



Huon Valley Residents & Ratepayers Association (Inc)

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Greater Hobart Traffic Congestion

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this important discussion. We represent residents in the Huon Municipality many of whom commute to Hobart for work and are affected by (and contribute to) traffic congestion.

It is obvious to all of us who drive in Hobart that traffic congestion is becoming worse and it is equally obvious that there is no single or simple solution. Many factors create congestion problems and so we present a number of suggestions that we feel may be worthy of consideration.

Peak periods

- There should be no parking permitted on the main arterial roads during peak hours (and probably at any time). This would be one of the least expensive measures that could be introduced. This may, of course, inconvenience some business owners and residents on Macquarie and Davey Streets but traffic flow would be considerably improved at negligible cost though some off street parking might have to be provided.
- This would make room for an extra lane (perhaps a transit lane) for vehicles and possibly a dedicated lane for cyclists as well.
- If traffic flows were equally distributed throughout the day the problem would be solved.
- This could be addressed to some extent by staggering office hours in Government departments with some staff being encouraged to start/leave earlier and later than the conventional hours.
- We have all experienced how the traffic flows far more freely during school holidays. Rather than spend multiple millions of dollars on road building, funding could perhaps be provided for free bus transport for all students rather than just those with or on Concession Cards.
- A campaign could be run in schools to encourage students to use public transport and to remind them of the impact private vehicle usage has on the environment.

Ride share

Many commuters living outside Hobart live in less densely populated areas where public transport is not economically viable, distance to transport routes are more than can easily be covered by walking and cycling and the easiest option, by far, is a private car.

To reduce traffic congestion at peak periods one solution would be the development of an efficient, user-friendly, ride-share network. For every private vehicle carrying two people, rather than just the driver, there is one less car on the road – half the cars, half (or less) congestion.

The introduction of an incentive based online-based system supported by the State Government and relevant local governments (Hobart, Glenorchy, Clarence, Kingborough, Derwent Valley, Sorrell and Huon Valley) and financed in proportion to the number of users could dramatically reduce congestion at minimal

cost and would also result in decreased maintenance costs for roads and less need for new infrastructure. Some funding might be provided through the Regional Climate Change Initiative (RCCI).

Such schemes in the past have only ever been moderately successful and we feel that, at least until “ride-share” becomes normalised (like taking your own bag to the supermarket has), incentives should be offered. Free or half-price car parking in the Hobart CBD car parks might be appropriate.

The technology now exists for providing feedback about potential “sharers” in much the same way as Uber and Airbnb rate drivers and hosts. This might overcome some of the hesitation.

If adopted broadly ride sharing could make a valuable contribution to a reduction in congestion at minimal cost.

Transit Lanes

Transit lanes serve a number of functions.

1. They provide relatively rapid, congestion free passage for public transport (buses and taxis) and private vehicles with more than two (or three) occupants.
2. This in turn encourages commuters to use public transport or rideshare to take advantage of this.
3. This takes vehicles off the road and so reduces overall congestion which, in turn, is advantageous for those who cannot use the transit lane

Decentralisation

The Federal Government has only this year restated its commitment to decentralising public service departments and this should be something that State Government and University of Tasmania should perhaps also consider.

This would reduce congestion and have more than one benefit for regional communities.

As well as providing additional employment opportunities in the regions, it would also mean that commuters (both in cars and on public transport) would be running both ways between regional towns and the CBD during peak hour.

This would not only reduce traffic congestion, but also have an economic benefit for public transport, with buses not travelling empty when returning from the city in the morning and going back to the city in the afternoon.

Congestion charge

- Toll roads are used in many cities both as a means of improving traffic flow and paying for road improvements. Melbourne is the closest example.
- Introducing a charge for using the primary arterial streets in Hobart during peak periods would undoubtedly be very unpopular initially and it would be a brave move for any government. Overseas experience (ie London) has shown that when the congestion charge was introduced 15 years ago it was very controversial but has since been accepted as normal and has considerably reduced traffic congestion. Over time, vehicle usage has changed with many more private hire cars (that are exempt from congestion charge) in the city centre and congestion is again becoming a problem and is again slowing bus travel which becomes a disincentive.

