

Public Transport and Rapid Bus Proposals for Greater Hobart

Submission

26 6 2026

The Committee for Greater Hobart is an independent, apolitical, member-funded organisation focused on the long-term liveability and economic development of Greater Hobart, defined by lived experience from the Derwent Valley through Brighton, the central city and eastern shore, to Sorell and the Huon Valley. Our work is focused on unlocking renewal and vibrancy, and creating connected, inclusive, activated and great places and precincts for communities to thrive.

We deeply appreciate the input and review of this submission from a wide range of our members.

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The Committee for Greater Hobart acknowledges and pays respect to the Tasmanian Aboriginal people as the traditional and original owners, and continuing custodians of this land on which we gather, work and enjoy and acknowledge Elders past and present.

1 Executive summary

Since its inception, transport has been a core issue for the Committee for Greater Hobart (CFGH). Three years ago, the CFGH convened a workshop with young voices from across Greater Hobart which identified transport as a clear priority to be addressed. CFGH actively supports the continued development of transport strategy and solutions that centre access to services and opportunity for all in our community.

The CFGH supports the finding of the Greater Hobart Rapid Bus Network Strategic Business Case that a rapid, frequent and reliable bus network across the northern, southern and eastern corridors is the most cost-effective and deliverable backbone for the region's public transport future.¹

However, the rapid bus network will only deliver on its promise if it is funded and built as part of a clear public transport policy and strategy for Greater Hobart, not as a standalone project.

Consideration needs to be given to the service standards the whole network is held to; how rapid buses, the wider bus network, ferries and active transport function as one system; how land use is sequenced around it; how it is operated and funded; and how today's once-in-a-generation mode shift is locked in.

Without a broader consideration of the strategic issues, there is a risk that initiatives such as the rapid network, fare-free travel, new ferries and the Greater Hobart Bus Network Review will start pulling in different directions.

Land use and density, deliverable staging, mode shift, a collaborative operating and planning model, safety, technology choices, and universal access all need to be considered by the strategy.

Underpinning all of this is the need for clear accountability and governance. The model to move this critical investment and transformation forward needs to set a clear, accountable strategic direction for the system, while proactively engaging and harnessing the expertise and capabilities of service operators. A balance of firm direction and genuine collaboration will provide a positive signal to investors and funding partners and create confidence to commit.

This is critical not just for transforming transport but as one of the most powerful levers Greater Hobart has for unlocking renewal, infill development and opportunity. This investment has the opportunity to help shape where people live, how the region grows and adapts, and whether that growth is genuinely connected.

2 Public transport strategy for Greater Hobart

Greater Hobart is making a series of major, interconnected public transport decisions such as fare-free travel, the Greater Hobart Bus Network Review, new ferry terminals and now the rapid bus business case.

We acknowledge this is not happening in a vacuum as there have been a considerable number of strategies and projects investigating these issues. The Southern Tasmanian Regional Land Use Strategy (STRLUS) and the Greater Hobart Committee's 30-Year Greater Hobart Plan, with its Strategy for Growth and Change and Implementation Plan, offer spatial growth and land use planning frameworks to varying degrees for part or the whole region.⁸ The City of Hobart maintains a Transport Strategy 2018–2030.⁹ The Tasmanian Government's Keeping Hobart Moving Draft sets out a ten-year-plus program of transport projects,¹⁰ the Hobart City Deal intersects with the delivery, and earlier background work catalogued the many existing transport policies and strategies across the region.¹¹

The difficulty is not an absence of plans or thinking, but the absence of one that binds them. These are many genuine attempts to draw different parts of the picture together however, lacking is an overarching published public transport governance, policy and strategy for Greater Hobart that sets network-wide service standards, integrates the modes and fares, and is consistently delivered against and monitored over time.

The 30-Year Plan itself makes this point: it identifies that 'comprehensive integrated transport planning is required for Greater Hobart' and lists a coordinated transport plan among the actions still to be delivered.⁸ The City of Hobart's strategy reaches only as far as one council's responsibilities and the Keeping Hobart Moving is a still-draft program of projects rather than a policy-and-service framework. Public transport and the rapid bus network needs a connective, governing strategy and should be assessed, funded and staged as the flagship project of a metropolitan public transport strategy for Greater Hobart, itself nested within a clear state-wide public transport policy.

