

Transport, Young People & The Bigger Picture

**Research conducted as part of
The Central Coast Youth Transport Project**

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Background

The Central Coast Youth Transport Project was initiated by the Dusseldorp Skills Forum in April 2002 in response to issues highlighted in the Central Coast Youth Commitment Environmental Scan. This scan, conducted by the Hunter Valley Research Foundation, reported on the situation of young people on the Central Coast in terms of their work and learning. In its section on transport, the scan found that the lack of viable public transport alternatives on the Coast is a barrier to young peoples' participation in education and employment and recommended that transport issues for young people be analysed in more detail.

The project is operating in partnership with Central Coast Transport Development and forms one strategy under the Central Coast Youth Commitment. It is currently being steered by a working group comprised of a cross section of community representative (the Central Coast Youth Transport Forum).

Research Aims

Research conducted as part of this project is designed to provide some insight into the transport situation for young people aged 14 –19 who live on the Central Coast and who are making the transition from school to work or further education¹. As far as the project can determine, detailed research into the transport needs of this specific group has not been carried out previously on the Central Coast.

This research is not designed to provide detailed quantification of the transport situation for all young people in the target group. Rather, the intention is to highlight some key transport themes and issues by exploring the attitudes and activities of a sample of young people in the target group, and the views of those who work with these young people in various capacities i.e. as teachers, youth workers, careers advisors, mentors.

Two broad types of research activity have been carried out since April 2002

1. Qualitative research: e.g. focus groups, community forums
2. Quantitative research: e.g. surveys, questionnaires (see Appendices B & C)

This report summarises the results of the research that has taken place so far, and provides a basis for recommendations regarding the focus of the Youth Transport Project from this point onwards.

¹ Including young people currently at school but engaging in "transition" activities e.g. work place learning, vocational educational etc.

Perspectives on the Transport Needs of Young People on the Central Coast

A. Young Peoples Perspectives'

Sources:

1. Focus groups (ET Australia "Links To Learning" Class, Youth Connections IT work placement group, Centrelink clients, Woy Woy Youth Cottage residents)
2. Survey of Year 10 students at Henry Kendall High School, Gosford
3. Central Coast Youth Transport Forum

