

Despite sustained publicity about traffic growth and its consequences, Australians appear to suffer from inconsistency in attitude to travel choices; they wish to have cleaner air and less traffic, but are not prepared to drive less.



Public attitudes towards transport



3.1 Introduction

The City Transport Plan is intended to provide a comprehensive basis for improved understanding, and informed comment on transport proposals in Gold Coast City.

Extensive consultation has already been undertaken on transport issues around the world, across Australia, and in South East Queensland. Specific focus group research has also been undertaken in Gold Coast City as part of the CTP process. The views expressed, as well as the outcomes and proposals developed through those processes, have influenced the directions, and proposals contained in this CTP.

3.2 Public attitudes to congestion

Experience worldwide indicates that after governments begin to lose the battle of keeping pace with traffic growth, a certain threshold point is reached at which major public backlash occurs, and a total rethink of transport policy is called for.

Congestion levels in Australia's major cities of Sydney and Melbourne are increasing, and represent a major concern in terms of social and environmental costs. Yet it has been estimated the costs of congestion in Australian cities are at least 50% below those of major international cities¹. While there are signs in Sydney the public is becoming increasingly less tolerant of widespread congestion, it is likely a "backlash threshold" has not been reached in any Australian situation.

Nationally, vehicle sales continue to reach new heights. The 1997 record of 722,000 new cars and trucks sold is expected to be broken in 1998, possibly exceeding 750,000². Of course, many vehicles are also de-registered each year. However, when it is considered the national population increases by only about 210,000 each year, the high dependence on private transport becomes obvious.

For Gold Coast City, levels of congestion are much lower again than Sydney or Melbourne, although Gold Coast travel demand will continue to rise more quickly in the foreseeable future. Assuming Gold Coast motorists have a similar level of tolerance for congestion and air pollution as other Australians, it is probable congestion levels will continue to rise in the medium term, say 10-15 years. Beyond that time, given the likely performance of the road system, there would be widespread calls for government to do something drastic to reduce congestion.

1. Martin, T. 1996. *Australian congestion pricing: will it work?* Road Transport Research Vol. 5 No.2.

2. *Financial Review*. Tuesday April 7, 1998. "Car sales on road to new record." Ian Porter.

3.3 Surveys of public attitudes to transport

A 1997 survey in Britain by the Royal Automobile Club indicated the three most important transport issues where:

- cleaner air and the impact of vehicle emissions on the environment;
- better public transport; and
- less traffic in towns.

However in the same survey 76% of respondents said they never take the environmental issues into account when choosing modes of transport. Similar results were reported in a 1998 survey of 500 Queensland motorists by the Royal Automobile Club of Queensland³.

Many Australians are free to choose how they travel, and the increasing affordability of the private car means this mode is the preferred choice. Although attitudes alone do not determine behavior, changing people's attitudes to travel choices is a first step in getting people to use more sustainable transport options. Yet despite sustained publicity about traffic growth and its consequences, Australians appear to suffer from inconsistency in attitude to travel choices; they wish to have cleaner air and less traffic, but are not prepared to drive less.

A 1997 survey of 1000 Australian drivers for the Automobile Association of Australia⁴ revealed 65% of them were unlikely to ever consider using public transport, and this proportion had increased significantly in just two years. Drivers generally indicated they would be likely to change to public transport only if parking was difficult or expensive.

Even if people are confronted with the problems of car use, it appears they are not likely to change their travel habits to reduce car use. According to recent Australian research⁵:

- in total about 25% of people who currently do not use public transport say they would use their car less if there was a realistic alternative;
- only 5-10% of motorists say they have a real desire to catch public transport and use their car less;
- over 75% of motorists will continue to drive unless strong economic factors intervene; and
- environmental issues, although intrinsically associated with the excessive growth of car use, do not figure greatly in the choice of travel mode.

Choosing Public Transport

A major survey of Sydney residents for the NRMA as part of the "Clean Air 2000"⁶ project sought people's opinions as to what factors they would take into account in deciding to use public transport more and drive less. Figure 3.1 illustrates the results.



Figure 3.1
Important public preferences in choosing to use public transport

(Source: "Clean Air-2000" Project)

Such results point to a need to significantly improve public transport before people will consider using it more.

