

SOUTH EAST
COMMUNITY
LINKS

CONNECTING COMMUNITIES

Public Transport Pilot 2023



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

South East Community Links acknowledges the traditional custodians of the lands that we work on. We pay our respects to the Woi Wurrung and the Boon Wurrung language groups of the Kulin Nations. We pay respect to their cultures, their elders past, present and emerging, and to all other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The Strategic Engagement Coordinator (SEC) Public Transport Project was supported by the Victorian Government.



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Public Transport (PT) project is a Strategic Engagement Coordinators (SEC) initiative that was designed and developed to better understand the barriers faced by culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities in accessing and using public transport. The pilot aims to bridge the gap and provide tangible solutions that address the barriers CALD communities experience. It provides both a model and recommendations for service providers to strengthen the inclusion and social and economic wellbeing of newly arrived CALD community members.

With growing concerns raised by local community members, SECL decided to trial a public transport training model to test the effectiveness of providing in-language resources and support to existing and newly arrived women living in the City of Casey. The development of the project is an opportunity for local governments and support services to consider how they can scale up or implement this model. The findings from the pilot will provide strong evidence to advocate for systems change with organisations including Public Transport Victoria (PTV) and public transport operators. This report provides clear recommendations that address the barriers and challenges CALD communities face in accessing public transport and becoming more socially and economically independent.

The program engaged 30 Afghan women across a 4-week period with a Dari speaking bi-cultural worker supporting their learning and practice trips. The following outcomes were achieved:

- 70% of women increased their confidence in using public transport independently
- 88% of women increased their understanding of the public transport system
- 80% of women learned how to purchase and confidently use a MYKI card
- 100% of women reported feeling more connected to the community and local services

Many women described the joy of not having to wait for their husbands to return home to take them places; "This is a big change for us".

Key learnings and recommendations for public transport operators are identified which include the development of in-language resources both online and at transport locations, comprehensive customer service training for public transport staff, strengthened consultation opportunities to improve service access with disadvantaged communities and the development of a Public Transport Feedback and Complaints Register that is accountable and imbeds a continuous quality improvement framework.



WHO WE ARE



South East Community Links (SECL) was established in 1970 with the vision that every person counts and every system is fair. We work alongside multicultural communities to offer real and meaningful solutions that are trusted, place-based, and people-centred.

For over 50 years, SECL has provided a range of services to the communities in the South-East Melbourne region.

SECL is guided by the core values of equity, inclusion, compassion, dignity, diversity, and choice.

We value and embrace the skills, perspectives, and experiences that culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities bring to our organisation and wider society.

Alongside communities, we also work with government agencies, and partner organisations to provide sustainable services that are culturally responsive, coordinated and effective in meeting the needs of clients. SECL always puts the community at the heart of our work and is dedicated to finding and closing the gaps that affect our communities.

SECL has a team of experienced staff who are dedicated to delivering high-quality services to the communities they serve alongside students and volunteers. We are committed to building strong and inclusive communities that are resilient and able to respond to the changing needs of clients and the community.

Spanning across multiple locations, our services include:

- emergency relief
- case work
- community programs and support
- youth and family services
- homelessness and housing support
- financial counselling
- employment support
- family violence support
- settlement services.

These services have continued to promote the social, economic, and cultural wellbeing of individuals, families, and communities, whilst fostering social cohesion and inclusion.

Our Vision: Every person counts, every system fair

Our Mission: Achieving better social and economic outcomes for people in our community

PROJECT OVERVIEW

In 2018, the Victorian Department of Premier and Cabinet funded 11 organisations across Victoria to deliver the Strategic Engagement Coordinator (SEC) program. In each organisation, a SEC was employed with the aim to strengthen settlement outcomes by using a community engagement approach to be more inclusive of CALD communities.

South East Community Links practitioners and local settlement service providers recognised a consistent lack of awareness and engagement with public transport, particularly within the City of Casey, for newly arrived communities with English as an additional language. This has been an issue for some time with little being done to address this. SECL and other local community services aim to see change and improvement in the use of public transport as currently it poses a significant barrier to social and economic mobility for many newly arrived families. Some are without cars or in some situations where the male is using the only car for work purposes and it leaves women and children incredibly isolated at home. Bringing attention to solutions to this problem is critical to achieving stronger social and economic mobility for newly arrived families and those other community members who are not in the position of owning a car.

