



Getting to Work

The impact of transport availability and affordability on seeking and maintaining employment.

Acknowledgement of Country

In keeping with MAX's commitment to reconciliation and respect, we acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land where we deliver our services and recognise that this land has always been under their custodianship. We pay our respect to Elders and emerging community leaders.

Foreword

Transport infrastructure is an issue that consistently dominates news headlines, government policy, and urban academia. However, the focus of the conversation is often on those in white-collar industries travelling to central business districts or regional commercial centres across the country.

The impact of a lack of affordable and accessible transport on vulnerable sectors of our community, particularly those looking for or trying to maintain employment can sometimes be overlooked.

That 1 in 2 of our customers had to quit a job or turn down a job offer because they couldn't physically get there is a hard number to swallow. This statistic remained consistent across geographical areas and other health and social factors highlighting the scale of this barrier.

The logistical and financial realities of improving transport infrastructure mean many of these barriers may persist for the foreseeable future. This does not just exclude people from the opportunity to work and lead a fulfilling life, it also impacts businesses, big and small, that can't get staff to their workplaces.

In order to address these barriers a rethink is necessary. Transport assistance programs that are scalable, respond to regional and demographic problems, and work in cooperation with industry can bridge these transport gaps in the short to medium term.



Our approach

Through this whitepaper, we provide insight into the impacts transport can have on people attempting to secure or maintain employment.

While the issues of access and affordability of public and private transport and their impact on commutes are well covered, the issues experienced by people who are out of work are often overlooked.

This paper examines the experiences and challenges of those seeking employment so we can provide the relevant support and advice to help them into meaningful, long-term employment.

By combining this with insight into how employers consider transportation links in relation to their businesses and employees, we consider what solutions might exist to overcome this significant and common barrier to employment.

We also look at some examples of regions where transportation is a key issue. Whilst we can only show a few in this report, there are examples of this in every state and territory across the country.

Customer survey research

In June and July 2024, MAX distributed surveys to MAX customers in employment services via email and text message.

The survey of 16 to 23 questions received 838 responses and asked about respondents' access to various transport options, how transport has affected their employment status and their opinions on solutions to transport-related barriers.

We also received responses from more than 300 businesses across Australia to a 16-question survey about how transport-related infrastructure factors into business location decisions. We also asked for their opinions on the impact transport barriers had on their ability to recruit staff and their solutions to mitigate these impacts.

Customer case studies & comments

We spoke to several customers who had experienced the impacts of transport-related barriers. We also spoke to several service providers involved with helping people to secure and maintain employment.

The purpose of this was to gain a better insight into the unique challenges that individuals face when looking for or maintaining employment while impacted by a lack of access to and ability to afford transportation.

Customer quotations from free text answers within the survey are used throughout this report with no attribution as the survey was anonymous.

Introduction

People looking for work can't get to work

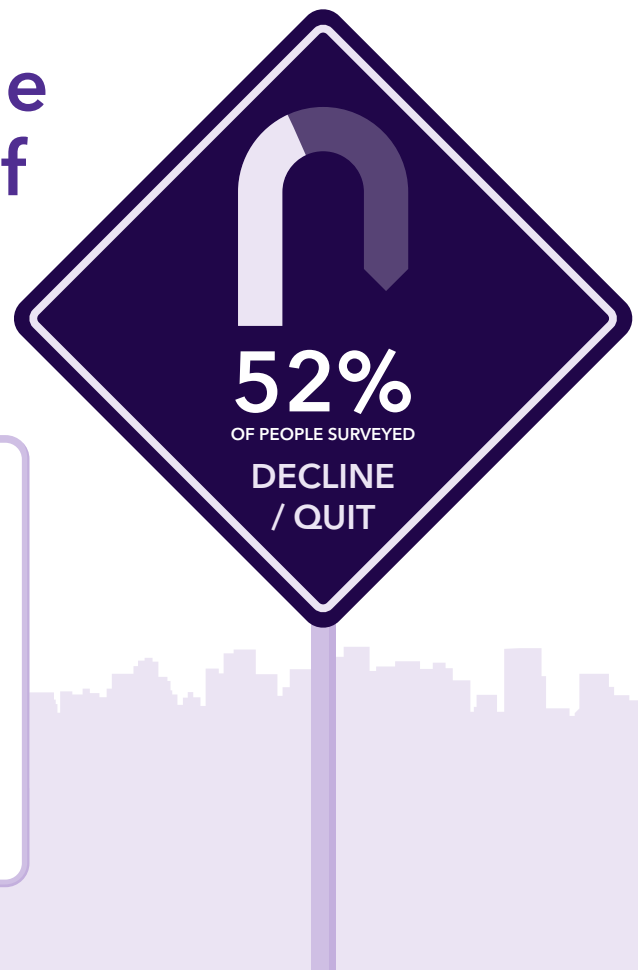
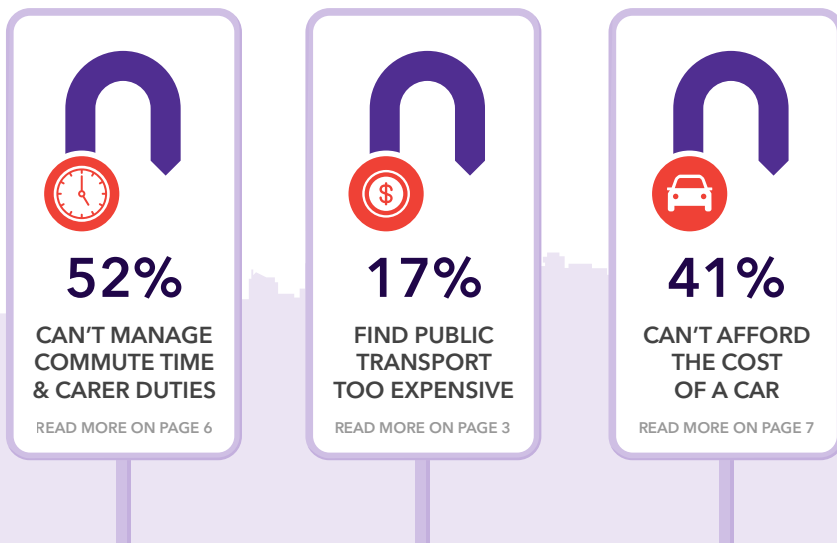
There are a range of barriers that exist for those trying to find employment. While some barriers are more problematic for certain demographics, one of the bigger impediments that cuts across demographic profiles is the commute.

