

Chapter 6

Liveable cities

Liveable cities offer a high quality of life, and support the health and wellbeing of the people who live and work in them. Liveable cities are socially inclusive, affordable, accessible, healthy and safe. They also feature attractive built and natural environments. Liveable cities provide choice and opportunity for people to live their lives, and raise their families, to their fullest potential.

A healthy, well educated population is a major asset for any city, and knowledge is a prerequisite for enhanced civic participation in the social, political and cultural spheres.

United Nations Human Settlements Programme, (UNHABITAT) State of the World's Cities 2010–11 report page xii

6.1 Housing our growing and changing population

Secure and appropriate housing is fundamental to health, wellbeing and quality of life. Housing constitutes the foundation upon which communities are formed and maintained. The nature of residential development in cities is also fundamental to their urban structure and form, which together influence liveability, productivity and sustainability.

The efficient supply of suitable, affordable and well-located housing is a priority of the Australian Government for our cities. In April 2009, COAG—noting that the housing market faces significant pressures from strong demand, driven by population growth and a robust economy—endorsed a housing supply and affordability reform agenda to remove barriers to supply and ensure efficient use of Australia's existing housing stock.

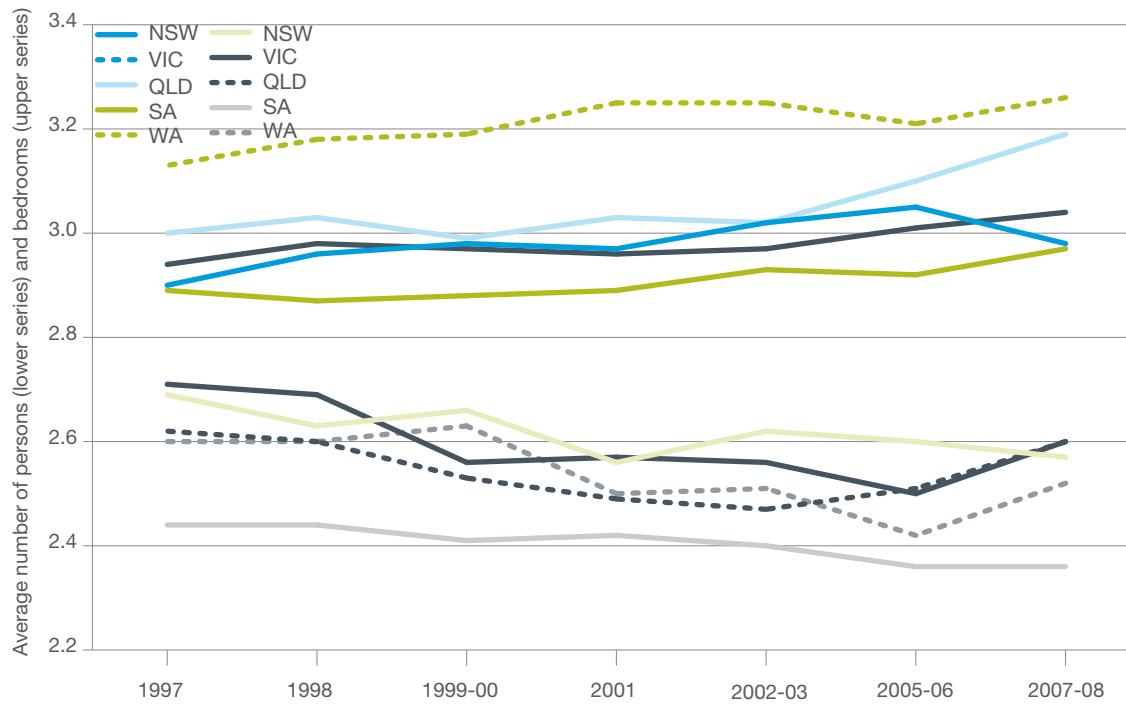
Two social trends have increased the growth in the number of households faster than the growth of the population. Firstly, the ageing population has meant a greater proportion of older people living longer, and secondly there are more people living alone, rather than forming couple households. These trends, together with overall population growth, have increased the number of households to the extent that the number is projected to increase to 11.8 million by 2029. This means there will be a need for 3.2 million additional homes to meet this underlying demand. The National Housing Supply Council (NHSC 2010) predicts the shortfall in housing supply will increase to 640 600 dwellings by 2029 if the market fails to respond to increasing demand.

Importantly, however, the trends have led to a decrease in the average size of households, which is changing the nature of the demand towards a more diverse mix of dwellings.

In the decade from 1994, Australia experienced declines in the average number of persons in a household from 3.1 to 2.6, yet the proportion of new homes with four or more bedrooms increased from 17 to 28% (BITRE 2009). Therefore, despite challenges associated with adequate supply and affordability in parts of the housing market, Australians, on average are increasing the amount of housing they are consuming.

In the past five years, however, there are signs of changing housing consumption patterns in New South Wales, with a decline in the average number of bedrooms following the decline in the size of households (Figure 30). Nevertheless, the mismatch in the dwelling stock compared to household composition is reflected in the proportion of lone-person households living in single detached houses. Almost half (49.9%) of all lone-person households in the five largest capital cities in 2008 lived in single detached dwellings (ABS 2009).

Figure 30 Number of persons per household and bedrooms per dwelling in five states (1994– 2008)



Source: ABS (2009a)

6.1.1 Housing affordability

By definition, liveable cities are places where people want to live, and the growth in demand for housing in our major cities is testimony to this. A strong demand for housing presents the first main challenge to liveability in our cities—the shortfall in affordable housing supply.

Two thirds of this projected demand is expected to be in the four largest cities Melbourne (19%), Sydney (16%), Perth (10%), Brisbane and south-east Queensland (21%) which corresponds to projected population growth trends. New South Wales and Queensland are estimated to have the most rapidly widening demand-supply gap of all States and Territories under medium growth and supply scenarios.

The shortfall in housing supply is likely to put continued upward pressure on house and unit prices and have follow on effects of a higher number and proportion of households for whom housing becomes unaffordable. More low-income households in private rental may also require housing assistance.

The NHSC report highlights the difficulty for low-income households. In 2006, there were 236 000 more private rental dwellings than in 1996 but 125 000 fewer dwellings with rents less than \$232 per week (in 2006 dollars, considered affordable).

The shortfall in affordable rental dwellings for low-income renters is estimated to be 500 000 and more than 20% of low-income private renters paid rents in excess of 50% of their household income. The variation in the shortfall in housing across the States and Territories is also reflected in the availability of affordable rental properties for low-income households across the cities (Wulff et al. 2009). The lack of availability of affordable rental properties for low-income households is most acutely felt in Sydney and the Gold Coast.

Multiple factors influence the delivery of an efficient supply of suitable and affordable housing. Housing supply, and the higher house prices that result from restrictions on this supply, are influenced by land zoning and building code regulations and other standards related to building quality; the imposition of charges for infrastructure, the availability of facilities and services; the often lengthy approvals processes; taxation, including stamp duties, land tax and the goods and services tax on input costs; and the costs of labour and materials which rise in a buoyant economy. Much of this policy framework is determined by the States, Territories and Local Government, hence the need for reform through COAG.

6.1.2 Housing diversity

Housing diversity refers to whether the range of dwelling types meets the needs of different households. Apart from size and types of dwellings, diversity includes:

- suitability of the structure of the building for the physical abilities and life stage of occupants, and adaptability so dwellings can accommodate the needs of members of the household—with minimal alterations at minimal cost—as they change over time
- locations that enable members of a household to maintain their livelihoods and supports their health and wellbeing
- security of tenure
- affordability—both initial capital and ongoing costs.

The majority of housing in Australian cities has long been single detached houses. The proportion of single detached dwellings being built continues to substantially outstrip other housing forms except in Sydney and Melbourne. At the 2006 Census of population and housing, 80% of new dwellings in Perth were separate houses, 62% in Brisbane, 44% in Melbourne and 33% in Sydney.

Most family households live in separate houses. However, as noted above, over the last 20 years the number of family households in Australia has declined. With declining fertility rates and increasing longevity, the age structure within cities is changing dramatically, reflecting the ageing population of the nation as a whole. The ABS (2008b) has projected that by 2056 there will be 8.1 million people aged over 65 years. This will be nearly a quarter of Australia's population (23%).

It must be questioned whether the current mix in the supply of dwellings will match these changing demographics. Whilst most existing housing stock and most new homes being built are single detached dwellings, we know that nearly all growth in households to mid-century are going to be in one- and two-person households. The NHSC estimates that to 2029 the growth in lone-person households will be more than twice that of the growth in two-parent family households in all States, except Queensland where the ratio is expected to be just less than double.

Recent research shows that older Australians are looking for affordable, practical housing in their own neighbourhood, close to transport, local services and shops, and with access to support services that will help them remain independent.

If we are going to successfully house Australia's people into the future, we need to see a better match between the homes on offer and the size of the households that are needed—particularly for the aged. A change in the composition of new housing, as is occurring in Sydney, is warranted in the rest of the country.

Similarly, unless the construction of residential buildings incorporate universal design (Box 2)—features that enable them to adapt to the changing needs of the occupants without expensive retrofitting—much dwelling stock will not be suitable. Universal design is a set of principles for planning for people across the life course. It has:

... the distinct advantage of considering the widest range of ages and abilities of older residents and their households; the features are built in from the start, which can accommodate temporary health conditions and visitors; and it minimises the need for custom modifications, with their associated problems, at a later date.

Quinn, Judd, Olsberg and Demirbilek, 2009

Such universal design features have been incorporated into Australian Standards but are not yet a requirement for general housing.

The Australian Government now requires that new dwellings funded through the social housing initiative meet universal design standards. This approach has proved successful, with almost all new social housing dwellings (more than 16 700) built under Stage 2 of the Social Housing Initiative incorporating these standards.

Box 2 Universal housing design

Universal design is a set of planning and design principles that aim to create environments that are comfortably useable by people from childhood into their older years to the greatest extent possible, without the need for major adaptation or specialised design which can add substantially to the cost of housing. It recommends the inclusion of key easy-living features that aim to make homes easier and safer to use for all occupants. This includes people with disability, ageing Australians, people with temporary injuries and families with young children.

With an ageing population comes increasing rates of disability. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare has estimated that around 2.3 million Australians will have a high level of disability by 2030. Accommodating an ageing population requires that housing and neighbourhoods be planned and built to be physically suitable to ensure that people of all ages and abilities can fully participate in their communities throughout their lives.

