



Latrobe Health
Advocate

Accessible Transport Aspirations and Priorities



April 2024





Foreword from the Advocate

Transportation is not merely about moving from one place to another; it is a lifeline that connects communities, fosters opportunities and shapes the well-being of individuals. In the Latrobe Valley, the accessibility and inclusivity of our transport systems directly impact the lives of residents, influencing their access to essential services, education, employment, and social connections.

This report, *Accessible Transport Aspirations and Priorities*, delves into the challenges and opportunities surrounding transportation in our region. It echoes the voices of our community members, highlighting their experiences, concerns, and aspirations. From the hurdles faced by individuals with disabilities, mental illness or trauma to the connectivity struggles in rural areas, the report provides a comprehensive overview of the existing transportation landscape.

As we consider the insights shared by our community, it becomes evident that the need for accessible and inclusive transport solutions is paramount. Every journey matters and every individual deserves the assurance of a safe, reliable, and accommodating transport experience. However, achieving this vision requires collective effort, collaboration and steadfast commitment from all stakeholders involved.

The report identifies the challenges and showcases the initiatives and attempts undertaken by various organisations and community groups. From innovative pilot programs to grassroots advocacy efforts, there are shining examples of progress and resilience within our midst. These stories of progress inspire hope and demonstrate the tangible impact of collective action.

Moving forward, the aspirations outlined in this report are a guide for our collective journey toward a more inclusive transport ecosystem. Whether it's integrating planning, fostering place-based projects, mobilising community resources or enhancing safety and inclusiveness, each aspiration represents a step towards a more equitable and accessible transportation system.

We heard that the community has voiced its concerns and aspirations on many occasions, and now it is time for action. Harnessing the power of collaboration, innovation, and advocacy will transform our transportation landscape for the betterment of all. Together, we can ensure that transportation not only connects destinations but also bridges the gaps in opportunity, accessibility, and well-being for every member of the Latrobe Valley community.

Jane

Jane Anderson
Latrobe Health Advocate



Challenges raised by stakeholders

A summary of the challenges raised by stakeholders the Advocate has engaged with in preparing this report is provided below.

- Many people have had what they describe as “bad” experiences on public transport, which can cause fear and worry that may lead to them stopping work or placing additional limitations on their life. Some people with disabilities, mental illness or trauma report experiencing PTSD when using public transport. In addition to practical physical solutions to enable access to transport, there needs to be appropriate supports in place to address the psychological and wellbeing impacts of negative transport experiences.
- Public transport connectivity across small towns and rural areas is challenging. There are no flexible community transport options available; accessible flexible community transport options are urgently needed.
- The train line between Gippsland and Melbourne has accessibility challenges which are exacerbated when trains are cancelled and replaced by buses. Passengers may miss important medical appointments or become stranded in the city as buses are not always accessible.
- There is an increasing need for public transport in the area and a desire from community for linkages and connections between towns and places of interest.
- People depend on transport to enable their daily lives and access healthcare, essential services, education, employment, social and physical activity. If they cannot access safe and inclusive transport, the impacts can be significant.
- Some public transport infrastructure is aging, and some people are frustrated by unused community assets that could address community transport needs.
- Public transport resources can be difficult to navigate.
- The end-to-end journey matters. Consideration for what happens to someone when they get off a bus or train is needed. Sometimes there are no pedestrian crossings or footpath connections.
- People with disabilities are less likely to have personal transport available and many rely fully on public transport to shop for food, attend medical appointments, work or education and for social activities.
- There are not enough wheelchair taxis available in Latrobe, especially at school drop off and pick up times.
- Accessible parking can be problematic. There is often not enough relative to need, it can be misused, or inaccessible with not enough safe rear unloading options.

Opportunities identified by stakeholders

A summary of the opportunities identified by stakeholders the Advocate has engaged with in preparing this report is provided below.

- Community Connect Traralgon East tested, trialled and implemented a simplified PT bus route resource in partnership with the local bus service that resulted in a 300% increase in people accessing the service within a three-week period with 100% Myki use.
- A recent Aboriginal employment pathways program significantly increased program participation after acknowledging the transport barrier and utilising a community organisation bus to get participants to the TAFE campus.
- Tarwin Lower Men’s Shed, Venus Bay Community House and Bass Coast Community House all offer community bus services to residents with great success.
- Public housing residents at the Rose Garden estate located at Maryvale Crescent in Morwell campaigned several years ago to have an additional stop put on a town bus route. There had been an assumption that due to the proximity to the town centre it was not needed, however as this housing is specifically allocated to people over 55 this assumption was incorrect and easily remedied.
- Gippsland Disability Advocacy Inc. (GDAI) put forward a submission through the Latrobe Community Connect funding program in 2021 about the accessibility of transport across Latrobe. The submission was unsuccessful. It is bringing together local township and community development associations that represent individual Latrobe towns to discuss the importance of human connection in Latrobe and to drive whole-of-Latrobe action as a result.
- An opportunity exists for the Victorian Government to provide support and coordination to implement a cross-governmental approach and develop a Latrobe Transport Strategy. This local strategy should aim to address known and future challenges associated with access to transport in Latrobe. As part of this strategy consideration ought to be given to current and futures modes of transport including active transport, the overall geography and demographics of Latrobe, access to health and other essential services, ability to scale up or adjust the system for community events and the underlying issues that prevent some people from utilising transport such as costs, physical access, scheduling and interchanges.

