



Tasmanian Council of Social Service Inc.

Submission to RACT Consultation on Greater Launceston Mobility Vision

August 2020



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About TasCOSS

TasCOSS is the peak body for the community services sector in Tasmania. Our membership includes individuals and organisations active in the provision of community services to low-income Tasmanians living in vulnerable and disadvantaged circumstances. TasCOSS represents the interests of its members and their clients to government, regulators, the media and the public. Through our advocacy and policy development, we draw attention to the causes of poverty and disadvantage, and promote the adoption of effective solutions to address these issues.

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Introduction

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the RACT Greater Launceston Mobility Vision.

TasCOSS advocates on behalf of low-income Tasmanians who often live in vulnerable and disadvantaged circumstances. Our submissions and advocacy are strongly informed by the expertise of our members and the lived experiences of the Tasmanians we represent.

The ability to get where you need to go, when you need to, is essential to participating fully both socially and economically in Tasmania. For transport-disadvantaged Tasmanians—people who struggle to own or operate a private vehicle due to a variety of factors, and who can't afford or lack access to public transport that can take them where they need to go—the journey to education, training, work and family can use up as much energy as the destination, if the destination can be reached at all.

By the same token, adequate access to transport has the potential to improve many of our State's poor outcomes measures, from health, to family support, childcare, training, education, employment, sport, social connections, involvement in the art, science and natural experiences Tasmania has to offer. Introducing measures to improve these outcomes will not only help to improve the lives of thousands of Tasmanians who were experiencing disadvantage before COVID-19, it will also contribute to the State's recovery by boosting participation in education, training, employment and health and wellbeing.

TasCOSS consultations with our membership and with individual Tasmanians consistently show transport as one of the key issues facing low-income residents of the state. This is as much the case in the Greater Launceston region as it is elsewhere in the state, with far fewer travel choices available and affordable for people living on low incomes and in vulnerable circumstances, particularly those living in the outer reaches of Greater Launceston. This applies not only to travel to and from central Launceston, but also to the ability to get around within and between other Greater Launceston communities.

TasCOSS' vision therefore is for socially equitable mobility across the Greater Launceston area, to ensure that all residents of the Greater Launceston area can get where they need to go.

- In the short term, social equity involves access to transport. For Greater Launceston's growth to be genuinely inclusive, it is necessary that everyone in this region can reach the drivers of growth—employment, education and training—as well as the things that make a good life possible: health facilities, support services for tough times, cultural and recreational opportunities, and friends and family. For some Tasmanians, the solution to this problem will be better access to a private vehicle; for many, however, private vehicle operation cannot be the answer.
- Over the medium and longer term, social equity also involves addressing climate change. In Tasmania as elsewhere, climate change will affect low income households and disadvantaged communities disproportionately: low income earners tend to live in areas more likely to be adversely affected by climate change, have less ability to move or make other necessary adjustments to their living circumstances, and are less likely to be able to afford insurance or other additional costs.¹ Despite increases in fuel efficiency which have blunted the impact of

¹ <https://www.acoss.org.au/climate/>

growing numbers of vehicle registration, in 2016-17 the transport sub-sector still made up 19% of Tasmania's non-offset emissions; cars are responsible for 48% of transport emissions.²

TasCOSS is happy to see social equity and sustainability explicitly included in the objectives of the draft Greater Launceston Transport Vision and its action plan.³ In working towards these objectives, we hope that decision makers will take into account some specific qualities of mobility disadvantage in Greater Launceston.

Mobility disadvantage in Greater Launceston

Greater Launceston has been thriving in recent years, economically, socially and culturally. However, prosperity is not equally distributed across the Greater Launceston area:⁴ the West Tamar LGA's median weekly family income of \$1139 is 1.1 times that of the Launceston, Northern Midlands and Meander Valley LGAs (\$1042/1045), 1.3 times that of the George Town LGA (\$854) and 1.4 times that of the Dorset LGA (\$822). Meanwhile, strong disparities exist between suburbs in the region. Within Launceston, the City of Launceston's richest suburb, Blackstone Heights, has a median weekly family income (\$1839) 2.9 times that of the city's poorest suburb (Rocherlea, \$627) and 3.3 times that of some Greater Launceston communities (for instance, Dorset's Derby, with a median family weekly income of \$556).⁵

Vehicle ownership is a significant expense for people on low incomes Australia-wide. In 2019, the typical Launceston household spent around \$14,815 on transport – an average of 16.9% of household income, the highest proportion of any regional community in the AAA's affordability index.⁶ For a single person on a low income, this proportion was likely to be closer to 30%.⁷ Fuel makes up a substantial proportion of these high costs: in the December quarter of 2019, Launceston became the AAA survey's third-most expensive regional centre for fuel expenditure.⁸ The impact of high fuel prices is disproportionate for people on low incomes given that they are more likely to be driving older cars. Tasmanian vehicles are by far the oldest in the country, with an average age of 13 years, and rising—resulting in high running costs due to both lower fuel efficiency and more frequent need for repairs.⁹ For people on low incomes, Tasmania's twice-yearly vehicle registration payments also represent a significant lump sum (a minimum of \$215 plus administrative fees and MAIB surcharges).

