

South Australian
Commissioner
for Children and
Young People
2023

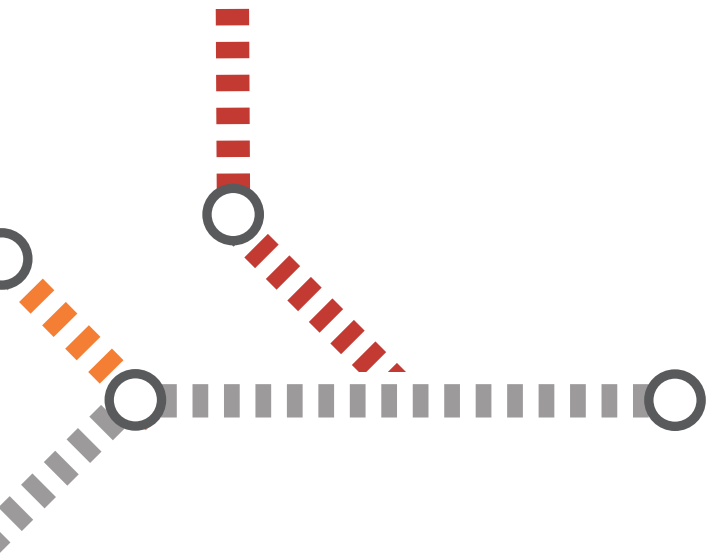
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Safe and Sound

Views and experiences
of young people on
public transport

PROJECT REPORT NO. 36 | JUNE 2023





The Commissioner's Role

The South Australian Commissioner for Children and Young People is an independent statutory position, established under the *Children and Young People (Oversight and Advocacy Bodies) Act 2016*.

The Commissioner's role includes advocating for systemic change to policies, programs and practices that impact the rights, development and wellbeing of South Australia's children and young people.

This work is informed by the experiences and issues of children and young people themselves, with a specific focus on those who struggle to have their voices heard.

The Commissioner's strategic agenda was formulated with direct input from children and young people. In particular children and young people asked the Commissioner to facilitate their involvement in decision making and to create opportunities for them to experience authentic participation.

The Commissioner is working with a number of partners on this agenda including ways in which children and young people can have input into the design and delivery of policies, processes, services and practices that affect their lives.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to the South Australian children and young people who shared their experiences and insights. Throughout this report we have used unedited quotes from children and young people to ensure their views are faithfully communicated.

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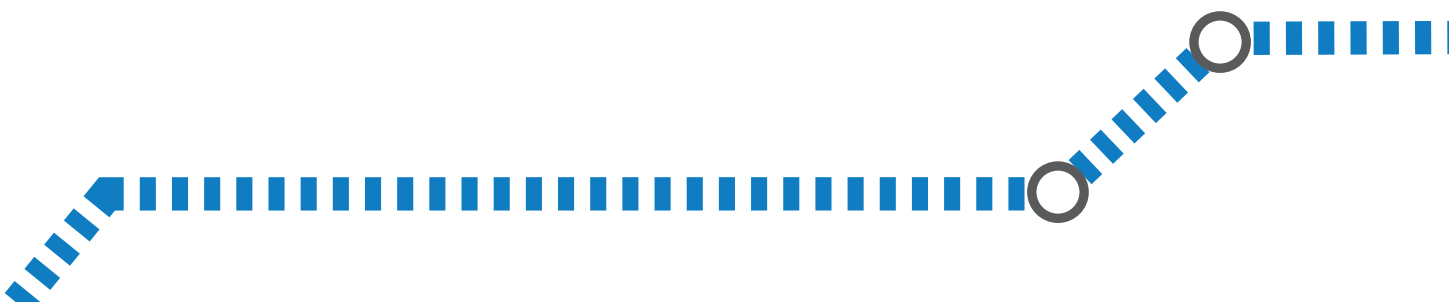


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To fully participate, young people need to be able to get themselves to all the activities they have committed to, regardless of their personal circumstances or geographical location.

Commissioner's Foreword

Transport is central to how young people experience their community and affects almost every aspect of their lives. Young people's access to a full range of reliable, consistent and integrated transport options is not just a 'nice to have' – it is an essential component of their full participation in society as active and engaged citizens.

As South Australia's Commissioner for Children and Young People, a key focus of my work is raising awareness about systemic issues that impact on children and young people's rights, development, and wellbeing outcomes.

My advocacy is directly informed by my regular conversations with children and young people. It seeks to place their voices front and centre in public policy and ensure they are engaged, healthy, safe, valued, and have a positive view of their future.

Transport consistently features in the top five issues raised by children and young people across both metropolitan Adelaide and regional South Australia.

In preparing this report 1,124 South Australian young people aged 13 to 20 years participated in a survey about their experiences using SA public transport. The three major challenges young people face in relation to public transport are its cost, accessibility, and safety.

The availability and affordability of public transport underpins children and young people's capacity to engage with school, employment,

key services, sport, hobbies, interests, and other social and recreational activities they enjoy.

When transport is lacking, unreliable, unsafe, or unaffordable, it has a disproportionate impact on the quality of their lives.

