

Information Pack: Passenger Transport

Workshop Boundary Rule: *We are not here to re-diagnose structural barriers or lament public transport deficits. Our focus today is strictly on co-designing a viable, place-based pilot solution for the Mid North and North West regions that ensures residents can reliably access work, training, and education when private mobility is unavailable, unsuitable, or insufficient.*

STRATEGIC OVERVIEW & THE LOCAL REALITY

Why This Pathway Matters

For many regional South Australians, a private vehicle is the baseline for economic participation, but numerous individuals face acute mobility gaps due to non-ownership, household vehicle constraints, financial distress, or licensing barriers. When private mobility is unavailable, passenger transport must serve as a critical safety net. Rather than simply trying to expand conventional fixed-route networks, the focus must shift to flexible, demand-responsive, and highly coordinated local models that connect jobseekers to regional hubs.

The Reality in Numbers

Based on a local community survey of 233 individuals who reported facing transport-related barriers to obtaining or increasing paid work:

- **19%** do not have access to any household vehicle.
- **54%** did not hold a valid driver licence.
- **58%** reported having no public transport near where they lived, **33%** had no community transport nearby, while **23%** had no public or community transport nearby.
- **58%** of respondents reasoned that they would be able to use public or community transport to get to work within an hour and only **25%** thought it would take more than an hour.
- **68%** of respondents said a more frequent or better coordinated public or community transport would improve their chances of securing and staying at work
- **63%** of respondents who needed disability access said public transport partially or fully met their needs.

Long travel distances, dispersed populations, and regional shift-work schedules mean that standard public transport schedules fail to align with employment realities.

What We Heard From the Ground

"Better coordination between existing transport providers, employers, and training organizations will deliver far greater regional benefits than simply throwing money at adding more empty buses on fixed routes."

"While young people could often travel into regional centres, they frequently struggled to return home, travel laterally between communities, or access evening, weekend and shift-based employment opportunities."

CORE BARRIERS

Barrier 1: Spatial & Temporal Asymmetry ("Wrong Place, Wrong Time")

Structural Friction: Traditional public transport networks rely on fixed routes connecting major towns, leaving smaller peripheral communities isolated. Furthermore, standard bus timetables operate almost entirely within standard business hours (9:00 AM – 5:00 PM).

Workforce Impact: Jobseekers cannot access industrial shift work, seasonal agricultural surges, or early-morning trade apprenticeships, as no commercial services run to align with regional employer shift-change hours.

Barrier 2: Fragmented Asset Institutionalization (The "Empty Fleet" Problem)

Structural Friction: Significant transport infrastructure exists across the regions, but it is locked within organizational silos. Dedicated vehicles owned by local councils, community health groups, NDIS providers, and corporate employers sit idle for substantial portions of the day due to strict funding restrictions and ring-fenced eligibility rules.

Workforce Impact: There is no centralized regional coordination mechanism or shared booking infrastructure to cross-utilize these empty assets for workforce transport, forcing the region to demand new capital expenditures while existing wheels do not move.

Barrier 3: Operational Affordability & Funding Silos

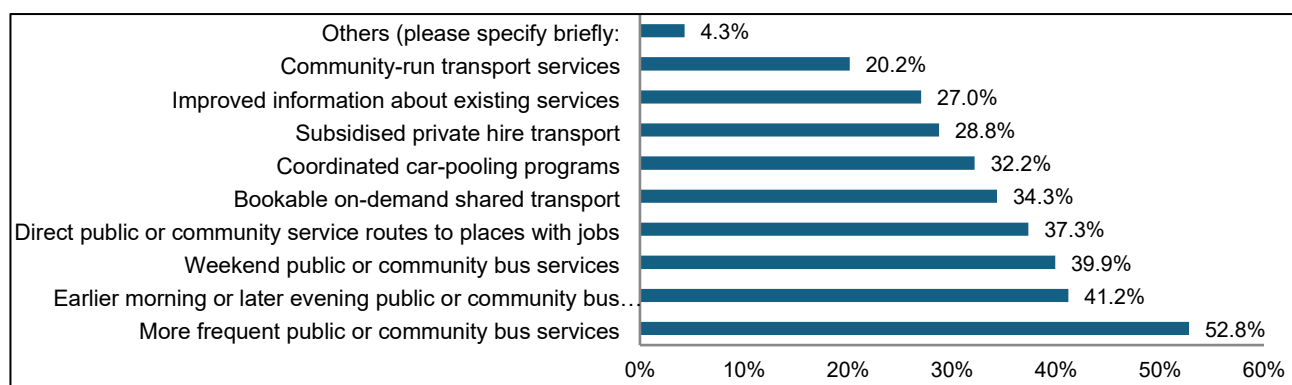
Structural Friction: Regional passenger transport is structurally incapable of recovering full operational costs from passenger fares alone due to low population density and vast travel distances. Current financing models rely on rigid government grant cycles that cover capital purchases but fail to subsidize ongoing running costs.

