

MAKING THEM PAY

Public Transport Cost Barriers and Queensland's Unemployed Job Seekers

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Acknowledgements

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Table of Contents

1.	Executive summary	1
1.1	Summary of findings	2
1.2	Key recommendations	3
2.	Introduction	4
2.1	The <i>Making Them Pay</i> project	4
2.2	Project Background	4
2.3	Key Terms	5
2.4	Summary of Literature	5
3.	Project Methodology	9
3.1	Methods	9
3.2	Data Collection and Analysis	11
3.3	Sampling	11
3.4	Ethical Considerations	12
3.5	Limitations and Biases	13
4.	Findings	14
6.	Conclusions and Recommendations	20
	Appendices	22
	References	27

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This project has been conducted in partnership with the Queensland Council of Social Services (QCOSS). It aims to determine the financial impact of Queensland Transport's concession policy on unemployed job seekers, and to examine the possible benefits of extending public transport concessions to this disadvantaged group. It is anticipated that the findings from this project will assist QCOSS to lobby Queensland Transport for concession policy reform.

The Queensland government's existing public transport policy does not offer concessions to unemployed job seekers. This is despite the Welfare to Work policies that require many job seekers to use public transport more frequently than ever before to meet their increased obligations. Queensland's exclusionary policy stance is in stark contrast to all other Australian States and Territories that extend concession fares to the unemployed.

While some research attention has been given to transport accessibility and its relationship to social status and social disadvantage (Dodson et al 2004, Social Exclusion Unit 2003, Hurni 2006), transport affordability has been relatively ignored, particularly in Queensland. As a result empirical data on the financial impact of job-related transport costs on the unemployed, particularly since the inception of Welfare to Work, is almost non-existent. This project is designed to minimise this gap in knowledge.

The project team utilized three primary methods to facilitate data collection. The first method was a job seeker questionnaire. The questionnaires were completed during interviews with 21 unemployed job seekers at Salvation Army Employment Plus offices in two inner and two outer Brisbane locations.

The second method was a set of three in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted with Employment Consultants from three of the four Employment Plus offices.

The third method was a comparative document and policy analysis of the concession's policy of other Australian States and Territories.

While this project contributes to providing empirical data on the financial impact of Queensland Transport's exclusionary concession policy on unemployed job seekers, it is meant only as a first step. Further research will need to be carried out to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the role public transport affordability plays in creating a barrier to employment.

Additional information regarding the project's background, methodology, data collection and analysis are provided in the main body of the report.

Overall, the literature and research findings point to a contradiction between the Queensland Transport's stated mission of providing an 'inclusive' transport system (Queensland Transport 2007) and its exclusion of the unemployed from transport concessions. By denying the unemployed public transport concessions, the Queensland Government is also maintaining one of the barriers to work opportunities for the unemployed. Yet reducing this barrier would have economic and social benefits not only to the affected individuals but also the wider community.

The key findings and recommendations of the project are outlined in the final section of this executive summary.

1.1 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

1.1.2 Finding 1

Our data found that 52 per cent of job seekers would refuse or have refused a job offer because transport costs were too high.

1.1.3 Finding 2

Approximately 23 per cent of the sample spent in excess of 10 per cent of their income to fulfill their job seeking obligations.

1.1.4 Finding 3

Public transport cost disadvantage is experienced equally across inner and outer regions of Brisbane. However, this may be due to Centrelink's policy of lowering Welfare to Work requirements for those termed 'locationally disadvantaged'.

1.1.5 Finding 4

While Queensland Transport excludes the unemployed from public transport concessions, it extends concessions to a range of other disadvantaged groups in the community.

1.1.6 Finding 5

Queensland is the only State or Territory in Australia to exclude the unemployed from public transport concessions

1.2 KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

1.2.1 Recommendation 1

That public transport concessions, be extended by Queensland Transport to include the unemployed. This would create a more equitable transport policy approach and reduce one of the barriers in accessing employment, hence reducing dependence on income support.

1.2.2 Recommendation 2

That further research to be undertaken, particularly in Queensland, on public transport affordability and its financial impact upon the unemployed.

2. INTRODUCTION

2.1 The *Making Them Pay* project

With QCOSS as its industry partner, the *Making Them Pay* research project has been conducted by University of Queensland students as part of a year-long Bachelor of Social Science project.