The strategy should help frame and set the service standards with the community including frequency, span of hours, reliability and accessibility that services should meet. It would define how rapid buses, the wider network, ferries and active transport operate as one integrated system rather than competing parts, with fares and timetables to match. It would sequence land use and investment together. This would give operators, councils, developers and the community a settled direction, and the certainty that underpins both private investment confidence and disciplined public spending.

It would also place fare policy on a deliberate footing. Fare-free travel is currently funded in an ad hoc manner as cost-of-living relief when deemed necessary; whether, and how, it endures is a strategic question with direct consequences for patronage, revenue and network design, and it should be decided within the strategy rather than around it or after it.

This approach has strong precedent among peer organisations. The Committee for Sydney's Plan B: Better Buses for Sydney (2024)² argues that bus planning has too often been treated apologetically, accepting service levels for buses, such as half-hourly off-peak running, that would never be tolerated in rail or metro jurisdictions and calls for a clearly defined and published bus hierarchy with explicit service standards (frequency, span of hours, priority and stop spacing

for each tier), sitting beneath long-term transport and land-use strategy and reviewed on a regular cycle. The same discipline should anchor a Greater Hobart strategy: published standards that the whole network is held to, so that quality does not default to whatever is cheapest to run.

Recommendation: develop and publish a public transport policy and strategy for Greater Hobart with explicit network service standards, a fares framework and an integration framework, nested within state-wide policy, and assess, fund and stage the rapid bus network as its flagship project.

3 Transport and land use

The decisions that determine whether this investment succeeds are, in large part, land-use decisions. Rapid transit and land use are a single system: corridors and stations are the armature around which housing, jobs and services can be organised. The international evidence is consistent: rapid transit returns most where it is co-located with, and sequenced ahead of, intensification. Auckland now plans explicitly to provide rapid transit ahead of growth so that development can be targeted to where the infrastructure already exists.³

This matters given Hobart's housing supply and affordability pressures and the live conversation about gentle density and the 'missing middle.' The potential rapid corridors, the northern suburbs in particular, are exactly where transit-supported density should be enabled. The strategy should therefore align corridor, planning controls and development sequencing with the Southern Tasmania Regional Land Use Strategy.

At the same time, a rationalised rapid bus proposal must retain sufficient suburban coverage to address one of the key barriers to rapid transit uptake: the first and last kilometre. Rapid corridors will only succeed if local feeder, connector and coverage services allow people to access them conveniently, safely and reliably, particularly in lower-density suburban areas where walking distance, topography and accessibility constraints can otherwise suppress patronage.

The Committee for Sydney's Plan B reinforces the point: it urges that transit-oriented development reach beyond rail to bus corridors and hubs, that strategic bus hubs be created within the Transit Oriented Development (TOD) program, and that new developments be served by frequent buses from day one rather than years after residents arrive.² Sequencing services and density together, and at the same time, should be a design rule for Greater Hobart's corridors.

4 Setting the project up for success: viable staging and corridor selection

A network delivered over ten to fifteen years lives or dies on the credibility of its first stage. Setting the project up for success means a stage one that is genuinely deliverable, visibly better than today, and quick enough to build patronage and momentum for what follows.

We therefore encourage Government to begin where the enabling conditions already exist, where available infrastructure and road reservation allow rapid, congestion-free running to be implemented well, without first resolving the most complex or contested works. The Hobart to

Moonah section is a strong candidate: established corridor, dense city-adjacent catchment, and an early, tangible proof point that converts today's patronage surge into demonstrated success.

Alignment should be chosen to maximise access, the size and diversity of catchment, and the destinations, employment, education and interchanges connected and to support current and future activation and amenity. A corridor chosen for engineering convenience can deliver a fast bus to the wrong places; one chosen for access and activation delivers a city-shaping asset.

