

Engagement review

Gold Coast Light Rail Stage 4 project

The Department of State Development, Infrastructure and Planning connects industries, businesses, communities and government (at all levels) to leverage regions' strengths to generate sustainable and enduring economic growth that supports well-planned, inclusive and resilient communities.

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Overview

As part of the review of the Gold Coast Light Rail Stage 4 (GCLR4) project, the Department of State Development, Infrastructure and Planning has been tasked with assessing the prior public engagement and undertaking engagement activities to seek community views on public transport availability and options (including mode and route choice) that may be subject to further detailed analysis. This supports the review work around proposed transport options for the southern part of the Gold Coast.

Consultation summary

Future transport options for the southern Gold Coast

The Department of State Development, Infrastructure and Planning (DSDIP) undertook independent community engagement activities to support the review of the GCLR4 project. This consultation was held from 21 March to 2 May 2025—to gather feedback on preferences, concerns, and vision for an effective, local transport system in the southern Gold Coast area. With 5,662 viable submissions received, largely from community members, the process revealed key themes in public sentiment, differing outlooks between southern Gold Coast residents and those from other suburbs, and strong community expectations for proposed public transport improvements. The following captures details of the consultation, feedback insights and explores concerns and sentiments around the proposed GCLR4 project (which was one of two options being considered as part of a Detailed Business Case by the Department of Transport and Main Roads before the review commenced), along with analysis of what the community envisions as criteria for a great public transport system.

Consultation activities

- » Website: 15,511 views from 10,256 users
- » Engagement platform: 5,774 submissions
- » Social media promotion of consultation: 5,217 impressions
- » Media statements
- » Other: A town hall meeting was organised by Mr Hermann Vorster MP, Member for Burleigh and The Honourable Laura Gerber MP, Member for Currumbin on 9 April 2025. The Honourable Jarrod Bleijie MP, Deputy Premier, Minister for State Development, Infrastructure and Planning and Minister for Industrial Relations spoke at this event, with over 430 registered attendees.

Engagement platform: consultation questions

The information presented below is the content from the Department website during the consultation process.

About you

- » Note: only submissions with addresses will be considered to ensure the voices of southern Gold Coast residents are heard. [Open text fields]
 - Street
 - Suburb
 - Postcode
- » Which best describes you, in submitting your feedback? [Tick box]
 - Community member
 - Business
 - Community group
 - Industry member
 - Peak body
 - Other (please specify)

About future transport options for the Gold Coast

- » Q1 – How would you describe a great public transport system for your local area? [Open text field]
- » Q2 – What are your concerns on the current proposal for light rail expansion in the southern Gold Coast? [Open text field]
- » Q3 – Do you feel that you were properly consulted in the prior process? [Open text field]
- » Q4 – In your opinion, what key features or services are important to consider, for developing a great public transport system in your local area? [Open text field]
- » Q5 – What is most important to you when considering public transport options? [Rank]
 - Affordability
 - Accessibility
 - Frequency
 - Proximity

Submissions overview

When consultation closed, 5,774 total submissions had been made. Through the data cleansing process¹ 2.15% of submissions were merged/removed—identified as duplicate submissions/submitters.

Based on this, 5,662 submissions were considered:

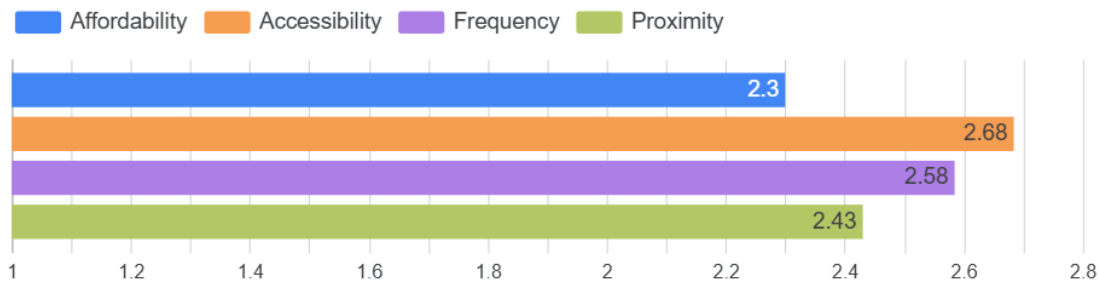
- » 3,962, from the southern Gold Coast and 1,700 from other suburbs (primarily the surrounding area and broader Gold Coast region)
- » most-represented suburbs include Palm Beach (29.5%), Elanora (7.8%), Burleigh Heads (7.4%) and Tugun (6.4%)
- » 94.4% from community members, 2.6% from business, 0.6% from community groups, and 2.4% from others.

