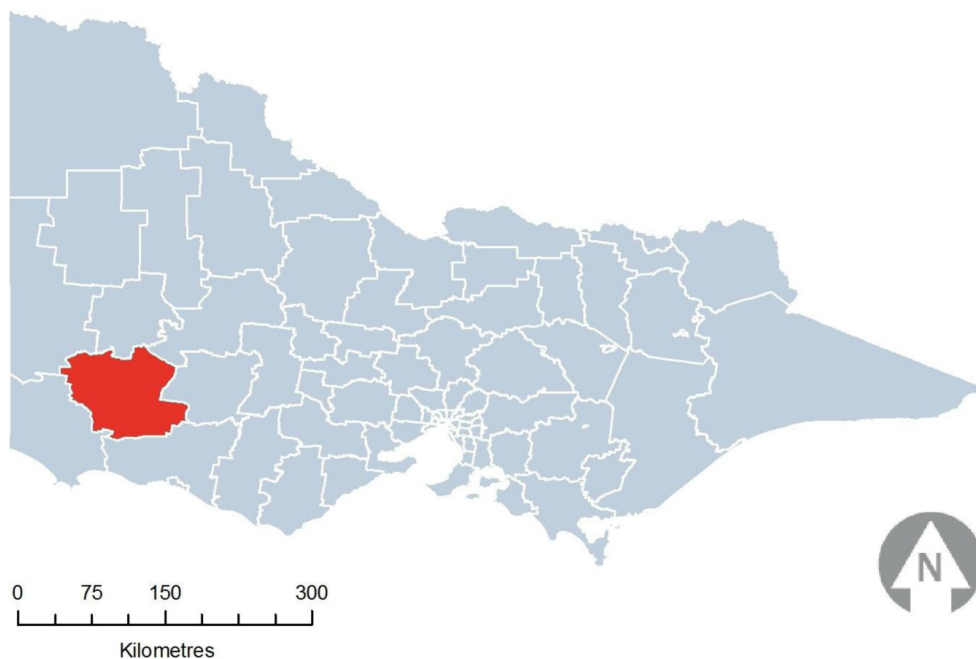


## **Transport disadvantage is a key factor contributing to social exclusion, and lack of transport is consistently rated by rural and regional communities as one of the most significant barriers to accessing services, employment and social networks.**

A public bus operates between Penshurst and Hamilton on Mondays and Thursdays and a Hamilton to Mount Gambier service operates on Wednesdays and Fridays. The Victorian Department of Transport has announced that both services will be removed at the end of 2011. The decision will lead to significant gaps in public transport coverage in South West Victoria, and the ripple effect will socially and economically impact on communities already working hard to overcome the centralisation of many essential services.

### **Regional Snapshot**

Located 300km from Melbourne, the Southern Grampians Shire is in the outer regional area of the State, and is characterised by dispersed settlements and considerable travel distances between essential services.

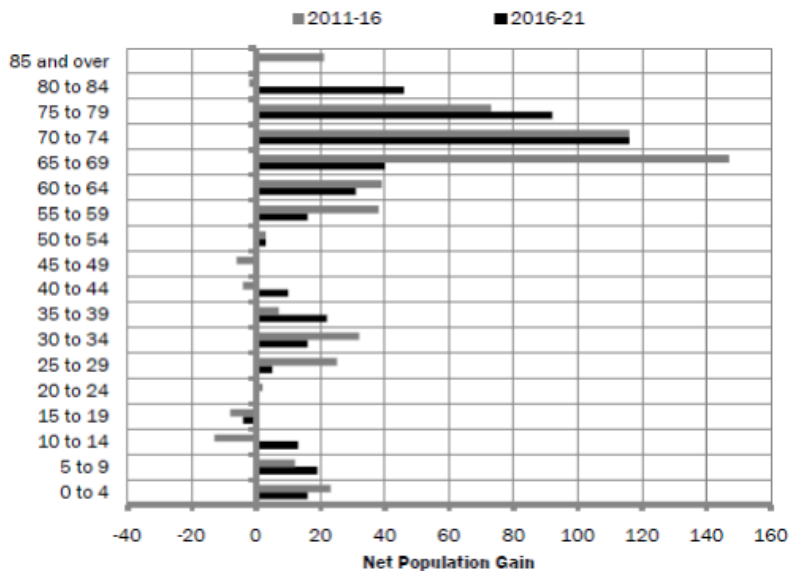


▲ *Figure 1.1 Southern Grampians Shire Council Location Map*

Current population projections (State and Council) to 2021 suggest a continued, albeit slow recovery from the slump caused by the wool price crash of the 1990s, averaging 0.15-0.5 per cent/year. This compares with 1 per cent per annum for regional Victoria and 1.3 per cent for metropolitan Victoria.

### **An Aged and Ageing Population**

Between 1996 and 2006, the median age in the Southern Grampians shifted from 37 to 41 (compared to 33 to 27 for the average for all Australian LGAs). The implication of slow growth and ageing is apparent in Figure 1.2: most of the net gain in population is from an increase in the number of people over 60 years old, pointing to an ageing and, eventually, shrinking workforce.