Adults often forget that young people have complex busy lives and can be as time poor as they are. To fully participate, young people need to be able to get themselves to all the activities they have committed to, regardless of their personal circumstances or geographical location.

Public transport routes in towns and cities across South Australia primarily travel along major arterial routes in a hub and spoke configuration. Many young people have expressed the need to travel against the grain, both within and between suburbs, often for relatively short distances. They can lose hours from their day when having to take two buses, or a bus and a train, to travel just three or four kilometres to a rehearsal, training session or part-time job undertaken after school. This can mean a commute of over an hour is required either side of a two-hour training session or three-hour work shift.

The same young people being hampered by these longer travel times on public transport are less likely to be called in for extra hours during a rush period, or be able to take up opportunities they may be offered at short notice in a sporting arena, hobby, or other recreational setting.

There are strong links between children and young people's mobility and their overall social inclusion and wellbeing. Children and young people are among the most transport disadvantaged members of their community.¹ Without alternative modes of transport (such as having a driver's license or parents, friends, and caregivers to give them a lift), children and young people can become socially excluded or isolated.

Transport disadvantage has a demonstrable impact on school attendance, gaining and maintaining employment, as well as on a child or young person's capacity to make and maintain their social connections. This is further exacerbated for those who have a disability, low socio-economic status or geographical remoteness.

Most survey responses were from children and young people living in Adelaide metropolitan areas. In comparison with their regional counterparts, these children and young people have greater access to transport services and accessible alternatives, such as walking or cycling. Earlier consultations undertaken with children and young people living in rural, regional and remote areas of South Australia, have already identified their varied experiences of transport disadvantage. They include reduced mobility due to the need to travel longer distances and the risk of social exclusion that they face because of this.

Many young people reported that limited public transport in the regions impacts significantly on other aspects of their lives, including getting and maintaining a part-time or full-time job, travelling to the nearest place of study, or allaying ongoing concerns they have about relying on others to drive them. This includes their inexperienced driver mates or overstretched family members who often have several transport commitments to fulfil.

Worries about personal safety on all forms of public transport are a concern for young people across South Australia, regardless of their economic and social circumstances.

These worries extend to walking through, or waiting in public spaces, especially at night. Young people have described how important night-time lighting is, and how reassured they are when they see businesses open late so they can be confident there are some responsible adults around in case they need help. For young people who rely on public transport at all hours of the day and evening, travelling on empty train carriages and waiting around deserted bus compounds can lead to significant feelings of anxiety and vulnerability in relation to their personal safety.

My recent survey findings are consistent with what was reported in my *Public Transport – It's Not Fine* report. In this 2019 report I heard that young people sometimes feel unsafe and unwelcome on public transport, particularly at times when they have forgotten their student identity card, or don't have enough money for their fare (but really need to get home).

In these situations young people described how the transport system can be “cruel”, “unfair” and “unkind” to them.

Over recent years the SA Public Transport Authority has been making more active efforts to not “punish” students for not having their student identification card on them while travelling home on the bus from school whilst wearing a school uniform. However, this is far from universal and young people continue to face ongoing challenges while on public transport.

The views expressed in this report have been gathered directly from young people across the state. They include both positive and negative experiences along with suggestions about what needs improving. Although many of the issues are shared by adults, young people have valuable insights to offer that are unique to them and their lived experiences. Their contributions should inform efforts made to increase the confidence and comfort of young people using public transport. In doing so we can simultaneously contribute to providing an increase in individual use and system sustainability.



Helen Connolly

Commissioner for Children
and Young People



Context

Adelaide's public transport system consists of buses, trams, and trains, made mostly available in the Adelaide metropolitan area. The patronage on public transport remained steady between 2016 and 2019, but despite the government's aim to increase usage overall, has decreased significantly year on year since 2020, mainly due to the impacts of COVID-19.

In the 2021–22 financial year, there were 47,529,517 passenger trips on public transport. Bus services were used by 72% of patrons, followed by trains at 16% and trams at 12%.²

Children and young people make up a significant population of Adelaide Metro patrons. Almost 1 in 5 of all patrons are primary or secondary students. Only 25% of patrons are classified as 'regular' full fare paying customers. Other patrons could be described as those who are on lower incomes, 29% on concessions (this includes tertiary students), 19% classified as students (primary and secondary students), 11% who are Seniors, and 15% of passengers who take free travel to special events, including New Year's Eve, the footy express, and tram travel within the Adelaide CBD.

Under the *Children and Young People (Oversight and Advocacy Bodies) Act 2016*, each State authority "must, in carrying out its functions or exercising its powers, protect, respect and seek to give effect to the rights set out from time to time in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child".

Particular rights relevant to public transport involve agencies always doing what is in the best interests of the child (Article 3), including keeping children safe.

Similarly, under the *Children and Young People (Safety) Act 2017* and the *Children's Protection Act 1993*, statutory bodies (including those bodies who administer passenger transport services on which children are carried for a fare) must comply with provision of child safe environments. To support child safe environments, South Australia established a Child Safe Environments, Principles of Good Practice Guide, which has been in place since 2012.

