

## SUBMISSION TO THE

### *30 Year Transport Strategy Overview*

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Submission authorised by

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COTA SA welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Transport Strategy Overview. We are committed to improving transport for older South Australians and participated in the Department for Infrastructure and Transport stakeholder discussions in October 2024. We look forward to ongoing involvement to ensure that older South Australians' needs are taken into consideration in the Transport Strategy Overview.

COTA SA is an older people's movement run by, for and with older people. We represent the rights, interests, and futures of around 700,000 older South Australians. We engage widely with older South Australians across the state and the lived experiences of the diverse community of older South Australians shape and inform COTA SA's policy and advocacy work. COTA SA cares deeply about ageing well and is committed to ensuring older South Australians have the opportunity, capacity and ability to navigate the changes of ageing in their place of choice. The Transport Strategy Overview is an opportunity to plan to support South Australians to age well, now and into the future.

Our population is ageing. In June 2020, approximately 16% of Australians were aged 65 and over and this is projected to increase 21-23% by 2066<sup>1</sup>. Our ageing population should be a major trend and driver that will shape the future of planning in South Australia.

We have responded to the overview where we feel we can meaningfully contribute to decisions that could improve the quality of life for older South Australians for the next generation.

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<sup>1</sup> [Older Australians, About - Australian Institute of Health and Welfare](#)

### **New technologies to enhance how we travel**

It is encouraging to see the strategy prioritise technological advancements to “enhance how we travel.” While such advancements hold great potential to improve access to transport opportunities, for many older South Australians, digital technology remains a daily challenge.

People aged 55 years and over have less digital ability than the average Australian, with those aged 65 -74 and 75+ scoring significantly lower than the national average when it comes to digital inclusion<sup>2</sup>. The digital divide negatively impacts quality of life, contributing to isolation and reducing access to services, information and transport options.

In 2021 the Australian Digital Inclusion Index (ADII) results revealed that South Australia lags behind the national average in digital inclusion by 2.1 points, with regional South Australia falling further behind by 8 points (63.1 compared to Metro Adelaide’s 71.1)<sup>2,3</sup>. Additionally, only 24% of regional residents are ‘high users’ (frequent users) of the online world, compared to 38%, in metropolitan areas<sup>4</sup>.

To address this, non-digital systems and access options must remain available, and structured, ongoing support is needed to help individuals improve and maintain digital literacy. The prohibitive costs and unreliable internet connections that undermine equitable access must also be addressed. Infrastructure must provide reliable digital connectivity to support people to use it. This is particularly important in regional areas where digital isolation compounds geographic isolation. This also needs to be considered when supporting low density areas to become connected to services.

### **Connectivity for our regions is essential**

Older Australians are significant and growing users of acute health services. In Australia in 2017-18, people aged 65 and over (who make up about 15% of the population) accounted for 42% of separations (episodes of care) and 49% of patient days<sup>5</sup> across Australian public and private hospitals<sup>6</sup>.

The 2023 COTA State of the Older Nation (SOTON) report outlines how over a fifth of older Australians (22%) had experienced a high level of difficulty in accessing needed medical services over the previous year, which was significantly higher than 14% reported in 2021<sup>7</sup>. In general, regional residents were more likely to report difficulty in accessing medical services during the past year (45%) in comparison to metro residents (37%)<sup>8</sup>. Our extensive engagement with older

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<sup>2</sup> [Key findings and next steps - Australian Digital Inclusion Index](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Digital Inclusion Regional SA.pdf \(sacoss.org.au\)](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Adult media literacy in Australia: attitudes, experiences and needs](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Admitted patient care 2017–18, Summary - Australian Institute of Health and Welfare](#)

<sup>6</sup> [6.17 Health care use by older Australians \(Australia's health 2016\) \(AIHW\)](#)

<sup>7</sup> [SOTON-2023-Summary-Report.pdf](#)

<sup>8</sup> [COTA State of the Older Nation 2023](#)

South Australians suggests this is an ongoing challenge, and one which must be addressed through integrated infrastructure and service design and planning.

Many areas, particularly regional locations, have a critical shortage of health practitioners and inadequate hospital patient transport. The Australian Institute for Health and Welfare 2018 Healthcare survey discovered that people in remote/very remote areas were the most likely to report going to ED because no GP was available<sup>9</sup>. The survey outlined that 3 in 5 people in remote/very remote areas said not having a specialist nearby stopped them from seeing one.

Virtual care plays an important role in providing high quality and safe care outside of the hospital system and allows for older people to access this service without having to travel. COTA SA would like to see virtual care services expanded so that more older residents in regional South Australia are better connected to the healthcare they need in the regions they choose to live in, without having to relocate to the city.

Addressing digital infrastructure gaps to support online and mobile connectivity and investing in programs that will enable older people to use their digital devices with confidence will lay foundations for integrated virtual healthcare services for older people in regional South Australia.

A South Australian Council of Social Service (SACOSS) study revealed that regional community facilities are under-resourced and facing increased demand as face-to-face services decline<sup>10</sup>. Enhancing resources in these facilities will equip older South Australians with the tools to leverage technology effectively, reduce reliance on private transport. These measures will support the expansion of virtual healthcare services, reduce pressure on public hospitals, and ensure equitable healthcare access for older South Australians.

