



# Gold Coast Rapid Transit

## Chapter **twelve** – Social impact

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One of the purposes of the draft Concept Design and Impact Management Plan is to develop a comprehensive picture of how the Gold Coast Rapid Transit project will impact the city and its people and to develop and recommend mitigation strategies to address any negative impacts.

As part of the draft Concept Design and Impact Management Plan process a Social Impact Assessment was commissioned. This report specifically focused on what social impacts the Gold Coast Rapid Transit could have on the local community. The aim of this assessment was to ensure that the Gold Coast Rapid Transit system maximises its social benefits and minimises its impacts.

Much of the feedback received from stakeholders and through community consultation has focused on the potential impacts on the city that will be caused by building and operating a major infrastructure project such as the Gold Coast Rapid Transit system. People are concerned about

impacts on properties, access, disruption and congestion during the construction period and also the impact of changes to current traffic arrangements once the Gold Coast Rapid Transit system is operational.

However the Gold Coast Rapid Transit project is not just an infrastructure project, it is more than just a corridor and new vehicles. Whilst the Gold Coast Rapid Transit will become a centrepiece of a much improved public transport network on the coast it also has the potential to have wider reaching impacts for the city, both positive and negative. However these benefits and impacts may not be immediately obvious or even directly related to the Gold Coast Rapid Transit system. These impacts were identified through the Social Impact Assessment.

## Social Impact Assessment objectives

Before the Social Impact Assessment began the Gold Coast Rapid Transit project team, in conjunction with Gold Coast City Council, agreed that the key objectives for the study were to:

- identify social impacts at a community level arising from both the construction and operation stages of the project
- provide feedback to the project's concept design and alignment
- inform the project's community engagement and impact management activities
- identify issues or impacts that can be mitigated or enhanced by the project or issues beyond the control of the project that should be referred to state, local government, other agencies or funding bodies.

## Methodology

The Social Impact Assessment methodology was developed by the Gold Coast Rapid Transit project in conjunction with Gold Coast City Council. The project also triggered the Gold Coast City Council social impact planning scheme policy that saw Council heavily involved in the development of the Social Impact Assessment terms of reference and methodology. Research comprised of literature reviews, demographic and existing community profiles, site visits, telephone and face-to-face interviews, workshops and focus groups with the local community and stakeholders. Potential social impacts were included if they were identified by at least 3 sources of data.

The report was divided into a local study area (the existing project area) and a regional study area (Gold Coast local government area).

The research was carried out independently from the Gold Coast Rapid Transit project to ensure that participants felt they could speak freely.

A wide range of stakeholders representing service providers, networks, groups or clubs were identified. Stakeholders who were asked to be involved were advised that they were being consulted as a representative of a group or network rather than as an individual.

## Existing community profile

As part of the report, a combination of desk based research, demographic data and consultation with stakeholders was used to develop a profile of the Gold Coast. The research told us that:

- The Gold Coast population is approaching 560,000.
- There are around 5 million day visitors and 3 million overnight visitors per year.
- The main industries of employment are accommodation and hospitality, retail, construction, manufacturing, health and community services.
- Land use on the Gold Coast is a mix of commercial development, residential housing, community facilities and services, sporting and recreational parks/open spaces.
- The key commercial business and employment hub is generally situated in Southport.
- Section two (Griffith University to Southport) of the Gold Coast Rapid Transit route features many social infrastructure facilities and services (places of worship, schools, community support services and medical facilities). In comparison these services are comparatively limited in section three (Southport to Broadbeach).
- The coast line from Main Beach to Broadbeach is unique because it has access to beaches and the extent of the tourist based accommodation and facilities.
- The main method of travelling to work is by car.
- Less than 4 percent of the trips made on the Gold Coast are by public transport.

