

Transport and Mobility Needs of Ageing Australians



Discussion Paper

NSW Parliament House
28 October 2010

What We Want

By 2012, the NSW Government should develop and implement a transport and mobility plan for an ageing population.

This must include the following:

- Ensure that all new and existing transport infrastructure projects and services take into account the transport and mobility needs of older people.
- A requirement that all cabinet minutes relating to transport infrastructure development and service delivery include an ageing impact statement.
- Strategies to allow people to drive for as long as they are safe to do so.
- Evidence based actions to improve the accessibility of transport and mobility for older non-drivers at local and State levels.
- A regional component to ensure that all forms of transport and mobility are integrated at a regional level.
- A communication strategy that includes providing transport and mobility information about:
 - transport options that are available to help people maintain their existing level of mobility when they stop driving; and
 - planning for future transport and mobility needs as part of people's retirement plan.

The plan must be a whole of government strategy with a review undertaken every three years with published performance results.

This should also include a report on the positive economic impact from the increased mobility of the ageing population.

The plan should identify funding sources for each initiative in the plan.

Introduction

For the ageing population of NSW, cars represent freedom, self reliance and mobility.

This generation of older drivers is especially more reliant on a car to get around – whether it is to go shopping, visiting family and friends, or getting to medical appointments.

Having a driver's licence is an important part of staying independent. However, what happens when you can no longer drive?

Poor transportation and mobility will have a detrimental effect on the health and safety of older people.

The associated health and community costs will increase dramatically if attention to this issue is not addressed soon.



The Ageing Issue

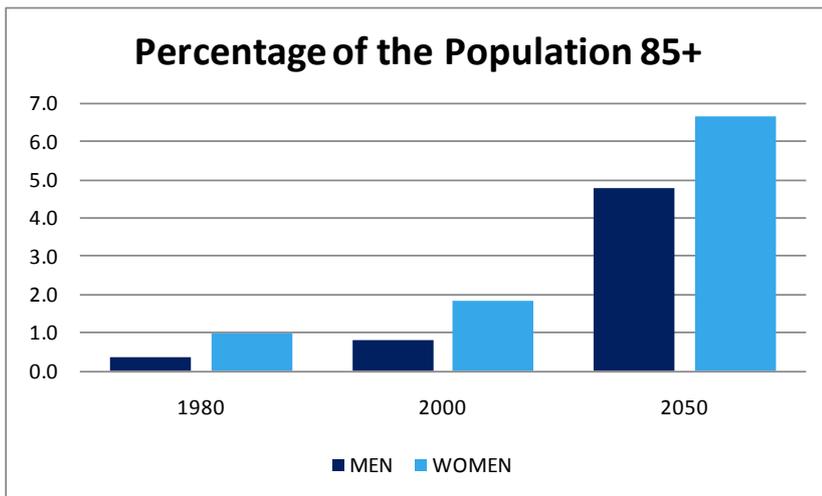


Figure 1: Population projection of people aged 85 years and over.

The population of NSW will continue to become increasingly larger and significantly older than it is today.

The State's population is projected to increase from 6.75 million people in 2006 to almost 8.7 million people in 2031.

A significant proportion of the increase will be people aged 65 and older, and those over 85 years will increase at an even faster rate (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008).

Over 65 year olds make up 13.5% of the population in NSW (ABS, 2008). Their numbers will increase to over one in five (20.6%) by 2031, when there will be almost two million people aged 65 years and over in NSW.

The impact of the increase in the age of the population is more significant amongst even older groups.

The number of people aged over 85 years is set to nearly double over the next 20 years, from 1.6% of the population to 3%, which represents approximately 170,000 extra people aged 85 and over in 2031 compared to 2006.

The 25 year period from 2031 to 2056 further demonstrates the significance of these trends.

By 2056, the NSW population is projected to be 10.2 million with 23.5% of those being over 65 years and 5.1% over 85 years.

The median age will also climb rapidly, rising from 36.8 years in 2006 to 40.6 in 2031 and 42.8 years by 2056.

One of the challenges is meeting the transport needs of this ageing but mobile population.