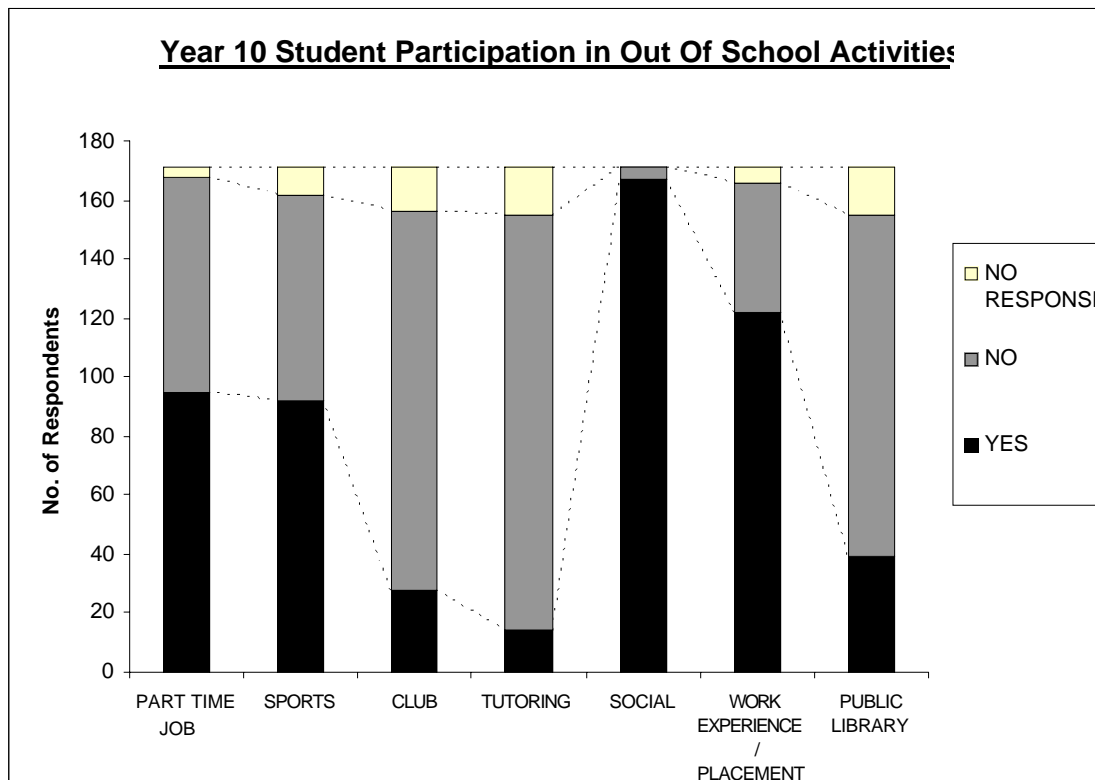
Destinations

Young people indicated the need to access a range of destinations outside of school on a regular basis.

Destinations most frequently mentioned were

- Part-time employment
- Sports training or competitions
- Apprenticeships / Traineeships
- TAFE study (including year 9 and 10 equivalence and TVET courses), and
- Employment related activities such as work placement and employment training
- Social activities e.g. movies, visiting friends

A survey of 170 Henry Kendall High School students indicated that over half of all Year 10 students had a part-time job and 71% were involved in work placements or work experience (Graph 1).



Graph 1: Year 10 Student Participation In Out Of School Activities²

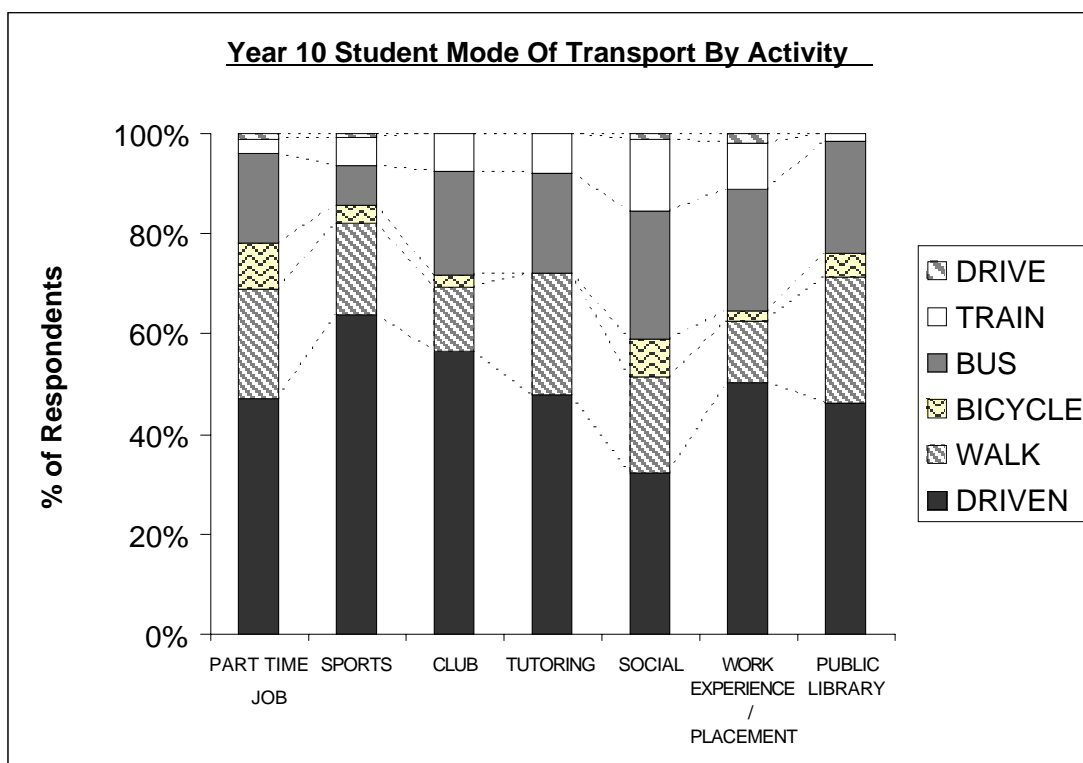
² Survey of Yr 10 Students at Henry Kendall High School, Gosford