The Committee for Sydney's Plan B offers two lessons that bear directly on how we stage. First, a rapid network should be business-cased as a whole rather than route by route, because a single route delivers far less value than the integrated network of which it forms part, even as physical delivery proceeds in stages. Second, and more cautionary, Sydney's 2013 bus strategy reached the business-case stage for a rapid network but was never implemented; their clear conclusion is that implementation, not planning, has been the binding constraint.² Greater Hobart should plan the network as a whole, stage delivery deliberately, and treat a credible, funded delivery path as part of the business case itself.

Corridor selection should also consider broader network integration and impacts. The rapid bus corridors will operate as part of the wider movement network, not as isolated links, and should be assessed for how realistically they interact with local bus services, walking and cycling movements, general traffic, freight, intersections, kerbside activity and access to adjoining precincts.

The objective should be to improve public transport corridor efficiency overall by giving buses a reliable travel-time advantage while maintaining safe and legible operation for all users. This means identifying where priority treatments can be delivered without simply transferring delay, safety risk or access constraints elsewhere in the network, and where complementary changes such as grade separation, intersection priority, stop rationalisation, access management, active transport connections and local network adjustments are needed to make the corridor function as intended.

Recommendation: stage the rapid bus network to deliver a credible, high-performing first corridor, while selecting and assessing corridors as part of the broader transport network so that bus priority improves corridor efficiency, integrates safely with local buses, walking, cycling, freight, general traffic and adjacent precincts, and does not transfer delay, safety risk or access constraints elsewhere.

5 Locking in the mode shift

Greater Hobart is in the middle of a behavioural shift most cities only hope for as since fare-free travel began in March 2026, patronage has risen sharply. The Government reports an uptick of more than 35 per cent on Metro and around 45 per cent on Kinetic and the 2026–27 Budget has extended it to 30 June 2027.⁴ Rising fuel costs have reinforced the trend, and the growth is concentrated in the commuter peaks the rapid network is built to serve.

Fare-free travel removes the price barrier; it does not, however, deliver the frequency, speed and reliability that turns a cost-of-living response into a permanent change in how the city moves. The risk is potentially asymmetric. If the rapid network and a near-term service uplift arrive in

time, today's patronage becomes a durable new baseline; if they lag, the marginal riders return to their cars and are far harder to win back. The staging therefore carries the central risk: the strategy must lift the quality of the everyday network now, in parallel with the long-lead infrastructure, so the window is not lost.

There is good evidence that rapid bus investment itself shifts behaviour. The Committee for Sydney reports that Sydney's B-Line rapid service drove a 22 per cent rise in bus patronage and a 5 per cent shift away from private cars. Plan B also makes the investment case plainly: buses are the most cost-effective public transport mode, far cheaper and faster to deliver than rail, and because they are not fixed in place, can be re-routed and re-networked as a city grows.² For Greater Hobart this reinforces the logic of consolidating the current gain: rapid bus is the highest-leverage, lowest-regret investment available to lock in mode shift.

The fiscal logic reinforces the case, especially as fare revenue has never been the main game for Metro: ticket sales have run at around \$11 million a year (on the order of 16 per cent of total income) while the substantial majority of revenue (in the order of \$60 million a year) is provided through a service contracts with Government. Removing fares is a modest fiscal lever on top of a large existing subsidy, and it has delivered a patronage uplift of around 30 per cent or more. The marginal cost of holding that gain is small relative to both the subsidy base and to the social and economic value of the shift, and impact on congestion.

Brisbane and the wider South East Queensland network provide a useful contemporary example of fare policy being used deliberately as a mode shift lever. Translink now applies a flat 50 cent fare across all zones and most public transport modes on its Queensland network, including bus, train, ferry, tram and on-demand services in South East Queensland, with a single journey able to include transfers between services provided passengers tap on and off correctly.¹⁸

The Queensland Government has made the 50-cent fare permanent, reporting that the initiative increased patronage across all modes and delivered significant user savings.¹⁹ Lessons from South East Queensland's fare policy are relevant for Greater Hobart, including that fare policy should be simple, integrated across modes and treated as part of the public transport growth strategy. A legible and low-cost fare structure can reduce the perceived penalty of transfer, support network redesign, and make rapid bus, ferries and local services function as one system rather than separate choices.