We will see a significant increase in the number of older people who will not be able to drive and will need to find alternative transport.

In NSW, there are currently 833,022 drivers over 60 years old who will need to plan for their future mobility (Roads & Traffic Authority, 2009).



Moving to Regional NSW - Any Transport There?

The location where Australians choose to live as they age will be important.

Most of Australia's population is concentrated in two widely separated coastal regions - the south-east and east, and the south-west.

Of the two regions, the south-east and east is by far the largest in area and population.



The population within these regions is concentrated in urban centres, particularly the state and territory capital cities.

As people get older they are choosing to have a sea change or a tree change. This is when suddenly being dependent on alternative transport for access to basic services can be a major problem.

In NSW, the coastal towns north of Sydney and Newcastle are beginning to see large growth in older residents, as are towns such as Kiama to Sydney's south and the Blue Mountains.

Figure 2 indicates that areas projected to grow the most are Richmond-Tweed, the Mid-North Coast, and the South Eastern region, all of which are regional coastal areas.

These same three areas are also projected to have the largest increases in the proportion of the population over 65 years.

The Hunter and Illawarra regions are also expected to experience the proportion of people aged over 65 years to double by 2031.

Sydney will continue to grow strongly like the coastal regions, although the population will not age as quickly, indicating that the ageing population is projected to shift to the coast.

To illustrate the magnitude of these trends, the South Eastern region is

projected to have a 134% increase in the population over 65 years, in comparison to an 83% increase for Sydney.

The third cluster were the inland regional areas such as the Far West and Northern districts which are not projected to grow or age as quickly as the Sydney or coastal regions.

For instance the Far West is expected to experience a 16% decrease in population, yet the proportion over 65 years is still slated to increase by more than a third.

This reinforces the need to start planning and implementing alternative transport options for people who are living in regional and rural areas.

People living in these areas may not even have a footpath, let alone any alternative transport options, and specialist medical facilities may simply not be available locally.

Without family to help them get around sea changers and tree changers may end up being stranded and unable to access basic services. A visit to the doctor or even a trip to the shops may become extremely difficult.

In many cases, moving back to the city will not be an option for these people. Once you sell out of the capital city property market it becomes very difficult to buy back, particularly if you are on a fixed income.