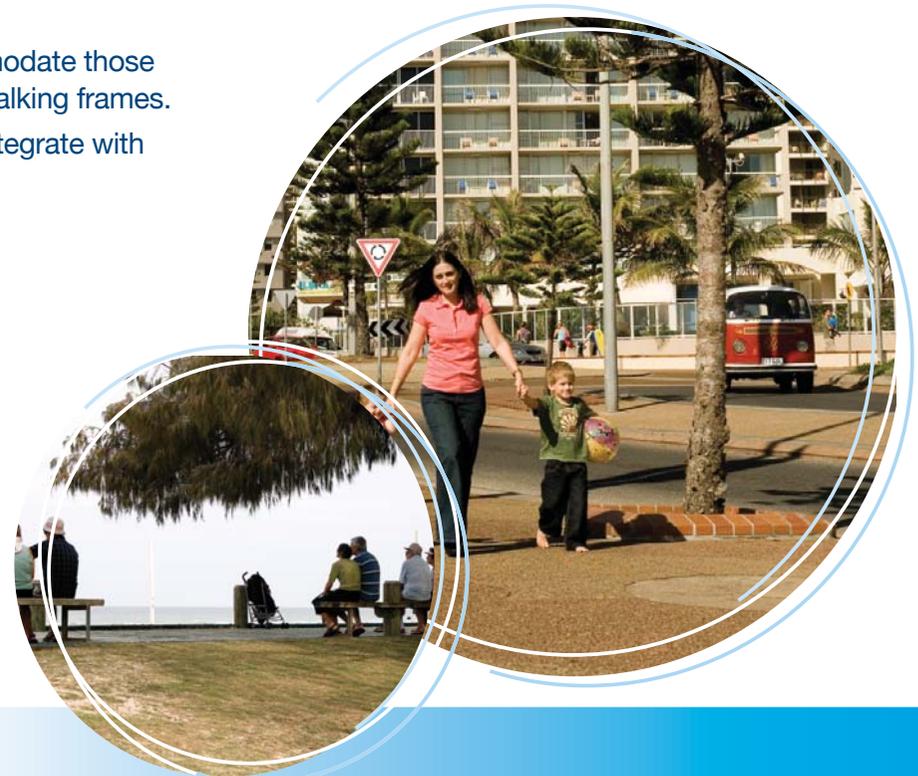


## Consultation with Social Impact Assessment stakeholders

A total of 28 interviews and/or focus groups were conducted with Social Impact Assessment stakeholders in November and December 2007. Social Impact Assessment stakeholders ranged from the Gold Coast Rapid Transit project's community reference group, chambers of commerce, residential associations, educational bodies, child care services, sporting facilities/clubs, youth organisations and disabled networks.

A summary of the feedback received during this consultation is as follows:

- Concern about the potential for negative impact on the local economy during construction.
- The system must integrate with other forms of public transport, the importance of feeder bus services was frequently raised.
- The design must take into account the mobility of elderly or sick people who use the service to access the existing and new hospital.
- The system must accommodate those who use wheelchairs or walking frames.
- The system must safely integrate with pedestrians and traffic.
- The system must be safe to use, particularly when boarding and alighting.
- Feedback on light rail covered areas such as comfort, efficiency, reliability, aesthetics and energy usage. The bus rapid system did not receive as much feedback and the main issues related to flexibility and changes to route alignment.
- There were also concerns raised about access to properties and services and also traffic impacts during construction.



## Identification of potential social impacts

Potential social impacts were identified by using the demographic and existing community profile of the Gold Coast, along with site visits, data from community consultation carried out by the Gold Coast Rapid Transit team and the feedback received from Social Impact Assessment stakeholders (see previous page).

Potential social impacts (both during construction and operation) could be broadly grouped under the following headings:

- accessibility
- integration with other forms of public transport
- disruption to traffic
- disruption to local businesses
- loss of on street parking
- pedestrian safety.

Property impacts have not been addressed in the Social Impact Assessment but are discussed in Chapter 9: Property impacts (from page 207).

### Section two – Gold Coast Knowledge Precinct to Southport

This area generated the highest number of potential social impacts in comparison with neighbouring sections of the project corridor.

These included potential for disruption to access to Southport State School, disruption and reduction of on-street parking on Nerang Street and disruption to access for emergency vehicles to and from the hospital and the potential relocation of community facilities in Southport.

### Section three – Southport to Broadbeach

Potential social impacts during construction included increased traffic congestion and disruption to businesses.

Once the Gold Coast Rapid Transit system was operational the main social impact would be positive – due to increased resident and tourist access to events and attractions.

