

Creating Better Connections for Queenslanders - A draft 10-year plan for passenger transport in Queensland

Engineers Australia's Transport Australia Society (TAs) welcomes the publication of *Creating Better Connections for Queenslanders - A draft 10-year plan for passenger transport in Queensland* (herein referred to as 'the draft plan') by the Department of Transport and Main Roads (DTMR) and appreciates the opportunity to provide comment.

Engineers Australia is the peak body of the engineering profession in Australia with approximately 100,000 members nationally and 23,000 in Queensland. Constituted by royal charter to advance the science and practice of engineering for the benefit of the community, Engineers Australia, through TAs, is motivated to promote sound and consistent transport planning approaches across Australia, advocating for the completion of planning frameworks by government to guide sustainable growth.

Passenger transport is in a period of transformational change with unparalleled challenges and opportunities. The global pandemic has highlighted the financial frailty of passenger transport operations and reliance on cross-subsidy to provide functional levels of service. Technological advancement and the subsequent entrance of new service providers into the passenger transport market has created an environment of opportunity. Engineers Australia supports all levels of government to work collaboratively to regulate the passenger transport market and ensure it plays a positive role in achieving broader quadruple bottom line objectives and maintaining equitable access.

The draft plan identifies five key priorities and 20 initiatives for the next 10 years. Four of the five key priorities respond to predominately accepted sound transport planning principles; reflecting how DTMR is generally perceived to be planning and operating Queensland's passenger transport system.

Escalating the importance of being 'responsive to changing community needs'¹ as one of the five key priorities is welcomed. This priority is essential in creating a pathway for user-centred network design and operation. Engineers Australia encourages DTMR to expand on how this will be achieved. Creating a user-centred design network that is responsive to changing community needs and usage will require an agile business model that facilitates the reallocation of resources.

Under the 'responsive to changing community needs'² priority, the commitment to partner with developers and local government is critical. For successful implementation of this commitment the following is recommended:

- In dealing with DTMR, the development industry is guided by the Guide to Traffic Impact Assessment (GTIA). If partnership with developers is to be achieved, the ability to capture the benefits of passenger transport interventions should be incorporated within the GTIA.
- A clear framework for engagement and collaboration with local government on the implementation of a more responsive passenger transport network would be beneficial.

The draft plan recognises growth in Queensland outside of traditional passenger transport operating areas is bringing new challenges as it expands. Equally, the draft plan identifies the importance of investing early in passenger transport as new communities emerge. The draft plan does not address how these initiatives will be funded. Without a commitment to reviewing passenger transport (capital expenditure and operational expenditure) business models to better enable investment, there is little confidence the intent of the draft plan can be delivered.

Consultation on the draft plan coincides with the recent publication of the *2021 Australian Infrastructure Plan*³ (the AIP), which highlights the needs for a transport system pricing overhaul towards a coordinated multi-modal transport pricing regime. DTMR should explore and leverage the intent of the AIP to investigate new funding models for passenger transport to support the delivery of the draft plan.

The draft plan commits to investing in infrastructure that provides...' passenger transport and those who walk or ride priority over those travelling in private vehicles.' This is a commendable commitment. However, the following is recommended for consideration:

¹ *Creating Better Connections for Queenslanders - A draft 10-year plan for passenger transport in Queensland*, 'Our Priorities' (page 3)

² *ibid*

³ *2021 Australian Infrastructure Plan*, Chapter 4 Transport, 4.4 Recommendation (page 360-361)

- Queensland is a diverse state with local government area transport systems at varying levels of maturity. For regional Queensland, for example, this commitment is unlikely to be relevant. Even within South East Queensland (SEQ), Local Government Areas (LGAs) are at different stages in the evolution of their transport systems where providing infrastructure for the private vehicle is, unavoidably, still a priority. Providing the physical road links to enable re-purposing when demand supports high-quality passenger transport should also inform planning. Consideration should be given to targeting this commitment in the LGAs of Brisbane, Gold Coast and Sunshine Coast as they have population densities and transport systems and can support a targeted switch to non-car modes.
- In areas with mature transport systems and where further provision of private car infrastructure is avoidable, such as the Brisbane, Gold Coast and Sunshine Coast LGAs, it will be necessary to enforce strict policy guidelines to ensure the commitment is adhered to.
- Business case justification for passenger transport projects is notoriously difficult due to the limitations of the cost benefit analysis. It is recommended that continued efforts are made to refine the business case process to better account for the benefits of passenger transport projects and better account for the negative impacts of projects that accommodate increase in car use (predict and provide).

Some specific commentary relating to the remaining four key priorities:

- Reliable and safer services.
 - The creation of a network of bus priority corridors is supported. However, the implementation of the corridors needs to be carefully considered where road space is being reallocated away from private cars. Key to the success of this measure is more passengers on services, which may require a suite of behavioural change measures backed by community engagement to support the investment in the infrastructure.
- Seamless end to end journeys:
 - The draft plan refers to personalised transport, previously only available through community transport for those with impaired mobility, being more widely available. It does not identify if and how this will impact on the community transport sector.
 - Strong Government leadership as a regulator of passenger transport services will be essential, particularly with new payment models being developed. It is important to ensure equitable access to passenger transport services is maintained.
 - Greater investment in trialling new and emerging mobility devices such as scooters and e-bikes for personal or shared use, particularly in suburban areas is supported. These micro mobility devices have the potential to effectively bring public transport stations closer to homes and in doing so promote more sustainable modes of travel in suburban areas that traditionally rely on or use cars as their preferred mode.
- Easy and accessible:
 - The commitment to an equitable and accessible passenger transport service is supported.
- Environmentally sustainable:
 - The commitment to more environmentally sustainable passenger transport service is supported.

Engineers Australia is broadly supportive of the draft plan and commends DTMR on the objectives contained therein. The success of the draft plan will be contingent upon appropriately allocated funding, governmental collaboration across all levels and relevant departments, and delivery of an achievable plan. Much of the draft plan is consistent with the recently published *2021 Australia Infrastructure Plan*, and it is clear that significant change to established business models and operations will be critical to its success.

The opportunity for continued engagement with DTMR to assist in refining the draft plan and in supporting subsequent delivery and implementation planning would be welcomed. Please contact Stacey Rawlings on +61 7 3226 3041 or at srawlings@engineersaustralia.org.au if you would like to arrange for a meeting to discuss this further.

Regards,

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