52% of people surveyed for this report had to quit a job or turn down a job offer due to their inability to commute to the workplace.

This data point is consistent when we look at where respondents live. While you may expect regional or rural customers to be more affected, of those surveyed, roughly half in every geographic location had to quit a job or decline a job offer due to transport inaccessibility or affordability.

The issue of commute times often receives media attention, however, often the focus is on those who are in work and those who live within major metropolitan areas and experience issues associated with infrastructure changes. Those who live regionally or rurally and those out of work are mostly left out and their challenges are not considered.

Have you had to decline or quit a job because of the commute?



The commute matters

The overwhelming majority (89%) of those surveyed consider the commute as an important factor when choosing which jobs to apply for. This is understandable as research continues to show potential detrimental health impacts of long commute distances¹.

Despite this, 66% of customers surveyed were willing to travel 25 km or further to work. When you consider that commuting averages nationally are sitting at 16.5 km², this shows there is not an unwillingness to travel further or for a longer period of time to get to work.

For those on limited incomes, finances are an important consideration when looking for work. 44% of survey respondents noted that the inability to afford their own transport was a reason to not apply for a job and 20% noted that they could not afford public transport.

With the double disincentive of inaccessibility and financial expense on those seeking work, it is no surprise that employers are also struggling to fill vacant roles with 32% of employers surveyed finding trouble in filling vacancies in the last 18 months.

1. Commute patterns and depression: Evidence from eleven Latin American cities - PMC (nih.gov)

2. 2071.0.55.001 - Census of Population and Housing: Commuting to Work - More Stories from the Census, 2016, 2016 (abs.gov.au)



'The Commute' is one of the most important factors when applying for jobs.

Average Australian commute to work

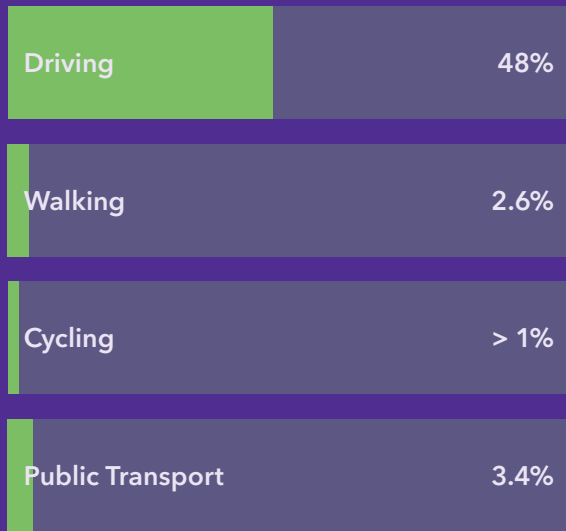
Commute 16.5 KM

People don't want to travel
in traffic every day.

56% of respondents believe that public transport does not meet their needs



Percentage of commuters who can reach work within 30 minutes¹



1. IJGI | Free Full-Text | Achieving 'Active' 30 Minute Cities: How Feasible Is It to Reach Work within 30 Minutes Using Active Transport Modes? (mdpi.com)

Public vs private transport

For the majority of Australians (56.6%), private transport is the main method of travel to get to work.²

While there are many reasons why a person may prefer private transport, there was a clear consensus from over half (56%) of our respondents that other options, such as public transport, were not meeting their needs. In fact, of those who had to quit or decline a job offer, over half of impacted respondents identified a lack of public transport as the main cause.

For those that do not have access to their own private transport, public transport may be the only option. As a result, the types of work and accessible employment available to them changes.

Recent studies have shown just how inequitable public transport is the further out from the CBD you live.

In most cities, outer ring suburbs both have the largest populations but the least access to public transport options.

Public transport design generally operates on the principle of transportation systems that ferry workers to central areas of the city from outer suburbs. But this leaves vital parts of cities and towns with little mass transit options and a reliance on private transport. Especially when suburban areas experience growth or industries operate out of areas that are not centralised.

2. Method of travel to work | Australia | Community profile (id.com.au)

“If I miss the public transport, I won't make it to work that day.”



CASE STUDY

Southwest Brisbane | QLD



For many people searching for work, the options they have can be limited by the availability of public transport. MAX customer Michael is a long-term resident of Inala, a suburb in southwest Brisbane that has been experiencing rapid growth. He has only been unemployed a few months but the lack of convenient transport options available to him locally makes finding work harder than it needs to be.

