



Ms Sangeetha Unbalagan
Manager
Social Wellbeing Programs
Community Services Commissioning
Department of Department of Families, Seniors, Disability Services and Child Safety
Level 22, 111 George Street
Brisbane City Q 4000

19th March, 2025

Dear Ms Unbalagan

Many thanks for allowing me to register our communities's community transport (CT) needs by 21st March.

Our community's geographic footprint

The Granite Belt Neighbourhood Centre (GBNC) serves the Granite Belt area of the Southern Downs Regional Council and abuts the NSW border to the south.

The Granite Belt area comprises nine small villages with the main township being Stanthorpe; the villages predominately dotted to the north and south of Stanthorpe mostly along the main highway. It's approximately 3 hours' drive (200) one-way southwest of Brisbane.

The Granite Belt from north to south spans approximately 60 klms. East to West the area spans approximately 15 klms. The New England Highway is the major arterial road through the region with a main distributor road heading west to Texas.

Transport mapping – supply (*availability of public transport*)

The Granite Belt has no form of public transport.

What follows are the other transport options that exist, commonly linking eligibility to specific cohorts.

There is one taxi operator who also holds a limousine license. There is very little knowledge of, or take up of the Taxi Subsidy Scheme by significant majority of Granite Belt residents who may be eligible. Naturally, the limousine vehicle is used for approved Dpt of Veteran Affairs clients' travel out of region for medical appointments or treatment.

Affordability of the only publicly-available transport option is the cost of a taxi fare. For example a one way trip to our furthest village of Wallangarra is \$145 one way, with on average the cost of a taxi fare within Stanthorpe itself is \$20 one way for approx for 1klm (fares quoted by taxi operator on 12/3/2025).

The Dept of Education contracts local charter bus providers to ensure high school students are able to get to the one public high school in Stanthorpe regardless of where they live.



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None of these school bus route operators have been used by non-student, local residents as a means to able to get into and out of Stanthorpe Monday to Friday (this is possible under the Dept's contract with chartered providers, but its at approval of the charter bus operator whether it can happen).

Several bus charter operators servicing the numerous school bus contracts make themselves available for general charter hire etc.

One of these charter bus hire operators (Crisps) also runs a regular service from Stanthorpe to Warwick (and on to Brisbane by interchanging) Monday to Friday. On Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays it also travel through Warwick to Toowoomba (and on to Brisbane by interchanging). This is the only 'public-available' service available to anyone needing to access either Warwick or Toowoomba hospital appointments or treatment; there is more knowledge of, and take up of the Patient Travel Subsidy Scheme which helps greatly to make the bus fare to Toowoomba more affordable.

There is also a small local Cancer support group who provide volunteer transport to cancer treatment out of the Granite Belt area; this group is small and its volunteers well aged themselves and operates entirely on donations.

Since mid January 2025, GBNC has through an memorandum of understanding with Footprints Brisbane agreed to be a collection point for local residents approved by Footprints as eligible for their CTF transport support.

This has been a wonderful addition to our area, especially because there are no restrictions on an eligible person being accompanied by their child or baby (because their only transport option is the use of taxis which accommodate child/baby travel and covers off such issues as insurance, appropriate driver screening etc).

The availability of Footprints CTF program is currently NOT advertised broadly because:

- a) this area is only allocated from their regional funding for a total of 31 trips per month which would be quickly expended if known about broadly
- b) from an affordability perspective, its only the immediate Stanthorpe township where the taxi vouchers are truly cost efficient and again if vouchers are only marketed to Stanthorpe residents the cries from the remainder of the area for equity and equality would be massive.

The above means all the outlying villages/areas don't really have access to Footprints CTF program and its only, and very limited transport solution is only financially viable for a subset of the area.

STAR Community Services sought Departmental approval to allocate some of its CTF to the Southern Downs area, whereas I believe it was only funded for the Toowoomba/Darling Downs region.





Since early 2024 when STAR established an office in Warwick (60klms or $\frac{3}{4}$ hr drive one-way) and bases its worker at GBNC 1 day per week. Their agency and services are very slowly being operationalized in the Granite Belt area.

From GBNC's perspective, the reasons for this slowness vest in STAR's centralized internal systems and protocols being suited to urban areas and not fit-for-purpose in our rural setting. It based worker to handle eligibility intake, take bookings and schedule which would free up their part-time Transport Worker to community develop a broader range of transport options targeted at specific needs.

And more critically, STAR doesn't allow under its CTF program for anyone under 18years of age to travel in their vehicles, even if accompanied by a CTF eligible person eg. young mums, teenagers with their parents. STAR reports they can't use CTF funding to provide taxi vouchers, it has to be via direct transport ie.. their car or a volunteer's car.

GBNC is unaware of how many CTF trips STAR is funded for in this area.

Neither Footprints or STAR's main transport solution, ie a taxi, is financially sustainable. What needs to be added to the transport options mix is regular scheduled services in & out of the smaller villages at least one day per week, preferably twice (with one day being a weekend day so rural people can participate in sport and the various free events that occur in Stanthorpe due to it being a tourist destination eg. every Saturday there is free music bands in the bandshell weekly).

Transport mapping - demand

GBNC is in the final stages of writing up a first time ever social needs mapping of the Granite Belt based on a broadranging survey we conducted mid 2024. The findings of this survey have been compared with benchmark data for each issue compared to Qld and Australia data. The total number of responses to the survey meant that 2% of our resident population participated.

In terms of the *number of people who are unable to afford private transport*.