The project aims to determine the financial impact of Queensland Transport's concession policy on unemployed job seekers, and to examine the possible benefits of extending public transport concessions to this disadvantaged group.

2.2 Project Background

Access to affordable public transport is an important concern for the unemployed. This issue has become particularly pressing with the implementation of the Commonwealth Government's Welfare to Work policies. The initiation of Welfare to Work has meant that the unemployed are required to have more frequent contact with Centrelink, the Job Network, and prospective employers in order to continue receiving income support payments.

While the unemployed have a greater need of affordable transport than ever before, Queensland is the only State or Territory Government that currently does not offer public transport concessions to the unemployed, despite extending a 50% concession to other transport-disadvantaged groups such as Pension Concession Card holders, Seniors Card holders, students and Gold Repatriation Health Card holders (Queensland Transport 2007).

In 2004, the former Federal Employment Services Minister, Mal Brough challenged the Queensland Government to reform its concession policy to include the unemployed (Brough 2004). Brough argued that excluding the unemployed from public transport concessions was in direct contradiction to the Beattie Government's stated commitment to jobs (Brough 2004). However, despite this challenge and efforts to lobby the State

Government for concession policy reform, Queensland continues to exclude the unemployed from public transport concessions.

2.3 Key Terms

Unemployed job seeker

This term refers to recipients of a Centrelink job seeker allowance, such as Newstart or Youth Allowance. However, for the purposes of this research project, the term 'unemployed job seeker' has been further refined to include job seekers that meet a specific criteria set out in the sampling section of this report.

Welfare to Work

Is a Government initiative designed to "assist people into paid work. These changes include encouraging and supporting people, who have the ability to work, to find a job". The Welfare to Work package includes new eligibility rules for income support payments, changes to participation rules and a new compliance system (Centrelink 2007). All recipients of activity-tested payments such as Newstart and Youth Allowance are automatically referred to employment services, usually Job Network agencies. Welfare to Work eligibility rules encompass participation requirements. Failure to meet these requirements can lead to suspension of payments. If there are more than three breaches of participation requirements per year then recipients may lose up to eight weeks income support (ACOSS, 2005).

2.4 Summary of Literature

Literature of relevance to the project can be divided into three key themes: transport affordability and accessibility; the impact of Welfare to Work; and transport equity.

Public transport affordability and accessibility

Literature relating to public transport affordability in Australia is sparse. Literature on public transport accessibility is more readily available. Although our study is primarily concerned with the affordability of public transport for unemployed job seekers in Queensland, the issues of accessibility and affordability are inextricably linked. Some difficulty exists in pulling the two issues apart to examine them separately, as one

cannot exist without the other, for example if people cannot access transport then the affordability of transport can be rendered irrelevant. Therefore, some of the literature uses the term 'transport accessibility' to refer not only to accessibility itself - the ability to access regular and reliable transport to destinations where employment, education or healthcare may be located – but also to 'transport affordability' - the cost of transport as a proportion of income.

In recent years it has been acknowledged that accessible and affordable transport plays an important role in ameliorating social disadvantage and exclusion (Social Exclusion Unit 2003, UK Department of Transport 2004, Hine 2006, Dodson, Gleeson and Sipe 2004). The concept of social disadvantage or social exclusion in relation to transport reflects the inability to "connect with jobs, services and facilities" (Hine 2006). One of the explanations often given for this inability or difficulty in connecting with opportunities or services, especially for the unemployed, is referred to as spatial mismatch.

Spatial mismatch occurs when employment centres are geographically distant from areas of affordable housing where the unemployed and socially disadvantaged often live (Dodson, et al 2004). In Brisbane, this phenomenon has created a 10 kilometre radius surrounding the CBD, that contains expensive housing (Dodson et al 2004) and 60 per cent of the total employment in all categories (Nightingale 2006). Many of Queensland's socially disadvantaged suburbs sit well outside this 'privileged circle' (Vinson 2007) and often suffer from the dual burden of locational and transport disadvantage (Dodson et al 2004); locationally disadvantaged because they are located in areas with fewer services and less economic and social opportunities; and transport disadvantaged because there is inadequate provision of affordable and accessible transport to reach important life opportunities (Social Exclusion Unit 2003, Dodson et al 2004). For the residents of these suburbs accessing the bulk of work opportunities means that they must, in some cases, travel greater distances, than those residents situated closer to the employment centre (Dodson et al 2004). This can incur greater costs.

