Southern Tasmanians for Action on Roads and Traffic

Ms Natasha Excel
Inquiry Secretary
Legislative Council Select Committee on Greater Hobart Traffic Congestion
By email: ght@parliament.tas.gov.au

Friday, 27 September 2019

Dear Ms Excel,

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the inquiry of the Legislative Council Select Committee on Greater Hobart Traffic Congestion.

About START

Southern Tasmanians for Action on Roads and Traffic (START) is a membership-based organisation that was established to lobby all levels of government to take the actions necessary to reduce traffic congestion across Southern Tasmania. Anyone can become a member of START and there is no joining fee.

START's inaugural general meeting was held on 27 July. We elected a seven-member management committee and established the following key principles to underpin our advocacy for solutions to traffic congestion:

- There is a need for both short and long term solutions.
- A significant investment is needed – which will require Federal as well as State funding.
- The key bottleneck for the traffic system is in the Hobart CBD.
- Solutions will require infrastructure investments for car traffic as well as investments that encourage take-up of public transport, potentially including new public transport options such as ferries.
- Land use planning is also a key part of the solution. There is a need to encourage appropriate residential development in the CBD and appropriate commercial development in the outer suburbs.
- There is a need for more real-time traffic monitoring including smart traffic monitoring systems with the data provided to the public in real time.

Terminology

Where the word **Hobart** appears in this submission without a qualifier it refers to Greater Hobart. This is generally understood to encompass the local government areas (LGAs) of Hobart, Glenorchy, Clarence and Kingborough. While it could be argued parts of other LGAs are relevant to the discussion about Greater Hobart congestion it is not necessary for the purposes of this submission to define the area to that level of specificity.

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TOR 1—The scope of Greater Hobart's traffic congestion and its impact on the community and economy

A recent study by navigation systems operator TomTom found that Hobart had the third worst traffic congestion of the capital cities, that drivers were spending an average of 123 extra hours a year behind the wheel due to congestion and that this was costing business an extra $80.77 million a year.[1]

TOR 2—Causes of congestion, including physical and topographical barriers

There are four key contributors to Hobart's traffic congestion:
1. The capacity of the network to handle traffic volumes
2. Travel patterns
3. Motor vehicle usage
4. Incidents which disrupt traffic flow eg. roadworks and crashes

Each of these are outlined below. The causes of congestion also point to possible solutions, which will be explored further in our response to the fourth term of reference.

The capacity of the network to handle traffic volumes

There are a number of major arterial roads that make up the backbone of Hobart's traffic network. These include the highways (Brooker Highway, Tasman Highway, South Arm Highway, East Derwent Highway, Channel Highway and the Southern Outlet), Elizabeth St/New Town Road/Main Road through the northern suburbs) and Macquarie and Davey Streets. There are also more minor arterial roads such as Clarence Street, Sandy Bay Road and Algona Road.

In most instances it is impossible to undertake a journey by road—other than a short itinerant trip—without committing to one of these arterial roads. The capacity of Hobart's traffic network is limited by the weakest bottlenecks.

Travel patterns

As outlined in the Tasmanian Government's June 2017 *Hobart Traffic Origin-Destination*[2] report, the vast majority of trips in Hobart in the morning peak originate North, South and East of the CBD and terminate in the CBD. During the afternoon peak, the majority of trips originate in the CBD and terminate in the North, South and East.

This indicates a pattern whereby commuters travel from home in the outer suburbs of Hobart. It also reflects the large concentration of commercial and government activity in the Hobart CBD and the concentration of residential development in the outer suburbs.

[1] "Hobart's traffic worse than all but two other state capitals", *The Mercury*, 13 December 2017, https://www.themercury.com.au/news/tasmania/hobarts-traffic-worse-than-all-but-two-other-state-capitals/news-story/9acdb0621602110be91603a524b376a3