Survey question 24 – *In the past 12 months, has lack of transportation kept you from participating in activities/events and/or attending appointments, meetings, work or from getting things needed for daily living established that 19.8% (almost 1 in 5 residents) of respondents indicated the lack of private transportation did impact their ability to pursue their activities of daily living.*

This means that of the total resident population of 6,418 people an estimated 1,207 Granite Belt people are experiencing a total lack of access to affordable transport and/or persistent, episodic access OR access to private transportation.





These numbers are unsurprising given to the Granite Belt area being rated as 12.6% in the most disadvantaged quintile unlike the broader Southern Downs region which is rated at 40.1% on the Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA); NB: the lower the percentage the higher the socio-economic disadvantage. This means there will be affordability issues, related to any aspect of their lives let alone whether they could afford to own and operate a car.

The above figures completely exclude the very large numbers of seasonal workers (and their families) predominately from the Pacific Island countries working as part of the Federal government's PALM Scheme. The majority of these people are living out of town on the very large employer farms with no access to non-work transport. All are CTF age range.

Would these people be eligible under CTF??? If they are, then the numbers of people without private transport in this area have significantly increased.

Impact of lack of access to transport that's affordable

As with other communities where lack of transport that is also affordable, the impacts of transport disadvantage have wide spread societal impacts. To put some humanity into the statistics, GBNC's various programs (that span womb to tomb) 'deal with' all sorts of impacts entirely due to transport disadvantage.

For example, the impacts that GBNC programs 'deal with' due to lack of transport that has diverse ripple effects include, but not limited to:

- no, or intermittent, attendance in our 2 playgroups (different age ranges) by existing clients; right now that program coordinator indicated she has 8 families alone (spread across our area) in this situation. This is very real for those families who don't have a car or only the 1 car or who are living on a fixed income and taxis are unaffordable on a fixed income.
- Families involved with Child Safety wanting to do the activities required (eg. attend one of GBNC's parenting courses) so the family is reunited can't get to these courses. In the current 24/25 year to date we have had 5 male parents in this situation. Added to this scenario, are those families whose access rights must be supervised where the location for all Granite Belt people in this situation is Toowoomba; Crisps doesn't run on weekends and it's a 1way drive of 2hrs.
- Healthy Ageing clients ie. over 65yrs living in outlying areas can't get to any events one-off or regular that run weekly. It should also be noted that some of the Stanthorpe resident elderly who drive to these events, the majority should not still be driving.
- Via a one-off crime prevention grant established a Braking the Cycle program specifically to tackle the high percentage of underage drivers (very common in rural communities) and young people who can't afford the cost of driving schools and don't have family support to gain their mandatory hours.





Transport needs / solutions

GBNC has grouped the main category of transport needs and possible solutions to arrive at the following table:

Transport Need	Trip details	Strategy
<i>Out of town (long haul) to Warwick and/or Stanthorpe</i>	<p>A. GB to Warwick – Monday to Friday</p> <p>B. GB via Warwick to Toowoomba i) Monday, Wed & Friday ii) Tues and Thursday</p>	<p>A. Pool of \$ subsidize cost of Crisp's fare</p> <p>B. i) Subsidize cost of Crisp's fare ii) Subsidize cost of Crisp's fare to Warwick then STAR or Footprints from Warwick to Twba???</p>
<i>Within Stanthorpe</i>	<p>People living no further out in a ring Applethorpe to Glen Aplin (8klms) needing to get into Stanthorpe</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - taxi vouchers (STAR or Footprints??). And/or - Volunteer driver scheme that covers all Granite Belt (STAR??? Footprints????) and/or - Set up share ride to common services/events subsidized by CTF \$
<i>From villages to Stanthorpe</i>	<p>A. travel from home to village centre and/or travel from villages to stanthorpe</p> <p>B. Group travel to support another program eg. Courtesy vehicle from villages to blue light disco or to attend film in Wallangarra or activity in Dalveen</p>	<p>A. Volunteer driver scheme that covers all Granite Belt Case by case solution/s depending on travel needs of the person etc.</p> <p>B. Set up share rides to common services/events subsidized by CTF \$ (charter bus operators or using other agencies loaned vehicles maybe be cheaper than taxi)</p>

To ensure financial viability and maximization of funding, GBNC suggests any solution/s which might be set up and coordinated using additional CTF \$ for CTF eligible persons, the transport solution should be available for all age ranges but not at the same subsidized price.

The above possible solutions also requires at the minimum CTF \$ for a rural hub model with:

- a. someone to coordinate requests for individual travel plus organizing any form of group/share ride travel, deal with eligibility etc. From experience to date, this person needs to be locally based and use systems and protocols that mean demand and supply of transport solutions are scheduled etc locally.
- b. the ability to use CTF as a collective amount (to pay for group rides) and allow this amount to be allocated as a trip to all CTF eligible persons so more accurate numbers of eligible travellers is gathered and not simply the cost of that transport service.
- c. the ability of any share or group ride to be accessed by non-CTF persons eg. over 65 year olds but NOT at the subsidized price





- d. exploration of how the vehicles owned by other agencies willing to provide to a central pool to help with regular group transport services, provided this central agency solves the issue of insurance coverage while using other agencies' vehicles. GBNC itself would donate on some days into such a pool 1 seven seater vehicle plus we know of 2 other agencies who have expressed a willingness to put their mini-buses into this solution.

On behalf of the Granite Belt communities, GBNC very much appreciates the chance to document our community transport needs and ideas on possible solutions for the purposes of your commissioning exercise.

We sincerely hope that our community may be the future recipient of additional CTF \$ aimed at a more coordinated and integrated range of financially viable transport solutions.

I would be happy to discuss our needs and thoughts in any future forums or meetings you may deem useful to your work.

Again thank you for the opportunity to lodge this submission

Yours faithfully

Ms Jennifer Leigh OAM
Service Manager

