



**Getting There:**  
A Homeless Youth Transport Policy Proposal  
For Victoria

## Getting There: A Homeless Youth Public Transport Policy Proposal for Victoria

### Summary

Youthlaw is a specialist community legal centre for young people up to the age of 25 and this proposal was initiated because of the significant volume of transport fines we deal with, particularly where young people are homeless or experiencing serious family issues. From a legal and a public policy perspective it is counter productive to fine young people who are homeless when they will eventually have their fines waived due to the recognised 'special circumstance' of homelessness.

### The Issues

- Young homeless people live on very low incomes. The costs of purchasing short-term accommodation, food and other necessities result in it being unlikely that young homeless people can afford to buy a ticket, even the half fare concession price, at the time of travel.
- Public transport is the main mode of transport for young homeless people and essential for access to homelessness services and networks that support young homeless people during these crisis periods.
- Young homeless people often travel without a ticket and may over time accumulate significant related fines. It is difficult, if not impossible, for young homeless people to pay these fines, which escalate with non-payment.
- Homeless youth surveyed by Youthlaw in 2007 had an average of \$973.00 in outstanding fines each. Public Transport fines lead to a downward spiral that may contribute to cyclical or long-term homelessness. The 78 young homeless people surveyed had outstanding fines totalling more than \$25,000 between them whilst the 97 non-homeless disadvantaged young people who were not experiencing homelessness had \$3,590 in outstanding fines between them.
- The Department of Infrastructure, the police and the courts expend significant resources processing and prosecuting fines that are typically withdrawn or dismissed due to special circumstances. The burden of administration is wider and includes considerable community sector resources spent on assisting young homeless people with public transport fines.

### The Proposal

**Issue young homeless people who satisfy agreed eligibility criteria with a full concession card enabling them free public transport within Victoria for a period of 6-12 months.**

### Outcomes

1. Full concession cards for public transport would enable young homeless people to;
  - better access to services,
  - be active participants in the community, maintain their relationships with friends and family, and
  - seek education and employment opportunities and ultimately create pathways out of homelessness.
2. This is a far less expensive initiative for government than continuously providing support services if they remain homeless for an extended period.
3. Free public transport is not unprecedented in Victoria, with some examples given below

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## Introduction

This proposal comes at a time when youth homelessness is at the forefront of the federal government's agenda.

Victoria is cited as innovative in youth homeless policies and effectively implementing them. Youthlaw's legal practice targets homeless and disadvantaged young people. Our experience over the past 5 years is that services and assistance available to young homeless people in Victoria are often inaccessible to them because they cannot afford public transport.

These young people experience chronic instability which includes financial crisis. They generally purchase short-term accommodation, food and other necessities at relatively high cost.

Public transport is the main mode of transport for these young people and essential for them to access the services and networks that support them during crisis periods. They therefore often travel without a ticket and over time accumulate significant related fines which escalate with non-payment. Public transport fines that are left unpaid can lead to a downward spiral that can result in cyclical or long-term homelessness. Youthlaw sees only a fraction of those receiving fines and those we assist frequently attend when the fines are hundreds and thousands of dollars.

The Department of Infrastructure, the police and the courts expend enormous resources in processing and prosecuting these fines, particularly given the young person has no fixed address. The community sector also uses significant limited resources and time to assist young people with public transport fines.

Access to public transport is integral to the social inclusion of young homeless people. Social inclusion is beneficial to society by increasing economic productivity and a sense of community. It also enables active participation in the community, maintenance of important relationships with friends and family, educational and employment opportunities and ultimately contributes to pathways out of homelessness.

The cost of not assisting young people who are homeless to reintegrate into family and community, is the cost of providing support services for those who are homeless for an extended period and the many long-term and related costs to society.

Free public transport is not a common form of assistance, but is not unprecedented in Victoria, and similar assistance is provided to those in financial crisis through the Victorian Utility Relief Grant Scheme. Overseas governments are increasingly recognising the need to address the issue of access to public transport for young homeless people. The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act in the United States for example requires States to provide free public transport for young homeless people to their educational institution, thereby reducing the risk of their falling out of education.

## 1. Social Inclusion

**1.1** Young homeless people, like all Australians, are entitled to full protection of their human rights including the right to fully participate in and contribute to society.<sup>1</sup> Participating and contribution to society is often referred to as social inclusion.<sup>2</sup> Conversely, social exclusion refers to constraints that prevent people from participating adequately in society, including education, employment, public services and activities.<sup>3</sup> When specific to transport policy, social exclusion is sometimes referred to as

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<sup>1</sup> Human Rights & Equal Opportunity Commission (2008) *Homelessness is a Human Rights Issue: White Paper a Good First Step*, available at <[http://www.hreoc.gov.au/about/media/media\\_releases/2008/6\\_08.html](http://www.hreoc.gov.au/about/media/media_releases/2008/6_08.html)> accessed 23 April 2008.

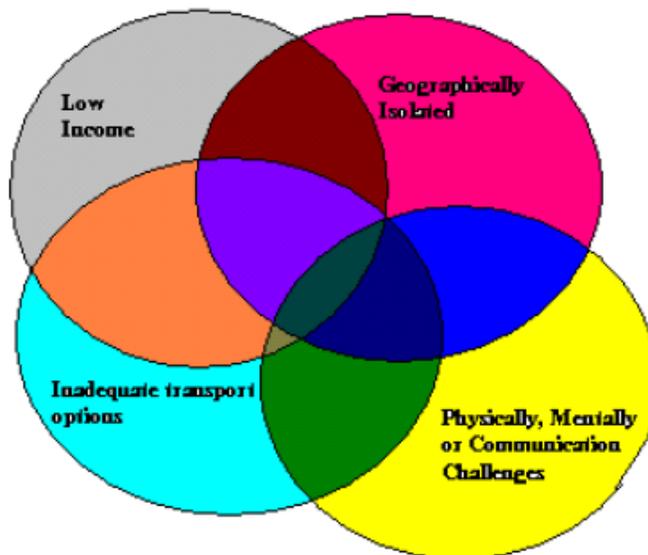
<sup>2</sup> T. Litman (2003) *Social Inclusion as a Transport Planning Issue in Canada*, Victoria: Victorian Transport Policy Institute, available at <[http://www.vtpi.org/soc\\_ex.pdf](http://www.vtpi.org/soc_ex.pdf)> accessed 23 April 2008, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

transport disadvantage.<sup>4</sup> Being unable to afford transport can affect social inclusion directly, by effectively making transport inaccessible, as well as indirectly, by reducing the amount of money left for other things such as food and clothing.<sup>5</sup> Factors that contribute to social exclusion as identified by Todd Litman, founder and executive director of the Victoria Transport Policy Institute in Canada, can be seen in Figure 1.<sup>6</sup> Young homeless people face most, if not all of these challenges.

