MOVING PEOPLE AROUND THE LIMESTONE COAST

Community Action Project Report

2020 Limestone Coast Leadership Program

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LIMESTONE COAST LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary

Transport of people in and around the Limestone Coast is an issue for all members of the community. Large distances between and within towns, with poor or no public transport services, makes moving around the region difficult, especially in situations where community members do not have access to a car.

The Limestone Coast Leadership Program Transport Consultation Group, comprised of members Belinda Anderson, Meg Bell, Hayley Neumann and Martin Peucker, set out to assess this issue within the region and where possible, to find solutions and recommendations for this issue to be addressed in the community.

Through consultation with community and stakeholders, it was identified that those with issues accessing transport around the region could be categorised as those who could not afford to drive a car, those who did not wish to drive a car, and those who were unable to drive a car. This encompassed young people, unemployed people, migrants, people with a disability, people who are temporarily incapacitated, and elderly people.

Significant community and stakeholder consultation was undertaken, via both one-on-one interview and via 2 community forums. Through this process, current transport services were shown to be inadequate for local communities through a combination of:

- Lack of funding
- Lack of awareness of services, resulting in services being underutilised and therefore not adequately invested in
- Open only to a certain sector of the community (e.g. people over the age of 65 for medical appointments only)
- Running at set times and to locations which did not suit the users
- Unable to be accessed by people with a disability
- Reliant on volunteers
- Inability to be self-sustaining
- Lack of collaboration and communication across and between regions

The intended outcome of the forums and community consultation was to encourage stakeholders and community to collaborate and network with each other, find common goals and identify services that could benefit each other, and to encourage continuity of a representative group to continue working in this space at the conclusion of this project. Through the community forums, this was achieved.

Based on these forums, three recommendations were made to address the issue of access to transport in the Limestone Coast:

1. That a community group made up of stakeholders continue to be coordinated within the Limestone Coast, so as to ensure continued collaboration and networking amongst the region as well as providing a touchpoint for future reviews into transport in the region.

2. That a database of current services is kept by each local council and/or the Limestone Coast Local Government Association, both on their website/s and in house, so as to provide one place for community members to find reliable information and contact details about services available in their communities.

3. That an on-demand transport service is trialled in Mt Gambier, to complement the city bus service.

It is the Transport Consultation Group's belief that if these recommendations were to be implemented, the result would be a significant increase in the availability of transport to those who need it most in the Limestone Coast, resulting in economic and social benefits to the region.

The Challenge

The second Limestone Coast Leadership Program (LCLP) commenced in February 2020 with participants from throughout the Limestone Coast and the Western District of Victoria. Whilst the 2020 LCLP was substantially disrupted due to COVID-19 restrictions, the Program entailed 7 sessions from February through to October 2020 in which participants' personal, professional and leadership skills were developed. Additionally, participants were required to participate in a Community Action Project (CAP), which provided the opportunity to develop, practice and test leadership skills in a situation unfamiliar to the participants.

Belinda Anderson (Mt Gambier), Meg Bell (Coleraine), Hayley Neumann (Mt Gambier) and Martin Peucker (Mingbool) were tasked with exploring 'Moving people around the Limestone Coast', an issue that affects all members of the community in the Limestone Coast to varying degrees.

Although all members of the community were affected by transport and the lack thereof, some sectors of the community were found to be disproportionately affected. These sectors included young people, unemployed people, migrants, people with a disability, people who are temporarily incapacitated, and elderly people. These sectors could also be defined as those who could not afford to drive, those who did not wish to drive, and those who were unable to drive.

At the outset, the issue was identified as the lack of access to a car and/or the high cost of obtaining a driver licence. Whilst it became apparent through community consultation that this was an issue for a percentage of the community, it was also identified that throughout the region there were few transport options available aside from private vehicles. Additionally, of the few transport options available aside from private vehicles, many of these services were poorly funded, relied on volunteers, were only accessible to those seeking medical treatment, and/or did not run on a timetable that suited those that needed the service.

Our challenge was to:

● Define the issue;

- Explore the causes of the issue;
- Explore which sectors of the community were affected;
- Explore how each sector of the community was affected;
- Explore what impact this issue had on those affected;
- Explore if community awareness about the issue was a factor; and
- Explore if there were possible region wide solutions to the issue.