The World Bank (2005) has suggested the implementation of a public transport affordability indices, with a suggested "reasonable ceiling" set at 10 per cent of income earned. However, unemployed and low-income earners may spend considerably more than 10 per cent of their income on travel. As Duffy noted, the lowest paid quintile of the Melbourne population spends 21 per cent of their income on transport, while the highest paid quintile spends only 10 per cent (1998). These travel costs can become a significant barrier to gaining work, and in some cases become a disincentive for accepting low-paid or part-time employment (Department of Transport UK 2004, McClure 2000).

The Impact of Welfare to Work

The Commonwealth Government's Welfare to Work policies requires unemployed Australian job seekers to participate in approved activities. They must also attend interviews with prospective employers, register with numerous Job Network agencies, attend seminars and submit forms to Centrelink (Welfare Rights 2002). Since its inception more than ten years ago the list of obligations has increased, resulting in more required activities and travel (Welfare Rights 2002).

Botsman (2000), states that job seekers in Brisbane can take multiple journeys to and from Job Network agencies even before attending an interview with a prospective employer, often having to take two or three buses to reach one destination (Botsman 2000). In a study conducted by Welfare Rights, transport costs were found to be a "significant expense" for all the young unemployed participants, with many stating that they spent between \$30 and \$50 per week on travel (2002). This amounted to approximately a third of their income. While the government covers the 'cost of compliance' for some of the approved activities under Welfare to Work, such as Work for the Dole, the compliance cost of other obligations, such as job seeking have been ignored (Welfare Rights 2002).

Transport Policy

Queensland Transport's stated mission is to "develop, lead and manage transport in Queensland which is safe, secure, efficient, *inclusive* [our italics], ecologically

sustainable and promotes a strong economy" (2007). However, despite this objective it continues to exclude the unemployed from concessions. Concessions are however extended to other transport-disadvantaged groups, such as pensioners, senior cardholders, and gold cardholders (Queensland Transport 2007). The rationale for the exclusion of Queensland's unemployed from public transport concessions are reflected in a 2004 statement by Paul Lucas, the then Minister for Transport and Main Roads:

Translink will not be offering concessions for the unemployed as government policy is that that is a matter for the Commonwealth Government. It provides unemployment support and it should continue to do that.

In contrast other States and Territories have accepted their responsibility in reducing the transport cost burden experienced by the unemployed. For example Victoria has implemented an initiative that incorporates redesigning transportation accessibility and affordability to include unemployed job seekers with Health Care Cards. Managed through the State Concessions and Hardship Program, it aims to alleviate disadvantage by identifying and implementing specific goals which are aimed at reducing barriers to opportunity (Victorian Department of Human Services 2006).

Transport equity can promote the social inclusion of disadvantaged groups that may otherwise find it difficult to participate economically and socially in the community (Social Exclusion Unit 2003). For the unemployed or the underemployed, who are at greater risk of social problems, promoting social inclusion by addressing transport inequity (as one of many dimensions of social inclusion), can also lead to increased economic productivity and less dependence on social assistance (Victoria Transport Policy Institute, 2003).

The literature reveals that some research attention, both internationally and nationally, has been given to transport accessibility and its relationship to social status and social disadvantage (Dodson et al 2004, Social Exclusion Unit 2003, Hurni 2006). However, literature specifically devoted to public transport affordability for unemployed job seekers is limited. In Queensland it is non-existent.

This project seeks to bridge this gap in knowledge by attempting to answer the following questions:

- What is the financial impact of Queensland Transport's concession policy on unemployed job seekers?
- What are the benefits of extending public transport concessions to Queensland's unemployed job seekers?

It is anticipated that this data will enable QCOSS to advocate for public transport policy change to reduce the cost burden faced by Queensland's job seekers.

3. PROJECT METHODOLOGY

The project is a cross-sectional study using a mixed methods approach. Through the use of questionnaires with job seekers, in-depth interviews with Employment Consultants, and a comparative document and policy analysis we were able to examine the issue from multiple perspectives. Analysis of the data was undertaken by triangulating results across a number of common themes.

