

# Project need: What are the problems facing the Sunshine Coast?

## Project need

**Confirming and articulating the problems or opportunities faced by the Sunshine Coast region is critical to understanding the need for action.**

Developing a sound understanding of the extent, scale, cause and effect of the problems provides a strong basis for developing options to address them.

The key problems identified are:

- 1 An accelerating trend towards urban expansion
- 2 High dependency on private motor vehicle transport
- 3 Growing levels of road congestion
- 4 Liveability and environmental sustainability challenges

### Problem 1: An accelerating trend towards urban expansion

Since the 1980s the Sunshine Coast region has experienced significant increases in urban expansion which is already impacting its ability to sustainably accommodate this population growth.

Recent releases of major new housing areas at Caloundra South and Palmview have resulted in acceleration of this trend, and intervention is required to maintain the region's attractive lifestyle and amenity.

This problem can be better understood by considering the effects of this trend towards urban expansion, including:

- Less affordable living
- Cost of urban expansion versus urban consolidation (i.e. growth within existing urban areas)

- Urban expansion is already well catered for
- Dominance of low-density housing that does not match our demographics
- Lack of a mass transit network matched to the scale of growth and the size of the Sunshine Coast
- Lack of housing choice

### Problem 2: High dependency on private motor vehicle transport

There are high levels of car dependency in the region resulting from key factors such as:

- Inadequate public transport system
- Car culture that does not see public or active transport as features of the regional lifestyle
- Ease of accessibility to free car parking.

Without intervention, existing challenges identified with the public and active transport system within the Sunshine Coast region will combine with car based urban expansion (i.e. growth beyond existing urban areas) to increase car dependency. This will inhibit the achievement of strategic urban and economic growth targets.

In places with high car ownership, the availability and price of car parking at the destination is a major driver of mode choice.

Car parking demand is forecast to grow strongly on the Sunshine Coast in the medium term (beyond the next five years), correlating with the forecast growth in car usage in the region. It is important to note that spaces dedicated to parking can have a significant cost, and that this land may have a higher value use than as parking.

### Problem 3: Growing levels of road congestion.

The Sunshine Coast already has a high level of car dependency and there is a low public transport mode share in the region. Congestion is currently occurring in many areas on the Sunshine Coast in peak times.

Key tourism locations on the Sunshine Coast are already under significant pressure from day trippers and overnight visitors during peak holiday seasons. On the weekends, day trippers put particular strain on the road network including the Bruce Highway. The local road network also experiences a higher proportion of trips (75 per cent) in the off-peak periods compared to weekdays (58 per cent)<sup>1</sup>.

This congestion is forecast to increase significantly as increased numbers of residents and tourists compete for road space in Caloundra, Mooloolaba and Maroochydore by 2041<sup>2</sup>. As the Sunshine Coast region grows, demand on the road network will continue to rise and, without intervention, runs the risk of escalating to a state that is not possible to manage. Traffic congestion has a significant social cost including:

- Lost time and extra vehicle operating costs
- Environmental costs and lost productivity to society
- Loss of liveability and amenity around congested road corridors.

Traffic congestion also has a significant economic cost. Without major intervention by government, the annual cost of congestion in the Sunshine Coast region and the Sunshine Coast Urban Corridor could almost treble by 2041. In particular, the coastal centres that are also tourist precincts, would likely suffer reduced attractiveness to visitors due to congestion.

### Problem 4: Liveability and environmental sustainability challenges.

Both the Australian and Queensland Governments have recognised the challenges of managing strong forecast growth in population in a manner which is sustainable and promotes high quality lifestyles. This includes recognising and responding to a trend towards increased urbanisation, and the social and environmental challenges this can create.

Increased levels of urban expansion and reduced levels of employment self-containment lead to an increase in long distance commuting and its associated economic, social and environmental impacts.

Council's vision to be '*Australia's most sustainable region: Healthy. Smart. Creative*' necessarily includes protecting the liveability of the region and its natural environment. Key measures of the region's liveability, economic sustainability and environmental impacts include:

- The growth of high-value industries and improved self-containment of the region
- The amount of natural environment consumed by urban expansion
- The amount of vehicle kilometres travelled which impacts on the need for roads and parking
- The level of energy consumed, and level of pollutants emitted from transport
- The level of greenhouse gas emissions produced by its transport system users.

Transport systems shape cities, support lifestyles and build economies. The right type of transport network can effectively bring businesses closer together by reducing travel times between key activity centres and increasing the transport service level for potential employees.

The closer businesses are to each other and to a deep pool of skilled labour, the higher their productivity will be. This can result in greater specialisation, more intensive knowledge transfer, and employees who are better matched to their organisation.

<sup>1</sup> Sunshine Coast Council (2019). *Integrated Transport Strategy*. Accessed at: <https://www.sunshinecoast.qld.gov.au/Council/Planning-and-Projects/Council-Strategies/Sunshine-Coast-Integrated-Transport-Strategy>

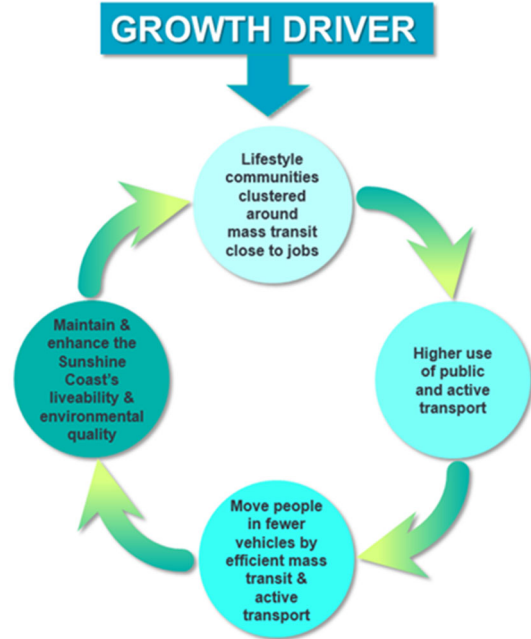
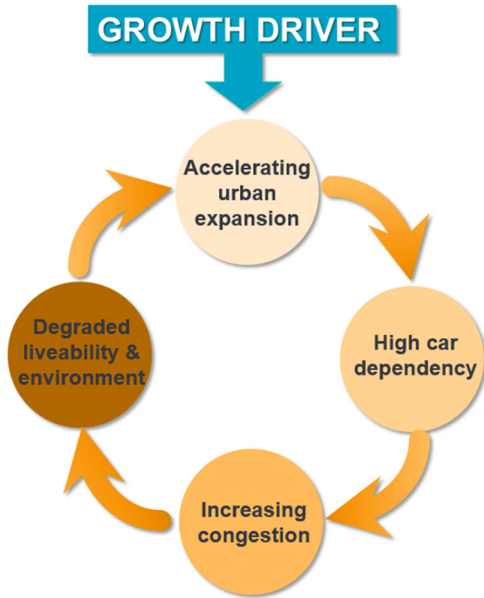
<sup>2</sup> Refer to chapter 9 of the OA for more detail on congestion in 2016 and 2041.

## Summary

If the problems that have been identified are not addressed there is a potential vicious circle created by the combination of the problems (Fig 1). However there is another way. There is an opportunity for a virtuous circle, by focussing growth on lifestyle communities clustered around mass transit and close to jobs (Fig 2).

Figure 1: The risk of a vicious circle

Figure 2: The opportunity of a virtuous circle



## Have your say

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