Commuting times in Perth are getting longer and it’s not just hitting your hip pocket but also your health. A report released by the Committee for Perth found that, internationally, long travel times are linked to long-term serious health and social problems including premature death, obesity, heart disease, increased blood pressure, cancer, Type 2 diabetes, high cholesterol, mental health issues, sleep apnoea and higher divorce rates.

“Perth is now the second most congested city in Australia, there’s a 31 minute delay for every one hour spent travelling during peak periods. 60% of Perth’s population growth is happening more than 20 kilometres from the CBD and our largest growing suburbs are more than 33 kilometres away from the CBD. This means that extended travel times and the flow on health issues are adversely affecting an ever-growing number of Perth people,” said Committee for Perth CEO, Marion Fulker.

“If you live more than an hour away from work, you’re spending 19 days travelling to work each year, so it’s bound to have an adverse impact on your health.

In 2011, 28% of Perth drivers felt that commuting was negatively affecting their health and 26% believed that traffic had a negative impact on their performance at work or school.

“It’s well known that when people get stressed it increases their risk of suffering from anxiety and depression, heart disease, sleep problems and leads to days off work.”

The report also revealed the results of studies which have found that as people’s commute times get longer their physical activity and fitness levels drop, while their blood pressure rises and weight increases.

“Obesity and physical activity have been found to be strongly linked, as have obesity and vehicle miles travelled. The percentage of people in Perth that are overweight or obese currently ranges from 61% in Fremantle and Perth’s northern suburbs to 72% in Perth’s southern coastal suburbs and the Peel region, so this is something we should be thinking about” Mrs Fulker added.

“Almost 90% of people with sedentary activity levels report sitting when they commute. There’s also a strong link between the time spent travelling and a reduction in how long people spent with their family or exercising, preparing nutritious food and sleeping.

“There is also significant international evidence linking long commutes to a greater risk of depression as well as reduced life satisfaction and family and relationship problems.”

Mrs Fulker added that one research project found that if one partner commutes for 45 minutes or more, each way, they are 40% more likely to divorce and that other research has concluded that a person’s sense of happiness, life satisfaction and sense of self-worth decreases with every successive minute of travel to work.

“But commuting doesn’t have to be bad for your health. Active commuting where you walk or ride to the bus or train station or walk or ride to work improves your health significantly. In some cases cyclists and
pedestrians can achieve 80% of their recommended daily physical activity levels by active commuting.

“The problem is that in car-oriented Perth most people can’t walk or cycle to work and not everyone has convenient access to public transport by walking or cycling.

“If we can make local and arterial roads more bike friendly, the return on this investment would be significant, with ten dollars returned for every dollar spent,” Mrs Fulker added.

The report concluded that strategies to address Perth’s health-related, commuting problems can’t just focus on building more roads but:

- Allowing more people to live closer to work by increasing the supply of diverse and affordable housing
- Having high quality public transport to major employment and service centres
- Ensuring public transport keeps pace with population growth
- Encouraging employers to provide flexible work hours and opportunities to work from home

“These actions will cost money in the short-term but they have the potential to deliver long-term health benefits for the entire community and also reduce the money government spends on its health budget,” said Mrs Fulker.

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Read the full report [here](#).

The Committee for Perth is an advocate for an integrated public transport plan, their work on transport and congestion issues can be found at: [http://www.committeeforperth.com.au/advocacyTransportCongestion.html](http://www.committeeforperth.com.au/advocacyTransportCongestion.html)

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This release has been informed by research undertaken as part of the Committee for Perth’s investigative research into the Rising Cost of Living in Perth.

Previous research focuses on:
- The growing cost of life in Perth - an overview, June 2013
- Information Technology - why do Australians pay more?, July 2013
- Eating out in Perth - are we paying too much?, August 2013
- Soaring rents fuel household stress, August 2013
- Have transport costs fuelled congestion in Perth?, November 2013
- What is your commute costing you?, June 2014

The research we are undertaking to inform this investigative series is only possible thanks to the investment of our members who make an enduring contribution to ensuring Perth is a great region in which to live, work and invest.

We particularly acknowledge our Foundation Members:
Media Release: The unhealthy cost of commuting