An increasing proportion of new housing will need to be produced that is more accessible or adaptable for older people. This would also support the Australian Government's access for all commitment under the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*, the *Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Act 1986*, and the *National Disability Strategy 2009*.

In 2009 the Australian Government convened the National Dialogue on Universal Housing Design, bringing together representatives from all levels of government, as well as key stakeholders groups from the ageing, disability and community support sectors and the residential building and property industry. The National Dialogue's strategic plan focuses on increasing national awareness of the issues around universal housing design and to set out a program to help all Australians realise its benefits in their own homes. An aspirational target that all new homes will be of an agreed universal housing design standard by 2020 was agreed to.

On 13 July 2010, the former Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Children's Services launched the *Liveable Housing Design Guidelines*. These were developed to assist the residential building and property industry and governments. They also provide useful information for consumers seeking to introduce liveable design features into a new home and could also be readily applied within an existing home.

It is not the Australian Government's intention to prescribe a one-size-fits-all approach to housing development. Its preferred approach is for a greater diversity in the supply of dwelling types across cities to provide more housing options for different sized and types of households.

The NHSC has investigated the extent of the mismatch between the nature of housing stock and demographic needs and identified impediments to the provision of more diverse housing stock.

The second *State of Supply 2010* report (NHSC 2010, p. 113) noted that among the barriers to the construction of more compact residential development with a more diverse housing mix are:

- the higher construction costs for alternate housing types compared to those for detached dwellings, including the time and finance required to acquire, aggregate and prepare the land for construction
- lengthy and sometimes uncertain planning and development assessment processes
- community opposition to change in the type of dwellings to be constructed in certain locations.

The challenge to increase both the supply and diversity of housing to meet the needs of growing and changing populations will require a different approach to residential development. Important considerations will include: residential development and building designs that are adaptable and accessible for households across the life course; that are attractive and compatible with the surrounding area; and located close work and leisure opportunities, transport and services, and green open space.

6.1.3 Living affordability

The size, type, structure, tenure and location of housing all contribute to the cost of living for households. The size and design of housing are major factors in determining household energy and water consumption. The proximity of housing to a range of employment, services and facilities determines how far and how often members of households have to travel.

Whilst there has been a strong consciousness in Australia about the need to supply, affordable housing, the affordability equation for households is more complex. The concept of living affordability, which includes the costs of transportation and operational costs of housing, as well as the cost of land and house construction, is becoming increasingly important, especially with likely increases in energy prices.

In addition to the post-war expansion of residential development into new greenfield areas, the past 15 years has seen a trend towards increasing residential development in the CBDs and adjacent inner localities. This is most evident in the growth of Australia's largest capital cities, particularly Melbourne, but it is also occurring in smaller capitals such as Adelaide and Perth.

The NHSC notes that the trend to inner-city living reflects changing preferences for dwellings located closer to employment concentrated in CBDs. State and Local planning frameworks further encourage infill residential development.

There is high demand for housing in established areas that are well serviced by public transport, have good access to employment, and have a wide range of facilities. Such demand increases the land value of inner urban property and reduces the availability of affordable housing.

Housing developed in outer areas is generally more affordable because of its upfront capital costs, particularly on a square metre basis, but these households are usually located at a considerable distance from employment and services and so must manage greater travel costs. Larger homes also require more heating and cooling, which increases the cost of running a household. Most households have to make substantial trade-offs (travel time, amount of personal space and household finances) when deciding where to live.

As noted in the *State of the Australian Cities 2010* report (Australian Government 2010), without adequate provision of local jobs, services and public transport options, many households in outer growth areas are highly vulnerable to anticipated fuel price increases. Likewise, public and community housing is often situated in places with low employment opportunities. Ensuring that housing programs assist people to move into areas with high job prospects, less concentration of poverty and good access to services, would help to address some of these issues.

Urban infill (Box 3) provides more housing in inner-city areas, which goes some way to solving the problem of housing supply. However, purchase costs and a desire for more space continue to be an overriding factor for many families.

Box 3 Targeting more housing to be built in existing urban areas

Metropolitan plans in each capital city aim to strike a balance between housing development in new greenfield locations and existing urban areas. For example, in the draft New South Wales State Plan 2010, for the Sydney Metropolitan Region, the target for new homes to be provided within existing urban areas is 70%. In fact, this target is already being well exceeded with more than 70% of new homes being built within the existing urban footprint. Melbourne, South-East Queensland, Perth and Adelaide all have targets in their metropolitan plans for at least 47% of new dwellings to be in existing areas. However, such urban infill also needs to be accompanied by improved urban amenity for existing and new residents (for example with attractive building designs and public spaces, access to conveniently located jobs, shops, education and other services and facilities, as well as quality transport). The metropolitan plans generally seek to accommodate a diversity of household types and levels of affordability in a more compact, sustainable city form.

Opportunities exist to produce a greater diversity of dwelling types in a wider range of house and unit prices across Australian cities. Options include: reforming planning systems to improve timeliness of decisions and to position a variety of residential developments in close proximity to activity centres and transport infrastructure; releasing surplus government land for development in existing areas to support job-creation activities and affordable housing; and minimising local opposition to more intense development by enhancing amenity for local communities such as nature reserves, streetscape and park improvements, cycling and pedestrian facilities, and improved public transport.

6.2 Accessibility—connecting people and places

Accessibility in cities means connecting people to places, goods, services, resources and opportunities in a timely and equitable way. Conversely, lack of accessibility is a major source of dissatisfaction for communities and businesses alike.

For individuals, lack of accessibility may mean hours stuck in traffic congestion, high vehicle running costs, lack of public transport options, or streets that cannot be navigated by foot, wheelchair or bicycle. Lack of accessibility can also mean that individuals may not be able to reasonably access jobs, schools, shops and services, or they may miss out on cultural, recreational or social opportunities. This has consequences for the liveability of a city: accessibility is associated with quality of life.

For businesses, lack of accessibility means an inability to run business effectively or cost efficiently. This has consequences for the productivity of the nation as a whole.

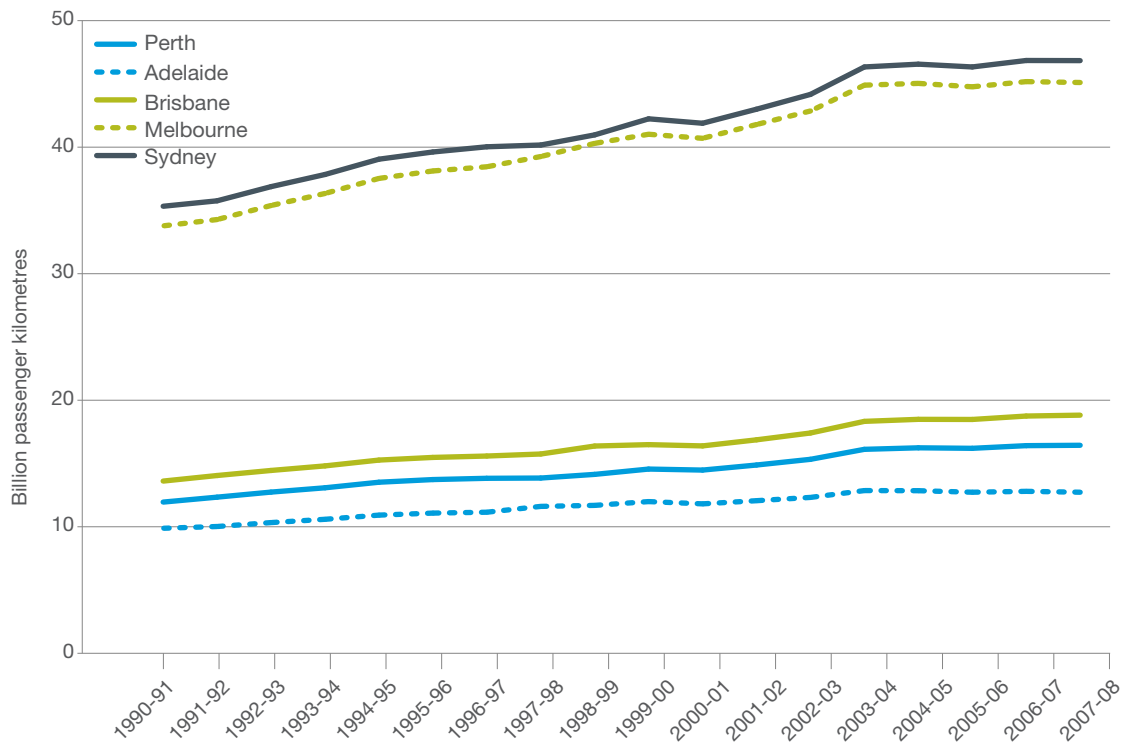
Better accessibility does not necessarily mean greater mobility. For example, advances in information and communications technology have changed the way business and social networking is conducted and will continue to improve efficiency in most sectors of Australia's economy. In addition, greater connectivity in cities can be achieved by locating people closer to the jobs, facilities, goods and services they desire or, conversely, locating facilities and services closer together in mixed-use activity centres and to major public transport interchanges with easy access. This highlights the important role of integrated land-use and infrastructure planning in reducing the distance, time and number of times people need to travel.

6.2.1 Changing travel patterns

In many respects, the private car provides unparalleled efficiency, flexibility and convenience for individuals and families. On the other hand, the levels of dependence on the private car has significant downsides that have implications for the future planning and management of our cities.