Response analysis

For questions 1, 2 and 4, the following key themes emerged – ranked from most to least mentioned:

- » Q1/Q4 – What makes a great transport system?
 1. Connectivity
 2. Efficiency/reliability
 3. Compatibility with other infrastructure (like roads or carparks)
 4. Frequency
 5. Affordability
 6. Accessibility
 7. Sustainability
 8. Safety
 9. Comfort/noise
 10. Cleanliness.
- » Q2 – What are your concerns on the current proposal for light rail expansion in the southern Gold Coast?
 1. Parking/traffic
 2. Cost
 3. Environmental/cultural
 4. Over-development
 5. Route/station design

- 6. Construction/noise
- 7. Business impacts
- 8. Delivery timeframe
- 9. Home resumptions
- 10. Safety/crime.
- » Q3 – Do you feel that you were properly consulted?
 - Yes (approximately 30%)
 - No (approximately 60%)
 - Neutral/N/A (approximately 10%).
- » Q5 – What is most important to you when considering public transport options? (ranked 1-4)



Summary of qualitative responses

Community engagement and consultation

As part of the survey, respondents were asked if they were properly consulted in the prior process. Over half indicated they hadn't been, with some saying that while they had been engaged, they didn't feel heard and/or their feedback hadn't been acted upon. This negative sentiment was felt moderately higher among southern Gold Coast respondents, suggesting that previous consultation efforts had not been effective within this community. Of those who agreed about being properly consulted, some expressed that the proposal was well-advertised and had been public knowledge for a considerable amount of time.

The importance of integration and connectivity

When asked about what makes a 'great' public transport network, a common theme emerged around the importance of a well-connected network that seamlessly integrates with other infrastructure like roads and car parks. Many expressed that public transport should facilitate movement between key locations, while also not significantly disrupting existing infrastructure in the process. This sentiment often came through in responses supportive of the bus network, with respondents suggesting that the mode's key benefits come from being flexible and compatible with the road network. One Burleigh Heads respondent said:

"The option of E buses (electric) are a ready solution which already exists without the need to destroy the existing functionality of the Gold Coast Highway and other, fit for purpose, major and minor roads. Variations to timetables and travel routes is relatively simple as societal needs vary."

An accessible*, affordable, efficient network

Many responses showed a general desire for a well-designed and operated public transport system, with themes like accessibility, affordability, efficiency and frequency all receiving similar amounts of interest. The ubiquity of these themes across supporters of all transport modes shows that while individuals can have preferences about what types of public transport are used, they expect a high-quality service regardless of how the network is ultimately designed.

Respondents sometimes differed on whether they thought the current public transport system was adequate, or if aspects like frequency and operating hours could be improved. While affordability was frequently mentioned as the sign of a great transport system, few respondents considered it a current issue, likely due to the introduction of 50 cent fares. Accessibility-themed responses sometimes expressed concern that a light rail network would be difficult to reach by all but those living directly along the line/is more geared towards tourists and that the distance between stations was a concern, while others felt that light rail was an accessible mode of transport.

**accessible refers to a system that everyone can use and get to easily and safely, regardless of their age, mobility, disability, or other needs.*

Mode-specific sentiment

Public views on transportation modes were mixed, with buses eliciting the most positive sentiment (around 50%), and some responses calling for the use of electric/zero emissions models. However, there was a marked divergence on light rail. While around a third of respondents expressed positive sentiment toward light rail, nearly two-thirds expressed negativity, showing a high degree of polarisation within the community. Negative light rail sentiment was especially concentrated in the southern Gold Coast, suggesting heightened concerns about localised impacts of this transport mode.

By contrast, heavy rail (particularly connecting Varsity Lakes to the Gold Coast Airport) and active transport (cycling, walking) received lower mentions but generally positive sentiment, indicating a general alignment in community thinking for these transport modes.

Concerns about the current light rail proposal

When asked for their concerns about the current light rail proposal, respondents flagged several issues around parking/traffic, project cost, overdevelopment, and impacts to the environment and cultural spaces.

A common concern among southern Gold Coast respondents was that the introduction of light rail would lead to changes to zoning, opening the coastal area up to new development and high-rise buildings, impacting the traffic flow, availability of parking, and local character of the area. This suggests a high level of local consciousness around the way major projects can impact quality-of-life. One Palm Beach resident said:

"I'm concerned about the damage to our beautiful Burleigh Heads national park/wildlife, noise pollution, no parking, that only residents close to the tram will be able to access it. Realistically people won't be able to catch the tram to work unless they live and work on the line."

Another persistent concern was the projected cost, with these respondents believing that the money would be better spent on the community, that other transport modes are more cost-effective, and/or that the project would disproportionately impact local businesses.

Approximately 17% of respondents expressed concerns about the environmental and cultural sustainability of the project, seeing it as having potential impacts on parkland, rivers, cultural sites, and native flora and fauna, particularly around Tallebudgera Creek and Burleigh Hill.

About a quarter of respondents flagged no concerns, with some expressing that their only worry was that the project would be delayed or not delivered.

Other consultation submissions received

A total of 20 submissions were received outside of the formal (online) consultation platform, representing a total of 30 people. Of these submitters, around 60% were strongly supportive of light rail vs. around 20% against.

For those supportive, the main themes for support were access to the airport, improving connectivity and accessibility, boosting sustainability and managing congestion.