[2] *Hobart Traffic Origin-Destination June 2017,* Department of State Growth

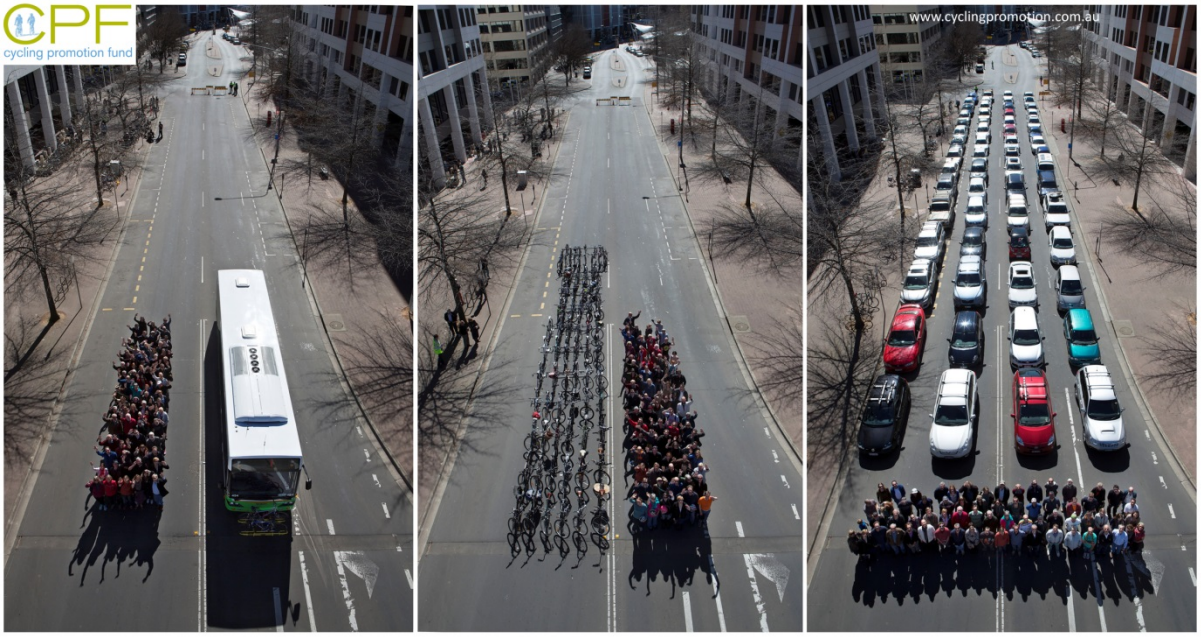
While START will argue later in this submission that the capacity of the network must be improved over time, another part of solution to Hobart traffic congestion is getting the most efficient use out of the network as it exists currently. The efficient use of the road network is undermined by a large portion of the road traffic travelling in the same direction during the same peak times of day.

Motor vehicle usage

It is well known that, in any part of the world, the use of motor vehicles contributes significantly to traffic volumes when compared to other forms of transport such as walking, bicycle-riding and public transport.

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, 76% of commuters travelling to work in Hobart in 2016 went by car as the driver.[3]

The photo montage below, produced by the Cycling Promotion Fund from photos taken in Canberra, demonstrates the dramatic difference in impact on traffic volumes when people use motor vehicles compared to riding bicycles or traveling in a bus.



Incidents which disrupt traffic flow

On a number of occasions when serious congestion has occurred in Hobart a contributing factor has been roadworks or crashes which interrupt traffic flow and create temporary bottlenecks. A single crash on the Southern Outlet, Brooker Highway, Tasman Bridge or in the CBD can have a cascading effect, causing or contributing to congestion throughout much of the Hobart road network.

[3] "More than two in three drive to work, Census reveals", Australian Bureau of Statistics, 23 October 2017, https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/mediareleasesbyReleaseDate/7DD5DC715B608612CA2581BF001F8404

TOR 2—Strategic planning processes between Commonwealth, State and Local governments

All three levels of government have responsibility for addressing traffic congestion in Hobart and all could be making a greater contribution in their area of responsibility. As outlined in START's response to the fourth term of reference there are a number of public policy areas in which solutions need to be developed, some of which are the responsibility of one level of government and some of which are shared.

These areas include:

- **Infrastructure development (planning and execution)**—infrastructure solutions will primarily be the responsibility of the Tasmanian Government however local government takes responsibility for some arterial roads and some aspects of public transport infrastructure and most cycling/walking infrastructure.
- **Infrastructure development (funding)**—all three levels of government are responsible however it should be recognised that the Tasmanian Government has a greater capacity to provide funding than local government and the Commonwealth has an even greater capacity to provide funding than the Tasmanian Government. This would be the Commonwealth's primary role.
- **Land Use Planning**—primarily local government but the Tasmanian Government is responsible for the planning system and framework. Currently there is an insufficient nexus between strategic land use planning across Hobart and the management of traffic.
- **Development of public transport**—primary the Tasmanian Government but local government takes responsibility for some public transport infrastructure such as bus stops.

State and local government should give serious consideration to establishing a new agency to co-ordinate their responses to Hobart traffic congestion. To a large extent councils are acting independently of the Tasmanian Government and each other. Such an agency could include traffic experts to ensure that an evidence-based approach is taken to coming up with traffic solutions.

TOR 4—Future initiatives to address traffic congestion in the Greater Hobart area

As there are several causes of Hobart congestion these point to a variety of solutions. There is no silver bullet to combat Hobart traffic congestion and as such several multi-faceted solutions should be investigated and progressed at the same time.

Infrastructure to increase network capacity

Developing new infrastructure to increase the capacity of the road network is a blunt instrument however one that is necessary if the population of Hobart and surrounding areas continues growing.

It is important to ensure that the greatest bottlenecks in the system are addressed first to maximise the benefit of any infrastructure developments to improve traffic flow. For example, while the Hobart Airport Interchange development will assist in removing congestion of morning peak hour traffic travelling from Sorell, it will not prevent Tasman Highway commuters from encountering further congestion when they reach the Tasman Bridge. Similarly, while an additional lane on the Southern Outlet may improve traffic flow along the Outlet, commuters will still encounter congestion when they reach Macquarie Street.

Increasing the capacity of Hobart's arterial roads is only helpful to the extent that we can address the major bottlenecks, many of which tend to occur at the intersections between major arterial roads. Traffic solutions need to look at allowing some traffic to bypass these bottlenecks.

