



## The East Gippsland *Let's GET Connected* Project (B)

The joint application from the Wellington and East Gippsland Shire Councils was successful in obtaining funding. The GET project was chosen as one of the nine TCP pilot projects (*Exhibit 1*) and commenced in October 2003 under the management of Rhonda James and Sheryl McHugh. It received funding of \$415,900, the largest amount for any of the pilot projects, and well ahead of the next largest grant (\$275,500). The project was under the auspices of the two councils, with Wellington as the lead agency.

### Gippsland

At the local level, James and McHugh were convinced that a formal steering committee structure was necessary to make collaboration work on a larger scale. The role of the steering committee was to

- “Oversee the strategic planning process for the project, bringing to this process local expertise and knowledge.
- Act as advisors and advocates to Local, State and Federal Government on policy and other related issues.
- Support and monitor strategic planning and achievement of objectives.
- Provide support, advice and direction for project staff.”

Reflecting the diversity of the region’s transport problems, a committee of representatives from 20 organisations was established (*Exhibit 2*). Members of the steering committee were required to sign a partnership agreement (*Exhibit 3*) setting out the role of the committee and the obligations of members. Committee members were expected to be actively involved

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This case was written by David Lansley, Australia and New Zealand School of Government, for Professor John Alford as a basis for class discussion rather than to illustrate either effective or ineffective handling of a managerial situation. It has been prepared for teaching purposes to accompany the case study 2008-62.1. The use of teaching materials is restricted to authorised persons.

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(“members who do not attend three meetings without apology are deemed to have resigned”), and operating procedures (including minuting of meetings, and the procedures for decision making and conflict resolution) were clearly defined.

Over time, the committee’s views evolved in a number of areas, including who were the critical stakeholders. It became apparent that focusing on outputs was more important to success than focusing on inputs. They found it was important to identify the people working with end users of the transport system – youth workers, education and training organisations and others – and bring them together, for it was these people rather than the actual transport providers who were best able to highlight the problems (such as students dropping out of further education) resulting from inadequate transport.

## **Spring Street**

Establishing a formal steering committee was to prove a necessary, but not sufficient, step. More needed to be done to improve cooperation between stakeholders at the local level and the state government departments overseeing the TCP (Infrastructure (DoI), Human Services (DHS), Victorian Communities (DVC) and Education and Training (DET)). In part reflecting the amount of regulation and red tape they had encountered in the transport area previously, James and McHugh initiated bi-monthly meetings of representatives of each of the nine TCP pilot projects across Victoria to take common concerns to the relevant government departments. As Rhonda James noted, “We were confronted with a lot of regulatory barriers, so we needed a forum to get our issues up through the system in government to get more flexibility in policy.”

At times, improving collaboration with these departments was tortuous, but paid dividends. James recalled that, in the case of school buses

“We’ve been able to get ticked-off at senior levels of government that school buses need to be more flexible ... Now we’ve got a project called the Gippsland School Bus Flexibility Project which we’ve rolled out right across Gippsland and we’ve got one of the departmental secretaries, Howard Ronaldson [Secretary of DoI from December 2002], as the champion of this particular pilot. We’ve got it from the top down now, but Sheryl and I had to start from the bottom up and then we tried in the middle and then we’ve gone to the top and we’ve gone up and down and around and around trying to loosen up the regulations.”

In order to “loosen up the regulations”, they pushed for access to senior people in the relevant departments that could make decisions, and developed links with the regional offices of the TCP departments to gain further support for specific projects and policy changes. Looking back, they believe they have been particularly successful at gaining support for projects at the regional level of state departments.

## **Postscript**

Towards the end of the three year GET pilot project, the steering committee undertook an assessment of the role of partnerships. The assessment concentrated on two specific partnerships – the TAFE<sup>1</sup> and Post-School Student Travel on School Buses, and the Melbourne Medical Transport Assistance Program. The school bus initiative involved eight

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<sup>1</sup> Technical and Further Education

agencies contributing in a variety of ways to achieve better utilisation of a substantial number of school buses (*Exhibit 3*). The regional office of DET authorised two of the largest local bus companies to participate in trialling access to school buses by post-school students. The medical transport program brought together six agencies to better coordinate travel for patients going to Melbourne. The steering committee concluded that GET's focus on partnerships had allowed considerably more to be achieved with the available resources than would otherwise have been possible. Crucial to the success of the partnerships was the energy of the TCP coordinators, the expectation that steering committee members would be active, and support for the GET project from senior departmental regional managers.

For Rhonda James and Sheryl McHugh, probably the dominant message from the GET project was the critical importance of champions at the local, regional and state levels, in government, commercial and community organisations. Champions or "friendlies" were essential to provide support, steer proposals and reduce barriers. Support from the DoI and DET regional offices was important, as was the decision of a school in Sale to act as a model for others by using buses more flexibly.