Mode shift will also require complementary actions beyond the bus network and fare structure itself, that should be considered in the rapid bus planning process to enable realisation of the intended benefits. Rapid and fare-free services should be supported by a coordinated package of demand management and access improvements, including parking reform, active transport first- and last-kilometre connections, and targeted behaviour change programs.

Parking reform is a significant lever to promote mode shift in conjunction with public transport options because parking availability, price and convenience directly influence mode choice. If driving remains cheaper, easier and more reliable than catching the bus, even a faster and fare-free service will struggle to compete for many trips.

Given the shape and topography of Greater Hobart, it is inevitable that private vehicles will remain a significant part of the transportation mix, and therefore parking will remain a significant need, however strategic planning should seek to manage parking deliberately so that

the most valuable spaces are prioritised for the highest-value uses, long-stay commuter parking is not over-supplied in the places rapid buses are intended to serve, and parking pricing better reflects demand, location and the public value of kerbside space. This way parking policy can work with the rapid bus network to reduce the relative convenience of driving for trips that can reasonably shift, while still protecting access for people and activities that genuinely need vehicle access.

Integration must also extend to the river. The Derwent ferry service between Bellerive and Hobart, launched as a trial in 2021 and made permanent on the strength of its popularity, has been embraced across the political spectrum and by the community; patronage grew quickly and has stayed strong, with more than 380,000 trips taken and up to around 550 vehicles a day removed from the Tasman Bridge.²⁴ The operator's own patron surveys indicate that more than 80 per cent of ferry passengers would otherwise have travelled by private car, a significant and instructive demonstration of mode shift.

With governments now funding the service's expansion to new terminals at Lindisfarne, Wilkinsons Point and Sandy Bay, it is critical that the rapid bus network and the ferry network are planned as one integrated system rather than in parallel. Bus connections to key ferry terminals should be timetabled to meet catchment demand and to draw pressure off the Tasman Bridge; active transport links to the terminals should be designed in; branding and marketing should reinforce the connection so the combined journey reads as a single network; and ticketing and fares should make transferring between ferry, bus and active modes a simple, seamless transaction. The ferry operator, like the bus operators, should be engaged early and proactively in planning and strategy, so that their on-water knowledge shapes how the wider network is designed.

Active transport connections and end-of-trip facilities are equally important because most bus journeys begin and end on foot, by bicycle or by another small personal mobility device. A rapid bus service is only useful if people can reach it safely, comfortably and directly from their trip origin and destination. Continuous footpaths, safe crossings, lighting, wayfinding, protected cycling links, secure bicycle and scooter parking, showers, lockers and other end-of-trip facilities all extend the practical catchment of each stop or station and reduce the barriers associated with choosing public transport. They also help make the whole journey feel coherent and continuous where their journey works at each end as well as along a rapid bus corridor.

Behaviour change programs are important to convert the availability of public transport options into actual changes in everyday travel habits. Many people do not reassess travel patterns unless prompted (another reason why now is a good time to capitalize on the fare-free patronage surge), particularly where driving has become habitual. Targeted programs with major employers, schools, universities, hospitals and activity centres can provide personalised travel information, trial incentives, workplace travel plans, staff and student communications, events, wayfinding support and feedback loops that make the new network visible and easy to try. These programs are most effective when timed with service improvements, fare changes or new infrastructure, because they give people a clear reason to reconsider their current behaviour and the practical support to make a different choice stick.

These measures should be considered in tandem rather than as optional add-ons. The rapid bus network can provide an attractive alternative to driving, but parking policy, safe local access,

end-of-trip facilities, travel planning, clear passenger information and incentives for new users will determine whether people are able and willing to change their everyday travel habits. Locking in the current uplift therefore requires a whole-of-journey approach that makes the bus not only cheaper and faster, but easier, safer and more practical than driving for a much wider range of trips.

Recommendation: treat the current fare-free patronage surge as a strategic asset and lock it in through a coordinated mode shift package, including near-term service-quality improvements, a simple and integrated long-term fare framework, parking reform, active transport first- and last-kilometre connections, end-of-trip facilities and targeted behaviour change programs, all planned in tandem with the rapid bus network so the bus becomes easier, safer and more practical than driving for a wider range of everyday trips.

