

It's time to ring in the changes to make sure Hobart's traffic system keeps moving ahead

A ring-road system would take pressure off Hobart's transport network, writes David O'Byrne

LIKE so many people, my family, friends and I were caught up in the traffic chaos on Monday. It was frustrating for us personally, but for many people there were serious consequences, and my thoughts and best wishes go out to all those impacted.

Anyone who tried to drive anywhere around the city on that afternoon or evening experienced the sort of citywide gridlock that would send a shiver down the spine of even the most dedicated Sydneysider.

While these events are thankfully a rare occurrence, it demonstrates just how brittle the Hobart road and transport network is and how susceptible it is to disruption. It is difficult to imagine how much worse it could have been just think what would have happened if this occurred during the school term.

Hobart city is jammed between a river and a mountain, but although these natural features make our city beautiful and unique it creates challenges for smooth movement of commuters, freight and travellers alike. We know many of us who live in Clarence, Glenorchy or Kingborough either work, play or have friends and family in other southern council areas and have little choice but to travel through the city to get to where we need to be.

Much of the traffic entering or crossing the city is funnelled into a combination of the Macquarie/ Davey street couplet, the Brooker Highway, the Southern Outlet and the Tasman Bridge. For those trying to get from east to west, or north to south and vice versa, there's often only one route you can take.

One incident on any one of those roads and the entire system grinds to a crawl, and occasionally, like on Monday, it comes to a complete stop.

The consequences of intense traffic congestion for our lives, community and the economy are profound. In 2016 the then Liberal state infrastructure minister, Rene Hidding, convened a crisis summit on the issue of traffic congestion in Hobart. If it was a crisis then, I am not sure what it is today.

There is no single solution to resolve this issue, but with Hobart's population expected to grow substantially over the next decade we need to see a comprehensive, layered approach to the problem.

There is no question that we need to significantly increase investment in our public transport network, including buses, ferries and light rail.

We also need to increase the use of bikes and walking options for those coming to and from the city, but the reality is that these measures will only suit a portion of the travelling public.

The last major infrastructure improvement that resulted in improvements for Hobart traffic occurred in 2012-13 with the creation of the Brighton Transport Hub, which removed the freight rail depot out of the Evans St Wharf district and moved thousands of daily light and heavy freight truck movements out of the Hobart CBD.

I have long argued that we need to push ahead and create a functioning ring-road system for our city. These ideas are not new, but we simply need to agree they are required and get on with building them.

Two roads need to be constructed to link up to existing roads to create this ring-road system.

The first is a Flagstaff Gully Link Rd that connects Mornington with the Bowen Bridge. This will better connect the Bowen Bridge with the Eastern Shore, giving commuters a viable alternative when the Tasman Bridge is congested. It will also ease traffic pressures on the East Derwent and Tasman highways.

The first part of this link road is actually already built. Completing the rest of the link road and connecting it to the East Derwent Highway between Risdon Vale and Geilston Bay is only logical. This link road will divert significant freight transport away from the Tasman Bridge.

The second key road upgrade that is needed is a "pressure valve" link road that connects the Southern Outlet near Tolmans Hill down through the McRobies Rd gully and connecting with the northern suburbs. This would take significant pressure off Macquarie and Davey streets and the Brooker Highway, allowing traffic to bypass the city and providing an alternative route for Southern Outlet traffic. It would also serve to better connect Hobart's southern and northern suburbs.

The number of locations where this link road connects could be added to over time to disperse traffic across the network and avoid the creation of other choke points.

The state government needs to consider building a small number of short tunnels, overpasses and underpasses to alleviate key pressure points in our road network.

Examples of where these pieces of infrastructure could work include the junction of Davey St and the Southern Outlet, which would remove the criss-crossing of northbound and south-bound traffic and remove the massive choke point that this intersection creates.

There is also the potential grade separation of the Railway (or "ABC") Roundabout, which was just one of the many suggestions within the landmark 2016 report on Greater Hobart Congestion that this state government has not followed through on.

We must keep in mind that these large infrastructure projects take years to build, and so if the state government doesn't start working on fixing Hobart's traffic congestion right away, then we can only expect the situation to worsen over the next few years.

What we need is a transport strategy, including infrastructure upgrades, that not only manages the current demand but will also meet projected growth. A fifth lane on the outlet, an extra ferry or two and a continuation of the under-resourcing of Metro will simply not cut it.

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