Workforce Impact: Pilots frequently collapse once initial seed capital ends because there is no integrated financial contribution structure connecting the economic beneficiaries of the transport—such as local employers desperate for labor and employment service providers seeking placement outcomes.

Barrier 4: Information Asymmetry & Service Invisibility

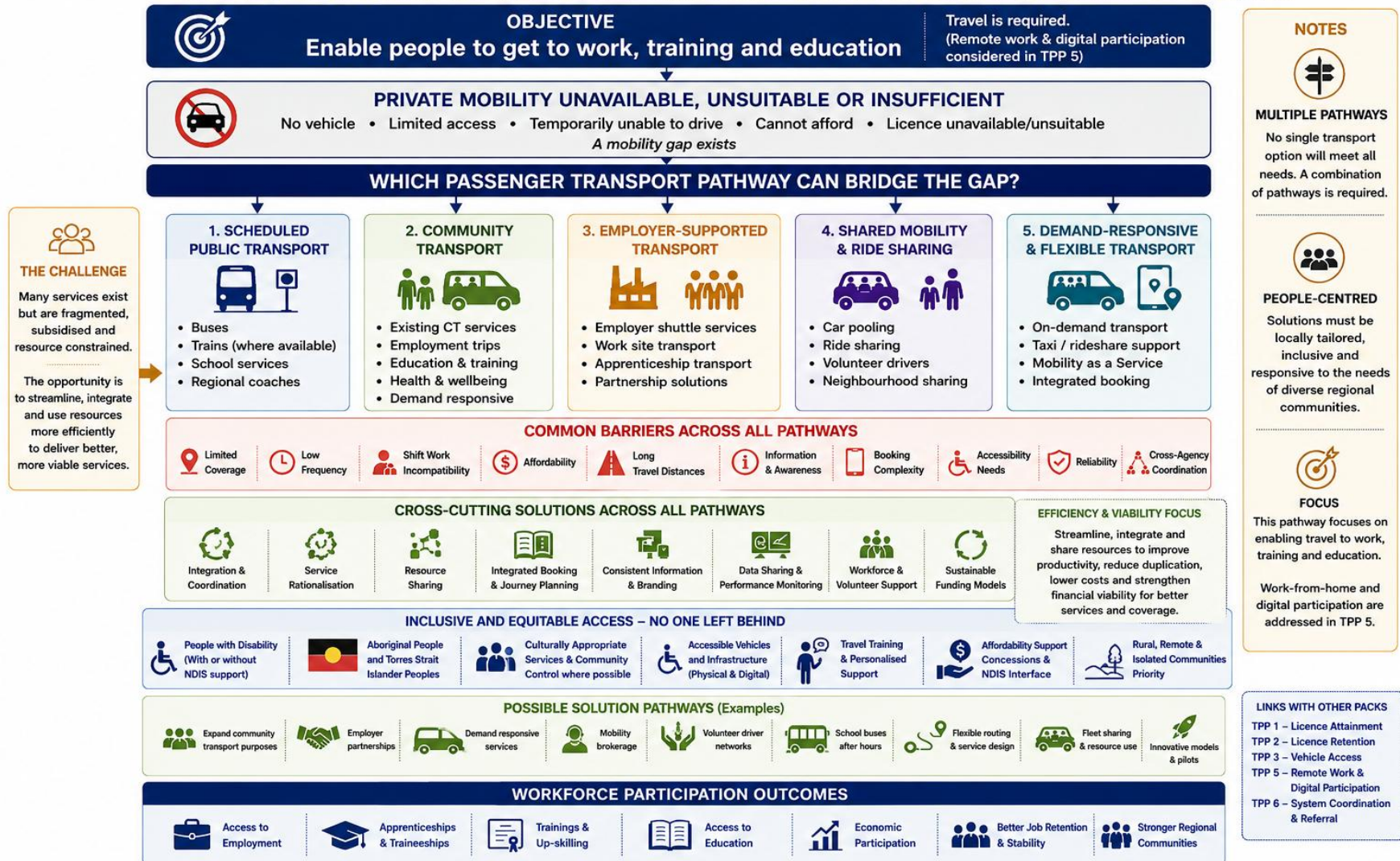
Structural Friction: There is an acute deficit in public-facing information, unified transport maps, and cohesive branding. Existing commercial or public transit routes frequently operate without visible regional signage or clear referral pathways.