Transport Usage

Focus group discussions indicated that school travel takes place primarily by bus and, for some older youth with licences, by car. Those young people not attending school reported a need to travel by bus and/or train to attend TAFE, training or employment on the Coast or in Hornsby, usually three or more times per week. In many cases parents were the main providers of transport, but those youth in refuge accommodation relied to some extent on youth workers for transport.

Bikes were named in a minority of cases as an alternative form of transport, although several constraints were noted around using bikes, such as the lack of cycle ways on main roads, steep terrain (especially in the Wyong area) and the lack of protection from the elements. Other forms of transport mentioned, particularly in relation to travel to social activities, included “scabbing lifts” from friends and hitchhiking.

These focus group findings were supported by survey results, which showed that young people of a pre-driving age displayed a high reliance on being driven by friends and family and a relatively low usage of public transport (train and bus). A substantial proportion of respondents (12% to 25% depending on the activity) said that walking formed a component of their journeys (Graph 2). In order to understand some of the reasons why public transport is does not comprise a larger share of travel, young people were asked about their attitudes towards and use of public transport.



Graph 2: Year 10 Student Mode of Transport By Activity³

³ Survey of Yr 10 Students at Henry Kendall High School, Gosford

Transport Issues

Overall perceptions of public transport

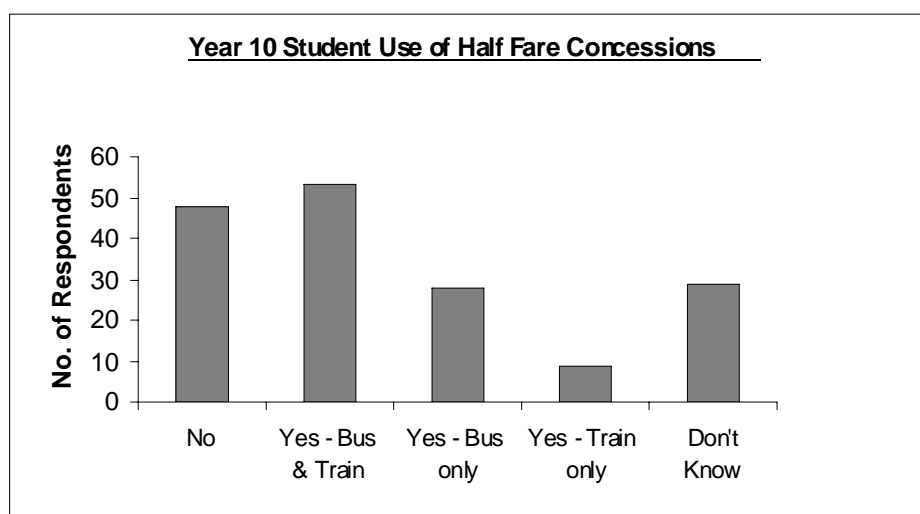
When asked what came to mind when they thought of “public transport”, young people in the third focus group replied “slow”, “not reliable”, and “expensive”. There is the perception amongst some young people that government-run bus services are more reliable and affordable than their privately operated counterparts. Specific issues identified with public transport are outlined below.