- If such a charge is considered for Hobart it should be done so on the basis that any revenue be spent on improvements to city transportation.
- It is worth noting that paying to use street space for parking is accepted as normal and reasonable. It could be argued that paying to use the same amount of street space for driving is no different.
- The question of equity arises with some arguing that such a tax would simply favour the better off. This is a valid argument (though not used in relation to on-street parking fees) but this would be less valid if all revenue was used to subsidise good quality, low cost (or free) public transport.
- By observation, most commuter vehicles carry one person and this is a primary cause of traffic congestion. A sliding scale congestion charge might have a significant effect on vehicle numbers. For the sake of argument if a single occupant vehicle might be charged \$10 if recorded in the CBD during peak hours. Vehicles with 2 occupants might be charged \$5, 3 occupants \$2, with no charge being levied on vehicles with 4 or more occupants.

Public transport

- Some people will never use public transport. Some would like to but can't because it doesn't provide the service they require. Some would use it if it was more efficient, less expensive, more comfortable and offered a better user experience (ie better coordinated service linkages/ good shelters/ GPS tracking/free Wi-Fi etc).
- It can be fairly estimated that a full bus can transport the equivalent number of passengers as 40 average commuter vehicles (50+). The impact on congestion would be significant if buses (+ light rail and ferries) were used more extensively.
- "Have I just missed it or is it running late?" Not knowing where the bus is currently a major disincentive. A simple and inexpensive means of encouraging bus use would be to "GPS enable" all buses so that their route, location and ETA were available in real time on mobile phone apps. Like Uber.
- All buses could provide free Wi-Fi which would allow many to catch up on emails etc on their way to work and perhaps be able to arrive a bit later having already started work on the bus.
- If a congestion charge was introduced it could provide funds for subsidising public transport and thus 'kill two birds with one stone'.
- A centralised "transport hub" should be introduced. Macquarie Point would seem to be the logical location since it could cater for road, rail, and water transport. Public transport will only work efficiently if transfer from one service to another can be seamless.
- Ticketing should be equally seamless with a card payment system introduced that covers all modes and allows for transfers from one to the other not being penalised (ie a day or single journey charge).
- Combined with free satellite car parking and transit lanes bus travel can become an attractive option. Many car drivers who are constantly stuck in slow moving traffic seeing their fellow commuters speed past in comfort in the Transit Lane would be easily convinced to give it a go.

Active travel (walking & cycling)

- Combined with public transport active travel can help reduce congestion significantly.
- Only Adelaide has less rain than Hobart so this should not be considered a disincentive and, unlike Adelaide and many other Australian cities, Hobart is rarely so hot that it is uncomfortable to walk.
- Walking and cycling is good for health and so should be positively promoted as such.

- With electric cycles becoming less expensive and more efficient Hobart's hilly terrain is less of an impediment than it used to be. Significant disincentives are sharing road space with other traffic and car drivers' negative attitude towards cyclists.
- We know that many Tasmanians do not get enough exercise and that this is a significant factor in many chronic diseases that cause individual suffering and cost our community a great deal.
- Appropriate infrastructure should be provided where needed including shelters and covered, secure bicycle parking areas.

New, bigger, faster roads?

- Recent traffic data indicates that the vast majority of commuter trips (75%+) end in the Hobart CBD https://www.transport.tas.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0020/152138/Hobart_Traffic_Origin-Destination_Report_June_20172.pdf
- The suggestion that a Hobart bypass (or tunnel) would have a significant impact on traffic congestion on the southern outlet or in the CBD would thus seem to be unrealistic even if the cost were not prohibitive.
- There is no doubt that bypasses can reduce local congestion and improve road safety (as the new bypass has done for Kingston) but it can be argued that this only encourages drivers to commute from further south has simply increased congestion on the Southern Outlet and in Hobart itself.
- Providing better Park & Ride opportunities might ultimately be a more effective option that would also reduce vehicle emissions significantly.
- It might be worth commissioning an independent cost/benefit analysis of providing free or heavily subsidised public transport.

Self-driving cars

We only include this as a topic as a reminder that technologies change quite rapidly. There are those who argue that personal car ownership will decline with the uptake of automated vehicles and that expensive infrastructure built to cater for an ever increasing level of car ownership may be obsolete within a generation.

This submission has been compiled with input from various members of HVRRA and discussion at our General Meeting on 24th September 2019.



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