Workforce Impact: Jobseekers cannot navigate or utilize routes simply because they do not know they exist or how to book them.



Transport improvements that would most help access work

Connecting People to Work, Training and Education When Private Mobility Is Unavailable, Unsuitable or Insufficient



A Framework for Thinking About Passenger Transport Solutions

EXISTING PASSENGER TRANSPORT SERVICES IN THE REGION

To ensure our newly proposed pilot concepts build upon, connect with, or directly address the operational gaps within the current landscape, any concept must navigate the features and limitations of existing systems:

Program / Service	Provider / Auspice	Target Group	Support Provided / Key Features	Core Limitations & Gaps for Workforce Travel
Community Passenger Networks (CPNs) & CTSA	Community Transport Operators & Local Councils	Transport-disadvantaged residents, particularly elderly or medical clients	Flexible local community transport loops, specialized medical travel, and social participation transport.	Generally designed around non-routine trips rather than daily workforce travel. Highly reliant on volunteer driver availability, restricted to business hours, and requires bookings far in advance.
Scheduled Public Transport (Inter-Town Links)	Department for Infrastructure and Transport (DIT) & Private Operators	General regional passengers traveling between major hubs	Scheduled fixed-route long-distance and inter-town bus coach services connecting regional centers.	Timetables do not align with modern shift work, early morning trade starts, or late evening finishes. Fails to provide lateral travel between smaller communities outside the main spine.
Local Town Bus & Regional Taxi Services	Private Operators & Local Small Business Taxis	Intra-city commuters and regional residents without private vehicle access	Point-to-point local transit and low-frequency intra-town scheduled loops.	Severe lack of rideshare alternatives. Taxis are financially exorbitant for regular commuting (\$30–\$35 per day for short 5km trips). Commercial operators frequently drop off only at site gates, forcing workers to walk vast distances inside industrial boundaries.
School & Education Transport Assets	DIT, Local Schools & Training Providers	Regional students and young learners	Specialized morning/afternoon scheduled school bus routes transporting youth into regional centers.	Highly regulated asset pool that remains completely unutilized outside school operating hours. Strict compliance rules block non-student jobseekers or apprentices from utilizing spare seat capacity.
Employer-Supported Shuttles (Ad-hoc)	Major Industry Employers & Private Sector Corporations	Employees, contract workers, and corporate staff	Private staff transport, informal car-pooling setups, and corporate site-specific shuttle vehicles.	Operates completely in isolation. Services are limited exclusively to a single company's staff list with no cross-employer coordination or community access integration.



Regional Bus Network.

Source: Department for Infrastructure and Transport

STRATEGIC INSPIRATION (WHAT WORKS ELSEWHERE)

Instead of designing a passenger model entirely from scratch, table groups should look to hybridize or adapt proven elements from these operational models from other jurisdictions:

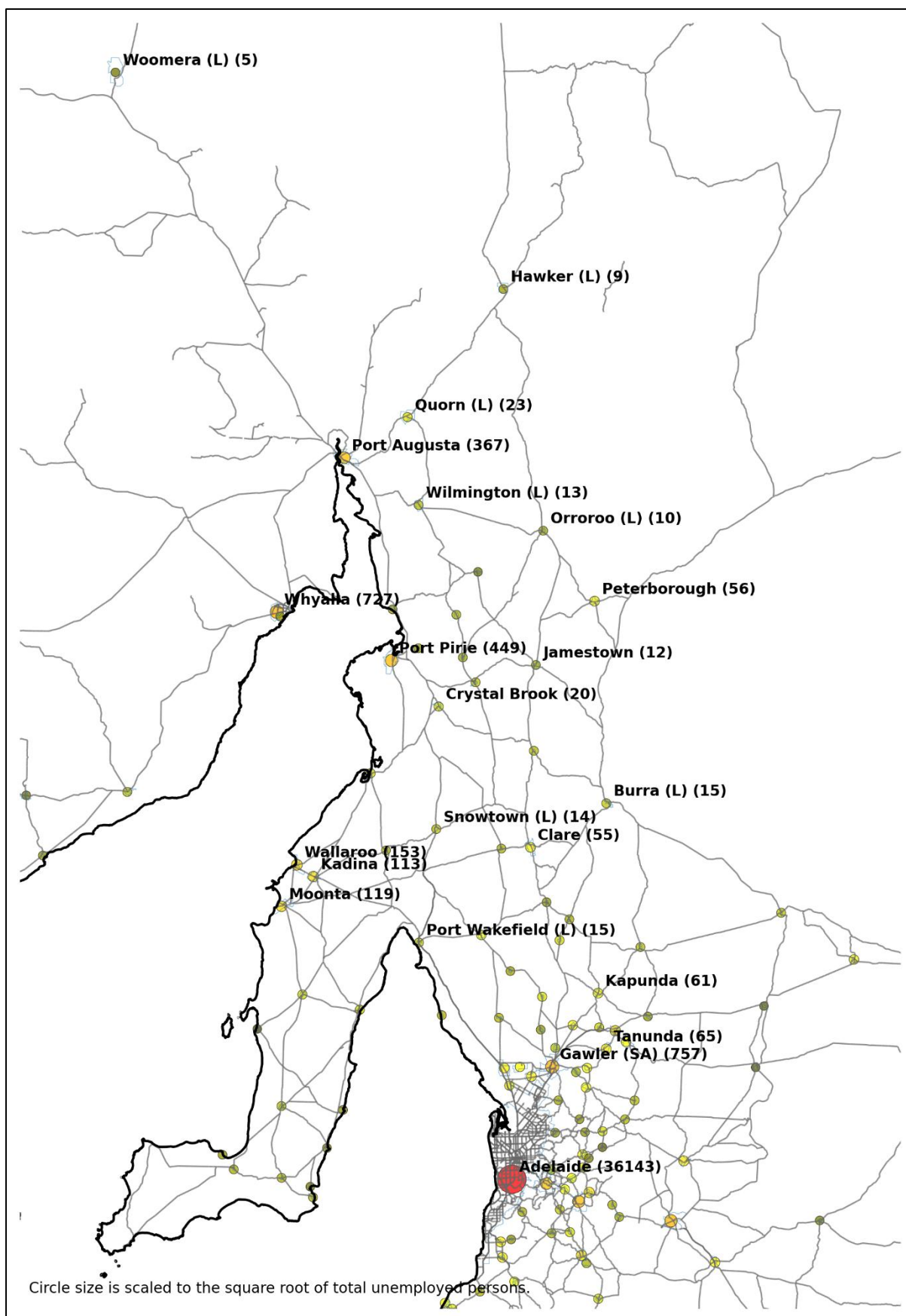
Service Model	Target Group & Access	Spatial Coverage	Temporal Flexibility	Booking & Dispatch	Fares & Financing
Area Connect (<i>Tasmania</i>)	Disadvantaged regional residents with poor/no public transport access. Focuses on connecting residents to work, training, and hubs.	Regional, low-density routes and remote towns (<500 pop) connecting back into regional service spines.	Dedicated low-frequency schedules (e.g., 1–2 days a week or fortnightly loops depending on regional hub ties).	Managed central booking platform via phone/online portal to ensure vehicle utilization.	Varies by trip; highly subsidized corporate/community fare (A\$3–\$10 depending on distance).
NSW On Demand (<i>New South Wales</i>)	General public, particularly commuters requiring first/last-mile transit connections to larger regional transport corridors.	Broad mix of metropolitan fringes, regional nodes, and selected isolated rural corridors (e.g., Ivanhoe to Hay).	Flexible on-demand hours; typically operates between daytime and early evening hours (e.g., 9am–6pm).	Fully integrated app-based booking (Newcastle Transport On Demand / Opal Connect) with real-time GPS tracking and phone backup.	Standard public transport tier equivalent (A\$3–\$6), fully matching standard Opal fare brackets.
FlexiRide (<i>Victoria</i>)	General public transport users. Home-pickup available for registered users with accessibility requirements.	Confined to designated local zone corridors (e.g., Rowville, Woodend) connecting to designated major hubs.	Strictly demand-responsive within daytime/commute hours; vehicles operate with zero fixed routes.	Custom smartphone app powered by Moovit platform. Bookings open up to 7 days in advance.	Fully integrated into standard Myki network fares (A\$5–\$11 caps) with transfer validation.