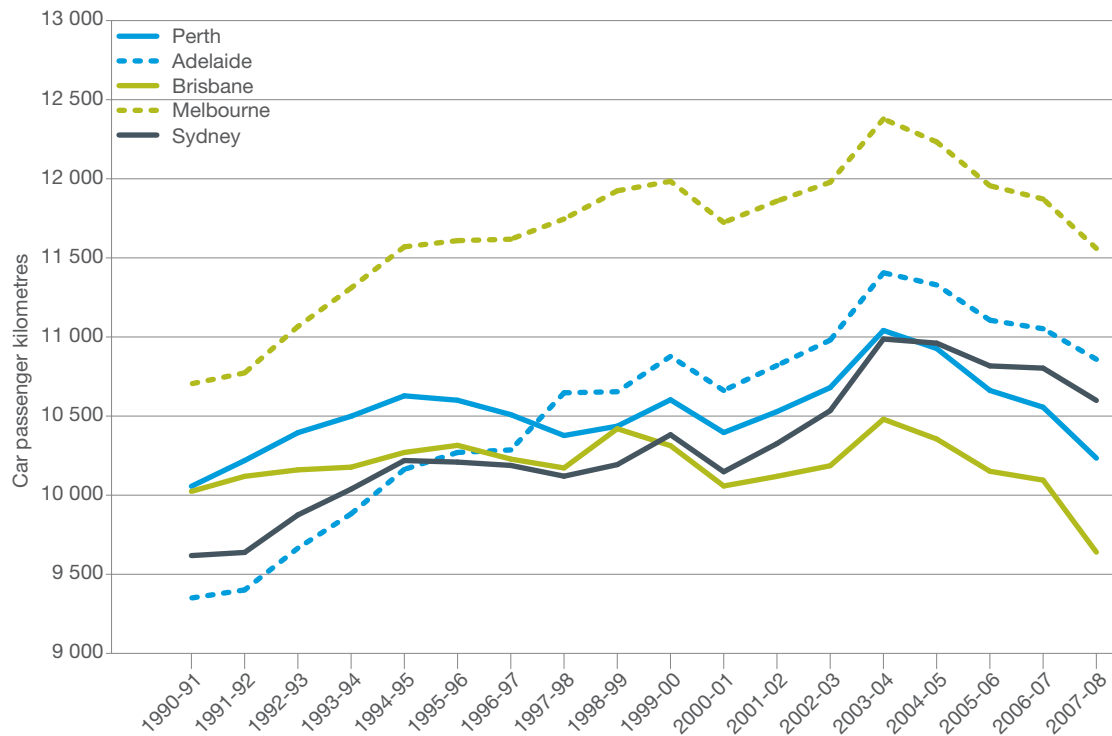
Since the 1950s car use has steadily increased to a peak of around 2004, when car travel began to decline slightly in most major cities (Figure 31 and Figure 32). In the last five years, however, there has been a noticeable change in how we travel in our cities, as described in the report *Moving People* by John Stanley and Simon Barrett (2010). *Moving People* reports an increasing use of public transport and active travel modes (cycling and walking) or not travelling at all in some cases.

Figure 31 Total car passenger km for capital cities by financial year (1991–2008)



Source: BITRE, Australian Transport Statistics Yearbook 2009, cited in Stanley and Barrett, 2010

Figure 32 Estimated car passenger km per capita by financial year (1990–2008)



Source: BITRE, Australian Transport Statistics Yearbook 2009 and ABS 2010 Regional Population Growth, cat. no. 3218.0, cited in Stanley and Barrett 2010

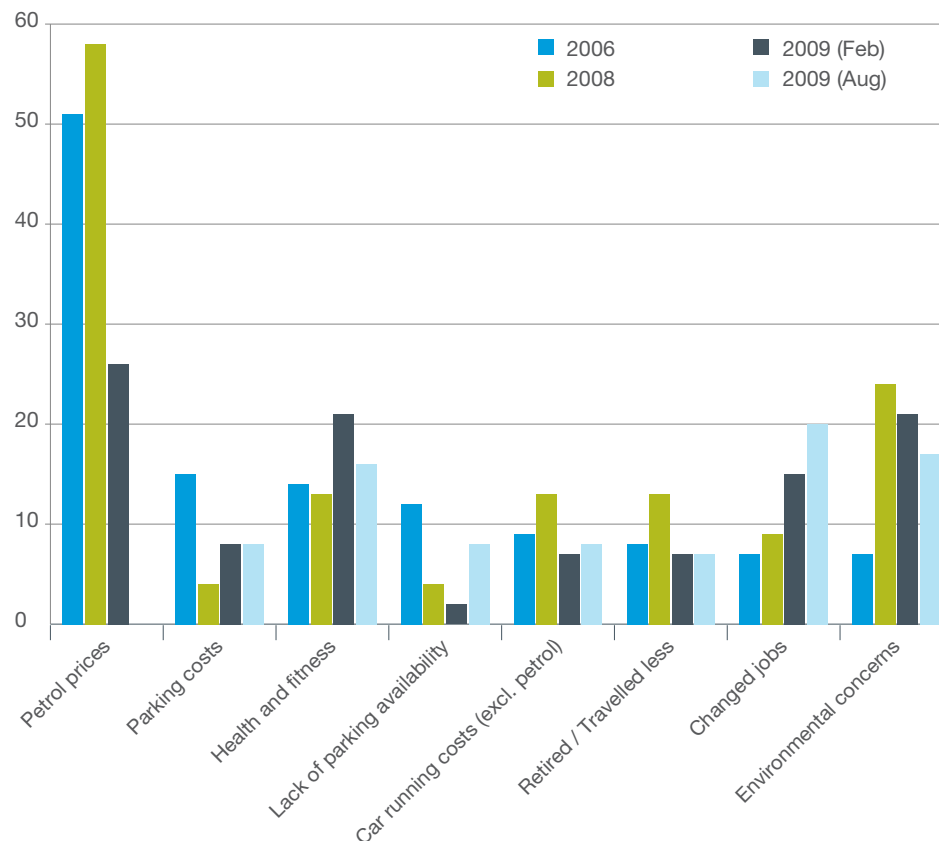
This trend reversal has coincided with noticeable increases in petrol prices but it also reflects other factors, including population growth in inner urban areas.

Figures 31 and 32 demonstrate that the size and growth rate of a city does not determine the amount of car travel per person. For example, Brisbane’s and Perth’s populations have grown at a greater rate than Adelaide’s, yet their average per capita car travel has stayed relatively stable over the past two decades, while Adelaide’s has increased.

The fall in car travel per person has balanced the growth in the numbers of people living in our cities, so that the total amount of car travel has changed very little since 2004. Nevertheless, the fact that our cities were able to accommodate some 900 000 additional residents during the period 2004 to 2009 without increased car travel is a positive sign for a more sustainable future.

Ongoing analysis of travel patterns is being undertaken by States and Territories to detect changes to these trends. At the same time, it is important to understand why these changes have been happening. The Victorian Department of Transport has been tracking reasons for changing travel patterns through a series of surveys that commenced in 2006. In that year, 335 randomly chosen Melbourne residents were asked if they had reduced their car travel in the preceding 6 months. Nearly 30% reported having done so, either a little or a lot. When asked what had prompted the change, half of all respondents attributed the change to the rapid increases in petrol prices that had recently occurred. Similar surveys were conducted again in 2008 and in 2009 (twice). The top eight reasons for decreased car use in each survey are shown in Figure 33.

Figure 33 Responses to Victorian transport choice survey



Source: Victorian Department of Transport (2010)

The Victorian research suggests that economic factors (petrol prices, parking costs and other car running costs) are important for many people, even in 2009 when the period of rapid escalation in petrol prices had passed.

A similar number of people reported making a change, not for economic reasons, but for various lifestyle reasons. Some cite the desire to include more exercise in their daily routine. Others report the desire to 'do the right thing' for the environment. This is the transport equivalent of purchasing Fair Trade goods or putting solar panels on roofs even when it is not economical to do so.

6.2.2 Reducing car dependency

A key challenge is to reduce dependence on private motor vehicles without compromising access between and within locations.

In the past, the solution to congestion has been to build new roads or create new lanes on existing networks. Roads have taken priority in funding over other modes of transport. An efficient road network is integral to city structure and functioning, as well as an essential part of the national freight network. When well planned and designed, roads can support cycling, effective bus transit and light rail options. However where the road system is not integrated within a broader transport and land-use plan, international and domestic evidence suggests that new roads are not a solution to congestion. In some cases it can even worsen the problem (Zeibots 2007). The Australian Government's advisory body, Infrastructure Australia, stated in its 2010 report to COAG:

In most cases, additional road capacity designed to facilitate private vehicle movements into urban CBDs is unlikely to lead to sustained reductions in congestion, and is likely to damage the environment and reduce urban amenity. However, some additional road capacity—for example the completion of networks serving freight needs—will, if properly managed, lead to improved long-term outcomes.

Infrastructure Australia Report to the Council of Australian Governments 2010, page 20

In its 2010 report, Infrastructure Australia also noted there are other costs beside congestion-related ones that result from transport systems relying predominantly on car travel. The environmental cost reduces liveability. Cars do not only emit greenhouse gases, they emit other fine particulates. A significant proportion of transport emissions are from cars, so switching the private motor vehicle fleet to hybrid and electric vehicles will help reduce emissions. Road safety is another concern related to car use for motorists, passengers and pedestrians alike. This is discussed later in this chapter (section 6.4.4).

The financial costs of car-dependency are considerable for households. Cars are expensive to purchase, maintain and operate, and households that are heavily car dependent may need to own more than one car. Such households are largely located in outer areas further away from higher frequency public transport services. When combined with high cost of housing, these households—already financially stretched—can become highly vulnerable to rising petrol prices and inflation (Dodson and Sipe 2008).

