



What SA Kids Have Told Us About Transport

Commissioner for
Children & Young People
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You may be surprised to learn that transport is one of the top five issues young people across the state have raised with the Commissioner when asked to share ideas for how their lives might be improved.



The three major challenges young people identified as barriers to having their transport needs met are **cost, accessibility and safety**. While not a 'hot button' topic in the same way that mental health or bullying is, transport is central to how young people experience their community, and means that these barriers are impacting on their capacity to participate fully in almost every aspect of their lives.

Decision makers should not underestimate the positive impact enabling young people to become more mobile would have on our collective wellbeing, as well as on our economic success and on young people themselves.

Young people in South Australia live in hugely diverse sets of circumstances. There are those who live within supportive households, where money is not an issue. Others are doing it tough. Some children and young people live with disability, while others are fulfilling roles as young carers. Some are forced to live independently out of home from a young age, while others manage one or more chronic health conditions that mean they must stay at home for much longer than they might like, and often spending significant time travelling to and from medical and other appointments.

Adults often forget that young people have complex busy lives with lots of moving parts that change on a daily basis. Because of this, just like many adults, they can often be time poor. They are juggling their commitments between school, work, sport, chores, hobbies, and volunteering, while also attending important social and recreational activities that ensure they connect regularly with family and friends.

Young people need to be able to get to and from all the activities they wish to participate in, regardless of their personal circumstances or geographical location. Their ability to do so determines how fully they can participate in their lives as active, engaged citizens.

'I want to pass my driving licence because I love to drive and then my mum & dad won't have to take me everywhere because we live out of town.'

Many of us might consider that the most affordable transport options available to young people such as buses, bikes, scooters and skateboards, are all easily accessed. Yet purchasing and then maintaining a push bike, scooter or skateboard are among some of the biggest barriers young people face when it comes to accessing affordable, reliable transport.

Thought the majority of young people can to some extent rely upon their parents to transport them to and from many commitments, some parents and carers are unable to afford to run a private vehicle. Or, if they can afford one, there may not be enough money to put fuel in the family car, or to get it regularly serviced. They may not be able to make loan repayments, or purchase insurance and replace worn tyres. They might not be able to renew a license, or register the family car for a full 12 months of every year.

Some parents live with a level of poverty that means they cannot afford to provide their children with bus fares to get them to and from school, let alone to other activities their children have expressed interest in participating in outside of school. Often too, these are the activities that provide a child with a sense of wellbeing and which add more meaning to their lives, enabling them to develop particular skills that are based on their interests and talents.

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High youth unemployment and uncertainty about the depth and length of the economic recession, particularly following the impact of COVID-19 has only exacerbated transport barriers.

Over the last twelve months significant parts of the economy have contracted, especially in industries that have traditionally provided young people with their first jobs, meaning many are now being required to travel greater distances to secure casual, part-time or ongoing permanent work.

Add to this the fact that public transport routes in towns and cities across South Australia primarily travel along major arterial routes in a hub and spoke configuration and the transport challenge becomes daunting. Many young people have expressed that they need to travel against the grain, both within and between suburbs, often for relatively short distances. This means they may lose hours from their day taking two buses or a bus and a train to travel the three or four kilometres needed to get to a part-time job that offers them crucial work hours after school or on weekends. And young people who are hampered by longer travel times on public transport are less likely to be called in for extra hours during a rush period.

For some young people obtaining a driver's license becomes crucial to their mobility. The need to regularly find a willing, fully licensed driver who can support their efforts to reach the required number of day and night driving hours to achieve this isn't easy. Plus, the cost of driving lessons and paying for driving tests can be a significant financial barrier, let alone that of financing purchase of a first car.

Young people that use bikes as their connective transport have described the struggle they face in taking them on trains and trams as a real deterrent. The ticketing requirements and a general lack of understanding from adult passengers and transit staff, makes the experience unpleasant and financially inefficient.

The fact that bikes cannot be taken on buses at all, shuts off another option to young people's mobility. In a similar way, skateboard and scooter riders don't always feel welcome in public spaces. They are constantly being asked to move on or to dismount and walk. A lack of urban infrastructure around bike lanes and safe places to lock up bikes also contributes to the need to own a car a lot sooner than many young people may want one.

Worries about their personal safety while travelling on all forms of public transport are a constant concern for young people across South Australia, regardless of economic and social circumstances. This extends to walking through or waiting in public spaces, especially at night. They have told me how important nighttime lighting is to their sense of safety and security, and how reassuring it is when they see businesses open late so that they know responsible adults are still around to assist should they need help.

For young people who rely on public transport, enclosed spaces like empty train carriages and buses compound their feelings of vulnerability. Seeing 'creepy or drunk adults' at places like bus shelters, train stations and the Interchange, can also impact on a young person's mobility.

In rural and remote locations across South Australia it is clear that children and young people share many of the same transport challenges as those living in metropolitan Adelaide. In fact, living away from Adelaide and its surrounds can sometimes be a multiplier of social and economic disadvantage.

It is unsurprising then that young people in rural centres describe how limited access to public transport is a real barrier to their capacity to find and keep employment, particularly when they often need access to jobs that lie outside their immediate community.

Young people's access to the full range of safe, affordable and reliable transport options, fully integrated between services is crucial if they are to fully participate in our communities and broader society. Young people need transport options that enable them to move quickly between services, so that they can fulfil their many commitments to study, work, play and socialising; activities that are essential to their sense of wellbeing, identity and personal autonomy.

- “ A more consistent transportation system so youth, and anyone for that matter, can get to Adelaide or Gawler to shop, work, complete courses, hang out with friends and live, just live!”
- “ Make the transport like flying to be cheaper, to [come] and go from Whyalla, because Whyalla is a beautiful place and we want it to be easily accessible for everyone.
- “ I would love to visit my family in Geelong or sister in QLD more but it's too expensive to fly.”
- “ I would also love to have the opportunity to work somewhere but I have to still wait a couple [of] years.”