

**Submission  
No 65**

**INQUIRY INTO CURRENT AND FUTURE PUBLIC  
TRANSPORT NEEDS IN WESTERN SYDNEY**

**Organisation:** The Heart Foundation

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Chair, Portfolio Committee No. 6 – Transport and the Arts  
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Macquarie Street, SYDNEY NSW 2000

### **Inquiry into Current and Future Transport Needs of Western Sydney**

Dear Ms Faehrmann MLC

Thank you for the opportunity to put forward a submission to the Inquiry into Current and Future Transport Needs in Western Sydney. The Heart Foundation encourages the Committee to adopt a people-first approach when considering the future transport needs of this growing region.

The Heart Foundation's submission responds primarily to term of reference:

(d) Social, economic and planning impacts of vehicle dependency and poorly integrated public transport

The Heart Foundation is Australia's trusted for-purpose organisation working to improve heart disease prevention, detection, and support for all people living in Australia. Cardiovascular disease is the cause of 1 in 4 of all deaths in Australia<sup>1</sup>, with three-quarters of the population at risk of developing cardiovascular disease. Most cardiovascular disease risk factors are preventable through a healthy lifestyle, this includes a healthy diet, regular exercise and maintaining a healthy weight. Unfortunately, 4 in 5 people in Australia do not get enough physical exercise<sup>2</sup>.

Part of the reason that people do not get enough exercise is that the built environment around them is not conducive to engage in active transport such as walking, running and cycling. To help overcome this issue, the Heart Foundation has developed tools and resources for professionals to facilitate changes in planning and design. These tools and resources aid the development of built environments that encourage and support active and healthy lifestyles and can be found on our dedicated website, [healthyactivebydesign.com.au](http://healthyactivebydesign.com.au)

Urban design and transport planning that considers the health of local communities contributes significantly to physical activity outcomes<sup>3</sup>, and therefore reduced cardiovascular disease, by making walking, cycling and use of public transport, the easy choice to get from point A to point B.

### **Public transport and health outcomes**

*Public transport and its impact on health through incidental exercise*

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2020. Causes of Death 2019, cat no. 3303.0, October.

<sup>2</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2018. National Health Survey. First results, 2017-18, cat no. 4364.0.55.001. December

<sup>3</sup> Giles-Corti B et al. 2019. Action area 1: Built environments. In: White K, editor. Blueprint for an Active Australia 3rd ed. Melbourne: National Heart Foundation of Australia.

Physical inactivity remains a major health issue and is calculated to cost Australia \$2.4 billion each year in additional health costs alone<sup>4</sup>. However, there are ways to help reduce both the economic and the health costs associated with physical inactivity, and one way is to improve access to public transport as public transport is inextricably linked with health and wellbeing outcomes for individuals and communities<sup>5</sup>. The use of public transport can support increases in incidental physical activity, such as through walking or cycling to and from a public transport stop, as well as many other beneficial outcomes across social, economic, planning and environmental factors. Research has shown that public transport use can increase a person's level of physical activity by accumulating up to 33 minutes of physical activity per day<sup>6</sup>.

Providing increased provision of and improving accessibility to public transport improves population health by facilitating physical activity and leads to healthcare cost savings<sup>7</sup>. Other outcomes of increased transport accessibility can lead to increased local business support, reduced transport emissions and traffic congestion, and improved community interactions<sup>8</sup>. The investment needed in public transport to achieve health benefits can be relatively low. Research has shown that local bus services only need to carry eight or nine passengers an hour for societal benefits to outweigh the financial costs of the bus operation<sup>9</sup>.

### *Vehicle dependency and barriers to using public transport in Western Sydney*

Standing in the way of the health benefits associated with public transport from being realised in Western Sydney are relatively high levels of vehicle dependency. Vehicle dependency is amplified in low density outer-suburban communities where geography and location are already a disadvantage<sup>10</sup>. This is prevalent in Western Sydney, with continued greenfield development and reduced access to services and transportation leading to higher car dependency<sup>11</sup>, and therefore reduced physical activity.