“I had a recent job that I couldn’t accept due to public transport access. I can get around fine and am willing to travel but it depends on if the public transport can get me there” he explains. “Some services only operate every 45 minutes to an hour and can take time plus they include a significant walk.”

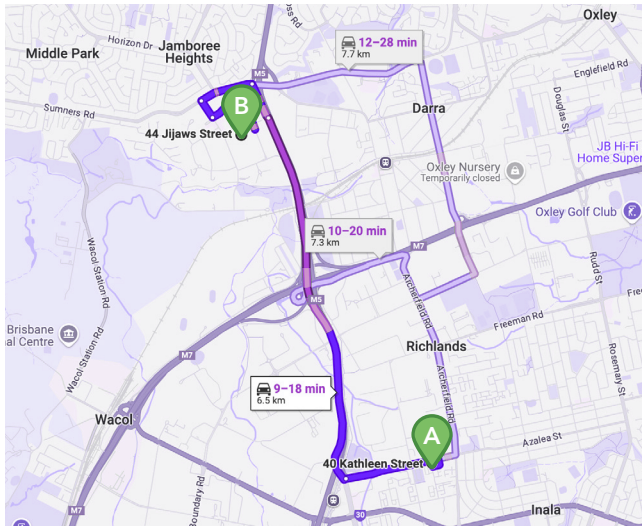
Quick facts

- > The southwest of Brisbane accommodates a population of over 500,000 people¹ with strong population growth predicted.
- > Encompasses the Southwest Industrial Corridor, a key driver of economic growth and development for Queensland with significant manufacturing, defence, construction, and transport industries.

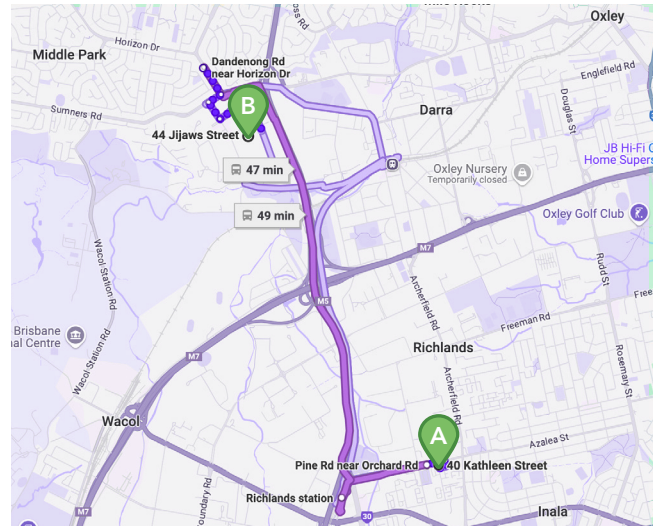
1. <https://www.abs.gov.au/census/>

Southwest Brisbane | QLD

These two maps illustrate two journeys travelling to and from the same location, two suburbs away, to get to work at 8.30am on a Monday.

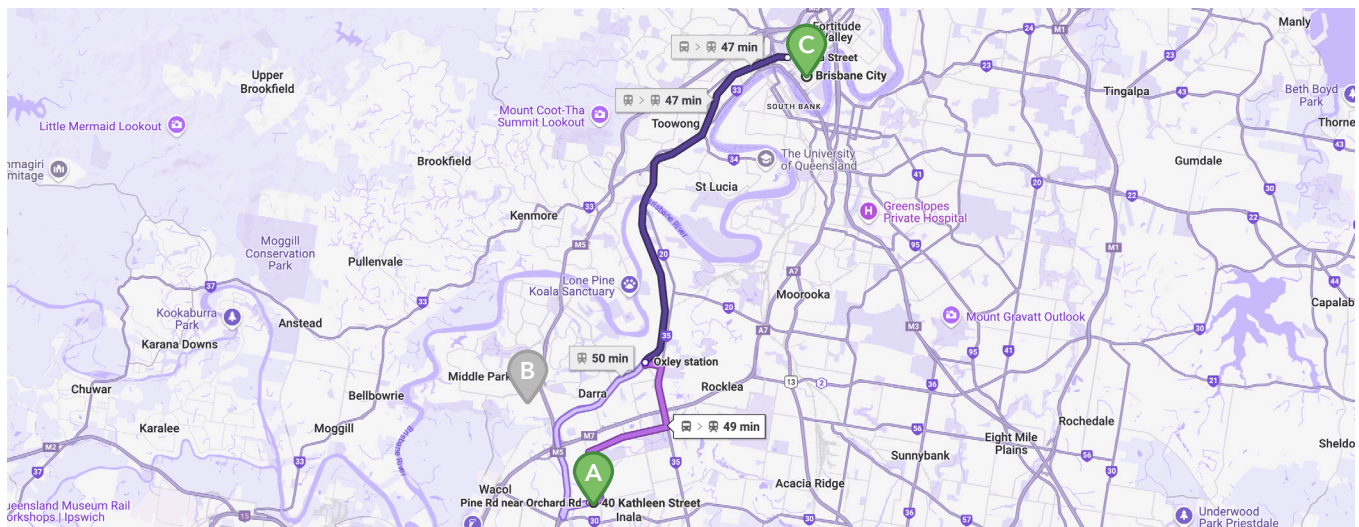


Driving 9 - 18 minutes
 During non-peak times, the drive can be as fast as 7 minutes.



Public transport 47 - 53 minutes
 Some routes require 2 or 3 transfers and up to 3 km of walking to reach the destination.