1. Concession Eligibility

Two related issues regarding concessions came through strongly in the research. The first regards eligibility for concessions, and the second awareness of concession eligibility. At the time of conducting the focus groups, school students were eligible for half fare concessions for trips between home and school from 8.30am to 4.30 pm. Some commented that this time period was too restrictive for those who lived in outlying areas and needed to catch a bus before 8.30am, others felt that concessions should be available in principle to all students under the age of 18 regardless of the time of day. It should be noted that, since the focus groups were conducted, both major bus companies on the Central Coast have altered their concession fare policies to make them available to a wider range of young people (i.e. all full time students) throughout the day. The second issue relates to a lack of awareness of concession eligibility. The survey of Year 10 Students, all of whom were eligible for half fare concessions for bus trips outside of school, indicated that 28% still did not pay half fare for those trips and 18% did not know whether they did or not (Graph 3).

“ They should increase the time you can catch the bus..the passes only work from 8.30 to 4.30 but I know people who catch the bus before 8.30 because otherwise they wouldn’t get to school on time...someone I know leaves at 6.30” - Alex, Mangrove Mountain

“ I used to have to get up to Lakehaven every Friday. I was 14 but was charged full fare when I showed my bus pass...I tried everything but they charged me \$4 because I was travelling outside of school (hours)” - Ryan, Blue Haven



Graph 3: Year 10 Student Use of Half Fare Concessions⁴

⁴ Survey of Yr 10 Students at Henry Kendall High School, Gosford

2. Public Transport Costs

Young peoples' transport costs varied widely depending on where they lived and which activities they were engaged in. The least that anyone in the focus groups had to pay for transport was \$10.70 a week for a young man living in Lisarow and attending an employment training class in Gosford. However, it was common for some young people, even those eligible for concessions, to be paying up to five times more than this. For example, some of the TAFE students interviewed in Woy Woy spent \$40 - 50 a week to get to classes in Hornsby or Gosford from the Peninsula. In some cases, the cost of transport was regarded as a disincentive to continue with a particular job or activity.

“When I was working as a landscape gardener in Sydney I got \$150 a week...(with that) I had to buy my weekly train ticket, I had to pay board, and then I had to buy food on top of that...so (at the end of the week) I had about \$10 in my pocket” - Grant, Woy Woy

3. Scheduling of services

Having buses at times appropriate to access part-time jobs was a particularly important issue for several young people. Having to navigate different bus routes and wait for more than one bus was also seen as a disincentive to catching public transport.

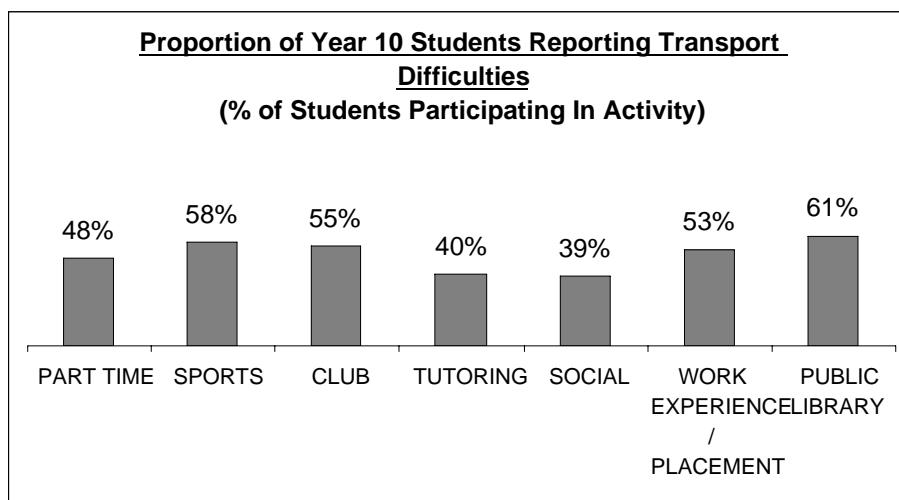
“ At about 10 (AM) you’ve got one (bus) every hour but when you need them at say 3.30(PM) you find there’re no buses between 2.30 to 4.30” - Ryan, Blue Haven

