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ADELAIDE HILLS, FLEURIEU AND KANGAROO ISLAND

Regional Public Transport Review

Submission

25 JUNE 2025

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ADELAIDE HILLS, FLEURIEU AND KANGAROO ISLAND

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25th June 2025

Submission: Public Transport Strategy + Regional Review

To Whom It May Concern,

Regional Development Australia Adelaide Hills, Fleurieu and Kangaroo Island (RDA AHFKI) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the state's Public Transport Strategy and Regional Review. As a non-profit organization taking the lead on our region's economic development and liveability, we are committed to working collaboratively with all stakeholders to ensure a prosperous and sustainable future.

RDA AHFKI plays an important role connecting the region and all levels of government. A key aspect of that connection is to inform state and federal governments of the region's issues and opportunities. We do that with a deep understanding of the region, gained through community consultation and collaboration with regional stakeholders.

RDA AHFKI has been proactively consulting with our communities and developing recommendations for improvements in public transport for many years. Our work includes:

- People transport Solutions for the Adelaide Hills (RDA AHFKI, 2021)
- Adelaide Hills – Fleurieu Peninsula Regional Public Transport Study: Strategic Directions and Public Transport Action Plan (RDA AHFKI, 2019)

We have also commissioned the following work:

- Rail Public Transport Options for Mount Barker & the Adelaide Hills (Rod Hook & Associates, 2021)

During this work, we have consulted with over 2,500 people across the region. Therefore, with some authority on the topic of regional public transport, we are grateful for the opportunity to make this submission.



SA Public Transport Strategy

Setting the Scene

The AHFKI population of around 150,000 persons, has been growing at a faster annual rate than the state or the nation for many years. It is a highly desirable place to live, work, do business, and visit. That trend is likely to continue which will result in a concurrent pressure for ongoing investment in expanded public infrastructure. The region includes several growth areas: Mount Barker, Goolwa and Victor Harbor.

The Greater Adelaide Regional Plan (GARP) plans for an additional 65,000 to 88,000 additional people in the Adelaide Hills and Fleurieu region by 2051. Engagement for the plan showed the existing greater Adelaide community want substantial investment in public transport infrastructure to reduce car dependency.

One of the GARP's long-term strategic transport objectives is to "align public transport planning and investment to state strategic infill locations and future greenfield growth areas, including future mass transit and redesigned bus networks".

A significant issue for the eastern spine into the hills and onward to Murray Bridge, is the reliance of a large population catchment on the South Eastern Freeway for access with Adelaide. This is a significant risk during emergencies (eg; bushfires), as well as a productivity issue (daily congestion and lack of access during accidents).

In the RDA AHFKI 2019 public transport study, over 2,000 community members rated all 8 measures of public transport 3.2 or less out of 5. This included cost, access and amenity at bus stops, Park n Ride facilities, travel times, frequency of services etc. There is so much room for improvement.

Impactful Vision Required

Status quo or business as usual is not an option. **A bold, impactful vision is required to deliver public transport that truly competes with private vehicles.** Objective thinking by government is required to commit to quantum change. The decision must be made to invest in dedicated mass transit options in place of continued road widening and expansion.

**Planning must begin for new transport corridors for fast rail or O'Bahn
to service the Adelaide Hills and the Fleurieu Peninsula.**

The Upside

Aside from the delayed capex demand for road upgrades, reduction in greenhouse emissions, and additional corridor options increasing community resilience, the single greatest upside of a bold and impactful vision for regional public transport, is the **economic opportunity for the state.**

Although smaller cities are areas of economic activity in their own right, their physical connectivity to capital cities is crucial in providing businesses with access to larger markets. In Victoria, over 33 000 people commute to Melbourne daily from the cities of Geelong, Ballarat, Bendigo and Latrobe, with most using the train (Vic DEDJTR 2015, p. 15). These centres have also **benefited from public transport upgrades which have enabled more people from these regions to commute to Melbourne. Upgrades have coincided with population growth in these centres that has outpaced other regional centres**, such as Shepparton, that lack similar rail access to Melbourne.

Productivity Commission 2017, Transitioning Regional Economies, Study Report, Canberra.

