



# Transport

## DID YOU KNOW?

**The Blue Mountains faces key challenges because of its location and unique geography.**

**Transport presents difficulties for residents** of the 27 settlements of the Blue Mountains when it comes to accessing health services, education and employment. Physically isolated residents and young people are two of the groups that are at risk of experiencing the most transport disadvantage in the region. With rising petrol costs and concerns about climate change, a transport system that is safe, accessible, affordable and environmentally sustainable is an important priority.

**Residents' dependence on personal motor vehicles is evident** when examining 2011 census data. The **number of Blue Mountains households without vehicles was only 8.1%**. Households which owned one vehicle: 38.8%; households with two or more vehicles: 36%; and three or more vehicles: 14.8%. These figures reflect **a higher level of car ownership, and fewer households without a car, when compared with the NSW state average** (ABS 2011 Census Data).

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**The preferred mode of transport is primarily car-based** (134,000 being drivers; 51,000 being passengers). Walking for transport (54,000) was the third most utilised transport mode.

**The Great Western Highway upgrade is now almost complete** (apart from the Bullaburra Village section) and is a major transport corridor to the Central West and beyond for usage by freight-bearing trucks, residents and tourists. Residents remained concerned about the safety of these heavy vehicle movements over the Blue Mountains. The Mountains is a World Heritage area and thus protection of the natural environment is a key.

## Our Goals

-  Provide information about local transport options.
-  Increasing sustainable transport options for Blue Mountains residents, including development of physical infrastructure. The quality of rail services to and from the Blue Mountains, for example, has implications not only for those commuting for employment or training purposes, but also has economic implications for tourism to the region.
-  Given the recent announcement that Badgery's Creek is to be developed as Sydney's second airport, we look to the new airport and its related infrastructure to be established as part of a broader strategic plan for Greater Western Sydney (GWS) – including:
  - rationalising and upgrading public & road transport infrastructure linking the airport, the CBD and GWS; as well as GWS town 'hubs' via link-roads and rail;
  - opportunities for long-term job creation as part of a comprehensive economic strategy and employment plan;
  - increasing housing affordability for GWS;
  - environmental sustainability best practice.

-  Making local transport options accessible, convenient, safe and affordable for all residents, including:
  - ensuring local transport options for residents who are 'transport disadvantaged' or physically isolated, young people, people with physical and social health issues, or those without access to a car; and
  - transport options for people who fall 'between the gaps' of current community transport services, such as GREAT Community Transport (i.e. social transport).

## What We're Doing to Achieve Our Goals

-  **The Lower Mountains Transport Forum** in July 2012 brought the community together to discuss transport issues in the lower Blue Mountains; it was a great opportunity for different age groups in the community to come together and share their perspectives, ideas and concerns. The forum was a partnership between the GAIC project and Lower Mountains Neighbourhood Centre. Forum participants identified key

**What We're Doing to Achieve Our Goals (cont.):**

priorities relating to transport, which can be summarised as:

- increasing community awareness/education (regarding code of conduct and mutual awareness of cyclists and walkers);
- an integrated transport system (frequency, and connections between transport modes);
- social transport (beyond needs of commuters and workers); *and*
- useability of transport - eg on trains: quiet spaces; clear announcements; physical access (especially for those with mobility issues; facilities for bikes, prams and scooters; luggage racks); safety at night; and Wi-Fi for the many daily commuters.

Community engagement was a key part of the three year **Getting Around in Community** (GAIC) sustainable transport project, which undertook consultation with other local groups and individuals on transport issues that affect them. These include carers, community workers who work with the physically isolated, young people and other residents.

**13% of the BM population is aged, and many are unable to access a motor vehicle or use public transport.** GREAT Community Transport (GCT) provides transport assistance through the Home and Community Care program (with some minor funding through NSW Health) for the frail aged, people with disabilities and their carers to get to their health-related appointments, shopping, centre-based meals and social outings.

**Mind the Gap:** Blackheath Neighbourhood Centre (BANC) and the Getting Around in the Community (GAIC) Project, in partnership with the Blackheath Community Alliance, interviewed 840 Upper Blue Mountains residents in early 2013 about their need for public transport. At present, there are gaps of up to and sometimes more than two hours between trains during the day between Katoomba and the west. The lack of a regular service adversely affects the community who need to be able to access employment, follow education, attend appointments, or shop. A resounding majority said that they wanted a train service that was at least hourly (*Mind the Gap* report), the same frequency as that 'enjoyed' by the rest of the Mountains.

In response to community groups wanting access to **affordable mini-bus transport**, local Council now has two small buses available for eligible non-profit community groups to hire through GCT. To improve access to booking these vehicles for groups 24/7, the SmartLink Transport website has been established, which allows small community groups to have access to other community buses as well. These vehicles are driven by volunteers, and GCT supports a Volunteer Drivers Pool so that groups which don't have their own drivers have the opportunity to have a qualified driver to assist them.

**✓ How is State Government Contributing to These Achievements?**

- ✓ NSW has a **Long-Term Transport Master Plan**. In relation to Greater Sydney, this includes:
  - modernising Greater Sydney's rail network through Sydney's Rail Future, with rapid transit services and improved frequency and capacity on suburban lines;
  - motorway infrastructure, including Managed Motorway systems on the M4 to improve real-time management of traffic; and WestConnex to integrate the M4 Extension from Parramatta towards the Airport; plus develop the road network in new growth centres to link the Greater Sydney workforce to employment opportunities;
  - Bus Head Start Program to improve public transport travel times to urban centres or interchanges; plus improvements to the busiest interchanges, with upgrades or car parks as 'park and ride' (eg at Parramatta & Penrith);
  - Greater Sydney's employment centres - tailor transport & congestion solutions in the regional cities Parramatta, Penrith & Liverpool.

- ✓ **OPAL Cards** have now been introduced for most public transport in Greater Sydney. The Opal card is a free smartcard ticket that has value loaded onto it, and can be used to pay for travel on all public transport (including the Blue Mountains); the value can be topped-up, and the Card reused.
- ✓ Transport NSW has just released for public comment the designs for a long-awaited **major upgrade to Wentworth Falls station** - with work planned to commence early 2015. The design includes lifts - a major accessibility issue for those with mobility issues, such as the elderly and those with a disability, or families with prams - covered walkways to reduce the risk of slips and falls in icy conditions, accessible toilets and upgraded footpaths. This will bring the total of accessible stations in the BM (including Springwood & Katoomba) to three. The residents of the other 15 stations (many with long and steep flights of steps exposed to the weather to negotiate) eagerly await their turn for such an upgrade.