“Its harder for people who work after school to get to their destinations because after school there’s a gap (in bus services)” - Laine, Blue Haven

“I work at Coles at Toukley. I get there from Norah Head...I drive there or get a lift..there’s no point getting public transport – its too confusing to there on time..you can never sort out what bus to catch..” – James, Norah Head

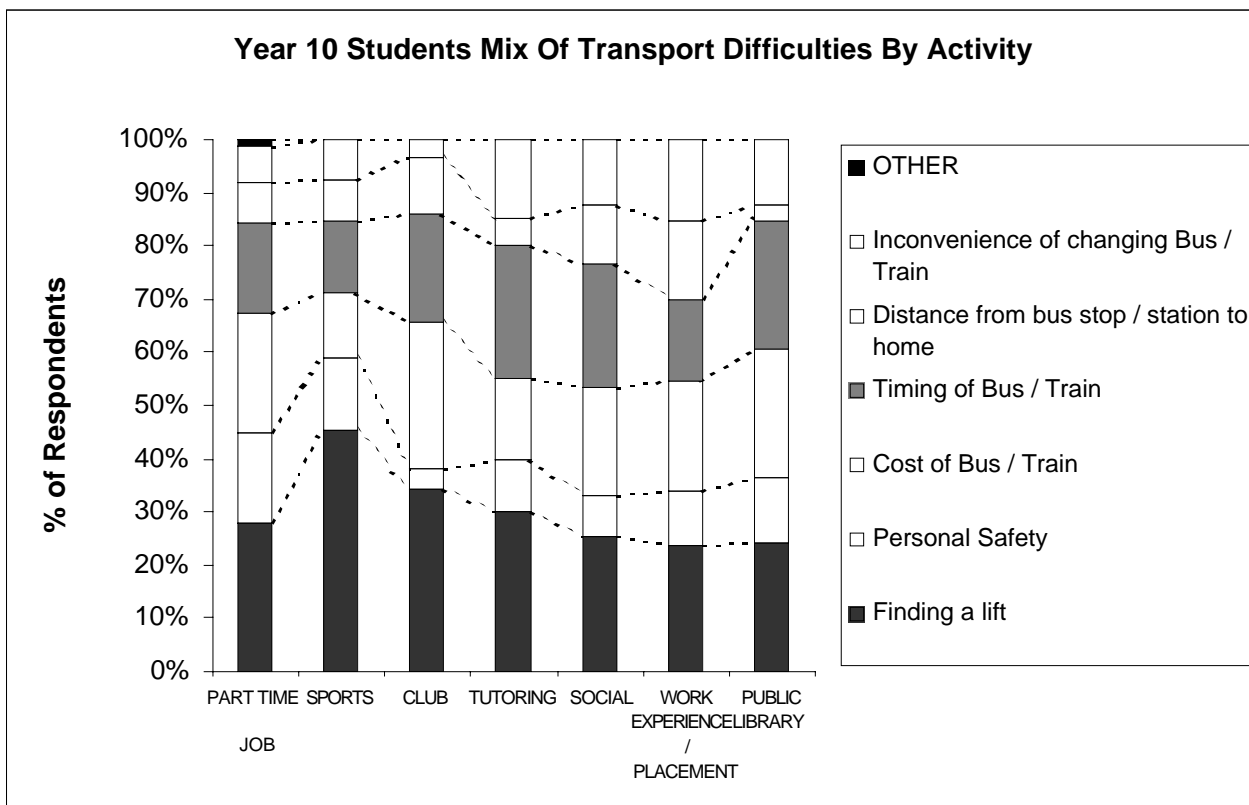
“ I considered night packing at Woolies for a job but there is no point because you couldn’t get home when you finished work because the buses have stopped” – Nicole, Springfield

Focus group findings were supported by the Year 10 Student transport survey where up to 60% of those engaged in a given activity reported transport difficulties when trying to access their destinations (Graph 4a). Those who indicated having transport difficulties cited infrequency of services and cost to be the key difficulties with public transport (Graph 4b).