**Figure 1.**<sup>7</sup>

**Social Exclusion Results From Multiple Challenges**



*A combination of factors that often overlap contribute to social exclusion. The more challenges a person faces, the more they are likely to be excluded from important activities and opportunities.*

Litman has also developed a Transport Social Exclusion Index, an adapted version of which accompanies this document as Attachment 1. Using Litman's Transport Social Exclusion Index, the vast majority of young homeless people would be categorised as socially excluded. Litman argues that basic mobility can be considered a right when it concerns travel for the purposes of accessing emergency services, health care, housing, basic food and clothing, education and employment, and public services.<sup>8</sup>

**1.2** The concept of social inclusion has gained currency within Australia in recent years as exemplified by the Deputy Prime Minister Julia Gillard's Social Inclusion Ministry. The recent 2020 Summit Strengthening Communities and Supporting Working Families stream led by World Vision CEO Tim Costello recommended that social inclusion be a national priority<sup>9</sup>. Social inclusion is beneficial to society, particularly for young people, the unemployed, and those at risk for social problems, as inclusion may have a particularly high value to society by increasing economic productivity.<sup>10</sup> *A Fairer Victoria* recognises the importance of social inclusion and aims to increase the wellbeing and social engagement of homeless people by encouraging them to actively participate in community activities.<sup>11</sup> This same policy objective is evidenced in *Youth Homelessness Action Plan 2006* (YHAP) which says:

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p. 2.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p. 9.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p. 7.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p. 2.

<sup>9</sup> Australian Government (2008) *Australia 2020*, available at <<http://www.australia2020.gov.au/topics/communities.cfm>> accessed 25 April 2008.

<sup>10</sup> *Social Inclusion as a Transport Planning Issue in Canada*, above n 2, p. 5.

<sup>11</sup> Government of Victoria (2006) *A Fairer Victoria: Progress and Next Steps June 2006*, Melbourne: State Government of Victoria, p. 10.

*“We need to recognise that pathways to independence require connection: to family, significant others and community and to real opportunities. Moving towards independence also involves social, vocational and financial assistance.”<sup>12</sup>*

And in Victorian government’s youth policy, *Future Directions*:

*“We want to make sure that they not only have access to fundamental services (like education, training, jobs and transport), but also opportunities to make a difference, to have their say...”<sup>13</sup>*

The benefits of social inclusion initiatives are minimised where current transport policy in practice prevents young homeless people from accessing public transport and engaging with their communities, and instead responds punitively at a time of financial and emotional crisis in the young peoples’ lives.

## 2. Accessibility

**2.1** A broad view of accessibility is central to the concept of social inclusion. Accessibility does not just mean physical accessibility, it can also include economic accessibility.<sup>14</sup> Viewing accessibility more broadly is essential to overcoming problems resulting from inaccessibility of services. The UK Social Exclusion Unit advocates this broader view of accessibility:

*“Accessibility depends on several things: does transport exist between the people and the service? Do people know about the transport, trust its reliability and feel safe using it? Are people physically and financially able to access transport? Are the services and activities within a reasonable distance?”<sup>15</sup>*

*A Fairer Victoria* recognises a number of barriers to participating in social and economic life and young homeless people often face all of the identified barriers.<sup>16</sup> *A Fairer Victoria* aims to tackle disadvantage by introducing *“innovative approaches to help disadvantaged groups access services and opportunities available to other members of the Victorian community.”<sup>17</sup>* More recently the Government launched the ‘Improving Options and Reducing Barriers – Addressing Transport Disadvantage’ report which outlines the Brumby Government’s current initiatives to address transport disadvantage.<sup>18</sup> The report makes it a priority to make services more affordable to targeted groups. It is now time for an innovative approach to public transport which is available to the vast majority of the Victorian community, but is inaccessible to young homeless people because of financial incapacity.

**2.2** Many young homeless people often choose to travel without a ticket, and risk criminal consequences rather than not access essential services, or community networks. Although the Victoria Government prides itself on making a wide variety of services available to young homeless people, in practice young homeless people are frequently unable to access these services.

<sup>12</sup> Government of Victoria (2006) *Creating Connections: Youth Homelessness Action Plan Stage 2: 2006-2010*, Melbourne: Department of Human Services, p. 1.

<sup>13</sup> Government of Victoria (2006) *Future Directions: An Action Agenda for Young Victorians*, Melbourne: State Government of Victoria, p. 2.

<sup>14</sup> Centre for Transport Studies, Imperial College (2006) *Social Inclusion: Transport Aspects*, UK Department for Transport, available at <<http://www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/inclusion/>> accessed 23 April 2008, p. 4.

<sup>15</sup> UK Social Exclusion Unit (2003) *Making the Connections: Final Report on Transport and Social Exclusion*, London: Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, p. 6.

<sup>16</sup> Government of Victoria (2005) *A Fairer Victoria*, Melbourne: Department of Premier and Cabinet, p. 19.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>18</sup> See <http://www.doi.vic.gov.au/DOI/Internet/transport.nsf/AllDocs/AB742159B0AB04EC4A25699A000055E5?OpenDocument#addr>

### Case Study: David

David\*, a young aboriginal teenager, left home two years ago because of alcohol abuse and violence in his family home. He is afraid he will go down the same path as family members and wants to make a positive change in his life. David suffers from depression and feeling isolated because he is homosexual. He wants to find secure accommodation and seek help for his depression. Since first becoming homeless in May 2006 David has received more than 17 fines for not having a valid ticket on public transport. Currently, David's outstanding fines total more than \$4,500. David sometimes feels hopeless about starting his new life because he doesn't know how he will be able to find money for a bond or rent with so much accumulated debt.