3.1 Methods

3.1.1 Questionnaires with Unemployed Job Seekers

Structured quantitative questionnaires (appendix 1) with unemployed job seekers were conducted at four Salvation Army Employment Plus offices across the greater Brisbane area. The questionnaires sought to determine how much of the unemployed job seekers' allowance was spent on public transport for job seeking activities.

Quantitative data on age, gender, income, transport costs and zones traveled to meet Welfare to Work obligations was collected to provide indications of the financial impact across the sample. The participant's own assessment of costs used for job seeking in the fortnight preceding the survey was able to be cross-examined against the stated number of suburbs traveled to and the number of trips recorded. This provided a checking mechanism to ensure realistic approximate costs were being recorded allowing a closer approximation to the real average costs.

Questions asking respondents if they had or would refuse a job due to high transport costs and whether they had been provided assistance with transport costs were aimed at disclosing if transport costs were in fact a barrier and consequently affecting their ability to access employment opportunities.

Open-ended questions completed the questionnaire and provided participants with an opportunity to elaborate further on their own experiences and to contribute their own opinions on how the unemployed could benefit from accessing public transport concessions.

3.1.2 Interviews with Employment Consultants

We conducted qualitative in-depth, semi-structured interviews with Employment Consultants at three of the four Employment Plus offices. A question format (Appendix 2) was used during the interviews as a guide only. We deviated considerably from this schedule to clarify a consultant's reply or to delve further into emerging themes.

Questions sought to clarify the Job Network Providers' policy stance on providing financial assistance and the criteria used to determine eligibility for assistance with public transport to unemployed job seekers. Predominantly it was used to gain a rich descriptive account of their professional experience with unemployed job seekers, in particular the job seekers ability to afford public transport in meeting their Welfare to Work obligations, such as attending interviews and training.

3.1.3 Comparative Document and Policy Analysis

The internet was used extensively to undertake a comparative document and policy analysis. A comparison of interstate concession policy practices was considered important in developing an understanding of how eligibility for concessions is determined and managed in other States and Territories. Also understanding the motivations behind other States and Territories introduction of concessions to unemployed job seekers was considered valid. Two distinct sets of data were collected.

Statistical data on current populations of Newstart and Youth Allowance recipients within each state and current total state populations were collected for the purpose of placing Queensland within the bigger picture.

The second set of data compared public transport fares and concession policies across all States and Territories, to determine Queensland's relative position. A state comparison table was then constructed to display findings clearly. This table is displayed in the Findings section of this report.

3.2 Data Collection and Analysis

Prior to the commencement of the research, pilot interviews were conducted with university students to test the uniformity of the questionnaire schedule, and to identify any inconsistencies. This process resulted in some minor alterations to the interview schedule to ensure the questions would accurately address the research aims.

The questionnaires are quantitative so that data collected could be analysed in the statistical analysis program, STATA. However, with only a small sample to analyse it was predominantly used for providing descriptive data on our sample.

The in-depth interviews with the Employment Consultants were recorded and transcribed by the research team. The transcripts were coded manually, by highlighting emerging themes relevant to the research questions. The data collected from the questionnaires, and the themes identified in the in-depth interviews were then cross-checked against each other to determine how consistent results were across the spectrum of participants involved in the research.

3.3 Sampling

The research team was granted access to potential volunteers in the project through Salvation Army Employment Plus offices in the greater Brisbane area. All participants were provided details on the right to withdrawal from the project at any time. To ensure their anonymity was maintained pseudonyms have been used for all participants and all references which could identify Employment Plus office locations have been removed.

Questionnaires were conducted at four Salvation Army Employment Plus offices on three pre-arranged days across a four week period in August 2007. The sample was drawn from those job seekers attending the office, on the day of our visit, for interviews or training sessions as part of their requirement to fulfill Welfare to Work obligations. Otherwise the sample was random, but purposive.

Respondents were required to be:

- (a) over 18 years of age
- (b) not in receipt of a Pensioner Concession Card (who are deemed eligible for public transport concessions)
- (c) Primarily relied on public transport for job seeking purposes
- (d) An unemployed job seeker for at least three months.

The overall number of respondents who volunteered to participate was twenty-one. Twelve participants were from two outer Brisbane offices and nine from two inner Brisbane offices.

