The Gold Coast is a unique city bordered by rainforest hinterland that includes world heritage-listed national parks to the west, and 54 kilometres of beautiful beaches to the east. Characterised by a relaxed lifestyle, premier sporting and entertainment events and an abundance of recreational pursuits, the Gold Coast is famous for fun. These attributes draw people to the city from all over Australia and the world to live, work and play.

The Gold Coast has evolved rapidly over the past 50 years from a series of small coastal settlements to the sixth largest city in Australia. Our city is now home to 513,954 people and is forecast to reach almost 800,000 people by 2031. Added to the pressure placed on the city by population growth, the Gold Coast has in excess of 10 million visitors per year, creating additional demand on the city’s infrastructure.

Effective transport systems are integral to the success of any modern city – they connect us to our families, friends, jobs, amenities and communities. As we continue to grow, Gold Coast City Council must plan for the future, to enhance these connections and to protect our lifestyle. Unless we change our travel behaviour, traffic congestion will significantly affect our economy, lifestyle and environment.

Purpose of this technical report

This technical report underpins the Gold Coast City Transport Strategy 2031, which is our blueprint for the city’s transport network over the next 20 years, with a particular focus on the years leading up to the 2018 Commonwealth Games. It provides a plan to keep the Gold Coast moving in the face of higher energy costs, increasing congestion and the need for responsible financial management.

The strategy will guide transport policy and investment decisions, ensuring transport funding is allocated in ways that deliver maximum benefits for the people of the Gold Coast and those who visit our city.

Planning context

The Gold Coast City Transport Strategy 2031 supersedes the previous Gold Coast City Transport Plan 1998. Since the release of the 1998 plan, there have been considerable changes to our city, the region and the state along with other external factors that have influenced the way people live and move around our city. Some of these include:

- an increase in the city’s population by 39 per cent from 369,500 (1997) to 513,954 (2011)
- the release of the South East Queensland Regional Plan 2009-2031 (2009)
- the release of Connecting SEQ 2021: An Integrated Regional Transport Plan for South East Queensland (2011)
- review of the local planning scheme
- the start of construction on the Gold Coast light rail project
- the definition of new local government boundaries (2008)
- the announcement that the Gold Coast will host the 2018 Commonwealth Games (2011)
- external issues that influence travel behaviour, such as the increasing price of oil and higher obesity levels.

South East Queensland Regional Plan 2009-2031

The South East Queensland Regional Plan 2009-2031 provides the framework for the overall development of the region. Population projections propose a need to develop a total of 143,000 new dwellings on the Gold Coast by 2031 (about 5700 new dwellings each year up until 2031).

An important focus of the regional plan is to continue the trend towards urban infill and regeneration, and to ensure new communities are developed along public transport corridors and contain a mix of uses, like services and employment, linked by direct walking and cycling paths.

In contrast to previous decades, the Gold Coast is expected to accommodate much of its future population growth in existing urban areas. The regional plan suggests approximately 22 per cent of new dwellings would be in the major broadacre development areas of Coomera, Pimpama, Reedy Creek and Mudjimba. The remaining 78 per cent would be achieved through development or redevelopment within existing urban areas, giving a total of almost 100,000 new infill dwellings over the next 20 years.

Connecting SEQ 2031

Connecting SEQ 2031 is the strategic plan for meeting the transport challenges facing South East Queensland and is an action of the South East Queensland Regional Plan 2009-2031. Council will partner with the Queensland and Commonwealth governments to deliver transport infrastructure and services to meet the city’s transport needs over the next 20 years. Connecting SEQ 2031 establishes specific targets for the Gold Coast to increase the use of public and active transport and reduce car trips.

Working with government

The Queensland Government is the lead agency with overall responsibility for planning and providing public transport services, infrastructure, strategic transport planning, managing the state-controlled road network, and the regulation of taxi services. The Commonwealth Government also contributes funding for transport in Queensland (for example, the Gold Coast light rail project). The Gold Coast City Transport Strategy 2031 aims to align Council transport initiatives with State Government plans and strategies.

Planning our transport future together

Community consultation

Council has worked closely with the Gold Coast community to develop this strategy. In late 2012, we released the draft transport strategy for community consultation. More than 2500 Gold Coast residents, businesses and organisations took part.

What people talked to us about

- Public transport – 46% of comments
- Walking and cycling – 14.4% of comments
- Road network – 10.2% of comments
- Parking – 3.9% of comments
- Travel behaviour change – 2.1% of comments
- Other – 22.6% of comments (including general support for the strategy, personal mobility vehicles and support to commence implementation)

Consultation showed us that public transport is clearly the community’s biggest transport concern, 46 per cent were about the need for better public transport, whereas 10.2% were about roads and traffic. This strategy sets out a plan for significant improvements to the public and active transport network, as well as targeted road upgrades to ensure the Gold Coast keeps moving into the future.