6 A new operating model: planners and operators deciding together

Good public transport is more an operating achievement than an engineering one. Where planning and operations are siloed, services drift out of step with demand and experience expectations; where they are integrated and data-rich, the network adapts dynamically and continues to build patronage and trust.

A model that brings planners and operators together around shared, near-real-time information including patronage, on-time running, demand by corridor and time of day, and the effects of disruptions should be created, along with the authority to adjust services continuously and transparently. Brisbane's busway stations have long run on live operational data, with real-time information at stations and a staffed operations centre coordinating the network, and South East Queensland's single coordinating body shows the value of one integrating point of accountability across multiple operators.⁷

The Committee for Sydney's Plan B goes further still, recommending a dedicated delivery agency modelled on Sydney Metro, to drive its rapid network to completion.² Greater Hobart is smaller and need not replicate that structure, but the underlying principle of data infrastructure and a single, accountable home for delivery and coordination are core enabling investments for the rapid network.

This operating model also needs to be supported by a clear and sustained operational budget. Capital investment can deliver the physical elements of the rapid bus network, but the passenger experience will ultimately be shaped by how the network is operated day to day. This includes the service kilometres funded, frequency, span of hours, reliability, staffing, maintenance, customer information, data systems and the ability to respond as demand changes. Operational funding should therefore be considered early in the business case and strategy, alongside capital costs. Without a clear recurrent funding commitment, there is a risk that the rapid bus network is delivered physically but not operated at the level required to meet community expectations, maintain reliability or lock in the current patronage uplift. A standing planner-operator model will only be effective if it has both the authority and budget flexibility to adjust services in response to patronage, reliability and customer experience data.

Recommendation: establish a standing operator/planner working model supported by shared, near-real-time data and a single integrating coordination function, authority to adjust services, and sustained operational funding to support the service standards, reliability and customer experience required for the rapid bus network to succeed.

7 The legislative architecture: the Metro Act and the Transport Commissioner

A practical question sits beneath everything above: who, in law, is responsible for planning, coordinating and delivering Greater Hobart's public transport? A strategy and an integrated operating model need an institutional home with the authority to act.

The Metro Tasmania Act 1997 constitutes Metro as a state-owned company whose principal objective is to provide passenger transport services in a manner consistent with sound commercial practice.²² Metro is, in other words, an operator: it runs services, it does not set network policy or routes. Recent amendments in force from January 2026 have sharpened the shareholder Ministers' involvement including a members' statement of expectations on strategic priorities, a new power for the Treasurer and Minister to direct the company, an annual statement of corporate intent, and half-yearly public reporting.²²

The coordinating role sits elsewhere. The Transport Act 1981 establishes the Commissioner for Transport, incorporated as the Transport Commission, as a transport authority whose stated purpose (in the words of the Act's long title) is the co-ordination, improvement, regulation and control of transport services in the State.²³ Its functions include devising and carrying out measures for the co-ordination, improvement and economic operation of transport, and ensuring, so far as practicable, that services are adequate to meet the needs of the public; its powers include contracting with operators to run services; and it is expressly barred from operating road transport itself.²³ The Commissioner is the body the law charges with making the system work as a whole including planning, contracting and coordinating, while operators such as Metro, Kinetic, Derwent Ferries run the services under contract.

Read together, these Acts describe a coordinating authority responsible for the whole, and operators responsible for delivery.

Tasmania does not need new legislation to plan and run an integrated, standards-based rapid network; it needs to use the coordination mandate the Transport Act already confers through the Commissioner's service contracts and standards and aligned at the operator level through Metro's statement of expectations and, where necessary, directions.

The single integrating point of accountability that we, and the comparative evidence, have argued for is in large part already drawn in statute; what has been missing is a strategy to coordinate towards, and the consistent, transparent exercise of that role.

Recommendation: give effect to the strategy through institutions that already exist using the Transport Commissioner's coordination and contracting mandate under the Transport Act 1981 to plan and integrate the network, and Metro's statement-of-expectations and direction powers under the Metro Tasmania Act 1997 to align the operator rather than treating new structures as a precondition for action.

