

SUBMISSION

Transport is an essential service: Submission to the Draft Transport Access Strategy



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Introduction to Anglicare Tasmania

Anglicare is the largest community service organisation in Tasmania with offices in Hobart, Glenorchy, Launceston, St Helens, Devonport and Burnie, and a range of programs in rural areas. Anglicare's services include emergency relief and crisis services, accommodation support, employment services, mental health services, acquired injury, disability and aged care services, alcohol and other drug services and family support. In addition, Anglicare's Social Action and Research Centre conducts research, policy and advocacy work with a focus on issues affecting Tasmanians on low incomes.

Anglicare Tasmania is committed to achieving social justice for all Tasmanians. It is our mission to speak out against poverty and injustice and offer decision-makers alternative solutions to help build a more just society. We provide opportunities for people in need to reach their full potential through our services, staff, research and advocacy.

Anglicare's work is guided by a set of values which includes these beliefs:

- *that each person is valuable and deserves to be treated with respect and dignity;*
- *that each person has the capacity to make and to bear the responsibility for choices and decisions about their life;*
- *that support should be available to all who need it; and*
- *that every person can live life abundantly.*

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Barriers for disadvantaged Tasmanians

Anglicare appreciates the opportunity to contribute to the Transport Access Strategy for Tasmania.

As the largest community service organisation in Tasmania with offices in Hobart, Glenorchy, Launceston, St Helens, Devonport and Burnie and a range of services in rural areas, we are well placed to provide commentary on the needs of vulnerable and disadvantaged Tasmanians as well as the factors that lead to disadvantage, including limited access to transport and its impacts on Tasmanians' health, education and employment.

The cost of owning, maintaining and operating a private vehicle is prohibitive for many families reliant on very low incomes. Private vehicle ownership is therefore low amongst our clients. Most of our clients rely on public transport, community services or their friends.

In many areas of Tasmania public transport is only available for limited hours, rarely into the night and is extremely limited or non-existent on Sundays. The limitations in hours and long gaps between bus services make it difficult for clients to attend multiple appointments at different locations in the one day, especially if there is a need to return home by the end of a school day or if they need to wait for a late appointment or class to finish.

Clients tell us they feel socially isolated because of a lack of transport options. Further, mental ill health can be a huge barrier for clients to use public transport.

The importance of adequate access to transport is a conversation that has been going on in our communities for many years. This submission is based on Anglicare's research and on the experiences of our staff across Tasmania, with particular contributions from areas that suffer transport disadvantage such as Ulverstone, the northern suburbs of Launceston and the Tasman Highway.

Response to Draft Transport Access Strategy

Anglicare believes the Draft Transport Access Strategy does a good job in articulating the need and proposing strategies for providing better integrated and coordinated transport services for all Tasmanians.

We appreciate the draft strategy's acknowledgement that transport needs to be looked at in relation to housing, land use, urban planning and employment and that there needs to be better integration between community transport, private transport and public transport. Its strong focus on people who are transport disadvantaged provides an opportunity to ensure the strategy has a real impact on the most vulnerable in our communities.

We also appreciate the draft strategy's acknowledgement of the good work of TasCOSS in this area and in particular their 2014 report on transport in the community. This report found that Tasmanians face multiple barriers to accessing transport and that the different services need to be integrated and expanded in areas and times covered.

The Tasmanian Government faces significant public transport challenges, with our small dispersed population providing limited financial returns. However, public transport is an essential service that our Government must prioritise.

Anglicare's overarching concern with the draft strategy is that it appears to continue to require public transport to be economically viable. Such an approach forces the system to be "efficient" rather than focus on providing a service to the public. We believe a large number of our clients have become resigned to diminishing timetables and routes in the name of "efficiency", which has increased the problems of falling behind in their access to health, education, essential services, places of employment and opportunities for social interactions.

Tasmania's per capita spending on transport is the lowest in Australia. TasCOSS argues that the State Government should increase its level of transport funding from under \$200 per capita per year to \$300, providing an annual total of \$150 million (TasCOSS 2015). These increased funds would assist the State to move away from a focus on transport efficiencies and better explore innovative service provision. Anglicare notes, however, that this increased level of funding would only just bring Tasmania to a comparable per capita level with South Australia and would see us still \$200 per capita behind Western Australia, New South Wales, Queensland and Victoria. Tasmania's transport disadvantage is further exacerbated when household income is considered: in a recent national study on transport affordability, transport costs per household were found to be less affordable in Hobart than Canberra, Darwin, Adelaide and Perth (Australian Automobile Association 2016).

Recommendation 1: The Transport Access Strategy sets the level of transport funding at \$300 per capita per year.