At three of the four Employment Plus branches we visited we sought one voluntary Employment Consultant to participate in in-depth qualitative interviews. Of the three Employment Consultants who participated, two were from outer Brisbane locations, one from an inner city office. Employment Plus branch managers were responsible for approaching consultants and determining their willingness to volunteer in the project. Each interview was approximately half to one hour in length.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

Full ethical approval was obtained for this research study from the University of Queensland's (St Lucia) internal ethical approval body. Gatekeeper permission was sought and received from the Salvation Army Employment Plus Operations Manager prior to commencement of the research. The Employment Consultants role in recruiting potential volunteer participants was confined to facilitating the interview process. All participants were made aware of their right to withdraw from the project at any time

and that their choice to participate would in no way affect their relationship with their Job Network Provider or Centrelink.

3.5 Limitations and Biases

Limitations and biases of this study are as follows:

3.5.1 Sample Size and time limitations

A larger sample may have provided more depth and breadth to this study; however the unpredictability of the job seekers attendance hindered this goal. Job seekers for various reasons did not always keep their appointments or attend training sessions. In the case of one particular inner Brisbane office, candidates repeatedly declined participation, citing fear of reprisals from Centrelink. Repeat visits to these offices over several weeks or months may have provided access to a broader range of candidates; however, time limitations in this study prevented the research team from adopting this option.

3.5.2 Greater Brisbane focus

Research was limited to the greater Brisbane area. Therefore, we cannot claim to have effectively represented those unemployed job seekers in regional areas whose experience of this issue may differ from our findings.

3.5.3 Sampling criteria

The purposive sampling criteria set for the study, was a limitation in accessing interviewees. Some of the unemployed job seekers we had access to did not meet our "primarily used public transport for job seeking" criteria. They had sourced alternative forms of transport such as private transport, bicycle or walking, to avoid the expense of public transport usage. In addition, a significant percentage of job seekers did not meet the age criteria of 18 years required for ethical approval purposes.

3.5.4 Public transport affordability in isolation

Public transport affordability is a complex issue. This is due to its inextricable link to other factors such as public transport accessibility, residential location, the impact of Welfare to Work policies, and the burden of meeting important living expenses such as

food and shelter. Therefore, we acknowledge that another limitation of our study is its focus on the financial impact of Queensland Transport's concession policy in isolation from other compounding factors.

3.5.5 Concessions focus

An obvious bias of the study was the project's emphasis on concessions as a means to addressing public transport affordability for the unemployed. As such other means of reducing the transport cost burden of the unemployed have not been addressed and are beyond the scope of this project.

Due to the limitations and biases highlighted above the data collected from this study is not intended to be generalised to the broader Queensland population.

4. FINDINGS

The findings can be divided into two distinct themes: affordability as a barrier to employment, and the impact of transport policy.

Affordability as a barrier to employment

Of our sample, 52 per cent said that they would refuse or have refused a job offer because transport costs were too high in accessing a job.

This figure demonstrates that a significant percentage of job seekers consider the expense of transport costs in accessing a job. Evidence from interviews with Employment Consultants suggests that the pressures of stretching their limited income to cover other fundamental living expenses such as rent and food may impact on the decision to accept or reject a job offer. As one consultant noted:

I guess the cost of living, just rent and food, that's their priorities. And with the money they've got left over it's not enough to cover costs of interviews,

particularly when a lot of our candidates attend interviews daily and they just can't afford to catch public transport on a daily basis.

Our finding also points to the disincentive that high travel costs pose in accepting employment, particularly low-paid or part-time employment, as evidenced by the following quote:

There's no point in getting somebody in a job that is part-time and they're only going to last a few weeks because they can't afford the transport. (Employment Consultant)

This supports findings from the McClure report that also noted transport costs as a significant barrier to employment (2000).

This finding infers that if public transport was more affordable the unemployed may more readily accept employment opportunities that were previously unviable due to high transport costs. Not only would this benefit the unemployed job seeker it would also encourage greater economic productivity and less dependence on social assistance. This has already been noted in international studies by the Social Exclusion Unit (2003) and the Victoria Transport Policy Institute (2003).

Approximately 23 per cent of the sample spent in excess of 10 per cent of their income to fulfill their job seeking obligations (refer figure 1).

Our finding is lower than the Welfare Rights study conducted in 2002 that found transport costs to be a "significant expense" for *all* the young unemployed participants. However there is some evidence to suggest that our figure could have been larger. Interviews with Employment Consultants and job seekers indicated that the unemployed in many cases avoided public transport costs by walking to appointments, obtaining lifts from family members or friends, or cycling. As one Employment Consultant illustrated:

We are dealing with people who walk 4kms....because they can't afford it, or the bus doesn't run at the right time, they have to walk just to get here to participate in compulsory jobs or training.