3. McDonnell-Phillips Pty. Ltd. 1998. Survey of 500 RACQ members. For RACQ, Brisbane.

4 .ANOP Research. 1997. Attitudes to Transport. Sydney.

5. Rose and Ampt. 1997

6. Reported in "The Sydney Morning Herald", Tuesday March 24, 1998. The Road to Reason. Robert Wainwright.



3.4 South East Queensland public attitudes to transport issues

Two of Australia’s most extensive public consultation programs concerning transport have been undertaken in South East Queensland in recent years:

- *The South East Queensland Passenger Transport Study (SEPTS)* undertook targeted consultation across the region throughout 1990 and 1991, utilising two steering groups and a series of local working groups drawn from representative sectors.
- *The Integrated Regional Transport Plan for South East Queensland (IRTP)* undertook broad-ranging consultation extending from 1995 to 1997. It included a discussion paper, a large scale public attitude survey, a draft IRTP, a multi-sector reference group, and public workshops around the region.

All up, nearly 60,000 people were directly involved in providing input to regional transport planning through these two exercises. The results were consistent in establishing support for a change in emphasis away from providing roads for cars, toward moving people by more sustainable modes of transport.

The SEPTS report contained 45 recommendations of which about half were acted on. There is reason to believe the SEPTS “vision”, which included restraining car use through a significant increase in the perceived (or marginal) costs of motoring, was out of step with prevailing political and community expectations.





The IRTP focussed on achieving a major swing to public transport, walking and cycling by improving the attractiveness of these travel options. It foreshadowed that tougher measures may be required in the future to curb car use, but stressed these were not achievable unless the alternatives were in place. The IRTP also emphasised the role of public education in helping change attitudes and behavior.

In April, 1997 the Queensland Cabinet endorsed the IRTP as official policy, and it is now the centrepiece of policy guidance for providing the region's transport infrastructure and other supporting measures like car pooling programs.

Many residents of Gold Coast City expressed their views in both these consultation programs. It is clear there is broad support in South East Queensland, and in Gold Coast City, for a swing to more sustainable transport.

However, people do not react well to any proposal aimed at restraining freedom to drive cars. The following quote from the IRTP perhaps summarises the need for caution:

...while the community wants to see the environmental impacts of transport reduced, there remains debate in the community about the level to which the use of the private motor vehicle should be restricted⁷.

7. Queensland Government. 1997. *Integrated Regional Transport Plan for South East Queensland*. Brisbane.

3.5 What Gold Coast residents think about public transport

A state-wide survey by the RACQ of 500 Queensland residents⁸ indicated public transport is not seen as readily accessible, reliable, affordable or convenient.

To test views in Gold Coast City, "focus group" research was convened to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the public transport system from the customer's perspective⁹.

A sample of different social and geographic groups were chosen across the City. It is important to recognise some of these people were not actually regular public transport users, hence their perception of the current public transport system is not necessarily reliable. Indeed, there is reason to believe the current bus system in the City is underrated by its residents. However since part of the research objectives was to determine what would attract non-public transport users to the system, the attitudes of non-users are important.

Subject to these provisos, the focus groups indicated:

- public transport is generally perceived by residents to be inadequate and uncompetitive with the car, especially when time is the main factor;
- public transport is perceived to be inconvenient due to difficulty in accessing the system, inability of fixed routes to meet diverse travel needs, problems with leaving cars in park-and-ride situations, and lack of integration of services;
- the quality of information on available public transport options is considered to be less than the quality of the actual services;
- taxis, while generally convenient, are perceived as too expensive for most people to use on a regular basis; and
- tourists were generally satisfied but surprised at the lack of a major "line haul" system in the major tourist strip. Travel beyond this strip was perceived to pose problems due to lack of information and services and difficulties in obtaining taxis.