**2.3** Some young homeless people elect not to travel on public transport because they cannot afford the cost of travel and do not want to risk criminal consequences.<sup>19</sup> The Royal District Nursing Service's study of homeless people and health care found that the most significant obstacles to using health services is a lack of transport.<sup>20</sup> This is reflected in the findings of Melbourne University's *Project i*, a comprehensive four year study of young homeless people in Melbourne. *Project i* found that on average only half those who believed they needed help for health and mental health related issues actually sought help.<sup>21</sup> The recent report of the National Youth Commission (NYC) Inquiry into Youth Homelessness also identified transport as a significant barrier faced by young homeless people in accessing services.<sup>22</sup> The National Youth Commission found that unaffordable transport was also a barrier for young homeless people seeking employment:<sup>23</sup>

*"Young homeless people need public transport to attend school, find work, access services and maintain connections with their community but are prevented from and punished for doing so because of their inability to pay."*<sup>24</sup>

Even free services can be inaccessible to young homeless people because they do not have the financial capacity to afford transport to and from those services.<sup>25</sup>

**2.4** *The Victorian Homelessness Strategy: Directions For Change* (VHS) opens with a forward by then Minister for Community Services and Housing, Bronwyn Pike:

*"Addressing inequality and disadvantage and ensuring that in times of crisis Victorians have access to the support they need are key commitments of the [Victorian] Government."*

Young homeless people are in crisis and although extreme poverty is not the only disadvantage they face, it is in this instance preventing them from seeking the help they need be it medical, educational, or employment related or communicating and participating in their families and communities. Accessibility must be broadly understood so that the cost of public transport for young homeless people is seen for what it is: an insurmountable barrier to accessing support, participating in society, and ultimately finding a pathway out of homelessness.

<sup>19</sup> S. Forell et al (2005) *No Home, No Justice?* Sydney: Law and Justice Foundation of New South Wales, p. 117.

<sup>20</sup> As cited in Commonwealth Advisory Committee on Homelessness (2001) *Working Towards a National Homelessness Strategy*, Canberra: Department of Family and Community Services, p. 38.

<sup>21</sup> B. Rossiter et al (2003) *Living Well? Homeless Young People in Melbourne*, Melbourne: The Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, La Trobe University, available at <[http://www.projecti.org.au/research/Living\\_well.pdf](http://www.projecti.org.au/research/Living_well.pdf)> accessed 23 April 2008, p. 11.

<sup>22</sup> National Youth Commission Inquiry into Homeless Youth (2008) *Australia's Homeless Youth*, Brunswick: National Youth Commission, p. 267.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, p. 119. This was also acknowledged in *Working Towards a National Homelessness Strategy*, above n 18, p. 16.

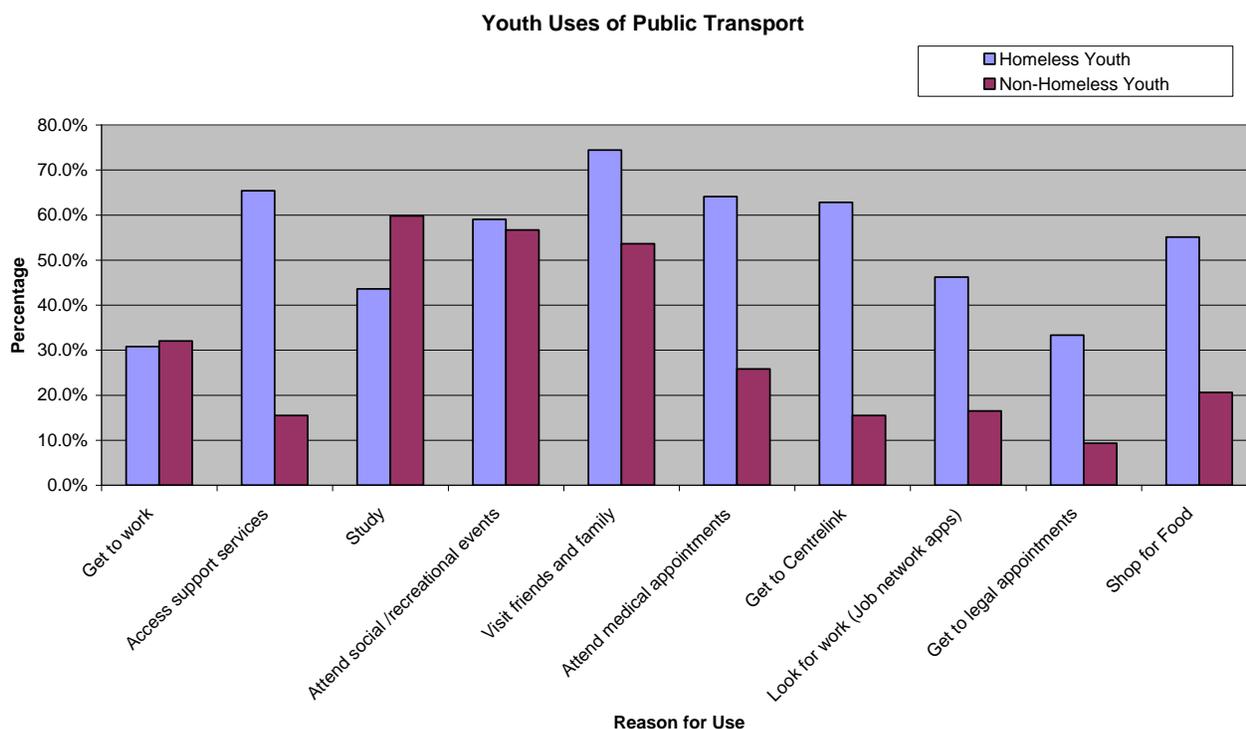
<sup>24</sup> *Australia's Homeless Youth*, above n 21, p. 289.

<sup>25</sup> *Working Towards a National Homelessness Strategy*, above n 18, p. 33.

### 3. Public Transport Use

3.1 A Fairer Victoria recognises that “access to transport plays a critical role in the quality of life of every one of us.”<sup>26</sup> Public transport plays an essential role in connecting young homeless people to support services, education and employment opportunities, and friends and family. In most cases it is the only available mode of transport for young homeless people. Unlike other young people who can rely on friends and family for rides, sometimes afford their own private transport as well as take public transport, young homeless people often have no alternatives for travelling distances too far to walk.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, young homeless people are often in more need of ongoing access to support services than other young people.

Figure 2.