This guide contains overarching principles that organisations must follow to ensure creation of a child safe environment. These include but are not limited to embedding child safety and wellbeing into organisational leadership, governance, culture, and training, with an emphasis on best practice in creating child safe environments.

Best practice includes engaging children and young people in the development of public transport policies taking into account their views and experiences utilising public transport services across the community. The principles are designed to operate as the baseline for how children and young people should be experiencing public transport every day.

Whilst we commend the action plans developed by the government as part of the public transport diversity and inclusion framework on transport (including a plan dedicated to students and young people) there is still scope to apply a child safe and child friendly focus on improving overall access to safe 'active' transport.

Consistently, children and young people have said they want safe, affordable, efficient and convenient public transport services, safer roads and alternate transport corridors for cyclists, skaters and pedestrians. They recognise that the better these alternative modes of transport and their associated infrastructure are, the fewer cars will be on the road, leading to safer streets overall, especially in urban areas.

Young people who use bicycles as their connective transport describe how they struggle taking bikes on and off trams and trains. The ticketing requirements and lack of understanding from adult passengers and transit staff make the experience unpleasant and inefficient. The fact that bikes cannot be taken on buses at all shuts off another transport option and hampers their mobility.

Children and young people highlighted the need for transport services to be trustworthy, welcoming, regular, and efficient.

This includes those public transport services operating within regional areas, with the strong need for better links between these and Adelaide, including those to Adelaide's CBD. These links would better enable children and young people's participation in their education, work, recreational and social activities essential to their health, wellbeing and citizenship.



Recommendations

1

Address children and young people's safety concerns through better street lighting at shelters and near bus stops, and by offering more frequent bus, tram and train services. These need to come with synchronised connections so that they're not left waiting for long periods or forced to walk extended distances in the dark because timetabled services are not meeting their travel needs.

2

Upgrade public transport infrastructure and facilities, including bus, train and tram stops, stations and shelters. These upgrades should include a modernised and environmentally sustainable transport system with air conditioning and USB charging ports.

3

Introduce free travel to and from school and sport for children and young people from low-income families by expanding the government School Card Scheme.

4

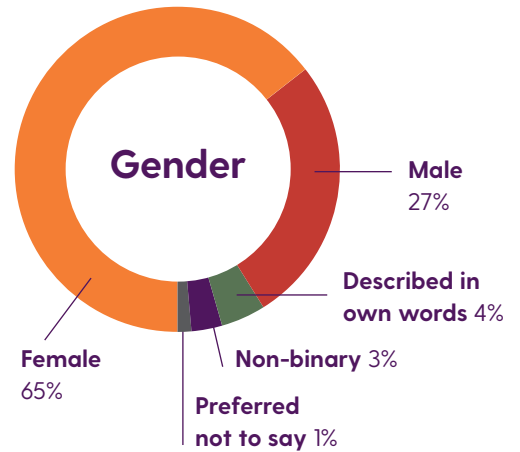
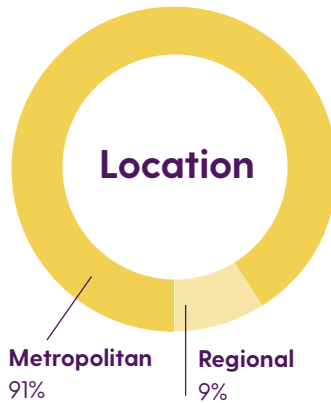
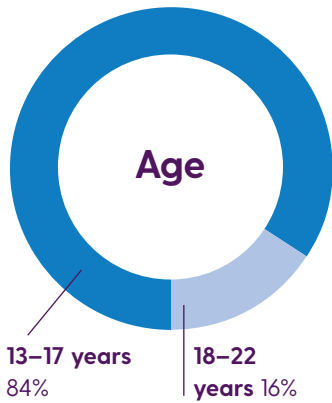
Increase digital accessibility for those travelling on public transport through provision of free Wi-Fi on all public transport and at train stations. This will enable children and young people to make the most of their travel time, while simultaneously improving the accuracy of timetables and tracking services via mobile applications, which they increasingly rely upon.

Key messages

- 1** When transport is lacking, unsafe or unreliable it has a disproportionate impact on children and young people's lives.
- 2** Affordable and accessible public transport underpins children and young people's capacity to engage in education, employment, sporting and other hobbies and recreational activities. It offers a convenient and cheap way for children and young people to travel without needing a car and a driver's license, or relying on parents, friends, and caregivers for their transportation needs.
- 3** Regular users who are most likely to report feeling unsafe on public transport include young women, LGBTQIA+ young people, young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and those with a disability.
- 4** Some of the issues that made young people feel unsafe on public transport included interactions with "creepy" adults, experiencing or witnessing sexual harassment, antisocial behaviour, and violence or threats of violence.
- 5** Transport access issues in regional areas significantly limits and restricts regional young people's study and work opportunities.
- 6** Young people's expectations of a positive "transport experience" are often not met due to challenges with routes, timetabling, connections, and ticket payment options.

Key findings

Of the 1,124 young people surveyed:



94% of respondents were secondary school students.



23% of respondents were from a culturally and linguistically diverse background.



29% of respondents also had a part-time or casual job alongside school.