▲ Figure 1.2 Net Population Change by Age Cohort 2006-2021

## Case Study 1:

Heather Parsons is a Hamilton-based woman on a disability pension. She regularly uses the Hamilton - Mount Gambier service to visit her sons and grandchildren, and says it's her only way of keeping in touch with them and remaining independent. Heather also sometimes accompanies her neighbour on trips as he is a severe epileptic and cannot travel alone.

She says the schedules of the V/Line service are not suitable – it leaves too early and arrives home too late. The times of the public bus suit everyone, and the removal of the service will increase her sense of isolation from family.

The implication of these current growth patterns for transport in the study area is significant given that residents aged over 60 are more likely to experience transport disadvantage, and are also most likely to use the public bus service in SW Victoria. Capacity for growth due to the ageing population should also be taken into consideration.

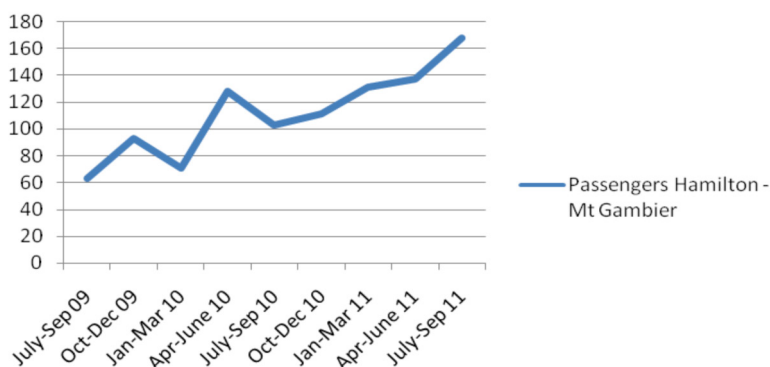
## Passenger Statistics

Currently, the services attract a core group of regular passengers along with 'casual' passengers. These passengers typically:

- ▶ Do not or cannot drive
- ▶ Require assistance with mobility or communication or other forms of personal support;
- ▶ Experience financial difficulties; and/or lack family or social network support.
- ▶ Are unable to afford taxi fares for longer trips

Over the past 12 months, the Hamilton – Mount Gambier route has enjoyed a steady rise in patronage.

## Passengers Hamilton - Mount Gambier



## Case Study 2:

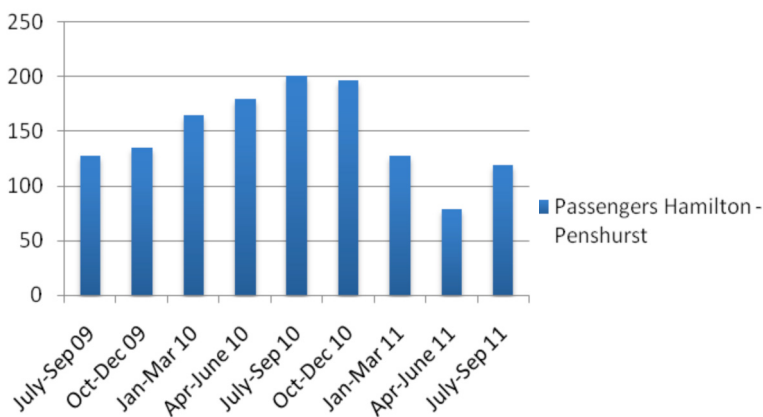
Casterton resident Eleanor Gould suffers type 1 diabetes and is not medically permitted to drive.

The 70 year old is also legally blind in one eye. She is heavily reliant on her elderly husband for transport, and says she was planning to use the public bus service in the future once he, too, was no longer able to drive.

Eleanor says the V/Line service through Casterton is quite limited, and the process of purchasing tickets online can be confusing.

The Department of Transport's Hamilton to Penshurst bus has been running since July 2008. Initially operating one day per week, it expanded to become a twice-weekly service in September 2009 in response to high levels of patronage.

## Passengers Hamilton - Penshurst



## Case Study 3:

*Margaret Brown, 67, makes the 64 kilometre round trip on the bus from Penshurst to Hamilton every Thursday to meet with friends for a coffee and a chat, attend appointments and do her shopping. She also uses the Hamilton – Mount Gambier bus for eye appointments, and booked surgery there in March specifically to tie in with the bus schedule.*

*"I won't be able to drive because of my eye, so I was absolutely flabbergasted when I heard the buses were stopping – they get all these things up and running, and then they drop it," she said.*

The Penshurst twice-weekly service costs \$27,000 annually, and the three day a week Mount Gambier service costs \$52,000 per annum. The fares paid by passengers need to be subtracted from this overall cost to get a true indication of total Government expenditure.

## Purpose of Travel

The community bus service has developed organically to fill gaps in access for vulnerable groups in the community. In addition to pursuing opportunities for social connection, many passengers have been using the service to attend medical and dental appointments and other specialist treatment.

The delivery of health services in regional Victoria has changed significantly over the years. There has been:

- ▶ A concentration of services in fewer hospitals and clinics
- ▶ Moves towards early discharge and increasing use of day surgery
- ▶ A decline in the number of general practitioners in regional areas.