A future vision for accessible transport in Latrobe

The Advocate and her office have engaged extensively with a range of stakeholders in preparing this report and identifying the four aspiration themes and associated actions.

A summary of the stakeholders engaged and key issues discussed is provided below.

Chief Accessibility Advocate

Consultation on accessibility of public transport for people with disabilities.

Department of Education

Consultation on access for students and families.

Department of Families, Fairness and Housing

Consultation on barriers to supporting clients and enabling clients to attend meetings.

Department of Transport and Planning (DTP)

Consultation on flexible local transport solutions program, funding men's sheds and funding vehicles for transporting people with disabilities.

Federation University

Consultation on equity and access, impact of student enrolments and ability to recruit staff.

Gippsland Disability Advocacy Inc.

Consultation on the needs of the disability community, pathways to inclusion and how to ensure community member's voice is heard.

Gippsland Multicultural Services

Consultation on need for connection and local solutions.

Gippsland Primary Health Network

Consultation on impact of transport barriers on health, especially chronic disease.

Latrobe City Council

Consultation on the needs of the community, ways to promote active transport, and how to educate the community on who is responsible for what.

Latrobe Community Health Service

Consultation on access challenges, expansion of the range of delivery options, e.g. telehealth, aged care in the home. More work is needed on making communities accessible for people living with disabilities.

Latrobe Health Assembly

Consultation focused on impacts of poor public transport on health and the social connections vital to mental health.



Latrobe Valley Authority

Consultation on improving public transport in the Latrobe Transition Plan.

Morwell Neighbourhood House

Consultation on needs of people with disabilities.

Public Transport Ombudsman (PTO)

Consultation on the Ombudsman's role and how this can be utilised to improve services and passenger safety.

TAFE Gippsland

Consultation on students getting to campus, accessibility concerns, and the need for funding for transport.

Transport for Victoria

Consultation with people with engagement area and the bus safety areas. Transport for Victoria is interested in ensuring the safety of the passenger, better understanding the service gaps and how to better support people with disabilities.

Traralgon Taxis

Consultation on service area and ability to meet the needs of people with disabilities.

V/Line

Consultation on safe and accessible transport options, and assessing the impact of changes that have been made.

West Gippsland Healthcare Group

Consultation on of service area and ability to meet needs of local community.

Accessible Transport Roundtable

The Advocate brought together a number of these stakeholders at a roundtable event to explore the challenges and opportunities associated with accessible transport in October 2022.

The purpose of the roundtable was to:

- Create an opportunity for all relevant stakeholders to come together to reach a shared understanding of the known issues and work that has occurred/is occurring to improve access to public transport in the Latrobe Valley;
- Understand what has enabled or prevented progress from occurring, identify what is getting in the way and what works when it comes to implementation; and
- Determine a way forward to progress past and current consultation into further action which may take the form of a whole-of-Latrobe transport strategy that is backed up by a funding proposal, implementation plan or similar.





Ideas to improve access to accessible transport

Based on the Advocate's extensive engagement with a broad range of stakeholders, four aspiration themes have been identified.

Each aspiration theme includes a number of associated actions to help improve accessible transport in Latrobe. A summary of the progress of actions to date and next steps against each theme is provided in the following pages.

Integrate planning, implement regular reviews and collect ongoing community feedback.

**THEME
01**



Develop location-specific, place-based projects to address local needs.

**THEME
02**



This theme includes actions and advocacy that relates to:

- Building a network of people with responsibilities for public transport usage and accessibility to encourage collaboration and innovative problem solving.
- Promoting and supporting public transport use and encouraging a greater community voice.
- Raising awareness of options and methods for people to raise their feedback and complain.
- Developing a local contact point for concerns and complaints and increasing community consultation.