23% of respondents belong to the LGBTQIA+ community.

Use of public transport:

41% of respondents used public transport every day or most days (49% of females and 42% of males).

8% of respondents report combining two forms of transport in one trip as part of their short commute journey.

81% of respondents said that public transport is an important way of getting around.

76% of respondents used the bus, the most commonly used form of public transport by respondents.

86% of respondents said that it was important that they were able to easily connect between buses, trains, and trams.

11% of respondents used the train the most.

92% of respondents said that it was important that public transport was reliable.

4% of respondents reported trams as their most common form of transport.

Safety and public transport:

Young people are concerned about their safety on board and waiting for public transport.

93% of respondents said it was important to feel safe on public transport.

91% of respondents said it was important to have safe spaces to wait for public transport.

Female respondents more frequently felt unsafe walking to, waiting for, and using public transport than their male counterparts.

83% reported feeling creeped out by adults and 33% reported this was "almost always a problem".

58% of respondents only felt "somewhat safe" while waiting for public transport.

12% of respondents reported feeling unsafe while waiting for public transport.

The most common problems young people experience while using public transport:



Feeling "creeped out" by adults




Low phone battery



Feeling judged by adults



Feeling judged by other young people



“Public transport allows me to go from one place to another without having to drive as it is often difficult to find parking. I also like that there are a large number of public transport points which allows me to get from one place to another in a relatively simple manner.”

(18, Female, Adelaide Northern Suburbs)

Young people's experiences of public transport

Young people surveyed said that public transport is a vital part of their independence. It provides them with an accessible and affordable way to travel to school, training, or university, to meet up with friends, get to and from work, and enjoy sport, socialising and other recreational activities; all without having to attain a driver's licence or rely on a parent or caregiver to drive them where they need to be when they need to be there.

Not having to depend on their parents or carers for transport is critical to many young people's confidence and self-sufficiency, allowing them the freedom and independence they need to live their own lives.

Some young people said they use public transport because they have no other way of getting to school, work or to their social engagements. They said it meant they could "get to places they can't otherwise get to" in a way that is mostly safe, affordable, and accessible.

“ **[Public transport] provides a freedom for me to be able to get where I need to be without outside support.**” (17, Non-binary, Adelaide Western Suburbs)

ACCESSIBILITY, COST AND CONVENIENCE

Some young people said they enjoyed the accessibility and convenience of public transport. Whilst some expressed the usefulness of school and tertiary education concessions, they also felt public transport should be free for all students. Others see public transport as a cheaper and more environmentally friendly mode of transport than a car, with respondents citing the high costs of purchasing, maintaining, and fuelling cars, in addition to getting their licence, as some of the reasons they choose to use public transport.

“ *It allows me to go places I otherwise would not be able to go without completely disrupting the schedule of someone with a license. It also allows me to not worry about traffic, car maintenance, petrol, excess emissions, and essentially all the issues that come with owning and using a car.*” (18, Male, Adelaide Northern Suburbs)

“ *It's convenient, often cheap and more environmentally friendly than individual travel.*” (18, Male, Eyre Peninsula SA)

ENVIRONMENT

Many of the young people who completed the survey, cited environment and sustainability as reasons they liked public transport. For them catching public transport is “better for the environment than driving” – especially with the introduction of hybrid buses.

- “ [I like that public transport] Helps save the environment by encouraging people to use their own cars less and to just have multiple people in one vehicle.” (14, Female, Adelaide Metropolitan Area)
- “ There should be big pushes to get people to take PT instead of cars. Trains, trams, and trucks are safer, more efficient, better for the environment. Better in almost every category except for convenience.” (20, Male, Adelaide Western Suburbs)

TICKETING, PAYMENT OPTIONS AND FINES

Young people said one of the major issues they faced when using public transport was Adelaide Metro’s ‘metroCARD’ system, which currently does not have facilities for ‘top-ups’ to be made enroute. Young people want to be able to use their phones as a back-up for their physical cards when this is needed – especially given single-trip tickets are no longer available for purchase on buses.

Although Adelaide Metro does offer metroCARD top ups online, young people reported that this facility was not user-friendly. They would also like to see instantaneous metroCARD top-ups made available.

TRACKING SERVICES

Further to the difficulties young people said they experienced in ‘topping up’ their metroCARDS, they noted that the Adelaide Metro website was confusing to use, and that transport tracking services were often inaccurate. They would like to see apps that show more accurate departure and arrival times, and a website that is easier to navigate, with information aimed specifically at young people as the largest single public transport customer group.

Incorrect estimates of how far away buses are, and outdated or incorrect timetables showing on mobile apps, meant some young people missed buses and trams. They reported incidents of buses having departed earlier or arriving later than timetabled, and how this results in them missing connecting services so that they would arrive late for classes and other commitments. They found this particularly frustrating given they had planned their routes in advance, to avoid exactly that outcome.



