

Regional Transport Survey



When compared to other States, most of Western Australia's population resides in its capital city. Unprecedented population and employment growth is however forecast for key regional cities in the State. A good transport system will be the foundation to facilitate and support this growth. Understanding, and ultimately addressing, the transport needs and challenges faced by regional cities will be of vital importance to plan liveable and sustainable centres.

In 2012, the population of regional WA only accounted for 22 per cent of the total population of WA¹. In comparison, 52 per cent of the population of Queensland resides outside of the capital, Brisbane².

In the 12 months to June 2012 the population of WA increased by 78,000 people, bringing the total population to more than 2.4 million. Over this period, only 16 per cent of new residents to the state settled in regional areas, as opposed to the Perth metropolitan area. Bunbury recorded the largest population increase for all Statistical Area Level 3 (SA3s³) outside of Greater Perth.

Between 2012 and 2026, the regional local government areas of the City of Albany, City of Bunbury and City of Greater Geraldton are expected to experience increases in population of up to 15 to 29 per cent (22, 15 and 29 per cent respectively)⁴.

Without effective planning, guided by a comprehensive strategic framework as has been developed for metropolitan Perth and Peel, there is a risk of undesirable patterns of urban growth and even the potential for the growth of regional cities to be constrained. Transport would likely be a significant contributory factor – it is therefore essential to get the transport system right.

Transport is an enabler for growth but it can also be a catalyst for urban sprawl. It has implications not only for mobility and quality of life but also for the economic prosperity of cities.

The RAC has launched a Regional Transport Planning Initiative (RAC-RTPI) to better understand the transport and mobility challenges and priorities for our regional members and help inform planning, infrastructure and service requirements over the short and longer term. As part of the RAC-RTPI, more than 300 RAC members residing in the regional cities of Albany, Bunbury and Geraldton took part in this inaugural RAC Regional Transport Survey conducted in October 2013.

¹Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012. 3218.0 - Regional Population Growth, Australia, 2012.

²Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012. 3218.0 - Regional Population Growth, Australia, 2012.

³SA3s generally have a population of between 30,000 and 130,000 people. In major cities SA3 represent an area serviced by a major transport and commercial hub. In regional areas they represent an area serviced by regional cities with a population over 20,000 people. Australian Bureau of Statistics definition.

⁴WAPC, 2012. Western Australia Tomorrow Population Report No. 7, 2006 to 2026. January 2012.



For the better

Mode choice & ease of mobility

The RAC Regional Transport Survey has revealed that two thirds of residents find it at least moderately easy to travel around their regional city, with 75 per cent typically doing so by single occupancy private car. Many also opt for active modes, such as walking and cycling.

Travel by single occupancy private car is greatest in Bunbury with 83 per cent of respondents travelling by this mode to access employment or education, compared to 78 per cent in Albany and 69 per cent in Geraldton.

The low public transport mode share in all three regional cities (1 per cent overall) would suggest that local services may not adequately cater for the needs of commuters. This is echoed in the responses given by the 16 per cent of respondents that experience some degree of difficulty in travelling around their regional city (issues with public transport provision was the most frequently given response).

Other reasons given for experiencing mobility difficulties included insufficient parking, road design (such as poor street layout and narrow roads) and poor driver behaviour. Whilst there are differences in

opinion about the level of traffic congestion, with some respondents highlighting pressures around the CBDs and during school run periods, a slight majority suggested congestion is not a problem when considered in the context of other larger cities such as Perth.

“Compared to living in the city (Perth) it’s really relaxed and easy to get around. However, since the population has been increasing there is some infrastructure (road-wise) that could be improved.”

(A respondent from Geraldton)

Familiarity with the area, close proximity to local services and amenities and being independent by having your own means of transport are seen as key influences on the ease of mobility in these regional cities.

For Albany in particular, the absence of traffic lights is considered to be positive.

“The only form of public transport is bus. Buses do not run very often nor reach outer suburbs.”

The road system is good but anyone who does not have a car is severely disadvantaged.”

(A respondent from Geraldton)

Interestingly, the average cycling mode share of respondents in these cities is relatively high at 5 per cent.

Respondents from Geraldton are the most active when it comes to their method of travel to work/education, with 9 per cent of respondents typically walking / jogging or cycling (closely followed by Albany with 8 per cent).

