

MERCURY

Time for a traffic fix

BEING stuck in a Hobart traffic jam is a frustrating experience. It is hard to understand how a city with a relatively small and stable population can manage to tie itself up in knots as regularly as Hobart does. It seems as if when schools go back or there's a minor prang or roadworks or a bushfire somewhere or a butterfly flaps its wings, suddenly commuters are stationary and cursing their luck.

By some cruel irony, an inner-city business district that a jogger can cross in about 10 minutes at a decent trot has become the heart of the third-most congested road network in the nation. Don't expect much sympathy from interstate friends on the mainland when recounting tales of your Hobart traffic woes — the perception is that our lucky isle is somehow immune to such big-city problems. And so it should be, but for reasons that are impossible to fathom, we are instead cursed with the transport trifecta: a road network that has reached capacity, a public transport system inadequate for the task and an all but non-existent network of cycle paths.

When anger over a series of traffic jams last year caused furrowed brows in government, the Department of State Growth produced the Hobart Congestion Traffic Analysis, which contained a series of recommendations. The RACT has called on the State Government expedite the introduction of the recommendations of the report. That would be a good first step. Given that the State Government has a vision of increasing the state's population to 650,000 people, what is needed is a bolder medium to long-term vision on reducing the amount of traffic on our

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roads to stop the current problem getting worse. There are plenty of small and medium-sized cities around the world which have tackled the same problem and found solutions which might provide templates.

It will mean big picture, big vision thinking that we as a state need to get better at: things like improving our public transport and giving careful consideration to light rail for the northern suburbs — as this paper has strongly advocated — and ferries for the Eastern Shore and Kingborough. It means improving park-and-ride facilities on the city fringe and managing the number of on and off-street parking spaces in the city so as not to lure in even more commuters. It might mean removing on-street parking or improving clearways so traffic can flow. It will involve things like increasing the availability of telecommuting and flexitime and decentralising government operations. And it means making it easier for people to choose active transport options like cycling or walking for some or all of their journey. And it might even mean untangling Hobart's byzantine nightmare of one-way streets straight out of a guide on how to design a city that's hard to get around.

What Hobart commuters don't want is different levels of government passing the buck. The State Government needs to take leadership on this problem and not blame the city council or hope that the Federal Government will come through with a big wad of cash to pay for a magic solution. Now would be a good time to show some serious commitment and hard work to come up with some solutions — lest things get worse and grumpy commuters become even more grumpy voters.