In May 2021 the Greater Western Sydney Health Partnership undertook a staff travel survey, completed by 5,133 of their approximately 35,000 staff. Roughly 70% of respondents noted their travel time is between 45-60 minutes. Travel by private vehicle was by far the most common mode of transport (72.8%), followed by train/metro (12.8%) and bus (4.1%). Only a small minority (less than 5%) of respondents used active transport.

Participants were asked to comment on barriers to public transport use. The most frequently stated barriers were time constraints (47.3%), lack of public transport options (35.4%), too many

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<sup>4</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. 2023. 'Economics of Sport and Physical Activity Participation and Injury. Date accessed 22/9/2023. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/sports-injury/economics-of-sport-and-physical-activity/contents/about>

<sup>5</sup> Burke et. al. 2019. Action area 4: Active Travel. In: White K, editor. Blueprint for an Active Australia 3rd ed. Melbourne: National Heart Foundation of Australia.

<sup>6</sup> Rissel, et al. 2012. Key health benefits associated with public transport: a rapid review. An Evidence Check review brokered by the Sax Institute for the NSW Ministry of Health. <https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/research/Documents/02-key-health-benefits-associated-with-public-transport.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Brown, et al. 2019. Better transport accessibility, better health: a health economic impact assessment study for Melbourne, Australia. International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity, 16:89. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12966-019-0853-y>

<sup>8</sup> Heart Foundation, 2011. Good for Business: The benefits of making streets more walking and cycling friendly Discussion paper. <https://resources.heartfoundation.org.au/images/uploads/publications/Good-for-business.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> Stanley, et al. 2022. Place-based disadvantage, social exclusion and the value of mobility. Transportation Research Part A: Policy and Practice, 160: 101-113. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0965856422000933?via%3Dihub#!>

<sup>10</sup> Giles-Corti et al., 2022. 'Spatial and socioeconomic inequities in liveability in Australia's 21 Largest cities: Does city size matter?'. Published in health and Place Journal Vol 78, Nov 2022. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1353829222001605>

<sup>11</sup> WSP Australia Pty Ltd. N.d. 'Western Sydney Centres: Beyond Recovery – Great Places Leading Our Liveability and Economic Success'. Date accessed 21/9/2023. [https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0006/1782933/western-sydney-centres-beyond-recovery-report.pdf](https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/1782933/western-sydney-centres-beyond-recovery-report.pdf)

interchanges between public transport services (33%) and unreliable public transport (30.5%). For those who currently drive and were asked about factors that might encourage them to use public transport, the most frequently identified response was an increase in public transport options/services.

### *Encouraging active travel by providing secure bicycle parking near public transport*

Actions governments and others can take to encourage people to take public transport should be explored as they can increase the amount of incidental exercise people undertake. One practical example would be providing increased and enhanced secure bicycle parking near to public transport options. This is because providing secure bike parking facilities and/or the ability to transport bikes on public transport gives people greater confidence to use their bicycle as part of a multi-modal transport choice<sup>12</sup>.

Cycling to and from public transport options can be a convenient way to bridge the last mile of a journey between either the home or the office and public transport options and helps to increase the catchment area of public transport when compared to walking. However, this option is not feasible for many people as secure bicycle parking is not available and people have concerns about the security of parking their bicycle<sup>13</sup>. Research has shown that where secure bicycle parking is provided people are more likely to make multi-modal public transport choices<sup>14</sup>, and when they do, they will increase the amount of incidental physical activity undertaken.

### *Public transport and social equity*

Increased access to safe, reliable and affordable services are critical in supporting the community – particularly enhancing access for older adults, women, those with disabilities and those who are at economic disadvantage. The availability and quality of transport has a direct impact on issues of social equity as people's lives are directly affected by the accessibility to amenities, destinations and services, as well as transport affordability and options to access services<sup>15</sup>. People who cannot easily travel can face challenges in accessing healthcare, employment and education.

Social inequity arising from lack of transport options can further impact on cardiovascular health. Studies have found a positive relationship between the presence and density of public transport stops and walking across all age groups<sup>16</sup>. Increased physical activity can significantly reduce heart disease and the burden of a range of other chronic diseases<sup>17</sup>.

