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An Alternative and Sustainable Transport Strategy for Geelong

Discussion Paper

Introduction

Traffic congestion in the region is set to grow at twice the rate of population growth.¹ As observed in a recent high-level report to State government, "motor vehicle emissions debase air quality. Traffic noise is a major concern. Roads have an impact on the ecology, altering water systems and changing natural drainage patterns. The toll that the transportation infrastructure takes on biodiversity is also an emerging issue of concern."²

The current State government acknowledges that "[t]he predominance of vehicles in towns and cities has led to unacceptable levels of congestion and pollution"³.

The Melbourne Metropolitan Strategy process has also revealed a significant level of community awareness of and concern about road congestion and car dominance:

[A]n OECD report ... summarising the available evidence, concluded that:

- building more roads has not noticeably reduced congestion – new road space is quickly filled. Even cities with the best road networks have high congestion levels

¹ *Metropolitan Strategy*, Issue 3, November 2001, p. 6

² Infrastructure Planning Council, *Interim Report*, October 2001, p.29

³ Justin Madden, Minister for Sport and Recreation, *A step ahead in Victoria*, December 2001, p.1

- where little or no attempt is made to increase road capacity in line with demand, cities do not grind to a halt. People and firms adapt and make other choices on mode or destination.

The OECD ... has also concluded that ... improving traffic flow eventually leads to more emissions overall as a result of the additional vehicle kilometres travelled generated.⁴

In another recent report, state government consultants note that the concept of sustainability would need to encompass the notion of "encouraging alternatives to cars for transport"⁵. They go on to observe that activity centres which succeeded in promoting a shift from the car to "greener" transport would provide adequate public transport for work, shopping and recreation trips, would establish sufficient density to support rapid transit systems, would promote mixed land uses, and would reduce the amount of car parking⁶. This report notes that activity centres in the Geelong region are "dispersed and generally lack good pedestrian access", and that "there are fewer neighbourhood centres in these areas."⁷

However, the City of Greater Geelong continues to plan for and cater to increasing motor vehicle traffic by:

1. promoting and encouraging land use practices favouring suburban sprawl and single-use zoning around urban fringes (for example, further proposed developments at Queens Park and Wandana Heights; approved development at 13th Beach);
2. spending the bulk of "transport" funding on road building and maintenance rather than on providing for travel by means other than private motor vehicles.

The Geelong Transport Strategy, which is still in draft form, refers to the need to "reduce car dependence"⁸. However, the Strategy is unable to deliver on this important and accepted goal because:

- it does not measure current levels of car use;
- it does not set any future targets for reduced car use;
- it does not set any targets for walking, or contain any strategy for walking as a means of transport in the region;
- it fails to note that the City of Greater Geelong has set targets for cycling which are not being measured and which the City has no specific plan or strategy to bring about;
- it sets targets for public transport use which are inappropriately unambitious (eg. less than half the rate already achieved in Canberra, the capital city with the highest rate of car use in Australia⁹);
- it contains no recommendations concerning mixed used zoning or other urban planning practices (beyond suggesting slightly higher urban density in new developments) which will reduce car dependence;

⁴ Metropolitan Strategy Technical Report No. 1, *Environmental Issues and their Impact on Metropolitan Strategy*, p.43

⁵ *Activity Centres Review*, Technical Report 8, Planning Melbourne for the 21st Century, Summary, p.1

⁶ *ibid*, pp.1-2

⁷ *ibid*, p.5

⁸ *Geelong Transport Strategy*, Draft Final Report, October 2000, p.7

⁹ Newman, P. & Kenworthy, J (1999). *Sustainability and Cities: Overcoming Automobile Dependence*, p.70.

- it contains no recommendations which will divert public expectations, funding or planning away from road building and maintenance and the provision of car parking, to alternative transport strategies.

