

Project Background and Context

Background

Council has been investigating the development of an integrated mass transit system to service the Sunshine Coast region's growing population and support sustainable growth since 2011.

The Sunshine Coast Mass Transit Project has also previously been known, and still sometimes referred to by some as the Light Rail Project. However, due to rapid advancements in mass transit technologies, the project is now considering a wide variety of options.

Mass Transit

This project commenced in 2011 and involved pre-feasibility and feasibility studies and used the technology and transit options available at that time. After assessing 6 options it was determined that a light rail system was a preferred option.

When the business case process commenced in 2018, the decision was taken to throw open the options to ensure a more robust business case and capitalise on some advances in mass transit technology like electric buses, trackless trams and wireless light rail.

Council and the Queensland Government are now able to consider a wider range of mass transit options. Accordingly, the project is now referred to as the Sunshine Coast Mass Transit Project.

In 2018 the Strategic Business Case kicked off a three-stage business case process.

The Strategic Business Case drew upon previous work undertaken in Council's 2012 *A Line in the Sand* report. It identified that as a region experiencing strong population growth, the Sunshine Coast is at a critical juncture in its evolution as emerging issues challenge the region's economic growth, productivity and lifestyle, liveability and sustainability aspirations.

Given the very high levels of car dependence, promoting public transport as a viable alternative for accessing key activity centres within the region and as a trigger for greater urban consolidation, will be essential to addressing these issues.

The Strategic Business Case identified and assessed 17 current and potential initiatives that are and could be progressed by the Council or the Queensland Government. The initiatives included:

- 10 non-capital initiatives covering reform and better use
- 1 capital investment to improve roads
- 6 capital investment initiatives to improve mass transit.

The Strategic Business Case recommended that Council proceed with the development of an Options Analysis for the Sunshine Coast Mass Transit Project, with Maroochydore to Kawana identified as the highest priority.

The Strategic Business Case also recommended the concept for the mass transit system must be based on a technology that offers a high quality service, capable of attracting a significant proportion of passengers out of cars and a demonstrated capability to catalyse urban transformation in the mass transit catchment.

The Strategic Business Case noted that modern light rail operating in a segregated right of way is a technology with proven capabilities in this regard, however other more cost-effective options would need to be analysed in the next phase of the business case process.

In 2019, the Queensland Government committed up to \$7.5 million to progress the detailed business case for the Sunshine Coast Mass Transit Project in 2022.

Context

The strategic context for the Sunshine Coast Mass Transit Project is about alignment with strategic planning and policies, as well as drivers of transport and housing demands that will impact current and future service needs for the Sunshine Coast.

Alignment to Council, State and Australian Government key frameworks is shown below.

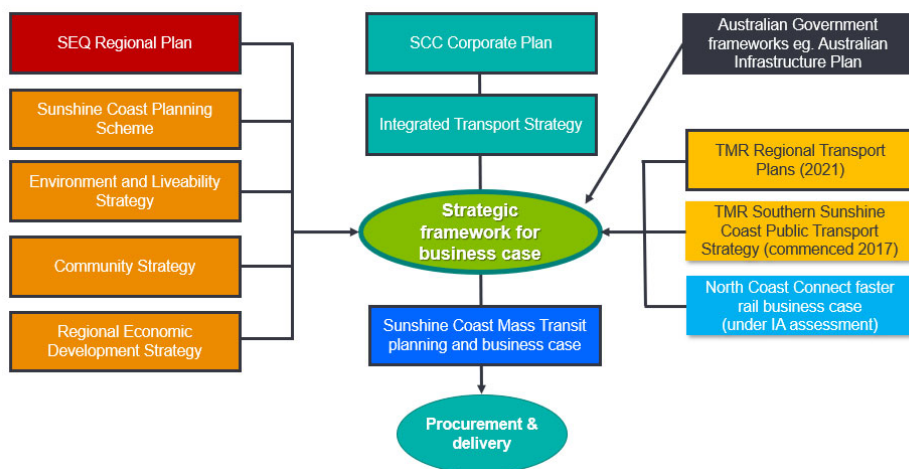


Figure 1 Strategic Alignment

Alignment with Council vision and priorities

Council has embraced the long-term aspirational vision to be 'Australia's most sustainable region – healthy, smart, creative'.

The corporate goals of Council have guided the development of a long-term land use, and transport-focused vision for the region including the urban transformation of the coastal corridor.

The Sunshine Coast Planning Scheme 2014 takes this goal further and identifies a high-quality mass transit in the Sunshine Coast Urban Corridor between Maroochydore and Caloundra.

A mass transit investment features heavily in the 2018 Sunshine Coast Integrated Transport Strategy, including a potential solution to providing high-frequency public transport connections between key centres to ensure adequate capacity to accommodate growth and deliver travel time competitiveness.

Alignment with Queensland Government and priorities

The Queensland Government sets clear direction for the future development of the Sunshine Coast through the South East Queensland Regional Plan *ShapingSEQ 2017*.

ShapingSEQ identifies an urban corridor from Maroochydore to Caloundra, supported by a high frequency passenger transport service.

This high frequency passenger transport service would result in the urban corridor between Maroochydore and

Caloundra becoming a cohesive corridor of distinctive, high quality urban environments that are typically 'Sunshine Coast' in character and optimise access to future passenger services.

This vision is supported by the *2021 Regional Transport Plan* which identifies a Public Transport Investigation Corridor from Caloundra to Maroochydore.

Alignment with Australian Government frameworks

The *Australian Infrastructure Plan* identifies the Sunshine Coast as a key region of Australia, alongside the eight capital cities and other key regions such as Newcastle, Wollongong, Geelong, and the Gold Coast.

Infrastructure Australia acknowledges that congestion has a very real economic cost for Queensland. Infrastructure Australia identifies that, without action, road congestion across South East Queensland could cost Queensland's economy more than \$9 billion by 2031.

A key recommendation from the *Infrastructure Australia Plan* is that the Sunshine Coast should be supported by governments, businesses and local communities, to grow its population and economy.

Have your say

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