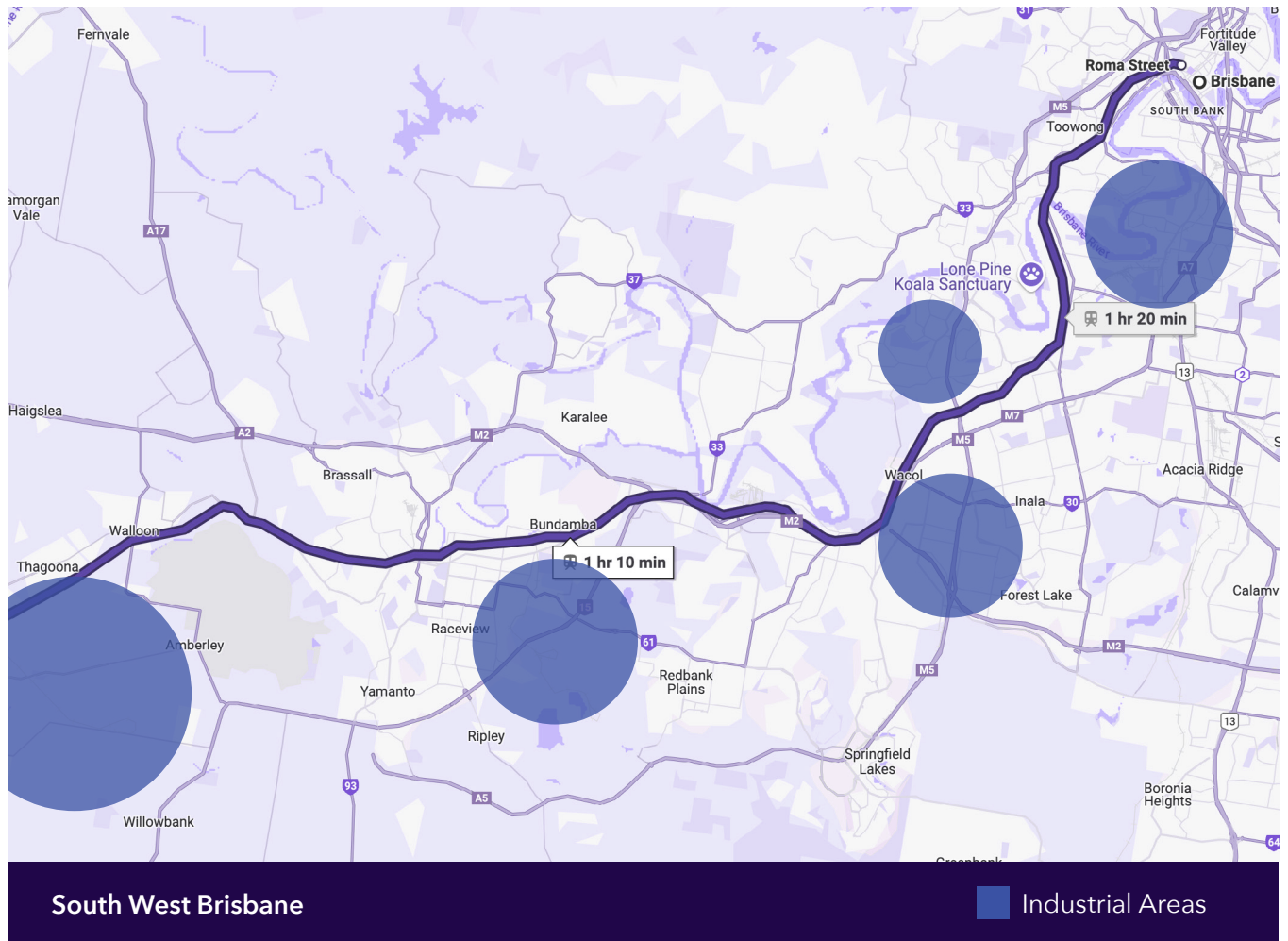
This map illustrates a journey that starts from the same location, but travels over 20km to get to work in the Brisbane CBD.



Public transport 44 - 50 minutes

Southwest Brisbane | QLD

There are major industrial zones which offer job opportunities across the Southwest Corridor that have similar issues. With populations spread out in suburbs along the rail line.



Michael's experience can be a common complaint for those living on urban fringes, particularly those areas that are growing at rapid rates such as this area of Southeast Queensland. Brisbane has some of the worst public transport accessibility in the country. Less than 15% of residents live within 400 metres of a bus stop that has services at least half-hourly. This is supported by our survey respondents with 51% claiming no public transport available was the main reason why they have either quit a job or refused a job offer.

This means for those looking to secure or maintain employment the only feasible option is private transport. As Michael confirms: "The biggest thing that would impact my job search would be owning a car." However, like many on fixed or low incomes and amid a cost-of-living crisis this option appears out of reach as well.

Public transport and disability

For those with disability, the barriers created by inadequate public transport can be more pronounced. Of those surveyed who identified as living with a disability, 48% have some form of physical disability.

Access to convenient and accessible public transport was a significant barrier for this cohort with 43% of those with physical disability experiencing difficulty accessing public transport. People living with intellectual disability or who experience general anxiety disorders may also have difficulty in accessing and using public transport.

Government data supports this with studies from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare showing only 66% of people with disability can access all forms of public transport without difficulty¹.

While there is a concerted government effort to make public transport more accessible,² it is irrelevant to those who live where there is no existing infrastructure or inconvenient transport options.

