



## Advocating for our students

### Reducing transport barriers to accessing education

Transport is viewed as a major barrier to participation in education for Wodonga TAFE current and prospective students, as well as the North East Victoria region.

Regional and remote communities have a significant disadvantage regarding education opportunities, as opposed to their metropolitan counterparts.

This disadvantage increases within remote communities and local government areas (LGAs) in the region, such as Indigo, Towong, and Alpine Shires.

While these communities continue to remain disconnected via public transport, communities and industries will become even more isolated and placed at greater disadvantage for accessing education.

In order to increase participation in education, public transport in these regions needs positive change.



**WODONGATAFE**

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## ► How this affects Wodonga TAFE's community

Wodonga TAFE's McKoy Street and Logic campuses welcome over 4000 students every year, and are the places of work for over 400 staff.

Inaccessibility can greatly affect a person's life. Wodonga TAFE commissioned an internal report to identify the transport issues facing our current and prospective students, staff, and the community. Research was conducted through consulting internal and external stakeholders in face-to-face meetings.

These consultations took place with over 80 members and the key findings mirrored those from the National, State and Local reports, including:

- Public transport routes and timing are not meeting student and community needs.
- Public transport timetables/information can be difficult to understand.
- Single use pre-paid vouchers are not available for public transport. (Term vouchers are available)
- Public transport amenities are not always clean and safe.
- Crossborder anomalies exist regarding fares and payment options (NSW have EFTPOS facilities, Victoria is cash only).
- Currently only one transport service to Wodonga TAFE Logic Campus. This departs McKoy Street for Logic Campus at 7:25am and departs Logic returning to McKoy Street at 4:15pm.
- Currently only a hail and stop service along Moorefield Park Drive, near Wodonga TAFE's Trades Training Centre.

## ► Wodonga TAFE actions

Wodonga TAFE is resourcing and actioning improvements to transport and transport information, that is within our scope. However there's much that can be done to benefit the whole community.

Wodonga TAFE's actions include:

- Creating clear and accessible maps available to our students.
- Further highlighting public transport information to our students.
- Reviewing and updating wayfinding signage throughout our campuses.
- Creating opportunities for short-term stays within our student accommodation to alleviate public transport reliance for rural and remote students.
- Exploring funding options through the Flexible Local Transport Solution Program run by the Victorian Government.
- Arranging roundtable discussions with like-minded organisations to investigate potential jointly funded solutions and opportunities i.e., a shuttle bus and/or mobility van.
- Supporting transport alternative transport options i.e., bicycle infrastructure, Driver Education programs.
- Advocating for students with key stakeholders that can introduce change into local public transport, i.e., Public Transport Victoria, transport contractors, and Wodonga City Council.

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## ► **Wodonga Education First Youth Foyer**

The aforementioned challenges grow further, as the site between Wodonga TAFE's McKoy Street campus and La Trobe University will be home to Wodonga Education First Youth Foyer from 2025.

Wodonga Education First Youth Foyer comprises of an accommodation facility, housing 40 studio bedrooms for youth, experiencing or at risk of, homelessness. Participants will undertake funded training at their provider of choice, and will have their skills developed in order for them to enter the workforce. Many of this cohort will not have access to a private vehicle, will have financial constraints, and will be relying heavily on public transport to and from the facility for education and employment purposes.





## ► Case studies

### **Current apprentice (16 years old, living in Yackandandah)**

Family home in Dinner Plains, relocates to Grandfathers house in Yackandandah for TAFE weeks (block release).

#### *Morning trip*

Was catching 7:45am bus from Yackandandah to Water Tower, High Street Wodonga, arriving at 8:15am

Catches connecting bus from Water Tower, High Street Wodonga to Wodonga TAFE McKoy St then walks to Trades Training Centre. Arrives at Trades Training Centre at 8:40am, 40 minutes late for class which starts 8am.

#### *Afternoon trip*

Student would need to leave Wodonga TAFE at 2:30pm to catch the bus back to Yackandandah. This is 2 hours prior to class finishing at 4:30pm and over a week would equate to missing a full day of TAFE.