6.2.3 Access to employment

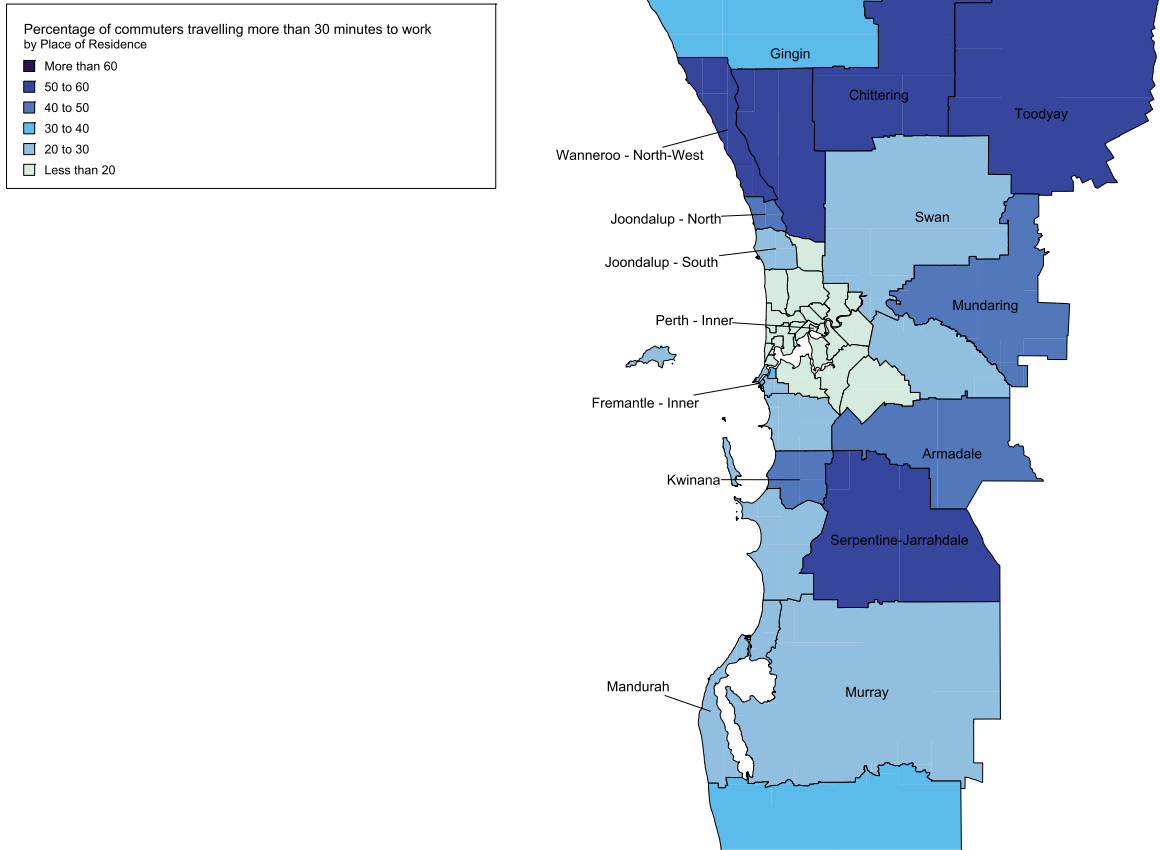
For our cities to become less car dependent there is a need to consider how well the public transport network enables people to access the resources and opportunities they need throughout their lives. An important access issue for Australian cities relates to how people get to and from work. Concerns about the time and costs associated with travelling to and from work are significant for many Australian households. For some households, getting and retaining a job is made significantly more difficult due to lack of transport availability.

The outward urban expansion of cities for housing has often occurred in areas with fewer public transport services. The distribution of residential development and employment away from higher frequency public transport services, as is especially the case in some outer growth areas, means that journeys to and from work and study involve long distances and lengthy travel times for many people.

A recent study of commuting in Perth by the BITRE (2010) showed that the population of Perth is concentrated in the outer suburbs, while employment is concentrated in the inner and middle suburbs. In 2006, the outer sector of Perth had 50% of the population, but just 30% of the jobs. A lack of jobs, relative to population, is most evident in the south-east and north-west sectors. Overall, however, 87% of Perth-employed residents live within 1 km of a regularly serviced rail or bus stop (one with a service that runs at least every 15 minutes in the morning peak period), but the proportion falls to 80% for outer-sector areas (66% for outer north-east and 69% for outer south-east) and 56% for the Peel region.

Similarly, public transport access to outer-sector jobs in outer Perth is lower, with 69% of jobs within 1 km of a regularly serviced bus or rail stop and 56% for Peel (compared to 99% for inner and 94% for middle-sector jobs) (BITRE 2010). Figure 34 shows the percentage of employed residents in Perth who do not live within 30 minutes of their job. As shown, some outer suburbs and per-urban locations have a high proportion of residents who commute long distances and the majority of employed residents are estimated to commute more than 30 minutes one way.

Figure 34 Percentage of employed residents in Perth not living within 30 minutes of their job

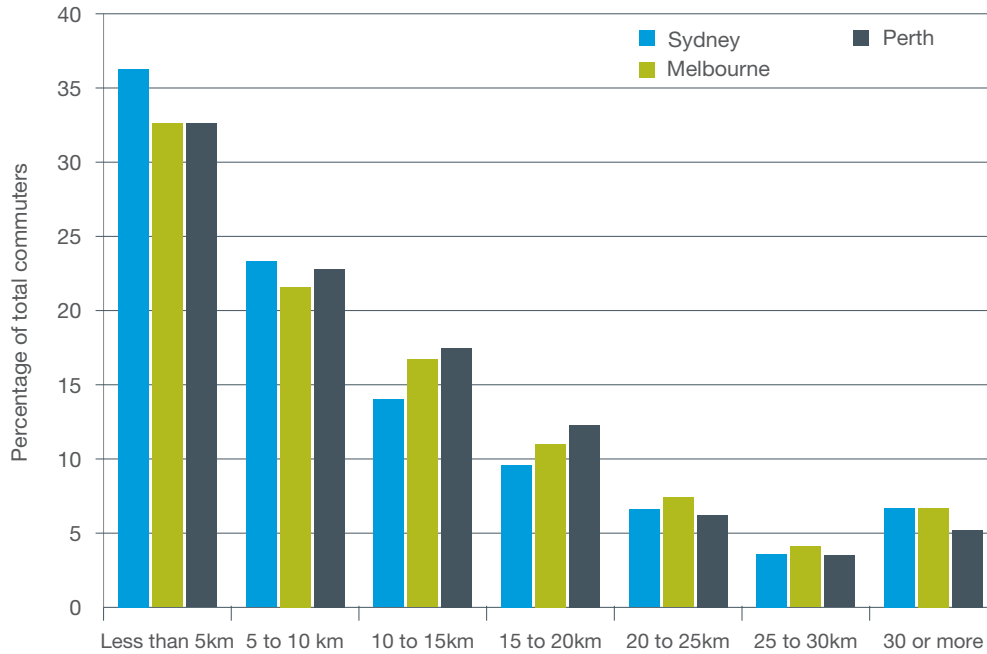


Source: BITRE (2010)

Note: Based on straight line distance between origin-destination SLA pairs and estimates of average travel speeds in different sectors, with TransPerth timetables used to identify origin-destination pairs that have a direct rail connection that takes 20 minutes or less.

While the majority of employed residents in Sydney, Melbourne and Perth live within 10 km of their workplace, a substantial minority (around 15%) live more than 20 km away, as shown in Figure 35 (BITRE 2010).

Figure 35 Comparison of distance travelled to work in Sydney, Melbourne and Perth



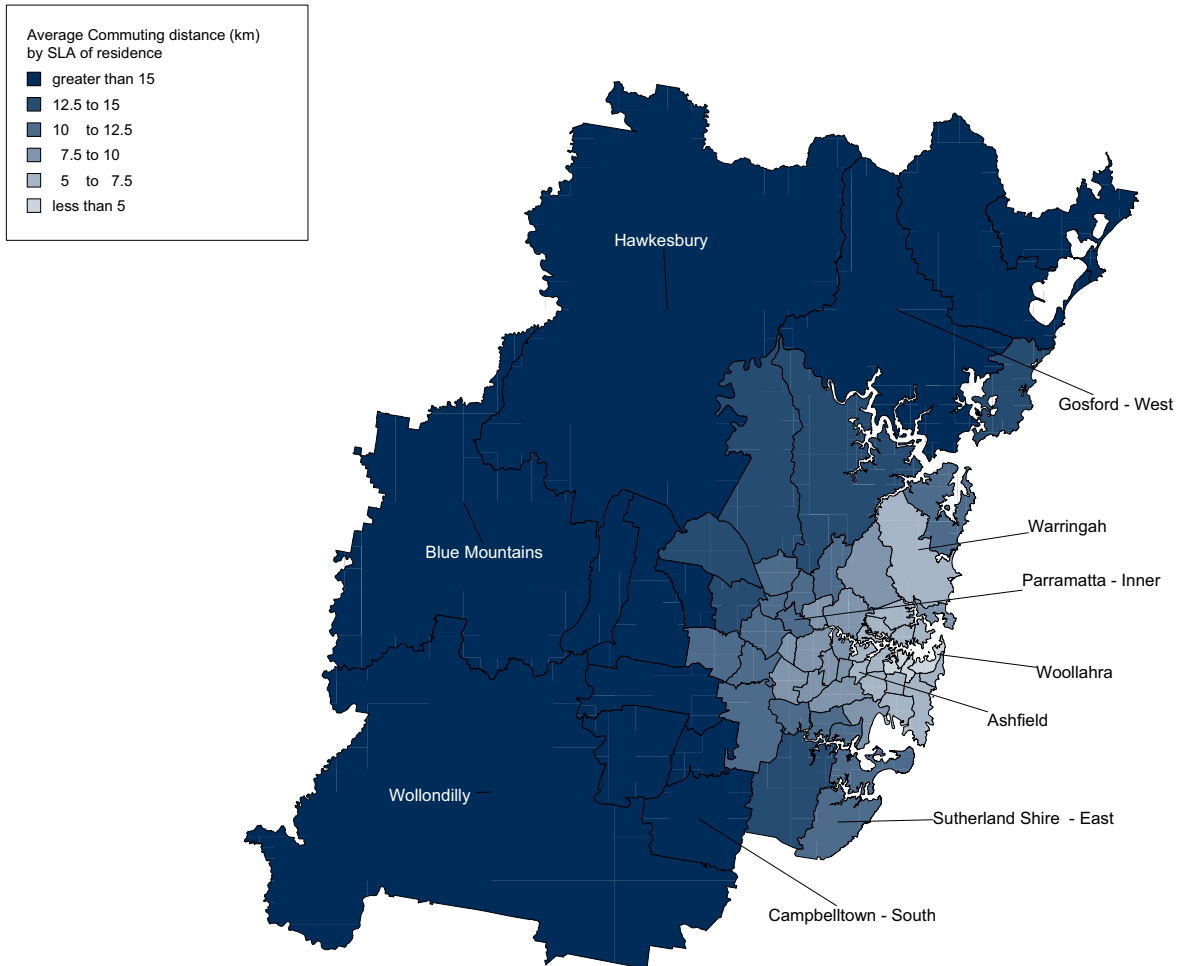
Source: BITRE analysis of ABS census of population and Housing (2006)

Note: Commuting distances are based on straight line distance between origin and destination SLA. Methodology and limitations are detailed in BITRE 2010, p.180.

In the past, residential development and employment development have not been well coordinated. As a result, outer suburban growth areas generally have poorer access to jobs or limited choice of quality jobs (Spiller 2008). A 2009 study for the National Growth Areas Alliance found that outer metropolitan growth areas were disadvantaged compared to metropolitan averages on resident skills and local employment opportunities in the cities of Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide and Perth, with average job to population ratio of 27% for growth areas alliance member councils compared to 43% for the metropolitan areas (SGS Economics and Planning 2009).