From our experience and the information shared with us by local community services many community members have requested support to feel confident in using public transport in the City of Casey and surrounding areas. SECL trialed this pilot and reached out to local community service organisations to promote and refer participants to take part in our hands on workshop and practice sessions that will help build their knowledge, awareness and confidence of some of the key bus and train routes that they would access for educational, health, social and other life needs.

It is SECL's assertion that engaging with Victoria's public transport system for everyday tasks will significantly aid the process of settlement and help newly arrived individuals to feel included and confident in their local environment. SECL is also aware of the urgency many participants feel to gain their license and purchase a car but doing so results in financial and other stress and at the cost of developing valuable local knowledge.

Findings from this pilot will be detailed in a report that will be shared with City of Casey, Public Transport Victoria, Metro Trains and other public transport operators as evidence for greater support interventions to increase public transport usage amongst newly arrived CALD communities.

Local Context

The Local Government Areas (LGA) of Casey, Cardinia and Greater Dandenong have spent significant resources researching and producing reports over the last 5 years evaluating transport systems and public uptake of alternatives. Other bodies including RACV and South Eastern Melbourne Primary Health Network (SEMPHN) have identified population growth and transport as connected issues impacting the areas of health, employment and financial capability. Public transport and congestion issues within the noted LGA's are prevalent, longstanding and urgent, requiring recommendations and solutions to be implemented now to ensure long term structural and psychosocial outcomes.

The City of Casey as of 2021 has 14,671 residents who were born in Afghanistan, with this population set to increase with a further 26,500 visa applications approved by the Australian Government before the 2022 election. License acquisition is a primary goal for newly arrived people with many bypassing public transport and relying on cars as a default means of travel. Within this group 56.4% live in multi-generational households of 6 or more persons. This results in multiple trips per day with an average of 10 trips per household in City of Casey at present.

Casey's population will increase by 21% in the next 8 years with a projected number of an additional 166,000 residents. Casey and its neighbouring LGA, City of Greater Dandenong (CGD) have young populations who are high public transport users; CGD is comprised of 14.2% of people aged between 15-24 years and a quarter of Casey Cardinia populations are aged 0-14 years. These figures indicate public transport will be increasingly needed, but potentially compromised if services do not improve over the next decade, with the greater proportion of the population using cars. (See Figure 1 Appendix)

These factors have direct, measurable impacts on the health of Casey as a liveable suburb and its residents health. (See Figure 2 Appendix)

The Need

- A program promoting the use of public transport would encourage new and existing CALD communities to consider it as a viable mode of transport promoting settlement values of self-efficacy. This creates a more inclusive culture where everyone feels valued, empowered and supported.
- It directly supports the Department of Transport Strategic Plan for 2022 -2026 which identifies a core focus area as New Patterns and Places stating: deliver a people-focused system that enhances communities with sustainable new travel patterns, public and active transport and shared mobility services.
- SECL is active in promoting the health and wellbeing of new populations in Casey and Cardinia and notes this program fits well with City of Casey's Municipal Health and Wellbeing Strategy of 2021-2025, to improve public health and wellbeing at local levels.
- As a place-based organisation, SECL values and recognises that services need to understand that people experience multiple and inter-related forms of disadvantage and provides a platform for the delivery of more integrated and holistic support.



SERVICE GAPS

Access to transport is one of the key drivers to achieving social and economic inclusion, further improving life satisfaction and financial independence. Transport difficulties are consistently identified as a factor that restricts Australian families' capacity to access services and participate in activities (Carbone, Fraser, Ramburuth, & Nelms 2004; Cortis, Katz, & Patulny, 2009). SECL aims to ensure that people from migrant and refugee backgrounds are included and have equal access to systems in Australia including public transport.