Students Grandfather is now driving student to TAFE. This requires him to make two trips each day. Student started in March 2023 and will not be able to gain license and drive to TAFE until June 2024 at the earliest. Significant impact on Grandfather.



### **Current student (20 years old, living in Wodonga)**

#### *Morning trip*

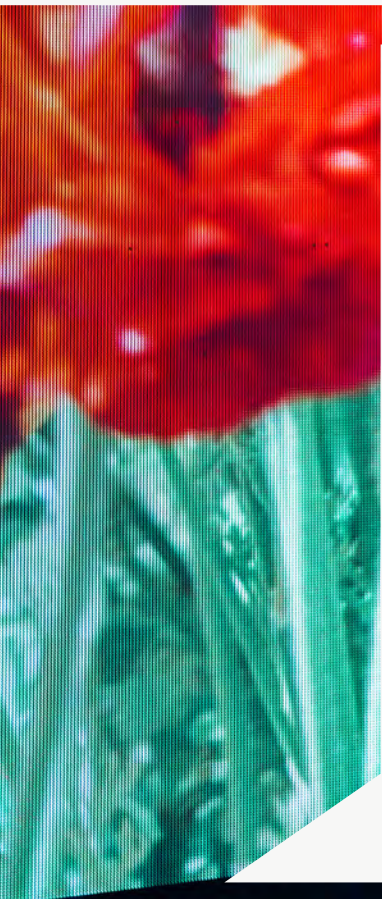
Catches 8:56 bus in McFarland Road Wodonga. Must tell driver on arrival that connecting bus at Birallee Shopping Centre is required. If this does not happen, student sometimes misses the connecting bus and then needs to decide whether to wait for the next bus or walk the remainder of the trip to Wodonga TAFE.

Catches connecting bus from Birallee Shopping centre to Wodonga TAFE McKoy Street bus stop. Arrives at 9:06am class starts at 9:30am.

Student sometimes needs to go to the shop prior to catching the bus to get cash out at the ATM and then change it into smaller denominations which will be accepted by the bus. Stated that offering a card service in addition to cash would be a benefit.

#### *Afternoon trip*

Occasionally uses service departing from Moorefield Park Drive (rear of Wodonga TAFE) at 2:54pm. Class finishes at 3pm. Bus only stops at Birallee Shopping Centre and student walks remainder of trip. If walking home from Birallee Shopping Centre student finds it very difficult to walk across busy Melrose Drive. Student often opts to walk the full 45-minute trip from Wodonga TAFE to home via an alternate route.



## ► Case studies



### **Current student (living in Albury, 10.6km from Wodonga TAFE)**

Catches the bus at QEII Square, Dean Street, Albury at 7:20am and arrives at Water Tower, High Street, Wodonga at 7:30am.

Student then waits 45 minutes for the connecting bus to Wodonga TAFE which departs High Street, Wodonga at 8:15am and arrives at Wodonga TAFE, McKoy Street at 8:25am.

Student does this 2-3 times per week and buys two 2 hour passes each time.

Student has a friend who drives into Wodonga TAFE from Mt. Beauty (87.1km) which takes the same time as it takes her to catch the bus from Albury.

### **Current student (living in Glenroy, 15.2km from Wodonga TAFE).**

Catches 2:55pm bus from Wodonga TAFE at the Moorefield Park hail and stop amenity, bus goes to Birallee Shopping Centre, Wodonga.

Catches connecting bus from Birallee Shopping Centre, Wodonga to Water Tower, High Street, Wodonga.

