

# **Submission to the Queensland Government:**

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**Review of public transport fares for the TransLink public  
transport network in South East Queensland**

15/3/2013



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### Introduction

The announcement that the State Government intends to introduce a new fare structure for public transport in South East Queensland (SEQ) is a welcome development.<sup>i</sup> This submission provides advice to the State Government regarding public transport fares for services operating within the TransLink network. This submission has been developed by the Queensland Council of Social Service with input from Rail Back on Track, Council of the Ageing (COTA) and the Multicultural Development Association (MDA).

QCROSS would urge the Government to focus in this review on the particular needs of those members of the community that do not have access to private vehicles, and for whom access to public transport is critical. As Dodson *et al* (2003) have argued households that do not have the financial capacity to travel by car 'are potentially at a disadvantage in their ability to achieve social wellbeing'<sup>ii</sup> and for this reason QCROSS considers that the implications of this review extend well beyond the transport portfolio.

The primary recommendation of this submission is that the State Government consider adopting *targeted concessions* for disadvantaged groups to ensure that people with limited financial resources are able to access public transport services for both social and economic participation.

The provision of targeted concessions has real benefits for the economy. It increases participation in the workforce with flow on impacts on productivity, tax revenue and welfare costs.<sup>iii</sup> Many disadvantaged jobseekers, particularly young people and the long-term unemployed, are discouraged from finding and securing adequate work because the costs of catching public transport outweigh the rewards available from the low-paid part-time employment available to these individuals.

The provision of targeted concessions also has the potential to be revenue neutral because it will have a positive effect on overall patronage. Lower transport fares for economically disadvantaged people have the potential to induce public transport use amongst people who would otherwise find the cost prohibitive or who might choose fare evasion because they cannot afford the cost of public transport.

Specifically this submission recommends that the review of public transport fares examine the feasibility of:

- extending concessions to disadvantaged and vulnerable groups, such as people on low-incomes, jobseekers, refugees and asylum seekers

- (re)introducing capped or daily fares for commuters
- introducing free off peak or weekend travel for low income pensioners and seniors
- introducing lower cost ticketing options for families
- reviewing the administration of post-secondary student concessions
- examining where the benefits of the nine and free incentive arrangements are being felt within the community with a view to ensuring that there are equitable incentives to encourage public transport patronage in place.

The following sections provide information to support these recommendations.

## **Context and background**

A comprehensive review of public transport fares should address four interconnected issues:

- revenue
- patronage
- affordability
- equity

The current fare structure fails to provide affordability and equity for commuters who can least afford to use public transport and, because of this, both patronage and revenue are declining.

It is argued that significant changes to the current fare structure are required to increase patronage and revenue and improve affordability and equity.

### ***Falling Patronage***

There is a clear issue with declining patronage within the SEQ network. As is shown in the most recent publicly available TransLink Tracker, patronage peaked at 181.8 million trips annually in the 09/10 financial year. Prior to this patronage had been growing progressively.

Despite the addition of 75,000 seats to the network between 2010-11 and 2011-12 patronage declined to 178.3 million trips in 2011-12. This fall in patronage is directly linked to the rapid increase in the price of base fares in recent years.

Unfortunately, it is difficult to assess the detail of the decline in patronage as data collected by TransLink through the go card system is not publicly available.

Emphasis should be placed on attaining higher patronage, this will enable lower fare increases in the future and thus higher cost recovery from passengers as the number of tickets sold increases.

Any review of fares should also acknowledge the many external factors that impact on patronage. These include the economic cost of private vehicles, roads, petrol, parking as well as issues related to the efficiency of using private vehicles relative to the efficiency of using public transport.

A study undertaken in Melbourne, for example, has shown the importance of factors external to fares in changing the type of transport used by commuters. The report shows that between 43 and 75 percent of survey respondents listed three cost related external factors - petrol prices, parking costs and car running costs - as reasons for shifting to public transport.<sup>iv</sup>

Patronage can also be impacted by government investment in infrastructure that support the use of public transport. Investment in parking at outer suburban railway stations, for example, can provide commuters in outer suburbs with a more efficient option than driving all the way to work. This will only be effective if the cost of using these services (including the time taken to travel) compares favourably with the alternative of driving to and parking at the final destination. Similarly investment in road infrastructure has the potential to undermine public transport use, as found in a recent survey of public transport in Australia.<sup>v</sup>

### ***Declining Affordability***

Affordability consistently receives the lowest satisfaction score from commuters in TransLink surveys<sup>vi</sup>. Commuters have rated affordability as below the 60 per cent level set as satisfactory in every quarter for the past two years.

The rise in the cost of public transport fares is disproportionate to the rises in the overall cost of living. Recent CPI figures show that the cost of public transport has risen by 55 percent in Brisbane over the previous five years (to September quarter 2012). Over the same time period, average inflation increased only 16 percent. In comparison the cost of new motor vehicles actually declined (by four percent) over the previous five years.<sup>vii</sup>

The rapid rise in the cost of public transport has also significantly outpaced the rise in wages. Wages in Queensland have only risen by an average of 3.6 percent over the past 3 years to the September quarter<sup>viii</sup>.

