where they need to go to participate in work, training, education, volunteering, and social and recreational activities, and to access services.

Analysis

TasCOSS is pleased that the Government has put together a strong, comprehensive draft Transport Access Strategy, but is disappointed that no funds have been allocated this year for implementation.

Until the level and nature of funding for the Strategy's recommendations is known, it is not clear how the Strategy will improve options for Tasmanians who don't have access to a private car. Furthermore, the Strategy's promises may prove easy to dismantle.

Initiatives

The 2016-17 Budget includes \$31Million towards 100 new buses for Metro Tasmania. A renewed fleet is necessary if Metro is to progress towards meeting its requirements under the transport standards of the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*. According to the latest targets, 80% of fleets should be disability-accessible by the end of 2017; however, as of June 2015, only 53% of Metro's services were being provided with DDA-compliant vehicles, and a 2012 review found that Tasmania lagged significantly behind most other states in the provision of disability-accessible vehicles.¹ New buses for Metro are therefore a legislated requirement.

The \$31Million, however, appears to represent primarily a bringing-forward of monies allocated for bus replacement, rather than an injection of fresh funds. It is not clear how Metro is expected to continue to improve services on an annual subvention that is not rising.

The Budget also allocates \$3.573Million this year to DGS for Passenger Transport, \$350k more than the \$3.223Million projected in last year's forward estimates. However, this additional sum does not come up to the \$450k that was projected for bus services procurement this year—work which has been rolled into Passenger Transport. Given how important it will be to finalise the Transport Access Strategy this year, and the complexity of the process of renegotiating bus contracts, these savings may prove to be a false economy.

TasCOSS also notes with concern that although the number of older and disabled Tasmanians is rising, funding for the Transport Access Scheme (which subsidises taxi fares) dropped by \$30k this year and stays at the same rate across the forward estimates.

¹ Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development (2012), Review of the Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport 2002 , p. 51; Metro Tasmania (2015), Annual Report 2014-15, p. 5.

Gaps

The Government's draft Transport Access Strategy clearly outlines the transport challenges facing low-income and disadvantaged Tasmanians. Despite good efforts in recent years by Metro and other service providers, transport services in the state are still substantially characterized by:

- Limited hours and frequency of operations
- Limited geographic scope
- Limited integration in ticketing, physical location and timetables
- Limited affordability
- Limited eligibility.

Needs are particularly acute outside of Hobart and Launceston.

Nevertheless, the Tasmanian Government's per capita level of spending on public transport remains the lowest in the country at \$209.86 per person per year. Even the Northern Territory spends more, at \$231.75 per person per year.² We appreciate that until the Transport Access Strategy is finalized and bus contracts are renegotiated on the strength of its recommendations and action plan, massive injections of funding are not yet needed. We are concerned, however, that the forward estimates give little sign of preparing for the work ahead. We urge the Government to begin to plan the process of bringing transport funding to \$300 per person per annum, in order to deliver on the promises offered up by the draft Strategy.

² Tasmania's 2016-17 spending: passenger transport: \$3.573m; metropolitan general access services: \$38.942m; non-metropolitan general access services: \$7.626m; rural and special needs bus services: \$23.72m; student-only passenger services: \$25.646m; Transport Access Scheme: \$4.518m; Pensioner Air Travel Subsidy: \$10k; Metro Bus Fleet Initiative: \$4.5m. Total: \$108.535m; population as of September 2015: 517,183; per capita: \$209.86. Northern Territory spending on passenger transport in 2016-17: \$56.66m; population as of September 2015: 244,484; per capita: \$231.753. Northern Territory (2016), Budget 2016-17, Budget Paper 3, p. 217; ABS 3101.0, Australian Demographic Statistics, Table 4.