- “ They are always late and impact my learning by being late. They also make me late for work, leading to a large anxiety around getting yelled at for being late.” (15, Female, Adelaide Eastern Suburbs)
- “ [Public transport would be safer if there were] route checkers like in the city, or something was placed at [the] interchange so I wouldn't have to guess the buses.” (17, Male, Adelaide Northern Suburbs)

TIMETABLING & ROUTES

Young people said that public transport services often arrive late and sometimes not at all – leaving them stranded so that they're late for school or work. This was especially true on weekends or outside peak travel times. They reported that this infrequent timetabling not only leaves children and young people waiting in unsafe, unsheltered stops and stations, it also poses considerable barriers to socialising, engaging in recreational and sporting activities, and maintaining casual, part-time or full-time employment.

In addition to this, young people noted that many Adelaide Metro services required transit into the city for inter-suburban travel. They expressed a need for better, more direct inter-suburban routes that went across suburbs rather than in and out via Adelaide City.

- “ The fact buses are late 9/10 times. There have been times I've nearly been late due to this. The longest a bus has been late for is 30+ minutes causing me to be late to school that morning.” (18, Male, Adelaide Western Suburbs)

“ I find that bus services around the northern suburbs are sparse and unreliable at times. The train is fine, but I have had plenty of difficulty getting to and from the station when I take the bus there.” (20, Female, Adelaide Northern Suburbs)

“ I wish I could reach [public transport] easily and safely. I wish it were organised to maximise efficiency. It is a 20 min drive to my workplace but takes over an hour and two buses to get there using public transport.” (17, Non-binary, Adelaide Inner Northern)

- “ If I just miss the train, I have to wait an extra half hour and get home half [an] hour later.” (19, Female, Adelaide Western Suburbs)
- “ I cannot stress enough that it should be easy to catch connecting public transport without waiting 30+ minutes between services. I don't feel that it is easy or accessible to do this at the moment.” (20, Female, Adelaide Northern Suburbs)
- “ The amount of public transport is so minimal that I still need to drive to get to a station and it is extremely annoying.” (18, Female, Adelaide Southern Suburbs)
- “ ...Also, on the weekends the train only comes every hour which is a problem for safety because you could be stuck somewhere unsafe for a long period of time without a way out.” (19, Female, Adelaide Metropolitan Area)

ACCESSIBILITY

Survey respondents thought that public transport in South Australia needed to be upgraded. They said many of the buses were “old, smelly, dirty, or otherwise poorly maintained”. They wanted modernised, safe, environmentally friendly, and accessible transport services.

Young people also said they wanted increased accessibility for people with a disability. Respondents with a disability said they wanted better help from drivers and transport staff when getting on and off public transport, and more seats that were designed specifically for people with disabilities. One young person with a vision impairment reported that they often struggled to find a seat or felt judged for using dedicated disabled seating because their disability was not obvious.

SAFETY

Most young people reported that when using public transport, they ‘felt safe most of the time’. For these young people, catching public transport was often a safer alternative to walking long distances – especially at night.

Despite the accessibility, cost and convenience of public transport, and the independence it affords young people, some survey responses highlighted concerns young people have about the safety and hygiene of public transport, as well as the anti-social, and in some situations, criminal behaviour of other passengers they’ve witnessed. Some young people said they found public transport services unclean and littered with rubbish, chewing gum and graffiti.

They also noted how difficult it was to socially distance themselves from other passengers, particularly at the height of COVID-19 when many passengers boarded the bus without a hygiene mask and then sat next to or near them.

“ I am often scared one of the threatening adults will follow me and hurt me because I am a POC and/or visibly queer.” (17, Non-binary, Adelaide Northern Suburbs)

“ The creepy people, the harassment I get for what I’m wearing (which isn’t okay). Feeling unsafe. [I] can’t listen to music because I need to be aware of the people near me.” (16, Female, Adelaide Northern Suburbs)

“ I hate taking the bus every day. I am so scared on there.” (17, Non-binary, Adelaide Northern Suburbs)

“ I have only experienced this 4 times, but it’s always incredibly uncomfortable when there are middle aged men holding their phone camera towards you since it feels like they are filming you, but you can’t [do] anything about it.” (15, Female, Adelaide Northern Suburbs)

“ Sometimes it’s awkward because I have seen women get harassed by other men on the bus more than once, and when it happens everyone gets uncomfortable and I don’t know whether I should say something or not.” (13, Female, Adelaide Southern Suburbs)

Young people said that the behaviour of other passengers made them feel particularly unsafe. This included “creepy” adult passengers, “druggies” and strangers yelling, invading personal space, or striking up unwanted conversations, as the main reasons they felt unsafe or “creeped out” on public transport. Sexual harassment including cat calling and leering was also reported.

Alarming, some respondents reported instances of being filmed or followed by other passengers (mainly older men).

- “ The things people seem to get away with near the back of the bus is kind of ridiculous, not limited to things like drug use and sexual acts. I would wish that there was less tolerance for that.” (18, Female, Adelaide Southern Suburbs)
- “ Some older people on the train are perverted and touch you when you sit next to them and it's uncomfortable and unsafe as a teenager.” (16, Female, Adelaide Northern Suburbs)

REGIONAL EXPERIENCES

Despite the small numbers of regional young people who completed the survey, their responses resonated with key messages from previous consultations undertaken with regional young people. For these young people, the lack of public transport options requires creative solutions that will ensure they can enjoy greater freedoms, independence and connectedness in the same way their metropolitan counterparts do.