### Whole Gold Coast Rapid Transit corridor

Other potential social impacts that were identified as possibly affecting the whole Gold Coast Rapid Transit corridor during construction included increased pressure on short term accommodation from construction workers; decrease in health and well being of residents and businesses adjacent to any construction sites; and reduction of on-street parking.

Once the Gold Coast Rapid Transit was operational the potential social impacts were identified as an increase in population; gentrification/renewal of communities; improved public transport linkages between precincts; and improved access to places of employment.

## Social Impact Management Plan

As a result of the Social Impact Assessment a Social Impact Management Plan has been developed to guide the implementation of mitigation and enhancement strategies for social impacts.

Social impact	Recommended mitigation strategy	Gold Coast Rapid Transit response/action
<p><b>Accessibility</b></p> <p>Feedback indicated that older people, and people with disabilities or mobility issues, faced difficulties when using public transport and that these groups could be further disadvantaged by the Gold Coast Rapid Transit system if their needs were not taken into account.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• suitable, safe access for pedestrians to be included in the Gold Coast Rapid Transit design</li> <li>• Gold Coast Rapid Transit to be designed in accordance with the Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport 2002</li> <li>• Gold Coast Rapid Transit project team to engage in consultation with disability advisory group.</li> </ul>	<p>The Gold Coast Rapid Transit will be fully compliant with the Disability Discrimination Act, the access strategy addresses station location and design, maintaining pedestrian accessibility along the route, suitable treatment of walking routes to stations and bicycle access.</p> <p>The Regional Disability Council and the Gold Coast Mobility Office are both represented on the project Community Reference Groups which have met regularly from the start of the project.</p> <p>An Access Reference Group were also established to provide specific input into the suitability of the proposed system for people with special needs.</p>
<p><b>Integration with other forms of public transport</b></p> <p>Concerns about the ability to effectively integrate the Gold Coast Rapid Transit project to the existing public transport network and also the need for improvements to the current network was frequently raised. Failure to effectively integrate the Gold Coast Rapid Transit system to the network would have a negative social impact on those who did not live in the vicinity of the corridor. These communities could experience increased difficulty accessing services leading to an increasing severance of suburbs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the TransLink Transit Authority to assess the existing public transport network and look for opportunities to enhance connectivity.</li> </ul>	<p>The Gold Coast Rapid Transit project is embedded in the TransLink Transit Authority 10 year Network Plan and also the 4 year Service Upgrade strategy.</p> <p>In the years prior to the Gold Coast Rapid Transit becoming operational a range of improvements will be introduced to strengthen the existing bus network plus a program of extensions to the heavy rail network and the introduction of high occupancy vehicle lanes to key east/west linkages.</p> <p>More details on the network integration strategy can be found in Chapter 6: Network integration, from page 167.</p>

Social impact	Recommended mitigation strategy	Gold Coast Rapid Transit response/action
<p><b>Disruption to local business</b></p> <p>Linked to the disruption of traffic was a concern that local businesses would suffer as a result of the Gold Coast Rapid Transit project, particularly during construction. The social impact could be closure of local businesses and services leading to loss of livelihood and loss of neighbourhood character.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• implement promotional activities and signage for directly affected businesses</li> <li>• construction team to provide adequate access during construction.</li> </ul>	<p>This would be addressed in the communications plan for the construction phase and be part of the requirement given to those tendering for the project.</p> <p>Access management would be defined and agreed with local businesses prior to construction.</p>
<p><b>Disruption to traffic</b></p> <p>The potential for increased traffic congestion, restrictions to access or changes to traffic arrangements as a result of the Gold Coast Rapid Transit system was highlighted as a concern. Social impacts relating to this disruption included increased stress due to congestion and longer travel times, the likelihood of more road accidents, increased pollution and emissions effecting health and reduction of business in areas that were difficult to access.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• communicate changes to traffic conditions through advertisements and other communication channels</li> <li>• construction work to be scheduled outside peak (tourist, events, university and school) times</li> <li>• construction team to provide adequate alternative routes during construction.</li> </ul>	<p>A specific communications plan will be developed for the construction phase of the Gold Coast Rapid Transit project.</p> <p>Part of the draft Concept Design and Impact Management Plan discusses construction issues for the Gold Coast Rapid Transit system and lays out what would be expected of the contractor who successfully bids to construct the Gold Coast Rapid Transit project. This includes recommendations that work is scheduled appropriately, traffic diversions are fully considered and changes to traffic conditions are communicated.</p> <p>More details regarding construction of the Gold Coast Rapid Transit system can be found in Chapter 7: Construction from page 181.</p>

