

SUBMISSION TO THE

Public Transport Strategy and Regional Review

24 June 2025

Submission authorised by

Miranda Starke

Chief Executive

Prepared by:

Allison Russell

Policy and Advocacy Manager

COTA SA

Kaurna Country

Level 1, 85 Hutt Street

Adelaide SA 5000

E cotasa@cotasa.org.au

P 08 8232 0422 1800 182 324 (Country callers)

www.cotasa.org.au

Executive Summary

COTA SA welcomes the development of a long-term Public Transport Strategy and Regional Review for South Australia and strongly supports the ambition to create a connected, safe, and sustainable transport system. As the peak body representing older South Australians, we advocate for a strategy that places ageing well, equity and accessibility at its core.

Older people are among the most frequent and dependent users of public transport. Reliable, accessible, and affordable transport is essential for maintaining independence; being an active participant in the community as workers, volunteers, carers and consumers; accessing health services; and maintaining social connection.

Our submission highlights five core priorities:

- recognising older people as a key user group with specific requirements
- addressing regional transport inequities
- making services truly accessible and building confidence
- bridging the digital divide
- supporting mobile health and aged care workers.

We urge the Strategy to adopt an age-inclusive planning lens, and invest in solutions that support older people to live well, remain active, and age in place. By doing so, South Australia can deliver a transport system that serves not only older people but all South Australians — now and into the future.

Introduction

In responding to the 30 Year Transport Strategy in December 2024, COTA SA outlined the needs and concerns of older people, and we reiterate some of the points from that submission below.

We welcome the opportunity now to contribute to the development of South Australia's Public Transport Strategy and accompanying Regional Review. As a voice representing more than 700,000 older South Australians, we are committed to ensuring that public policy reflects the realities and aspirations of our ageing population — and transport is central to this.

Transport is more than a service; it is identified by the most recent State Public Health Plan 2019-2024 as a social determinant of health¹. As South Australia prepares for significant demographic, environmental, and economic shifts over the coming decades, it is imperative that our public transport system reflects the diversity of our state, including the growing number of older people who wish to remain active and connected in the communities they call home. In order to achieve this, older South Australians need access to a range of public transport options in both the metropolitan area and in regional South Australia.

Accessible and reliable public transport is important to older people who may 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 on Metro Adelaide services for Seniors Card holders in 2022 resulted in an almost 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 social, economic and recreational activities². Further, it gives older people an alternative to driving and thereby contributes to South Australia's carbon emissions reduction goal.

Even when it is free, some older people do not feel confident using public transport because of the digitisation of timetables, ticketing and information, fewer bus stops and no printed timetables at stations. We address issues around digital exclusion as they relate to public transport in section 4 of this submission. COTA SA's Seniors on Board program³ found that the confidence of older travelers can be enhanced by community education and digital literacy capability building, 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 metropolitan areas capitalise on this significant public transport concession, those living in regional areas are faced with more expensive and limited publicly funded transport options.

COTA SA welcomes the 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.

¹ [State Public Health Plan, 2019-2024](#)

² [SA seniors saving millions as free travel boosts public transport patronage | Premier of South Australia](#)

³ [Seniors on Board • COTA SA](#)

We request that the Public Transport Strategy and Regional Review 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.

1. The Need for Age-Inclusive Transport Planning

Older people in South Australia are a core part of our public transport constituency.

It is an important element in ageing well in place. Importantly, it allows people to:

- remain socially connected, minimising social isolation and loneliness
- participate fully in volunteering, caring, and community life

Transport planning must explicitly acknowledge older people as a priority demographic in design, investment, and service delivery. Age-inclusive planning is not only equitable — it is essential to the sustainability and success of our transport system.

Recommendations:

1. Explicitly identify older South Australians as a key user group in all strategy outcomes, KPIs and future consultation processes.
2. Ensure adequate parking near transport hubs to accommodate those with mobility constraints
3. Consider seating, shelter, safety and wayfinding

2. Addressing Regional Transport Inequities

COTA SA believes that there needs to be specific focus on the transport needs of older South Australians living in regional areas, and in particular, our state's oldest demographic regions: the Lower Fleurieu and the Yorke Peninsula.

The lack of accessible, reliable, and affordable transport options leads to:

- delayed or missed medical appointments
- unsafe continuation of driving due to a lack of alternatives.

In Victor Harbor and Goolwa, about 63% of the population is aged over 50, compared to the state average of 39%⁴. Through our ongoing engagement with residents in this area, 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 them to access necessary 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, too. With the cost of fuel rising to more than \$2.20 a litre in 2024⁵, 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.