“ I enjoy the independence it has given me since I was a young teenager, and I wouldn't be attending university without it. That said, there have undoubtedly been times where it has been a barrier to my work and study, as I have been utterly exhausted by the process of trying to get home and waiting far too long for a bus to come (or to not show up at all), and events like the Gawler line closure lasted nearly the entirety of my undergraduate degree and severely hindered my ability to commute.” (18, Female, Adelaide Northern Suburbs)

Young people who came from regional areas expressed a need for greater access to transport services overall. They reported that the lack of mobility and transport disadvantage in regional areas is what drives social isolation and exclusion. Young people in regional locations, just like their city counterparts, want faster, more direct school routes to improve access to and from school.

Some young people are dependent on the school bus and do not have alternative ways to travel to school (such as walking or cycling) mainly as the distances are too great and the routes too isolated and risky. Instead of waiting for a school bus or other bus in exposed locations on the side of the road they want well-designed shelters where they can wait in a protected yet visible area.



“[I would feel safer on public transport if] bus drivers were trained in de-escalation or having a security guard (NOT a ticket inspector) on at late/midnight buses or trains.”

(18, Male, Adelaide Western Suburbs)

What would make public transport better

Young people had many suggestions for ways to improve the overall safety and accessibility of public transport for their age group. These suggestions included improvements to safety overall, along with youth focused timetabling, ticketing and payment options, improving stops and station infrastructure, and focusing on accessibility for people living with a disability.

IMPROVE SAFETY

To improve safety on public transport, young people said they want to see greater levels of security that include a stronger presence of Adelaide Metro staff on trains, trams and buses, as well as at stations, stops and platforms.

They believe this would discourage antisocial behaviour and keep younger and more vulnerable passengers safe. They wanted to know that a security guard, or the bus or tram driver could *and* would handle nuisance behaviour and manage threatening situations if they occur – especially at night. One young person's survey response noted that "trains with security guards or personnel in the carriages feel a lot safer".

Young people want to see drivers pay greater attention to what is happening on the bus and be trained to intervene in unsafe situations if these occurred. They want to see drivers given greater control over who is allowed to get on a bus or tram, so that people who were obviously under the influence of drugs or alcohol, or otherwise behaving anti-socially, could be

denied entry by the driver, or removed from the service by the driver or public transport personnel if this was deemed necessary.

Young people said that increasing safety measures for children and young people should also include improving safety measures for women, CALD and gender-diverse people, and those living with disability. They proposed more school buses be introduced so school students can travel safely and separately to adults.

Young people reported that buses were often cramped and overcrowded – often to what they believed were unsafe levels. They wanted more seating and more frequent services made available to address this issue. This observation also raised feedback relating to issues of safety and accessibility for passengers with a disability.

“ [I would feel safer on public transport if] bus drivers were trained in de-escalation or having a security guard (NOT a ticket inspector) on at late/midnight buses or trains.” (18, Male, Adelaide Western Suburbs)

“ [Public transport would be safer if] Bus drivers had better authority to be able to get someone off a bus. For example, one

time I was on a bus and about 4 teenagers got on. They refused to pay and started being racist towards the bus driver, making fun of people on the bus and playing music out loud. The bus driver tried asking them to get off, but they of course refused.” (13, Non-binary, Adelaide Eastern Suburbs)

“ Often the social environment on the bus feels unmanaged and undisciplined. Social rules are often overlooked, and many individuals make the environment uncomfortable without any sense of repercussions.” (17, Non-binary, Adelaide Western Suburbs)

“ I think there should be another worker on the bus that could watch the people because sometimes I see people doing really weird stuff and I don't feel very comfortable or safe.” (12, Female, Adelaide Western Suburbs)



STOPS AND STATION INFRASTRUCTURE

Young people want to see safer, better designed waiting areas for public transport. Approximately ninety percent of young people surveyed said it was important to them that they have somewhere safe to wait for public transport services, particularly at night or in remote places.

They want to see better lit and more protected shelters designed and installed throughout the outer suburbs of Adelaide and particularly in regional locations.

“ Better lighting, especially at night, would make users, especially young people, feel safer as they would be able to see what's happening around them better.” (17, Female, Eyre Peninsula SA)

“ It'd be great to have more shelters, as the shelter at my nearest bus stop was removed as it became damaged after time but was never replaced. During winter, especially when it's raining, it deters me from catching public transport as I do not want to get sick standing in the rain.” (18, Female, Adelaide Western Suburbs)

“ **[Public transport would be better if there was] more lighting, SHELTERS for bus stops as I've had to wait in wind rain and hail on a regular basis just to get home as the bus stop, I need does NOT have a shelter, the one on the other side does though.**” (18, Male, Adelaide Northern Suburbs)

“ [Public transport would be safer if...] the stops could be designed safer somehow – when waiting under the bus shelter I get worried a car will come along and attempt abduction (I’ve heard a story about this happening to another girl my age).”
(16, Female, Adelaide Eastern Suburbs)

TICKETS

Young people were aware that in Victoria and New South Wales all public transport allows passengers to pay directly from their debit card or phone wallet. They wanted to see this method of payment enabled in South Australia. While trains and trams already host vendor “tap and pay” machines for payment by card or phone, Adelaide Metro buses currently do not.