Graph 4a: Proportion of Year 10 Students Reporting Transport Difficulties By Activity⁵

⁵ Survey of Yr 10 Students at Henry Kendall High School, Gosford



Graph 4b: Year 10 Student Mix of Transport Difficulties By Activity⁶

4. Lack of public transport services

Lack of access to public transport services rarely meant a complete lack of access, but rather a more extreme case of the above noted problem with infrequent services. In some cases, bus services in and out of a particular area were restricted to two services a day. Unsurprisingly this was very location specific problem – problematic locations that were mentioned repeatedly included suburbs in North Wyong (e.g. Gwandalan, Mannering Park) and those west of Gosford and the freeway (e.g. Mangrove Mountain, Peats Ridge, Calga, Tascott, Kariong)

5. Reliability & Timeliness

Reflecting the views of many adults on the Central Coast, some people do not regard public transport to be a viable transport option because of its unreliability and long journey times involved. Some reported preferring to hitch a lift with a friend or stranger, or walk long distances ahead of looking for public transport options. The perceived lack of reliability and timeliness of services is a major disincentive to those needing to get to work on time.

“ If I miss my bus it takes an hour for another one to come past, and then it goes around the world and takes half an hour to get to Gosford whereas by car it only takes ten minutes” – Desi, Terrigal

“ You pay \$5, it’s not that bad, but you’re (only) working for an hour and the trains are so unreliable and slow..its not worth it..you’d be twice as fast by car” – Ian, Woy Woy

“I can’t afford to be late for my apprenticeship” – Bianca, Woy Woy

⁶ Survey of Yr 10 Students at Henry Kendall High School, Gosford

6. Personal Safety

Personal safety was an issue that raised a lot of comment in focus groups. A few young people reported having been mugged whilst using public transport, others said they felt unsafe on stations and in trains. Security on trains, when available, is not perceived to be effective.

“ We need more security on the train” - Grant, Woy Woy

“I’ve never seen a transit cop patrol the trains” - Laine, Blue Haven

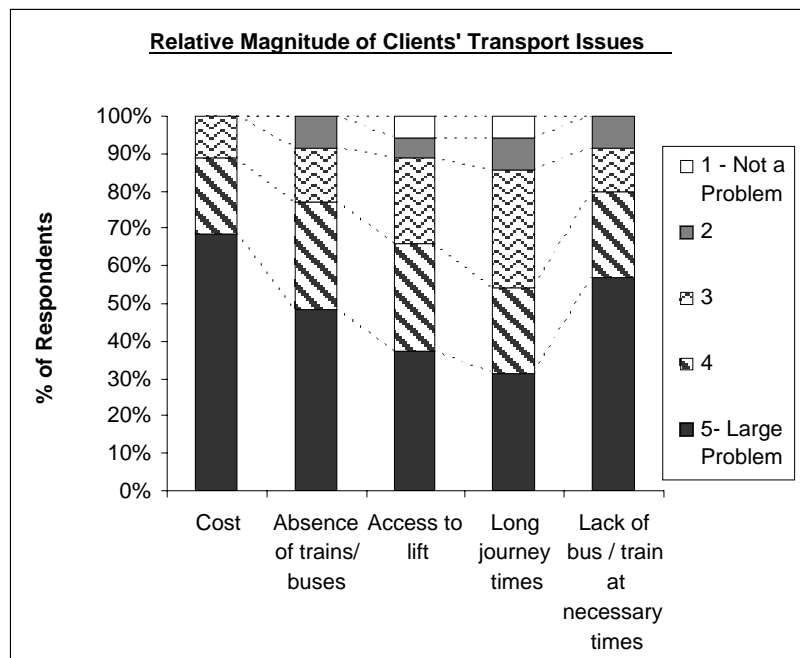
B. Perspectives of those working with young people

