SAPTA Regional Area Service Review 2024 – Position Statement (Draft)

BusSA is the voice of the South Australian bus and coach industry. Our members are operators offering services across the route, school, charter and tour sectors throughout the state.

Our vision is to promote integrated and world-class passenger transport for all South Australians, while aiming to ensure buses operate safely, effectively and sustainably.

This statement is to inform the upcoming investigations into how to better integrate public transport opportunities in regional centres to be conducted by the South Australian Public Transport Authority (SAPTA) as committed by the State Government in the 2022/23 Budget.

Position and Aims:

- Frequency, in combination with span of hours and geographic coverage, are the mainstays of service metrics that must be considered in a regional public transport framework. Presently these are all compromised, likely leaving plenty of latent demand that could be tapped to drive utilization and patronage growth.

- In addition, current ticketing, service information and inter service connectivity is poor and is a barrier to public transport use in regional SA.

- Spending over $400,000 on a Review with no additional service funding - what do SAPTA and the Government expect to achieve? This approach would be considered piecemeal, a waste of effort and resource and won't realise any uplift in service span of hours or accessible service via improved location/distance = no increase in social inclusion, employment and business opportunity or public transport patronage.

- The challenge for regional public transport remains budget. Industry is ready and able to scale service delivery to a framework as determined by Government. It is our policy position that Government should aim at a $70 per regional resident spend on country bus (city connector) services and town services, including other regional mobility tasks.

  As evidenced in 'An Investigation of Regional Public Transport Spend in Australia' (p19); this compares with a current spend in SA of under $40 per head, $273 in metropolitan Adelaide and up to $200 per head in other Australian states. The current disparity for regional SA residents is stark. Progress towards this $70 target spend as a goal will be a significant enabler of improved networks and will lead to improved patronage over time.

- The Bus Industry Confederation's "The value of getting there: mobility for stronger Australian Regions" finds that mobility improvements support economic participation (p9) and social inclusion (p12), thereby helping to foster strong regional communities. This report includes various case studies as well as making recommendations on "Public Transport Service Standards", describing the types of services that could be made available for towns and cities of certain population sizes (p29).

Opportunities:

- Operators report that assets are currently underutilised. At the very least, the Government should fund the cost of running additional services with the current asset – to improve span of hours and frequency, including for weekend services.

Note: Long haul (inter-own) and on demand services should be viewed differently assets are not under-utilised, however there is spare demand on current services.

- Recent trials have demonstrated that 'on demand' services provide a viable complimentary service and/or alternative where scheduled services are not operating. These on demand services can be more versatile however the cost per km and passenger trip is greater. For example, Mt Barker (Govt funded as part of metropolitan services = 400k patronage since 2020), Victor Harbour (Council funded phase 1 contract), Pt Lincoln (town service substitute) and Barossa (1 bus for short trips with in as Dial a Ride) have all been considered a successful, viable alternative. Mt Gambier is interested to trial.
  The full benefit of on demand is realised when run in combination with a regular service to improve access and service as a feeder to that town service.

- Introduce free travel for Senior Card holders in Regional South Australia – why does this only apply to metropolitan services?

- Report of the Select Committee on Public and Active Transport, 2023: Recommendation 1 (p6):

  The Committee recommends that state government reviews its policies and processes to ensure that public transport services and infrastructure improve with regard to:
  a) Increasing the frequency of buses in metropolitan Adelaide and in regional centres;
  b) Better bus connectivity between metropolitan suburbs, and especially between regional centres ensuring that regional communities have access to health services;

- Bus operators, SAPTA, local councils, residents and businesses work together to identify areas of significant gap/demand and priorities that meet criteria for additional funding, including where service gaps are aligned with current and planned population growth including as detailed in the Greater Adelaide Regional Plan (GARP)

LGA (LGA South Australia) has also provided in principle support to the vision, aims and opportunities outlined by BusSA.

Research attached and available at the BusSA website:

- The value of getting there: Mobility for stronger Australian regions – Bus Industry Confederation, 2021
- An investigation of Regional Public Transport Spend in Australia – University of Sydney, 2022
- Report of the Select Committee on Public and Active Transport, 2023

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