The disproportionate rise in the cost of public transport impacts significantly on low income households. Low income households spend a higher proportion of their incomes on essential items, such as transport. As low-income households have less discretionary income rises in the cost of essential items can have dramatic impacts on their capacity to meet a basic standard of living. While all other states offer people on low incomes with half price concession travel, Queensland currently does not.

Unfortunately, the rapid increase in fares is acting as a disincentive to commuters. The negative impact on patronage is acknowledged in the TransLink Annual Report 2011-12.<sup>ix</sup>

## ***Declining Revenue***

Revenue to government from user charges has declined as patronage has fallen and fares have increased. While the dollar amount contributed by passengers has increased from around \$1.50 to \$2.08 since 2009/10, the government subsidy per trip has also risen from around \$4.75 to \$5.00 in 2009/10 to \$6.72.

The increase in base fares, it would appear, is not having the intended effect of decreasing the amount of subsidy per trip. Instead it would appear that fare increases are in fact decreasing patronage and undermining revenue.

Part of the problem with declining revenue is the introduction of incentives for regular commuters. According to the 2012 TransLink Annual Report, revenue declined by 3.1 million due to the introduction of the ten and free fare incentive. While figures are not publically available regarding the cost to revenue of the new nine and free incentive scheme it can be assumed that revenue foregone as a result of the nine and free system would be greater than that under the ten and free incentive. While the high number of free trips increases affordability for regular users it undermines the capacity of government to recoup revenue as users take advantage of free journeys that they might otherwise have paid for.

While the 9 then free scheme has done something towards increasing patronage in overall trips, paid trips have fallen and this then has an opposite impact on the subsidy per trip, leaving a net decrease in the number of trips for which passengers contributed towards the cost of running the service. This is most likely because the 9 then free scheme was attractive for those who might already be commuting by public transport most days of the week. Unfortunately, it isn't attractive for those who might only be using the network occasionally, where it is likely that growth in patronage would be coming from (those who already use it 4-5 days a week have little capacity to use it more frequently).

As this method of decreasing the subsidy has failed, it leaves only two options to decrease the subsidy per trip: drastically reducing services, or reducing fares to get more people on services. Reducing services is a flawed notion in many cases as services are quite well used and any reduction in service would only further reduce patronage, although reviews to find efficiencies (such as the current SEQ Bus Network Review) are useful for reducing duplication in the network. The key to ongoing patronage growth, the public transport budget and reducing the subsidy per trip is to reduce the cost to individual passengers. In this way more people will find travel affordable and will take more trips.

There are also potential revenue issues related to the administration of post-secondary student concessions. Under the current system, institutions self-regulate the delivery of concessions by attaching the Public Transport Identifier to eligible student cards. While it is assumed that most institutions follow these guidelines there is potential for some institutions to attach the Public Transport Identifier to all student cards regardless of eligibility. An alternative to this would be to have a post-secondary student concession administered centrally by TransLink. In Victoria students 17 years and over must apply for a VPT concession card in order to receive a concession. This is administered centrally with a \$9 annual fee attached to cover the cost of processing the application.<sup>x</sup>

## **Poor Equity**

There are a number of different demographic groups who are significantly or disproportionately impacted by the current public transport fare structure. Older people, jobseekers, people on low-incomes, young people and newly arrived refugees and asylum seekers have high need for, use of and dependence on public transport.

Despite the high dependence on public transport amongst these specific groups, life circumstances mean that they generally have limited financial resources with which to spend on public transport (information outlining the key issues facing each of these demographic groups is outlined in Appendices A to E of this document).

While many people have access to a private vehicle and choose to use public transport as an alternative, there are many people who rely on public transport because they have no other means of transportation. According to the survey of TransLink service users conducted in May 2010 some 53 percent of passengers indicated that they used public transport because they did not have access to any other means of transportation.<sup>xi</sup> For many people financial barriers prohibit them from having access to a private vehicle.

Certain sections of the community struggle more than others to meet a basic standard of living because they are either unemployed, underemployed or are employed in low-skilled and low-paid employment. Young people are also affected as they may not have access to a private vehicle.

Many low and middle income households are located further away from the city centre where public transport options are inaccessible or irregular. Individuals living in outer suburban areas incur significant cost to access the higher number of employment opportunities and services available in and around the city centre. Low income families in areas with poor public transport spend a significant proportion of their income on transport. Research undertaken by the Victorian Council of Social Service, for example, found that the lowest paid quintile of the Melbourne population spends 21% of their income on transport, while the highest paid quintile spends only 10%.<sup>xii</sup>

Given that the only alternative for commuters in outer suburbs is to rely on a private vehicle, the higher costs of travelling over multiple zones to access employment, education and services disadvantages those on lower incomes, especially pensioners and young people who may have no access to a private vehicle. The sunk costs associated with operating a private vehicle make it difficult for low income households to justify the cost of catching public transport.

