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Strategic Transport Planning
City of Greater Geelong

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Barwon Heads Association (BHA) feedback on the City of Greater Geelong's Integrated Transport Strategy (ITS)

Find attached our submission to this Strategy. There are so many opportunities for better connections and improvement, we encourage the City to be more creative and engage with all the other service providers to create a more usable and safer environment.

On behalf of the Barwon Heads Association

Sandra Gatehouse
Vice President
Barwon Heads Association



Introduction

Barwon Heads is a small coastal village with a number of different functions which change across the year. It is permanent home to a population of 4,353 people (2021 Census) and also serves a large holiday population during the summer months, It is beset by a failure to plan for these variations in population and the significant population growth around it. There is little evidence of integrated planning for the transport needs of Barwon Heads despite a lot of talk over the past 10 years. The following entities have diverse responsibilities for transport within our area:

- Regional Roads Victoria (RRV) is responsible for the road entries, Golf Links Rd, Bridge Rd, the Spit Rd. and the 2 Barwon Heads bridges (including the pedestrian bridge).
- The City of Greater Geelong (CoGG) is responsible for local roads, 13th Beach Rd., footpaths and the Village Park;
- Barwon Coast Committee of Management (BCCM) is responsible for the shared paths and parking for the beaches and around the surf clubs. They have recently completed an accessibility review which is referred to later.
- The buses are provided by McHarry's. which provides a regular/long bus service which commences in Ocean Grove and which connect Barwon Heads to Geelong via Marshal Station.

There are other entities that provide important transport links between the Bellarine and Melbourne which are import for connecting Barwon Heads and other communities around Port Phillip Bay. These include:

- V/Line services from Marshall and Geelong Stations
- The 2 independent entities providing separate ferry services connecting the Bellarine with Melbourne and the Mornington Peninsula.

With the exception of the 55 Bus Service from Barwon Heads which stops at Marshall Station, there are few obvious connections between these services and the rest of the Bellarine's transport network.

In an effort to protect our village and ensure that all risks are on the table the Barwon Heads Association (BHA) convenes a quarterly meeting comprising the RRV, CoGG, BCCM and local representatives of the school, cycling groups, traders and the general Barwon Heads community and Ocean Grove.

Council engagement with the community in 2020 "Barwon Heads Transport and Parking Study 2020" produced an implementation plan for short, medium and long-term solutions. Most short and medium-term solutions have now been implemented with some time-based parking changes still to be implemented in Hitchcock Ave. No long-term changes have been implemented.

There is an urgent need for co-ordinating transport planning for Barwon Heads and the Bellarine. We request that the Barwon Heads Transport and Parking Study is reviewed and long-term changes that were recommended are re-assessed in the context of the growth we are experiencing and expecting in the future.



Outstanding long term solutions from 5 years ago are:

- Barwon Heads active transport path improvements (not sure what this means BCCM manages current foreshore shared paths)
- Sheepwash Rd, Carr St and River Pde – footpath and cycle improvements
- Carr St drainage upgrades, footpath provision and width for bike lanes

Traffic

Since the opening of the new Barwon Heads bridges and the removal of load limits Barwon Heads has become a major traffic thoroughfare servicing the route to the Geelong By-pass, ferry traffic going to and from the Great Ocean Road, commuters from Ocen Grove to Geelong, and to rail links. This is in addition the normal traffic generated by the town.

The traffic goes down mainly residential roads, past the Primary School and seems to be ever growing. It is important for the livability of Barwon Heads that urgent consideration is given to the following:

- The Bellarine Link project has been in the system for over 10 years We encourage CoGG to lobby for this project as an alternative route to other areas on the Bellarine which will take traffic away from Barwon Heads - This link is now urgent.
- Reduced speeds through Barwon Heads
- Reduction of load limits on the Spit Rd and Barwon Heads Bridge
- Park and Ride opportunities on the borders of Barwon Heads and Ocean Grove
- Better public transport links between Barwon Heads and Marshall Station and between Lara Station and the Avalon Airport, as well as a future rail link.

Public Transport

Public transport is a critical connector for communities, providing essential access to education, employment, healthcare, and social participation. For individuals with disabilities, older adults, and those without access to private vehicles, it serves as a lifeline to independence and inclusion. When designed with accessibility in mind, public transport becomes more than just infrastructure, it enables equitable opportunity and ensures that all community members can move safely and confidently through their environment. Trains, buses, ferries and airports are all on offer, but it is exhausting for an individual or family trying to get it to work. There is little value put on time and convenience with many of our residents forced into cars, relocating to Melbourne, and in the case of at least one local student trying to study in Melbourne, actually giving up.



There are a range of users of the bus system. People commuting to Melbourne for work and study and shopping etc. who rely on the bus connection. Especially the old and young and disabled who cannot drive. There is little apparent effort made to connect the disparate range of public transport offerings, with little regard shown for the diverse range of users and their valuable time.