A key bottleneck in the entire traffic system is Macquarie and Davey Streets. As observed in the Hobart Traffic Origin-Destination report, the Hobart CBD is a focal point for many journeys. Improving or diverting the flow through Macquarie and Davey Streets is likely to have a cascading effect throughout the entire traffic system. A short term solution is the development of new clearways as recommended in the report *Hobart Congestion—Traffic Analysis 2016*.[4]

There may be a need in the long term to explore options for road traffic to bypass the Hobart CBD. Because of the topography of Hobart bypass options are expensive and extremely limited. Options that have been canvassed/explored in the past include a cross-city tunnel and various options for a road bypass the CBD for traffic travelling from the Southern Outlet to the Brooker Highway.

START does not have a position favouring any particular solution, but we suggest that any analysis of the feasibility/desirability of these options also be compared to options for the side streets feeding Macquarie and Davey Streets to pass under or over and allow for traffic to flow along Macquarie and Davey Streets uninterrupted. Options should also be explored to reduce cross-traffic of pedestrians such as pedestrian under- or over-passes.

Changes to land use

There is currently an insufficient consideration of traffic congestion when it comes to the zoning of land throughout Hobart and surrounds. Earlier in our submission we pointed out that the majority of traffic is flowing in the same direction during peak periods owing to the concentration of commercial development in the CBD and residential development outside the CBD.

The Southern Tasmanian Regional Land Use Strategy (STRLUS) needs to be reviewed giving consideration to how this imbalance can be addressed in order to better balance the flow of traffic.

Both the Tasmanian and Australian Governments should also consider locating public service offices outside the CBD.

Changes to business hours

A significant contributor to peak hour congestion is the adoption of the usual 9-5 work schedule (with slight variations) which requires a large number of commuters to travel to and from work at the same time. If businesses, particularly those located in the CBD, were able to stagger their work hours they could help spread out commuter traffic over a longer timeframe. This may also be an opportunity to provide greater flexibility for workers who don't mind starting early or finishing late while juggling morning or afternoon commitments.

Both the Tasmanian and Australian Governments should look at implementing such an arrangement in their Hobart-based agencies, but only where it is not essential for the services to be delivered during ordinary business hours and employees agree to shift their ordinary working hours.

[4] *Hobart Congestion—Traffic Analysis 2016*, Department of State Growth

Encouraging alternatives to motor vehicles

We accept the observation that has been repeatedly made by some commentators that Hobartians are going to continue to be heavily reliant on motor vehicles into the near future because of their need to rely on them for journeys to multiple destinations. As such we also agree that solutions to traffic congestions will need to account for continued and increased motor vehicle usage.

This is not a reason to dismiss solutions based on promoting other forms of transport. The sensitivity of Hobart's traffic network is such that a small change to traffic volumes can have a big impact once the road network approaches its capacity. Improving the convenience of other forms of transport is likely to be a major factor in encouraging motor vehicle users to change their behaviour.

While local government has been doing an excellent job developing infrastructure such as cycling paths, to incentivise commuter cycling there needs to be consideration given to other required infrastructure such as bicycle lockers and public showers. Commuter cyclists tend to use on-road infrastructure such as cycle lanes. While commuter cycling should be encouraged START does not believe cycle lanes should be installed where they have the potential to reduce the road capacity available to other vehicles.

There has been much debate about establishing other forms of public transport—such as ferries and light rail. START does not favour any particular form of public transport but encourages the Tasmanian Government in investigating public transport options to consider the following:

- The net benefits of these proposals—taking into account capital and recurrent costs—must be compared with the opportunity cost of expanding bus services.
- Where these forms of transport rely on road infrastructure, the degree to which any gains in reducing congestion outweighs the costs of reduced road capacity for other vehicles.
- Any new forms of public transport must be operated by Metro Tasmania to ensure timetables and ticketing are integrated with other forms of public transport.

Improved traffic monitoring

Both the *Hobart Traffic Origin-Destination Report* and the *Hobart Congestion—Traffic Analysis 2016* contribute useful data to the discussion about solutions to Hobart's traffic congestion. These data need to be updated on a regular basis, and START recommends the adoption of sensor technology which provides real time monitoring of traffic flows, particularly along arterial roads.

Monitoring data should also be made available to the public in real time. This will help open up to the public the opportunity to use these data for desktop and mobile applications, research, analysis and the development of new traffic solutions. Real time monitoring is also useful in providing real time traffic management. For example, the Department of State Growth could manually override scheduled traffic light changes to clear congested roads.

TOR 5—Any other matters incidental thereto

The Commonwealth's commitment in terms of their key responsibility—which is funding—has been grossly inadequate. Traffic congestion is one of the key challenges facing Hobart and yet the Australian Government has contributed $25 million to addressing this issue—only 1.7% of the funds they contributed to the $1.43 billion Hobart City Deal.

We also consider that the Tasmanian Government has not moved quickly enough to progress short-term solutions to address Hobart traffic congestion.

Thank you again for the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry.

Yours sincerely,

Daniel Hulme
President
Southern Tasmanians for Action on Roads and Traffic.