It is critical therefore that the government review the current zones used to determine fares to ensure that the zone system works as an incentive which encourages people to use public transport.

## **Options for revising the fare structure**

### ***A revised fare structure should address the fact that Health Care Card holders in Queensland do not have access to public transport concessions***

All other states in Australia provide some means by which jobseekers or people on low incomes can claim a concession on public transport. This includes people who receive Newstart or Youth Allowance. It is not realistic to expect that jobseekers wait to use public transport in off-peak times in order to be able to attend interviews, training or other relevant appointments. Nor is it realistic to expect people who are employed on a part-time basis who work in low paid jobs to pay full price when they are ineligible for other incentives such as the nine and then free scheme.

A more equitable system would provide concessions for people holding a Health Care Card, this would capture jobseekers, low-income earners, young people and newly arrived refugees. Provisions should also be made for a special card for asylum seekers who are not currently eligible for a Health Care Card.

### ***The review of fares should investigate the feasibility of reintroducing daily or weekly capped ticketing***

The introduction of the go card system resulted in the removal of the very popular daily and weekly capped ticketing. This has had a negative impact on commuters who rely on public transport particularly low-income people. While the nine and free system offers a proxy for the weekly ticket, there is no comparable product which enables commuters who travel regularly over the course of a day.

### ***A review of the fare structure should investigate the feasibility of introducing family/group ticketing as a way of encouraging people back to public transport***

The cost to families for using public transport is far too expensive to encourage regular use and makes using a car far more cost effective option. States, such as Western Australia, offer families (up to 7 people) access to a FamilyRider ticket that can be used for unlimited system-wide travel on weekends and public holidays for a flat fee of \$11. The FamilyRider ticket can also be used after 6.00pm Monday to Thursday, after 3.00pm on Fridays and after 9.00am on weekdays during school holidays.

### ***The present concessions offered to seniors, pensioners and veterans should be reviewed to ensure optimal accessibility and affordability***

The present two paid journey cap, then free for Seniors Card, Pensioner Concession Card and DVA Gold Card holders needs a review. This scheme is inequitable to those seniors/pensioners and veterans who don't have access to high frequency public transport services, which makes their initial journey cost very expensive.

It would be more equitable to institute a low daily rate for seniors, pensioners and veterans, such as the \$2.50 Pensioner Excursion Ticket offered in New South Wales, to provide greater accessibility. Consideration should also be given to the introduction of free travel for seniors, pensioners and veterans on weekends in line with other states (see Appendix A).

***The current system for administering concessions for post-secondary students should be investigated to ensure that the system is not being exploited***

The current system relies on self administration and regulation by educational institutions and has the potential to be open to discrepancies, which may lead to a decline in revenue. A better system would be to centrally administer the delivery of a concession card similar to the system in Victoria. A small processing fee could be charged to recover costs of administering the card to eligible students.

***The current zone system should be reviewed to ensure that the fare system is fairer and less complicated***

The current zone system is complicated, confusing and expensive. A review of TransLnk fare zones should result in a rationalisation of this system. Other Australian states have much simpler zones, Melbourne, for example, has only two zones.

***The review of the fare structure should investigate whether there is a significant loss of revenue and capacity to generate revenue resulting from the nine and then free incentive scheme***

The free travel provided to regular commuters through this scheme is potentially eroding revenue, placing pressure on government to increase base prices for all users. Given that TransLink incurred revenue losses of \$3.1 million under the previous ten and free fare incentive scheme in 2011-12, it would be expected that the nine and then free system will incur even greater losses in revenue.

While the incentive scheme has benefits for regular users it undermines the capacity of government to recover costs. If revenue is undermined as a result of this incentive government may increase the cost of base fares to meet the shortfall in revenue. This will have an impact on the patronage of irregular public transport users who may be discouraged from using public transport due to the increased cost of fares.

***Any review of public transport fares should include modelling of the impact of fare changes on commuters and the public purse and options should be made available for public scrutiny***

To ensure the transparency of any review, modelling should be undertaken by the Department of Transport and Main Roads to demonstrate the effect on patronage, revenue, affordability and equity for various fare structure scenarios.

Information about the full cost of the current system, including the number of users benefitting from the nine and free incentive, should be made publicly available as part of this process to enable informed public debate about the best option.

## Appendix A: Older people

Transport has a significant impact on older people's quality of life and ability to remain independent. Affordable, accessible and well integrated public transport is essential for the participation of older people in society. Many older people live in outer urban areas and rural areas where there are limited public transport services and pay higher fares to access services located in the city centre.

Many seniors experience physical and mental changes which may reduce their capacity to drive. Older people who live in residential aged care facilities often have little or no access to public transport. They often rely on family and friends as the primary source of transport support. While public transport does not always provide a viable alternative, because of the distance to services, inaccessibility of infrastructure, and infrequency of schedules, public transport still plays a vital part of social inclusion for many older people.

In other states of Australia, pensioners and seniors are offered a range of concessions above and beyond what is available in Queensland.