It is these areas of cities where access to employment often involves the longest journeys, as illustrated in Figure 36. This figure shows that average commuting distances (darker blue) tend to rise with distance from central business district.

Figure 36 Average commuting distance to place of work in Sydney



Source: BITRE (2010) analysis of ABS Census of Population and Housing 2006 data

Note: Commuting distances are based on straight line distance between origin and destination SLA. Methodology and limitations are detailed in BITRE 2010, p. 180.

In Brisbane there is similar strong job growth in the north-east of the city, while most population growth is occurring to the south west. This planning outcome creates a huge travel task as people travel across the city from home to work. Influencing where jobs and housing are located is a continuing challenge for metropolitan planning in all Australian cities. Integrating planning of employment areas with residential and transport services is critical to enabling more households to access the new employment opportunities generated by the industries locating in employment zones without an inacceptably high travel task.

Where families need to travel long distances for work, flexible hours and working conditions that help them balance work with caring responsibilities have shown to improve children’s wellbeing (Strazdyns 2008) and is one option that can reduce congestion at peak hours. Extending the times that public transport services run at peak-hour frequencies is another way people can access a wider range of employment opportunities within cities.

Attracting industry to outer areas to generate a greater diversity of employment is also part of the solution to improve access to employment and to reduce car travel. This long-term option will require considerable effort. An analysis of employment opportunities in Western Sydney (O'Neill et al 2008) has shown that a strongly growing national economy is not, on its own, sufficient to generate the targeted number of jobs needed for Western Sydney to support likely population growth.

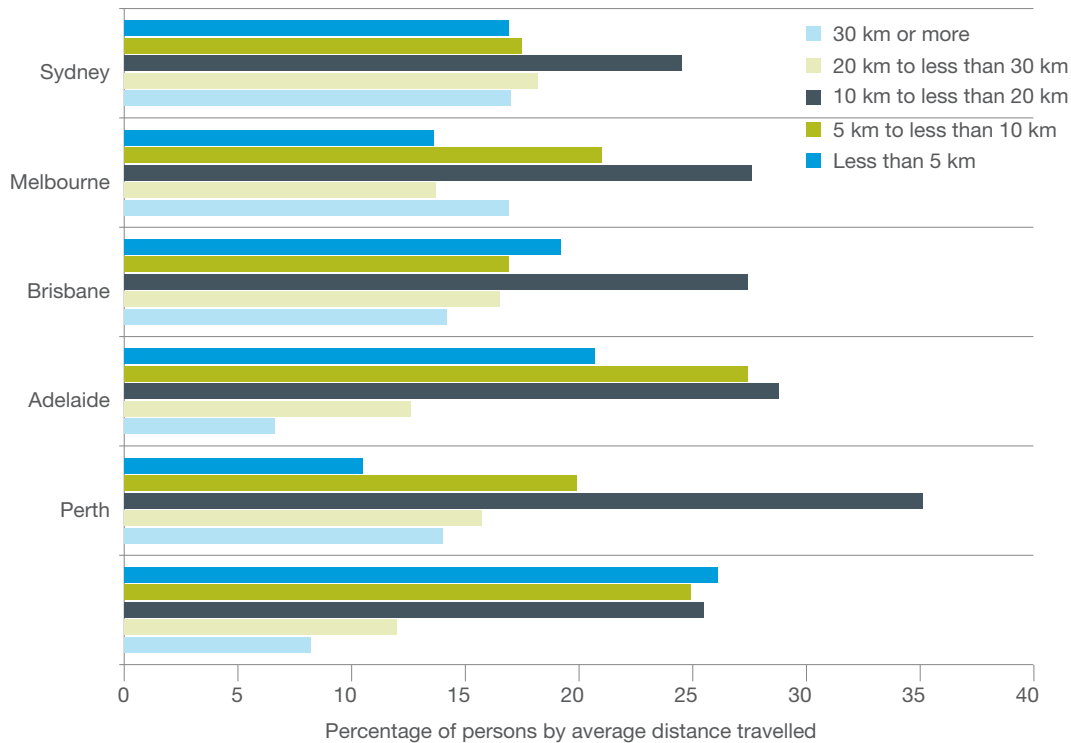
As with many other growth areas in other metropolitan regions, Western Sydney has high concentrations of unemployed or underemployed households. The evidence from the last decade shows that falling national unemployment rates have not been accompanied by the structural shifts in Western Sydney needed to allow it to shift from a manufacturing-based economy to the next phase of jobs generation in services and other industries. Improvements to the quality of housing, and investment in commercial centres planned around public transport hubs, are part of the necessary ingredients to attract businesses and people with different skills to these areas, in order to invigorate their centres and boost local job opportunities.

6.2.4 Access to education

Our future workforce will need more people with multiple and higher-level skills and qualifications. Deepening skills across all occupations is crucial to achieving long-term productivity growth. An estimated 4.6 million additional qualifications may be required over the next 15 years due to employment growth. As a result, enrolments in higher education and vocational education training will need to expand by 3% per annum (Skills Australia 2010).

Higher levels of participation and increasing skill levels are engines of economic growth. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has noted that the 'quality' of the labour force, as seen in education and skills, also has measurable effects on economic growth. Currently, the working-age populations of most countries in OECD countries have between 10 and 14 years of education per capita, compared with about seven and 11 years in 1970. This improvement in education is estimated to have increased GDP per capita in the range of 10% to 20%, bringing high returns to individuals and their society as a whole (OECD 2003).

Figure 37 Average distance to work or full-time study, selected capital cities



Source: ABS (2009c)

Access to education and training including early childhood education is important for people to fulfil their personal ambitions and become productive members of society, and to help people out of socio-economic disadvantage. The Australian Government has a major investment in universal access to preschool, providing \$955 million over five years to the States and Territories through the National Partnership Agreement for Early Childhood Education.

Governments can influence accessibility to education through careful consideration of where educational facilities are to be located, how they are linked into existing and new transport systems, particularly public transport, and the ease and affordability of travel for students.

The need for substantial amounts of land for universities and large training institutions has meant that those built in the last half century have tended to be located away from main centres and transportation hubs, unlike more centrally long-established universities. While these newer institutions may be located close to residential areas they may not be accessible from major centres.

Examples of options for improving access to universities include providing frequent and affordable bus services from major centres to campuses, such as the ‘Gong Shuttle’ free bus service in Wollongong. Where there are higher density populations expanding transit systems to link up educational institutions have been put into place or planned, such as in Queensland where the Gold Coast Light Rail will link up with Griffith University. One other alternative is the relocation of university campuses closer to city centres, as proposed in Newcastle and evidenced in Adelaide with the University of South Australia.

6.2.5 Increasing transport options

The 2009 Senate inquiry into public passenger transport concluded that, as our cities grow, public transport must inevitably play a greater role to combat traffic congestion and to improve urban amenity. Land needed for roads and car parking could be put to more attractive and sustainable uses. Importantly the inquiry highlighted the importance of public transport in reducing transport disadvantage and social isolation, and in reducing the need for urban fringe dwellers to spend an excessive proportion of their income on car maintenance and running costs (Australian Senate 2009).

The experience in many Australian cities has been that the community will embrace alternatives to car travel if options exist. As Figure 38 shows, there was an increase in walking and cycling mode share between 2001 and 2006 in Sydney, Melbourne and Perth, and an increase in public transport mode share in Melbourne and Perth. The three main reasons cited for this recent increase include a rising inner-city population, higher fuel prices and employment growth concentrated in the CBD. Changes in community attitudes, road congestion, increased parking costs and fare policy changes have also contributed (Gaymer 2010).

It is likely that the influence of rising fuel prices and growth of employment and population in CBDs will continue to be strong. Community attitudes toward sustainability, as noted above, may also strengthen to support the trend towards increased patronage in public transport.

Decisions about using public transport are also influenced by the design of neighbourhoods around people's home and work environments as well as transport interchanges. For example, studies have shown that people are most likely to catch a bus if there is a stop located within walking distance of their home (Burke and Brown 2007). Perceptions of safety around stations and transit stops also influence if and when people might choose to use public transport. Connections between modes at interchanges can deter public transport use, especially if wait times and poorly connected routes and services extend the travel time much beyond the time taken to drive. To ensure maximum use, public transport investment needs to take account of these multiple social and physical factors.

Figure 38 Change in modal share for journey to work (2001–06)



Source: BITRE analysis of ABS Census of Population and Housing, 2001 and 2006 place of enumeration data.

6.2.6 Active travel

Active travel is another important transport option that provides an alternative to car travel. Active travel is about the use of human energy for transport: walking, cycling and, because it involves some component of walking to stations and stops, using public transport.

Active commuting, ideally suited to short trips of up to 5 km, builds frequent physical activity into people's lifestyles which has health benefits. For example, a recent study in the United States involving 2364 people showed that active commuting was positively associated with fitness in men and women (particularly associated with lower levels of body mass index in men) and lower rates of obesity and blood pressure (Gordon Larsen et al 2009). An earlier large-scale survey in the United States showed that each additional hour spent in a car per day was associated with a 6% increase in the odds of being obese, while each additional kilometre walked per day was associated with a 4.8% reduction in the odds of being obese (Frank, Andresen and Schmid 2004).

Cycling and walking have many other benefits over motorised movement of passengers, particularly when integrated into an overall transport strategy. Like public transport they can help reduce traffic congestion, air or noise pollution. It is energy efficient and produces negligible greenhouse gas emissions. Well-designed urban spaces, that incorporate walking and cycling, can encourage social interaction which is linked to wellbeing. Cycling and walking are also affordable means of transport compared to owning and maintaining a car.

A number of options relating to built environments can support and encourage walking and cycling. Proximity to work is the single major factor in determining if a person will commute by bicycle or on foot. Of the people who live within 5 km of their place of work or study, nearly a fifth walk or cycle on a regular basis. Other research has shown that compact development, a wide variety of land uses close to home and work, a well-connected street network and the quality of the urban environment (for example, having a safe and pleasant route), are all factors associated with encouraging people to walk and cycle (Frank, Sallis et al 2005).



Sydney, New South Wales

6.2.7 Cycling in Australian cities

Australia falls well behind many other developed nations on bicycle use but cycling is increasing. In 2008, more than 1.9 million people were cycling in Australia, an increase of 21% over three years.