3.2 Youthlaw and Travellers’ Aid conducted a survey of the public transport behaviours of 175 young people. Of these young people, 78 were identified as homeless. These young homeless people used public transport to access services an average 23% more than the non-homeless young people surveyed.<sup>28</sup> Figure 2 shows the comparison of public transport use between homeless and non-homeless young people by type of service accessed. This survey demonstrates how essential public transport is to young homeless people; 74% of young homeless people use public transport to visit friends and family, 65% to access services, and 64% to attend medical appointments<sup>29</sup>.

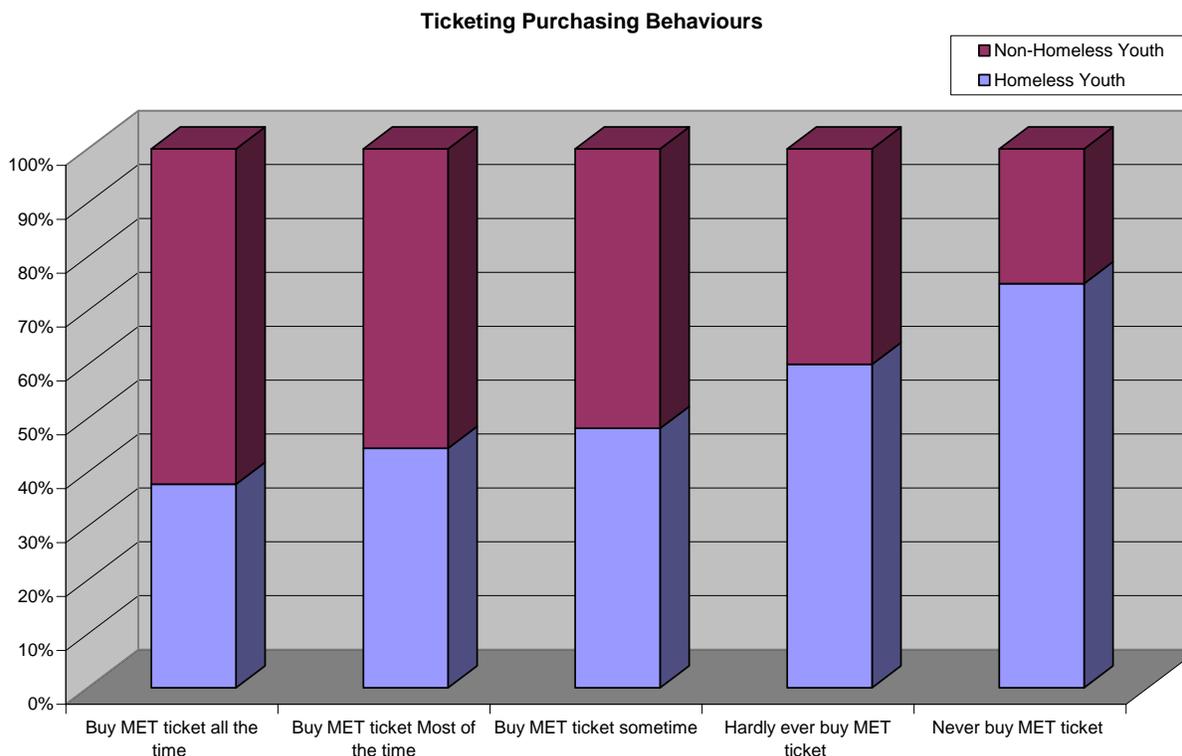
<sup>26</sup> A Fairer Victoria: Progress and Next Steps June 2006, above n 11, p. 44.

<sup>27</sup> Australia’s Homeless Youth, above n 21, p. 289.

<sup>28</sup> Data on File, Youthlaw 2008.

<sup>29</sup> Figure 2: Data on File, Youthlaw 2008.

**Figure 3.**



**3.3** Despite the essential role that public transport plays in the lives of young homeless people, they are barred from accessing transport without fare evading because even the minimal costs of concession tickets are simply unaffordable. Many young homeless people are living on very low incomes, and the costs of purchasing short-term accommodation, food and other necessities result in young people not being able to afford to pay the ticket fee, even at half fare concession price, at the time of travel. For the 22% of young homeless people that do not have a source of income<sup>30</sup>, a concession ticket is obviously not affordable. Other young homeless people who have limited income from government benefits or other sources are still unable to afford the cost of public transport because of additional expenses they incur as a result of homelessness. For example, Youth Allowance for those living away from home is \$177.20 per week<sup>31</sup> and a rooming house costs \$160.00 per week<sup>32</sup>. That leaves young people with a weekly budget of \$17.20 for food, clothing, medicines, transport, and any other needs. Yet a weekly concession Metcard for zone 1&2 is \$23.70 – unquestionably unaffordable.

**3.4** It is one of the most common and frequently committed crimes by young homeless people.<sup>33</sup> Yet for many it is a crime essential to survival.<sup>34</sup> Figure 3 shows a comparison between Metlink purchasing behaviours of the homeless and non-homeless young people surveyed by Youthlaw. A telling incline is observed in the data. It is also relevant to note that of the young homeless people that stated that they ‘Buy a MET ticket all the time’ several also stated that they had received transport fines, likely indicating an intention to pay but a lack of capacity to do so.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>30</sup> *Living Well? Homeless Young People in Melbourne*, above n 19, p. 10.

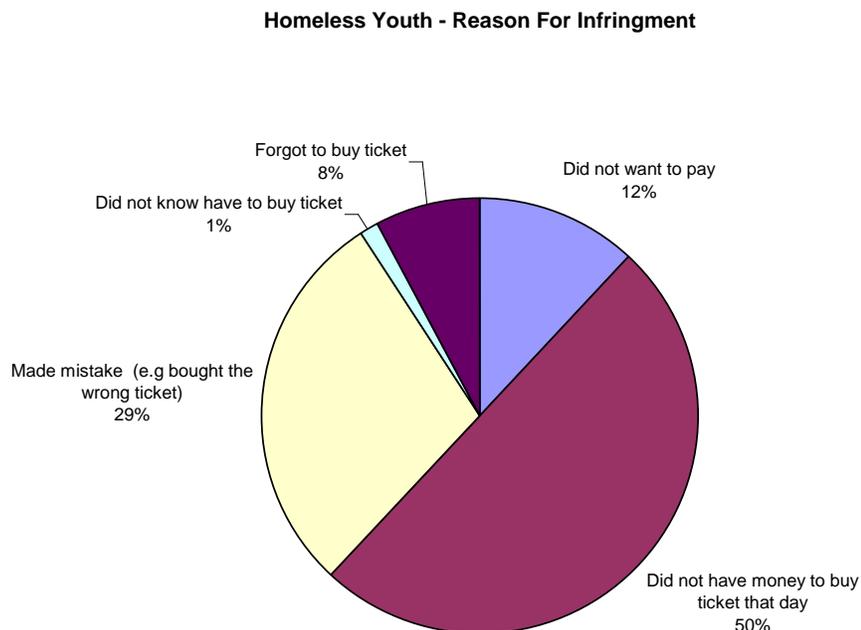
<sup>31</sup> Centrelink <[http://www.centrelink.gov.au/internet/internet.nsf/payments/pay\\_how\\_yal.htm](http://www.centrelink.gov.au/internet/internet.nsf/payments/pay_how_yal.htm)> accessed 30 April 2008.