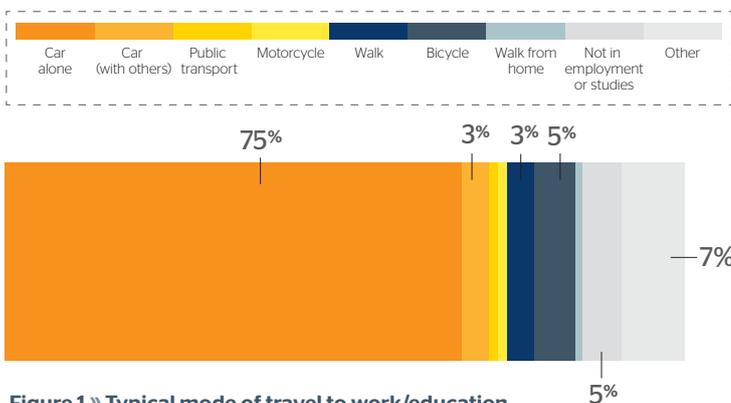


Figure 1 » Typical mode of travel to work/education

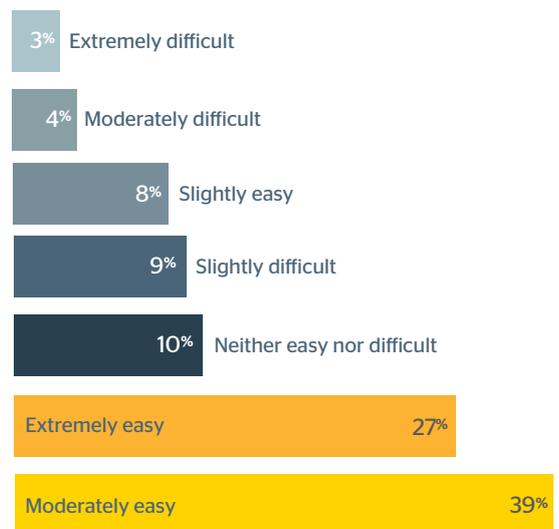


Figure 2 » Ease of Mobility

Existing transport services & facilities

When it comes to satisfaction with existing transport services and facilities, respondents are most satisfied with the condition of highways, management of roads and pedestrian facilities. They are somewhat disgruntled with public transport services, cycling facilities and public parking provision.

Just over a quarter (26 per cent) of respondents are to some degree dissatisfied with the existing public transport services (14 per cent being extremely dissatisfied) and a further 44 per cent are unable to comment because they do not or have never used them. Poor network coverage, frequency, hours of operation and reliability were commonly given reasons.

Despite the relatively high cycling mode share for journeys to work/education, 29 per cent of respondents are to some degree dissatisfied with the level of provision in relation to cycle paths and dedicated cycle lanes (and a further 12 per cent have mixed feelings about the provision). Where cycle facilities have been provided they are generally

considered to be good but respondents believe more are required for improved safety and accessibility. With the increasing levels of cyclists using the road in regional cities, road user behaviour and driver frustration are becoming a bigger issue.

“I would really like to see more cycle paths around town. It would be safer for cyclists and less frustrating for drivers and I know more people would cycle if they felt safer.”

(A respondent from Geraldton)

“Cars won’t wait for cyclists, and overtake dangerously, and cyclists pull out in front of cars

believing they don’t have to follow any rules.”

(A respondent from Albany)

Respondents were also frustrated with the difficulty in finding parking spaces in the city centres at peak times, and also the lack of free/long-stay parking for use by the local workforce. This has contributed to 33 per cent of respondents being at least moderately dissatisfied with parking in their city.

“Worker parking is inadequate and expensive for a country town with no adequate alternatives for worker transport.”

(A respondent from Bunbury)

