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Public transport needs to go to people who need it and will use it

As a region of car lovers, we will endure almost anything during the daily commute to stay in our own personal cocoon of convenience. That's why public transport investment needs to be focused on delivering it to those who need it and will use it.

In the lead up to an election politicians promise new public transport projects. As taxpayers, we need to consider whether they will deliver the best return on our investment.

As a precursor to the Committee for Perth's Get a Move On! report released last year, we surveyed more than 2,000 commuters and what we found was:

- In the suburbs where free parking is available, the car is the mode of choice for all workers.
- Where drivers have to pay for parking – car, public and active transport are part of the commuting mix, especially at universities and hospitals.
- In the CBD, where parking is included in the salary package - car is the preferred mode.
- In the CBD, where parking isn't part of the salary package - car, public and active transport, form part of the commute.
- Professional workers, below executive level, prefer public or active transport.
- Commuters who live on the Mandurah-Perth-Butler line, who can either bus or park at a nearby train station easily, and do not have free parking at work, are most likely to take the train.
- Those who have a longer commute of over 30-40km are more likely to drive than use public or active transport options.
- People without access to a car and use public transport often make two or three changes of mode to travel between home and work.
- Inner city residents ie those who live within 5-10kms of the city, use public transport more than their counterparts that travel 15kms or more.

We know that economic activity drives employment and there are currently a whopping 204 activity centres across Perth. We also know that very few people live and work in their local communities, so most of us commute to other locations.

To complement the Commuter Survey, we also commissioned a series of one-on-one interviews to understand why businesses are located where they are and the key finding is that firms seek out the locations that meet their needs.

The Perth CBD is the capital of commerce; at the height of the boom more than 110,000 people were coming into it each day. It is the place where large corporations have established and maintained their significant branch offices and where two home grown success stories, Wesfarmers and Woodside reside.

Fremantle Port is the gateway for both imports and exports. Both Perth and Jandakot airports have significant warehousing, freight and logistics companies operating there. Forrestfield, Welshpool, Osborne Park, Malaga, Canning Vale, Wangara, Belmont, Balcatta, Maddington, Kewdale, Tonkin Park, Bibra Industrial, Kwinana, Hazelmere and O'Connor are centres of industrial significance that fuel the economy. All of these centres need to be connected by a road network that can handle both car and truck traffic.

Retail centres such as Booragoon, Carousel, Karrinyup, Rockingham, Midland, Cannington, Mandurah, Morley, Melville, Stirling, Belmont, Claremont, Dianella, Armadale, Hillarys, East Vic Park, Wanneroo and Willetton are places that offer local employment and are particularly car friendly.

Health and education are also nodes of significant activity around our major hospitals and universities and have the full spectrum of commuters from students to high-end professionals.

Not all of the above locations are equal in terms of our ability to access them using public transport. Therefore, investment needs to be made in those areas that can alleviate some of the congestion pain points that Perth is experiencing, such as in the CBD and inner city as well as locations where public transport demand is high. At the same time there needs to be ways of getting more commuters onto the existing train network by using shuttle bus connections and making adequate parking available at train stations.

Getting public transport commitments right is essential in order to ensure that Perth doesn't realise the dire predictions made by Infrastructure Australia, that Perth will be a highly congested and less productive region - a place in which our highly prized quality of life will be eroded.

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