



MOUNT GAMBIER PUBLIC TRANSPORT SERVICES

VISION

Achieve a sustainable, high-quality public transport service for Mount Gambier which meets the needs of our community, strengthening accessibility, fostering social inclusion and enhancing liveability within our city.

Public transport services in Mount Gambier are the responsibility of the South Australian Government through the Department of Infrastructure and Transport and administered by the South Australian Public Transport Authority (SAPTA). The current Mount Gambier City Bus service is delivered under contract by Link SA, a subsidiary of Keolis Downer, with an agreement extending until 2030.

SOUTH AUSTRALIA'S TRANSPORT STRATEGY

Improvements to the public transport model in Mount Gambier align with the goals of the South Australian Transport Strategy, which recognises the value of strong regional centres. Our advocacy supports its aim to:

- Expand transport options in regional towns and cities.
- Promote low-emissions travel by reducing car dependency.
- Improve regional connectivity to essential services.
- Enhance wellbeing through healthier, inclusive transport choices.

CURRENT SERVICE OVERVIEW

- A fixed-route service operating three loops across the city.
- Utilises a small fleet of diesel buses, often incorporating aged ex-metropolitan vehicles.
- Services operate Monday to Friday, commencing at 9:00am and ceasing at either 4:45pm or 5:15pm depending on the route.
- Services work around a separate timetable exclusively for school transport resulting in a pause to some routes mid-afternoon.
- No services are offered before 9:00am or evenings.
- No services are offered on weekends or public holidays.
- No special services are offered to connect with large-scale civic or community events.

SHORTFALLS

- The lack of services on weekends or public holidays, increasing social exclusion and reducing access to employment for those relying on public transport services on these days.
- No services in mornings or evenings, restricting the capacity for public transport to be an option for those working standard office hours.
- No services to several key residential growth areas, some representing more than 2000 homes and 5000 residents who have no reasonable access to public transport.
- No direct services to retirement living developments such as Woodlands Grove and Hallmont Estate, comprising of over 450 residential dwellings.
- Limited and infrequent services to key health and education facilities such as the Mount Gambier Hospital, TAFE and University of South Australia.
- No daily services to peri-urban communities surrounding our fringe or broader connections with a regional population of 100,000 people who rely on Mount Gambier as a critical cross-border service centre.
- No public transport options to:
 - Wulanda Recreation and Convention Centre – our primary all-weather sport, recreation and cultural facility.
 - Carinya Gardens Cemetery – Mount Gambier's primary cemetery.
 - Mount Gambier Crater Lakes Park – a significant place of recreational and environmental value to the community.
 - Mount Gambier Airport.

As the regional capital of South Australia, the City of Mount Gambier has an ever-growing resident population approaching 30,000 people and acts as an important service centre for over 100,000. Due to this size and function, the provision of affordable and effective public transport is increasingly critical to the function and liveability of our community.

Unfortunately, despite the significant growth and advancement of our city over time, our public transport system has remained largely unchanged for the past three decades.

A comprehensive service review conducted by the City of Mount Gambier in 2020, drawing insights from residents and public transport users, revealed that six out of ten locals feel dissatisfied with the current service, citing substantial limitations attached to the existing model that impede their daily lives. These findings underscore the urgent need for substantial improvements to meet the diverse transportation needs of our residents.

In response to these findings, the City of Mount Gambier has consistently advocated for reform at both the ministerial and departmental levels, submitting detailed proposals across various channels.

Unfortunately, despite these concerted efforts, a contract awarded in 2023 for an additional eight years merely perpetuated existing service levels, disregarding the community's pleas for meaningful improvement.

The current State Government investment in public transport in Mount Gambier is comparatively inadequate.

As a significant regional centre, the people of Mount Gambier retain the reasonable expectation that our community is afforded a public transport service that provides comparable service outcomes to those living in similar sized communities in peri-urban Adelaide or regional areas in all other states and territories in Australia. Unfortunately, our current service falls significantly short of meeting these expectations.

An independent report released in 2022 highlighted the vast disparity in funding between metro Adelaide and regional South Australia, with \$273 per person allocated for Adelaide and a mere \$40 per person for regional SA. The City of Mount Gambier is also advised that a significant proportion of this regional spend centres around contracts within closer proximity to Adelaide. Comparatively, across the border, townships like Stawell in Victoria with populations of only 8,500 people, enjoy robust transport services operating six days a week from 7:00am to 6:15pm.