- Buses
 - The Bus is hourly and goes on a long journey around Barwon Heads and Ocean Grove as part of its regular route. There is no express service at peak hours when the bus is full, and it is often empty at nonpeak times. It effectively by-passes the beaches.
 - In the afternoon for two hours there is no service and it is impossible to get to Melbourne for an early evening event unless you leave Barwon Heads on the bus before 2.30 pm.
 - There is an acute failure to align timetables with the trains leaving Marshall station and to leave adequate time for the crossover from bus to train.
 - There are no obvious links to point Lonsdale, Drysdale, Portarlington to the East/North or Torquay to the west. Advertised connections are via Geelong. The last bus leaves Barwon Heads at 8.28 pm on weekdays (7.34pm on Saturday and 6.21pm on Sunday). On a Saturday there are 10 services and on Sunday 8.
 - From Geelong to Barwon Heads the bus service is as poor. The first bus to Barwon Heads from Geelong leaves at 8.34am on a weekday. On weekends the last bus leaves at 8.16pm on a Saturday and on Sunday the last service leaves Geelong at 5.34pm. These times mean that travel from Melbourne to Barwon Heads by public transport for any afternoon event in Melbourne is impossible via public transport.
 - Barwon Heads and Ocean Grove would benefit from a more localized service which also serves the beaches and provides connections to the other towns on the Bellarine.
 - In addition, the busy school holiday periods such as December/January and Easter clearly establish a case for expanded/amended services or a specific shuttle bus to connect the 2 towns and the beaches. This may also help solve the issue of overcrowded and limited beach carparks during summer months and provide a service to the beaches for all the people who don't drive.
 - There is no apparent link between the Barwon Heads bus and the Barwon Heads airport. The bus stop is dangerously situated with users of the airport required to walk on the road. This will hopefully be remedied with the new roundabout.
 - The 2023 Armstrong Creek and Torquay Bus Network Reform, undertaken by the Department of Transport and Planning proposed changes to provide bus services for the new growth areas in Torquay, Armstrong Creek and Charlemont. Planning also included the introduction of a new more direct bus route between Torquay and Geelong Station. There is no hub that connects with the Barwon Heads bus to enable easy transfer to the west.
 - At many stops in Barwon Heads there are no bus shelters



- Trains
 - Stations are being upgraded, with large car parks.
 - Services are ad hoc and v few express services available to Melbourne
 - Trains go via Wyndam Vale and Tarneit, they are crowded and slow
 - Bus services don't connect with V/Line train or the change over time is inadequate
 - Some stations feel unsafe

- Ferries
 - We are all excited by the Queenscliff and Portarlington ferries and are pleased for the people in Portarlington who can catch the ferry to work in Melbourne.
 - We would value better bus connections to these services and support the notion of having ferries that take passengers from Queenscliffe ferry terminal to Portarlington.

- Planes
 - The Barwon Heads airport is on the Barwon Heads Road. The bus stop leaves people on the main road and too far away from the airport to provide a safe option.
 - The bus connection to Avalon seems quite efficient but the construction of a rail link from the Geelong to Melbourne to Avalon Airport would improve the access to Avalon Airport and encourage more flights to use the airport.

Recent Audit

The Barwon Coast Places and Spaces Access Audit Project conducted by Enable Access for BCCM represents a three-stage approach to improving accessibility and inclusion across the coastal environments managed by Barwon Coast. With a new Masterplan in development, this project offers a clear, evidence informed pathway for embedding accessibility into long term planning, redevelopment, and maintenance of public spaces.

Amongst the many findings the Audit confirmed: Public transport to and around the Barwon Coast region is limited. McHarry's Buslines is the primary provider, operating Routes 55 and 56, neither service offers direct or convenient access to many key destinations across the coastal network.

Beyond service availability, the design and infrastructure of bus stops across the region present significant accessibility challenges. In many instances, bus stops are marked only by a simple signpost, lacking essential features such as shelter, seating, or tactile ground surface indicators. Some have a basic concrete pad but no connection to adjacent continuous accessible paths of travel (CAPT), rendering them difficult or unsafe to use, particularly for people with disability and/or mobility needs. In the most inaccessible cases, stops are located away from any infrastructure,



forcing users to navigate roadside edges, bushland, or uneven terrain to reach their destination.

Given these barriers, it is unsurprising that public transport is rarely the mode of choice for people with disability or limited mobility visiting the region. Instead, they are often reliant on private vehicles or costly alternatives such as taxis or ride share services to access coastal destinations.

Opportunities shared trails

There is a significant increase in the use of these paths by walkers and families. There is an urgent need for proper rules regarding the use of shared paths by electric vehicles – they conflict with more passive users and are dangerous when the two come together.

There needs to be a review of the definition of shared paths to protect the pedestrians, recreational riders and young families that use them from the more aggressive approach and speed of the e-bikes and e-scooters.

With proper funding paths should connect to the surf beaches.

Opportunities - carparking

Carparking is limited. New developments provide inadequate parking to support their impact and once built Council only responds to community advice regarding non-compliance with parking requirements under the permit. It does not undertake proactive enforcement due to the large number of permit applications each year (about 1500).

Parking is not timed in the beach and river carparks.

There is an opportunity to identify sites for a park and ride service across the Bellarine during the summer months.