Key stakeholder consultation

Council held a number of workshops with transport industry stakeholders, including representatives from Gold Coast City Council, the Department of Transport and Main Roads and specialist planning consultancies. The workshops took a collaborative and interactive approach to exploring transport solutions for the city, which helped to determine realistic public and active transport initiatives across the Gold Coast that can be implemented by Council and the Department of Transport and Main Roads.

2. How we travel today

Mode share

In 2009, 87 per cent of all trips made on the Gold Coast were by private vehicle (refer to Figure 3). Public transport made up 4 per cent of trips, up from 3 per cent in 1992. Cycling was 1 per cent, down from 3 per cent in 1992, and although walking increased slightly from 2007, to 8 per cent in 2009, it is still lower than the 10 per cent share in 1992.

Different travel experiences across the city

Travel experiences vary across the city. For example, Figure 4 shows the proportion of no car households by suburb and Figure 5 shows the proportion of walking trips to work by suburb. These data show that people living in high-density areas (Coolangatta, Southport and Surfers Paradise) are less likely to own a car and more likely to walk more than those in lower-density areas (Nerang, Robina and Coomera). This shows that in urban environments where there is the right mix of density, connectivity and quality public and active transport links people will embrace more sustainable transport options and reduce car ownership.

The Gold Coast’s outer, low-density suburbs are likely to continue to remain highly car-dependent, although there is room for significant improvement in public and active transport use in these areas. The activity centres across the city have developed more densely, providing greater public and active transport options. High-density mixed-use activity centres are vital economic drivers for the city and their accessibility must be strategically managed to ensure that they remain attractive, functional and vibrant.

Figure 3 How consultation shaped the transport strategy

Figure 3 Mode share on the Gold Coast

Figure 4 No car households by suburb (2006 Census data)

Figure 5 Percentage of walking trips to work by suburb

Around 47 per cent of Gold Coast residents use no public transport at all and are solely reliant on cars for all trips. This is comparable with the Sunshine Coast, where 50 per cent of residents identify themselves as non-public transport users. This is significantly higher than Brisbane where 30 per cent of residents identify themselves as non-public transport users.

Where and why people travel

Work trips, including business trips throughout the work day, are the most common trip purpose, responsible for 27 per cent of all trips on the Gold Coast, followed by shopping trips at 17 per cent and social/recreation trips at 15 per cent. The split of trip purpose on the Gold Coast is shown in Figure 7 2009 trip purpose - Gold Coast. Although work trips make up less than a third of all trips (27 per cent), they account for 43 per cent of all kilometres travelled on the Gold Coast.

Key trip generators

Southport, Robina and Coomera are the Gold Coast’s principal activity centres. Southport and Robina currently provide the bulk of civic, business and health services. Coastal centres such as Surfers Paradise and Broadbeach provide tourism accommodation, entertainment, retail and dining, while Burleigh Heads and Coolangatta offer an attractive beach village atmosphere. Nerang and Helensvale are key retail and commercial centres.

Journeys to work

The Gold Coast differs from other similar-sized cities in that it does not have a dominant central business district (CBD). For the Gold Coast, it demonstrates how jobs and residences are located all over the city, not focused on one major destination. The city’s structure presents opportunities and challenges: it helps balance transport trips across the entire network, but makes providing high-quality public transport services across multiple centres difficult.

By comparison, Brisbane’s journeys to work are much more focused on one central CBD. Currently, 86 per cent of journeys to work are within Gold Coast City Council boundaries, with around 7 per cent heading north towards Brisbane. Work trips to Brisbane will continue to be a major trip generator from the Gold Coast, as well as construction jobs, with workers travelling daily to the Logan and Ipswich regions.

Figure 6 Gold Coast centres network

Legend

- GCCC boundary
- Pacific Motorway
- Multi-modal arterial
- Train station
- Train line
- Principal regional activity centre
- Major activity centre
- Specialist activity centre
- District activity centre

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Results

- Work trips
- Education
- Accompany
- Social recreation
- Personal business
- Serve passenger

Figure 7 2009 trip purpose - Gold Coast

Figure 8 Comparison of Gold Coast and Brisbane journey to work trips
Tourist travel

Roughly half of all trips made by visitors are made by car (see Figure 9 Mode choices of visitors). Visitors to the Gold Coast do, however, frequently choose to walk to activities. Public transport is a popular option for visitors, with 14 per cent of all visitor trips taken by public transport (compared to only 4 per cent of Gold Coast residents). Although visitors take more than half of their trips by car, they have a low impact on total road demand. During the peak holiday period, visitors represent an estimated 3 per cent of all drivers on the Gold Coast during the morning peak period and 5 per cent in the afternoon.

The Department of Transport and Main Roads is currently collecting more data on visitor travel patterns and updating the transport planning modelling tools to improve visitor modelling, and allow planning for projects to take into account the effect that tourist travel has on the Gold Coast transport network.