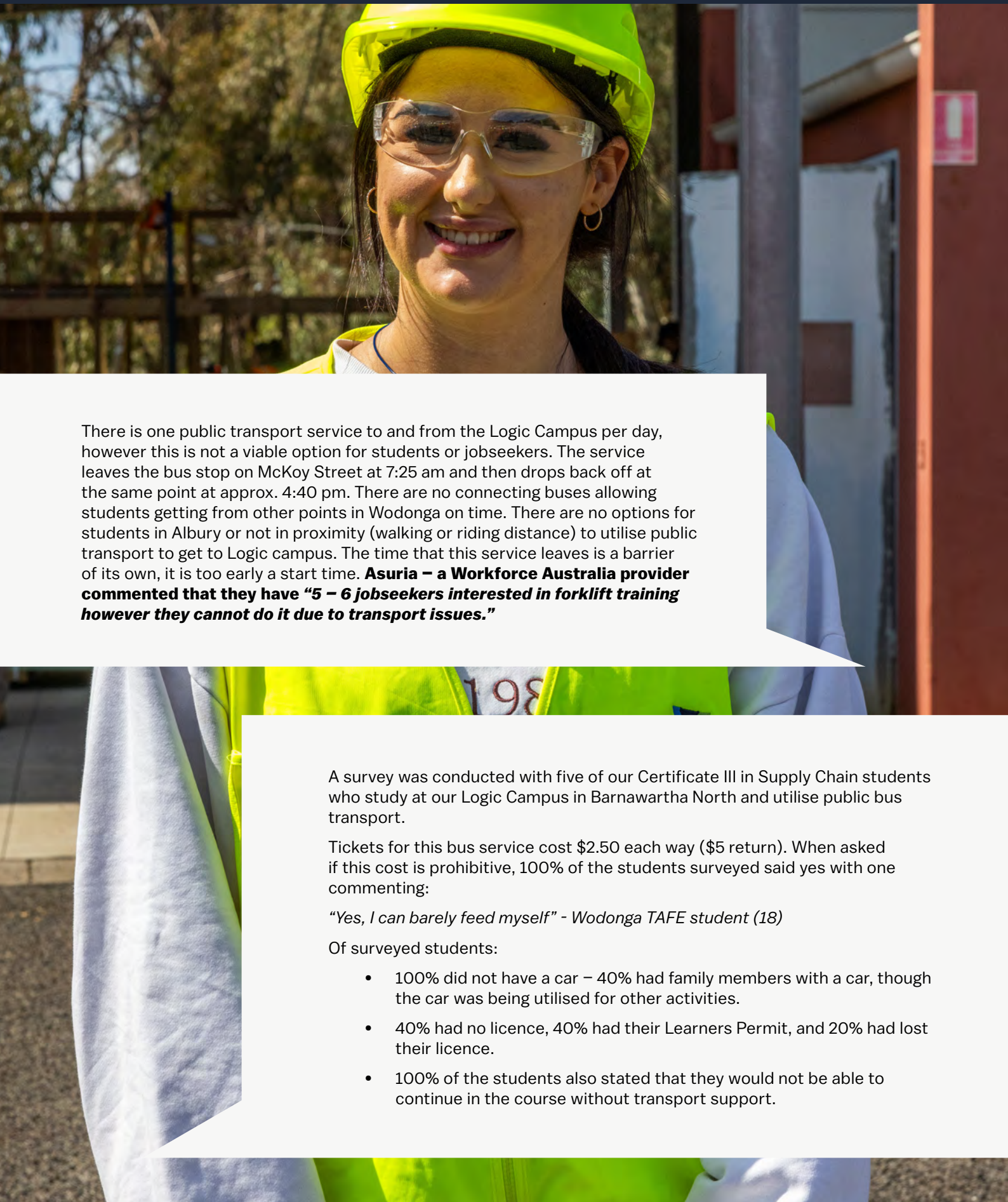
Catches connecting bus from Water Tower, High Street, Wodonga to QEII Square, Dean Street, Albury.

Then catches final connecting bus, with another fare, as it's NSW, from QEII Square, Dean Street, Albury to Glenroy.

Student asked to leave at 12pm one day to catch the bus on current 2 hour pass as they did not have the \$1.20 (concession fee) for another 2 hour pass for a bus later in the afternoon when the class finished.