1. Public transport usability - Inclusive homes and communities
- Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (aihw.gov.au)

2. Disability Transport Standard reforms to improve public transport accessibility | Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts

I am a person with chronic pain and fatigue who uses mobility aids. I cannot always bring them with me on buses and, when I can, the areas I need to be are rarely accessible.



Don't have a licence

35% of those who responded to the survey did not have a licence and of those 37% didn't own a car. There are many reasons why a person may not have needed a licence or is unable to get one.

Those who have learning difficulties or come from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds may struggle with applications or tests. There may be physical or health reasons that exclude them from having a licence. Or they simply may not have had the financial resources or support networks to enable them to get a licence when they were younger.

The costs of trying to obtain a licence can be prohibitive for those on government payments leaving little option but to rely on support networks, if they have them, or public transport. Certain cohorts are disproportionately affected.

Of those surveyed who did not have a licence, 46% had a disability and 32% were parents or carers. For these groups, public transport may not be an option either due to a lack of accessibility or convenient scheduling.

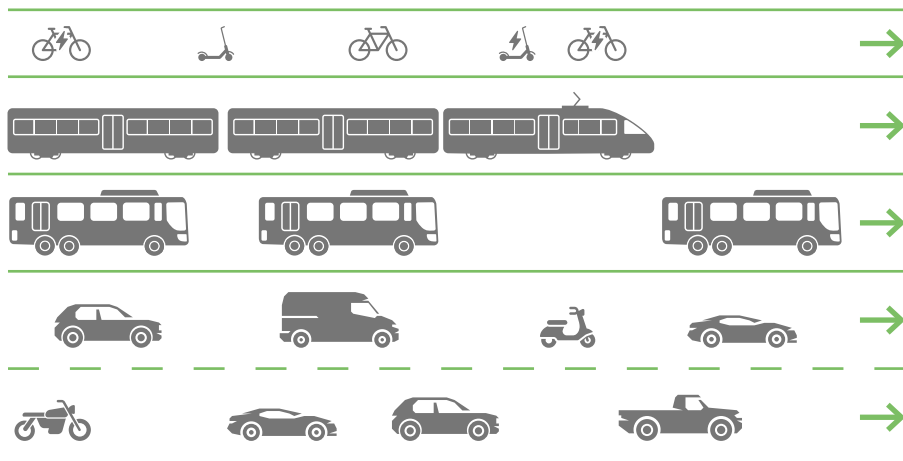
High proportions of white-collar and hospitality workers are located in the inner city and CBD. These locations are well serviced by diverse, accessible and efficient transport options. Conversely, blue-collar industries such as construction, manufacturing and warehousing are commonly found in industrial areas and are harder to reach via public transport options.

In more rural and regional areas that may have more opportunities within primary industries, it is unlikely that these jobs can be accessed without private transportation.

Where you work impacts your ability to commute.

Whilst there are a mixture of roles both inside and outside the CBD, the concentration of corporate organisations in the CBD mean that white-collar industries tend to dominate inner city job opportunities.

White-collar & hospitality jobs in the CBD



Blue-collar jobs outside the CBD



Of those surveyed who did not have a licence:

46%
had a
disability

32%
were parents
or carers

Public transport in remote regional and outer areas

60% of those who live in remote regional or outer areas said that public transport did not meet expectations for convenience and accessibility.

Infrastructure investment in remote, regional, and outer metropolitan areas typically revolves around large-scale road building to ease traffic congestion. Largely, areas with lower population densities do not receive the benefits of accessible and affordable public transport networks.

For those who live further away from cities, the issue becomes more pronounced.

50% of customers surveyed who could not maintain employment or had to decline a job were rural or remote residents. When asked about driving, 44% of the people who responded that they did not have a licence were also rural or remote residents. While the data we have collected shows a nationwide issue, those who live further out are more likely to experience transportation as a barrier. Coupled with less economic opportunity in those areas, unemployment and disadvantage can become entrenched in these communities.

Buses in my area don't run early enough (to get to work) on weekends and there is no bus on a Sunday.



52% of carers had to decline a job offer or quit in order to look after those they care for.

Public transport doesn't suit everyone

Parents and carers can have limitations on their availability based on their caring commitments. When coupled with limited resources to purchase a vehicle or limited public transport schedules it can be hard to find a job with the right fit.

As a result, 52% of those with caring commitments had to decline a job offer or quit in order to look after those they care for. Finding work that fits around school runs, medical appointments or having to share a vehicle with other members of a family can mean that public transportation is the only viable option.

However, outer suburbs of metropolitan areas and regional towns are often limited to peak hours for high-frequency services which doesn't allow for much flexibility for those who may have to factor in caring responsibilities.



CASE STUDY

Launceston | TAS



Tasmania lags on several markers of prosperity when compared to the rest of Australia. With a higher-than-average unemployment rate and older population, lower post-secondary educational attainment, and far lower median weekly incomes.

It is far more likely that an employed person is working in a job that requires reliable transport to get to work. For those who don't own a car, the public bus network which services the entire state is their only option. 2/3rds of the population do not live within the greater metro area of Hobart and while services may be available, their frequency and timing may lock many out of job opportunities.

Michael Gillman is from Kings Meadows, a suburb less than 5 km from the centre of Launceston. While there are frequent turn-up-and-go buses that service his suburb, often times Michael found that several buses were needed to be taken to attend job interviews. Sometimes it just was not viable to reach these areas, and this limited his ability to apply for work more broadly across Launceston.