Methodology

Between February and October of 2020, our group was tasked with exploring the challenges of moving people around the Limestone Coast. Our process was to research as widely as possible on this issue by consulting with the local community, engage with stakeholders and the community to bring this issue to their attention, and to bring these stakeholders and community members together to collaborate and network around this issue. This research and consultation process led to the formation of a number of recommendations for the local community. It should be noted that due to COVID-19 restrictions, the length of this program and consultation process was pushed out by 3 months.

Our research coincided with two state MP's calling for a state government review into regional bus services in South Australia, indicating to our group that the issue of access to transport was not localised to the Limestone Coast but that it affected the entire state.

After conducting some of our own research, we decided to narrow the scope of our project to focus on people that did not have access to a car. We were then able to compile our information and distill what the challenges were for those who:

- Could not afford to drive;
- Did not wish to drive; and/or
- Were unable to drive.

In the process of gathering this information, the potential to improve the usage of existing services was highlighted.

We gathered information from stakeholders through various means including:

- Face-to face conversations
- Emails
- Phone calls
- Our own experiences
- Independent online research

Our final opportunity to gather information was at our forums, one held online and the other in person. Our goal for these forums was to generate discussion between stakeholders and the community about the challenges of transport in the Limestone Coast, encourage collaboration and networking across the community, and sufficiently inspire community members and stakeholders so that this issue could continue to be worked on

after the completion of the CAP. We invited stakeholders to share their points of view concerning the viability and accessibility of transport in the region and what could be done to improve services and public knowledge of them.

Engagement Strategy

Identification of stakeholders

Initially, stakeholder engagement involved speaking to the listed sponsors on the original briefing for this project topic:

- Youth on Wheels program: The District Council of Grant
- Public Transport – City of Mount Gambier
- Community bus operators
- Limestone Coast Road Safety Officer – Ali Auld

Further to this, we approached each of the seven councils in the Limestone Coast in order to engage with them around this issue.

As we discussed the broader topic of 'Moving people around the Limestone Coast,' we attempted to identify stakeholders and stakeholder groups throughout the community. Through this process, we identified the below key stakeholders:

Table 1 Key stakeholders in transport in the Limestone Coast

Group	Stakeholders
Community groups	- Adelaide Hills Public Transport Service Advocacy - Limestone Coast Chronic Illness Support Group - Lions Club Millicent - Rotary Club of Mount Gambier Lakes - Sunset Community Kitchen - Toy Library
Mainstream groups/supports	- AC Care - Australian Red Cross - Boandik Community Services - Carers SA - Foodbank - Headspace - Lifeline - Limestone Coast Volunteer Network Service

	- Migrant Resource Centre - Library - MyTime Peer Support Group - Pangula Mannamurna - Salvation Army - St Vincent De Paul - The South East Junction - Unity Housing - Uniting Communities - Baptist Care - Stand Like Stone
Government and regulatory agencies	- City of Mount Gambier Council - District Council of Grant - Kingston District Council - Naracoorte Lucindale Council - Robe District Council - Tatiara District Council - Wattle Range Council - Member for Barker (Federal) - Member for MacKillop (State) - Hon Clare Scriven MLC – SA Labor Party - PIRSA Regional Development - Services Australia - Department of Education - Department of Infrastructure and Transport
Community and consumer representatives	- Green Triangle Freight Action Plan - Port MacDonnell Community Bus - Social Issues Gathering Network - University of South Australia (UniSA) - Limestone Coast Community Justice
Industry	Bus SA

	● Hunter Bus Services
	● Mount Gambier Taxi companies
	● Mount Gambier wheelchair taxi service
	● Regional Development Australia
	● Women in Business and Regional Development
	● Tourism Mount Gambier
Peak bodies and professional associations	● Chamber of Commerce
	● Limestone Coast Leadership Program
	● Limestone Coast Local Government Association and working groups
	○ Roads and Transport Working Group
	○ Limestone Coast Economic Development Group
	○ Tourism Management Group

One-on-one interviews with stakeholders

As we proceeded with community mapping, we identified a range of stakeholders to personally engage with to explore this topic further. Communication was exchanged through phone calls, in person meetings and/or emails with the below stakeholders:

- The South East Junction
- Australian Red Cross
- Chamber of Commerce
- City of Mount Gambier Council
- Foodbank
- Wheelchair Accessible Taxi, Mount Gambier
- Hon Clare Scriven MLC
- Youth on Wheels Program, District Council of Grant
- Naracoorte Lucindale Council
- Wattle Range Council
- Steven Noble Memorial Community Bus (Port MacDonnell)
- Millicent Men's Shed
- Millicent RSL
- Millicent CFS
- Millicent Suicide Prevention Network
- Millicent Lions Club