This theme includes actions and advocacy that relates to:

- Analysing end-to-end journeys to assess how different transport modes link up.
- Encouraging conversations across Latrobe.
- Promoting learnings from other communities.
- Facilitating collaborative action between users and providers.
- Ensuring the built environment meets community needs.
- Promoting walking and riding options.



Mobilise community buses to improve access to services.

**THEME
03**

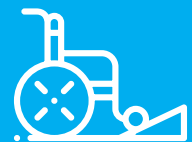


This theme includes actions and advocacy that relates to:

- Identifying community bus stock and its utilisation.
- Designing a mechanism to collate community bus resources.
- Developing a booking system for community buses.
- Encouraging inclusion of transport support in community services.
- Including transport support in grant application and service funding models.

Improve safety and inclusiveness of transport system.

**THEME
04**



This theme includes actions and advocacy that relates to:

- Encouraging conversations to develop a collective view of inclusive and safe transport.
- Designing cultural safety training, recognising that safety means different things to different people.
- Training bus drivers on more inclusive and compassionate behaviour to encourage usage by people with disabilities.
- Setting measurable outcomes that look at the end-to-end journey experience.



Progress of key actions to date

- Stakeholders consulted as part of the Advocate's Accessible Transport Forum have been informed of the outcomes and contacted to determine a convenor to drive a local network to achieve aspirations.
- The PTO has and continues to be promoted by the Latrobe Health Advocate as a key resource for receipt of feedback and complaints.
- The PTO is developing web forms to facilitate community feedback on public transport issues which were released in the 2022/23 Annual Report on 6 December 2023.
- Regional V/Line fares were capped in March 2023 to ensure it costs the same amount to travel anywhere in Victoria. The daily capped fare is currently \$10 full fare, or \$5 for concession.
- Latrobe City Council consulted with the community on the design of the Morwell Circuit - Shared Pathways Concept.

Next steps

DTP

- DTP is working with local councils on integrated transport planning including in activity centres. The Movement and Place Framework is used as a basis to ensure the best possible accessibility outcomes. A particular focus is the ongoing improvement to public transport access. DTP in partnership with local councils has identified strategic cycling corridors and priority pedestrian paths (often shared paths) to promote healthy active transport options and work will continue to address gaps in these networks.

Public Transport Ombudsman (PTO) and Federation University

- The PTO has improved the ease of lodging complaints by providing a new eForm. The PTO will continue to improve its complaint handling mechanisms by refining its collation and reporting tools and developing new ways to identify possible solutions. The aim of these reforms is to reassure people making complaints that they have been heard and that possible mitigating steps are being developed, tested and implemented.
- Federation University will work with the PTO to develop a project where it can review complaints submitted across the state with a focus on complaints from the Gippsland region. This work can be cross-referenced with work from All Aboard network, which is part of the National Inclusive Transport Network (NITAN), to gather more regional-focussed feedback, as many people have complaint fatigue and have stopped alerting authorities to the problems encountered.



Photo: P. W.
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Progress of key actions to date

- Community engagement activities in small towns have been used to collect information on any transport issues of concern.
- DTP has built an accessible pedestrian overpass at the Traralgon Station that includes lifts that enable people of all abilities to cross the rail line in the centre of town.
- DTP is investigating opportunities for local transport in Gippsland to provide additional travel options for residents.
- DTP is selling 1-, 7- and 30-day travel pass tickets to approved community service organisations and educational providers for their clients and students free of charge.
- The Regional Car Parks Fund (RCPF) is delivering 900 spaces across Traralgon, Morwell and Moe through Regional Development Victoria, together with local councils, government transport agencies and key local partners.

Next steps

DTP

- DTP is managing the Gippsland Line Upgrade, which includes major station upgrades with additional station platforms at Traralgon, Morwell, Longwarry and Bunyip. These upgrades will allow for extra services as rolling stock becomes available. Further station upgrades to improve accessibility are being considered as part of the Traralgon Station Masterplan and the Moe Station Revitalisation Plan.

Federation University

- Federation University is keen to participate in engineering research to review ramp access for standard low-floor buses to enable extendible, lightweight ramps that can be deployed to ground-/road-level surfaces. The university is aware that metal materials exist for such ramps. The need is based on the knowledge that end-to-end journeys for many people include the need for 'special' access in out-of-town locations, where people need to be picked up from the road-side or driveways by bus services. While buses may have low floors and ramp access, with no hard standing at the appropriate height the ramp is not safe to be lowered and the gradient too steep to board. Some of these buses may be small 'mini' style buses with a step entry, again posing problems for people with mobility limitations.