Quick facts

- > There are more opportunities in customer-facing roles or those without work from home options such as health care and social assistance, construction, and retail trade.
- > Less opportunity in professional careers compared to other states and a lower number of large organisations that choose to operate out of Tasmania.
- > The Metro Tasmania bus network is the only public transport option - with a capped daily cost of fares at \$9.60.
- > Climate in Tasmania means Launceston often experiences cold, and wet weather which reduces active travel options.
- > Most expensive regional area for transportation costs in Australia.¹

1. AAA_Affordability-Index-Q2-2022.pdf

Launceston | TAS

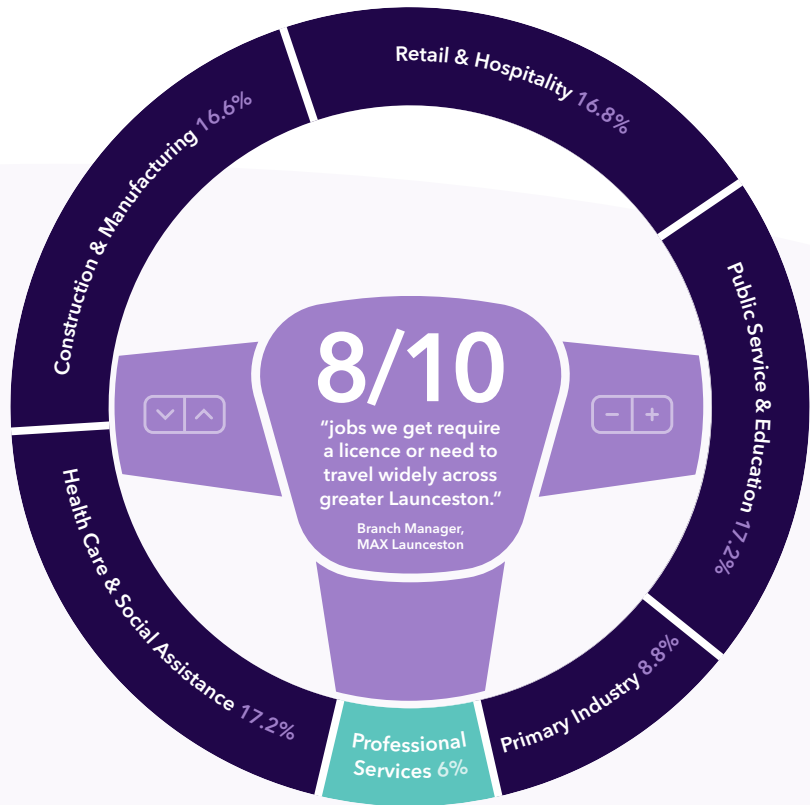
Launceston job landscape

In regional areas
over

94%

work in industries where they cannot work from home or rely on public transport.

This most likely means, most of them need to drive.



MAX Business manager for Launceston, Travis Boyle, adds there is another element that those seeking work must contend with.

“8/10 jobs that we get from employers require a licence or the need to travel widely across greater Launceston. If bus coverage is spotty in some areas, it really limits customers’ ability to apply for or maintain employment in those jobs without personal transport.”

There are however initiatives that seek to remedy this issue. Jo Kemp, a Chaplain from Door of Hope Christian Church in Launceston helps facilitate a program called Mad Wheels that seeks to provide donated vehicles for those that need it. “Ten minutes out of Launceston really limits your ability to travel,” she says. “For many of those that seek out our service; women fleeing domestic violence, larger families, those with disability, or those struggling financially, public transport can be difficult.” While this program is able to donate a car a month on average - Jo notes that there are many more waiting for help.

Without the help of programs like Mad Wheels, jobs like the one that Michael now has, which requires he visit several worksites a day, would just not be possible.

37% do not own a car



35% do not have a licence



Only 6% are able to work from home



Businesses do consider employee accessibility

Should a business consider transport accessibility for their employees when choosing where to operate?

Without adequate access to their businesses, the ability to attract the staff they need to function can be severely limited. Understandably, employers need to consider a range of factors when it comes to locating their businesses. Those surveyed had a focus on minimising their operating expenses and improving their profits as primary concerns.

However, transportation links still ranked highly as the 5th most picked option from respondents. But there is a disconnect between what businesses and workers consider as accessible and affordable public transport.

Almost all business leaders (85%) consider public transport links to their business as at least adequate, conversely, 56% of customers surveyed felt that public transport wasn't meeting their needs. Employers are doing their best to make sure their businesses are accessible, but transportation issues are impacting a viable cohort of potential employees.

Government and private industry partnerships may be a solution. Through joint investment and approaches, working together would help to mitigate transport-related barriers and create better focus on areas which are underserved through transport but have demand for employees.

The most important factors to consider when relocating your business.*

*prioritised by 306 employer respondents

- #1 Increased Earning Potential
- #2 Reduced Operating Expenses
- #3 Growth Potential
- #4 Supply Chain Efficiency
- #5 Access to Public Transport



Public transport costs

The weekly average cost of public transport nationally sits at \$46¹, however, these costs can vary wildly depending on the location and services available.

While 20% of customers surveyed identified public transport costs as a barrier to finding work, half of those also did not have a licence either, meaning their transport options were severely limited. A similar number of customers (17%) also had to quit or refuse a job offer due to the costs of public transport.

For many, it is the initial costs of getting to work in the first few weeks that can be a barrier and see people fall out of work whilst trying to accommodate the costs associated with going to work whilst waiting for their first few pay cheque.

1. What is the cost of a commute? - finder.com.au

Trying to live, pay bills and rent on Centrelink doesn't give you enough for extras such as public transport.