8 Decarbonisation and technology choices

Fleet and infrastructure age, and over the life of the rapid network they will need to be renewed. That renewal poses a strategic question best settled deliberately, within the strategy, rather than vehicle-by-vehicle at the point of purchase: what technology the network is built around. These decisions have long tails: a bus or a depot bought today will still be running in fifteen to twenty years. The test is not only what is cheapest to buy this year, but what remains fit for purpose, and compatible with where the technology is heading, across the whole asset life.

The direction is now clear. Across most transport modes, traditional fossil-fueled internal-combustion technology will not be the technology of choice over the coming decade, and assets procured today should be zero-emission from the outset or explicitly designed to be convertible. For urban buses, the global answer has converged on electrification. The evidence is consistent: battery-electric buses already match or beat diesel on total cost of ownership in a growing number of markets,¹⁴ with operating and maintenance costs reported at a fraction of those of diesel,¹⁵ and battery pack prices have fallen by roughly 70 per cent over the past decade.¹⁴ Europe, China, Latin America and a widening set of cities are now integrating electric buses into standard fleets rather than running them as pilots, and upfront price parity for most bus classes is expected within this decade.¹⁵

For Tasmania the case is unusually strong, for two reasons. First, the grid: Tasmania is one of very few places on earth effectively self-sufficient in renewable electricity, so electrifying a bus can remove emissions rather than shifting them to a fossil-fuelled power station, a benefit most jurisdictions cannot claim. Second, the Tasmanian Policy Exchange's emissions work shows that, while the state is net-negative thanks to its forests, its gross emissions have barely fallen in three decades and are trending upward. Transport is the second-largest source of actual emissions (around a fifth of the total, of which road transport is the overwhelming majority), and the state's net-zero status is not guaranteed.¹² With a legislated target of net zero from 2030,¹⁶ decarbonising everyday transport is central and an electrified bus network running on Tasmanian renewable power is among the most direct levers available.

Where a proven technology exists (as it now does for buses) the network should be built around the most efficient use of energy, and on that test battery-electric wins decisively for metropolitan passenger services. The reason is physics, not preference, as a battery-electric bus stores grid electricity directly and delivers roughly 70 to 80 per cent of it to the wheels; a hydrogen bus must first make the hydrogen by electrolysis, then compress it, then convert it back to electricity in an onboard fuel cell, losing energy at every step and ending at around 25 to 35 per cent well-to-wheel.

In practice a hydrogen bus therefore needs roughly two to three times as much renewable electricity to cover the same distance as a battery-electric one.¹⁷ In a state whose comparative advantage is abundant renewable power, deliberately using two to three times more of it per kilometre is the wrong default for high-frequency urban routes which are also the easiest to serve from depot-based overnight charging on cheap, off-peak power.

Other fuels retain genuine roles: hydrogen may suit heavier, longer-range or harder-to-electrify duties, and Tasmania has real green-hydrogen ambitions in industry and export. Metro is trialing both battery-electric buses in Launceston and hydrogen buses in Hobart to build local

evidence.¹³ But for the bulk of the metropolitan passenger services the rapid network will carry, battery-electric is the clear primary choice, and the strategy should say so rather than leave it to be settled by procurement.

Choosing electrification early will reshape how the network is planned and run, and these implications are far cheaper designed in than discovered later. They span procurement (specifying zero-emission or convertible vehicles, and the depots and grid connections to support them); vehicle sizing and range (matching battery capacity to route length and duty cycle); maintenance (new high-voltage skills, tooling and supply chains, against fewer moving parts); operations and depots (layout, electrical capacity and resilience); charging infrastructure (depot and, where needed, opportunity charging, with the grid upgrades that implies); and timetabling (building charging windows and range realities into rosters and run-cutting).

Planning the network around electrification from the outset (corridors, depots, charging and schedules together) is far better than retrofitting an electric fleet onto infrastructure designed for diesel.

Recommendation: settle the fleet's technology within the strategy rather than vehicle-by-vehicle; adopt battery-electric as the primary choice for metropolitan passenger services, reserving other fuels for genuinely suited use cases; and require that any assets procured in the interim be zero-emission or explicitly convertible, with procurement, depots, charging, maintenance and timetabling planned around electrification from the start.