Themes and suggestions that came out of our one-on-one interviews with stakeholders were as follows:

- Travel by car is the main mode of transport in the Limestone Coast, with other services limited to community bus or Mount Gambier city bus
- Transport services for those under 18 years old are limited
- Distances in the region are large and difficult to cover with the services that have been trialled or offered to date
- Increasing access to and skills for using computers and the internet would assist to solve some of the issues with transport
- Good access to transport would have a positive effect on the region's economy, community mental health and better access to services
- Community sectors are affected differently. Sectors of the community that are affected include:
  - Older people
  - Youth
  - Migrants
  - People with a disability
  - Socio-economically disadvantaged people
- Reasons people need to travel:
  - Medical appointments
  - Socialising
  - Shopping
  - Work
  - Specialist services
- Locations people need to travel to:
  - Within towns
  - Between towns
  - Between regions
  - To cities
- Mount Gambier Bus Service
  - Revision of bus service in Mount Gambier is needed for:
    - Tourism
    - Growth corridors
    - Access to essential services (e.g. Foodbank)
  - On-demand bus service trial for Mount Gambier is warranted
- Medical services
  - Transport to medical appointments is provided by the Red Cross
- Community groups

- o Many community groups provide transport services, and these are mainly run by volunteers
- o It's difficult to find enough volunteers to deliver a service to the level that communities require
- o Community services are reliant on external funding and are not self-sufficient or cost recovery.
- o Community transport services often are not wheelchair accessible
- o Programs and services are not advertised sufficiently across the community
- Government assistance
  - o Taxi voucher system is not consistent (some clients are eligible for 50% off a full taxi fare whereas others are eligible for 75% off a full taxi fare)

Transport Forum

As a result of these one-on-one interviews and the announcement of a review into regional bus services by the state government, it was identified that it would be beneficial to engage a group of stakeholders in a forum environment to network and collaborate. The forum focus remained broad to include the entire Limestone Coast and hence stakeholders were invited from across the region. Invites to attend the forum were sent to all stakeholders initially identified in Table 1, above.

Our group adopted the title 'Limestone Coast Leadership Program Transport Consultation Group', and coordinated two community forums designed to identify transport issues across the Limestone Coast, bring stakeholders and community members together to collaborate and network, and inspire attendees to continue this work after the conclusion of our group's project. Although the topic and region were broad, the group purposely did not want to exclude anyone from the discussions.

The format for the forums was discussed by our group, and due to COVID-19 restrictions as well as issues with transport in the region, it was decided that two forums would be held; one in-person forum at the Mt Gambier Main Corner Complex, and one online forum on the platform Zoom.

To help promote the forums, a flyer invitation was created and sent to stakeholders throughout the Limestone Coast. We also created a Facebook page (Limestone Coast Leadership Program Transport Consultation Group, https://www.facebook.com/LCLPTransportConsultationGroup/), and advertised our forums on this Facebook page.

In order to engage the wider community, a media release was sent out to local media organisations. Following on from this, 4 radio interviews were conducted (2 interviews on Triple M and 2 interviews on ABC South East). Significant interest was also shown by local media organisations The Naracoorte News, Lifestye1, and the SE Voice.

21 stakeholders from a wide range of councils and community groups attended both forums, including a Mount Gambier community member who personified the issues for

elderly residents of The Limestone Coast. Additionally, there were a large number of interested parties who put forward apologies for these forums, indicating their interest in the topic and in any follow up activities that might be held.

The forum format included the following questions:

- Blue sky dreaming
    - If money were no object, what would transport look like in the Limestone Coast?
- Status quo
    - What transport services are you aware of currently in the region?
    - Who are the people that need the services?
    - Who are the people that might not currently use or need a service but might want a service?
- Identifying the gaps
    - Why are the services we've identified not working at the moment?
    - What gaps exist between the services we've identified?
- Collaborating more effectively
    - How can we make the current services work better, reach more people or fill some of the gaps in these services?
    - Would collaboration work? Are there opportunities for collaboration in this room?

Discussion was robust and was group led with some guidance from the facilitators Meg and Hayley in the online forum, and Hayley and Belinda at the in-person forum. The Zoom session was recorded (with participant consent), for further analysis after the session and notes taken at the in-person session by Martin.