- In New South Wales, Seniors Card and Pensioner Concession Card holders are eligible for a daily \$2.50 Pensioner Excursion Ticket on CityRail, bus and ferry services and Country Pensioner Excursion (CPE) fare on CountryLink services on public transport.<sup>xiii</sup>
- In Victoria, Seniors and Pensioner Concession Card holders who receive a Disability Support Pension or a Carer Payment can apply for free weekend travel.<sup>xiv</sup>
- In South Australia Seniors Card holders are entitled to travel free on trains, buses and trams in metropolitan Adelaide in off-peak on weekdays, and all day on weekends and public holidays.<sup>xv</sup>
- In Western Australia Seniors Card holders are entitled to travel for free on all Transperth services between 9.00am and 3.30pm Monday to Friday, all day Saturday and Sunday, as well as on public holidays.<sup>xvi</sup>

## Appendix B: Young People

Young people rely more on public transport for getting around than most.<sup>xvii</sup> Yet young people have difficulty getting around because they may not have a Queensland drivers licence or access to private vehicle. As a result, many young people rely solely on public transport to look for or attend work, access services and engage in social activities.

Unfortunately, though, many young people do not have the economic resources with which to use public transport. This is due partly to the higher rates of unemployment amongst young people. The rate of unemployment for people aged 15 to 19 years old was 16.5 percent in Queensland in January 2013.<sup>xviii</sup> Unless young people meet the strict eligibility requirements for government allowances, young people without employment must rely on their parents to access transport. Even if they have access to government allowances, these are not substantial enough to enable young people to meet even a basic standard of living.

The situation is particularly difficult for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. Young people who experience homelessness as a result of family breakdown and violence struggle because they are ineligible for concessions and do not have the economic resources to meet the high cost of public transport, yet require a range of support services that could assist them to overcome the significant barriers they face in accessing employment.

### Case Studies: Young people experiencing homelessness

Steve\*

Steve has been experiencing secondary homelessness in an outer Brisbane suburb during the past two years. Steve pays most of his youth allowance payment on board to family and friends. He travels to the inner city to visit government and non-government support services and informal supports.

In the time that Steve has been known to this service, he has been fined many times and been directed to appear in court for Fare Evasion on a number of occasions. The effect of this is that Steve often chooses to 'sleep rough' in the CBD when he can no longer afford the train fare to and from the suburbs. Steve's connection with inner city services and support networks and his inability to afford regular tickets means that he continues to be criminalised and to place himself in risky circumstances.

Laura\*

Laura is 16 and has been sleeping rough in the Brisbane inner city for the past month. Brisbane Youth Service has supported Laura to reconnect with her previous school and to maintain some connection with family though it is presently unsafe for her to live at home. Laura receives youth allowance but the chaotic circumstances of her current living situation means that her income will not sustain her basic needs of food, clothes, transport etc. for a week living on the streets.

Laura was given two go cards during two weeks from an Emergency Relief program. She tells us that she has lost these on both occasions. Other young people in a similar situation claim that they don't value the go cards after the credit runs out, as they don't know when they will next be able to afford to 'top up' the cards. Laura instead relies on Brisbane Youth Service (BYS) issued Queensland Rail Travel Warrants, distributed through the Emergency Relief programme and swappable for a paper ticket at the local train station. This is not cost-effective at paper ticket prices and the organisation spends hundreds of dollars per week on Travel Warrants enabling young people like Laura to make one-way trips.

*\*Not his/her real name*

## Appendix C: Jobseekers and low-income earners

Jobseekers and low-income earners find it very difficult to afford the cost of public transport under the current system. Despite the fact that Welfare to Work policies require many job seekers to use public transport more frequently to meet the increased obligations, the cost of public transport continues to undermine jobseekers capacity to look for work.<sup>xix</sup>

Unemployed jobseekers struggle to meet the costs associated with travel because they earn excessively low incomes. Evidence suggests that the Newstart Allowance provided by Centrelink does not meet even a very basic standard of living let alone allow participation in the full range of activities required to find employment.<sup>xx</sup>

Low income earners who work part-time or work in low-skilled employment may also struggle with the cost of transport. Low income earners, having sunk money into buying and maintaining a private motor vehicle may have little left in their budget to catch public transport without access to concessions.

Many unemployed jobseekers and low income earners live in outer suburbs where employment opportunities are diminished.<sup>xxi</sup> This means that individuals must use either private vehicle or public transport to find employment. In many cases this will entail travel across a number of zones to look for work or attend interviews on a daily basis (see Figure 1, below).

In all other states, jobseekers and people on low incomes are provided with access to concessions for public transport.

