



BUS NETWORKS IN THE NORTH

Executive Summary

Melbourne's northern region is home to just over 1 million people and will grow to house almost 1.5 million people by 2036. The region is underserved by public transport, and consequently suffers from higher levels of traffic congestion. This impacts access to education, employment, health and other services for all residents, but will be felt most acutely in the northern growth corridor.

The Northern Region Transport Study (NRTS) has been commissioned by the Northern Councils Alliance (NCA) to identify transport advocacy and investment priorities that will improve public transport connectivity and encourage sustainable transport growth.

NRTS stage 1 identified the following key issues in the northern metropolitan region:

- Unreliable public transport
- Inadequate bicycle infrastructure
- Congestion on roads
- Poor connections in growth areas
- Poor east to west connections
- Safety concerns on public transport

NRTS stage 2 focuses on strategic improvements to the bus network, in particular:

- Improvements to existing SmartBus Routes
- A high-quality route that could mimic the benefits of Suburban Rail Loop (SRL)
- Improvements to key destinations – Melbourne Airport and La Trobe University
- Services required in Growth Areas

The study's key findings are summarised below.

Implementing a Suburban Rail Loop Bus (SRLB)

An SRLB would provide a continuous, rapid and direct east-west public transport connection from Melbourne Airport to Box Hill, mimicking the proposed alignment of SRL North stations. Adding an additional stop at Keon Park brings significant time savings for commuters from Mernda with minimal impact on overall journey time for other customers.

SmartBus 901, 902, 903 review

To maximise patronage and connectivity in the north, we recommend:

- Realigning SmartBus 901 to service Greenvale and to terminate at Airport West Shopping Centre (instead of Melbourne Airport)
- Realigning SmartBus 902 to terminate at Melbourne Airport (instead of Airport West Shopping Centre) to improve access for airport employees
- Improving spatial distribution of Smartbus 901 and 902 and local routes through Greensborough to improve user experience, accessibility and convenience



Improving connections to La Trobe University (LTU)

LTU is poorly served by public transport compared to universities such as University of Melbourne and Monash. LTU is planning significant growth with a private sector partner, which will bring an additional 12,000 residents, 40,000 students and 20,000 employees.

This growth can be provided for with improved public transport. If services are not improved, the resulting car trips will create significant congestion in Melbourne's north.

The bus connectivity improvements required include:

- Local connections to Viewbank, Watsonia and Yallambie
- Longer distance routes to northern suburbs such as Mill Park, South Morang, Mernda, Diamond Creek and Hurstbridge
- Cross Yarra connections including existing routes, and new direct connections between LTU and Bulleen, Kew and Hawthorn

Improving connections to Melbourne Airport

Melbourne Airport and the surrounding business park is a key employment hub in the north, with over 20,000 employees distributed across an estate of approximately 450Ha.

Existing public transport services do not meet the needs of shift workers in the area, with many businesses operating '24-7'. To improve employee access, we recommend:

- Creating new direct connections to key employee catchments including Craigieburn, Gowanbrae and suburbs around Sunbury
- Increasing service levels on key links and through key areas including the business park and express services to Broadmeadows Station
- Creating a direct link between Melbourne Airport and the La Trobe NEIC via Coburg improve east-west connectivity and connections to four train lines

Serving Mitchell Shire's growing population

Wallan and Beveridge in Mitchell Shire sit within metropolitan Melbourne's northern growth corridor and will house over 200,000 people by 2051, quadruple the entire Mitchell Shire's current population. This growth will create a jobs deficit in the Mitchell Growth Area, requiring residents to travel 10-25km to access jobs and services. If these trips are by car, the Hume Highway (a key National Freight Route) will be overwhelmed.

We recommend establishing direct public transport connections to key employment areas including Broadmeadows, Epping, La Trobe University, Melbourne Airport and the surrounding business park and Thomastown to provide real options for journeys to work that avoid entrenching car dependence in the Mitchell Growth Area.

Mitchell Growth Area and townships would also benefit from aligning bus timetables with train services, and longer term east west links between Whittlesea and Woodend.