Sources

1. Consultations with youth service providers (various locations)
2. Survey of Youth Workers at the 2002 Regional Youth Development Officers Network (RYDON) Conference
3. Central Coast Youth Transport Forum

Transport Issues

Many of those who work with youth on the Central Coast consider transport to be a key issue for their clients and students. 36 Central Coast youth workers were surveyed at the 2002 Regional Youth Development Officers’ Network (RYDON) conference. When asked if they believed transport to be a problem for the youth they worked with, 78% indicated that transport was a problem or a large problem for their clients (Graph 5). Like the Year 10 students who were surveyed, youth workers at the RYDON conference indicated cost and infrequent scheduling of services to be two key difficulties (Graph 6).



Graph 5: Relative magnitude of clients' transport issues ⁷

⁷ Survey of Youth Transport Providers, 2002 RYDON Conference

When asked to estimate what percentage of their clients were likely to be experiencing transport difficulties of some kind, the greatest proportion of respondents indicated the range “between 51% and 75%”. Again, this is fairly consistent with Year 10 student survey results.

Transport & The Bigger Picture

The transport difficulties faced by young people on the Coast should be assessed not only in terms of the specific issues involved, but also in terms of the impact they have on young people and the delivery of programs and services to them.

Some young people are clearly missing out on participation in certain key activities. In the transport survey completed by Henry Kendall students, respondents were asked whether they had ever missed out taking part in an activity as a result of a lack of transport. The majority of students answered in the affirmative. Most of the missed activities were of a social or recreational nature e.g. going to the movies, participating in weekend sport, but a significant number were employment related. Examples of the latter are given below (Table 1).

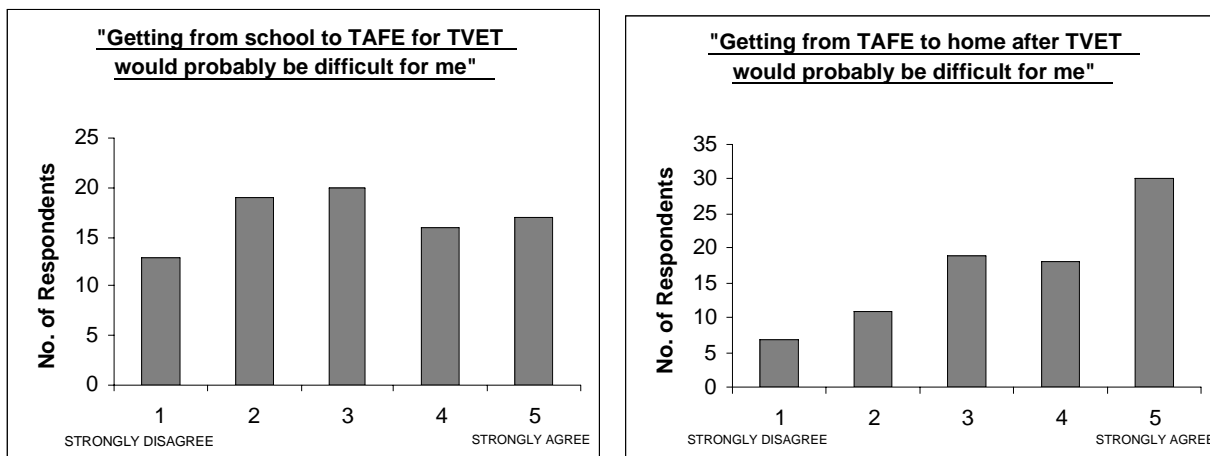
Suburb of Residence	Missed activity	Location of missed activity	Transport difficulty
Bucketty	Part time job	Tuggerah	"There's not enough buses"
Tascott	Work placement at Hoyts	Erina Fair	"Too far for a lift and too expensive for buses"
North Gosford	Part time job	Erina Fair	"If I had to work late, safety on buses was not good enough and I would have to walk a fair way in the dark so the getting home was a problem"
Kariong	Work	Mangrove Mountain	"There is no public transport and mum couldn't take me both ways"
Tascott	Part time job	Erina/ Umina/ Ettalong	"Because it would be in the afternoon after school and it would be difficult to get home"
Mangrove Mountain	Part time job	Gunderman	"It was too far for Mum to drive everyday. There was no other transport"
Kariong	Job Interview	Wyoming	"Couldn't get a bus. There wasn't one from Kariong and no parents were home"