Opportunities - cycling

Providing better and safer cycling infrastructure is a major opportunity that needs to be far better co-ordinated across the Bellarine and into Geelong and the Surf Coast.

Bike riding in the region is not just about road cyclists on training rides, it's increasingly about families and people of all ages riding as individuals or as social groups and getting outdoor exercise.

There is a lack of linked infrastructure for people to feel safe and confident to commute to work or study. Ride on a Bike path then its onto roads often with poorly maintained or non-existent shoulders, back onto a bike path, a lack of connected infrastructure. Improved connected bike infrastructure will reduce the number of vehicles on the road.



There appears to be some internal bike riding tracks/paths within townships, often of poor quality and maintenance, but a lack of connection across communities for example from Ocean Grove through Barwon Heads to Geelong that should include access to Marshall station.

Likewise, there is very poor connection across the Southern Bellarine to Torquay, there are bike and shared paths but they all lack connection unlike the popular Bellarine rail trail.

There are few if any bike parking facilities. Noting that many cyclists also need bathroom as well as refreshment stops.

Opportunities - transport hubs

There is little co-ordination of public transport services across the Bellarine. There is a real opportunity to establish bus hubs, one missed with the current growth of orphan shopping centres across Geelong and the Bellarine.

- Local hubs - identify a significant place in each centre (or more than one if a large suburb) eg supermarket etc. Small buses run on a very frequent and continuous basis connecting all local hubs and local hubs to region hubs. Hubs need to be within walking distance of major shops etc
- Regional Hubs
 - Connecting centres to the bigger world e.g. train stations, shopping complexes, new developments enabling connection of local buses to long-distance buses, ferries, trains and planes.
 - Larger buses run on a timetable co-ordinating travel between region hub and local hubs. People arrive at or depart from regional hub by train etc, then bus is co-ordinated to that timetable to connect them with local hub without delay where frequent buses are available.
 - Travel to “hubs” will be by car, bike, walking, so established footpaths, bike tracks, shared paths and secure parking, bike storage are important.

Opportunities to co-ordinate online information

- Coordinate information and services, train, bus, ferries
- Replace current old style PDF with real time information



Summary

Issue of Concern	Areas Impacted
Cross Bellarine transport – eg St Leonards, Drysdale, Portarlington to Ocean Grove, Queenscliff to Ocean Grove – especially for students who attend campuses in Drysdale	All
Synchronicity re services from Geelong to Bellarine communities – dearth of services in school start/finish times; poor connectivity linking buses with Geelong train services; terminations at Drysdale do not meet North Bellarine needs. No north/south connections	All St Leonards, Portarlington Barwon Heads
Breamlea – no regular bus service/public transport at all	Breamlea
Lack of connection to key venues - Ocean Grove Beach, Deakin Uni Waurm Ponds campus, Portarlington ferry, Potato Shed, new North Bellarine Aquatic Centre, Drysdale schools, Murradoc Road (and Bendigo Bank)	All
Lack of accessible public transport options.	All
Forward planning for services to housing estates - Jetty Road of approximately 2,500 in stage 2 and building of homes in stage 1 still continuing; 270 in Wyndham Street; 30 Oakden; approx 200 in the McLeods development located within Wyndham Street; high possibility of other infills. Possible need for smaller buses	Drysdale
Myki card top up	Now available Drysdale newsagency and Ocean Grove tatslotto No provider Portarlington or elsewhere on Northern Bellarine
Bus shelters – virtually no shelter provided	Everywhere



Appendix

Copy letter from Barwon Heads resident to local Member of Parliament

Dear Alison

I often use the bus and tram to travel from Barwon Heads to Melbourne as it is convenient, safer and generates less carbon dioxide than the alternative.

In the eight years I have lived in Barwon Heads we have always had a spasmodic bus system with large timetable gaps and an early shut down. With the upgrading of the Geelong to Waurn Ponds railway line I was led to believe that this would improve my journey to Melbourne.

Since the new line was opened I have travelled several times to Melbourne and I have noticed that the bus I caught did not link to the Vline train at Marshall station (as it usually did previously) and it was quicker to take the bus to Geelong and catch the train to Melbourne from there. Noting this I decided to do some research. Using the Public Transport journey planning App I checked the recommended journeys to Melbourne for tomorrow (Thursday 6 February). This App indicates that there is no route 55 bus that links to trains at Marshall station (I checked all scheduled services up until 4pm). This means that despite the railway upgrades the journey to Melbourne from Barwon Heads and parts of Ocean Grove on route 55 is now longer than before the line was upgraded.

As a user of the public transport system I am frustrated that we went through all the disruptions of the railway upgrade and at the end of the interruptions and inconvenience our service to Melbourne is now worse. I am a supporter of the work that has been done on our railway upgrades but to then produce a timetable for buses/trains where, due to a lack of coordination, the journey now takes longer for all Barwon Heads/Ocean Grove services on route 55 is unacceptable.

Could you please advise me when this situation is likely to be rectified and our journey from Barwon Heads by bus and train to Melbourne will be reduced rather than increased to over two hours as per the current timetable.

Yours sincerely
Brian