Telecommunications Accessibility Report

Our aims

City of Whittlesea advocates for state and federal government to:

- provide an accessible, equitable and reliable communication network for all residents and businesses

- reduce the mobile black spots that impact the safety and welfare of our community

- ensure that communication coverage meets our emergency management needs.

City of Whittlesea

Introduction

Mobile technologies are part of our everyday life. Today, 89% of Australians own a smartphone and the average Australian spends three hours every day using their smartphone – working, playing and connecting with family and friends.

Mobile devices have become a vital tool for businesses, government and service providers, with more than half of businesses reporting that mobile internet is important for their activities. Mobile connectivity also plays a critical role for emergency response during crisis situations, including bushfires.

The City of Whittlesea recently commissioned a study on mobile coverage across the municipality. This report ensures that we have current and accurate information to underpin our advocacy to government for funding to improve our mobile services.

We are committed to advocating to both state and federal government and telecommunication providers to improve the delivery of digital infrastructure to meet the expectations of our whole community – including residents, businesses, and visitors.

"Here at Donnybrook, there is a terrible lack of mobile phone coverage and lot of dead spots.

We just need to be able to access coverage for our phones, it's about functioning in a normal capacity for this day and age."

Michelle

Our research

The study mapped out the quality of mobile coverage in the City of Whittlesea. We conducted comprehensive research so that we have the evidence we need to take to government for funding and support.

Drive testing involved 170,862 individual mobile coverage tests across three carriers over 4G and 5G. The total testing distance was 1,455 km and took 118 hours to complete.

It covered:

- emergency markers
- business, medical, retail and tourism precincts
- schools and kindergartens
- aged care and senior citizen centres
- community centres
- key segments of the road network
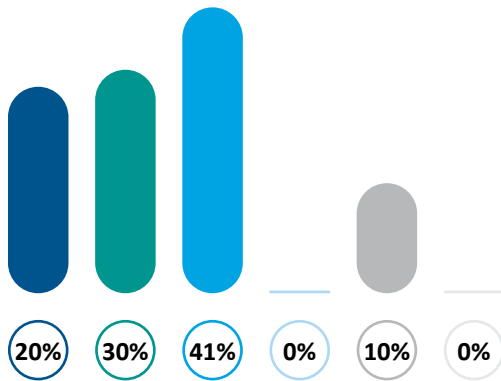- bus stops, train stations and tram stops.

For each location, the dedicated testing equipment evaluated the signal strength and network performance for three national 4G and 5G carriers – Telstra, Optus and TPG Vodafone.
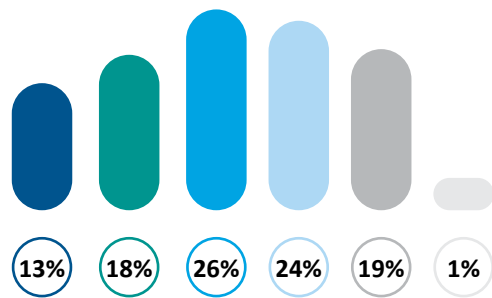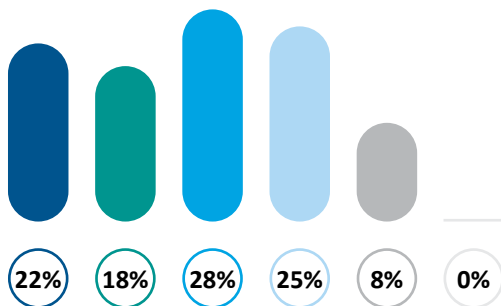
Network quality: our findings

● excellent   ● good   ● fair   ● poor   ● unusable   ● no coverage

Network quality ★))

| 20% | 30% | 41% | 0% | 10% | 0% |

Road network
(142 priority routes, 2,083 road segments)

| 13% | 18% | 26% | 24% | 19% | 1% |

Emergency markers
(40 – combined coverage)

| 22% | 18% | 28% | 25% | 8% | 0% |

Bus stops
(853 sites)

| 18% | 21% | 34% | 21% | 5% | 0% |
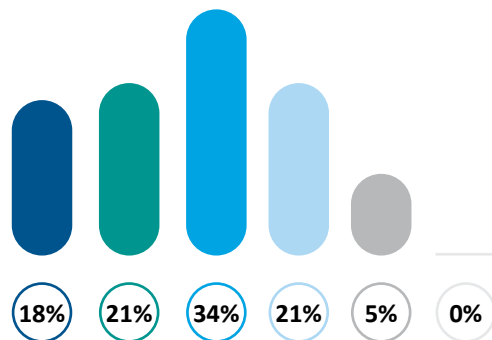
Other points of interest[1]
(184 sites)