- In Victoria, concessions are offered to jobseekers and low income earners using the Commonwealth Health Care Card.<sup>xxii</sup>
- In New South Wales, jobseekers can apply for a NSW Half Fare Entitlement Card for jobseekers which is issued by Centrelink on behalf of Transport for NSW upon successfully meeting the eligibility criteria.<sup>xxiii</sup>
- In South Australia, individuals on government allowances, such as Newstart, can apply for a Transport Concession Card to be eligible for concession fares for services in Adelaide.<sup>xxiv</sup>
- In Western Australia, concession fares are available for people holding Health Care Card in Perth.<sup>xxv</sup>
- In Tasmania, Health Care Card recipients are eligible for concessions on Metro bus services operating in Hobart, Launceston and Burnie.<sup>xxvi</sup>

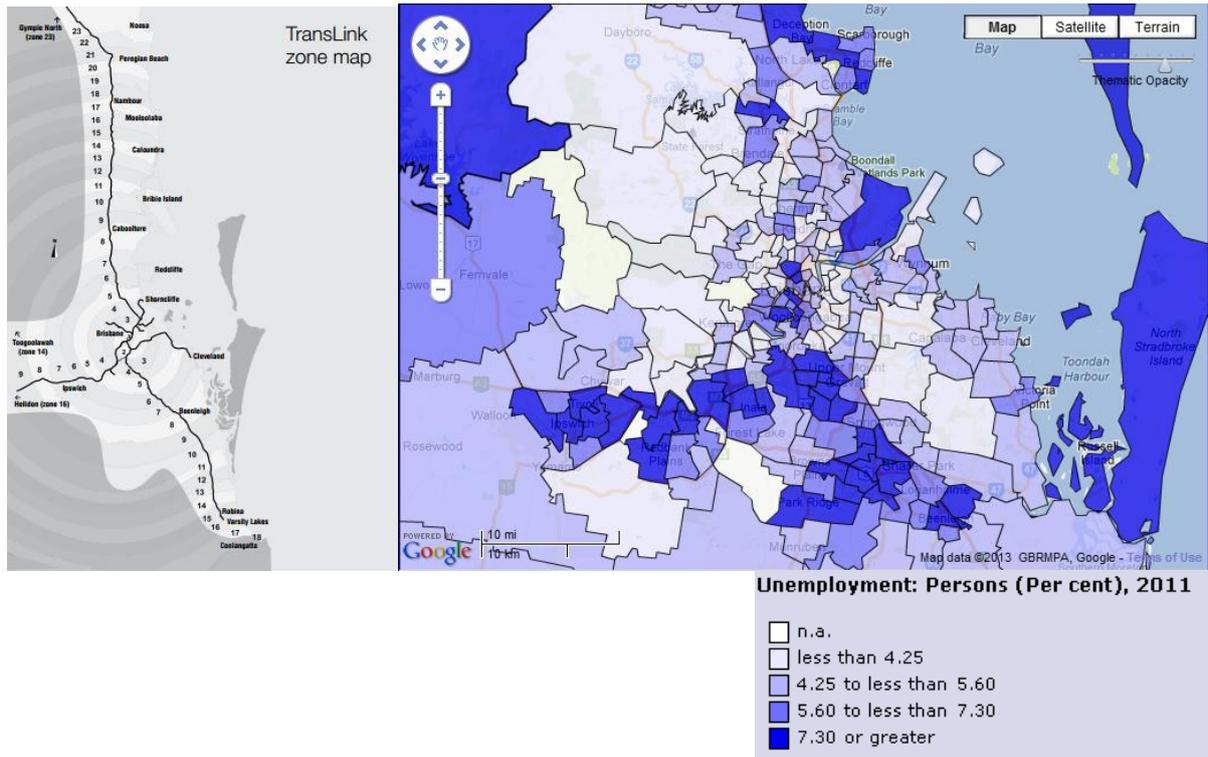


Figure 1: Comparison of TransLink zones and high/low unemployment<sup>xxvii</sup>

**Case study: A young jobseeker who needed assistance with transport costs to gain employment**

Darren\* is a young man with a mild learning disability who was forced to drop out of school due to a violent home invasion incident at his home when he was in grade 12. Darren was 17 years of age when he was referred by Jobs Services Australia (JSA) to the Participate in Prosperity (PiP) program funded through the Skilling Queenslanders for Work program. PiP arranged for Darren to be enrolled in a Get Set for Work program at the Beenleigh Police and Citizens Youth Centre (PCYC). Darren lives in Ormeau and relies on costly and infrequent public transport to access education, training and employment opportunities. He used public transport to get him to the nearest Business Centre in Beenleigh to attend the course arranged through the Get Set for Work program.

As Darren was not eligible for concessions and was required to travel during peak times to attend the course. This cost him \$3.85 one way using an adult go card (zone 7 to 8), which amounted to \$77.00 per fortnight or \$385.00 for the duration of the 10 week course. This was a significant cost for Darren and was more than one third of his \$223.00 fortnightly dependent Youth Allowance payment. Fortunately for Darren, he was able to receive assistance with his transport costs through the PiP program.

With his newfound confidence and support of his facilitator from Get Set for Work program, Darren was able to approach a major retail company and ask about work experience. He did 2 weeks work experience with the retailer while on the Get Set for Work program and has now secured an ongoing position starting in January 2013.