Weekend travel

The Gold Coast experiences unique weekend travel characteristics when compared to similar-sized cities. The coastal strip’s beaches, shops and dining areas attract a large number of discretionary trips from residents. In addition to the high demand placed on the network by tourists, the Gold Coast attracts large numbers of day trippers on weekends from neighbouring areas such as Brisbane, Logan and Tweed Shire. As a result, a number of key roads experience traffic levels on weekends matching or exceeding the weekday commuting peak. Figure 10 Roads that experience high weekend traffic demand shows which roads currently experience these high traffic demands.

Some major roads carry up to 50 per cent more traffic on weekends at peak times compared with weekday peak times. On these roads, the weekend period can account for as much as 60 per cent of total traffic for the whole week. By comparison, peak traffic for a major road not affected by weekend travel is typically 45 per cent less than the weekday commuting peak and only accounts for about 20 per cent of all traffic for the week.

Most of the roads identified on Figure 10 experience congestion on weekdays and weekends, creating inconvenience and delay for residents and visitors. With growth in both resident and visitor numbers expected in future, a key challenge will be to manage demand and make improvements to these routes so that economic activity is supported.

Recreational boat travel

With an abundance of waterways, the Gold Coast is a haven for boating, water sports and fishing. Canals are just one of a number of water accesses and Council has a program to maintain these throughout the city. Maintenance involves the removal of problem vegetation and dredging on canal banks to restore desired profiles.

Our local waterways, canal estates and marinas have supported the development of a significant marine sector on the Gold Coast. Currently the Gold Coast has 26,992 registered boats and the southern portion of South East Queensland has 69,778 registered boats. The Navigation Channel network links together the Broadwater, Moreton Bay, the Gold Coast Seaway (Ocean) and Gold Coast Marine Precincts (Coomera and Steiglitz). It is the backbone of the local marine industry, supports the tourism sector and is significant to the Gold Coast lifestyle.
3. Our transport challenges

Traffic congestion

Traffic congestion is fast becoming a major challenge for the Gold Coast as the city grows and develops. If not addressed, congestion will cost the Gold Coast in lower productivity, poorer health and a greater imbalance of work/family life. Increasing congestion levels will undermine the attractive lifestyle enjoyed by our city’s residents and visitors. A gridlocked city is not an attractive place to live or visit.

It is forecast that the avoidable costs of traffic congestion in Australian cities will exceed $20 billion by 2020, caused primarily by:

- workers spending more time in traffic rather than at work – causing a loss in productivity for businesses
- slowing down the movement of freight as trucks fall behind schedule due to congestion.

In the urbanised areas of the Gold Coast, there is little scope for large-scale expansion of road capacity without affecting the quality of life that attracts people to live and holiday here. A balanced approach to transport investment and management is required so that people who do not need to travel by car are provided with real transport alternatives that leave room for those who do need to drive (such as tradespeople and freight traffic).

One of the most harmful effects of traffic congestion is its impact on the environment. Stop-start driving, for example, produces large volumes of carbon emissions that contribute to climate change. The Gold Coast’s natural environment – from our extensive waterways and expansive hinterland – is sensitive to phenomena like climate change. To protect our natural environment, we must reduce or cease the practices that threaten to erode its beauty by developing transport systems that move our city into an environmentally healthy future.

**Car dependence**

Car travel has been the main focus of the Gold Coast’s transport system for the past 50 years, resulting in low public transport use compared to many other Australian cities (see Figure 3.1). Public transport mode share in Australian cities (2006).

The share of trips by car increased from 83 per cent in 1992 to 87 per cent in 2009 (see Figure 3.1 mode share on the Gold Coast). Vehicle ownership rates across the city are also rising. In 2001, there were 213,118 cars registered on the Gold Coast. In 2012, this rose to 320,100 – an increase of 50 per cent. The Gold Coast has an average of 1.8 motor vehicles per dwelling (excluding motorcycles and scooters).

**Figure 12 Public transport and walking accessibility to employment**

- Gold Coast (Community and the economy)
- Traffic congestion
- Energy, oil and climate change
- Relying on car-dependent lifestyles and transport modes that are carbon intensive or use large amounts of fossil fuels exposes us to major risks in the future.
- Energy from all sources is likely to become more expensive in the future.
- A fast growing and multi-centred city

Before World War II, Australian cities were reasonably compact and relied heavily on railways, tramways and buses as the dominant mode of passenger transport. The post-war era saw some major changes, such as the increasing ability of ordinary families to own a private car. Car ownership gave greater mobility and created demand for new car-based suburbs at the fringe of existing cities. Construction of modern roads to better link the Gold Coast with Brisbane and New South Wales opened up new development opportunities along the Coast and in new inland centres.


5. ICLEI Local Government for Sustainability (2009) South East Queensland Regional Greenhouse Challenge Project Phase 2 Emissions Analysis

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