The announcement that the government will be extending this infrastructure to include the O-Bahn and full bus network (announced 2 Feb 2023) is welcome – however it should be remembered that most young people do not have credit cards, and will need access to a debit card to make the most of this expansion.

Also, current “tap and pay” options are charged as a regular fare which costs more than a student or concession fare. Young people want to be able to host their metroCARD on their mobile phones – “like you can with proof of age cards or credit cards”. This would prevent there being a problem if they lost or forgot their metroCARD or ticket.

Young people who do not live near a news-agent, or who are rushing to meet a work or study commitment, and who haven’t realised their metroCARD or ticket has run out of trips or funds, are often caught out. While some bus drivers are understanding and allow young people to board regardless of their situation, others do not, leaving young people stranded

without transport and having to deal with the consequences of being late to work, school, or an appointment – thereby creating extra levels of stress and anxiety.

As covered in my *Public Transport – It’s Not Fine* report (2019), these are the types of challenges that often result in children and young people being unfairly fined for fare evasion. This has a compounding effect because young people often cannot afford to pay the fines in the timelines required, and will therefore also incur late payment fees. These grow exponentially the longer the fine remains unpaid, with young people becoming reliant on family members to pay them out.³

As a result of the recommendation made in my report and in the Nyland Royal Commission report, the Attorney-General’s office consulted with relevant stakeholders on the proposed reduction to the victims of crime levy. For young people, this culminated in a reduced levy for children and young people which commenced on 31 January 2023. However, there has been no reduction in the rate of fines for young people meaning they are still required to pay the same rate as adults. Young people said they would like to see fines for students scrapped or capped and outstanding fees reduced or eliminated altogether.

“ **The metro scanners (to tap on the bus) only accept metro cards which means if you forget your card, you’re kind of stuck. Other states (e.g., Sydney) have installed into their scanner machines that you can use apple pay to tap on as well. The fee is slightly higher (I guess as a penalty for forgetting your card) but overall, it’s a life-saver for when you don’t have your card which sometimes happens.**

Maybe adding this to Adelaide buses would be helpful to everyone.” (15, Female, Adelaide Eastern Suburbs)

“ Add metroCARD support to phones. And not the one that is on trams, because that requires you to pay for a single trip. I am an avid user of the 28 day pass so being able to have my metroCARD with that loaded on it available on my phone would be a life saver.” (17, Male, Adelaide Southern Suburbs)

TIMETABLING & ROUTES

In addition to young people's desire for up-to-date apps and tracking services, they would also like to see timetabling that reflects the needs of young people; particularly throughout inter peak times and on more direct routes. They would also like a greater frequency of bus, tram and train services at the times they're looking to use them.

Young people especially wanted more frequent transport services made available at night, so they aren't left waiting alone at stops and stations in the dark. They want to be able to rely on public transport services during inter peak times and at night in the same way they rely on these services at peak times during the day.

They also want services to 'sync up' with other routes, ensuring smooth transfers between trains, trams, and major bus routes, and without lengthy waits in between. Having their needs considered when timetabling decisions are being made would assist with this.

Young people were keen to see accessibility measures recently implemented across the network introduced on more Adelaide Metro trains, trams and some of the newer buses.

These include announcing the route and stop numbers, and letting passengers know when they were on an express service or not.

“ Some of the Adelaide metro buses are falling apart and being held together with tape.” (19, Female, Adelaide Metropolitan Area)

“ **While disability seating is available, I've often had experiences where I have been told to move because I don't look disabled. My disability is invisible and makes it so I am unable to stand for long periods of time. It can make catching public transport very difficult during peak travel times.**” (16, Female, Adelaide Northern Suburbs)

“ I think public transport would feel a lot safer with well-trained bus drivers who can help disabled people and are aware of unsafe situations.” (16, Female, Adelaide Southern Suburbs)

Many of the new metro buses and trains now have USB charging ports installed, with young people keen to see these installed on all public transport services, particularly given that low phone battery levels were a recurring problem for approximately 70% of respondents.

As children and young people rely heavily on their mobile phones to keep track of time, plan their journeys, and contact friends and family, they felt having the capacity to charge their phone on public transport was imperative to their safety. It not only enables them to contact friends, parents, or caregivers, before and when they arrive at their destination, it also allows them to contact police or security services if they feel unsafe.

REGIONAL ACCESS

Like their metropolitan counterparts, regional young people want their school bus route to be specific to school students. They want connecting buses between regional towns to improve social connection and access to school, employment and extra-curricular activities.

“ [Public transport would be better if...] Schools had their own personal and private bus for all areas – our school bus is for those who live where public buses don't go.”
(15, Female, Riverland SA)

“ I think having a focus on implementing public transport in rural and remote areas would be very nice, especially between towns which would be far away on foot. This would allow sharing of resources and convenience going from one town to another to be much easier, not to mention, safer for young people. This would also be beneficial for students who live out of town but would like to join an extra-curricular club or work in town.” (16, Female, Eyre Peninsula)



A way forward

To make public transport safer and more accessible and affordable, implementing the range of practical suggestions young people have made would make all the difference.