A follow up was requested from various media organisations, and as a result a media release highlighting the outcomes of the forums was distributed to media outlets throughout the Limestone Coast. At the time of writing this report, interviews and liaison with these media outlets was still occurring.

Social Impact

In conducting the two transport forums, the intended outcome was to bring stakeholders and members of the community together to:

- Network and collaborate with each other;
- Identify common issues across council areas;
- Identify existing services that were not being used to their full potential; and

- Inspire attendees and other stakeholders and community members to continue to communicate and collaborate on this issue in the future.

A high level intended social impact of this project was that all members of the Limestone Coast community were able to move around the Limestone Coast in a manner that suited their lifestyle and that they had control over. Whilst this was not achieved through the course of this project, the starting point of encouraging networking and collaboration amongst community and stakeholders has been initiated, with all attendees at each of the forums agreeing to meeting in the future to continue to collaborate and network on the issue of transport in the region and to work toward some kind of solution for the region

Recommendations

Continuation of the Limestone Coast Transport Group

The two forums held by the Limestone Coast Leadership Program Transport Consultation Group brought together many stakeholders from throughout the community. There was a strong feeling at the forums that these stakeholders wanted to be able to continue to network with each other, and to find potential areas to collaborate where possible. It was also felt that this group would be able to easily network and provide feedback to both the local review of the Mt Gambier bus service, and the State Government review into bus services in regional areas.

For this group to be able to thrive and function well, it is vital that the group members are invested in the outcomes, but more importantly, that the responsibility for coordinating this group is delegated to one organisation or one role within an organisation. Without a group member who is responsible for coordinating meetings and communicating with group members, there is a high risk that this group will fold and that no further action will be taken.

Central database of current transport services available in the Limestone Coast

Throughout the consultation process, it became apparent that there were large number of community busses and car services offered within the Limestone Coast. However, many of these services were only known independently of each other with no visible collaboration between groups or advertising of the services. These services tended to be "word of mouth" services, with no way of finding out about these services unless you were referred by a particular organisation or by someone who was involved with the service. Additionally, it was not possible to search these services online or through any type of community directory.

A simple step for all councils to implement is to maintain a database of each service in their own area, including:

- Which organisation runs this service?
- Who is the responsible person for this service?
- Who can access this service?
- How does this service operate?

- Where to go and/or who to contact for more information.

After an initial set up, this would take a relatively small amount of time to keep this database updated each month, but would provide enormous benefit for members of the community in need of these services. As with the coordination of the transport group, it's vital that the responsibility for maintaining this database sits with one role within an organisation, to ensure that there is a chain of responsibility and that this database does not become out of date. There is a high risk that without delegating someone with this responsibility, the maintenance of this database will be neglected and become outdated and useless to the community. This database could be either housed on the various councils' websites, and/or internally so that community members can either search the services available on the internet or call the council for information. There is also the potential for this database to be coordinated region wide by the Limestone Coast Local Government Association; if each council keeps their database updated, then it would be a simple task for the LCLGA to coordinate these databases on their own website or internally to provide region wide information on the transport services available. Additionally, identification of these services will also aid in identifying where gaps are in the services that exist, providing an opportunity for councils to invest and innovate strategically.

Trial of a Transport on Demand service for Mount Gambier

The City of Mount Gambier is about to start community consultation regarding the current city bus service before the bus service goes to tender for the State Department of Planning, Transport and Infrastructure (DPTI). A review of the service has not been completed in over 20 years with the city growing substantially, not only in population but area, in that time.

Currently the DPTI is trialling a transport on demand service for the Barossa Valley and Mount Barker region called Keoride *(https://www.sa.keoride.com.au/). Before a tender is awarded for the next 10 years there is the potential for a service similar to this to be trialled in Mt Gambier.

Keoride is a service which provides on demand public transport using an app, internet and telephone booking system. The system technology calculates the most efficient route and organises a bus/car to pick up passengers and takes them to their destination. This is similar to a taxi or uber service however it picks up and drops off passengers along the way using either cars, bus or minibus according to the most efficient method.

This service could be available from early morning to late evening, and also be complemented by a hop on hop off inner city bus loop service. It would negate the need for bus stops and shelters in urban areas of the city and also expand the accessibility of currently under serviced locations.

There would be the potential to assist many groups who were identified during the consultation process as being in need of transport. If successful, this service could be expanded to other localities within the Limestone Coast.

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