Closing the transport gaps: lack of early/late buses

The lack of early and late services are a particular problem for our clients who are attempting to access education or work or who wish to participate in their community on a weekend, especially on a Sunday which has the most restricted and often absent bus services.

For example, clients in Ulverstone find it is difficult for them to use public transport to attend films, bowls, go out for meals or visit friends as they have no means of getting home at night. They also find it difficult to visit the North West Regional or Mersey Community hospitals on weekends as there is no bus after 3pm on Saturdays and no bus at all on Sundays. Clients in the northern suburbs of Launceston find it difficult to attend events such as weddings or funerals that are held in neighbouring towns because of the irregular bus services.

Access to public transport does not appear to be equitable. The 11,000 people of Ulverstone, for example, have no public bus services to either Burnie or Devonport on a Sunday and only four buses on a Saturday. In comparison, the Hobart suburb of Sandy Bay, with approximately the same population as Ulverstone has 26 buses on Sundays and 59 on Saturdays. While the geographical closeness of Sandy Bay to Hobart's CBD obviously encourages greater demand, if the purpose of public transport is service provision then the people of Ulverstone are severely under-serviced.

We also note the limited starting and finishing times of bus services, especially in evenings and on weekends, is a particular issue for young people who wish to participate in sport or engage socially with others.

Closing the transport gaps: first/last mile

Many of our clients travelling on public transport are families with children, older people or people with a disability who find the first/last mile an impediment to their daily chores. The need to carry shopping and the hilly terrain of some areas of Tasmania further exacerbate these obstacles. Many clients need to catch multiple buses or walk long distances between bus services and may be concerned with their personal safety when walking in the dark. Many clients also do not have the support at home to help them get ready for travelling on public transport.

For example, while Anglicare was well briefed about Metro's Hobart Network Review, which aimed for a "faster, smarter and easier" network, its focus on increasing economic efficiency has led to more of our clients finding difficulty with the first/last mile of their journey.

People in urban fringes need to engage with urban facilities such as education, employment and health as well as social activities. However, limitations in access to transport mean they are restricted in the options they choose to take up or have to

undertake much more planning and preparation than people accessing a metropolitan service. This is difficult for all our client groups but is particularly isolating for young mothers.

There are numerous urban fringe areas of Tasmania that are significantly under-served by public and community transport services. For example, while metropolitan buses service the approximately 3,500 people living in the Seven Mile Beach, Cambridge and Acton Park area from 6am to 6pm weekdays (with the usual reduced services on Saturdays and Sundays), the 6,000 people living beyond Seven Mile Beach, in Midway Point, Sorell and the postcode of 7173 (Forcett, Lewisham, Dodges Ferry, Carlton and Primrose Sands) have a very long first/last mile to public transport.

For the population living beyond Seven Mile Beach, while Redline does provide services to all these communities except Primrose Sands, the service is limited in route and timing. And yet, our clients tell us this area beyond Seven Mile beach should be seen as a commuter community and aspiring satellite suburbia of metropolitan Hobart.

Primrose Sands is even more transport disadvantaged with the only public transport service provided by council, a free service from Primrose Sands to Sorell once a day two days a week. While this service is much appreciated by our clients, advanced planning and extended time is required to manage appointments. It is also not a link-up service, but specific to Sorell. Current Metro bus services travel as far south as Cygnet which is 57 kilometres from the CBD and home to less than 900 people. In comparison, Primrose Sands, with a similar population to Cygnet, is 10 kilometres closer to the Hobart CBD but lacks any public transport to the city.

The Tasman Peninsula is even more isolated than Primrose Sands but it at least benefits from a much larger array of outreach and visiting services compared to the 7173 community.

Recommendation 2: The Transport Access Strategy proposes initiatives that will improve transport services to urban fringes such as the Sorell area and similar satellite areas outside Launceston, Devonport and Burnie.

Closing the transport gaps: cost of public transport

Our clients generally feel satisfied with the fares charged for an individual on public transport. However, they find transporting a family on public transport can be prohibitive, which leads to families missing out on opportunities or choosing to use their car if they have one, which can lead to increased household expenses to maintain the car and traffic congestion. Young clients who are not full-time students or students wishing to participate in extra-curriculum activities tell us they struggle with the cost and timing of public transport.

The necessity for Anglicare clients to travel by taxi due to limited bus timetables and routes, including difficulty with the first/last mile, means the taxi subsidy is of utmost importance to a transport access strategy.

Recommendation 3: The Transport Access Strategy introduce family concessions for travel on public buses.

Recommendation 4: The Transport Access Strategy commit to the ongoing provision of the Taxi Fare Concessions for eligible Tasmanians and propose opportunities for its expansion should taxis become adjuncts to regular public bus services.