Social impact	Recommended mitigation strategy	Gold Coast Rapid Transit response/action
<p><b>Loss of on-street parking</b></p> <p>The Gold Coast Rapid Transit project involves a number of changes to the city, one of which is an impact on existing on-street parking. The social impacts linked to the reduction on of street parking could be difficulty accessing local services, loss of trade and a reduction of vibrancy of some local centres.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gold Coast City Council recommended to review the Whole of City Parking Strategy to incorporate the Gold Coast Rapid Transit system.</li> <li>• identify potential park ‘n’ ride facilities.</li> </ul>	<p>The Gold Coast Rapid Transit project and Gold Coast City Council are working together to mitigate any loss of parking. For example a 360 space temporary car park will be in place for the duration of construction in Southport.</p> <p>Gold Coast City Council is also considering other options for short stay car parking during construction including providing parking spaces on vacant development sites; adjusting the length of stay permitted in some parking spaces; and working with developers to make the best possible use of existing and planned off street parking spaces. See Chapter 8: Parking and traffic impacts (from page 193) for more details.</p> <p>The project is guided by TransLink policy for park ‘n’ ride facilities. Consistent with this policy park ‘n’ ride facilities will not be provided in densely settled sections of the route. Short stay ‘kiss ‘n’ ride’ facilities will be provided in the vicinity of stations where space and access requirements permit.</p>
<p><b>Pedestrian safety</b></p> <p>How cars, cyclists, and in particular pedestrians, would interact with the Gold Coast Rapid Transit system was also identified as an area of potential impact. Social impacts include the potential for increased accidents and concerns about personal safety around Gold Coast Rapid Transit stations and on board vehicles.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• implement a Gold Coast Rapid Transit system safety/ awareness campaign</li> <li>• implement crime prevention principles and safety measures into the Gold Coast Rapid Transit design such as CCTV and emergency phones</li> <li>• construction team to implement a Safety Management Plan focusing on pedestrians, cyclists and motorists.</li> </ul>	<p>Prior to the launch of the Gold Coast Rapid Transit system it’s likely there will be an extensive marketing campaign to educate and encourage patronage.</p> <p>The Gold Coast Rapid Transit project has been designed according to Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design principles. These principles include guidance on how lighting, fencing, landscape, surveillance etc can assist in reducing crime and improving peoples perception of safety.</p> <p>Again, the draft Concept Design and Impact Management Plan discusses construction issues for the Gold Coast Rapid Transit system and lays out what would be expected of the contractor who successfully bids to construct the Gold Coast Rapid Transit project. This includes recommendations that a Safety Management Plan, focusing on pedestrians, cyclists and motorists, is implemented.</p>

It’s clear that the Gold Coast Rapid Transit system has the potential to have a number of both positive and negative impacts on the Gold Coast.

The Gold Coast Rapid Transit system is not going to solve all the traffic and congestion problems on the Gold Coast. However the project, coupled with other public transport improvements (see Chapter 6: Network integration, from page 167, for more details) will provide a fast, frequent and reliable alternative to taking the car.

## What are the impacts if we do nothing?

The Social Impact Assessment focuses on the potential social impacts of the Gold Coast Rapid Transit system, it does not discuss the social impacts if we do nothing.

It's clear that traffic congestion is one of the biggest issues faced by the Gold Coast as it continues to grow. A fully car dependent future, with no viable alternative, would result in very significant social costs to both to the community and business.

Social impacts resulting from traffic congestion include:

- longer journey times reducing leisure or family time
- increased stress associated with car travel in congestion
- increased possibility of road accidents
- detrimental impact on the environment due to increased air and noise pollution
- higher fuel costs impacting on disposable income
- reduced growth in land values due to access difficulties
- loss of appeal as a desirable place to live, work or visit
- reduced competitiveness in the tourist market.

For more information refer to the following chapter in the draft Concept Design and Impact Management Plan:

- Volume 2, Chapter 10: Social Environment.

See page 24 for details of how to access the full draft Concept Design and Impact Management Plan report.