Several recent events have highlighted the urgent need for an alternative and sustainable transport strategy for Geelong. The first is the recent release of a consultants' report on the traffic implications of the release of further house blocks in the Queens Park area. The consultants predict a sevenfold increase in peak hour traffic in the study area over the next 15 years¹⁰. The report also notes that *more than 80% of school children in the study area are driven to school, and that 90% of commuters in the study area travel less than 10 km to get to work, and yet 89% of them do this in a car*¹¹. Despite national and international acceptance that these are the very journeys which:

- create the most pollution,
- most jeopardise the psychological and physical health of our children (by promoting a dependent and sedentary lifestyle),
- and are most replaceable by other more sustainable transport means,

the consultants' report goes on to make a series of recommendations which cater for the convenience of motor vehicle use (eg. signal arrangements which minimise car queuing at intersections, new road treatments, etc.). The report does not recommend any targets for replacing car journeys with walking, cycling or public transport journeys.

Secondly, the recent anger on the part of Ryrie Street traders over the removal of some carparking in Ryrie Street as part of the redevelopment of the city centre highlighted the lack of an articulated vision for alternative transport in Geelong. The traders were able to hold up the redevelopment work for some weeks, and commanded a lot of community attention. Had the City had an accepted alternative and sustainable transport policy in place – one which had been worked through with the Geelong community – such a blockade would not have been necessary or possible.

An alternative and sustainable transport strategy

An alternative and sustainable transport strategy for Geelong would acknowledge that the only truly sustainable means of human transport are walking and cycling. It would recognise that:

- compared with a single-occupant car, walking uses 18 times less energy and cycling uses 53 times less energy¹²;
- for journeys not able to be undertaken by walking or cycling, public transport uses between two to three-and-a-half times less energy than private motor vehicles¹³; and
- in terms of consumption of space, the advantages compared with a private motor vehicle are a factor of 62 for walking, 16 for cycling, and up to 33 for public transport¹⁴.

¹⁰ *Inner South West Area Traffic Study*, Final Report, City of Greater Geelong, June 2001, p.v

¹¹ *ibid*, p.12

¹² Perry, David. (1995) *Bike Cult*, p.189

¹³ Newman & Kenworthy, *op. cit.*, p.78

¹⁴ Whitelegg, John (2002) *We can get rid of a tremendous number of the bothersome things of life if we put our minds to it* (paper presented at sustainable transport conference, Melbourne, February 2002), p.6

It would further recognise that a continuing policy of unrestricted car use is not sustainable – economically, socially or environmentally. An alternative and sustainable transport strategy would contain specific targets and measures to reduce car use. This would be achieved by a number of means, which would fall broadly into two categories:

- (a) reducing travel demand (via means such as better urban planning practices including mixed use zoning, urban infill rather than continuing sprawl, development of more effective activity centres, etc), and
- (b) reversing the current hierarchy of transport priorities so that planning and funding are consistently directed to facilitating the following priorities (in this order):
 - walking
 - cycling
 - public transport
 - private motor vehicles.

Benefits of an alternative and sustainable transport strategy

An alternative and sustainable transport strategy would bring many tangible benefits to the Geelong region. Among other things, it would:

- improve liveability
- reduce air and noise pollution
- reduce the overall cost of transport to the Geelong community
- improve the health of the community by raising activity levels
- encourage eco-friendly tourism
- reduce greenhouse gas emissions (and assist in meeting our commitments under the Cities for Climate Protection protocols)
- increase the whole community's access to transport
- revitalise existing city, town and suburban centres
- create a highly marketable "character" for Geelong which would significantly differentiate it from other cities and regional centres.

Supporting framework for an alternative and sustainable transport strategy

Geelong already has a number of policy documents which dictate a change in direction in urban and transport planning. To date, these policies have not been translated into appropriate action plans. An alternative and sustainable transport strategy would provide an integrated statement of targets and actions which would, *inter alia*, translate policy into meaningful action.

In 1996, the City of Greater Geelong adopted a Strategic Bicycle Plan which required the City to "actively promote an increase in cycling to 15% of all trips by the Year 2005 for environmental, health and economic reasons"¹⁵. At that stage, the modal share of travel undertaken by bicycle was 4%. Beyond continuing to implement the building of a network of bicycle lanes, the City has done nothing to meet this policy commitment. Bicycle usage has

¹⁵ *Barwon Regional Strategic Bicycle Plan*, 1996, p.42

not been monitored since the adoption of the policy, and no programs have been undertaken to encourage people to use bicycles.