In countries such as the Netherlands, Denmark and Germany over 10% of all daily journeys are made by bicycle, and in some cities the share is much higher. By comparison, Australia's cycling mode share is 1.5% of usual trips to work or study (ABS 2009) and 4.8% of day-to-day trips other than to work or study. This places Australia in the range of the United Kingdom and Canada in terms of commuter share.

Some local areas have much higher levels of cycling than the national average. For example, 17% of all journeys to or within the City of Melbourne are by bicycle, whilst in Yarra-North, Port Phillip-West and Southbank Docklands more than 5% of journeys are made on bicycles. These statistics show a wide diversity of cycling uptake but, at an aggregate level, cycling remains marginalised as a mode of transport in Australia.

Over the past few years many western European countries have successfully increased cycling's share of transport journeys, particularly over short distances. It is increasingly recognised as a clean, enjoyable and sustainable mode of transport in urban areas, and a means to encourage physical activity as a component of public health.

There is enormous scope to increase the modal share of cycling in Australia, particularly for those 20% who commute less than five kilometres to their place of work or study, or for those making other short local trips.

Some critics argue that increasing the numbers of cyclists on roads increases traffic congestion due to their slower pace. This argument underscores the need to appropriately integrate and design cycling infrastructure (such as separated paths and driver speed restrictions) to minimise adverse impacts on traffic congestion and improve safety. Most State and Territory Governments, and many Local Governments, are progressively promoting and improving facilities to encourage cycling, including committing more funds to build paths that separate cyclists from vehicle traffic (Box 4).

Currently, cycling in Australia does not encompass a broad spectrum of users: for example, in New South Wales, women represent only 17% of commuter cyclists. In planning for cycling and pedestrian infrastructure it is important to consider the broader community, including women and children, for whom safety is paramount. Well-considered land-use patterns, quality urban design, integration with public transport, slower road speeds and improved cycleways, especially when combined, can help to encourage greater community participation in cycling.

6.2.8 The National Cycling Strategy 2011 to 2016

In September 2010, the Australian Transport Council of Federal, State and Territory Transport Ministers endorsed a new five-year *Australian National Cycling Strategy for 2011 to 2016*. The short-term goal is to double the number of people cycling over the next five years. In releasing the strategy the Council stated it was 'serious about tackling climate change and traffic congestion as well as encouraging healthier lifestyles in our cities and regional communities.'

The National Cycling Strategy includes six key actions which aim to:

- promote the benefits of cycling for recreation and commuting
- work with employers to create cycle-friendly workplaces
- extend networks of safe cycle routes and end-of-trip facilities
- consider and address cycling needs in transport and land-use planning
- continue programs to target cyclist safety and road user perceptions
- develop national decision-making processes for investment in cycling
- share best practice across the country.

The Australian Government's commitment to cycling, jobs growth and building community infrastructure—through its \$40 million National Bike Path Projects economic stimulus package—is considered an important component in progressing and realising the National Cycling Strategy's goal.

6.3 Amenity—creating people-friendly places

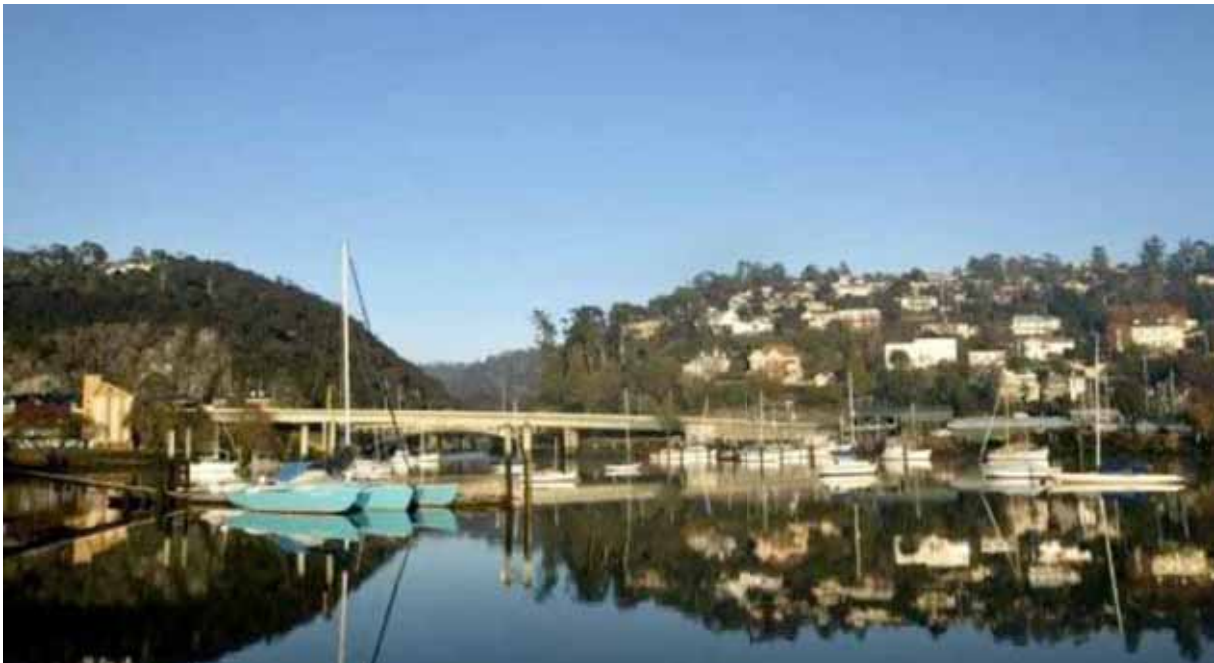
Cities are fundamentally places where people live out their lives, in households, neighbourhoods and communities.

The most important, overarching desire or concern among metropolitan residents is for the urban environments to be 'humanised' as much as possible. This means living in neighbourhoods which embody clear signs of thriving, harmonious communities.

At the same time, it is also clear that a range of tastes and lifestyles exist, and that different people are seeking different qualities: there are varied preferences about what types of environments people find harmonious. For example, people who consider themselves 'cosmopolitan' are more likely to be seeking a vibrant setting full of new experiences, while families are more likely to seek quieter, more spacious settings that will accommodate the needs of young children. As such, it is important that a city offers a variety of urban environments and provides for a variety of lifestyles.

Box 4 Cairns Central Business District to Aeroglen Cycleway

A new \$6.1 million cycleway will be constructed from Aeroglen to the Cairns CBD providing a safe cycle route, 3 to 4 metres wide, with protection from traffic to encourage people of all ages to cycle. The project will benefit recreational cyclists and pedestrians along the esplanade corridor, as well as commuters working in the adjacent shopping precinct. Its is a good example of a partnership between the Cairns Regional Council and the Queensland Government with funding support from the Australian Government.



Launceston, Tasmania

Liveable cities, featuring high amenity places, are commonly characterised by:

- high-quality building design and public spaces;
- elements of the natural environment, such as nature reserves, waterways, flora and fauna;
- quality open space that includes parklands, trees, views and places for recreation;
- access to a range of facilities and services;
- convenient means of transport;
- and an absence of signs of danger or decay such as derelict buildings.

Enhancing the liveability of cities to support the health and wellbeing of people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities is an internationally recognised priority (Box 5 and Box 6).

6.3.1 Child-friendly cities

The guiding principle behind the United Nations Child-Friendly Cities Initiative is that safe and supportive environments nurture children of all ages with opportunities for recreation, learning, social interaction, psychological development and cultural expression, promoting the highest quality of life for its young citizens. The Child Friendly City Initiative aims to guide cities and other systems of local governance in the inclusion of children's rights.

The Child-Friendly Cities Initiative in Australia is an unfunded collective of organisations and councils led by researchers at Griffith and Wollongong universities that form part of an Asia-Pacific network of countries including New Zealand, Japan, Bangkok, India, China and Papua New Guinea. In Australia 32 local councils have signed up to the network. In New South Wales there are 10 in the Sydney metropolitan area, including the City of Sydney, Wollongong City Council, and three other regional councils. Victoria has 17 Child-Friendly Cities, including the City of Melbourne and Greater Geelong City Council, South Australia has one (City of Playford) and Tasmania one (City of Hobart).

Box 5 United Nations Child Friendly Cities Initiative

In 1996 the Child Friendly Cities Initiative was launched to act on the resolution passed during the second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), which declared that the wellbeing of children is the ultimate indicator of a healthy habitat, a democratic society and good governance. A Child Friendly City is a local system of good governance committed to fulfilling children's rights, including their right to:

- influence decisions about their city
- express their opinion on the city they want
- participate in family, community and social life
- receive basic services such as health care and education
- drink safe water and have access to proper sanitation
- be protected from exploitation, violence and abuse
- walk safely in the streets on their own
- meet friends and play
- have green spaces for plants and animals
- live in an unpolluted environment
- participate in cultural and social events
- be an equal citizen of their city with access to every service, regardless of ethnic origin, religion, income, gender or disability.

The Australian Government is a signatory to the international human rights conventions, and has recently reaffirmed its commitment to our human rights obligations that support these directions (Attorney-General's Department 2010).

6.3.2 Age friendly cities

With an ageing population, it is important to encourage 'active ageing', where older people remain healthy, active and able to participate in, and contribute to, community life, helping them to remain independent for longer. Many aspects of urban settings, over and above the design of homes as discussed earlier, can contribute to or hinder active aging. This includes critical services and facilities such as in health and transport to basic access to buildings, public transport and along footpaths for the mobility or sight impaired.

Box 6 World Health Organization's Age Friendly Cities

The idea of an age-friendly city builds on World Health Organization's active ageing framework (2010) which was developed as a contribution to the Second United Nations World Assembly on Ageing in 2002. Active ageing promotes opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age.

In an age-friendly city, policies, services, settings and structures support and enable people to age actively by:

- recognising the wide range of capacities and resources among older people
- anticipating and responding flexibly to ageing-related needs and preferences
- respecting their decisions and lifestyle choices
- protecting those who are most vulnerable
- promoting their inclusion in, and contribution to, all areas of community life.



Perth, Western Australia

6.4 Health, safety and community wellbeing

Progress towards a more productive economy and fairer society depends upon the health and wellbeing of our people. The way our cities are planned, designed and built has a profound influence on the health, wellbeing and quality of life of the people who live in them.

