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Comments on the Municipal Strategic Statement and Planning Policy Review

The Public Transport Users Association (PTUA) is the recognised consumer group representing passengers on all forms of public transport throughout Victoria. It promotes policies for ecologically sustainable transport, and is a non-profit, voluntary organisation, with no political affiliation.

The Geelong branch of the Association thanks the City of Greater Geelong for the opportunity to make the following comments on the *Municipal Strategic Statement and Planning Policy Review- March 2007 Draft for Discussion*:

1) There is a need for stronger statements on improving public transport

It is disappointing that the draft MSS has only one sentence relating to improving public transport services within Geelong, given that the transport system plays such a significant role in shaping the form and dynamics of a city.

The sentence is also quite vague, merely saying that “there is a need to reduce car dependence by improving public transport, bicycle and pedestrian linkages” (p 20).

This is in stark contrast with the inclusion of specific road proposals on the same page, such as the statement that “the City will investigate the potential for a new east-west link road between Portarlington Road and the Geelong Bypass”.

While the City is not responsible for providing public transport services to Geelong, neither is it responsible for building major new road links. The City is, however, largely responsible for the provision of bus stop infrastructure, and plays a significant part in determining the location of stops. The location and design of stops, as well as of major new land or property developments, affects the efficiency and viability of public transport services.

The PTUA wants to see the same sort of treatment given to public transport as is given to the proposed East-West road link. The City's Environmental Management Strategy 2006-2011 (EMS) included in its objectives:

USO 2 Establish an integrated, efficient and cost-effective public transport network serving existing and new residential areas which is well utilised. (EMS p. 47)

An associated strategy action (USA 5, EMS p. 48) also states that an Alternative and Public Transport Strategy should be prepared.

Therefore, following the example of the East-West road link, the MSS should state that the City will "investigate the potential for" upgraded public transport services.

As with the EMS, the MSS should state that establishing an integrated, efficient network of high-occupancy public transport services is a priority for the City of Greater Geelong.

At some point in the MSS, the reasons why upgrading public transport is an important strategic direction for Geelong should be outlined, going beyond simply 'reducing car dependency', and including more pressing issues such as:

- encouraging and supporting more intensive development in activity centres, in particular the city centre and centres designated under the City's *Medium Density Housing Strategy*;
- reducing greenhouse gas emissions to help tackle climate change;
- providing transport services to an ageing population; and
- reducing Geelong's vulnerability to future oil price rises.

The MSS should also give some direction on the type of services required to meet this goal in urban areas, such as frequent, regular-interval services, running along direct routes, and providing services from the early morning until midnight.

The targets from the City's Environmental Management Strategy 2006-2011 (EMS p. 47), to reduce car dependence and increase use of public transport also need to be included within the MSS:

- UST 1 20% increase from 2001 levels in the use of alternative transport modes to the car for people travelling to work by 2010.
- UST 4 20% increase from 2001 levels in public transport and bicycle usage by 2010.

The City has to back these targets up with planning strategies designed to achieve them.

2) There is a need to recognise the importance of public transport to central Geelong, and vice versa

The PTUA challenges the City to find cities larger than Geelong that have strong and healthy CBDs, but lack extensive, fairly high-quality public transport systems.

We note in the MSS “key influences” on Central Geelong (cl. 21.05-1, p. 31) that, while there is a brief mention of the railway station precinct, there is no reference to any street-based public transport or the important role it does and could play in the city centre.

Given that buses are the only form of public transport access to the city centre for most Geelong residents (and should provide an important link between the station and the city centre to the east), they need to be a significant focus for the City in its aim to improve access to the CBD, alleviate parking problems, reduce traffic levels and improve links within the central city.

Furthermore, while public transport can strengthen the city centre, a large and healthy city centre can strengthen public transport. The city centre will always be the most accessible place in the City’s public transport network, and is the travel destination to which public transport holds its biggest competitive advantage. Land-use policies favouring development in the city centre (in conjunction with some restraint of cars and car parking) will support public transport and help to increase patronage, in line with the City’s EMS goal of increasing public transport use.

3) There is a need for stronger statement opposing new retail and office development outside existing or designated activity centres

To encourage the use of sustainable transport modes and reduce car travel, retail and office development should be restricted to designated walkable centres that are well served by public transport. To assess proposals for out-of-centre locations, the MSS proposes a net community benefit test compared to potential in-centre locations.

This test is potentially very weak, particularly if there is no requirement for developers to be flexible in considering alternative sites and retail formats. We presume that this was the same test that was applied to the enormous ‘Hometown Geelong’ proposal, which was approved by the City Council, only to be vetoed by an independent planning panel. One of the reasons for this rejection was the impact the development could have on retailing in the city centre, which was supposed to be protected by the City’s previous policy.

The MSS must make it very clear that out-of-centre developments should be opposed in all but the most limited and exceptional circumstances.

4) There is a need for guidelines for new urban developments outside the Armstrong Creek Urban Growth Plan Area

The same principles, many of which were taken in account in designing the structure plan for the Armstrong Creek Urban area, should also be included in the MSS in relation to other large new developments.

In particular, new subdivisions should be served by an approximately 800m wide grid network of direct arterial roads, to allow public transport to efficiently service new estates and allow all parts of the estate to be within walking distance (around 400m). The MSS should specify standards for the permeability of street layouts, to allow easy and direct access to facilities and public transport for pedestrians and cyclists. It should also strongly encourage the provision of footpaths on both sides of streets.

A public transport service plan should also be required, in order to show that existing or proposed future bus routes can be extended to serve the new area efficiently and without compromising the wider network design.

These measures appear to be supported by the EMS (p. 38), which states the following objective (emphasis added):

USO 3 All new housing estates include best practice features addressing native vegetation protection, solar orientation, stormwater quality treatment, water and energy conservation, open space linkages *and cycle/public transport connections.*

The EMS also commits the City to the following action (EMS p. 37):

AQA 7 Establish as Council policy that as part of the detailed planning for new major urban growth areas *that the design of the residential areas focuses on the provision of public transport, cycling and interconnecting with walkways and open space...*

The MSS should also state that convenient access for pedestrians and public transport must be a high priority in any new shopping centre or other similar development.

5) There is a need for to discourage further rural-residential development

Rural-residential development is of such low density that it is very difficult to serve by public transport and, because of the long distances involved, also discourages walking and cycling. It therefore locks residents into car dependency and makes those on low incomes particularly vulnerable to petrol price rises. The City should seek to limit any future development from occurring even within the designated nodes (p. 8).

6) There is a need to encourage rail-based access to the port over truck-based access for all bulk products

The MSS should state the need to prioritise rail-freight access to the port, rather than truck-based access, for all bulk products (including sawlogs). This has the potential to significantly reduce vehicle movements on roads throughout the municipality,

improve residential amenity, reduce congestion, improve road safety, and help the City achieve sustainability goals.

The City may need to take an active investigatory role in upgrading freight interchanges, or extending the rail freight network beyond the City of Greater Geelong. This needs to be another *Supporting Action* (pp. 40-41), along with working with VicRoads to investigate options for new road links, and working with 'relevant agencies' to ensure the timely construction of rail links to the Lascelles Wharf development.

7) There is a need to clarify the position relating to *Incremental Change Areas* in the Medium-Density Housing Strategy

Our comments on the MDHS can be found in a separate submission. However, we note that it remains unclear how medium density housing will be 'directed' to *Increased Housing Diversity Areas*, when it appears *Incremental Change Areas* will also be able to accommodate medium density housing. The relationship needs clarification.

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission.

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