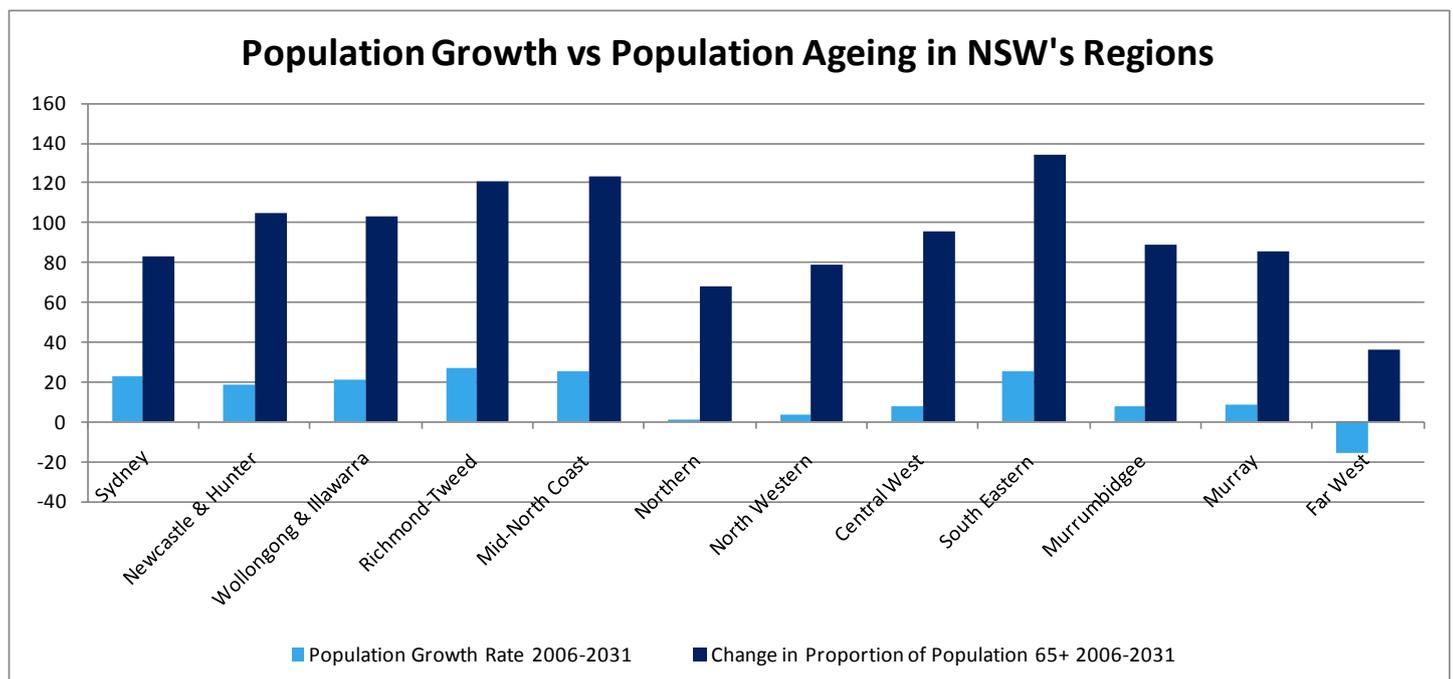


Figure 2: Population growth versus population ageing in NSW Regions

There will need to be better alternative transport in the regions.

The economics of public transport will make delivering traditional forms of public transport in regional areas very challenging.

There will be low levels of patronage where people will not be commuting for work and there is no existing public transport infrastructure in regional areas.

It is also vital that any future planning has a regional focus to ensure that all forms of transport and mobility are integrated at a regional level.



How Will We Get Around Without a Car?



Driving is an integral part of peoples' lives – it is the key to their independence and freedom – they can go shopping, visit friends and relatives, and go to medical appointments.

It enables them to maintain social contacts and participate in community activities. It is a key contributor to peoples' quality of life.

The degree to which older people are reliant on their car will affect their resistance to reducing or stopping driving altogether.

The consequences of not having the freedom to get around in their car are enormous for older people.

It can have a detrimental effect on one's health and safety as research has found that driving cessation is associated with increased depressive symptoms in older people.

A recent NRMA (2010) survey revealed that only a third of people (33%) aged 60 to 70 years old have put a lot or some thought into what they would do if they could no longer drive. Many people haven't even considered it.

Interestingly, 16% of people aged 80 years or more still think it will be a long time before they need to think about what they would do if they could no longer drive.

There will be many older drivers on our roads in the future but, ultimately, giving up driving is likely to be an issue that will be faced by many people at some stage in their lives.

For many, the prospect of driving less, or not at all, is made all the more stressful because they have little knowledge of transport alternatives and lack the experience in using them.

For others the transition from driving to non-driving is anticipated and planned.

In these cases familiarity with transport alternatives has been gained over time and these alternatives are used confidently.

NRMA believes that there is a great need to prepare for the mobility and transport needs of our ageing population.

Research needs to be undertaken to assess the current and future accessibility and transport needs of non-drivers at a local and state level.

People also need to be provided with information about what transport options are available to help them maintain their existing level of mobility when they can no longer drive.



Public Transport

It is a myth that older people can use public transport when they limit or stop driving.

For a start in many regional and rural areas, and in outer metropolitan suburbs of cities, public transport is limited.

An NRMA (2010) survey showed that 23% of drivers who require assistance with their mobility have difficulty accessing public transport in their local area and 42% don't use public transport.

Some of the most widely-reported reasons for not using public transport, when it is available, are the fear of crowds, security issues, and the heightened risk of a fall.

This fear is well founded with older people suffering serious injuries from falls, often resulting in permanent disability or death.

Most public transport is unsuitable for older people.

Some railway stations have been made more accessible, but many stations still have a lot of stairs and still do not have lifts, and it is unlikely that they will for many years.