| 18% | 21% | 34% | 23% | 5% | 0% |
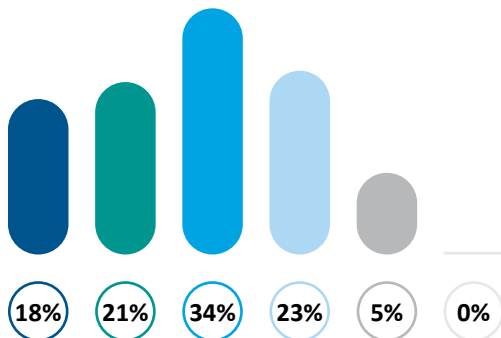
10% of locations across the City of Whittlesea were found to have unusable network quality

Note: The totals may not add up to 100% due to rounding adjustments

1 These included regional and rural localities, educational facilities, retail centres, employment precincts, community centres, aged care and senior citizen centres.

Recommendations

Our research report contained a series of recommendations that would improve mobile access across the City of Whittlesea.

Funding and support to remove black spots

Black spots are areas that are not currently serviced adequately by at least one cellular telecommunication carrier with usable network quality. Our target is for 100% mobile coverage across the City of Whittlesea.

We identified black spots at a range of locations across the municipality.

- Residential and business communities include:
  · Eden Park
  · Beveridge
  · Donnybrook
  · Humevale
  · Wollert.
- Roads include:
  · Epping Road, Beveridge
  · Glenburnie Road, Beveridge
  · Grants Road, Woodstock
  · Humevale Road, Humevale
  · Jana Road, Beveridge
  · Ridge Road, Humevale
  · Whittlesea-Yea Road, Humevale.
- Selected national parks and forestry sites, such as Yan Yean Reservoir
- Key sites in times of natural disaster (floods and fires) include:
  · Eden Park
  · Beveridge
  · Humevale.
- Road networks where distances without any mobile coverage exceed the minimum acceptable distance (for example, target mobile coverage minimum every 10 kms).

● Expansion of the Mobile Black Spot Program

Criteria and targets for funds under the government's Mobile Black Spot Program vary each time the program is offered. In the past this has disadvantaged the City of Whittlesea in different ways.

For example, factors such as rapid population growth and the needs of large outer metropolitan areas should be considered. There also needs to be changes to the type of connectivity systems the program supports so that greater coverage can be achieved.

⚡ Upgrade power resilience

Recent storms have shown that critical communications can be at risk during emergencies and disasters. This will require improving coverage in areas with poor or unusable coverage, installing backup generators and upgrading critical base stations.

