

OUR COMMUNITY URGENTLY NEEDS BUS SERVICE IMPROVEMENTS

Improvements to bus services in the Epping to Wollert corridor provide a critical link to education, employment, health and social destinations until Wollert Rail is built, which is required by 2030. The current bus service offered will see demand exceed capacity by 2025. Urgent improvements are needed to service the future population growth and provide transport trips both to the Melbourne CBD and the growing Epping Metropolitan Activity Centre.

What is needed:

Bus service improvements are needed as a critical interim solution to a train service to Wollert. We are seeking:

1. State Government investment for a new bus service from Epping Station to Wollert (via Edgars Road) to coincide with the opening of Edgars Road (between Cooper Street and Craigieburn Road).
2. Extensions to existing bus services to capture the growing community plus increased frequencies during peak travel times.



Our community in Epping North and Wollert urgently need additional bus network services to access work opportunities, education and services and to improve health and wellbeing. Currently Council's fastest growing corridor, with population expected to grow rapidly from 39,683 to 94,466 in 2041. Whilst a rail line extension from Lalor to Wollert has long been planned for, until such time as a connection is built, additional bus services and improvements are sought to cater for growing communities. In addition, demand for bus services will exceed the current capacity in the corridor by 2025.

Our community urgently needs a train Line to Wollert. Many residents face frustrating commute times, missing out on important family and social time. As an interim measure until a rail connection to Wollert is provided, bus service improvements in the area are critical.

CITY OF WHITTLESEA CONGESTION

Our communities are increasingly concerned with, and affected by, traffic congestion. The burden of chronic congestion and poor access to public transport combine to result in many of our residents facing oppressive commutes to work.

We continually hear about the health and wellbeing impacts of long and frustrating commutes and social isolation directly from our residents through community consultation exercises and Council's Annual Household Survey. In addition, 82% of Epping North residents reported that they 'sometimes or often' have difficulty getting to places by car and public transport, respectively. The proposed bus service improvements are a key element to improving liveability and wellbeing in our municipality.



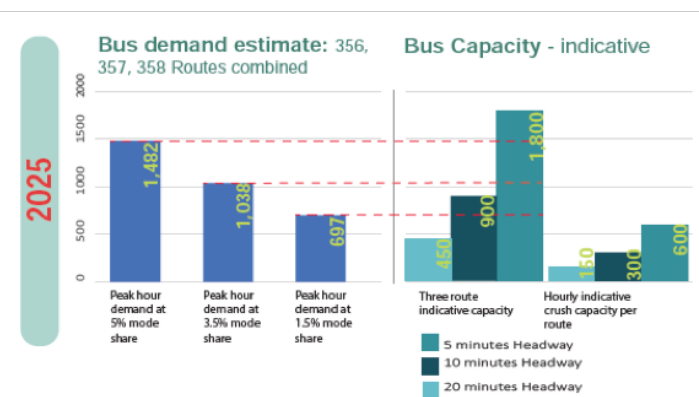
REDUCING CONGESTION AND ENHANCING LIVEABILITY

Epping North and Wollert has undergone significant growth in the last five years with a further 12,500 people living in these areas between 2016-2021. With limited public transport options, our residents are forced to rely heavily on cars, which further exacerbates local traffic congestion, particularly along Epping Road. We know that congestion has a serious impact on the health and wellbeing of our residents and further complicates the issue of mortgage stress that our residents already experience.

IMPROVED CONVENIENCE AND CAPACITY

In 2016, Public Transport Victoria (DoT) introduced three new bus routes into the precinct. These services have proved popular with a 25 per cent increase in bus patronage in this precinct. The bus networks currently servicing travel between Epping North and the Epping Central Activity Centre are important yet do not meet the public transport needs of our community. The current three bus services operate on a low frequency (every 20 minutes) even during peak times. Also, the currently incomplete road network means that buses are forced to compete with other vehicles and suffer from the congestion, imposing delay and unreliability on the service.

Demand for bus travel in the corridor will exceed capacity by 2025 with the existing service provision. A commitment is sought to build a rail extension to Wollert by 2030, which means that bus services will continue to provide all public transport in the corridor until then. Therefore, additional bus services, route coverage and increased frequencies are required.



Bus Demand and Capacity at 2025

It is anticipated that Edgars Road will be completed by August 2022, providing a continuous north-south connection between Cooper Street and Craigieburn Road. This connection will facilitate the introduction of a new bus service between Epping Station and Wollert, which will help to relieve local congestion. The service would effectively mimic the connectivity sought from the future rail service by running an express service to connect the areas that align with the proposed train stations on the corridor.

ACCESS TO ACTIVITY CENTRES, EMPLOYMENT AND COMMUNITY FACILITIES

The current bus routes provide access to a catchment of 10,661 residential properties in the Epping to Wollert corridor. However, the forecast population growth, together with the further development of Epping Central as an employment and health hub, will need to be met with increased routes, higher service frequencies and longer span of service.

The improvement to bus service provision in the corridor will provide residents with direct access to Epping Plaza, the Northern Hospital, Pacific Epping and Epping station and CBD-bound employment and education opportunities. Users will be able to transfer from bus to rail at Epping station for longer trips to the inner suburbs and Melbourne CBD. This is particularly advantageous to Epping North and Wollert residents, who are more likely to work in relatively skilled occupations with employment destinations in the CBD. Route extensions northwards into Wollert PSP are also sought to provide access to our new residents.

The Cooper Street Employment Area is predicted to create around 25,000 new jobs over the next ten years. A number of new secondary schools are due to open in the Epping North and Wollert suburbs which will further the travel demand to and from the corridor. The Northern Hospital has the busiest emergency department in the state, treating nearly 88,000 patients annually and employing nearly 3,000 people. Both the Northern Hospital and Epping Private Hospital are set for expansion, acting as increasing trip attractors and important destinations for patients, visitors and staff.

The growth of both Aurora and Wollert town centres will further contribute to the demand for public transport in the area, with over 8,000 new jobs proposed for Wollert.

The future expansion of the bus network will see a number of routes converging on key destinations in both Epping and Wollert.

CITY OF WHITTLESEA PLANNING

The City of Whittlesea's Council Plan identifies seven Future Directions based on an extensive community consultation process. The public transport improvement requested will directly assist each of these Future Directions, particularly "Accessibility in, out and around our city". The proposal is included in Council's Road and Public Transport Plan (2017) and also addresses Council's Integrated Transport Strategy (2014). The State Government policy used as a guide relevant to this action includes the Victorian Road Safety Strategy 2013-2023. A rail line to Wollert is also a key inclusion within the Wollert PSP.

