

The Public Transport Users Association (PTUA) welcomes the Committee's inquiry into sustainable employment for disadvantaged jobseekers. We wish to make the following brief comments on issues strongly affecting the ability of vulnerable jobseekers to access sustainable employment.

Many disadvantaged jobseekers are unable to drive

The inability to drive is often the most significant mobility barrier affecting people with disabilities (Currie & Allen 2007). Public transport can offer independent mobility for many people with disabilities (Quednau 2018), however this potential will not be fulfilled if vehicles and stops are not accessible or service levels do not meet requirements.

Universal access should be a core part of transport design (VCOSS 2011), and the availability of accessible trams improved through adding additional accessible trams to the tram fleet (Bowen 2018).

The costs of Forced Car Ownership are a large burden

The 2019 RACV car running costs calculator shows that an average small car costs \$160 per week to own and operate. This represents nearly 60% of the weekly Newstart allowance for a single jobseeker with no children, leaving little money for essentials such as housing, food and utilities. While an old car would have lower upfront and financing costs than the RACV figures indicate, this may also come with higher repairs and maintenance costs and reduced reliability. Both upfront costs and large unexpected maintenance costs can leave people on low incomes vulnerable to payday lenders and entrap them in a cycle of debt (Financial Counselling Australia 2011; Walks 2018).

For some this may be an insurmountable barrier and severely limit their access to employment opportunities in the absence of usable public transport services.

Expanded active transport facilities and accessible public transport would boost access to sustainable employment

Whether access to employment is impeded by an inability to drive or vehicle affordability, improvements to the public transport network can help to overcome these impediments. This entails not only making universal access a reality, but also ensuring that services are frequent, that they operate across a wide span of hours, provide good geographical coverage and are well integrated to provide seamless connections.

Similarly, good active transport facilities (e.g. separate walking and riding paths) can expand affordable access to employment opportunities for disadvantaged jobseekers (Laker 2018; Schmitt 2019).

Both of the above measures to improve access for disadvantaged jobseekers are undermined by road-centric transport planning and investment. Transport systems based around high levels of private car use place a high financial cost on communities and thus drain funding that could be used for accessible and sustainable transport (Litman & Laube 2002). Car dependence can also be self-reinforcing by encouraging car-dependent land use patterns that limit access for non-drivers. The needs of disadvantaged jobseekers will be better served by reducing car dependence and prioritising non-car access in planning and funding decisions.

Accessible public transport has universal benefits

Lastly, it is important to recognise that a comprehensive public transport network is not of benefit solely to the disadvantaged. Just as the costs of the road network are more easily borne when spread over the entire community, so the ability of public transport to serve the widest possible range of travel needs ensures system costs are able to be recovered from a wide pool of users, including those with the means to pay full fares.

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