<sup>32</sup> Data on file, Frontyard 2008.

<sup>33</sup> *Australia’s Homeless Youth*, above n 21, p. 285.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 283.

<sup>35</sup> Data on file, Youthlaw 2008.

**Figure 4.**

Financial and social disadvantage is further entrenched, a sense of hopelessness enforced and emotional and psychological stress exacerbated by fare evasion and the resulting fines incurred by the young homeless person. The Report of the NYC highlighted the concern within the sector of the cumulative effects that fare evasion has on young homeless people:

*“There was recurrent mention of the problems that unemployed and homeless young people have using public transport, where they are apprehended for travelling without a ticket, experience a punitive and often unsympathetic interaction with a transport policeman and then incur mounting fines they can’t pay with subsequent legal action. On-the-spot fines for public transport fare evasion are a counter-productive measure when homeless young people are incapable of paying the fines and need to move from place to place to access services. Avoidance of the authorities because of these unpaid fines further exacerbates the marginalisation of homeless young people.”<sup>36</sup>*

**3.5** Comparisons between homeless and non-homeless young people surveyed by Youthlaw and Traveller’s Aid illustrate the overwhelming burden transport fines have on young homeless people. 68% of young homeless people reported having received transport fines, whilst 42% of non-homeless young people said they had received fines<sup>37</sup>. However, the most striking contrast was evidence in the number of fines still owing: young homeless people with fines owing owed an average of \$973.53 each, and had 168 fines owing between them, whilst non-homeless young people with fines owed an average of \$299.17, and had only 86 fines between them.<sup>38</sup> In total, the 78 young homeless people who completed the survey had outstanding fines totalling more than \$25,000 whilst non-homeless young people only had \$3,590 in outstanding fines between them.<sup>39</sup> Figure 4 shows the reasons

<sup>36</sup> *Australia’s Homeless Youth*, above n 21, p. 298.

<sup>37</sup> Data on file, Youthlaw 2008.

<sup>38</sup> Data on file, Youthlaw 2008.

<sup>39</sup> Data on file, Youthlaw 2008.

young homeless people received fines, indicating that the overwhelming majority did not buy tickets because they did not have the money to do so.<sup>40</sup>

### Case Study: Mark

Mark\* has been homeless since 2005. He left home as a teenager because he was the victim of violence. Since then he has been living between a youth refuge and rooming house which he pays for with Youth Allowance, his only source of income. Mark wants to make changes to his life and find stable accommodation. Case workers at Melbourne City Mission have been impressed with Mark, noting that he has attended all scheduled appointments on time and demonstrated a genuine desire to change his situation. Because Mark moves around a lot, between the youth refuge and the rooming house, and to and from appointments with case workers, he has received many public transport fines for travelling without a valid ticket. To date, Mark has had 16 fines dismissed on the basis of special circumstances. He still has 20 fines outstanding, totally more than \$3,500. It is likely that these fines too will be dismissed on the basis of special circumstances but not until after a great deal of work and resource expenditure by case workers at Youthlaw, the Department of Infrastructure, and the courts.

## 4. Prevention & Intervention

**4.1** Providing young homeless people with the services and opportunities they need to create a pathway out of homelessness and become contributing members of society is far less expensive for government in the long run than providing services to those same youth were they to remain homeless for an extended period or even life.<sup>41</sup> The National Youth Commission Inquiry into Youth Homelessness found that the punitive impact of these laws on young people can lead to a downward spiral that heightens the negative consequences of homelessness and can often lead to cyclical or long term homelessness<sup>42</sup>. In the *Youth Homelessness Action Plan* the Victorian government recognises the importance of early intervention and prevention of youth homelessness:

*“Early intervention and prevention of homelessness for young people is particularly important, as this is a time when life patterns and responses to opportunities will be established... Without timely and appropriate support to successfully move to adulthood, many of the young people who become homeless may be caught in cycles of economic and social disadvantage. The Victorian Government and the broader community have a social obligation to protect and support young people who face disadvantage and provide them with every opportunity to participate in, and benefit from, living in the community.”<sup>43</sup>*

**4.2** Young homeless people are in their formative years of life and are creating patterns of behaviour that will be followed for the rest of their adult lives, as such they are at grave risk of cyclical or long term homelessness.<sup>44</sup> Melbourne University’s Project *i* identified a window of opportunity with young homeless people to end cycles of poverty and homelessness.<sup>45</sup> Young homeless people also engage in more risk behaviour and are exposed to more violence than other young people which can have life-long consequences.<sup>46</sup> For example, Project *i* found that 77% of young homeless people in Melbourne

<sup>40</sup> Data on file, Youthlaw 2008.

<sup>41</sup> Government of Victoria (2002) *Victorian Homelessness Strategy: Directions for Change*, Melbourne: Housing and Community Building Division, Department of Human Services, p. 6.

<sup>42</sup> *Australia’s Homeless Youth*, above n 20, p. 287.

<sup>43</sup> Government of Victoria (2004) *Youth Homelessness Action Plan: First Stage Report*, Melbourne: Housing, Department of Human Services, p. 4.

<sup>44</sup> *Youth Homelessness Action Plan: First Stage Report*, above n 40, p. 3.

<sup>45</sup> M. Milburn et al (2006) ‘Cross-National Variations in behavioural Profiles Among Homeless Youth’, *American Journal of Community Psychology*, Vol. 37, No. 1, p. 11.