The figure of 10 per cent was selected as a "reasonable ceiling" on transport costs, as suggested by the World Bank literature (2005).

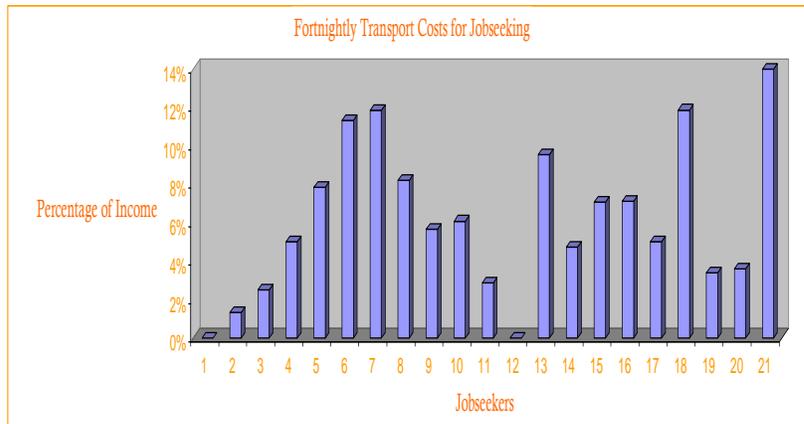


Figure 1

Impact of Transport Policy

Data indicates public transport cost disadvantage is experienced equally across inner and outer regions of Brisbane.

Initially the research team assumed that job seekers from outer city regions would spend more of their allowance on transport costs to meet obligations, than those closer to the CBD. This was reinforced by findings from a fare comparison undertaken by the Public Transport Users Association (Figure 2) showing that Queensland has the cheapest fares within a 15 kilometre radius of the CBD, beyond this zone however fares escalate to one of the most expensive in Australia.

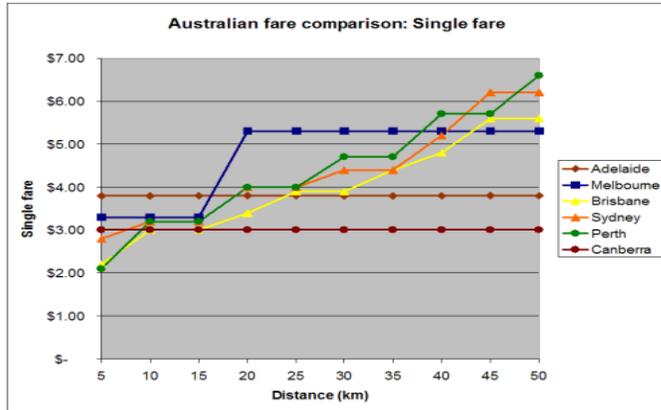


Figure 2 (Public Transport Users Association)

However, after correlating the zone that job seekers lived in against the amount spent on transport, our data showed that there was no significant relationship between where unemployed job seeker’s lived and their transport costs to fulfill Welfare to Work obligations such as attending interviews, training and Job Network agencies (Figure 3).

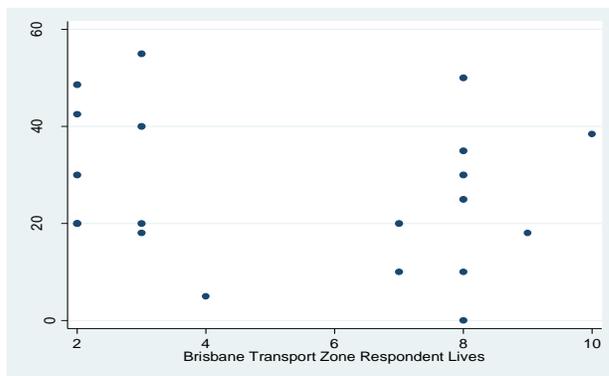


Figure 3

While our data showed no correlation between region of residence and the amount of transport expense, analysis of the interview data indicates that this outcome may be affected by Centrelink’s process of classifying job seekers that enter the Job Network system. In essence those residents that were termed ‘locationally disadvantaged’ were required to meet fewer obligations than inner city residents, and therefore were required to spend less on public transport to meet their Welfare to Work obligations. As highlighted here:

Centrelink sets down their criteria for the amount of the job search. Some of the locationally disadvantaged only have to look for four jobs a fortnight, some will have to look for six, some two. (Employment Consultant)

While Queensland Transport excludes the unemployed from public transport concessions it extends concessions to a range of other disadvantaged groups.

