



## MEDIA RELEASE

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### Free public transport highlights deeper transport inequities for regional Victoria

Regional Cities Victoria (RCV) Chair Cr Ben Blain, Mayor of Warrnambool, has welcomed efforts to ease pressure on households through free public transport in April, but says the announcement exposes a deeper and long-standing inequity for regional communities.

“We hope this measure helps stabilise fuel supply because for regional communities, businesses and families, reliable access to fuel is not optional, it’s essential,” Cr Blain said.

“But this announcement also highlights a hard truth: regional Victorians are being left behind when it comes to transport investment.”

Cr Blain said that while public transport will be free across the state, many regional communities will see little benefit due to networks that are not fit for purpose.

“Regional Victorians will be effectively subsidising free public transport for Melbourne, while being left with services that are less reliable, less connected and underinvested,” he said.

“For many people in regional areas, public transport simply isn’t a viable option for getting to work, school or daily life.”

Local bus networks in most regional cities have not been reviewed in more than 15 years, exacerbating the lack the coverage, frequency and integration needed to support growing populations and modern commuting patterns.

“Free fares are not the issue, the network is. Without serious investment in regional bus services, people will continue to rely on their cars, regardless of whether public transport is free.”

Cr Blain also noted that regional rail services, with low-cost fares, are frequently operating at capacity.

“Making services free without increasing capacity risks worsening overcrowding rather than improving access,” Cr Blain said.

These public transport challenges reflect a broader pattern of underinvestment across regional infrastructure.

“Just as regional public transport has been left behind, our regional roads have also been allowed to deteriorate after years of neglect,” Cr Blain said.



“This is not just a transport issue, it’s a productivity, cost-of-living and equity issue for regional Victoria.”

Cr Blain said the current situation should act as a catalyst for more meaningful reform.

“We appreciate all short-term efforts to safeguard fuel supplies, but if the Government is serious about supporting regional growth and easing cost-of-living pressures, it must commit to long-term investment in regional transport – both public and roads – that is fit for purpose, reliable and built for the future of our cities.”