6.4.1 Designing places for improved public health

Central to the concept of liveability is the effect of urban environments on public health. Public health relates to health status of populations rather than individuals; and its focus is to prevent rather than treat disease. The Australian Government is committed to refocusing the health system towards prevention and has undertaken major reforms to improve the health of Australians, including funding of community-based programs to promote healthy lifestyles and participation in sport and active recreation (Australian Government 2010). Progress towards a healthier future for our people can be accelerated by designing and building cities and the local places within so them that they help support and encourage healthy, active living.

There were marked improvements in public health achieved during the twentieth century, in large part, attributable to planning and investment in cities. These improved health outcomes have included reductions in infant mortality; control of infectious diseases; better nutrition; reductions in fatalities from motor vehicle crashes; cleaner, safer water supplies; and reduced air pollution.

In the twenty-first century, main risk factors affecting the health of Australian people, as identified by the Australian Government's Preventative Health Taskforce (2009) are obesity, and tobacco and alcohol consumption. Of these, there is evidence that increased rates of obesity is related to contemporary urban living that gives rise to low levels of physical activity and poor diet (Preventative health Taskforce 2009a).

One of the greatest public health challenges confronting Australia... is the obesity epidemic. Australia is one of the most overweight developed nations, with over 60% of adults and one in four children overweight or obese. The prevalence of overweight and obesity has been steadily increasing over the last 30 years. Obesity is particularly prevalent among men and women in the most disadvantaged socioeconomic groups, people without post-school qualifications, Indigenous Australians and among many people born overseas.

Australian Preventative Health Taskforce (2009)

Sedentary lifestyles lead to diabetes and other related health problems which place a huge burden on our health system. The increase in car usage over the past few decades has also coincided with more sedentary lifestyles. Studies have shown that more time spent commuting by car is correlated with increased rates of obesity (Frank, Andresen and Schmid 2004). Reducing our cities' dependency on motor vehicles won't solve the obesity epidemic. However, car dependency is part of a greater picture that links the health, social, cultural, economic and environmental dimensions of our cities.

As well as obesity, reduced physical activity results in increased rates of cardiovascular disease, diabetes and related health problems. The direct and indirect cost of obesity in Australia is estimated at around \$20 billion annually, while the direct cost of physical inactivity is \$377 million (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Health and Ageing 2009).

In Australia, the proportion of adults classified as overweight or obese has increased from 64% in 1995 to 68% in 2007–08 for males and from 49% to 55% for females. This is a significant increase in weight gain over just 12 years.

Box 7 Reducing childhood obesity

One in four Australian children are overweight or obese; in the United States the ratio is one in three.

In response to this alarming situation in the United States, the Obama Administration has initiated a suite of actions aimed at solving the childhood obesity within one generation. These actions include funding to local authorities to construct safe bicycle and pedestrian networks, and other improvements to the urban environments through a Safe Routes to School program to encourage active travel. They have set their goal at returning to the expected levels in the population, before this epidemic began, meaning returning to a childhood obesity rate of just 5% by 2030 (White House Task Force on Childhood Obesity, 2010). A similar target and suite of actions for reducing childhood obesity has been set by the government of the United Kingdom (Her Majesty's Government 2009).

As noted in the technical report on obesity by the Preventative Health Taskforce (2009a) urban planning approaches influence community levels of physical activity and driving behaviours, thereby influencing health outcomes (Lee and Richardson 2008). Solutions to address the obesity-promoting environment such as changes in transport infrastructure and urban design can be more difficult and expensive than interventions targeting groups, families or individuals. However, these kinds of strategies are more likely to support and encourage physical activity among the greatest number of people in the population in the long term.

The House of Representatives Report on Obesity (2009) concluded that:

Urban planning is a significant contributor to the high levels of obesity in Australia, and planning guidelines and laws must be improved, with responsibility shared by federal, state, territory and local governments alike.



Cairns, Queensland

Local Government is the main provider of urban design and amenity at a community scale; State Government sets out the strategic land-use planning; whilst the Australian Government provides significant tied and untied funding to local governments to deliver a range of infrastructure and services to communities. An opportunity exists for ensuring community infrastructure is based on the principles set out in the *Healthy Spaces and Places* guidelines, 2009 (Box 8).

Box 8 Healthy spaces and places

Healthy Spaces and Places is a national web-based guide for planning, designing and creating sustainable communities that encourage healthy living.

It has been prepared primarily for planners and designers, to help them tackle some of Australia's major preventable health issues by creating places where it is easier and more desirable for more Australians to be active – walking, cycling and using public transport – every day.

This resource was developed by a collaborative team comprising the Australian Local Government Association, the National Heart Foundation of Australia and the Planning Institute of Australia and funded by the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing. It is available online at <http://www.healthyplaces.org.au/site/>.

Better designed built environments that encourage physical activity will support other public health initiatives that promote walking and cycling to people of different age groups in local communities such as walking school bus projects (Box 9).

In Australia's major cities, people in the lowest socio-economic groups tend to be concentrated in areas characterised by poor urban design, inadequate infrastructure and facilities, and lack of healthy, affordable food options. Renewal and retrofitting of these areas based on principles that support healthy lifestyles, including opportunities to exercise, access to affordable fresh food and accessibility to social support networks can help improve public health outcomes for these communities.

Box 9 Walking school buses

The Walking School Bus program is a community and Local Government initiative to encourage more children to walk to and from school. It involves engaging volunteers to supervise and escort groups of children between home and school. In Australia it has been taken up in various Local Government areas

In Victoria, where the program has been funded since 2001 by VicHealth, the number of councils that have implemented Walking School Bus programs has grown from four to 58 council areas. An evaluation of the program for the period 2005 to 2007 found that the number of volunteer led 'buses' had grown to 487, which involved 974 volunteers and had an average of 3 935 children walking to school. (VicHealth 2007).

6.4.2 Heat and air quality

Urban environments are also associated with public health concerns, water and air quality, noise, temperature, vectors such as mosquitoes, access to natural environments and open space, and opportunities to socially interact.

Air pollution, though improved, still poses a health risk to many communities, and especially children and the elderly. The most commonly reported conditions among children and young adults were respiratory conditions (17% of children under 15 years and 28% of persons aged 15–24 years), with asthma being the most prevalent for children aged fewer than 15 (10%) and hay fever and allergic rhinitis for those aged 15–24 (17%). Respiratory conditions were also common among people aged 65 years and over (29%), other conditions were more prevalent in this age group (ABS 2009d).

Record breaking heatwaves in southern Australia in 2009 resulted in high death rates due to heat stress. Certain parts of our cities are more susceptible to these factors, with some places, such as south-western Sydney, at times being exposed to both high temperatures and high air pollution levels.

6.4.3 Road safety

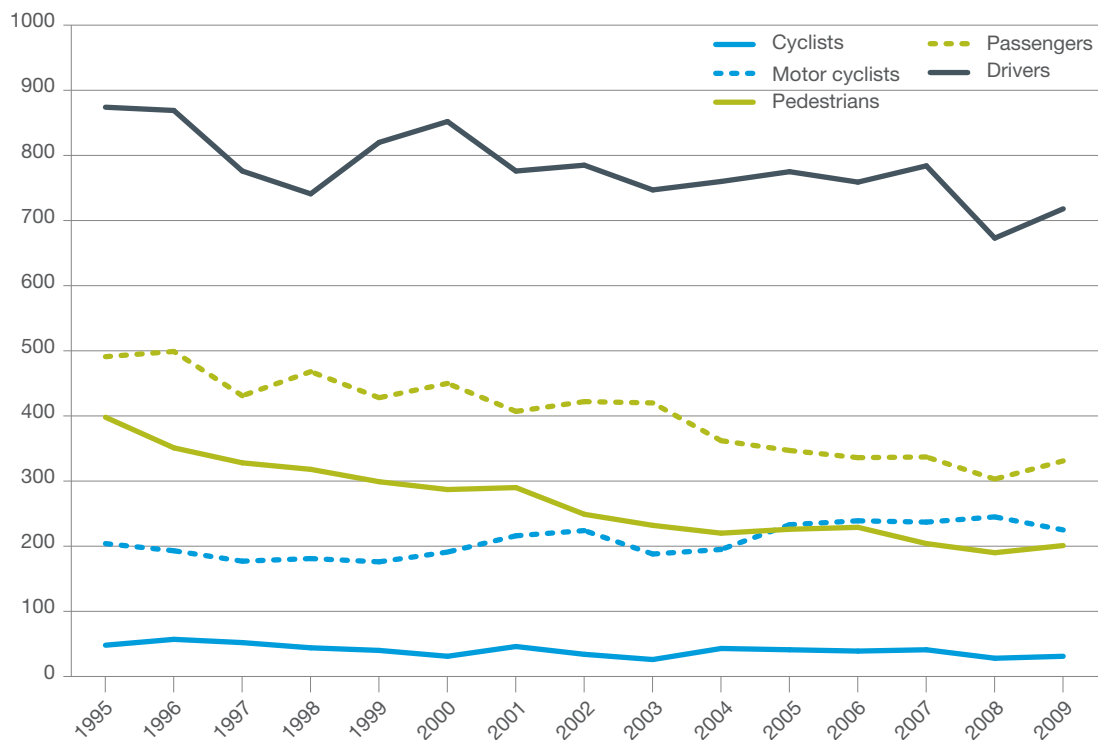
Australia's national road fatality rates have fallen by almost two thirds over 39 years from a peak of 3 798 deaths in 1970 to 1 507 in 2009 despite substantial growth in population and vehicle usage. The continued reduction in road deaths (Figure 37) has been achieved through concerted government action and a combination of road safety legislation, improvements to roads and vehicles, intensive public education and enhanced police enforcement aided by improved enforcement technology (BITRE 2010b).

Notwithstanding these improvements the Australian Government and States and Territories Governments remain committed to continuing to improve road safety outcomes. With changing patterns in travel towards active travel alternatives, however, consideration is warranted for a shift in emphasis in funding for road safety programs towards greater pedestrian and cyclist safety. The National Cycling Strategy 2011–2015 is one such example.

Box 10 National Road Safety Strategy 2011–2020

Transport Ministers from the Australian Government and States and Territories Governments and the President of the Australian Local Government Association have committed to a new National Road Safety Strategy for 2011 to 2020. The draft strategy was released for public comment on 1 December 2010. The underlying premise of the National Road Safety Strategy is that road safety is a shared responsibility between governments, industry and the community. It encompasses not just investment, design and maintenance of roadways, but the integration of the road network as part of broader transport and land-use systems. The approach aims to better align safe roads and speeds with the road environment, vehicles and people.