## ► Case studies



There is one public transport service to and from the Logic Campus per day, however this is not a viable option for students or jobseekers. The service leaves the bus stop on McKoy Street at 7:25 am and then drops back off at the same point at approx. 4:40 pm. There are no connecting buses allowing students getting from other points in Wodonga on time. There are no options for students in Albury or not in proximity (walking or riding distance) to utilise public transport to get to Logic campus. The time that this service leaves is a barrier of its own, it is too early a start time. **Asuria – a Workforce Australia provider commented that they have “5 – 6 jobseekers interested in forklift training however they cannot do it due to transport issues.”**

A survey was conducted with five of our Certificate III in Supply Chain students who study at our Logic Campus in Barnawartha North and utilise public bus transport.

Tickets for this bus service cost \$2.50 each way (\$5 return). When asked if this cost is prohibitive, 100% of the students surveyed said yes with one commenting:

*“Yes, I can barely feed myself” - Wodonga TAFE student (18)*

Of surveyed students:

- 100% did not have a car – 40% had family members with a car, though the car was being utilised for other activities.
- 40% had no licence, 40% had their Learners Permit, and 20% had lost their licence.
- 100% of the students also stated that they would not be able to continue in the course without transport support.

## Reports

### Local report

In 2022 Albury City Council and Wodonga City Council developed *MOVE: The Albury Wodonga Integrated Transport Strategy*.

In terms of socio-economic profile, the report revealed “both Albury and Wodonga are disproportionately disadvantaged compared to the whole of Australia, New South Wales and Victoria”.

The background report also noted “The bus routes have not changed since 2007 and Albury-Wodonga is growing fast, but the bus system is not evolving to meet new population distribution”.

In the background report, when comparing 12 different journey types findings showed that,

***“On average, a bus takes three times as long as a car and that bus travel is also more expensive. In some cases, a bike can be faster than taking the bus”.***

### State Report

Youth Affairs Council Victoria (YACVic), the peak body and leading policy advocate for young people and the youth sector in Victoria also released a report last year titled *On the Buses: Improving rural and regional public transport using school buses*.

This report highlighted the significant transport disadvantage rural and regional young people face compared to their peers in Melbourne.

As the report identifies,

***“Young people who have left school to pursue other pathways have different learning and work schedules that do not always align with school bus times. Existing school bus routes do not cater to apprentices, trainees, TAFE students and part-time or casual workers because they are designed solely for school runs.”***

### National report

In 2021 the National Youth Commission of Australia (NYCA) released a report titled *A Youth Transport Guarantee - The Great Job Enabler* as part of their inquiry into youth employment and transitions. The Commission identified transport as one of the pillars in the Youth Futures Guarantee. Participation in education, training, and employment is greatly increased with access to public transport, and transport as a barrier is often underestimated.

The Commission found that young people are often caught in a cycle of disadvantage “where a young person can’t get a job without transport but can’t get a licence or run a car without a job”. Young people wanting to enter Vocational Education and Training (VET) to gain skills for employment would face a similar situation.

In Wodonga, the Commission was told by Neil Aird, former CEO Business Wodonga:

***“We need much better public transport up here. Even an employer from a bus company agreed with this who supplies a lot of public transport. For young people to be independent and get themselves to work and back from work or to study and back from study in tertiary education without good public transport is really difficult”.***

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## ► Summary

In April 2018 a National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) article titled '*VET's role in mitigating disadvantage*' identified transport as one of the key limitations faced by a range of disadvantaged students interested in VET.

Current rises in cost of living, including high petrol prices, has increased all types of disadvantage across the community.

When people are trying to keep a roof over their heads and food on the table, pulling money together for bus fare, taxi, fuel, or car maintenance is often not a consideration.

Wodonga TAFE is actively implementing improvements to our services and resources to enhance transport and accessibility for our students.

However, many changes and recommendations from our internal findings require action from key external stakeholders of whom we are advocating to on behalf of our student cohort.

Increasing and improving accessibility to public transport will remove a significant barrier our students experience. This will provide great opportunity and capability for our community to access a quality vocational education, increasing participation in our region.