Just as important was the willingness of a taxi owner in Bairnsdale to set a precedent by purchasing a multi-purpose taxi van, knowing that, as such vehicles were not popular with regular taxi users, he would need to develop a new market among group users such as retirement villages and day care centres. And at the state level, having the Secretary of DoI as a champion lent invaluable weight to the GET project. The success of collaboration was always very dependent on the individuals involved, and staff turnover at times posed a problem because new relationships had to be established, and the passion of individuals to the aims of GET varied. But the support of active and imaginative people was particularly important in encouraging the collaboration necessary to the success of GET.

## Exhibit 1: Transport Connections Projects – Selected Features

Pilot Projects	Location	Resource base	Brokerage Funding	Coordinator Status	Auspice Agency	Commencement date	Focus
Bass Coast Transport Connections	Bass Coast Shire	\$166,266 over three years	Yes	Part-time	Local Government	January 2004	Transport disadvantaged population in the Bass Coast shire. Targeted solutions to various community groups
Let's GET Connected	East Gippsland Shire Wellington Shire	\$415,900 over three years	Yes	Part-time	Local Government	October 2003	Transport disadvantaged population in Gippsland. Targeted solutions to all members of local communities
Valley to City Efficiently	Mt Beauty and Kiewa Valley (including parts of the Alpine, Indigo and Towong Shires)	\$151,578 over three years	No	Part-time	Health Organisation	November 2003	Transport disadvantaged population of Mt. Beauty and Kiewa Valley
Hume Transport Links	Craigieburn and Roxburgh Park	\$268,000 over three years	No	Full-time	Community Organisation	October 2003	Transport disadvantaged population in Craigieburn and Roxburgh Park
Getting Around	Macedon Ranges Shire Mt. Alexander Shire	\$247,717 over three years	No	Part-time	Local Government	October 2003	V/Line scheduling, and transport disadvantaged population in Macedon and Mt. Alexander
Golden Connections	Golden Plains Shire	\$193,447 over three years	Yes	Part-time	Local Government	September 2003	Frail/Elderly People People with disabilities Young People Isolated Communities in Golden Plains Shire
Two Rivers	Shires of Moyne	\$126,492 over three years	Yes	Part-time	Health Organisation	July 2003	Transport disadvantaged population in the communities of Casterton and Port Fairy
Wimmera Transport Connections	West Wimmera Shire Hindmarsh Shire Yarriambiack Horsham (Rural areas)	\$275,000 over three years	Yes	Full-time	Community Organisation	November 2003	Young People Frail/Elderly Isolated Communities in the Wimmera region
Southern Mallee Transport Connections	Buloke Shire Ganawarra Shire Swan Hill Rural City	\$268,000 over three years	No	Part-time	Local Government	November 2003	Transport disadvantaged communities in Southern Mallee Region

## **Exhibit 2: Steering Committee Membership, GET Transport Connections Project**

### **GET Project**

- Wellington Shire Council
- East Gippsland Shire Council
- RuralAccess
- DoI (Gippsland Region)
- DHS (Gippsland Region)
- DET (Gippsland Region)
- DVC (Gippsland Region)
- Department of Veterans' Affairs (Gippsland Region)
- Bus Association
- V/Line
- Taxi Association
- Vic Roads
- Gippsland East Local Learning and Employment Network
- Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal Cooperative
- Ramahyuck District Aboriginal Corporation
- East Gippsland TAFE
- Kilmany Uniting Care
- Latrobe Community Health Services
- Central Gippsland Health Services
- Gippsland Lakes Community Health Services

### Exhibit 3: GET Transport Connections – Partnerships in the TAFE & Post-School Student Travel on School Buses Project

Agency	Role agency played in the partnership	Type of partnership (selection from list)	Impact that the partnership has had or will have on agency or agency clients
Dept of Education & Training (DET)  Gippsland East Local Learning & Employment Network (GELLEN) East Gippsland & Wellington Shire Councils	Undertook preliminary work  Worked with TCP to implement existing DET policy that enabled a process for post-school students' access to school buses	Collaborative	More young people accessing school buses  Agency committed
Transport Connections Project (TCP)	Brought partners together and expanded partnership		Increased workload
Department of Infrastructure (DOI)	Information-sharing and research-sharing information more broadly across networks	Collaborative	Increased number of post-school students accessing buses
Department of Education & Training (DET)	Negotiation – negotiated with sector – broke down barriers	Collaborative	Cultural change requires greater depth (upper management)  Providing opportunities
Department of Victorian Communities (DVC)	Placed information on DVC agenda Advocacy role	Cooperative	
TAFE		Cooperative and Collaborative	