Queensland's concession policy is inequitable. It does not extend concessions to the unemployed. However, as noted in the literature, Queensland Transport does extend concessions to other transport-disadvantaged groups, such as pensioners, seniors cardholders, and full-time students (2007).

This is in sharp contrast with Queensland Transport's mission to create an 'inclusive' transport system (2007). It also highlights the inequitable concession policy currently employed by the Queensland Government. This is explored further in the next finding.

Queensland is the only State or Territory in Australia to exclude the unemployed from public transport concessions.

Figure 4 gives a summary of the findings from our comparative policy and document analysis. It is clear from this table that Queensland's transport policy stance is at odds with that of other States and Territories within Australia. Paul Lucas' statement in 2004 makes it clear that public transport funding for the unemployed is considered by the Queensland Government a Federal, not a State, responsibility. This position seems unjustified when all other Australian States and Territories do give concessions to the unemployed and do not consider it a Commonwealth responsibility.

Furthermore, States such as Victoria, as our literature review revealed, have implemented initiatives under the *State Concessions and Hardship Program* to help alleviate the disadvantage experienced by the unemployed, in line with other disadvantaged groups (Victorian Department of Human Services 2006).

Finally, our comparative document and policy analysis revealed that Queensland has one of the lowest rates of unemployment in Australia. This implies that extending concessions may be less costly for Queensland than it is for other States and Territories such as Tasmania and the Northern Territory that *have* implemented concessions.

STATE	Job seekers as % of total State population	Public Transport Concession Provided	Eligibility Card recognized to Access public Transport concessions	Concession Rate for Unemployed Job seekers
NSW	6,875,700 1.66%	✓	Centrelink issued Half Fare Entitlement Card	50% of Adult Full fare
VIC	5,188,100 1.49%	✓	Centrelink Health Care Card	Approx. 50% Full fare
QLD	4,162,000 1.29%	✗	No entitlement	No Entitlement
S.A	1,581,400 1.78%	✓	State Concession Card	50% of Adult Full Fare
W.A	2,094,500 0.98%	✓	Centrelink Health Care Card	40% of Adult Full fare
N.T	213,800 2.29%	✓	Centrelink Health Care Card	25% of Adult Full fare
TAS	492,700 2.39%	✓	Centrelink Health Care Card	50% of Adult Full fare
ACT	338,200 0.69%	✓	Centrelink Issued ACTION card	50% of Adult Full fare

Figure 4

Note: Percentage figures in the above table are derived from DEWR figures for Youth Allowance and Newstart recipients in Queensland (Labour Market and Related Payments Report, Aug 2007) divided by ABS State unemployment figures (3101.0 - Australian Demographic Statistics, Mar 2007)

Summary

Overall, our findings from job seeker questionnaires demonstrate that a significant proportion of our sample found the financial impact of public transport costs an obstacle to accessing work opportunities. This was supported by our in-depth Employment Consultant interviews.

Our comparative document and policy analysis, along with analysis of available literature revealed that Queensland has an inequitable transport policy that excludes the unemployed from public transport concessions despite offering concessions to other disadvantaged groups. It is also the only State or Territory in Australia to take this exclusionary policy stance.

Therefore, extending concessions to the unemployed has two primary benefits.

- It would create a more equitable concession policy that: included the unemployed, and recognized their status as a disadvantaged group; that was aligned to that of other States and Territories within Australia; and that truly reflected Queensland Transport's mission statement of creating an "inclusive" transport system.
- It would reduce one of the barriers to employment, and in so doing would encourage greater economic productivity and less need for social assistance.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Queensland Transport's current concession policy excludes the unemployed, based on the rationale that it is the Commonwealth Government's responsibility to offer support and assistance. This position is not supported by the concession policies of other Australian States and Territories that acknowledge the importance of assisting the unemployed in accessing job opportunities and therefore extend public transport concessions. This seems to suggest that Queensland's concession policy stance is a deliberate policy decision.