In February 1999, the City adopted an Environment Management Strategy which committed it to the following goals:

- reduce reliance on motor vehicles through promoting the use of alternative and public transport (p.16)
- work in partnership with the community to improve energy use and conservation (p.20)
- lead the way in improving energy efficiency through practical application and demonstration (p.20)
- develop affordable and accessible programs to encourage people to adopt energy efficiency practices and wise resource use (p.20)
- develop and encourage energy efficient transport systems (p.20)
- create urban areas where the transport needs of the local community are addressed in a manner that minimises air pollution, reduces stress and provides for safe pedestrian and cyclist access (p.38)
- provide educational opportunities to decision makers to ensure an appreciation of the impact of decisions on the environment (p.46).

In 2000, the City adopted the Cities for Climate Protection protocols, under which it agreed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the city by 30% (based on 1996 levels) by 2010. To date, the City has not engaged in any community consultation about how to meet these targets, and has not produced any public statement about what role transport planning will play.

The Geelong Road Safety Strategy documents a number of concerns and policy directions which are supportive of an alternative and sustainable transport policy and which appear not to have been taken up. These include:

- evidence that the Geelong CAA is not a "user friendly" place for pedestrians
- evidence that the accident rate in Geelong is due, in part, to aggressive driving by Geelong motorists, and that "a campaign aimed at making aggressive driving anti-social in the same manner as drink-driving is deemed anti-social needs to be introduced"
- "[t]he emphasis to reduce reliance on the car in strategic planning policies, such as those reflected in Urban Villages and Transit Orientated Development needs to be recognized by the Strategy ..."
- [f]rom a strategic viewpoint, Council can initiate policies that reduces (sic) motor vehicle travel demand in favour of safer forms of transport"¹⁶

At a regional and state level, there are other projects and initiatives which could be incorporated into an alternative and sustainable transport strategy:

- Regional Fast Rail Projects
- Metropolitan Strategy
- Great Ocean Road Strategy
- Infrastructure Planning Council's report
- Commonwealth and State Government Greenhouse commitments.

¹⁶ *Draft Geelong Road Safety Strategy*, April 2000, pp. 29-32

Developing an alternative and sustainable transport strategy

We see the need to ensure a number of hitherto ignored factors in the development of this strategy – that is, there are things which haven't been done to date, the omission of which have led to the lack of a strategy despite a strong policy pull towards its development:

- the development of the strategy must involve all key stakeholders, including Council, State government *and the community*
- at Council level, the strategy needs to be committed to by, and woven into the work of, *all* departments of Council (including urban planning, traffic engineering, and environment)
- there needs to be a clear, public process by which the City educates and consults the community about how to implement alternative and sustainable transport (the public consultation process undertaken by Barwon Water over the past 18 months on the issue of water resources is a good illustration of an effective process)
- the strategy needs to move beyond mere policy statements about the desirability of alternative and sustainable transport (which we already have) and identify *specific targets, programs and infrastructure, and budgets and timelines* which fulfil these policy statements.

Establishment of a Geelong Region Alternative and Sustainable Transport Taskforce

Our proposal is that a Geelong Region Alternative and Sustainable Transport (GRAST) Taskforce be established. The GRAST Taskforce would consist of the following membership:

- a local State MP (to chair the Taskforce)
- one councillor each from the City of Greater Geelong, Surfcoast Shire, the Borough of Queenscliffe and Golden Plains Shire
- Public Transport Users Association
- Cycling Geelong.

The GRAST Taskforce would establish a process and a timetable for the development of three separate but integrated plans:

- **Walking Action Plan**
- **Cycling Action Plan**
- **Public Transport Action Plan.**

Each plan would recognise the unique needs and contribution of each mode, and the three plans would stand together as an alternative and sustainable transport strategy. The strong links between modes would be recognised.