Figure 39 Road deaths by road user group (1995–2009)



Source: BITRE (2010g)

There is evidence to suggest off road cycle ways and 40 kilometres per hour speed limits in town centres would reduce risk of death and injury to cyclists. Between 1990 and 2005 the largest proportions of cyclist deaths have occurred on roads where the speed limit was 60 kilometres per hour: 55% in 1991–95, 42% in 1996–00 and 35% in 2001–05. By comparison in 2001–05, the years in which 50 kilometres per hour speed zones were introduced in many Australian cities and towns, 18% of cyclist deaths occurred in 50 km/h speed zones. One-fifth or more of cyclist deaths occurred in 100 kilometres per hour speed zones, though the proportion declined from 26% in 1991–95 to 21% in 2001–05 (ATSB 2006).

6.4.4 Personal safety

A sense of safety within communities is important to wellbeing and assists law enforcement. The issue of personal safety in urban environments is of particular concern to women and the elderly, even though victims of crime are more likely to be young men. The 2006 ABS General Social Survey showed that 26.5% of women reported feeling unsafe or very unsafe walking alone in their local area after dark compared to 9.1% of men (ABS 2006).

Perceptions of personal safety influence the decisions people make about where and how they travel. The safety of travelling on public transport is a concern for many people, especially around interchanges. The location, design and features in the built environment, such as lighting, and well maintained public spaces, can contribute to the perceptions of a safer environment. There are long standing principles of crime prevention through environmental design that address these issues and should continue to be promoted and incorporated in the design of places, and associated infrastructure.

6.5 Social inclusion

The Australian Government is committed to progressing towards a more socially inclusive society in which all Australians feel valued and have the opportunity to participate fully in the life of our society.

Achieving this vision means that all Australians will have the resources, opportunities and capability to learn by participating in education and training; to work by participating in employment, in voluntary work and in family and caring; engage by connecting with people and using their local community's resources; and have a voice so that they can influence decisions that affect them. In particular, the Government is committed to supporting children and families experiencing or at risk of disadvantage.

The Government released *A Stronger, Fairer Australia* in January 2010, outlining its vision for social inclusion—that no Australian is left behind—all should have access to the opportunities, resources, capabilities and responsibilities to learn, work, connect with others and have a say in community life.

Applying the concept of social inclusion to the urban context, liveable cities offer a wide range of opportunities for people to work, learn, socialise, be active, be creative and have freedom in cultural and religious expression.

Australian cities have relative equality in international terms. The consequences of this social egalitarianism are relative social cohesion and harmony. However, where different kinds of disadvantage—lower incomes, poorer housing, poorer health, lower education attainment, higher unemployment and higher crime rates—tend to coincide for individuals and families in a relatively small number of particular places, these concentrations of disadvantage tend to persist over time (Social Inclusion Unit 2009).

These localities were often built with insufficient infrastructure, with little regard for community development and building social capital and have become home to Australians at risk of social exclusion.

The potential for social isolation of individuals in our cities, particularly in the outer suburbs where jobs, education, health services can be a long way away and where transport options are limited, is one such issue. Isolation can impact on the individual's wellbeing and also on the cohesion and productivity of the community at large through being able to build 'social capital'. In response to the global recession, the Australian Government focussed its employment efforts on 20 priority employment areas.

These areas are highly vulnerable to the impacts of economic recession and the associated impacts on health, wellbeing and employment. These areas were determined by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations through analysis of labour market indicators. The criteria for identifying priority employment areas are shown in Box 10. The *2010 Intergenerational Report* very clearly described the importance of maximising workforce participation for our future economic prosperity. It is therefore important to harness the potential of these areas and their people to ensure both social and economic opportunity is realised.

Box 11 Priority employment regions

The Australian Government has identified 20 priority employment areas and 29 remote priority areas as experiencing or at particular risk of disadvantage based on an analysis of various labour market statistics which indicate a region's likelihood of experiencing disadvantage now or in the future.

These priority employment areas were identified based on the indicators that they:

- were already facing high levels of labour market disadvantage and a high unemployment rate
- were displaying a notable increase in unemployment since the onset of the global economic downturn and which may be 'at risk' of employment losses and increases in unemployment as the slowdown takes full effect
- were already experiencing a high proportion of their population receiving Centrelink benefits
- had populations with poor educational attainment levels/low skills
- had, in previous downturns, experienced entrenched disadvantage or a significant lift in the unemployment rate
- had a high concentration of industries that are likely to exhibit or are already exhibiting a significant decrease in employment (or rise in unemployment) due to the global economic downturn (for example, those with high concentrations of manufacturing, financial and insurance services, rental, hiring and real estate services, mining or accommodation and food services).

The 20 priority employment areas are located across most of the major cities including in:

- 14 local government areas in the Sydney metropolitan area across Canterbury-Bankstown, and South-Western Sydney and Western Sydney
- Wollongong and Shellharbour local government areas
- all of the local government areas of Newcastle
- local government areas in South-Eastern and North-Western Melbourne
- South-West Perth
- Northern and Western Adelaide
- Ipswich and Logan in Brisbane and in Cairns and Townsville in north Queensland
- Launceston in Tasmania.

Funding of research into emerging issues of importance to Australian cities is essential to the development of new policy responses for improving social inclusion in these priority areas.

The Australian Research Council sponsored a three year research study, commencing in late 2006, to investigate transport disadvantage, social exclusion and wellbeing in metropolitan, rural and regional Victoria. An international, collaborative research team was established including Monash University, the University of Westminster, the University of Ulster and the Brotherhood of St Laurence. Travel surveys were undertaken to allow an evidence-based examination of the issues. A series of papers have been published, including a potential methodology for incorporating social inclusion benefits in the assessment of transport projects.

An opportunity exists to ensure that investment in housing, services, facilities and transport is carefully targeted to assist the residents of areas to be able to take up opportunities in education, employment and civic life. This has been the emphasis of the Australian Government's Social Housing Initiative.

6.5.1 Enabling places for people with disabilities

Australia became one of the first western nations to ratify the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (the Convention) on 17 July 2008. While not creating any new rights, all tiers of Australian Government now have an obligation to act in accordance with the rights provided for in the Convention. The Convention aims to enhance opportunities for people with disability to participate in all aspects of social and political life including access to employment, education, health care, information, justice, public transport, affordable housing and the built environment.

The National Disability Strategy announced in November 2008, is being developed under the auspices of COAG in recognition that support for people with disability is a shared responsibility across the Australian Government and the states and territories. The Strategy will drive future reforms in both the disability service system and, importantly, mainstream systems for people with disability, their families and carers. The National Disability Strategy aims to ensure that the principles underpinning the Convention are incorporated into policies and programs affecting people with disability, their families and carers.

On 15 March 2010, the Government launched the *Disability (Access to Premises – Buildings) Standards*, which for the first time set the minimum access requirements for people with a disability to publicly accessible buildings. The Standards cover features such as accessible lifts, stairs, ramps, toilets and corridors and include buildings such as office blocks, shops, hotels, motels, and common areas of new apartment buildings. These Standards will also provide greater certainty for people with disability as well as industry, and will cover new public buildings and those that are being significantly upgraded. The Standards will harmonise the technical requirements of the Building Code of Australia with broader accessibility requirements under the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*. The Standard will commence on 1 May 2011.

In addition, the *Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport (Transport Standards)* under the *Disability Discrimination Act* came into operation on 23 October 2002. They establish minimum accessibility requirements to be met by providers and operators of public transport conveyances, infrastructure and premises, in accordance with a staged compliance timetable set out in the Transport Standards.

Design measures that improve accessibility for people with disabilities such as height and placement of switches, mirrors, handles, often benefit women and older people, in terms of height and ease of use. Overall, a deliberate broadening of the scope of use of transport, buildings, public bathroom facilities, walkways and recreation areas, as not merely for able-bodied, full-time workers but for parents (mothers and fathers); women and men with disabilities and their carers; older women and men, would promote a more welcoming environment for all people.

6.5.2 Closing the Gap for urban Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities

Urban Indigenous communities comprise 43% of Australia's Indigenous population. In many cities the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities comprise a similar proportion of the population around 2%, as at in the overall Australian population. However, there are some major cities, like Darwin, Cairns and Townsville, and some local government areas within cities which have substantial Indigenous populations. Three local government areas in western Sydney, Blacktown, Penrith and Campbelltown, combined, have more Indigenous people than any other location outside of the Northern Territory.

Indigenous Australians experience high levels of social exclusion in all areas of life, including employment, justice, housing and education, as well as higher than average rates of disability and chronic disease (DEEWR, 2009). Many urban Indigenous people experience disadvantage in respect to education and labour force participation compared to the non-Indigenous urban population. In some respects this reflects the fact that many of the places in which there are higher proportions of Indigenous people in the population are the areas which have lower amenity, limited accessibility and fewer resources or opportunities.

COAG is committed to halving the employment gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians by 2018. To meet this target, major reforms are being implemented to promote Indigenous people's participation in the wider economy.

To help 'close the gap' for Indigenous people in urban areas, issues to be tackled include the accessibility to jobs and education from areas in which Indigenous communities are more highly represented, the distribution of services in these areas and the investment in improving amenity. Addressing these issues will also help improve the general health and wellbeing of our Indigenous communities.

When addressing the needs of communities in urban areas, such as provision of affordable housing and transport and improving access to employment, education and health services, the needs and specific cultural concerns of Indigenous people must be considered by engaging and enabling their participation. It could also be argued that increased amenity, such as better public transport, positively affects Indigenous people to a higher degree by removing obstacles to the access of services, whereas non-Indigenous people may utilise alternative strategies to access services.

Additionally, there are considerations specific to Indigenous Australians. For example, social housing is particularly important for Indigenous people, who experience significantly lower home ownership levels and may experience difficulty accessing private rental accommodation due to low incomes and/or discrimination. While social housing planning which avoids concentrations of disadvantage is important, there is a tension with the increased wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people that results from proximity to family and access to community activities (SCRGSP, 2009). Such culturally based considerations are relevant to planning for the range of services and infrastructure.

The liveability of our cities will be enhanced if all communities are enabled to participate fully and equally in helping to shape the future of our cities.