As a consequence of these costs, the rate of carless households in many areas around Launceston is significantly higher than the state and national averages (6.9% and 7.5% respectively).¹⁰ For example, the rate of carless households in the Launceston LGA is 9.4%; in the state suburb of George Town, 9.8%; in Ravenswood, 14.3%; and in Rocherlea, 16.4%.¹¹ These figures rise significantly in one-person

² http://www.dpac.tas.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/473774/Tasmanian_Greenhouse_Gas_Emissions_Report_2017.pdf

³ <https://greaterlauncestontransportvision.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Greater-Launceston-Transport-Vision.pdf>

⁴ Defined, in accordance with the Greater Launceston Transport Vision, as including the Launceston, Meander Valley, West Tamar, Northern Midlands, Dorset and George Town LGAs. <https://greaterlauncestontransportvision.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Greater-Launceston-Transport-Vision.pdf>

⁵ ABS Census 2016

⁶ <https://www.aaa.asn.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Affordability-Index-Q4-2019.pdf>

⁷ UNSW (2017) New Minimum Income for Healthy Living Budget Standards for Low-Paid and Unemployed Australians. <http://www.cssa.org.au/storage/budget-standards-final-report.pdf>

⁸ <https://www.aaa.asn.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Affordability-Index-Q4-2019.pdf>

⁹ ABS 9309.0, Motor Vehicle Census, January 2020. The national average age is 10.4 years.

¹⁰ ABS 2016 Census.

¹¹ ABS 2016 Census Quickstats.

households: statewide, 16.3% of one-person households do not own a car, a rate that rises to 19.4% in George Town, 23.9% in Rocherlea, and 24.5% in Ravenswood.¹²

Rates of precarious transport are also high among families dependent on one vehicle. In these cases, if a vehicle is being used by one member of the family for employment, the rest of the family can be left stranded; if the vehicle breaks down, there are no backup options. In Rocherlea, for example, while 14.5% of one-family households have no vehicle, an additional 37.7% have only one car. In Ravenswood, these figures are 9.4% and 30.4%; in George Town, they are 5.7% and 28.9%.¹³

In Greater Launceston, the impact of high transport costs falls disproportionately on residents of less advantaged communities in surrounding LGAs. This is because incomes are lower, driving distances are longer, and public transport is less available and more expensive.

Community	Median weekly household income ¹⁴	Proportion of employed residents working in Launceston ¹⁵	Median commute ¹⁶	Proportion commuting more than 30 ks each way ¹⁷	Concession return bus fare to Launceston
George Town ¹⁸	\$772	29%	10.75 kms	25.6%	\$11.00 ¹⁹
Beaconsfield	\$784	28%	29.4 kms	48.7%	\$11.00 ²⁰
Westbury	\$880	35%	26.6 kms	46.2%	\$11.90 ²¹

Even within the area serviced by Metro, public transport is often limited outside the main trunk routes even within the city. However, outside the Metro area, the availability of public transport drops sharply, and the cost of using public transport rises sharply. For example:

- For a concession adult, a 25 km trip from Exeter to Launceston (\$4.50) costs 2.3 times as much as the 22.5 km Metro Greencard concession fare from Hadspen to Rocherlea (\$1.92).²²
- Meanwhile, the last weeknight bus toward Beaconsfield leaves the Launceston CBD at 6.20 pm, too early for many people working in hospitality, aged care, and other shift-based jobs (on weekend days, the last bus leaves at 5.20).

¹² ABS Census 2016.

¹³ ABS Census 2016.

¹⁴ ABS Census 2016

¹⁵ ABS Census 2016

¹⁶ ABS 2071.0.55.001.

¹⁷ ABS Census 2016

¹⁸ State suburb

¹⁹ <http://easttamarbuslines.com/fares.html> (\$13.80 minus 20% for use of a Smart Card).