*\*Not his real name*

## Appendix D: Newly arrived refugees and asylum seekers

New arrivals, whether refugees or asylum seekers, have very limited financial resources. Those assessed as refugees and granted protection visas are initially reliant on Centrelink benefits such as Newstart and Rent Assistance as they establish their lives in Australia and begin searching for jobs. Others cannot work and must rely on Centrelink benefits longer term, for example those who are recovering from trauma, are unwell or are full time carers.

For many newly arrived refugees and asylum seekers, public transport plays a critical role as a gateway to their participation in society, as they do not have the economic means to access private vehicles. There are two distinct groups who face significant barriers to participation in society as a result of their economic situation.

The first are newly-arrived refugees in the early stages of settlement. While people in this group have access to full payments under Newstart there is clear evidence that the level at which Newstart is set does not provide recipients with enough to meet even a very basic standard of living let alone resources to enable active participation in education, training or employment.

Newly-arrived refugees must attend many appointments during early settlement. Typically, this includes:

- Case worker appointments
- Local area orientation
- Australia orientation course
- Appointment to open a bank account
- Arranging housing
- Registration with Centrelink
- Registration with Medicare
- Medical assessments and follow-up appointments
- Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) assessment interview
- Centrelink 6 week follow up interview
- Centrelink job capacity assessment
- School enrolment visit for children
- Specialist appointments such as optometrist, dentist, audiologist, psychologist, psychiatrist
- Immigration legal appointments

While some newly arrived refugees will be eligible for student concessions if they become enrolled as full time students at Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) or school, not all new arrivals can immediately begin full time study. Some may have physical or mental health challenges to address first, or are engaged in full time care for dependents. This means they are not eligible for concession travel.

Often, refugees live in outer suburbs where housing is more affordable, meaning they must travel many zones, sometimes using multiple buses and trains. Transport for entire large family groups can be so expensive that some families choose not to travel together, taking it in turns to visit friends and relatives. For single parents and younger families where taking turns is not practicable, transport costs can force them to stay home, missing appointments and events and contributing to social isolation.

The second group is a very small number of asylum seekers<sup>xxviii</sup> whose refugee claims are not yet decided. Some of these are community detainees, who live in the community while waiting for their claims to be processed. Many asylum seekers have no work rights, and are reliant on a living allowance provided to them which is equivalent to between 60% and 89% of Newstart. This means that they have very limited resources with which to access expensive public transport.

Like refugees, asylum seekers must attend many appointments when they initially arrive in Brisbane, however, they will attend slightly fewer than refugees with visas because many have no work rights and limited eligibility to study at TAFE. They will still need to attend medical appointments, immigration legal appointments, country orientation, case worker meetings, meet with Department of Immigration and Citizenship officers, go shopping, arrange housing, open a bank account, attend some English classes, and it crucial to their mental health that they engage in community activities as often as possible.<sup>xxix</sup>

### Case Study: A refugee family's first two weeks in Brisbane

A family arrived in Brisbane in early December 2012, on permanent humanitarian visas.

The family consists of 8 people: an adult father, mother, two adult children (aged 21 and 19), and four children aged 6, 5, 3 and 1. The family receives support under the Humanitarian Settlement Services (HSS) program, funded by DIAC, and delivered by MDA . HSS provides initial practical support in early settlement (generally for the first 6 – 12 months), to build independence of newly arrived refugees.

Upon arrival, the family's settlement service provider, MDA provided the family with four adult Go Cards loaded with \$50 credit each, plus two child Go Cards loaded with \$25 credit each (a total of \$250 credit to last two weeks). Under Translink's fare rules, the children aged 3 and 1 travel free, and children 14 and under pay concession fares. The adult children and parents were not eligible for any concession.

The family attended the following essential appointments during their first two weeks:

Appointment	Zones travelled	Single ticket costs	Total family cost return
Appointments at Stones Corner (arranged on same day – this is not always possible): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Centrelink registration</li> <li>• Bank account</li> <li>• Medicare registration</li> </ul>	Inala (zone 5) to Stones Corner (zone 2) = 4 zones	One way adult: \$4.11 One way child: \$2.06	\$41.12
Lifeskills course – 6 days at MDA, Woolloongabba	Inala (zone 5) to Woolloongabba (zone 2) = 4 zones	One way adult: \$4.11 One way child: \$2.06	\$41.12 (per day) \$248.72

Area orientation	Based on travel over 2 zones in the local area around Inala*	One way adult: \$3.08 One way child: \$1.54	\$30.80
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>\$318.64</b>

*\*NB: Area orientation depends on family need. Sometimes it involves travel as far as city; other times it may involve walking around local area.*

Based on this calculation, the family's public transport spending exceeded their Go Card credit by **at least \$68.64**. However, for most families, this will be an underestimate, because:

- it does not include additional transport costs for trips to buy groceries and food, engage with local services, attend medical appointments and visit family and friends;
- it is based on off-peak trips only when in reality some trips may be at more expensive peak times;
- it is not always possible to arrange bank, Centrelink and Medicare appointments on the same day

The family were at risk of ceasing to attend appointments during their second week of settlement, because they could not afford the transport. To prevent their disengagement, MDA had to provide additional resources to the family to meet their transport costs.