8. McDonnell-Phillips Pty. Ltd. 1998. *Survey of 500 RACQ members*. For RACQ, Brisbane

9. Nelson Taylor Fox Ltd. 1997. *Focus Group Research on attitudes to public transport in Gold Coast City*. Sydney.

What Gold Coast residents and visitors say should be done to improve public transport

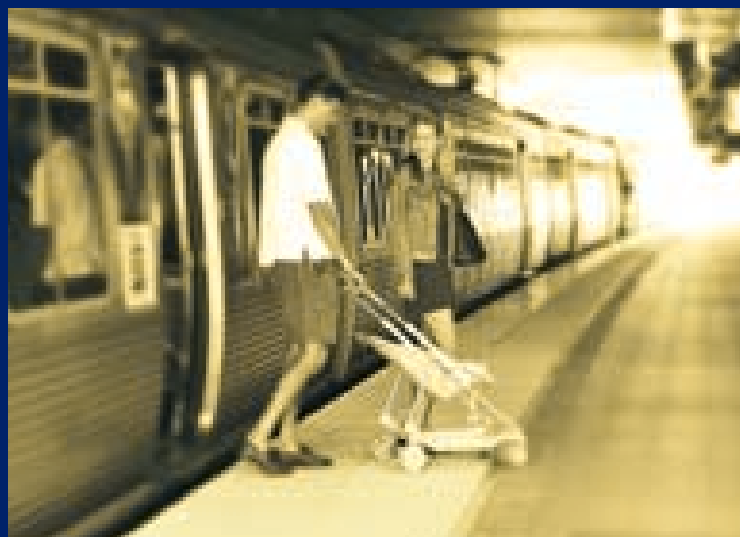
The focus groups research process conducted in Gold Coast City asked people to suggest ideas for improvements to public transport. Suggestions included:

- **MORE MINIBUSES AND MORE FREQUENT SERVICES;**
- **NETWORK OF SERVICES TO THE MOST POPULAR DESTINATIONS;**
- **MORE INFORMATION ABOUT ROUTES AND TIMETABLES;**
- **BETTER “LINE HAUL” PUBLIC TRANSPORT, PERHAPS ELEVATED TO AVOID TRAFFIC;**
- **FERRIES USING OF THE CITY’S MAJOR WATERWAYS; AND**
- **BETTER USE OF TECHNOLOGY, SUCH AS COMPUTER DESPATCHED SHARED RIDE VEHICLES TO CO-ORDINATE OTHERWISE SEPARATE RIDERS WITH AVAILABLE MULTI-HIRE VAN SERVICES.**

Residents and visitors indicated an integrated public transport system with more affordable alternatives to a single hire taxi, could reduce the need for the second car, replacing many of the drop off/pick up trips which strongly dominate private vehicle trips.

Such a system would give the intending rider a range of public transport options, depending on the time of day and the travel budget. This would fill the gaps in existing public transport services and reduce, or even eliminate, the current need of a city resident to have access to private motor vehicle to be able to fulfil their daily needs.

The concept of a high quality reliable public transport service is particularly well received by older people, tourists, and teenagers whose travel needs are not always well catered for at present.



3.6 Strategies for changing travel behaviour

To produce change, there are two pre-requisites¹⁰:

- there have to be reasons to change; and
- there has to be scope for change.

It is apparently the case many people simply do not see any reason to change their own travel behavior, however much they may be concerned about the environmental impact of motoring, or appreciate the need for system-wide changes. It is also evident that as long as cars are affordable, and road space and parking are available and free, most people will continue to drive, and public transport will remain irrelevant to them.

Given population growth predictions, the present road system will never cope with the consequences of such an attitude.

Expanding road capacity in an attempt to keep pace with rising travel demand is not consistent with objectives for a better quality of life and reduced traffic. There are also considerable political, physical and financial barriers to a major increase in road system capacity. A balanced strategy with a combination of improved public and non-motorised transport options, and measures to manage travel demand, and targeted new road construction, appears the only viable approach.



Action must begin to improve the attractiveness of more sustainable options, especially public transport. Without such improvements, “penalising” motorists by measures such as increasing the cost of motoring appears unlikely to convince them to change modes, even if these measures were found politically acceptable.

As congestion builds in the next century, measures to restrain the freedom to drive private cars, or raise the cost of motoring, may be considered necessary by the community to support public transport use and protect the environment. However these measures must be further trialed and evaluated before they are likely to be accepted by the general public.

¹⁰ Rose G. & Ampt E. 1997. Reducing car use through an individual action program. Proceedings, Transportation Research Board Conference, Washington DC.