We recognise the barriers faced by people in terms of access to and use of public transport in the Casey region which is applicable to other settlement areas. Community members and workers identified and articulated multiple barriers that CALD commuters face when trying to move around their local areas to get to appointments, errands, work and study including:

- Insufficient resources and information in community languages on PTV app and public signages.
- Lack of understanding of the public transport system including the tickets, fares, concessions and zones.
- Difficulties in navigating and using the PTV tools such as apps, maps, routes and timetables.
- Poorly designed public transport facilities including unsuitable locations, inadequate shade and personal safety care as well as limited access for pedestrians and prams.
- Limited knowledge of public transport routes including stops and connecting services in the City of Casey particularly in new estates.
- Concerns regarding the cost of tickets and fines, particularly among CALD young people.
- Reports of discrimination and racism by public transport workers towards CALD people.

PUBLIC TRANSPORT PILOT MODEL

The Process

- Dari and English speaking volunteers or bicultural workers are recruited and coached to facilitate and support small groups for the duration of the program.
- Interested participants are referred through local settlement agencies where a need has been identified and they are within the geographical area.
- An information session is delivered relating to PTV system, journey planning apps, maps, timetables, ticketing and fares including fines. Myki cards with credit are distributed to participants checking for concessions applicable.
- Succeeding sessions are planned journeys (return trips) to identified, significant and frequented destinations utilising all types of public transport: bus, train and tram.
- A survey assessing level of confidence and understanding of the PTV system is conducted at the start, end and 4 week post-program ending to measure and evaluate engagement and learning.



PILOT PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

Our SECL Public Transport Pilot initiative aims to test the effectiveness of providing in-language resources and support to existing and newly arrived women to overcome the barriers they face in becoming more social and economically mobile. The model offers simple to use and in-language support and resources as a solution to challenges faced by CALD commuters in navigating their local area and doing everyday errands.

The expected outcomes for this program include:

- Improved understanding of public transport options within the local area.
- Increased confidence and independence in navigating a local area via public transport.
- Increased proficiency in using the Myki ticketing systems to support independence and self-reliance in using public transport.
- Increased knowledge of services and facilities available in their local area.
- Increased social connection and mobility of local CALD populations through engagement with others.



“

‘It was useful for me because I did not have much confidence to top-up a myki, I learned a lot from when the worker was showing others. I now feel 80% confident.’

”

PUBLIC TRANSPORT PILOT PROGRAM OUTCOMES



24 APRIL – 29 MAY 2023

The Public Transport Pilot program was developed to trial the effectiveness of providing in-language supports to newly arrived women living in the City of Casey to increase their confidence and ability to access public transport.



30

Women engaged

100%

Found the program useful in their life

100%

Would recommend the program to family, friends, and other community members

HOW THE PROJECT MADE A DIFFERENCE?

Across the 2 groups, post program surveys found that:



70%

Felt more confident in using public transport by themselves in their local area



88%

Increased their understanding of the public transport system.



Learned how to:



80%

Buy a Myki card



80%

When and how to top-up a Myki card



100%

Use a Myki card on public transport



Empowering women

Women developed greater confidence, knowledge and skills as they learnt to navigate the local public transport system. This led to increased independence, self-efficacy and increased opportunities for social and economic mobility. It was reported that women experiencing social isolation were also more likely to engage in other activities following the program.



Increased inclusion and belonging

Participants experienced a stronger sense of belonging and inclusion within their local community. A Dari interpreter was provided to ensure the women were able to understand the information in-language.



Increased sense of safety and security

The women developed greater safety awareness and knowledge of the public transport system. This comprehensive program creates safety for women and families involved, as well as the broader community.



“

'We didn't just learn about public transport, but we also learned about different places we can go to and take our family to.'

”

FINDINGS AND LEARNINGS

The direct lived experiences and analysis of evaluations informed the following conclusions:

- Participants found it useful to learn how to navigate the public transport and ticketing system to carry out day to day errands.
- Most of the women said that using public transport was integral to their independence, and their social and economic participation.
- The women learned how to get to health centres, shops and community centres by public transport independently. Many described the joy of not having to wait for their husbands to return home to take them places; "This is a big change for us".
- Participants generally felt happy and found using public transport safe and secure being amongst other commuters.