Private transport costs

The average cost to fuel a car was \$73.01 in 2023.¹ Combined with the cost to maintain (\$1664 annually)² and insure (\$900 - \$1700 annually)³ a vehicle, a person on limited income is unlikely to be able to afford these expenses.

This of course assumes that a person already owns a vehicle. For those on limited incomes such as government support payments, saving for a vehicle is largely out of reach.

Additionally, there are extremely limited financing options for those on this level of income. While there are more affordable vehicle options such as a scooter, motorbike, or bicycle, they might not be for everyone (particularly those with disability).

41% of customers noted that one of the main reasons they had for quitting a job or not accepting a job offer was the inability to afford a car.

While the costs above are annualised, maintenance issues or accidents that require repair create sudden situations that can throw people off track. These events can be expensive and for those that can't afford to repair their vehicle, it could mean losing their job and income.

This is echoed by our customers who overwhelmingly (70%) suggested cheaper registration and running costs as the top solution to mitigate transport issues when searching for work.

1. Fuel Consumption Survey and Statistics 2023 - Budget Direct

2. Costs of Owning a Car in Australia | Savings.com.au

3. What's the Average Cost of Car Insurance? | Simple! | Compare the Market



70% of people surveyed agree

cheaper registration & running costs

is the #1 solution to transport issues when searching for work.

Petrol is expensive which makes car ownership a challenge when combined with the other costs of keeping a car on the road.



CASE STUDY

Collie | WA



For those living in regional areas, public transport is rarely readily available. Collie, a town of just under 8000 people in southwest WA, is emblematic of this common issue that residents must deal with when searching for work.

Local Job Coach Michael Bowles says: "Over 30% of our customers don't have a driving licence. While there are opportunities available, getting to them is the problem...Mine sites are 20 kilometres out of town but there aren't any buses or shuttles to get there," he says.

For those looking for different kinds of opportunities, the city of Bunbury, an hour away is the closest option but the one daily bus only runs on weekdays and leaves from Bunbury before 4 pm. For Jesse, the lack of a licence is a real impediment to him finding work.

Moving from Perth where public transport is readily available and a licence less necessary, he found that finding consistent work was hard without being able to drive in a town like Collie. Moreover, the makeup of the Collie employment market leaves little opportunity for Jesse to find work using his IT qualifications.

"I need to look further out of town to find work, but it's hard without a licence. I'm trying to get my hours up when I can but driving schools are booked out 6 months in advance," Jesse explains. "The cost of lessons can also add up, especially when you are on limited payments," he adds.

When you consider that more than 1 in 3 surveyed who did not have a licence were from regional or rural areas it highlights how significant a barrier transportation can pose to those looking for work from these areas.

Quick facts

- > Home to WA's only coalfields and provides significant baseload power to the state.
- > No public transport and only one bus to the regional city of Bunbury (60 km) Monday to Friday - no direct route to Perth.
- > Construction, Mining, Manufacturing and other primary industries account for almost 40% of employment in the region, significantly higher than the rest of the state.

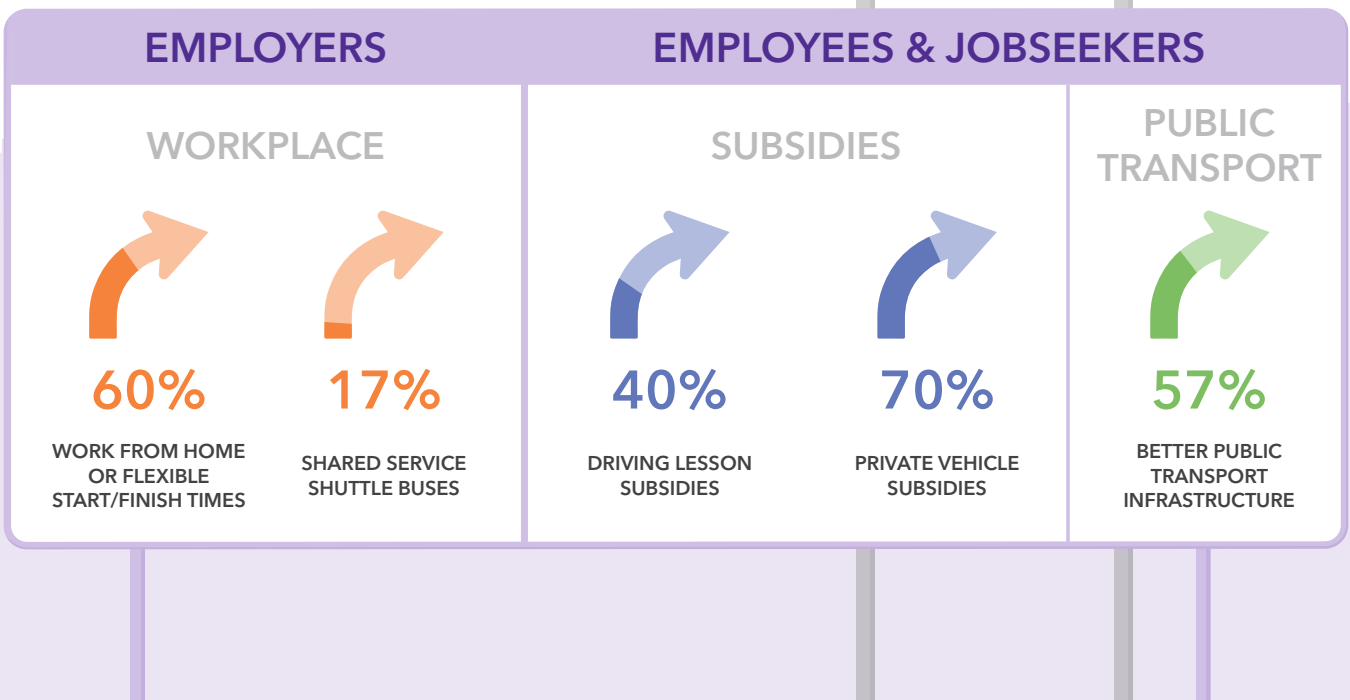
Navigating the road forward

Like any complex issue, there is not a silver bullet that will remove these barriers to employment for all.

