

Submission from Get Around Caboolture to the Productivity Commission's Net Zero Interim Report



Key Points

- Car dependence is a major contributor to emissions, traffic congestion, and social isolation, particularly in outer suburban areas.
- Reducing car dependence in outer suburban areas where people live, work, and play is essential for reducing transport emissions.
- eBikes, eScooters, and eBuses provide cost-effective and scalable solutions to reduce emissions, improve mobility, and enhance public health.
- The economic burden of car dependence includes unemployment benefits, healthcare costs, and social isolation, with \$3 billion annually spent on social isolation alone.
- Investing in active transport (e.g., cycling infrastructure, public transport) is highly cost-effective, with every \$1 spent on cycling infrastructure yielding \$11 in savings.
- Upstream solutions like providing better access to transport options can break the cycle of car dependence and promote a healthier, more connected society.
- Multi-modal transport systems are the key to achieving net-zero emissions while also addressing economic and social equity challenges.

Let's stop building more roads and start building the future

There's a familiar paradox: the more roads we build, the more pressure we feel. It's like a child trying to keep a balloon in the air by blowing harder and harder. No matter how much they puff, the balloon always falls. Expanding roads to solve congestion is the same. It creates more space for cars, more pollution, and more traffic jams. We're stuck in a cycle that keeps repeating itself.

But we don't need grand, complex solutions. What we need is to make better use of the tools we already have. Tools that don't cost the earth and that work right now. Tackling car dependence in our outer suburbs can immediately relieve the pressure. Lighter air, smoother travel, and a sense of ease. This isn't a far-off dream. It's something that can start today.

Tackling Car Dependence: A Key to Lower Emissions

Unless we resolve car dependence in areas where people live, work, and play, the quest for lowering transport emissions is essentially futile. We cannot continue to build more roads and expand infrastructure, only to face more congestion, higher emissions, and lower quality of life. It's akin to blowing air into a balloon that keeps deflating. Until we shift away from car dependency, the cycle will never break.

Instead of perpetuating this endless cycle, we must focus on creating solutions that make better use of the resources we already have. By investing in active transport options like eBikes, eScooters, and eBuses, we provide practical, scalable solutions that not only reduce emissions but also increase mobility and improve health. These are solutions that work now, not decades into the future.

A multi-modal solution with big impacts

Australia's transport system is the third-largest contributor to greenhouse gas emissions. Expanding roads doesn't make things better. It only makes them worse. As we build more roads, we end up with more cars on the road, more emissions, more congestion. It's a never-ending spiral.

But the answer isn't more roads. The answer is smarter choices. We can create a multi-modal transport system that integrates eBikes, eScooters, and eBuses. These are simple, affordable solutions that are already available today not futuristic dreams. They're practical ways to help people get around more easily, more comfortably, and with less hassle.

The hidden cost of car dependency

Car dependence doesn't just burden the environment. It weighs down people's lives. In the outer suburbs, where 1 in 5 adults can't drive and 60% of trips are under 5 km, people are often stuck unable to reach jobs, medical appointments, or social gatherings because public transport is either non-existent or unreliable. It's a vicious cycle, and it costs Australia \$3 billion each year, much of it driven by healthcare. (As an aside, pharmaceuticals create a surprisingly high number of emissions, contributing further to the environmental and economic burden.)

But the financial toll isn't just about healthcare. It's about people missing out on the opportunity to work, to learn, to thrive. When people can't access reliable transport, they often fall out of the workforce, relying on unemployment benefits just to get by. It's not about choosing to rely on government support. It's about being locked out of opportunities because you can't get to where you need to go.

This is real. This is human. These are parents, students, carers, and workers trying to make it, but stuck. They're unable to access the job they want, the services they need, or the opportunities they deserve. And all the while, they're facing an economic burden that's beyond their control.