Queensland's concession policy is also inequitable and contradicts its mission to create an inclusive transport system.

Our findings, suggest that the financial impact of Queensland Transport's concession policy on unemployed job seekers is significant. It is particularly noteworthy that more than half of our sample would reject or have rejected an employment opportunity due to transport cost concerns in accessing the job.

Time and financial limitations, and a relatively small sample, collected from within the greater Brisbane area mean that our findings cannot be generalized to the wider population of unemployed Queenslanders. However, our research project does represent the only known study to provide empirical data on the financial impact of public transport costs on the unemployed.

In light of our findings and the acknowledged limitations of our research we make the following recommendations:

1. That public transport concessions, be extended by Queensland Transport to include the unemployed.

2. That further research is undertaken, particularly in Queensland on public transport affordability and its financial impact upon the unemployed.

The implications of continuing to ignore the issue of public transport affordability for Queensland's unemployed is an ongoing and unnecessarily high transport cost burden, and a risk of being economically and socially excluded.

The benefits of extending concessions to the unemployed are twofold. Firstly, it would reduce one of their barriers to accessing employment, possibly leading to increased economic productivity and reduced dependence on income support. Secondly, it would meet Queensland Transport's mission of creating a more equitable and truly 'inclusive' transport system.

APPENDIX 1

Questionnaire for Job seekers

Interviewer's Name _____

Date _____

Name.....

Male

Female

Age: 18-25 26-35 36-45 46-55 56-65

1. Do you currently receive

Newstart

Youth Allowance

Other

(If payment type is other, please end questionnaire here).

2. What is your total fortnightly allowance (before deductions) \$

3. Have you current eligibility for any of the following cards

PCC (Pensioner Concession Card)

HCC (Health Care Card)

No card issued

(If PCC or no card issued – please end questionnaire here).

4. What is your primary form of transport for job seeking activity purposes

Rail

Bus

Private Vehicle

5. Do you live with a partner?

Yes

No

6. How long have you been unemployed?

7. In the past fortnight, please indicate how many times you have traveled to the following:

Job Interview/s

Training programs

Work for the dole program

Centrelink Office

Employment Plus Office

8. What suburb do you live in?

9. As an estimate, how much do you spend each fortnight on fares for job seeking/activity purposes?

10. In the past fortnight, what suburbs have you traveled to for job interviews using public transport?

.....
.....
.....

11. Have you ever experienced difficulty attending interviews with Centrelink, any Job Network Agency or a prospective employer as a result of not being able to afford public transport? Yes No

12. Have you ever missed an appointment with Centrelink, a Job Network Agency or a prospective employer as a result of not being able to afford public transport? Yes No

13. Were you breached as a result of missing your appointment? Yes No

14. Have you ever refused a job offer because transport costs were too high in accessing the job? Yes No

15. Have you ever been provided assistance with transport costs to attend an interview or training for job seeking purposes? Yes No

16. If yes, what type of assistance was provided.

- a. Cash -
- b. Public Transport Ticket
- c. Taxi Voucher
- d. Other (please specify)

17. If you answered 'yes', please indicate who provided you with assistance

- Employment Plus Employment Consultant
- Other Job Network Employment Consultant
- Centrelink Officer
- Friend or Relative
- Other (Please specify).....

18.What do you think would contribute to alleviating your public transport costs?

.....

.....

.....

19.Is there anything else you would like to add?

.....

.....

.....

Thank you very much for your time.

20.Interviewer's comments or observations (if any)

.....

.....

.....

.....

APPENDIX 2

Interview Schedule For Employment Consultants

Interviewers Name _____

Date _____

The aim of our project is to examine the financial impact of Queensland Transport's Concession policy on unemployed job seekers receiving Newstart or Youth Allowance.

Name..... Job Title.....

1. Do you in your current job capacity provide job seekers with financial assistance for public transport costs? YES/NO
(If no, enquire why assistance is not given, then bring interview to an end)

If yes, which job seeking activities do you provide assistance for?

.....
.....
.....
.....

What types of assistance do you offer? (e.g. cash, multi-trip tickets, taxi vouchers)

.....
.....
.....

What criteria is used to determine what is assistance given and how often?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

In your opinion, do you think that public transport costs impact on job seeking activities?

.....
.....

If yes, how?

.....
.....
.....
.....

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