For those against light rail, some raised electric/zero emission buses as their preferred mode, and listed concerns relating to GCLR4 including reduced parking and access, location of stations, noise, housing resumptions, increased crime, environmental impacts, cost, traffic, land resumptions and the potential promotion of over-development.

One submitter also raised concerns about the validity of the DSDIP-led consultation, survey questions, the ability to allow multiple responses from the same IP address and the lack of information on alternative transport modes. However, the high level of engagement, breadth of feedback received and an applied process for merging/removing multiple submissions/submitters, indicates a valid process.

Another submitter raised thoughts about this not being the best use of government funding, in comparison to things like hospitals, recycling facilities or road and bus service upgrades.

Remaining submitters provided feedback on alternative modes/solutions including underground tunnelling, cable cars and elevated tracks. Along with offers of consultation services and one submitter regardless of mode chosen, highlighted the desire to also deliver active transport solutions.

» Breakdown of question: 'Which best describes you, in submitting your feedback?'

- Community: 11 submitters
- Business: 9 submitters
- Environmental group: 1 submitter
- Peak body: 6 submitters
- Local government: 1 submitter
- Education: 2 submitters

Conclusion

Previous consultations and support materials focussed on plans for extending the Gold Coast light rail as the only transport option being considered. With mode and route choices predominately discussed in association with its interactivity with the proposed extension of light rail from Burleigh Heads to Coolangatta. This did not allow an opportunity for community (particularly those most affected in the southern Gold Coast), to provide their thoughts more broadly on their aspirations for future transport solutions, including different transport options.

In addition, the framing of the previous consultations and related materials as 'Gold Coast Light Rail Stage 4' further contributes to a perception that light rail is a foregone conclusion and the only option the community can comment on. Both previous consultations were based around TMR's Gold Coast Highway Multi-modal Corridor Study, and the consultations were undertaken prior to the development of the Preliminary Evaluation (also referred to as the Gold Coast Light Rail Stage 4 Preliminary Business Case) and prior to the shortlisting of options for further detailed planning.

The aim of the Corridor Study was to review all previous planning and develop an updated transport strategy for this corridor that considers all modes of transport including walking, cycling, public transport and private vehicles. However, as the consultation was positioned as 'Gold Coast Light Rail Stage 4', this may be a contributing factor to 60% of respondents feeling like they were not properly consulted in previous consultations.

In contrast, the most recent consultation ensured the views of the local community at the broadest level were considered. Some key takeaways:

- » Gold Coast residents, particularly in the southern Gold Coast area, do not feel like they have been properly engaged or heard.
- » Views on preferred transport modes remain mixed.
- » There are heightened concerns about localised impacts of light rail in the southern Gold Coast community.
- » While individuals may have preferences about types of public transport, they expect a high-quality service regardless of how the network is ultimately designed.
- » When asked about what makes a 'great' public transport network, a common theme emerged around the importance of a well-connected network that seamlessly integrates with other infrastructure like roads and car parks. Along with it being accessible, affordable, efficient and frequent.

There were significant similarities in the concerns raised by community in both past and present consultations, for example, parking and traffic was the number one issue raised in all three consultations.

However, sentiment towards light rail shifted between past and present consultations. At present around a third of respondents express positive sentiment toward light rail, a significant reduction from the previous research that showed support for light rail at around 63%. This may be a result of the most recent consultation providing opportunity for feedback more broadly on transport solutions (including modes) – as opposed to the previous consultations that were centred around providing feedback on extending light rail.

The previous two consultations did not create an environment for the community to provide their thoughts more broadly on options including mode and route choice—noting that prior to these, in March/April 2020 there was consultation on a Multi-modal corridor study which did discuss other modes (buses). The latest consultation filled this gap by allowing the community to provide their thoughts on future transport solutions in a wider context.

Recommendations

Considering the most recent views provided by members of the Gold Coast community, future transport planning and decision making should consider:

- » integration with other infrastructure like roads and car parks
- » limiting the disruption of existing infrastructure in the process
- » facilitating movement between key locations
- » parking/traffic, project cost, overdevelopment, and impacts to the environment and cultural spaces
- » providing ongoing and transparent communication and engagement with the community.

ⁱ When consultation closed, 5774 total submissions had been made.

Four were immediately removed because they were test submissions made by departmental staff at the opening of the survey.

When analysing the remaining 5770, it became clear that there were some instances of duplicate IP addresses. Use of the same IP address doesn't necessarily mean a single person submitted more than one survey, as locations with shared Wi-Fi (like public libraries, hotels and large households) can see multiple people legitimately having the same IP, however it can still be an indication of duplicate submissions. To ensure the quality of the survey data, we conducted a more thorough analysis on 420 (7.28%) of the submissions, looking for clear issues like:

- if a large number of submissions were attributed to the same IP address
- if they were submitted at a similar time
- if they came from the same physical address
- if the phrasing and/or content of the submissions were similar

Following this analysis, 124 (2.15%) submissions were found to show evidence of being duplicate submissions. We consolidated these into 16 responses to ensure that these community members would have their voices heard while still guaranteeing the representative quality of the overall dataset.

The final dataset then included 5,662 responses.