These changes have meant that people have to travel more often to access health services; for example, there was a large increase in demand for transport when the local eye surgeon moved away from Hamilton and all patients had to travel to Warrnambool and Mt Gambier for treatment.

## Alternative Transport Options

For many passengers without access to a car, there will now be no alternative transport options in 2012 following the removal of the public bus services. The schedules and routes of existing V/Line services are largely unsuitable unless passengers stay at their destination overnight. For example, to access a medical appointment (rather than in Mount Gambier) in Ballarat or Melbourne by public transport from Hamilton, passengers have to leave Hamilton at 7:00am and return at 10:15pm. This leaves a long wait in either Ballarat or Melbourne. While this is inconvenient for most people, it is impossible for frail elderly people or those who are unwell. Passengers will also lose the only connection point they have with an Adelaide service. The Adelaide service doesn't currently connect with the existing coach service from Hamilton.

## Comparison with other Victorian towns

Town	Hamilton	Swan Hill	Sale	Bairnsdale	Apollo Bay
Population (approx)	9,400	9,700	13,000	11,300	1,800
Distance From Melbourne	300	338	260	281	191
Week day V/Line services to and from Melbourne	2 per day each way via Ballarat* 1 per day via Warrnambool and Geelong (extra service on Fridays)	4 services per day each way, extra service on Fridays	6 services each way, extra service on Fridays	3 services each way	3 services each way
Weekend V/Line services to and from Melbourne	2 each way via Ballarat, 1 service each way on Sunday (no opportunity to do a return trip to Melbourne)	3 services each way on Saturday and Sunday	5 to Melbourne and 4 return on Saturday.  4to Melbourne and 3 return on Sunday	3 services each way on Saturday and 2 each way on Sunday	2 services each way on Saturday and Sunday

## Social and Economic Benefits of Public Transport

- ▶ High speed rural roads and unsealed roads can increase the number, severity and cost of road crashes. The Transport Accident Commission estimates that the average cost to the community of a road fatality is \$1.7 million and for a serious injury \$408,000 per person. The possibility of saving lives by reducing traffic on roads and supplying community buses becomes a minimal investment.
- ▶ The elderly, people living with a disability, people who are unemployed, students and children are among the groups most likely to require public transport. Buses enable them to be self sufficient and economically active by providing vital support to social capital and the vital link to jobs, shops, education, training and services, many of which have been centralised following the closure of rural facilities.
- ▶ Social inclusion improves significantly for people who live in close proximity to public transport; it is essential to help combat isolation by enabling people to stay connected with family and friends, and live productive and meaningful lives.
- ▶ The availability of public transport can be a key influence in a family decision to move to an area – or leave it. Greater connectivity to other locations and liveability attractors such as public transport and health services have been identified as two of the main drivers for population growth, and an adequate public transport service will help to achieve this goal.

## Environmental benefits of public transport

Bus use, if adequately marketed, can aid the transition to a low carbon economy by cutting carbon emissions. While fuel has been excluded from the Australian Government's Clean Energy Legislative Package, savings of around \$2,000/year in net hypothetical greenhouse gas costs could be expected under a carbon price of \$23 per tonne.



# Southern Grampians Public Transport Bus Brief

**If you are upset about the proposed closure of this service it is important that you let people know how you feel and what the loss of this service will mean to you. Write, phone, fax or send an email; the more people you contact the more people will know how you feel.**

**Here are some people you can contact.**

**Barwon South Western Regional Office  
Department of Transport**

180 Fyans St  
South Geelong Vic 3220  
Ph 5225 2550  
Fax 52252514  
Email [Barwon.southwestern@transport.vic.gov.au](mailto:Barwon.southwestern@transport.vic.gov.au)

**Department of Transport  
Public Transport Division**

GPO Box 2797  
Melbourne Vic 3001  
Ph 1800 264 644  
Fax 9656 6426

**Hon Hugh Delahunty - Member for Lowan**

Level 22, 50 Lonsdale St  
Melbourne  
Vic 3000

**OR**

114 Firebrace St  
Horsham Vic 3400  
Ph 5382 0097  
Fax 5381 1177

Email [hugh.delahunty@parliament.vic.gov.au](mailto:hugh.delahunty@parliament.vic.gov.au)

44 Gray St  
Hamilton Vic 3300  
Ph 5571 9800

**Hon Terry Mulder - Minister for Transport**

Level 16, 121 Exhibition St  
Melbourne Vic 3000  
Ph 9095 4330  
Fax 9095 4483

Email [Terence.mulder@parliament.vic.gov.au](mailto:Terence.mulder@parliament.vic.gov.au)

115A Bromfield St  
Colac Vic 3250  
Ph 5231 5046  
Fax 5231 5209

**Hon Ted Baillieu - Premier of Victoria**

Level 1, 1 Treasury Place  
Melbourne Vic 3000  
Ph 9651 5000  
Fax 9651 5054

Email [ted.baillieu@parliament.vic.gov.au](mailto:ted.baillieu@parliament.vic.gov.au)