While a majority of customers (57%) called for better public transport infrastructure, it will not remedy issues in the short to medium term. Major public transport infrastructure projects take years and cost taxpayers billions. There is significant media coverage and pressure on governments to act on these large-scale projects, but what this report aimed to uncover were more agile initiatives that can be implemented in shorter time frames, at lower costs, and which highlight transport black holes.

What can we do?

Those surveyed recommended the following:



1. Private vehicle subsidies

Cheaper registration or subsidised running costs for private vehicles received strong support from customers with 70% believing subsidies were the best option to fix their transport issues.

With a cost-of-living crisis biting, it's no surprise that this was the top choice, and, in some form, this already exists with eligible job seekers able to receive fuel vouchers to help attend work or interviews. An expansion of this subsidy could be a cost-effective solution to enable people to secure and maintain employment.

Implementing discounting or funding support for vehicle registration costs could also help people maintain their vehicles or encourage them to purchase one if able.

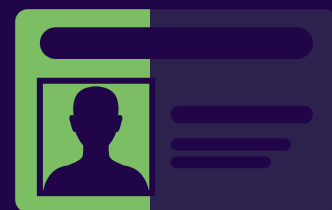
No-interest loans (NIL) are another option for people to help maintain their vehicles while they are searching for work. However, the sharp increase in average used car prices nationally, coupled with the limits of these types of loans means that those who don't already own a vehicle may not have much use in an NIL program. This may mean the expansion of funding to support larger loans.



2. Support learning to drive

With 35% of respondents not having a driving licence, it is no surprise that 40% of those surveyed also thought that subsidised driving lessons or licence cost subsidies could remove a barrier to work.

Of those without a licence, 37% do not have access to a car. This represents a significant financial barrier that they cannot overcome on limited income without assistance. But having a licence to start with is the start of the process to help them access alternative private transport.



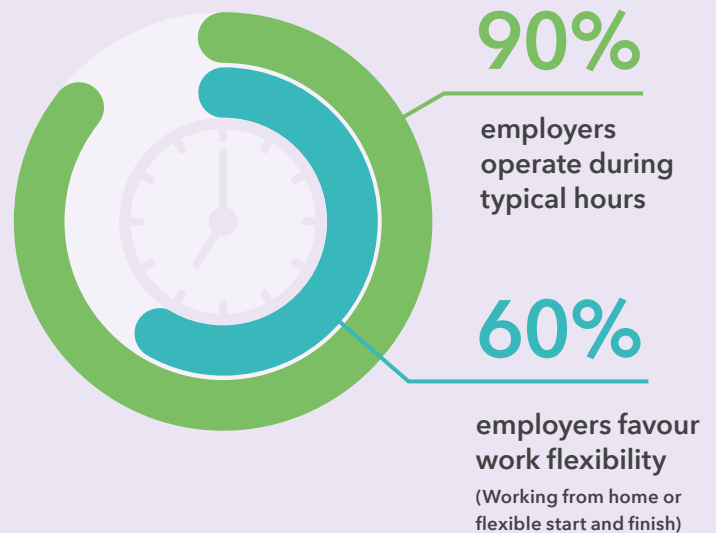
40%

of people believe subsidising the cost of driving lessons or licence fees could remove a barrier to work.

3. Flexible work arrangements

Employers too had solutions they preferred. Nearly 60% favoured work flexibility such as working from home options or flexible start and finish times. However, for the large sector of the working population that have jobs where working from home is not an option this does little to mitigate their transport issues.

Additionally, flexible start and finish times as a solution also exclude significant parts of the working population, particularly when you consider that over 90% of employers surveyed run businesses that operate during typical daylight hours.



4. Other concessions and subsidies

While concessions exist for those on government payments, it is clear from the survey responses that public transport is regularly inaccessible and inconvenient rather than just unaffordable for many of those seeking work. The success of the recent 50c fare initiative in Queensland shows the cost of public transport is a significant motivator in the increased usage of public transport.

While further subsidies may help those who are motivated solely by cost, in the short to medium term it is unlikely that many of the underlying infrastructure issues will be rectified.

That is why it's important to maintain the existing funding models such as the Employment Fund, that supports those looking for work. One of the key criteria of the Employment Fund is to address barriers to employment such as lack of access to transport. It is clear given the survey responses that this program could be vital in helping to remove those transport-related barriers.

5. Industry or employer-specific transports

Nearly 15% of employer respondents were in favour of shared-service shuttle buses where multiple nearby businesses contributed to the provision of a shuttle bus to bring workers to the area. These kinds of programs are in place in various locations around Australia and have proved successful in enabling more people to get to work.

While these types of programs are funded through state governments there is also an option for private enterprise to initiate these types of shared services for suburban businesses, or industrial hubs. This type of program also had strong support from customers with nearly 40% in support of these types of initiatives to help them get to work.

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