The dwell time of trains at platforms will also need to increase as older people take longer to get on and off trains.

Public transport providers might also need to run smaller, more localised services.

This is not just to negotiate narrow streets that have been traffic calmed, but to get older and less mobile people to where they need to go.

For example, even in Sydney, very few major hospitals are close enough to railway stations for many older people to make the walk between the station and hospital comfortably.



This means we will need to look at things like frequent shuttle bus services and more home visits.

There are some good examples of this already occurring with Leichhardt Council mini buses taking people to Balmain and Royal Prince Alfred Hospitals.

However, this will need to become much more widespread and coordinated, especially as people may need to travel across regions to get specialised care.

NRMA believes that public transport needs to be reviewed to ensure that the needs of older people are properly taken into account, and are planned for and implemented.

Scenario: Norma in Byron Bay

Norma and her husband Norman moved to Byron Bay after they retired for a well deserved sea change. Their daughter Sally lives in Sydney with her husband and two children.

Norma and Norman were quite active members in the community and volunteered most days of the week.

After six years of living in Byron Bay, Norman unexpectedly fell ill and passed away. Norman was the only driver in the family and now Norma struggles to get around and do the basic things like her grocery shopping.

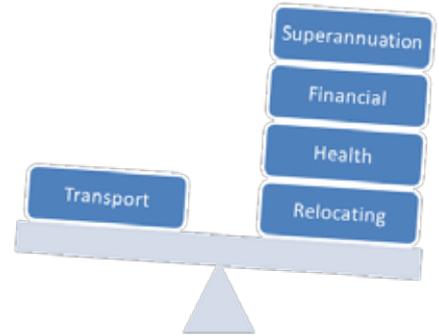
Norma feels isolated and depressed because she can no longer do the things she enjoys or even the basic essentials.



Retirement

An NRMA (2010) survey found that only one third of people started to think about their transport needs when they were thinking about their retirement.

We found that superannuation, financial planning, health and relocating needs came highest up the list when thinking about retiring.



With the current retirement age of 65 years, people are still driving and are very mobile.

Long term decisions about their retirement are made without thinking about their future transport and mobility needs.

It is important that people start thinking about how they will get around if they can no longer drive.

For example, moving house or moving to a different area requires the consideration of a transport plan should driving become too difficult in future years.

NRMA believes that it is important for governments to inform people planning their retirement so they understand the implications of transport on their future.

Many people will not live in retirement villages with purpose designed facilities so the issues will need to be addressed across all our communities.



Infrastructure

Road infrastructure has an impact on the lives of older people whether they are a driver, pedestrians or when they are using a wheelchair or motorised scooter.

More than half of those that NRMA surveyed (56%) felt that the quality of footpaths in their local area were inadequate.

If something as basic as a footpath is not up to scratch for our current population, now is the time to start planning and addressing the infrastructure needs for our future ageing population.

All levels of government need to work together to ensure that a coordinated approach to infrastructure design and delivery is undertaken so that older and less mobile commuters can be accommodated.

Road owners, particularly councils, will need to modify or replace fixtures and fittings such as roundabouts, chicanes, and speed humps that may serve safety and traffic management functions so as to accommodate services like low floor buses.

Changes to the current road infrastructure could include:

- Larger, better positioned, and easier to read street and direction signs.
- Elimination of confusing and multiple signs. Signs should be placed higher, overhead, and in advance to announce upcoming streets.
- Crossings and pedestrian areas in general can be made safer. Reflective pavement markings to increase visibility should be used along with countdown signals so pedestrians know the amount of time needed to safely cross.
- Longer walk times for slower-paced pedestrians and larger buttons that are easier to reach.

- Pedestrian refuge islands on large streets.
- Signalled intersection with right turn lanes and right turn arrows, as they are one of the most dangerous traffic manoeuvres for seniors.
- Eyesight begins to worsen around age 40 and by 60, a driver needs three times more light to see than at 16. For these reasons, better lighting for highways and city streets is needed.
- Traffic signals will need to be larger. Providing more contrast, back plates for traffic signals also improve visibility since people's contrast sensitivity decreases with age.





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