Service Model	Target Group & Access	Spatial Coverage	Temporal Flexibility	Booking & Dispatch	Fares & Financing
Bürgerbus (Citizens' Bus) <i>(Germany)</i>	Isolated rural villages and regional elderly/workforce populations.	Local geographic clusters underserved or bypassed by mainstream commercial transport operators.	Structured semi-flexible loops running heavily during regional daytime business and community hours.	Handled via localized community phone line dispatchers or village coordination offices.	Highly subsidized town council model (€1–€3 fares) to ensure widespread financial equity.
Buurtbus (Neighborhood Bus) <i>(Netherlands)</i>	Dispersed village commuters, jobseekers, and regional students.	Lower-density rural connections between towns where regular heavy buses face low patronage lines.	Regularly scheduled fixed loops operating primarily on a shift system managed by active community associations.	Central public transit schedule integration, allowing standard digital line lookups.	Standard national public transport regional fare cards (OV-chipkaart integration).
MassMobility <i>(Massachusetts, US)</i>	Human service clients, jobseekers, low-income individuals, and cross-sector transport providers.	State-wide coordination across multiple regional boundaries and municipal lines.	Functions 24/7 as a backend coordination matrix rather than a physical fleet operation.	Centrally coordinated digital clearinghouse platform and agency booking cross-referral system.	Free to use platform for agencies; costs absorbed via state human services and transit coordination grants.
fflecsi <i>(Wales, UK)</i>	General rural community members and commuters.	Rural areas and localized community zones connecting seamlessly with active passenger rail lines.	High real-time flexibility; dynamically calculates routes based on immediate passenger trip requests.	Bilingual app (English/Welsh) providing live bus tracking, passenger match logging, and phone-in booking.	Exactly matches standard local public bus network fares; accepts digital passes, smartcards, and cash.