### **Our public transport can do more**

It is important for older South Australians to have access to a range of transport options. Access to adequate public and community transport in both the metropolitan area and in regional South Australia is fundamental to ageing well.

Quality, accessible and reliable public transport is more likely to be valued by older people who do not drive due to age-related changes, or who are on low and fixed incomes and unable to afford private transport. Making public transport free for Senior Card holders in 2022 resulted in a 40% increase in usage over the following year, showing that increasing access to public transport results in greater participation in the community by older South Australians whether it is in volunteering roles, commuting to work, undertaking caring roles and getting involved in

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<sup>9</sup> [Survey of Health Care: selected findings for rural and remote Australians, About - Australian Institute of Health and Welfare \(aihw.gov.au\)](#)

<sup>10</sup> [Keys to the Digital World - SACOSS](#)

social, economic and recreational activities. Further, it gives older people an alternative to driving and thereby contributes to South Australia's carbon emissions reduction goal.

Even with free public transport, some older people do not feel confident to use public transport because of the digitisation of timetables, ticketing and information, fewer bus stops and no printed timetables at stations. COTA SA's Seniors on Board program<sup>11</sup> found that the confidence of older travelers is enhanced by community education that helps to navigate travel planning and use. Being able to equip older South Australians with the tools to understand and feel confident to use public transport is fundamental in improving our public transport network.

While older South Australians in metro areas capitalise on this significant public transport concession, those living in regional areas are faced with more expensive and limited public funded transport options.

Many of South Australia's regional towns do not have adequate, appropriate, or affordable transport options, all of which creates a barrier to older people's independence. In the absence of transport options, many older people continue to drive cars, even when they may not feel safe or confident to do so.

The community transport sector plays a critical role in areas where there is limited or no public transport, hospital/medical patient or social transport.

Community Transport SA (formerly known as Community Passenger Network) and regional bus services provide transport services in regional areas, however not all older South Australians are eligible for all services, services can be limited in their operation, and there are costs which can be significant for regular use.

We request that the Transport Strategy Overview considers these challenges and factors for regional communities and takes a more equitable approach when considering how the strategy can continue to support all older South Australians.

### **Our population is growing and changing**

COTA SA acknowledges work is already underway on reviewing regional transport needs by Department of Infrastructure and Transport (DIT), but we believe that there needs to be specific focus on older South Australians living in regional areas, particularly in regions with the oldest demographic.

In Victor Harbor and Goolwa, about 63% of the population is aged over 50 and much higher than the state average of 39%<sup>12</sup>. Through our ongoing engagement with residents in Victor

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<sup>11</sup> [Seniors on Board • COTA SA](#)

<sup>12</sup> [2021 Victor Harbor - Goolwa, Census All persons QuickStats | Australian Bureau of Statistics](#)

Harbor and Goolwa, we are aware there is a heavy reliance on remote/drive in drive out workers for many services, contributing to cost and access barriers for local residents to access needed health services in community.

Residents of the lower Fleurieu often tell us that transport is a challenge when they need to attend specialist and hospital appointments in Adelaide. With the cost of fuel rising to more than \$2.20 a litre in 2024<sup>13</sup>, regular travel to Adelaide for medical appointments has become a costly exercise for many older people in Fleurieu Peninsula, who are also struggling with escalating energy, insurance, and grocery costs.

The State Government's Patient Assistance Transport Scheme (PATS) provides financial assistance towards transport and accommodation costs when people living in regional areas are required to travel more than 100km each way for medical specialist services. The Fleurieu Peninsula community is not eligible for PATS subsidies as the region is located just under 100km from Adelaide. The journey from Goolwa to the Royal Adelaide Hospital is around 85km.

PATS schemes in Queensland and Tasmania have lower thresholds for the transport subsidy to apply, and Western Australia provides a transport subsidy for people travelling 70km or more one way for cancer or renal services.

In 2023 the State Government in a significant step in reforming and strengthening PATS, doubled the fuel subsidy – the first increase in this subsidy in two decades<sup>14</sup>. This move showed the Government is open to changing the scheme to make it fairer and better tailored to meet demand and need.

To meet the need of the growing and changing population, COTA SA encourages the State Government to extend the PATS transport subsidy to Fleurieu Peninsula communities. This will create a fairer system and relieve cost of living pressures for older South Australians in Fleurieu Peninsula. COTA SA also calls for the State Government to examine the eligibility of people living elsewhere in regional South Australia who are currently ineligible for PATS transport subsidies.

### **Our economy is transforming**

COTA SA understands the importance of strategic infill to increase access to services, social connection and to localise the workforce through suitable worker housing accommodation and job opportunities. We acknowledge that in South Australia, there are a number of regions of lower density where residents experience barriers to accessing a range of services that might support living and ageing well and hope that the Transport Strategy Overview might address

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<sup>13</sup> [Average fuel prices in Adelaide | FuelPrice Australia](#)

<sup>14</sup> [Fuel subsidy doubled for country South Australians travelling for healthcare | Premier of South Australia](#)

these challenges proactively. There is evidence that shows that established areas with medium density housing is linked to higher liveability<sup>15</sup> .

