

Community Transport

Whittlesea Community Futures Partnership is seeking State Government support to invest in a comprehensive community transport service catering to the needs of Whittlesea’s transport disadvantaged. Whittlesea’s growth has raised significant concern amongst the human service sector about ways to overcome social isolation before it becomes entrenched. Transport options and alternative transport solutions are a major focus for the sector.

What is happening right now?

Whittlesea is one of the largest municipalities in Melbourne. Only 2% of residents (approximately) live within walkable distance to heavy rail services, with the highest future population growth proposed in the corridor north of Epping where public transport access is the poorestⁱ.

Whittlesea’s geographic diversity is characterised by:

- Older established suburbs (with ageing populations)
- Rapidly growing new residential areas (with large numbers of young families)
- Rural farming areas and small rural townships (with marked deficiencies in services and transport options)
- Areas of financial hardship, with high levels of fixed and low incomes in the urban south and high levels of debt and a significant level of financial vulnerability in the growth areas of the north.

Whittlesea is simultaneously young and ageing:

- The number of people aged over 65 is expected to increase by 53% between 2013 and 2023, and represent 12% of the population by 2023. The 70 – 74 year old age group is forecast to have the largest proportional increase relative to its population size by 2023 (a 64% increase)ⁱⁱ.
- The youth population is also rapidly expanding. Approximately 25% of Whittlesea’s population is estimated to be under the age of 18 yearsⁱⁱⁱ. The number of people aged under-15 is forecast to increase by 52% between 2013 and 2023, representing a rise in the proportion of the population to 23% by 2023^{iv}.

In 2011, 5.2% of the City of Whittlesea's population needed assistance because of a disability compared to 4.5% in Greater Melbourne^v. The municipality ranks as the 6th highest out of all Victorian LGAs in terms of the proportion of the population requiring assistance because of a disability^{vi}.



Many social and health impacts for older people, young people and people living with disabilities arise from the lack of available and accessible transport:

- **Social isolation** is compounded by lack of access to transport particularly for people without networks in the community to assist them.
- Access to **medical and health appointments** and services is difficult.
- **People with chronic illnesses and medical conditions** can have difficulty independently using public transport.
- **Young people** are limited in accessing educational, sporting and recreational activities.
- **Community activities and events** are not accessible.
- **Families** on low/fixed incomes and those newly arrived to Australia can find public transport expensive and navigating transport options (where they exist) challenging.
- **Community groups** are restricted in their meeting times, places and involvement of new members because of transport limitations.

How can we build a better future?

Whittlesea Community Futures is requesting State government:

- Fund a fulltime community transport coordinator and fleet associated costs for the service in order to support and invest in the sustainability of Whittlesea's community transport sector.
- Work in partnership with Federal Government, Local Government, private sector and local communities to develop clear policies and legislations for community transport services. This will remove the barriers currently faced by the 'community transport sector' and will better enable the sector to service the transport disadvantaged community.

Community transport is a not-for-profit solution to local transport issues. Services are tailored to those with existing barriers to accessing transport (the transport disadvantaged). They assist people who are transport disadvantaged to remain active and valued members of their communities and to live independently in their homes and neighbourhoods. Community transport makes a significant contribution towards promoting and sustaining the health and well-being of its service users.

Community transport services typically address gaps in commercial and public transport provision, offering flexible transport options for community groups. Community transport is also an ideal solution for the transport shortfalls faced by communities in the growth corridors until they are adequately serviced by conventional transport services.

The key reasons for using community transport include:

- attending health and medical appointments (not including medical emergencies)
- access to essential community, welfare and professional services
- attending social support groups or health groups
- food shopping or using local or regional shopping centres
- visiting friends or relatives who are at local or regional health care facilities
- participating in local and regional social, cultural and sporting activities

There is compelling need for Federal and State Governments to work together in developing policies and legislations to enable ‘community transport’ as an alternate solution to address the shortfalls in conventional transport in serving disadvantaged communities and to bridge the transport gap in the growth corridors during early housing development stages, when the conventional transport services are typically absent or vastly inadequate.

Whittlesea’s community transport service is largely provided by Whittlesea Community Connections. This service, established in 2006, is mostly unfunded by government. The use of scarce agency reserves, fund-raising activities and short-term funding from philanthropic trusts has enabled Whittlesea Community Connections to support the need for community transport in the area. In the 2012/13 financial year 5,245 journeys were provided. Without government funding, the sustainability of community transport in Whittlesea is an on-going challenge.

How much will it cost?

Community Transport Service Coordination and running Costs	Resources	Cost
Employment of a Full-time transport Coordinator to manage and grow the community transport service and establish a funding model to grow the range of services provided to Whittlesea’s transport disadvantaged population	1 EFT Community Transport Manager	\$72,000
	Fleet and Administration Costs	\$123,000
TOTAL (per annum)		\$195,000

How does the community benefit?

Adequately supported community transport for Whittlesea will play a significant role in:

- Coordinating existing community transport resources for broader community benefit
- Developing responsive direct access to community transport by Whittlesea residents who are aged, disabled, or socially and/or geographically isolated
- Providing a central point for disseminating information and education on transport options for local people
- Promoting the principles of community engagement and connection of residents with the broader community.

What objectives does this help us to achieve?

Federal and State Government Policy Objectives

- The Transport Integration Act 2010, Victoria's principal transport statute, An Integrated and Sustainable Transport Future: A New Legislative Framework for Transport in Victoria, 2009 a policy statement, both outline the following as their vision and objective:

"Vision

Victoria aspires to have an integrated and sustainable transport system that contributes to an inclusive, prosperous and environmentally responsible state.

Social and Economic Inclusion Objective

The transport system should provide a means by which people can access social and economic opportunities to support individual and community wellbeing including:

*minimising barriers to access so that, as is possible, the transport system is available to as many people as wish to use it
providing tailored infrastructure, services and support for people who find it difficult to use the transport system."*

City of Whittlesea Objectives

- Council Plan 2013-2017
- Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2013-2017
- Connect: A municipal plan for children, young people and their families 2013-2018

www.whittleseacommunityfutures.org.au

Whittlesea Community Futures Objective

- *'Older residents have adequate access to appropriate community and public transport options in the City of Whittlesea.'*
- Whittlesea Community Futures Strategic Plan 2011-2016.

Key Messages

- Whittlesea Community Futures is seeking integrated Federal and State Government support to invest in a comprehensive community transport service catering to the needs of Whittlesea's transport disadvantaged.
- Population growth, geographic and demographic characteristics of Whittlesea are compounding the lack of available and affordable transport options.
- Higher populations of young families, young people, older people and people living with disabilities mean Whittlesea is more vulnerable to social isolation and lack of access to support and service systems.

ⁱ Integrated Transport Strategy, City of Whittlesea 2013.

ⁱⁱ forecast.id.

ⁱⁱⁱ profile.id 2013

^{iv} forecast.id 2013

^v profile.id 2013

^{vi} Statistical data for Victorian Communities 2013