Table 1: Details of missed employment-related activities⁸

Consultations with those working with youth would further suggest that young peoples' transport difficulties can have a negative impact on the effective delivery of youth services and the success of training and employment related programs. For example, work placement coordinators' at Youth Connections report that the large distances that young people are required to travel to work placement (e.g. between North Wyong and the Peninsula) have had a negative impact on attendance at work placement, both because the cost of getting to work placement is prohibitive, and because of the lack of frequency of services. Similar comments were made by TVET coordinators from schools in the North Wyong area, who note the role that transport considerations play in their students' decisions to participate in TVET courses at TAFE. Specific concerns

⁸ Survey of Yr 10 Students at Henry Kendall High School, Gosford

are with personal safety of after dark (e.g. walking to Ourimbah station) and service frequency for students returning home from TAFE. This is supported by data from the Year 10 student survey, which indicated that travel home from TAFE was more like to be difficult than travel to TAFE from school.



Graph 6a & b: Student perceptions of transport difficulties to and from TAFE for TVET ⁹

Exploring Solutions

A Youth Transport community forum was held in July to discuss youth transport and explore solutions to some of the issues highlighted above. The forum involved approximately 50 individuals from across the Coast representing the community sector, education and training, transport providers, and local government. The group discussion strongly favoured three approaches to overcoming youth transport issues on the Coast, namely

1. Developing strategies to make public transport a more viable option for young people
2. The utilisation of volunteer drivers / car pooling to transport young people without other transport options
3. More efficient utilisation of existing mini-buses on the Coast for the transport of groups of young people with transport difficulties

Young people and those representatives from education and the youth sector were consulted about their views on each of these approaches. It was regarded that, where public transport is available, efforts should be made to make it more viable for young people, particularly by providing better information about concession fare availability. The last two approaches, namely developing community based transport alternatives, is considered to be a practical, effective way of utilising existing spare capacity in the community (in the form of volunteer drivers and community mini-buses) to fill gaps in public transport provision.

⁹ Survey of Yr 10 Students at Henry Kendall High School, Gosford

Conclusion

Young people, particularly those in the 14-17 age bracket have a high need for transport mobility. Transport difficulties appear to be experienced by a significant proportion of young people in this age group. Despite the fact that young people appear to depend on public transport more than the population as a whole, public transport is still not a favoured mode, with many young people depending instead on lifts from families and friends. At least part of this behaviour can be explained by specific difficulties with public transport, and specifically cost and route / scheduling difficulties.

Of particular concern is the fact that, because of transport difficulties, young people are missing out on key activities, some of which may have a significant impact on their employment and education opportunities. Part time work and employment related training / experience are of particular importance to young people not only for the valuable learning opportunities they provide, but also because they enable young people – some of whom are “at risk” of leaving school – to make a successful transition from school to independence and sustainable employment. For these activities in particular, we should consider ways of alleviating the transport barriers to access by increasing awareness of public transport as an option, and providing alternative transport means where public transport is not a viable option. Importantly, the views of those who have provided input into the research so far would suggest that there is both a need and a willingness at the present time to find cooperative, community-based solutions to the difficulties identified.

Recommendations

1. That the Youth Transport Project pursue the three avenues for action highlighted at the first Central Coast Youth Transport Forum in July 2002 (see page 11)
2. That further research be conducted into the specific user groups who would potentially benefit from a scheme that provided alternative, demand responsive transport for young people (as individuals or in groups)
3. That the above actions be carried out in collaboration with major stakeholders in the project, including local government, transport providers, education providers and community services