### *Public transport and gender*

In addition to issues of equity in transport, as indicated in the Planning Institute of Australia's 'New Planner Journal' article by Stace et. al on applying a gender lens for inclusive active transport,

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<sup>12</sup> Pucher et. al. 2009. 'Integrating Bicycling and Public Transport in north America'. Published in the Journal of Public Transportation Vol. 12, issue 3 July 2009 p79-104.

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1077291X22002569>

<sup>13</sup> The League of American Bicyclists. 2014. 'First Mile, Last Mile: How Federal Transit Funds can improve access to transit for people who walk and bike'. Report prepared in partnership with the Alliance for Biking and Walking. [https://bkeleague.org/sites/default/files/FirstMileLastMile\\_August2014\\_web.pdf](https://bkeleague.org/sites/default/files/FirstMileLastMile_August2014_web.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> Flamm et. al. 2014. 'Perceptions of Bicycle-Friendly policy Impacts on Accessibility to Transit Services: The First and last Mile Bridge. Technical Report prepared for the Minnesota Transportation Institute. <https://transweb.sjsu.edu/sites/default/files/1104-bicycle-policy-transit-accessibility-first-last-mile.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> Cantilina et. al. 2021. 'Approaches and barriers to Addressing Equity in Transportation: Experiences of Transportation practitioners'. Published in Sage Journals 8 June 2021, Vol. 2675, issue 10. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/03611981211014533>

<sup>16</sup> McCormack et. Al. 2008. 'The relationship between destination proximity, destination mix and physical activity behaviours'. Published in Pub Med Journal vol 46 Jan 2008. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/17481721/>

<sup>17</sup> Heart Foundation. 2019. 'Blueprint for an Active Australia'. Third edition.

<https://www.heartfoundation.org.au/getmedia/6c33122b-475c-4531-8c26-7e7a7b0eb7c1/Blueprint-For-An-Active-Australia.pdf>

women do not feel safe at night in public places and women's perceptions of safety have a high impact on their willingness to use public transport, especially at night<sup>18</sup>.

### *Recommendations*

- **Recommendation 1:** Financial benefits associated with the physical health outcomes achieved through access to public transport – and the costs associated with physical inactivity – should be included in any cost-benefit analysis for public transport in Western Sydney.
- **Recommendation 2:** Provide equitable transport options by ensuring walking routes to public transport stops are accessible and safe for all.
- **Recommendation 3:** Provide multi-modal transport opportunities through provision of secure bicycle parking at public transport stops and/or bicycle racks on buses.

## **Public transport for growth areas in Western Sydney**

### *Reducing car dependency in new growth areas through infrastructure investment*

In Western Sydney new growth areas are being developed at long distances from strategic centres and employment opportunities<sup>19</sup>, forcing residents to depend on private vehicles for transport. Public transport options need to provide connectivity not only within the key strategic centres, but also to provide network movements to enable those living in outer suburbs to access strategic centres<sup>20</sup>. Outer suburbs of Western Sydney that require specific attention for public transport accessibility are those of the Wollondilly Shire, Camden Council, Liverpool City, Penrith City, Blue Mountains City, Hawkesbury City and Blacktown City.

In addition, the delivery of schools and other local community facilities often lags far behind new residents moving into new growth areas, forcing children to travel long distances each day, often by private vehicle<sup>21</sup>. This creates disparity for Western Sydney residents in terms of accessibility and walkability as well as the associated personal health outcomes.

The importance of facilitating and encouraging active transport to and from school for health outcomes, including integration with public transport, is well established in the Australian and global context<sup>22</sup>. Children's active travel to school, including by public transport, includes not only physical health benefits but also improved concentration, and can also increase levels of confidence and independence<sup>23</sup>.

- **Recommendation 4:** Ensure public transport options, as well as other local services and facilities including schools, are available as new residents move into growth areas.

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<sup>18</sup> Stace et al 2023. Applying a Gender Lens for inclusive Active Transport. New Planner Journal, Planning Institute of Australia NSW Chapter p38-39 <https://www.planning.org.au/membersresources/new-planner>

<sup>19</sup> SGS Economics. 2020. 'Western Sydney Growth Infrastructure, Compact program Land use Scenario Forecasts'. Report Prepared for Greater Sydney Commission.