The GRAST Taskforce would consult widely with the community, including:

- youth groups and agencies (eg. BAYSA)
- disability agencies
- welfare organisations
- Council of the Ageing (COTA)
- environmental groups (eg. Geelong Environment Council)

- Barwon Health
- Geelong Otway Tourism
- bus and rail operators
- Barwon Regional Bicycle Council.

The Walking Action Plan

This would arguably be the most "novel" innovation to transport planning in Geelong. Walking is possibly the most ubiquitous but invisible means of transport – ubiquitous because most people do some of it on most days, and invisible because transport planners have traditionally not seen walking as a form of transport. This is possibly because transport planning is done by middle-aged males, which of all demographic groups is the only one to make the majority of its journey by car (other groups use more of walking, cycling and public transport)¹⁷).

As a set of objectives for a Walking Action Plan, it would be difficult to improve on the following aims as articulated in the Australian Pedestrian Charter produced by the Pedestrian Council of Australia:

- create a physical, social, economic, legal and psychological context in which more Australians will be encouraged to walk more often and to walk further
- re-assert the rights and freedoms which pedestrians once enjoyed but which are now being usurped and threatened by private motorised traffic and the infrastructure that supports it
- promote the personal, social and environmental benefits of walking as a fare, healthy, enjoyable and accessible form of transport, exercise and recreation
- encourage the planning, design and development of neighbourhoods in which safe, attractive and convenient walking conditions are provided as a fundamental right
- ensure that in the planning of our community's access to basic amenities and services is not dependent on car ownership but is always available to those on foot, bicycle, wheelchair and public transport.

The GRAST Taskforce could set a process for developing the Walking Action Plan. Of all the alternative and sustainable modes, walking may lend itself most readily to discrete pilot projects. For example, funding could be sought to engage one neighbourhood in identifying actions and resources which would facilitate walking. Such a project would be a good way of ironing out an effective process as well as providing a high-publicity message about walking.

There are several Australian precedents for developing walk-friendly environments, including the Western Australian Ministry of Sport and Recreation "Towards Walk Friendly Environments: a Local Government Assessment Guide" and the Heart Foundation's "Supportive Environments for Physical Activity: Guidelines for Local Government".

The Cycling Action Plan

It is possible that existing mechanisms could be used to develop the Cycling Action Plan. The Geelong region already has a now outdated and inadequate cycling strategy – the

¹⁷ Tolley, R. & Hallsworth, A. (1997) "'I'd walk there, but ...': thoughts on the attitude-behaviour gap", *The Greening of Urban Transport*, edited by Rodney Tolley, p.138

Barwon Regional Strategic Bicycle Plan of 1996. It also has a key stakeholder forum in the Barwon Regional Bicycle Council (BRBC). The BRBC is currently considering whether and how to update and expand on the bicycle strategy. With adequate secretariat and funding support, the BRBC could oversee a consultation process which would result in a complete and up-to-date Cycling Action Plan for the region. We recommend that this course of action be considered.

The Public Transport Action Plan

Given the appalling state of public transport in Geelong, we see the development of a Public Transport Action Plan as being a clear priority, and we recommend that work commence on this immediately.

The objectives of the Public Transport Action Plan would be:

- to develop a first-rate local public transport network, integrated with the upgraded trains resulting from the Fast Rail Projects
- to achieve a fiscally responsible outcome
- to provide better value for public subsidies.

The Public Transport Action Plan would be directed by the GRAST Taskforce, and have:

- a mandate from State and local governments
- a budget of \$50,000- \$100,000 and a secretariat
- a 12 month time frame.

The Public Transport Action Plan would examine all aspects of existing and possible bus and rail (or tram) services, including routes, stops or stations, fares, ticketing, service frequency, hours of operation, information and promotion of services. The Plan would also take into account the broad directions proposed for public transport in the draft Geelong Transport Strategy.

In particular, the Public Transport Action Plan would:

- propose coordinated bus, rail and ferry services, including development of a prototype timetable
- identify and assess the cost and feasibility of up to two major projects, such as installing a light rail (or tram) service and/or reopening a rail line
- document tourism opportunities resulting from new or upgraded services
- identify and recommend urban planning strategies which support the use of sustainable forms of transport
- measure public transport patronage, calculate public transport's modal share and make recommendations on annual measurement and reporting of these indicators
- ensure access for disabled and disadvantaged members of the community.