If the adult members of the family had been entitled to concession fares, the family's transport costs in the first two weeks of settlement would have been \$191.52, enabling them to attend all essential appointments without financial stress.

#### *Ongoing costs*

MDA cannot provide ongoing transport assistance beyond an initial Go Card, and people are expected to budget for travel themselves, from Centrelink payments. Some clients become eligible for student concession travel because they enrol in AMEP or high school full time. Unfortunately, because of the timing of this family's arrival, in December, they could not commence AMEP or school until late January. This meant that all four adults had to pay full adult fares for all travel for their first two months, severely stretching their budget.

#### **Case Study: Asylum seekers in community detention in Brisbane**

Amir\* and Nasrin\*, a young couple in their late twenties, fled from persecution and torture in Iran. After a period of three months in detention centres at Christmas Island and Darwin, they have transferred to community detention in Brisbane in January 2013, to await the outcome of their humanitarian protection application.

While they are in community detention, Nasrin and Amir are not allowed to work. They are eligible for \$267 each per fortnight (approximately 60% of the normal Centrelink allowance), which is their only income. They are also provided with housing at Sunnybank, and do not have to pay rent, but the housing provider takes about \$30 per person per fortnight to cover utilities bills. This means Amir and Nasrin have a total of \$474 per fortnight, or less than \$17 per day each, to cover food, transport and everything else.

Nasrin and Amir must rely wholly on Brisbane's public transport network to get around. As community detainees, they are not eligible to get Australian drivers licences. They are allowed to drive if they get their Iranian licences translated at a cost of about \$70 each. But this would only be worthwhile if they had a friend willing to lend them a car, because they are not eligible to register a

car, nor could they afford one.

Nasrin is in the early stages of pregnancy. She has significant health issues including a spinal condition, asthma and rheumatism. Nasrin is also likely to require mental health services due to her experiences of torture and trauma. The International Humanitarian Medical Service (IHMS) covers the cost of her medical treatment while she is in community detention, but she is responsible for the cost of transport to appointments to the providers that IHMS nominates.

Nasrin and Amir are very lucky that their house in Sunnybank is within 1.5 kilometres of their nominated IHMS GP, so they can walk there. (Many people in community detention must travel much further, sometimes catching multiple buses.) However, to attend other specialist appointments at inner city facilities such as the Mater Hospital, they must travel a four zone trip on public transport. As Nasrin's pregnancy progresses, and she needs to attend regular ante-natal appointments, her travel will become more frequent. She may not be able to afford to attend all the health appointments she should.

The couple must travel to the city to meet with a representative from the Department of Immigration about every two months while they are in community detention. They also need to attend MDA at Woolloongabba to meet with their case manager every three weeks.

A return 4 zone trip costs \$10.26 per person (or \$8.22 off peak). If Amir accompanies Nasrin, the couple will spend around \$20 in travel, which leaves them with only about \$14 of their daily budget (\$7 each). If they need to travel an extra journey in the day, for example, a one-zone trip to attend a second appointment in the city, to go to shops or to visit their case manager at MDA's Woolloongabba offices, this will cost \$3.28 (peak) or \$2.63 (off peak) each, leaving them virtually no spare money.

Amir and Nasrin can realistically only afford two or three journeys each week. They have decided not to attend a free Australian orientation course at MDA at Woolloongabba, because the transport costs of six days' attendance are prohibitive. This means they are missing out on crucial, practical information to help them settle in Australia (such as information about services, emergencies, laws and culture), as well as missing the chance to meet other new arrivals and make social connections.

Other opportunities important to their settlement and mental health, such as a short English language course, support groups and social and sporting activities, are available to Amir and Nasrin. However, prohibitive transport costs mean they cannot afford to attend these as well as all their health appointments, case manager meetings and government appointments. They will also find it difficult to afford travel to visit the few friends they already have in Brisbane.

The ability to travel at concession rates would halve this couple's existing transport costs, allowing them to undertake more trips and access more services and opportunities. This would reduce the risk of them missing important appointments, reduce their anxiety about money and speed up the process of their settlement and integration into Australian life.