<sup>20</sup> Saelens et. al., 2003. 'Environmental correlates of walking and cycling: Findings from the transportation, urban design and planning literatures'. Accessed via Heart Foundation, Healthy Active by Design, Design Features: Movement Networks. Date accessed 21/9/2023. <https://www.healthyactivebydesign.com.au/design-features/movement-networks>

<sup>21</sup> Sarkar et. Al. 2021. 'New Housing Supply, Population Growth, and Access to Social infrastructure'. Australian Housing and Urban Research institute Ltd Melbourne. <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/sites/default/files/migration/documents/AHURI-Final-Report-356-New-housing-supply-population-growth-and-access-to-social-infrastructure.pdf>

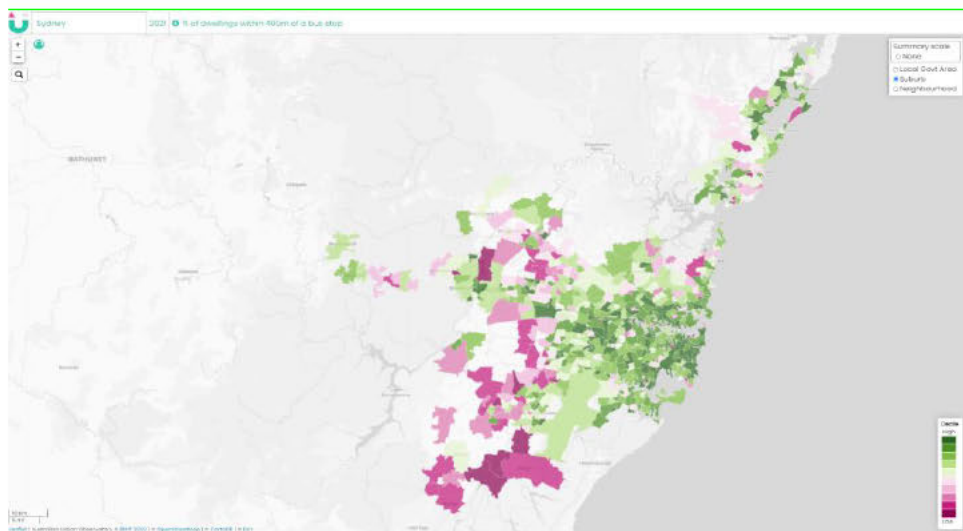
<sup>22</sup> Department of Health, New South Wales Government. 'Children's Active Travel in New South Wales: Resources for parents/carers and communities' accessed 20/9/2023. <https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/health/schools/Pages/children-active-travel.aspx>

<sup>23</sup> Department of Health, New South Wales Government. 'Children's Active Travel'. Date accessed 20/9/2023.

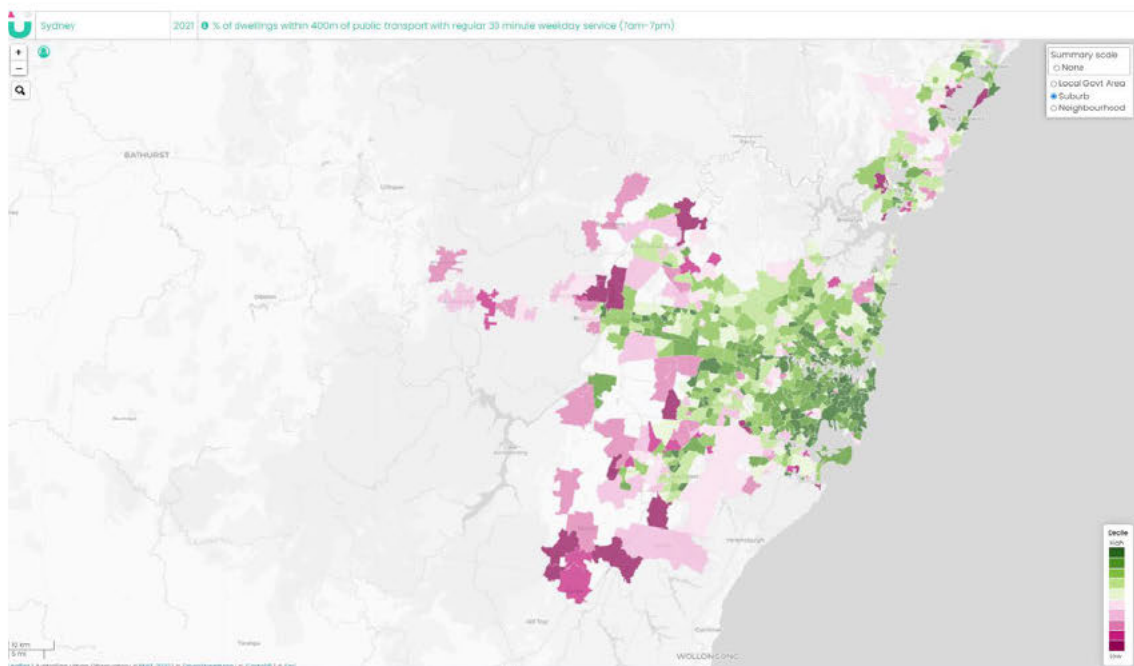
*Geographical context, existing public transport options and travel time determinants*