Simple improvements such as timetable coordination could proceed in the meantime.

The GRAST Taskforce would develop the Public Transport Action Plan via a four-stage process:

- **Stage 1:** broad consultation on needs (with help from local governments and/or consultants)
- **Stage 2:** the preparation and costing of a “best practice” proposal by internationally recognised experts in public transport planning, based on "best practice" in other comparably-sized cities
- **Stage 3:** consultation on the proposal
- **Stage 4:** presentation of a final concept plan, with financial analysis.

A final note on community acceptance

Political will with regard to alternative and sustainable transport has lagged considerably behind community expectations and acceptance. This may well be partly the result of the afore-mentioned phenomenon of transport planning being largely the purview of a highly-specific demographic group which, of all groups in the community, makes the most use of private motor vehicles and the least use of alternative modes.

Evidence for community support has been documented in a number of places. Internationally, several studies have shown that transport planners are out of step with community expectations. Surveys in 12 European countries showed levels of community support of between 71% and 90% for the preferential treatment of cycling, walking and public transport use over private car use. The authors observed that "[p]oliticians and technicians are more timorous than any other groups of persons questioned, including motorists, perhaps because they confuse their own mobility requirements with those of the average citizen. But the public is in fact ready for a change of attitude from the authorities and it is the latter who are lagging behind public opinion"¹⁸.

This phenomenon was also commented on by other alternative transport experts:

... there is a reversal between what people think and what other groups think they think Thus 73 per cent of citizens are in favour of the "bike-before-car" solution as are 69 per cent of the opinion leaders. The citizens, however, thought that only 42 per cent of the opinion leaders were in favour, and the opinion leaders thought that only 30 per cent of the citizens were in favour. ... This deludes the general public into thinking that the views of a minority are in fact the views of a majority. At the same time, this minority is unaware of the fact that it does not constitute the majority.¹⁹

There is evidence that the same lag between decision-makers' attitudes and community attitudes and expectations exists in Australia as well. An Australian poll undertaken in August 2001 showed:

- 83.7% support for building more rail lines to reduce road congestion compared with just 38.3% supporting construction of more freeways to reduce congestion
- 60% support for giving pedestrians and public transport priority over cars.²⁰

These results are supported by research undertaken by the Warren Centre at the University of Sydney. The Centre studied community values in early 2001 as part of its Sustainable Cities project and found that 85% of respondents were opposed to the idea of spending on roads at the expense of public transport, 70% favoured public transport improvements being funded

¹⁸ European Communities (1999) *Cycling: the way ahead for towns and cities*, p.24

¹⁹ Tolley & Hallsworth, op. cit., p.139

²⁰ Hill, David *Urban rail can deliver*. Australasian Railway Association Inc.

from the roads budget, and 64% favoured road demand management instead of more freeways.

Closer still to home, we note the following observations of the consultants engaged in the Melbourne Metropolitan Strategy:

Strong support was recorded for initiatives to reduce or improve [sic] car usage, and increase the service levels of public transport. Initiatives to encourage walking and cycling to work also drew general support from participants. ... The participants in support of more roads and freeways were in the minority.²¹

A recent newspaper article reported on a Victorian State Government report arising out of the Metropolitan Strategy – Moving Forward Together – which noted that "Victorians want to reduce their dependence on cars, control urban sprawl and better look after the environment". Further, "residents across the state also want a better public transport system, [and]more cycling and walking paths ...".²²

Conclusion and recommendation

We strongly recommend the development of an alternative and sustainable transport strategy for the Geelong region. We believe there are social, economic, financial and environmental imperatives for doing so, and for doing so urgently. The costs of continued unfettered car use in the region are already high and are continually escalating. The development of an alternative and sustainable transport plan would not only reverse these costs, but would provide a platform for Geelong to be an urban leader on the Australian stage.

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²¹ *Metropolitan Strategy*, Issue 3, November 2001

²² "Your keys to next 30 years", *Sunday Herald Sun*, 31 March 2002