The Transport Strategy Overview acknowledges ‘our transport system needs to ensure efficient connections to new economic hubs, enabling the seamless movements of goods and workforce.’ The Plan must do more to ensure older South Australians can age well in place. We also note that as our ageing population grows and increasingly, remains living in community, the number of mobile care workers must also grow, along with the infrastructure to support these activities without causing contribution to roads becoming congested.

We would consider the future impact of the new Aged Care Act and imminent Support at Home program, which encourages people to age in place in community for as long as possible. To be achievable, this will rely on an increasingly mobile workforce of carers and support workers to older people wherever they live in community. This access to workers and workforce mobility needs to be considered in future developments.

### **Community safety is critical & Transport is central to achieving our net zero target**

It is important that we invest in infrastructure that builds communities that are age-friendly, cohesive, inclusive, resilient, and accessible. Our infrastructure strategy must design and build an ecosystem that supports this.

Like Australians of all ages, many older people are concerned about climate change, viewing it as a significant and real threat to our national interests and livelihood. COTA SA takes the threat of climate change seriously and our passionate Climate Change Group is focused on the actions that can be taken at a policy, organisational and personal level. Our [Statement of Interest](#) on Climate Change outlines our commitments to climate change action.

COTA SA welcomes the intent to “an ongoing commitment to ensuring sustainable infrastructure, materials and assets should underpin our future transport system.” This must be balanced, however, with the reality that many older people will remain reliant on private vehicle travel. In particular, COTA SA has found that private vehicle is the dominant mode of transport when attending medical and specialist appointments, due largely to the unreliability of other modes of transport.

Equally important is planning for active travel. For example, incorporating bike paths and storage, footpaths and walking paths into the design of neighbourhoods that enable people to be physically active, safely. Tree canopy and green spaces are also important, not only for their cooling effects, but to provide environments that enable active travel and connection to nature.

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<sup>15</sup> [Adelaidenow.com.au](https://www.adelaidenow.com.au) | [Subscribe to The Advertiser for exclusive stories](#)

We acknowledge that the government is developing a new plan for ageing well for 2026 and this also will need to integrate with infrastructure plans.

### **Community safety is critical: electronic scooters**

In August this year, COTA SA consulted with our community in relation to the Personal Mobility Devices Statutes Amendment Bill 2024, which will pave the way for private electronic scooters (e-scooters) to be used on public roads and paths.

We acknowledge the consultation that the government carried out in 2023 and note that the engagement process highlighted mixed views in the community. While the government's consultation indicated support for the ongoing use of e-scooters on public roads and paths, it is important to recognise that most respondents were under the age of 50 years, male and from metropolitan Adelaide.

By contrast, in response to COTA SA's own consultation process with South Australians aged over 50, from a total of 144 survey respondents, a majority expressed their concerns with e-scooters clearly identifying their were safety concerns specifically, regarding the safety of both pedestrians and other road/ path users. Importantly, a strong majority (70%) of older people told us they do not support the legislative change. The principal concerns of older people include:

- Feeling personally unsafe around e-scooters when walking or driving on the road (81%)
- Trip hazards and environmental litter due to insufficient parking provision (77%)

A survey respondent further elaborated on this stating:

“As a walker I'm forever having to dodge electric scooters especially on Linear Park. Both bikes and scooters need to have a walking pace maximum speed limit. I feel walkers are being 'pushed' aside. You can no longer go for a leisurely walk. You're forever on the lookout for scooters ore bikes. It's sad, because there are lonely older people who would at least go for a walk and no longer do so as they feel it's not safe. There need to be some walkers only paths. Walkers have been completely forgotten.”

For the small portion of survey respondents that have their own e-scooter or have used one (9%), the main purpose of the e-scooter use was transportation (60%) and leisure (27%), with some people also using scooters to learn how to use them (13%) and when travelling (7%). A survey respondent stated that: 'I find mine very efficient, easy to handle, and a very cheap form of transportation. Good fun as well. Have used it when on holiday and sometimes wonder how I managed without it!'.

Older South Australians shared that inadequate safety measures, deter them from walking or driving safely in shared spaces. Although we understand the benefits that can come from e-scooters in community, addressing these issues is crucial to ensure older community members

feel safe and supported, maintaining their active lifestyles and confidence in navigating shared spaces.

### **In closing and for future discussion**

COTA SA recognises the importance of ongoing consultation and development over the near 30 years to drive meaningful change in our South Australian communities. We welcome the opportunity to have an ongoing commitment to contribute to the overview and ongoing planning. We would be pleased to meet with the Commission to discuss our submission. Please contact Chief Executive, Miranda Starke in the first instance.

### **Acknowledgement of Country**

*COTA SA acknowledges and respects Aboriginal people as the traditional custodians of the land of South Australia. We honour Aboriginal peoples' continuing connection to Country and recognise that their sovereignty was never ceded. We pay our respects to First Nations Elders past, present and emerging and extend that respect to all Aboriginal people.*