²⁰ <https://www.manionscoaches.com.au/general-timetables/general-fares.html>;

²¹ <https://cloud.itmprojects.com.au/shuttles/shuttles?CID=TRC&type=express>

²² <https://www.metrotas.com.au/fares/non-urban-fares/>; <http://derwentvalleylink.com.au/fares/>.

The disproportionate impact of transport costs on the outer areas of Greater Launceston is also partly due to the high costs associated with travel over long distances. With the sharp rise in accommodation costs and decline in rental availability documented in 2017-18, these figures are likely to have risen.²³

Taken together, these factors add up to significant challenges for many Greater Launceston residents in getting where they need to go, particularly on the area's outskirts. Modelled estimates from 2014 found that, for instance, residents of the northern suburbs of Launceston were twice as likely as Launceston/West Launceston residents to have difficulty getting to places needed; residents of George Town were 1.4 times more likely than Launceston residents to struggle to get around.²⁴ Younger people (under 65, not disabled) who are not eligible to drive (due to age, inability to obtain a license, or loss of license) are particularly disadvantaged due to their ineligibility for Home and Community Care (HACC)-funded transport options.

Key challenges and possible actions for a Mobility Vision for Greater Launceston

A Mobility Vision for Greater Launceston therefore must address a variety of challenges that face Tasmanians on low incomes, particularly those who cannot operate a private car. Below, we identify six key challenges.

1. ***The challenge of managing travel into Launceston in a fashion that ensures that people on lower incomes are not disadvantaged by efforts to control traffic flows into the CBD.*** While parking fees can be a valuable mechanism in steering car users towards public transport, in Hobart, TasCOSS consistently hears that the cost of parking is a significant impost for low-income workers coming in to the CBD from areas with poor public transport, particularly where later-starting shifts do not permit workers to access early bird rates.

Possible actions include the creation of park-and ride facilities across outer and middle-ring areas of Greater Launceston and bringing non-Metro fares into line with Metro fares (see below).

2. ***The challenge of helping people conquer the “last mile.”*** Unfortunately, many residences and businesses lie beyond easy walking distance to a bus stop—a situation known as the “last mile” problem. In some cases, the last “mile” may in fact be a much longer distance. In others, hilly ground or bad weather can act as significant barriers, especially people experiencing any kind of physical challenge (the elderly, people in ill health or with disability, people with small children, people needing to carry heavy loads). The number of people living far from a bus stop will only grow as housing affordability issues continue to push people out of urban areas into cheaper rural and regional areas. Meanwhile, the streamlining of bus services onto main roads is leaving former customers on side roads feeling stranded. “Last mile” services can also help people who live farther than walking distance from shops and services, and who are not on bus routes.

Possible actions include the creation of feeder services to bring people to main bus routes, as well as the development of park-and-ride facilities along urban and rural bus routes. Feeder

²³ http://www.utas.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/1138269/tasmanian-housing-update-august-2018-executive-summary.pdf ; ABS Census 2016.

²⁴ PHIDU, Social Health Atlas of the Australia, data by Population Health Areas <http://phidu.torrens.edu.au/social-health-atlases/data#social-health-atlas-of-australia-population-health-areas>

services might include contracted maxi-taxis or small buses run by private operators, community organisations licensed as transport operators, or not-for-profit transport operators.

3. ***The challenge of helping people circulate across the spokes of the Launceston transport system.*** Launceston's bus services are for the most part set up to move people from the periphery to the centre²⁵ -- a pattern that does not help people who are best served by shopping and service centres in nearby suburbs. The recent introduction of Waverley-Ravenswood-Mowbray services in response to community feedback is a welcome step towards connecting communities directly.

Possible actions include continued consultations to seek out further opportunities to connect communities via public and active transport.

4. ***The challenge of helping people access employment located outside urban areas.*** Tasmanian bus services have historically been biased towards commuters working standard hours in urban centres. The Greater Launceston area's employment environment, however, is already a geographically dispersed one, a situation that will only be intensified by the rise of the agriculture, dairy and tourism sectors. These industries often are geographically somewhat clustered (wine regions, for instance), but away from major road corridors, leaving them unserved by existing public transport options. Here, the challenge for social equity is to ensure that services link areas with higher unemployment with areas of employment concentration along routes and at times that will meet the needs of both employers and jobseekers. This issue is likely to gain in importance if COVID-19 restrictions are still in place during the peak agricultural season; addressing it will require work with state, regional and local economic development bodies, employment services, and jobseekers themselves.