*\*Names have been changed.*

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<sup>i</sup> <http://www.thepremier.qld.gov.au/plans-and-progress/plans/assets/6-month-action-plan-jan-jun-13.pdf>

<sup>ii</sup> [http://www.griffith.edu.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0008/81386/infrastructure-03-dodson.pdf](http://www.griffith.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/81386/infrastructure-03-dodson.pdf)

<sup>iii</sup> SQW report

<sup>iv</sup> Gaymer, S. 2010 'Quantifying the impact of attitudes on shift towards sustainable modes' in Australasian Transport Research Forum 2010 Proceedings 29 September – 1 October 2010, Canberra, Australia [http://www.atrf.info/papers/2010/2010\\_Gaymer.pdf](http://www.atrf.info/papers/2010/2010_Gaymer.pdf)

<sup>v</sup> Mees, P. and Groenhart, L. *Transport Policy at the Crossroads: Travel to work in Australian capital cities 1976-2011* December 2012 <http://mams.rmit.edu.au/ov14prh13lps1.pdf>

<sup>vi</sup> Translink 2013. 'Public transport performance data' Accessed 15 February 2013

<http://translink.com.au/about-translink/reporting-and-publications/patronage-and-customer-satisfaction>

<sup>vii</sup> Queensland Council of Social Service 2012. *Cost of Living report 2012 update*.

<http://www.qcross.org.au/sites/default/files/Cost%20of%20Living%20%20Update%20Final.pdf>

<sup>viii</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics 2012. *Wage Price Index*. Cat No. 6345.0

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<sup>ix</sup> TransLink 2012. *Annual Report 2011-12*. TransLink: Brisbane.

<http://translink.com.au/resources/about-translink/reporting-and-publications/2011-12-annual-report.pdf>

<sup>x</sup> Public Transport Victoria 2013 'Concessions' Accessed 14 February 2013 <http://ptv.vic.gov.au/fares-tickets/concessions/students/#1>

<sup>xi</sup> Translink 2010. *TransLink Public Transport User Survey Summary*. TransLink: Brisbane.

<http://translink.com.au/resources/about-translink/what-we-do/customer-research/100501-public-transport-survey.pdf>

<sup>xii</sup> Duffy, G. (1998). "Tickets Please": public transport costs for low income and disadvantaged Victorians. Melbourne: VCOSS.

<sup>xiii</sup> Transport NSW 2013. 'Pensioner Excursion' Accessed 14 February 2013

<http://www.cityrail.info/tickets/which/pensioner>

<sup>xiv</sup> Public Transport Victoria 2013 'Free weekend travel' Accessed 14 February 2013.

<http://ptv.vic.gov.au/fares-tickets/free-travel-passes/free-weekend-travel/#1>

<sup>xv</sup> Department for Communities and Social Inclusion 2013. 'Public transport concessions' Accessed 14 February 2013. <http://www.dcsi.sa.gov.au/pub/tabid/209/itemid/349/default.aspx>

<sup>xvi</sup> Transperth 2013. 'The right ticket for you' Accessed 14 February 2013.

<http://www.transperth.wa.gov.au/TicketsandFares/Tickettypes.aspx>

<sup>xvii</sup> Victorian Council of Social Service 2010. *Mind the Gap: An assessment of transport needs and issues for young people in Melbourne's urban fringes* <http://vcoss.org.au/document/mind-the-gap-an-assessment-of-transport-needs-and-issues-for-young-people-in-melbourneaes-urban-fringes/>

<sup>xviii</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics 2013. *Labour Force Detailed Electronic*.

<http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/6291.0.55.001Jan%202013?OpenDocument>

<sup>xix</sup> Jensen, K., Breslin, M., Spiranovic, M. and Wenzel, M. 2006. *Making them pay: Public transport cost barriers and Queensland's unemployed job seekers*. Brisbane: University of Queensland/Queensland Council of Social Service.

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<sup>xx</sup> Queensland Council of Social Service 2012. *Op. cit.*

<sup>xxi</sup> Dodson, J., Buchanan, N., Gleeson, B., Evans, R. and Sipe, N, 'Investigating the Social Dimensions of Transport Disadvantage' in *Towards New Concepts and Methods Urban Policy and Research*, Vol. 24, No. 4, 433–453, December 2006

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<sup>xxii</sup> Public Transport Victoria 2013 'Health Care Card' Accessed 14 February 2013.

<http://ptv.vic.gov.au/fares-tickets/concessions/health-care-card/>

<sup>xxiii</sup> Transport NSW 2013. 'Travel concessions for jobseekers' Accessed 14 February 2013

<http://www.transport.nsw.gov.au/content/travel-concessions-jobseekers>

<sup>xxiv</sup> Department for Communities and Social Inclusion 2013. *Op. cit.*

<sup>xxv</sup> Transperth 2013. 'Transperth concession passes' Accessed 15 February 2013.

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<sup>xxvi</sup> Metro 2013 'Concessions' Accessed 15 February 2013. <http://www.metrotas.com.au/tickets-and-fares/concessions>

<sup>xxvii</sup> Map of unemployment from Queensland Thematic Maps <http://statistics.oesr.qld.gov.au/qld-thematic-maps>. Query uses Census 2011 – Basic Community Profile, Unemployment - persons (percent), Statistical Area Level 2..

<sup>xxviii</sup> Currently there are only around an estimated 1500 asylum seekers in the south-east region who would require a concession for public transport.

<sup>xxix</sup> Refugee Council of Australia 2013. *Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Program 2013-14: Community views on current challenges and future directions*. February 2013. <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/r/isub/2013-14-IntakeSub.pdf>