The Bus Industry Confederation (BIC) suggests that a reasonable benchmark for a community of approximately 20,000 inhabitants (closest available reference point for Mount Gambier's population of 27,749) includes hourly services throughout the day, with additional services during peak hours, running from 7:00am to 7:00pm on weekdays, with hourly headways from 8:00am to 6:00pm on Saturdays, and from 9:00am to 4:00pm on Sundays. All services should be operated by low-floor route buses, with the possibility of additional peak services being provided by community or school buses.

Comparative assessments of public transport services in regional cities across Australia with similar populations to Mount Gambier indicate that most cities outside South Australia are meeting or exceeding the BIC published standards. Additionally, some areas offer fixed-route services supplemented by on-demand transport options, with many also benefiting from networks that facilitate frequent connections with surrounding townships.

These services of equivalent communities clearly support public transport as an integral contributor to the liveability of their host cities. They provide more adequate services and social inclusion to those who solely rely on public transport, whilst also sustaining legitimate alternative transport options for those commuting to employment or recreational pursuits.

The existing service is inequitable and disadvantages those most in need.

The Mount Gambier Public Bus Service provides the only affordable mode of transport to socially disadvantaged sections of our community, particularly new migrants, unemployed, seniors and those with accessibility considerations.

Current ticket data highlights that only 5% of current passengers make up paying adult fares, with the remainder making up concession or student ticket categories.

A survey of bus passengers conducted in 2020 revealed alarming statistics: only 33% of current users possess a valid driver's license and 43% own or have regular access to a vehicle. Furthermore, 38% of passengers identify as living with a disability and 24% travel with someone who relies on a mobility aid.

For those dependent on the service, its limitations directly impede their ability to fully engage in the social fabric of our city. The inadequacies of the existing model severely restrict reasonable access to essential services such as healthcare, education, and employment. Moreover, they hinder participation in important social activities, public events, or community gatherings held during evenings or weekends.

We are a motivated and willing participant in trialling transport solutions.

City of Mount Gambier notes the leadership of the South Australian Government in the trial of alternative models of public transport through initiatives such as the Future Mobility Lab and ongoing trials of on demand services such as 'Keoride' in Mount Barker.

Acknowledging the range of alternative models available to solely fixed-route bus services, the City of Mount Gambier remains positioned as a motivated collaborator with the South Australian Government to trial models which are fit-for-purpose for our landscape and population.

The benefits of improving the service transcends transport alone.

A strong public transport system reduces social isolation, supports improved physical and mental health, assists in enabling employment, encourages active citizenship and genuine connection within a community.

Research shows that strong public transport systems provide benefits such as:

- *Reducing disadvantage - connecting people with employment, education and health care*
- *Supporting local economies*
- *Improving social inclusion (connecting friends, family and recreational activities).*

Reducing social isolation is known to have broader societal benefits such as lowering crime rates, reducing unemployment, reduced health costs etc.

For public transport to have an impact on social inclusion benefits that are equal to service costs, services only need a boarding rate of only seven passengers per hour (Stanley and Hensher, 2011).

In addition to servicing those with little transport alternative, for a city of its size and function, the community of Mount Gambier retains the reasonable expectation of a robust public transportation system that offers a viable, more efficient, and environmentally sustainable transport alternative to private vehicle ownership.

The absence of reasonable investment from the State Government in developing a transportation infrastructure tailored to our city's needs serves as a significant impediment to realising our liveability goals and growth potential.

OUR COMMUNITY'S CALL TO ACTION

The City of Mount Gambier urges the South Australian Government to:

1. Deliver immediate improvements

- Extend services to currently unserved or underserved areas.
- Increase frequency of services.
- Introduce services in the mornings, evenings and on weekends.

2. Restructure the Mount Gambier public transport service

- In partnership with the local community and Council, undertake a focused review of public transport in and around Mount Gambier to determine, fund and deliver a fit-for-purpose and sustainable model for our city, including consideration of complementary On Demand services.

3. Prioritise Mount Gambier for future trials

- Use Mount Gambier as a pilot site for new transport technologies or service models in regional South Australia.

4. Establish fair standards for regional South Australia

- Introduce transparent, population-based service benchmarks, aligned with national standards, to guide regional public transport funding and service delivery.