These suggestions include providing visible, well lit, well designed protective shelters that don't leave passengers exposed to the elements while they wait, and which ensure they're not 'passed by' when they do use them.

It means installing technology that enables mobile phones to be charged so that passengers of all ages can maintain communication with their support networks and access information about services they need.

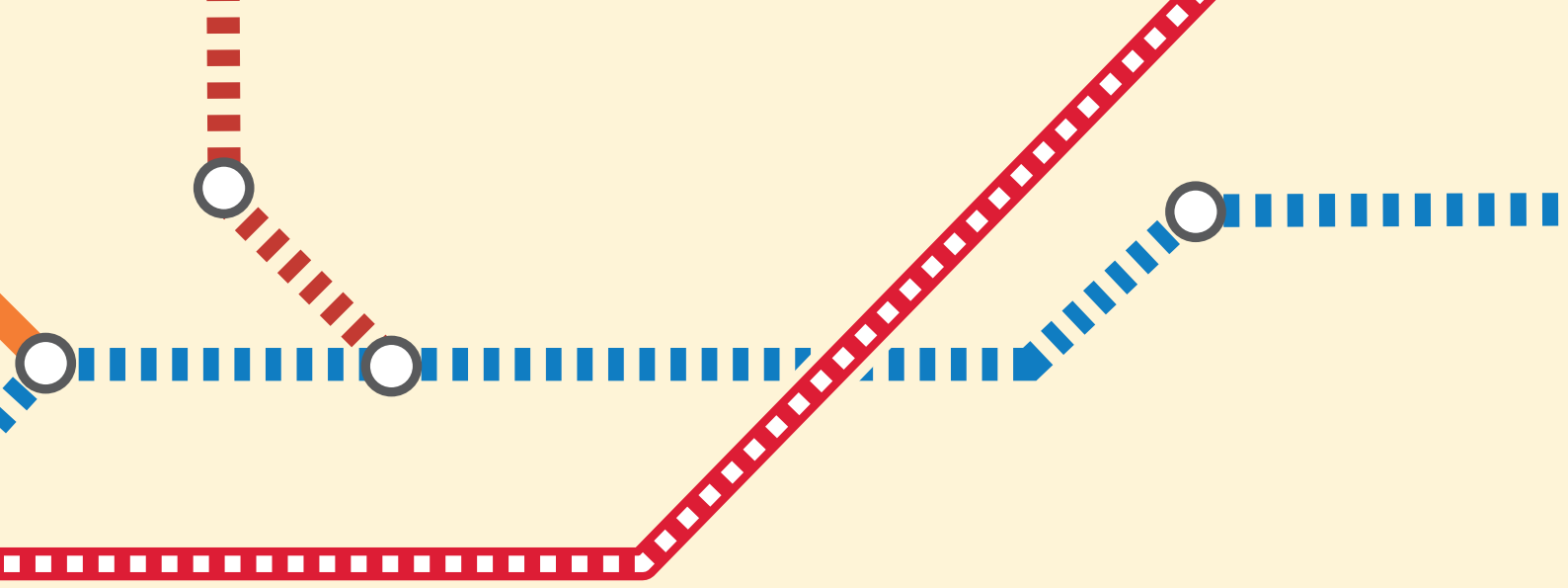
It means increasing security presence and CCTV monitoring on trains, trams and bus services and stations, so that younger and more vulnerable passengers feel safe at all times. Providing more frequent connections between stops, so that passengers are not left waiting for long periods or forced to walk extended distances between stops for different public transport services, are also needed, particularly at night.

Although the public transport needs of children and young people who are living in Adelaide and in other state metropolitan centres need to be addressed, it is the lack of public transport in rural and regional areas, that places the most significant burden on South Australian young people and their families. The lack of public transport services in these areas limits and restricts the lives of children and young people in ways that those living in metropolitan centres take for granted.

It is essential to find new and creative solutions that address issues of access and affordability in regional locations. As a priority, sustainable transport options that can be accessed independently need to be made available to more children and young people in regional locations.

Regional young people in particular often have to rely upon a parent or carer to take them where they need to go, and be able to collect them when it's time to leave. When this isn't possible, young people can't commit to group or team activities that would benefit them in myriad ways. If regional young people had greater access to affordable transport they would not feel as dependent, isolated, or limited in their choices. It would also enable them to seek part-time work, enjoy recreational activities in their own preferred timeframes, and increase their overall wellbeing and sense of independence. This 'connectedness' with those of their own age across their community is vital for them to thrive.





Endnotes

- 1 Stanley, John, Stanley, Janet, 2020. The humble school bus: An opportunity for improving regional mobility (Working Paper). Institute of Transport and Logistic Studies (ITLS).
- 2 Department for Infrastructure and Transport. 2021-2022 Annual Report. Available at https://www.dit.sa.gov.au/about_us/governance_reporting/annual_report/dit-annual-report-2021-22-online-version
- 3 Commissioner for Children and Young People. 2019. *Public Transport – It's Not Fine* report.

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