There is an incredible opportunity to connect the regions growth centres with Adelaide to leverage population growth and economic opportunity, to make the most of highly liveable areas with cheaper land, easier infrastructure, plentiful options for renewable energy, and options for industry not possible in Adelaide.

Regional Services Review

Recent Investments

RDA AHFKI is grateful for the additional investment in the Adelaide Hills public transport network in recent years, all of which are aligned with recommendations of our 2019 and 2021 public transport studies, including;

- Expanded Crafers Park 'n' Ride (PnR)
- New, higher frequency bus services between Adelaide and Mount Barker with fleet and depot upgrades
- Planning for a Bridgewater PnR
- Expansion of the trial KeoRide on-demand service in Mount Barker
- Recent state budget commitment to a permanent on-demand service in Mount Barker.

Affirmation

The SA Select Committee on Public and Active Transport (2022) recommended the state government:

- reviews its policies and processes to ensure that public transport services and infrastructure improve.
- as a high priority, conducts a trial of passenger train services from Mt Barker to Adelaide.

Infrastructure SA's Mount Barker Mass Transit Study (2022) recommended public transport be made more convenient through improvements to accessibility, integration, connectivity, and safety.

In a RDA AHFKI survey of Fleurieu Peninsula residents (603 responses) in 2022/23 the top 5 reasons why people do not use public transport were:

1. Services not frequent enough (73% of respondents)
2. No services when I travel (65%)
3. No services to where I travel (64%)
4. Too far or inconvenient to get to the bus stop (47%)
5. I do not know when and where to get the bus (37%).

As stated in the Greater Adelaide Regional Plan (GARP), residents in new housing developments will more likely use public transport if it is in place prior to residents moving into the region.

More work to be done

Despite the above acknowledged investments, there remains a long list of service shortfalls for public transport in our region. In particular, while its population continues to grow, the Fleurieu Peninsula is void of any tangible improvements to public transport since our 2019 study.

RDA AHFKI agrees with the principal that for public transport to be well-patronised, it is critical that it competes with private vehicles on comfort, transit time, and convenience.

Considering the current state of our region's public transport, we submit the following recommendations:

1. **We must increase the regional public transport budget to have any hope** of making any in-roads to improving public transport. Otherwise, it is not possible to convert commuters out of private vehicles to reduce traffic congestion, carbon emissions, and demands for enormous investment in expanded road infrastructure. South Australia's spend on regional public transport is abysmal, failing all other states by magnitudes (An Investigation of Regional Public Transport Spend in Australia, The University of Sydney, 2022).
2. **Focus on strategic high frequency links first** because they form the backbone of attractive public transport experience – ie; high frequency, express services between Adelaide and:
 - Mt Barker
 - Victor Harbor.

RDA AHFKI and hills stakeholders are eagerly awaiting the release of the Mount Barker Mass Transit Business Case.

Design of a mass transit solution between Adelaide and Mount Barker must consider improvements to average bus speed along Glen Osmond Road. Our own studies and Infrastructure SA's Mount Barker Mass Transit Study recommended targeted investment in Glen Osmond Road, as well as the Toll Gate intersection, to improve traffic flows and bus prioritisation.

3. In conjunction, **further investment in Park 'n' Rides** (PnR) along the high-frequency, express routes at:
 - Adelaide Hills
 - Bridgewater – design and construct expansion of the existing informal PnR
 - Verdun – design and construct expansion of the informal PnR
 - Fleurieu
 - Victor Harbor - design and construct of a new PnR.
4. **Careful planning of secondary services** that connect catchments of population into PnR's, including:
 - Services along Onkaparinga Valley to the proposed Verdun PnR (capturing Balhannah, Oakbank, Woodside, Lobethal – and even Birdwood and Gumeracha).
 - A new, contemporary, on-demand service at Victor Harbor (replacing the council-run Dial-a-Ride), expanding in time to Goolwa, to feed into the above-proposed Victor Harbor PnR.
5. Sequential consideration of **tertiary and regional services** that connect:
 - smaller population centres into PnR's on mass transit routes
 - regional townships with each other.

RDA AHFKI is grateful for the opportunity to provide this submission. Through collaboration we can ensure that the Adelaide Hills, Fleurieu Peninsula, and Kangaroo Island remain exceptional places to live, work, and visit for generations to come and we urge consideration be given to this submission.

Yours sincerely,



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