<sup>46</sup> ‘Cross-National Variations in Behavioural Profiles Among Homeless Youth’, *American Journal of Community Psychology*, above n 41, p. 11.

use drugs, which is 4-6 times more than non-homeless young people,<sup>47</sup> and 72% smoke tobacco every day which is five times more than the national average for the same age group.<sup>48</sup>

**4.3** Early prevention measures necessitate a holistic approach, and in fact homelessness, cannot simply be solved by building more roofs<sup>49</sup>. The National Youth Commission Inquiry into Youth Homelessness found that prevention and early intervention measures for youth is cheaper for government than the assistance required once they have become homeless.<sup>50</sup> Although the Victorian government is leading the nation in providing a variety of services for young homeless people to enable them to overcome their situation, those services are insufficiently accessible because transport is not affordable.

## 5. Sector Strain

**5.1** In 2006-07 the Victorian government spent \$41.8 million towards young homeless people.<sup>51</sup> Some of that funding went towards community sector time and resources spent on providing brokerage funds for MET tickets and assisting young homeless people with public transport fines. Many agencies within the sector reported in the Youthlaw and Traveller's Aid survey that they had workers spending significant time on assisting young people with public transport fines.<sup>52</sup> In the same survey, the majority of agencies reported spending as much as 26-50% of their brokerage funds – money intended for emergency use for provisions such as food – on subsidising transport tickets for youth.<sup>53</sup> Figure 5 shows how many agency workers, of the 72 who completed the survey, reported assisting youth in dealing with public transport related issues and the type of assistance they provided.

**5.2** Over and above the amount of time and resources expended by the community sector, a significant volume of resources are also spent processing and prosecuting fines against homeless young people by Victoria Police, the Department of Infrastructure and the courts. Ultimately many fines are withdrawn or dismissed on the grounds of special circumstances for homelessness, but only after a time consuming process that on average can take 12 months, and sometimes longer.<sup>54</sup> In 2007, the efforts of Youthlaw alone saw more than \$80,000 worth of public transport fines dismissed on the basis of special circumstances.<sup>55</sup>

### Figure 5.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, p. 5.

<sup>48</sup> *Living Well? Homeless Young People in Melbourne*, above n 19, p. 10.

<sup>49</sup> Prime Minister Rudd: "It's not just a question of saying, here's a building, put all the homeless people in it. It doesn't work that way... [We need to] get the overall policy analysis right and then go forward with an integrated solution for the future." 28 January 2008 Press Conference <[http://www.pm.gov.au/media/Interview/2008/interview\\_0047.cfm](http://www.pm.gov.au/media/Interview/2008/interview_0047.cfm)> accessed 30 April 2008.

<sup>50</sup> *Australia's Homeless Youth*, above n 21, p. 14.

<sup>51</sup> *Youth Homelessness Action Plan Stage 2: 2006-2010*, above n 12, p. iv.

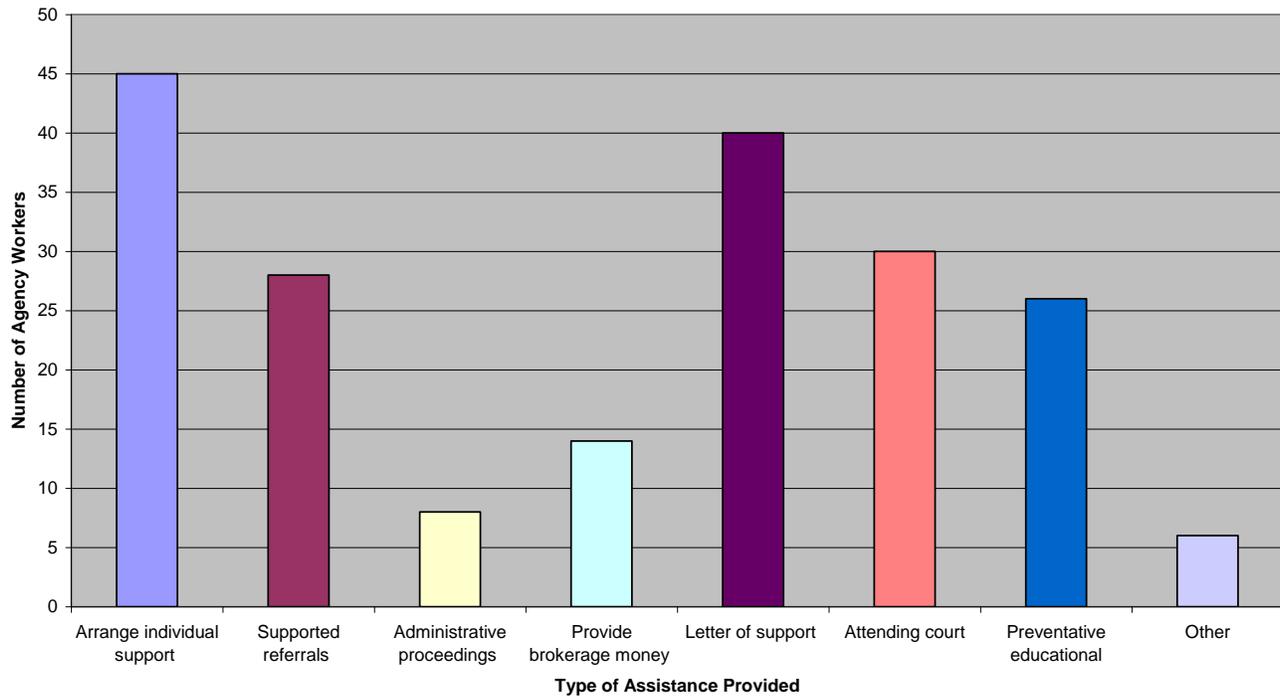
<sup>52</sup> Data on file, Youthlaw.

<sup>53</sup> Data on file, Youthlaw.

<sup>54</sup> Data on file, Youthlaw 2008. This timeframe depends on what stage in the process the young person seeks assistance.

<sup>55</sup> Data on file, Youthlaw.

**Agency Activities**



**5.3** Rather than fruitlessly expending time and resources on the fining process, these situations can be dealt with preventatively by issuing young homeless people with public transport full concession cards. The amount of time and sector funds spent on this issue would be dramatically decreased enabling more money and time to spent on the provision of other services. Similarly, this would relieve existing burdens on the courts and the administrative costs of the Department of Infrastructure.