Tasmania's eBike libraries offer a simple but profound solution. People can leave their cars behind, reclaim their independence, and rediscover their freedom. This isn't just about saving money. It's about giving people back their agency, their dignity, and their future. This is the kind of solution we need in Australia's outer suburbs, where people just need the chance to move.

Reimagining our streets to be smaller, smarter, and healthier

Imagine streets where the sound of cars fading away is replaced with the sound of laughter, footsteps, and the whirr of eBikes. Where the streets are no longer dominated by the roar of engines but are alive with movement and connection. We have the power to make this happen.

When we promote the use of smaller vehicles, like eBikes and eScooters, we don't just reduce the need for sprawling, car-heavy infrastructure. We open up our streets for people to walk, cycle, and interact. Public spaces become healthier, more connected, and more welcoming.

We can slow down the pace of traffic, making streets safer for everyone especially children, seniors, and people with disabilities. Lowering speed limits on local streets to 30kph, and on

arterials to 50kph, will not only reduce harmful emissions but also create peaceful, inviting spaces where people can walk, cycle, and live without fear.

The cost of doing nothing

Australia's dependence on cars isn't just costly for the environment. It's also costing us in terms of healthcare. Obesity, heart disease, and mental health problems are directly linked to the lack of active transport. The real toll of isolation, missed opportunities, and the financial strain of unemployment is huge. The cost of social isolation alone is \$3 billion a year.

We can't afford to ignore these impacts any longer. It's not just a policy issue. It's a human issue. People need options, and those options can't come soon enough. Solutions like eBike libraries, expanding eBus networks, and promoting active travel are essential to reducing healthcare costs, improving social wellbeing, and offering real opportunities for people to escape the trap of car dependence.

A simple, effective solution

We don't need complex systems. We need simple solutions (eBikes, eScooters, and eBuses) that people can use today. They're affordable, they're scalable, and they're easy to implement. These solutions are the most effective way to reduce emissions from short trips and give people back their mobility, their health, and their independence.

By investing in these transport solutions, we can:

- Cut emissions from short trips that would otherwise require a car.
- Empower people in the outer suburbs to take control of their travel without relying on cars.
- Create healthier communities where people can live, work, and play without fear of rising healthcare costs.
- Alleviate the \$3 billion burden of social isolation.

Tasmania's eBike libraries are just one example of how these ideas work in practice. We can replicate this across Australia, empowering people to ditch their cars and create a healthier, happier future.

Investing in the future to see the economic and social benefits

Shifting away from car dependence is an investment in our future. Every \$1 invested in cycling infrastructure can yield up to \$11 in savings thanks to reduced congestion, lower healthcare costs, and improved worker productivity. A healthier, more connected society is less stressed, more productive, and more fulfilled.

Children who ride bikes to school not only benefit from improved physical health but also show better academic outcomes and develop stronger social relationships. These benefits carry through to adulthood, where they result in higher productivity post-education. Active travel helps young people develop key life skills like independence, time management, and confidence; all of which contribute to greater success in the workforce.

Healthier populations lead to fewer sick days, lower healthcare costs, and greater productivity. The ripple effects of these changes reach beyond the individual, improving the overall economy and quality of life for everyone.

But this requires bold action. We need to stop talking about solutions and start putting them into practice. We need to make active transport options available to everyone, not just the lucky few. This is an investment in our future. It's one that pays off in better health, better jobs, and a better quality of life for all Australians.

A sustainable, equitable future

Shifting away from car dependence is an investment in our future. Every \$1 invested in cycling infrastructure can yield up to \$11 in savings thanks to reduced congestion, lower healthcare costs, and improved worker productivity. A healthier, more connected society is less stressed, more productive, and more fulfilled. To meet the Productivity Commission's goals of reducing emissions while boosting productivity, we must prioritise active transport and multi-modal solutions in outer suburban areas. By investing in eBikes, eScooters, and eBuses, and improving public transport, we can reduce car dependence, improve public health, and create long-term economic savings. This approach will not only help us meet net-zero targets but also contribute to a more sustainable, equitable future for all Australians.