9 Learning from Auckland, Brisbane and elsewhere

Auckland's Northern Busway, opened in 2008, grew patronage at an average of about 25 per cent a year (from roughly 1.3 million trips to nearly 8 million by 2019) and by 2017 Auckland Transport projected it would reach capacity around 2026, some two decades earlier than first expected, prompting major reinvestment to protect reliability.³ The lesson is twofold: well-designed transport systems can far outperform conservative forecasts, so corridors, stations and depots should be sized and protected for growth; and Auckland's deliberate investment in station access and land-use integration is the engine of that growth.

Brisbane's busways, anchored by the South East Busway that opened in 2000, now carry on the order of 70 million passengers a year and form the largest busway network in Australia.⁷ Two features transfer directly to the Greater Hobart opportunity: buses run on and off the busway, collecting passengers on local roads before joining the corridor to maximise fast, one-seat journeys; and integrated, zone-based fares impose no penalty for transferring between services.

The broader lesson, echoed by the Committee for Sydney, is that transit-oriented growth must be planned with communities, not delivered to them.² Across both cities the pattern is the same: dedicated running so buses beat cars, integrated fares and timetables, land use and stations planned together, and investment in the everyday experience.

10 Real and perceived safety central to uptake

Safety is a primary determinant of who uses public transport and when. A service can be statistically safe and still go unused after dark by women, older people, young people travelling

alone, or people with disability, if it does not feel safe. Perception governs behaviour, and behaviour governs patronage. This is acute for the evening and night-time economy the region is working to grow, where travel after dark is exactly when perceived safety most shapes whether people choose the bus.

Safety must be engineered in from the outset: passive surveillance and good sightlines at stations; consistent lighting on platforms and the routes that connect to them; clear wayfinding and real-time information; visible, well-trained staff and a credible response capability; waiting environments that feel overseen rather than isolated; and attention to the 'first and last' part of the journey, where people often feel least safe.

Brisbane's busways, for example, are monitored continuously and coordinated through a staffed operations centre working alongside police and emergency services.⁷ Perceived safety cannot be designed from a single vantage point, so State Growth should consult women, people with disability, older and younger Tasmanians and Aboriginal community members and measure and report safety performance, including perceived safety, rather than assume it.

Safety should also be considered through the way rapid bus stops and stations integrate with surrounding land uses. Stops that are isolated from activity, poorly connected to adjoining streets or surrounded by inactive edges are less likely to feel safe, particularly after dark. By contrast, stations integrated with housing, employment, community facilities, active frontages and well-used walking routes can support passive surveillance and create a stronger sense of everyday activity around the network.

This is not automatic. More development near a station does not necessarily create a safer environment. The safety benefits depend on precinct design, including clear sightlines, lighting, direct pedestrian access, visible waiting areas, legible crossings and land uses that generate activity across more of the day. There is also a commercial opportunity: transit users often value convenient access to everyday services such as coffee, food, small groceries, pharmacy items and parcel collection. These uses can support local businesses and improve the passenger experience, provided they are planned to support safety, accessibility and movement rather than adding clutter or conflict.

Recommendation: make actual and perceived safety an explicit, measured design objective across the network and its stations and access routes, supported by land use integration, active frontages, safe walking connections and informed by consultation with the groups most affected.

11 Accessible to all: universal design

A network is only 'rapid' for those who can use it. Universal design should be the binding standard, applied end to end across the whole journey, not just the vehicle: step-free, level boarding; tactile, audible and visual information in consistent and redundant forms; seating and shelter; legible wayfinding; and accessible paths connecting stations to the surrounding neighbourhood.

Accessibility should be understood more broadly than physical access alone, and consider the physical and mental experience of the transport journey. A genuinely inclusive public transport system is connected, legible, predictable and dignified for people with different backgrounds, abilities, ages, neurodiversity, confidence levels and digital access.