**Case Study: St Vincent de Paul Youth Outreach Support Services**

*"Fee public transport would ultimately increase young people's chances of moving out of the homelessness sector, into stable housing, employment and education."*

The eight workers at St Vincent de Paul Youth Outreach Support Services provide support to 200 young people each year who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Almost every young person they support requests assistance with transport related issues and the Service spends 16 hours a week on this assistance. St Vincent de Paul Youth Outreach Support Services assists these young people by providing them with Metcards to enable them to attend appointments, which uses approximately \$1,500 of the Service's brokerage funds each year. St Vincent de Paul Youth Outreach Support Services support approximately 50 young people per year as they are engaged with the legal system for the purposes of having their fines withdrawn or dismissed. The Service estimates that they are directly responsible for having 100 fines per year withdrawn or dismissed. St Vincent de Paul Youth Outreach Support Services feels it would be much more beneficial to support vulnerable young people by providing them with free transport which would ultimately assist them to access support services and places of education and employment, thereby increasing their chances of moving out of the homelessness sector and becoming more self reliant. St Vincent de Paul Youth Outreach Support Services believes that significant time and money spent by them on assisting with transport related issues is much better utilised to support young homeless people to achieve their education and employment goals and ultimately find pathways out of homelessness.

## 6. Proposal

**6.1** Assisting young homeless people to find a pathway out of homelessness requires a holistic and multifaceted approach from government and the sector. In a recent interview Prime Minister Kevin Rudd said of homelessness:

*“We have actually got to stand back from this and say, it’s in part the physicality of having enough accommodation, but it’s everything related to that as well, so that you don’t have this recurring cycle of homelessness.”<sup>56</sup>*

**6.2** The Victorian government has endeavored to create an integrated and preventative approach to youth homelessness, and yet youth homelessness is worse than it was 20 years ago.<sup>57</sup> Now is the time to develop policy that has been proven effective overseas<sup>58</sup> to address the issues that contribute to youth homelessness becoming long-term homelessness. More than 2/3rds of agency workers surveyed by Youthlaw and Travellers Aid felt that public transport should be free for young homeless people.<sup>59</sup>

**6.3** It is proposed that to enable social inclusion and to facilitate pathways out of homelessness young homeless people who satisfy strict eligibility criteria would be issued with a full concession card enabling them free public transport within Victoria. This card would be valid for 6-12 months. A worker from support agencies would fill out an application as part of a case management assessment. This assessment would verify the young person’s homelessness status, financial eligibility and need for full travel concession. The young person may then take the application form to a Metlink issuing office where a card or form of ID would then be processed in the same way as student concessions presently are.

**6.4** This proposal is consistent with Recommendation 18.5 by National Youth Commission Inquiry into Youth Homelessness:

**The NYC Inquiry recommends that Centrelink issue a means tested ‘youth card’, which would carry certain entitlements such as free or concession fares on public transport, as a way of reducing fines and punitive outcomes.<sup>60</sup>**

**6.5** Strict eligibility criteria will ensure that full concession cards for young homeless people are issued only to those who require them. There is support within the sector for a two tiered test utilising existing and accepted criteria for homelessness and a means test. The existing criteria for homelessness that has the most support within the sector is the cultural definition developed by Chamberlin and Mackenzie<sup>61</sup> and used by The Australian Bureau of Statistics and Centrelink among others.<sup>62</sup> It identifies three types of homelessness:

Primary – People without conventional accommodation, such as people living on the streets, sleeping in parks, squatting in derelict buildings, or using cars or railway carriages for temporary shelter.

<sup>56</sup> Press Conference, above n 48.

<sup>57</sup> *Australia’s Homeless Youth*, above n 20, p. v.

<sup>58</sup> See Precedents. Also, for example: the Activpass system in Linz, Austria: Linz Aktivpass Brochure available at <<http://portal.linz.gv.at/ServiceResource/booklet/20071018-0740-2243646542.pdf>> accessed 26 April 2008.

<sup>59</sup> Data on file, Youthlaw 2008.

<sup>60</sup> *Australia’s Homeless Youth*, above n 20.

<sup>61</sup> Chamberlain, C. and MacKenzie, D. (1992) ‘Understanding Contemporary Homelessness: Issues of Definition and Meaning’, *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, Vol. 27, No. 4.

<sup>62</sup> For example see: Department of Housing <<http://hnb.dhs.vic.gov.au/OOH/ne5ninte.nsf/childdocs/-DABB793C4B375F1BCA2571330009C35E-4AE47DDD9F5CE7A7CA2571370018BD18?open>> accessed 26 April 2008.

Secondary – People who move frequently from one form of temporary shelter to another. It covers: people using emergency accommodation, such as hostels for the homeless or night shelters; teenagers staying in youth refuges; women and children escaping domestic violence staying in women's refuges; people residing temporarily with other families because they have no accommodation of their own; and those using boarding houses on an occasional or intermittent basis.

Tertiary - People who live in boarding houses on a medium to long-term basis. Residents of private boarding/rooming houses do not have a separate bedroom and living room; they do not have kitchen and bathroom facilities of their own; their accommodation is not self-contained; and they do not have security of tenure provided by a lease.

## 7. Proposal Benefits

**7.1** Implementing this proposal will increase young homeless peoples' social inclusion by facilitating access to support, advocacy, educational, employment, health and welfare services, and enabling them to be active participants in the community, and maintain their relationships with friends and family.

**7.2** Implementing this proposal will reduce agency time and resources currently dedicated to assisting homeless young people with fines and providing them with MET tickets, allowing that time and resources to be spent supporting young homeless people to create pathways out of homelessness.

**7.3** Implementing this proposal is a far less expensive initiative for government than fining young homeless people and processing those fines through the existing system that involves fines proceeding through police, public service processes and the court system before ultimately being withdrawn or dismissed.

## 8. Precedents

**8.1** Government assistance for person's experiencing financial crisis already exists within the essential services sector. Section 3 of *The Essential Services Act 1958* (Vic) lists six essential services, including transport.<sup>63</sup> All of these essential services, with the exception of transport, are provided for under the Victorian Utility Relief Grant Scheme which provides persons in financial crisis with assistance in making their utility payments. To be eligible for the assistance applicants must be registered with their utility provider's hardship program.<sup>64</sup> Registering with the utility provider's hardship program demonstrates a person's intention to pay although they do not have the capacity to pay.<sup>65</sup> By analogy, applying for the full concession card would demonstrate a young homeless person's intention to pay. Research by Youthlaw and Travellers' Aid indicates that most young homeless people do have the intention to pay for public transport but do not have the capacity to do so.