Closing the transport gaps: cost of private transport

The cost of purchasing, registering and maintaining a car is prohibitive for many of our clients. For those who do have a car, they are often forced to buy older, larger and less fuel efficient cars as they are cheaper upfront, which brings difficulties with the ongoing costs of petrol. Registration is a significant cost and it is not uncommon for vehicles to be unregistered for a period of time in a year.

Car pooling can be effective but can be difficult to coordinate. For example, tenants at Anglicare's Grove House in Ulverstone will often let others know if they are travelling to Devonport or Burnie, thereby sharing in the journey's costs.

Recommendation 5: The Transport Access Strategy initiate a project to work with community services such as Neighbourhood Houses to identify areas and systems for car pooling to be effective.

Transport Access Strategy: making a difference

Tasmanians living on very low incomes need an authentic public transport system with the primary objective being to meet the transport needs of the community. This means services that are regular and frequent and that pick up from suburbs. Public transport has, however, moved away from this model to one that is focused on corporate efficiency. To ensure all Tasmanians have access to the transport they need to carry out their familial, social and economic activities, the State Government must prioritise suitable forms of transport, and if this requires multiple modes of transport such as public buses, private buses and subsidised taxis, that these are well integrated and are able to serve disadvantaged Tasmanians. For example, while Anglicare can see that subsidised taxi travel may provide a cost-effective mode of transport for areas away from the peak routes, the State needs to provide incentives for them to increase their fleet with accessible taxis as clients tell us that many taxis are too small to accommodate walking frames and they have been refused service.

Anglicare supports the initiatives of the seven priority areas but has further recommendations:

1. **Living closer** aims to integrate the location of homes, employment, education, services and recreational opportunities with transport corridors.

Recommendation 6: The Transport Access Strategy immediately investigates the integration of land use planning and passenger transport provision, rather than setting this aside for future consideration.

2. **Working together** aims to reduce transport gaps through collaboration. However, the initiatives identified in the Draft Strategy are limited to improving transport for schools and large employers.

Recommendation 7: The Transport Access Strategy develops further initiatives for Priority Area 2 that assist the formation of partnerships between community and government service providers to improve access to transport for a wider range of Tasmanians.

3. **Connected transport system** aims for a more economically efficient and extensive public transport.
4. **Better integration**, including the development of a journey planner and coordination of timetables. We particularly applaud the intention to introduce common ticketing across bus companies including consistency of fares and concessions.

5. **Closing transport gaps** to assist people to overcome transport barriers. For many of our clients, the first/last mile and lack of early or late services seriously limits their social and personal opportunities.

Recommendation 8: The Transport Access Strategy evaluate and compare all recent trials such as the North-West Coast project, car pooling and services for specific rural employment such as orchards, for targeted programs to be developed for each currently under-serviced geographical or demographical community.

Recommendation 9: The Transport Access Strategy introduces programs that assist disadvantaged people to get their driver's license and to share cars, particularly for people living outside urban and urban fringe areas.

6. **Innovative pricing** to support greater use of public transport. While Anglicare's focus on public transport is to make it accessible, available and affordable for the most disadvantaged in our community, we support the proposed initiatives for the general community that encourage a shift from private cars to public transport to improve the financial viability of public transport.
7. **Improved infrastructure**, particularly for a more active, healthy life. In particular for our clients, the intention to locate services together and provide accessible walking and safe cycling routes will be of benefit.

Finally, as an essential service transport must be integrated across all departments and with a strategy that has the support of all members of Parliament. We cannot afford to lose ground when governments change hands. A long-term, multi-department and cross-party commitment to improving transport in Tasmania will have broad-reaching impacts on our health, employment and social wellbeing.

Recommendation 10: The Transport Access Strategy's governance structures to require the Department of State Growth, as lead for the Strategy, to bring all relevant stakeholders together regularly to create and share a long-term vision for better transport services in Tasmania.

Conclusions

Tasmanians suffer from the “perfect storm” of disadvantaged access to transport: low income, low density cities, dispersed rural population and high fuel costs. Many Tasmanians on low incomes rely either entirely on limited public transport or on a car that strains their weekly budget. Anglicare’s clients tell us of the social isolation that results from not being able to travel to participate in essential social, economic and personal services, events and activities.

Access to transport is an essential service in Tasmania that successive governments have underfunded.

To address this shortfall, Anglicare recommends the Strategy addresses the following three key areas:

1. *Transport funding must be increased;*
2. *Barriers to access to transport must be reduced, in particular in urban fringes; and*
3. *Transport policy must be integrated across all departments.*

References

Australian Automobile Association 2016, *Transport affordability index: August 2016*, AAA, Canberra.

Tasmanian Council of Social Services 2014, *Transport in the Community Project Final Report*, TasCOSS, Hobart.

Tasmanian Council of Social Services 2015, *Budget priorities submission 2016-17*, TasCOSS, Hobart.