

Improving Transport Access, Workforce Participation and Community Wellbeing

City of Warrnambool

Appreciative Inquiry Outcomes – Warrnambool, Victoria

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Executive Summary

This report presents the outcomes of a Workforce Australia Local Jobs – South Coast of Victoria Local Initiatives Fund (LIF) project, delivered through an Appreciative Inquiry workshop conducted in Warrnambool, focused on how transport access can better enable workforce participation, education and training, health access, and social inclusion across the City of Warrnambool and surrounding districts.

Participants consistently identified that Warrnambool already has significant transport assets and services in place, including town buses, regional rail, school buses, taxis, L2P programs, employer-supported transport and active transport infrastructure. However, these assets are not yet configured or coordinated in ways that fully support contemporary work patterns, education pathways and community needs.

Rather than calling for entirely new systems, the inquiry emphasised better use of existing infrastructure, increased frequency and reliability, expanded access, and more flexible design. The ideas generated are practical, locally grounded and well aligned with State and Commonwealth priorities for regional connectivity, workforce participation and service access.

What We Heard in Warrnambool

Participants in the Warrnambool Appreciative Inquiry described transport as central to independence, opportunity and quality of life.

Several consistent themes emerged:

- Transport that is frequent, reliable and predictable makes the difference between people accessing work or training and disengaging altogether.

- Warrnambool functions as a regional hub for education, health and employment, meaning transport impacts not just the city but surrounding towns.
- Existing services are valued, but timing, coverage and coordination often do not match start and finish times for work, apprenticeships or study.
- Young people, apprentices and people without licences were highlighted as cohorts who would benefit most quickly from small, targeted changes.
- Participants expressed strong support for using what already exists better — school buses, town buses, courtesy buses, taxis and community vehicles.
- There was optimism that practical, testable improvements could be implemented quickly and deliver visible benefits.

Overall, the conversation reflected confidence that Warrnambool has the capacity, assets and leadership to improve transport outcomes with the right design choices and policy flexibility.

What Is Working Well in Warrnambool

The inquiry identified a number of strengths already supporting mobility and access:

- Town bus services operating within Warrnambool
- Regional rail services, providing relatively affordable access beyond the city
- School bus networks, particularly effective for student travel
- A well-utilised L2P program, supporting young people into licensing
- TAFE transport arrangements, including dedicated bus services
- Taxi, Uber and “Get a Cab” services, including invoicing to organisations
- Employer initiatives, such as paying for taxis or providing fuel vouchers
- Purchasing of bikes and EVs by organisations to help people get around
- Walkable CBD areas and emerging active transport infrastructure

These strengths demonstrate that Warrnambool already has a diverse transport ecosystem that can be built upon rather than replaced.

Design Opportunities Identified Through the Inquiry

Participants identified several priority areas where design changes could significantly improve outcomes.

1. Increasing Frequency and Reliability of Bus Services

- Strong preference for smaller buses running more often, rather than infrequent larger services.
- Continuous loop services and expanded routes were seen as more practical for daily travel.
- Extended timetables, including later evening services, were repeatedly raised.

2. Better Use of School and Education Buses

- Opportunities to use school buses throughout the day, with appropriate safeguards.
- Segregated sections and WWCC requirements were discussed as workable solutions.
- Combining school buses and town buses was seen as a way to increase coverage.

3. Improving Regional and Inter-Town Connectivity

- Strong interest in earlier and more frequent trains (e.g. Colac–Warrnambool).
- Better bus connections to surrounding towns (Hamilton, Portland, Camperdown, Corangamite Shire).
- Recognition that Warrnambool acts as a regional access point for services and employment.

4. Licensing and L2P Expansion

- Expanding L2P age eligibility and mentor availability.
- Interest in work-related or provisional licensing models for apprentices.
- Reducing anxiety and delays for young people entering employment.

5. Active and Alternative Transport

- Support for e-bikes and e-scooters within the CBD.
- Improved bike and walking paths to connect residential areas.
- Focus on safety, lighting and end-of-trip facilities.

6. Data-Informed and Community-Based Design

- Desire to work with data to show demand and lived experience.
- Community-based timetable construction and service design.
- Making services easier to understand and navigate.

Alignment with Government Priorities

The Warrnambool inquiry outcomes align strongly with existing policy directions.

Victorian Government alignment includes:

- Department of Transport and Planning priorities for place-based, integrated public transport
- Infrastructure Victoria's emphasis on maximising use of existing assets and improving access to jobs and services
- Regional Development Victoria objectives to strengthen regional hubs, workforce participation and liveability

Commonwealth alignment includes:

- Jobs and Skills Australia priorities to remove structural barriers to workforce participation
- National focus on improving regional connectivity to education, training and health services

The ideas generated in Warrnambool are well suited to pilots, staged trials and incremental reform rather than large-scale system redesign.

Key Recommendations Emerging from the Inquiry

1. Increase the frequency and reliability of town bus services, using smaller buses and continuous loops
2. Extend bus timetables to support early starts and late finishes
3. Explore shared use of school and education buses outside peak student times

4. Improve connectivity between Warrnambool and surrounding towns
5. Expand L2P and licensing pathways, particularly for apprentices and young workers
6. Invest in active transport infrastructure and safety measures
7. Use data and lived experience to guide ongoing service design and evaluation

From Ideas to Action: Trials and Implementation Pathways

Destiny Phase Idea	What Could Be Trialled in Warrnambool	Primary Stakeholders	Intended Outcome
Smaller, frequent bus loops	Pilot continuous loop services using smaller buses	DTP, Council, operators	Improved daily access and reliability
Combined school & town buses	Time-based shared use of school buses with safeguards	Education & transport agencies	Increased coverage and efficiency
Extended timetables	Later evening and early morning services	Transport providers	Better alignment to work & study
Regional connections	Improved bus and rail links to nearby towns	State agencies, councils	Stronger regional access
Expanded L2P	Incentives for mentors, broader age eligibility	L2P providers, employers	Faster licensing for workers
Active transport upgrades	Safer bike paths, lighting, EV access	Council, State agencies	Increased local mobility

Conclusion

The Warrnambool Appreciative Inquiry demonstrates that transport improvement is less about inventing new systems and more about configuring existing ones to fit real lives.

By focusing on frequency, reliability, access and smarter use of assets, government and community stakeholders can unlock meaningful improvements in workforce participation, education access and wellbeing, positioning Warrnambool as a strong, connected regional hub.