**8.2** In July 2007 the United States Congress celebrated the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act.<sup>66</sup> This Act is the major federal legislative instrument directed at reducing homelessness in the United States. One of the key components of the Act is that it requires States to

<sup>63</sup> *The Essential Services Act 1958* (Vic) s 3(a).

<sup>64</sup> For example, such hardship programs are mandated by legislation such as s 43(3) of the *Electricity Industry Act 2000* (Vic) and s 48G(3) of the *Gas Industry Act 2001* (Vic).

<sup>65</sup> Guidelines No. 21: Energy Retailers' Financial Hardship Policies.

<sup>66</sup> Resolution of the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress available at <[http://www.nlchp.org/content/pubs/SHAYS\\_MV\\_Resolution.pdf](http://www.nlchp.org/content/pubs/SHAYS_MV_Resolution.pdf)> accessed 26 April 2008.

provide free public transport for young homeless people to their educational institution. Transportation to a young homeless person's school of origin is deemed a basic right. This is in response to the Congressional finding that transportation is the number one barrier to education for young homeless people.<sup>67</sup> The National Youth Commission Inquiry into Youth Homelessness found that in Australia approximately two-thirds of the homeless young people aged 12-18 years of age are outside the education system despite being of school age.<sup>68</sup> The Inquiry also found that not having access to transport was a contributing factor.<sup>69</sup> In the United States young homeless people have had a right to free transport to their schools for more than 20 years and yet in Australia many young homeless people are still unable to access education because they cannot afford public transport.

**8.3** Free public transport is not unprecedented in Victoria. In March 2008, the 'Early-Bird' Metcard was expanded to all Connex train services.<sup>70</sup> This ticket enables free travel on all Connex trains for any ticket holder for trips that are completed before 7am.<sup>71</sup> The objective of the scheme is to ease crowding on peak hour trains to further the Victorian Government's commitment to improving public transport services.<sup>72</sup> Anyone can take advantage of the Early-Bird Metcard there is no eligibility criteria for ticket holders, the Government instead is encouraging a 'big-picture' approach which recognises the overall advantage to the community of easing overcrowding on trains. Similarly, the big-picture view clearly demonstrates, as discussed throughout this proposal, the multitude of ways that providing full concession public transport cards to young homeless people will not just benefit the individuals themselves but also the community as a whole.

**8.4** The Vision Impaired Travel Pass allows legally blind persons to travel free on all metropolitan trains, trams, buses, light rail vehicles, and all VLine passenger services, including VLine buses. It is renewable every five years and issued by the Metlink Central Pass Office. For many blind Victorians public transport is their primary mode of transportation; the same is true for most young homeless people. Unlike blind persons, young homeless peoples' situation need not be life long – accessible public transport is one fundamental way of preventing it from becoming so.

## Conclusion

This proposal recommends the issuing of full concession cards to young homeless people. Full concession cards for public transport would facilitate the social inclusion of young homeless people and assist them in creating pathways out of homelessness. The opportunity now presents itself for Victoria to lead the nation in assisting young homeless people through innovative preventive means that benefit both the individuals themselves and the community as a whole.

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<sup>67</sup> U.S. Department of Education's McKinney-Vento Report to Congress for Fiscal Year 2000 <<http://www.ed.gov/programs/homeless/guidance.pdf>> accessed 23 April 2008.

<sup>68</sup> *Australia's Homeless Youth*, above n 20, p. 68.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 182.

<sup>70</sup> Viclink <[http://www.viclink.com.au/news/media\\_releases/metropolitan\\_trains/early\\_bird\\_frequently\\_asked\\_questions#1](http://www.viclink.com.au/news/media_releases/metropolitan_trains/early_bird_frequently_asked_questions#1)> accessed 26 April 2008.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> Ashley Gardiner, 'Connex to provide free train travel to ease crush', 18 September 2007, *Herald Sun*.

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## Homeless Youth Transport Social Inclusion Index

Factor	Definition	Indicators	Rating
<b>Mobility Need</b>	Number of 'essential' trips outside the home a person must make.	Not enrolled in school	
		Not employed or seeking employment	
		Not a primary caregiver for children or elderly or disabled adults	
		Does not have special medical requirements (i.e. ongoing treatment)	
		Does not have responsibilities that require frequent travel	
<b>Land Use Access</b>	Average travel distance to common destinations, based on land use clustering and mix, and roadway network connectivity.	Food store within 0.5 km from residence	
		Support services within 0.5 km from residence	
		Family home within 0.5 km from residence	
		Centerlink office within 0.5 km from residence	
		Work or study within 0.5 km from residence	
		Hospital within 0.5 km from residence	
<b>Physical &amp; Communication Ability</b>	An individual's physical and communications ability.	Can walk one kilometre	
		Can bicycle three kilometres	
		Can speak & read English	
		Has a residential telephone	
		Has residential internet access	
<b>Physical Location</b>	An individual's residential location.	Has ongoing stable accommodation	
		Lives in metropolitan Melbourne	
<b>Automobile Access</b>	An individual's ability to use an automobile.	Has full drivers licence	
		Lives in household with motor vehicle	
		Owens a motor vehicle (not shared)	
<b>Mobility Options</b>	Number of non-automobile mobility options available to an individual for local travel.	Owens a bicycle	
		Public transport within 05. km from residence	
		Use of other local transport service (i.e. school bus)	
<b>Financial Wealth</b>	Ability to pay for transport services. (Select all that apply)	Is not entitled to any government pensions	
		Has income of more than \$274 pw	
		Has income of more than \$415 pw	
		Has income of more than \$563 pw	
		Has income of more than \$743 pw	
<b>Total</b>			

*Less than 15 (50%) indicates a high probability of social exclusion.*

This index has been adapted from Todd Litman (2003) *Social Inclusion as a Transport Planning Issue in Canada*, Victoria: Victorian Transport Policy Institute, available at <[http://www.vtpi.org/soc\\_ex.pdf](http://www.vtpi.org/soc_ex.pdf)> accessed 23 April 2008, p. 13.