Possible actions include the development of industry transport action plans and the expansion of services along the lines of Area Connect into the north of the state.²⁶

5. ***The challenge of helping people circulate within regions in the Greater Launceston area.*** Transport services in Tasmania are for the most part set up to move people in straight lines between regional areas and major metropolitan centres. However, circulation within regions can be as important as these longer-distance services, particularly in relation to accessing employment, local health and community services, healthy food, child care, and family and social connections. At the moment, such circulation is impossible in many parts of the Greater Launceston outskirts. Here, the challenge for inclusion is to find out where people would like to be going within their regions, rather than relying on a wheel-spoke model of public transport that assumes Launceston as its hub. This will require collaboration between councils and a highly consultative, potentially co-designed approach.

Possible actions include the development of local transport action plans and an expansion of services along the lines of Area Connect into the north of the state.

6. ***The challenge of helping people circulate around other town centres in the Greater Launceston region.*** Town centres around greater Launceston offer an increasing range of services and opportunities. However, these are not always accessible to people of all ages and levels of ability. Ensuring that town centres offer mobility will require collaboration between experts in accessible

²⁵ https://www.metrotas.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/20200_DSG_network_map_launceston-urban_A3.pdf

²⁶ Area Connect is a smaller-vehicle service run by Community Transport Services Tasmania (CTST), currently operating in communities the Derwent Valley, Central Highlands, Southern Midlands and Sorell LGAs. <http://areaconnect.org.au/>

transport design, local councils, the Department of State Growth, community sector organisations and their clients, and other peak bodies such as the Heart Foundation and the Bicycle Network of Tasmania.

Possible actions include supporting all Greater Launceston councils to develop active transport strategies and action plans.

7. *More broadly, there is the challenge of ensuring equitable access for all Tasmanians to all modes of transport.* This includes:

Equitable access to driver licenses. A driver license not only gives a person the ability to access employment, but also is increasingly viewed as a prerequisite for employment, even for positions that do not involve driving a company vehicle. Many jobs also require start or ending times/are at locations that will never be easy to accommodate by public transport. However, TasCOSS has heard from people on low incomes and young jobseekers that getting a license is often a struggle, particularly when a lack of public transport keeps them from being able to get to driver mentoring programs. The problem is particularly acute in families without a private vehicle, but also affects families with a single vehicle that may be in use by someone needing to get to work, or be in too precarious a condition to risk at the hands of a learner. There is a need for expanded driver mentor programs and also for exploration of programs offering licensing in high schools.

Equitable pricing of bus fares. In 2016, non-metropolitan residents made up approximately 30% of Tasmania's population, but non-metropolitan general access services received only 15% of the state's 2018-19 transport funding. As a consequence, as noted above, non-Metro fares are significantly higher than Metro fares. Bus fares across the state should be brought into line with Metro fares.²⁷

Equitable approaches to vehicle registration. South Australia already permits registration fees (for 3 or 12 month periods) to be paid off monthly through direct debit to either a credit card or a bank account.²⁸ The rate of SA registration payments made on time has risen by 10% from 70% in December 2013, when the monthly payment option was introduced, to 77%.²⁹ Meanwhile, Northern Territory permits monthly payments and Victoria and Western Australia permit the payment of registration on a quarterly basis; Victoria does not charge administrative fees for shorter-term renewals by concession card holders.³⁰

Equitable access for all ages and levels of ability. Progress should continue towards 100% compliance with the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* in relation to public transport facilities as well as vehicles.

Conclusion

Transport is an important key enabler of participation in key areas of life, including education, employment, engagement with community and access to essential services. As Tasmania recovers from COVID-19 it is more important than ever to ensure that all Tasmanians have the means to participate in

²⁷ ABS Census 2016; Tasmanian Government, Budget 2018-2019, Budget Paper 2 Vol. 1, Tables 11.2, 11.11, 11.13.

²⁸ <https://www.sa.gov.au/topics/driving-and-transport/vehicles-and-registration/vehicle-registration/ezyreg-direct-debit>

²⁹ Email, Road Safety, Registration and Licensing branch, SA Dept. of Planning Transport and Infrastructure, 9 May 2018.

³⁰ <https://www.vicroads.vic.gov.au/registration/registration-fees/short-term-rego;> [https://www.transport.wa.gov.au/licensing/renew-replace-my-vehicle-licence.asp;](https://www.transport.wa.gov.au/licensing/renew-replace-my-vehicle-licence.asp) <https://nt.gov.au/driving/regio/check-renew-or-transfer-your-registration/renew-your-vehicle-registration>



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these key areas of life. The possible actions set out in this document show that greater participation does not always bring with it greater cost. We encourage the RACT to work closely with councils in the Greater Launceston areas as well as the State Government to prioritise in their COVID-19 recovery plans implementation of equitable transport solutions.