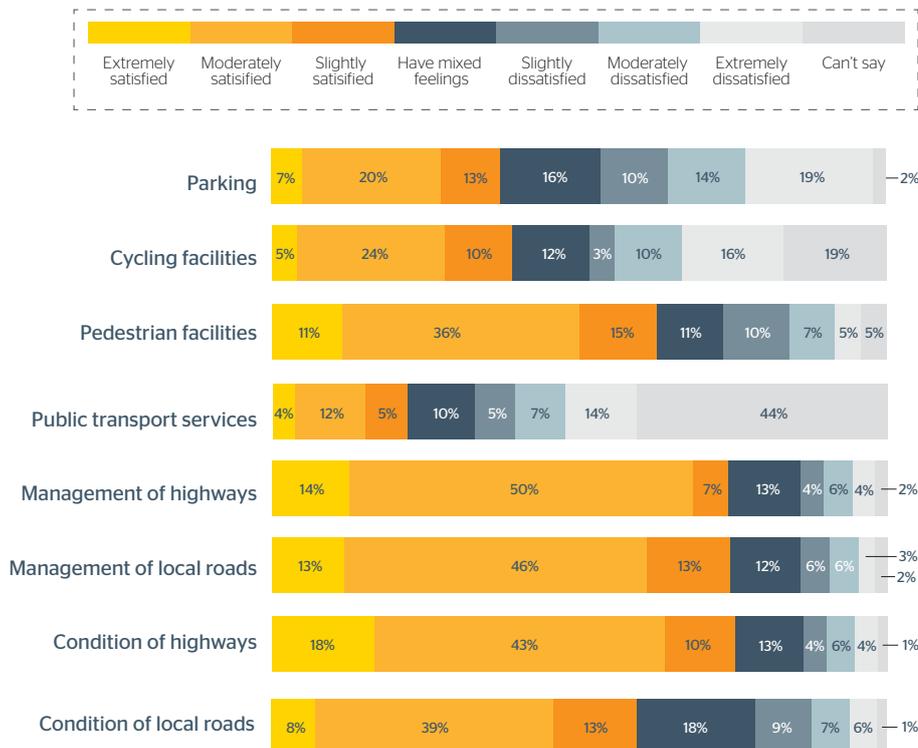


Figure 3 » Satisfaction with transport services and facilities

Looking forward

Whilst the car will remain important for the mobility of our regional members, the inaugural RAC Regional Transport Survey has highlighted the growing desire and need for access to a greater range of transport options. Regional members would also like to be able to travel less.

Respondents were asked to provide their views on a range of potential strategies and initiatives to help improve accessibility in and around their regional city. Maintaining/improving the condition of existing roads for comfort and safety (62 per cent), increasing parking supply (62 per cent) and building bypasses to divert freight traffic away from the city (58 per cent) have emerged as the top three priorities.

Associated with the high level of dissatisfaction with existing public transport services, there was also strong support for improved regional and local public transport connections (50 per cent and 49 per cent respectively). However, the provision of free services was not viewed as being as important as providing improved services.

Despite the frustrations experienced in accessing parking in the city centres, only 3 per cent of respondents considered introducing/increasing

parking fees to be a high priority strategy to manage demand for, and improve access to, public parking as this is considered to be a supply issue.

At a city level, whilst improving road conditions and building bypasses were in the top three priorities for all three cities, increasing parking supply only featured in the top three for Geraldton, with respondents from Albany and Bunbury prioritising improvements to public transport instead.

The most significant differences in the proportion of respondents from each city prioritising particular strategies and initiatives are:

- > better regional public transport connections in Albany (71 per cent, compared to 45 per cent for Bunbury and 41 per cent for Geraldton);
- > better public transport connections to key destinations in Bunbury (62 per

cent, compared to 54 per cent for Albany and 41 per cent for Geraldton);

- > increased parking supply in Geraldton (72 per cent, compared to 49 per cent for Albany and 58 per cent Bunbury).

A decade from now...

When it comes to the longer term outlook for the movement of people in their city, over half of respondents would like to see the greatest priority being placed on public transport over the next 10 years. The motor vehicle ranked second. This was consistent across all three cities.

In terms of the differences between the cities, respondents from Albany placed stronger emphasis on cycling (with 42 per cent of respondents considering this a priority) and whilst one third of respondents from Bunbury agreed, reducing the need to travel was recognised as being equally as important.

Maintain / Improve condition of existing roads for comfort and safety	62%
Increase parking supply in the city	62%
Build bypasses to move freight out of the city	58%
Better regional public transport connections	50%
Better connection of public transport with key destinations	49%
Improve cycling infrastructure	47%
Improve pedestrian amenity and wayfinding in the city	45%
Better management of local roads in terms of traffic flow, speeds and road works	40%
Improve the frequency of local bus services	39%
Expand existing or build new roads	34%
Free buses in the city centre (either a Free Transit Zone or free Central Area Transit service)	33%
Reallocate road space to provide dedicated bus lanes	9%
Introduce/Increase parking fees to manage demand for parking and generate funding for transport	3%

Table 1 » High priority strategies/initiatives to help make regional cities and surrounding areas more accessible

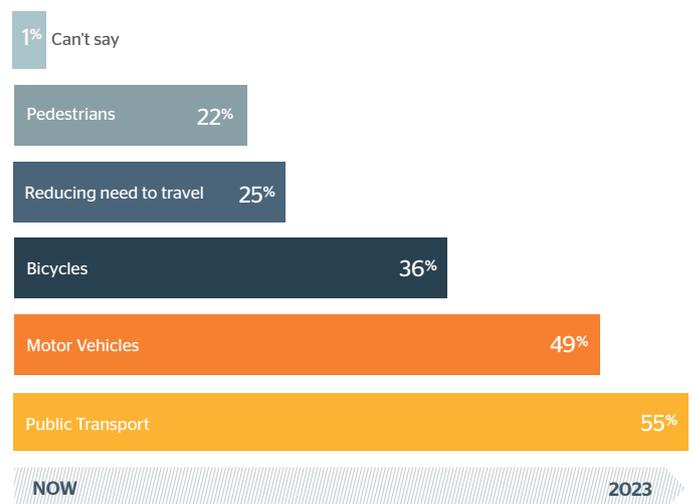


Figure 4 » Priorities for a decade from now