Urban sprawl fuels Perth’s traffic congestion

Perth’s worsening traffic congestion is being fuelled by people who live in outer suburbs according to new research released by the Committee for Perth. The report found not only do people living in the Perth’s outer suburbs have higher rates of car ownership than those who live closer to the city but they’re forced to drive to work because they don’t have a choice.

“The research clearly shows that the main reason people drive to work is because they don’t have the option of catching public transport. This means that even as the cost of running a car rises and traffic congestion gets worse, unless public transport services improve, the people living in Perth’s fringe suburbs will continue driving to work. On the other hand, people who live closer to the city can choose to save time and money by using public transport,” said Committee for Perth CEO Marion Fulker.

“Perth’s metropolitan area now stretches 120 kilometres and an estimated 60% of Perth’s population are living in outer and fringe areas. Until we stop our urban sprawl, the number of cars on the road and the congestion will keep growing.”

The latest Rising Cost of Living report, commissioned by the Committee for Perth, reveals that, despite a 67% increase in fuel costs over the past decade, Perth households own more cars than ever before.

“There are up to 1.5 million registered vehicles on our roads, which is more vehicles than there are people over 18 years of age.

“Households in the outer local government areas of Wanneroo, Swan, Serpentine-Jarrahdale, Kalamunda, Mundaring and Armadale have 2 to 2.5 vehicles for every household. Running a medium sized car costs anywhere between $456 and $570 a week. The average mortgage repayment is $500 a week.

“So while people may choose to live in outer suburbs because property might be cheaper, they’re paying a lot more in ongoing transport costs. We believe that households should be encouraged to factor in transport costs when they decide to live in outer suburbs.”

By comparison, households in the local government areas of Perth, Subiaco, Vincent, Victoria Park, Stirling and Fremantle have 1.3 to 1.7 cars per household which cost them an average of $296 to $387 to run each week.

“Not only is this a sizeable saving on running costs, compared to people living further out but people in inner and middle suburbs are also more likely to walk, cycle or catch public transport to work,” added Mrs Fulker.

The Committee for Perth believes that an integrated and strategic action plan needs to be implemented to tackle the issue of car ownership and usage; otherwise life in Perth will be marred by the ever-growing economic, productivity, health and lifestyle costs of congestion.

This plan would include:

- Increasing growth in inner and middle suburban areas that are already highly accessible by
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public transport.

- Increasing the public transport accessibility of key employment and study areas outside the City of Perth.
- Encouraging more people who live and work in areas that are accessible by public transport to use public transport.
- Continually improving public transport, walking and cycling infrastructure, particularly in and around key employment centres.
- Discouraging continued growth in passenger vehicle ownership rates.

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The Committee for Perth is an advocate for an integrated public transport plan, their work on transport and congestion issues can be found at:

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. Read the full report here.

This is the fifth article in the series. 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
Souring rents fuel household stress, August 2013

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:

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