⁴ [2021 Victor Harbor - Goolwa, Census All persons QuickStats | Australian Bureau of Statistics](#)

⁵ [Average fuel prices in Adelaide | FuelPrice Australia](#)

Through our regional engagement — including recent listening posts in the Yorke Peninsula, and Lower Fleurieu — we consistently hear that transport is one of the top challenges facing older residents. Indeed, 21% of regional respondents list ‘Transport’ within their top three concerns in COTA SA’s “How are you going?” 2024-25 tracking study, compared to 12% for metro respondents⁶. For this reason, many continue to use private vehicle as the dominant mode of transport when attending medical and specialist appointments, due largely to the unreliability of other modes of transport.

COTA SA listening posts also identified many stories relating to the stress of trying to get to and from appointments especially when eligibility criteria for transport assistance (like the Patient Assistance Transport Scheme, or PATS) were not met. Several people expressed anxiety about missing the one daily return bus to Adelaide, particularly if their appointments run late. COTA SA has been advocating to extend the PATS fuel subsidy to the Fleurieu Peninsula, and will continue to do so.

In some cases, the lack of transport options leaves people without safe or reliable ways to attend hospital stays or specialist care. One person from Yorke Peninsula shared that they were only able to return home from hospital because a nurse coming off their shift agreed to drive them.⁷

Recommendations:

1. Prioritise regional transport solutions that reflect demographic need, not just distance or density
2. Expand and invest in flexible, localised community transport services

3. Accessibility and Confidence: Beyond Infrastructure

Accessibility is not just about step-free access. It is about confidence, usability and support.

While public transport is free for Seniors Card holders on Adelaide Metro services, many older people still do not use it because: bus stops have been removed or are difficult to reach, timetables are now digital-only, and services are infrequent or do not align with medical or social needs. Other issues that have been raised are the lack of shelter and shade at some public transport stops, and the difficulties of getting on and off with mobility aids such as walkers and mobility scooters.

COTA SA’s Seniors on Board program (run when free, all day public transport was first introduced) demonstrated that confidence and familiarity can dramatically increase public transport usage among older people. But without intentional design and education, usage remains low.

Recommendations:

1. Retain printed timetables and signage at key bus/train stops
2. Fund transport confidence programs in partnership with local councils and community organisations

⁶ [COTA SA Listening Post report - forthcoming](#)

⁷ [COTA SA 2023-2024 Budget submission](#)

3. Ensure first- and last-mile connectivity (e.g. safe footpaths, drop-off zones, park 'n' ride options) is age-friendly

4. Bridging the Digital Divide

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.

The Strategy's emphasis on digital integration risks excluding some older South Australians. This demographic is among the most digitally excluded groups, especially in regional areas where digital infrastructure may also be limited.

According to the 2021 the Australian Digital Inclusion Index (ADII) results, South Australia lags behind the national average in digital inclusion with regional South Australia falling even further behind^{8,9}. Additionally, only 24% of regional residents are 'high users' (frequent users) of the online world, compared to 38%, in metropolitan areas¹⁰.

This data also suggests that people aged 55 years and over have lower 'Digital Ability' compared to younger Australians, with those aged 65 -74 and 75+ scoring significantly lower than the national average when it comes to digital inclusion¹¹. The digital divide – more pronounced in regional areas – negatively impacts quality of life, contributing to isolation and reducing access to services, information and transport options¹².

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.

Recommendations:

1. Retain non-digital access points for information, ticketing, and planning.
2. Invest in local digital literacy programs.
3. Improve mobile coverage and digital connectivity in regional areas to enable access to real-time services.

5. Supporting the Mobile Health and Aged Care Workforce

As federal Aged Care reform progresses, more and more Australians will be supported to age in place. This will dramatically increase demand for mobile care workers travelling between homes. Our transport system must plan for this shift now.

⁸ [Key findings and next steps - Australian Digital Inclusion Index](#)

⁹ [Digital Inclusion Regional SA.pdf \(sacoss.org.au\)](#)

¹⁰ [Adult media literacy in Australia: attitudes, experiences and needs](#)

¹¹ [Australian Digital Inclusion Index](#)

¹² [Key findings and next steps - Australian Digital Inclusion Index](#)

Recommendations:

1. Ensure regional and peri-urban transport planning accounts for the growing mobile workforce.
2. Provide targeted infrastructure (e.g. parking, EV charging) to support care workers.
3. Encourage integration of aged care, health, and transport planning in regional areas.

Conclusion

COTA SA thanks the Department for Infrastructure and Transport for its consultative approach and the opportunity to contribute. We urge the Public Transport Strategy and Regional Review to adopt an inclusive, whole-of-life lens that acknowledges the distinct needs of older people, particularly those in regional and peri-urban communities.

By designing a public transport system that works for older South Australians, we create a system that works for everyone — now and into the future.

For further engagement, please contact Miranda Starke, Chief Executive 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.