Ongoing Challenges

Through this pilot, the following ongoing challenges have been identified:

- The majority of respondents faced barriers to a safe and informed journey such as: lack of in language travel information, resources and signage, literacy and incidents of racism and discrimination.
- Participants shared having negative experiences on public transport due to unprofessional conduct by staff. They reported that people have felt disrespected or not adequately supported by transport staff and not given opportunities to provide feedback, complain or report misconduct.
- Some participants expressed concerns and anxiety about trying to use the public transport system due to poor customer service and long wait times for buses and trains.
- Participants shared that unreliable and inaccessible transport systems forced them to rely on the goodwill of family or friends and others shared that it resulted in social isolation, a loss of independence and inclusion.

The impact of an unreliable and inequitable transport system is significant as it creates additional barriers to employment, study, social and civic life. It further isolates CALD communities and inhibits their potential for achieving full participation and inclusion.

“

I feel more relaxed and safer in public transport, I don't feel the same when I am driving, even though I drive I like public transport more.

”

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this project, the following recommendations are suggested for local councils, transport operators and service providers:

1. Conduct regular consultation with key advocacy organisations and disadvantaged groups such as women and CALD people to plan, implement, improve and resolve systemic issues and service gaps for public transport in Casey and Victoria.

2. Embed the using public transport program model at a local level using multi modes of engagement to improve social and economic mobility of their constituents.

3. Develop a comprehensive training program for all public transport providers in Victoria to deliver equitable and accessible service to all commuters including newly arrived CALD people. Successful completion of this training should be a pre-requisite for all staff, a Key Performance Indicator (KPI) for government public transport provider contracts and an ongoing registration requirement for public transport operators prior to commencing service delivery.

A fair and efficient public transport system should ensure that all commuters including from migrant and refugee backgrounds feel welcome, supported and empowered to thrive in their community.

4. Multi-media, in language resources for community to improve their understanding of the public transport system including having maps and APPs available in languages other than English. This may also include resources to raise awareness about the benefits of public transport for socio-economic participation, inclusion, health and wellbeing of CALD communities.

5. A Public Transport Feedback and Complaints Register (PTFCR) for all modes of public transport be established to promote accountability, transparency and continuous quality improvement. The PTFCR be managed by the Public Transport Ombudsman and include the production of annual audit reports identifying the nature and category of complaints, and the outcome and timeline for resolution of all complaints.





REFERENCES

Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016b; Public Health Information Development Unit, 2021b

<https://profile.id.com.au/casey/workers>

City of Casey: Integrated Transport Strategy Streets Ahead

City of Casey Parking Strategy 2018

Dept. of Transport Strategic Plan 2022 - 2026

Greater Dandenong Cycling Strategy 2017-2024

Annual Needs Assessment PHN – 2022-2025

Victorian Refugee Health Network Second Quarter 2022.Data Bulletin

Growing Pains RACV- RACV's Blueprint for road and public transport projects needed in Outer Melbourne.

<https://aifs.gov.au/resources/policy-and-practice-papers/relationship-between-transport-and-disadvantage-australia>



APPENDIX

Figure 1 -Population Growth

City of Casey	2020 – 117,469	2025 – 142,419	21.2% increase
Shire of Cardinia	2020 – 363,512	2025 – 424,589	16.8% increase
City of Greater Dandenong	2020 – 160,300	2025 – 174,534	10.4% increase

Figure 2 -Psychosocial

Number of residents of working population who reside in Casey.	Overall number of workers 82,165	Number that work and live locally 50,084.
Number of residents who speak English as a second language	35.8%	
Vehicle accidents in Casey & Cardinia requiring hospitalisation	March 2021 – March 2022	452
Inadequate exercise: number of adults out of 100 City of Casey	2017 - 2018	73.6 people
Inadequate exercise number of adults out of 100 City of Greater Dandenong	2017- 2018	78.2 people
Prevalence of obesity: number of adults out of 100 City of Casey	2017 - 2018	34.1 people