Access to bus services in Western Sydney falls below the levels provided elsewhere in Sydney. Figure 1 below shows the percentage of dwellings in Local Government Areas (LGAs) across Sydney which are located within 400m of a bus stop. The areas highlighted in red have a relatively lower level of bus services, and these areas tend to be focused across Western Sydney.

Furthering this disadvantage in Western Sydney are the increased distances that residents must travel to reach a public transport stop. Figure 2 below shows the percentage of dwellings within 400m of a public transport stop which also have regular, 30-minute weekday services. As can be seen, the areas in red have a relatively further distance travel and these are predominantly located in Western Sydney.



*Figure 1 - % dwellings within 400m of a bus stop (source AUO.org.au)*



*Figure 2 - % of dwellings within 400m of public transport with regular 30-minute weekday service (7am-7pm) (source AUO.org.au)*

Further to the insights of Figures 1 and 2, all eight Local Government Areas in Greater Western Sydney fall in the bottom third of Sydney LGAs when assessed for access to public transport<sup>24</sup>. Bus routes in Greater Western Sydney are often long and circuitous and, when combined with cumulative wait times between multiple connections, bus commuters in Greater Western Sydney experience trip times far in excess of the NSW Government's 30-minute goal<sup>25-26</sup>.

Travel time is a key determinant of travel mode choice for Australians. Public transport must be reliable, efficient, cost and time effective to be considered a viable alternative to car dependency and deliver the cardiovascular health benefits associated with active travel to and from public transport stops.

- **Recommendation 5:** Review and improve the coverage and frequency of public transport in Western Sydney, with a particular focus on improving active travel arrangements to and from public transport stops.

Thank you for your consideration of our submission to help improve public transport options for people living in Western Sydney and, by doing so, contributing to positive heart health outcomes. The Heart Foundation would welcome the opportunity to discuss our position and recommendations further with you during public hearings.

Yours sincerely,

Simon Cowie

NSW General Manager

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<sup>24</sup> McKell Institute, March 2022. Funding the Infrastructure of Tomorrow.

<https://mckellinstitute.org.au/research/reports/funding-the-infrastructure-of-tomorrow/>

<sup>25</sup> Transport for NSW. Vision for our Future. <https://www.future.transport.nsw.gov.au/vision-our-future>. Site accessed 19 September 2023

Greater Cities Commission. 2020. The Pulse of Greater Sydney 2020: Measuring What matters in the Metropolis. [https://greatercities.au/sites/default/files/2023-07/The%20Pulse%20of%20Greater%20Sydney\\_December2020.pdf](https://greatercities.au/sites/default/files/2023-07/The%20Pulse%20of%20Greater%20Sydney_December2020.pdf). 17-20.

<sup>26</sup> Transport for New South Wales. Routes and Timetables Information. Date accessed 21/9/2023.

<https://transportnsw.info/routes/>