🌐 Provide emergency internet for the community

Internet services need to be available 24/7 during emergencies. Designated safe community locations require access to satellite connectivity alongside backup power to withstand any power outages caused by an emergency or disaster.
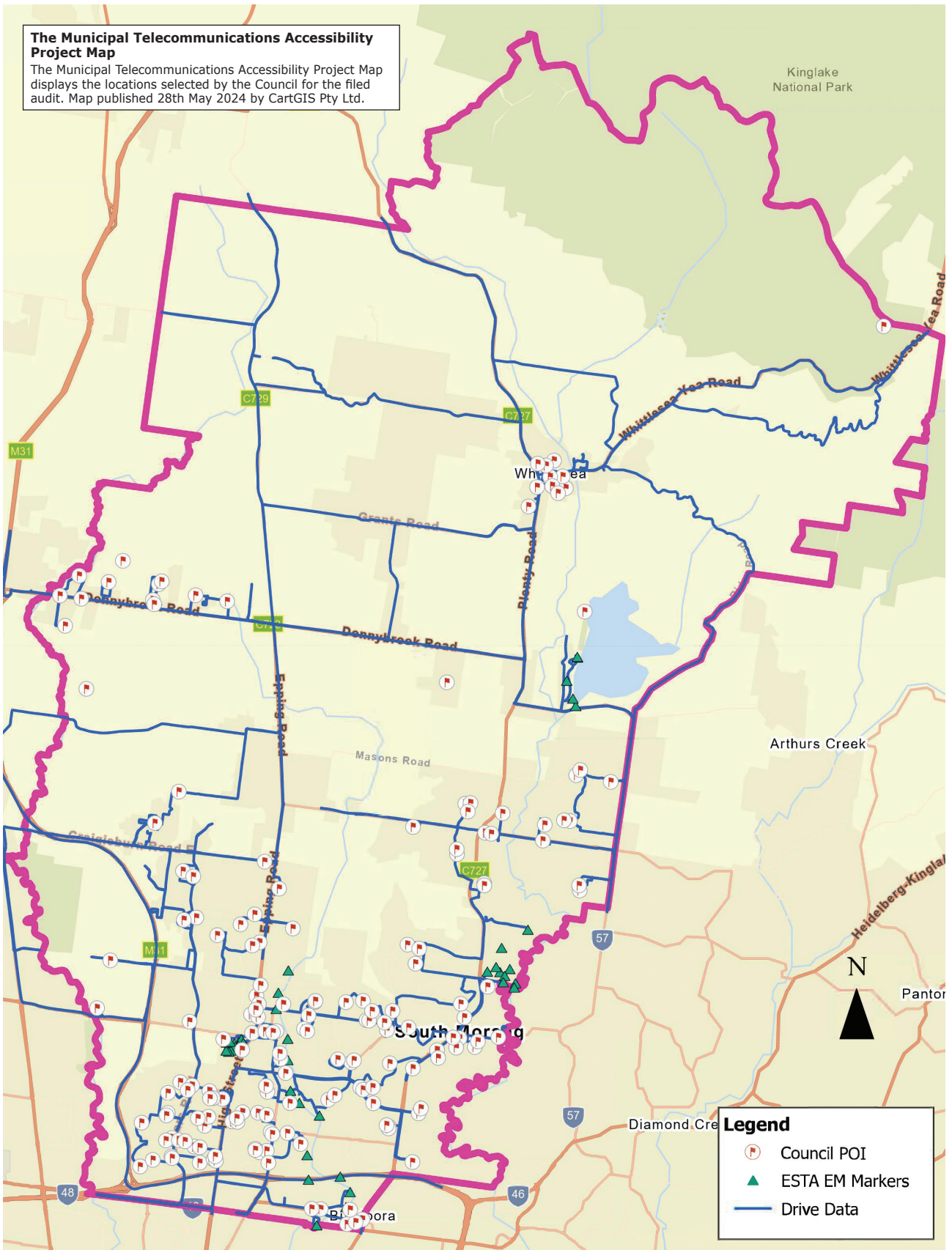
"I am working remotely most of the time and as part my job, there is a lot of video conferencing involved. Time to time my video conference drops out.

Lots of people live here now and schools, college, a lot of students here. We really need a reliable and consistent internet and mobile connection."

Rahman

Locations tested

The Municipal Telecommunications Accessibility Project Map

The Municipal Telecommunications Accessibility Project Map displays the locations selected by the Council for the filed audit. Map published 28th May 2024 by CartGIS Pty Ltd.

Legend

- Council POI
- ESTA EM Markers
- Drive Data

"A resident who was going through domestic violence had to leave her home because it was unsafe and could not get mobile phone reception outside of her house."

Michelle

"At a café in Donnybrook, people often pay in this day and age with their credit card on their phone, and customers will be standing there for a very long time trying to get reception on their mobile phone to be able to pay for their lunch. Resolving the issue obviously is to have a mobile phone tower."

Michelle

What we need

We are asking state and federal government to invest in our telecommunications infrastructure to meet the needs of our current and future communities.

To improve services across our whole region, we also need telecommunications carriers to work with us.

We require support and funding to:

- **ensure all residential and business communities have useable network quality** – target 100%

- **advocate for changes to government funding criteria** so that municipalities such as the City of Whittlesea are not disadvantaged under programs relating to mobile network upgrades

- **upgrade carrier networks** to avoid disruptions and ensure power during emergencies such as severe storms and fires

- **enhance carrier network coverage** across areas that have poor or unusable coverage

- **provide 24/7 emergency internet services** at designated community locations.

To find out more visit whittlesea.vic.gov.au/About-us/Advocacy-priorities

"My wife is studying Cyber Security, she had to submit an assessment and that was the last day of the assessment, the internet was playing up by the time she was submitting it. It took over an hour to fix that issue."

Rahman

City of Whittlesea