Travellers Aid

- Travellers Aid has been funded by the State Trustees to conduct a local six-month pilot of its Companion Service program in the Latrobe Valley to support people to attend medical services, via the public transport network. The project will recruit volunteers to provide a companion to local community members who need assistance to utilise public transport for appointments. It is anticipated that the service will be up and running by April 2024.







Progress of key actions to date

- A community-led integrated healthcare model has been developed by the Gippsland Primary Health Network to deliver services to families with disadvantaged children, including the provision of transport services.
- The Latrobe Health Assembly has determined that access to transport is a key shortcoming in parents attending appointments scheduled for their children by community nurses in primary schools and in accessing mental health services for children aged 0-8 years.

Next steps

DTP

- DTP has over the previous year funded community bus services for students to support medical access and social inclusion. These have been in more remote communities outside Latrobe City, including Venus Bay, Sandy Point, Mirboo North, Leongatha, Yarram, Lake Tyers and Lakes Entrance. These projects have been funded through the Flexible Local Transport Solutions Program (FLTSP). FLTSP could provide an opportunity in Latrobe City for any non-profit organisation to seek a community bus for more remote towns in the municipality. FLTSP could also provide an opportunity to coordinate current community buses in Latrobe where bus managers were prepared to share. If a lead was identified, then support could be provided to develop the necessary system to administer.
- DTP, in partnership with Federation University, Kinetic and Volgren, is trialling a wheelchair safety containment device on low-floor public buses in Victoria. The device is not a four-point tie down, but is an additional safety mechanism, on top of the seatbelts installed on many modern public buses. DTP has no plans for a rollout of seatbelts on public town and urban bus services. Seatbelts and four-point tie downs are available on many V/Line coaches as these coaches have fewer seats and allow longer for people to board and alight specifically to support people with mobility devices.
- DTP is reviewing the department's seatbelt policy and program fitting them onto the highest risk regional school bus routes.

Federation University

- In September 2020, Federation University participated in the Parliamentary Inquiry into the use of school buses in rural and regional Victoria. The Economy and Infrastructure Committee of the Legislative Council issued its report in November 2021. The report contained 12 findings and nine recommendations, with the government's response uploaded onto the Victorian Parliament website in August 2023. None of Federation University's suggestions which focused on strategies to utilise this valuable community resource, such as improved access into the buses, were included. DTP has advised that accessibility challenges on board school buses and coaches with stairs can be overcome in some cases with wheelchair lifts or by deploying alternative vehicles.

Latrobe Health Assembly

- In April 2024, the Latrobe Health Assembly Board approved a triple diamond project to fully explore the issues embedded in the early childhood development services analysis conducted by Ninety Mile Consulting. This analysis found that low availability of transport options or lack of convenience was a barrier to parents accessing appropriate referrals for their children.





Progress of key actions to date

- Federation University is working on two projects with DTP. One is to develop training for bus drivers to support better communication and inclusiveness, and another is focussed on improving physical safety onboard for passengers using mobility devices. A third recently completed project investigated access and use of public transport. A major theme was passengers reported feeling unsafe and vulnerable due to the unreliability of services and fear of being left stranded.
- The Australian and Victorian Governments have invested more than \$4 billion in the Regional Rail Revival program, which will deliver extra daily services between Traralgon and Melbourne.

Next steps

DTP

- DTP (in particular through the Gippsland Line Upgrade) has worked to make stations safer and more inclusive through Aboriginal artwork as an example. DTP will work with local councils to explore ways to make public transport more culturally safe.
- DTP will apply an Accessibility Assessment Tool to measure the gap in performance of and support for inclusive accessibility at public transport stops and interchanges. Gap assessments should be used to prioritise access for all ages and abilities at the Latrobe Valley train stations and important bus interchanges subject to budget availability.
- DTP's Chief Accessibility Advocate, is undertaking further research on improving accessibility and safety, including for people with and without mobility devices such as wheelchairs and mobility scooters.

Federation University

- The health and engineering schools at Federation University are working on two projects funded by DTP. The first is the development of training for bus drivers to support better communication and inclusiveness. A co-designed training program for bus drivers to improve communication, attitudes, and behaviour when transporting people with disabilities is currently being developed. This training program draws on the results of earlier studies with passengers and bus drivers on the issues that need to be addressed. The second project is to improve physical safety onboard for passengers using mobility devices. This research is developing improved safety mechanisms for people using their mobility devices (wheelchairs and scooters) that can be used independently on buses to reduce the incidences of tips and slides. Test buses incorporating these modifications will be rolled out early in 2024.









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The Latrobe Health Advocate respectfully acknowledges Aboriginal people as the Original Custodians of the land we walk on today – the land of the Braiakaulung people of the Gunaikurnai nation and passes on respect to their Elders past and present, future and emerging.