For example, people who are blind or vision impaired face particular barriers where stops are difficult to identify, routes to and through interchanges are inconsistent, information is visual-only, disruptions are not communicated in accessible formats, guide dogs are not accommodated appropriately, or electric vehicles introduce safety issues due to their quiet operation.²⁰ Another example is for some neurodivergent passengers, including autistic people and people with sensory processing differences, anxiety or cognitive disability, public transport can be difficult where environments are noisy, crowded, unpredictable, visually cluttered or difficult to understand.²¹ These issues can make an otherwise accessible vehicle difficult or unsafe to use independently. Rapid bus planning should therefore consider the total user experience and combine physical and mental universal design principles.

When designed in at the business-case and station-design stage, accessibility is far cheaper and better than retrofit, and benefits every passenger.

The Committee for Sydney's Plan B frames the appropriate ambition well: stops and stations should aim to exceed, not merely meet, Disability Discrimination Act standards.² We encourage State Growth to embed universal design as a binding standard on that footing, co-designed with the disability community.

Recommendation: adopt universal design as a binding, whole-of-journey accessibility standard, co-designed with the disability community from the detailed business case onward.

12 Summary of recommendations

1. Develop and publish a public transport policy and strategy for Greater Hobart with explicit network service standards, a fares framework and an integration framework, nested within state-wide policy and assess, fund and stage the rapid bus network as its flagship project, so that this and related transport investments are made within one coherent frame.
2. Plan and assess the network jointly with strategic land use aligning corridor and station decisions, planning controls and development sequencing with the Southern Tasmania Regional Land Use Strategy, and identify priority precincts early for gentle density and activation.
3. Prioritise a deliverable, demonstrable first stage such as Hobart to Moonah where existing infrastructure and road reservation enable successful early implementation, and select corridors and alignments to maximise access, activation and amenity rather than construction convenience.
4. Select and assess corridors as part of the broader transport network so that bus priority improves corridor efficiency, integrates safely with local buses, walking, cycling, freight, general traffic and adjacent precincts, and does not simply transfer delay, safety risk or access constraints elsewhere.
5. Treat the current fare-free patronage surge as a strategic asset and lock it in through a coordinated mode shift package, including near-term service-quality improvements, a simple and integrated long-term fares framework, parking reform, active transport first- and last-kilometre connections, end-of-trip facilities and targeted behaviour change programs, all planned in tandem with the rapid bus network so the bus becomes easier, safer and more practical than driving for a wider range of everyday trips.
6. Establish a standing operator/planner working model supported by shared, near-real-time data and a single integrating coordination function, authority to adjust services, and sustained operational funding to support the service standards, reliability and customer experience required for the rapid bus network to succeed.
7. Give effect to the strategy through institutions that already exist – using the Transport Commissioner's coordination and contracting mandate under the Transport Act 1981 to plan and integrate the network, and Metro's statement-of-expectations and direction powers under the Metro Tasmania Act 1997 to align the operator – rather than treating new structures as a precondition for action.
8. Settle the fleet's propulsion technology within the strategy as it renews, adopting battery-electric as the primary choice for metropolitan passenger services (other fuels reserved for genuinely suited use cases), capitalising on Tasmania's renewable grid and require interim asset purchases to be zero-emission or convertible, with procurement, depots, charging, maintenance and timetabling planned around electrification from the start.
9. Apply the transferable lessons of Auckland, Brisbane and comparable cities: size and protect corridors for growth, integrate fares and timetables, plan land use and stations together, invest in the everyday experience, and bring communities along.
10. Make actual and perceived safety an explicit, measured design objective across the network and its stations and access routes, supported by land use integration, active frontages, safe walking connections and informed by consultation with the groups most affected.

11. Adopt universal design as a binding, whole-of-journey accessibility standard, co-designed with the disability community from the detailed business case onward.

13 References

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11. Greater Hobart Committee, Greater Hobart Plan Background Papers – No. 3, Greater Hobart Transport Data, and No. 4, Policies and Strategies (as at March 2021). greaterhobart.tas.gov.au
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14. BloombergNEF, Electric Buses in Cities: Driving Towards Cleaner Air and Lower CO2, and Zero-Emission Vehicles Factbook (e-buses already competitive or cheaper than diesel on total cost of ownership; battery pack prices down ~70% over the decade).
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