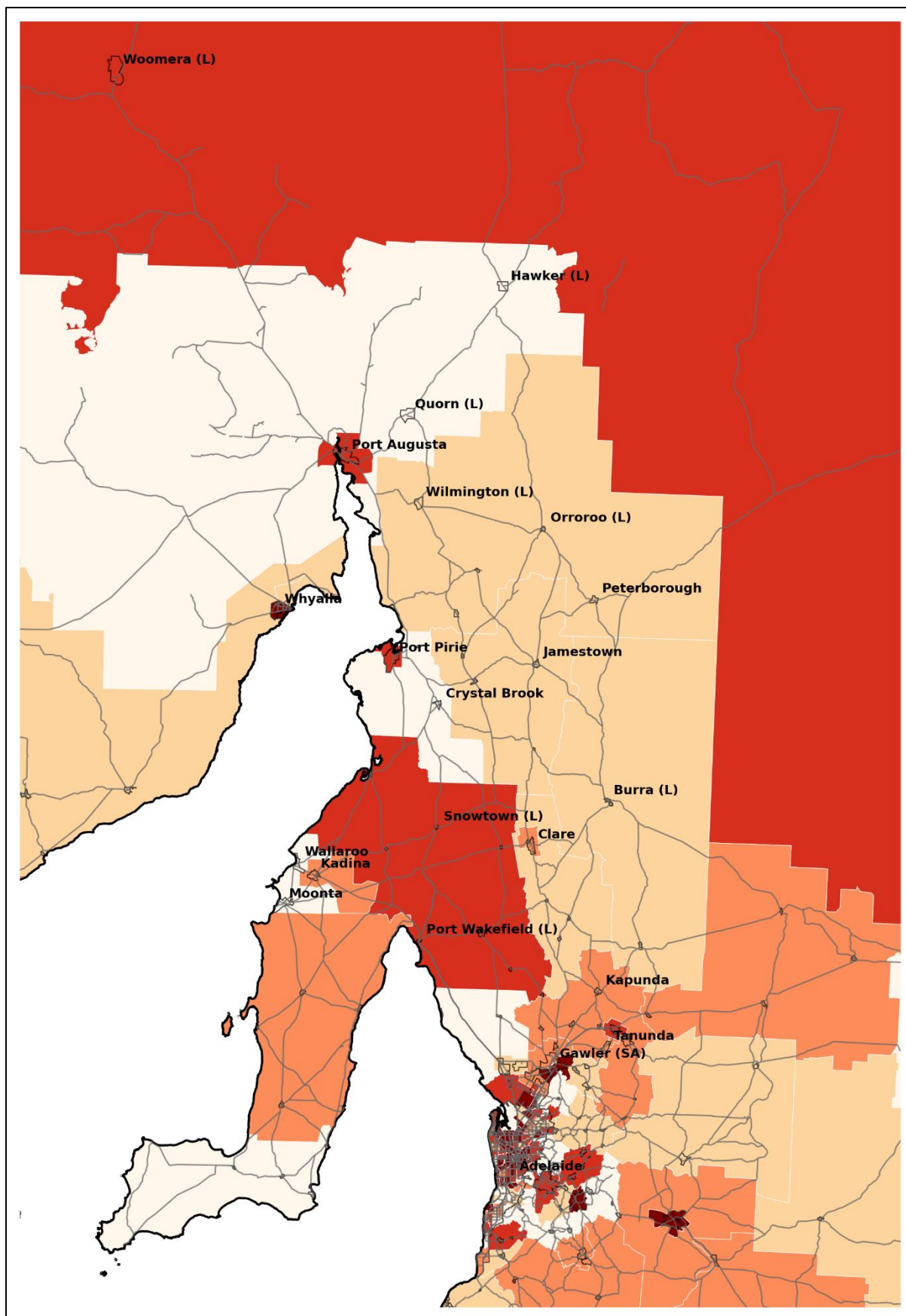
CO-DESIGN PROMPTS & FOCUS AREAS

Table groups must address the following operational pillars to build a viable pilot proposal:

1. **Flexible Service Architecture (Demand-Responsive Transit):** How can we design a flexible, demand-responsive passenger service (e.g., micro-transit, ridesharing, or scheduled shuttle loops) that matches regional shift schedules, seasonal employment surges, and training hours?
2. **Cross-Sector Asset Coordination:** How can we better integrate and share existing underutilized vehicle fleets (such as community transport assets, local council vehicles, or employer-sponsored vans) to bridge the mobility gap without purchasing new capital?
3. **Selecting the Priority Target Cohort and Service Area:** To maximize the immediate economic return of this pilot, who gets first priority? Should it be shift workers in expanding local industries, or jobseekers and young apprentices traveling to core regional TAFE/training hubs? Using the maps on the following pages, identify which specific geographic corridors (e.g., connecting specific smaller towns to regional industrial hubs like Whyalla, Port Augusta, or Port Pirie) offer the highest immediate economic return for a pilot.
4. **Information Navigation & Change Management:** How will we ensure regional residents actually discover and trust this new service? What branding, physical signage, or referral pathways will we establish with local employment agencies to make the pilot visible? Crucially, how do we protect the pilot from being prematurely judged or withdrawn before regional travel habits have had sufficient time to adapt and stabilize?
5. **Designating the Local Anchor Lead:** Which existing regional organization (e.g., a regional community transport provider, local council, or industry employer consortium) is best positioned to act as the operational lead, manage centralized bookings, oversee scheduling, and handle vehicle logistics?
6. **Sustaining the Financial Runway:** Beyond initial pilot grant funding, how will ongoing operational costs (fuel, comprehensive insurance, driver wages/incentives, and dispatcher platforms) be subsidized? Can we integrate corporate employer-paid placement contributions, co-contributions from employment service providers, or a flexible fee-for-service model?
7. **Navigating Regulatory Barriers & Long-Term Reform:** While this pilot must remain fully viable under current South Australian transport regulations, what mechanisms will we use to log the specific accreditation, route licensing, or insurance friction points encountered during the trial? How can this evidence be structured to advocate for broader regional transport policy flexibility or smart regulatory adjustments in the future?



Number of unemployed residents across urban centres per the 2021 Census
 Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics



Distribution of jobs at zonal level per the 2021 Census
Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics