

# Rolling out Free Public Transport

## Free travel for kids, free off-peak for everyone and a 3 month trial of universal free public transport

*Part of the Greens' Public and Active Transport platform for the March 2024 Brisbane City Council election.*

**The price of everything is going up. Traffic jams are endless. At the same time pollution from cars is climbing and climate disasters are getting worse.**

Free public transport helps tackle all those problems at once.

It's not surprising traffic is getting worse. Too often, public transport is slow and unreliable, and fares are so high that it's often cheaper to drive rather than take the bus or train.

The Greens have already announced a plan to double high frequency buses, but we need to do more.

We want to give Brisbane residents the freedom to live without a car, or for families to sell their second car and save money on rego, tolls insurance and fuel.

### A Greens-led Brisbane City Council will:

- △ **Fund a 3 month trial of free public transport in Brisbane** as a congestion-busting real-world experiment, aiming to build the case for a permanent change. The trial would run from July - September 2024.
- △ **Roll out free public transport progressively**, starting with all children under 18 and then free off-peak travel for everyone.

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### Why a 3 month trial?

The State government collects all fares, and funds almost all public transport in Queensland. That means Brisbane City Council doesn't have the resources to abolish fares overnight. **But Council can show leadership by running this trial.**

The 3 month trial would help **build the case for permanent State government funding** for free public transport. This real-world experiment would give Brisbane residents a taste of the freedom to leave their cars at

home, and would demonstrate the congestion-busting potential of making public transport free.

### How would the trial work?

Under the Greens plan, all travel on trains, buses and ferries would be free within the Brisbane City Council area for the three month trial period, funded by a once-off \$45 million subsidy from Council.

This would apply to everyone, not just Brisbane residents, which encourage

commuters from Ipswich, Moreton Bay and Redlands to leave their cars at home.

Council would negotiate with the State government to implement the trial, reimbursing the government for lost revenue.

### Free fares for kids

While we wait for the State government to get on board, a Greens-led Council would start rolling out free public transport with Council funding, starting with making public transport free for kids, and then making it free for everyone off-peak.

The Greens plan to progressively roll out free public transport in Brisbane. **We would start by making public transport free for all children under 18.** This first stage would cost Council \$13.5 million per year.

Everyone knows that traffic is better on school holidays, so extending free public transport to kids is a simple and quick way to cut congestion.

### Free off-peak and weekends for all

The LNP Council has already bowed to Greens pressure and made off-peak travel free for seniors on buses and ferries. The policy is successful and very popular.

**The Greens plan would make all public transport free for everyone during off-peak periods including weekends.** This second stage would cost Council \$80 million per year.

That means the whole family would be able to get to Southbank on the weekend for free.

### Just make it free

The State government already pays for about 80% of public transport costs, with fares covering the remaining 20%.

Collecting that last 20% adds huge costs and bureaucracy. For residents it means unnecessary hassle and stress, and means more people choose to drive.

For governments, that includes the privatised ticketing system which costs ~\$50m per year to run across SEQ.

On top of that are the financial and social costs of criminalising residents for fare evasion. Chasing young, poor or marginalised people through the courts for fare evasion is a huge waste of public money, and often results in further criminalisation by exposing young people to the police and justice system.

In recent weeks, Brisbane Labor has finally followed the Greens towards cheaper public transport, announcing a narrower plan to make fares on buses 50% cheaper, leaving train and ferry fares the same.

While a welcome acknowledgement that the Labor State government is charging too much for public transport, their plan would create a two-tiered, less efficient public transport system within Brisbane. More concerningly, Labor has not committed to any new high frequency bus services, and has announced they will pay for their plan by cutting funding to already-planned public transport infrastructure, likely to be the Woolloongabba Metro Station.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [Courier Mail, 23 Jan 2024](#) Woolloongabba Metro Station has \$150 million in planned Council funding which is not yet contractually committed, and \$300 million in State and Federal funding. Labor has

### Free Public Transport Works

Free public transport can cut traffic congestion and cut climate pollution very fast, and very cheaply, without a single ton of concrete or a single new train station.

In NSW, the [Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal found](#) that free public transport in Sydney could create “an immediate increase in public transport ridership of around 40%”.

That would be a game-changer for all of SEQ, where public transport ridership has been [stuck below 10% for decades](#).

In 2023 a 12-day trial of free public transport [in Sydney](#) created a 35% increase in ridership compared to normal. [Free holiday-time buses in Noosa](#) were so successful they were made permanent on weekends in February 2022.

Of course, services will need to increase to keep up with demand, but growing demand is a sign of success.

### More high frequency services

Free public transport is only useful if you have a decent bus or train close by. That’s why in December 2023 the Greens announced the biggest expansion of bus services in a generation.

Our [Brissie Bus Boost](#) would double the number of high-frequency bus routes. Our plan would:

- **Create 15 new high frequency routes**, to link suburbs directly without needing to go through the CBD:

- **Upgrade and extend 10 existing routes** to high frequency.
- **Create 13 bus priority or transit corridors** on key arterial roads which already carry frequent buses, to let buses skip traffic jams.

By creating new inter-suburban routes, buses will become a real option for thousands of people who just need to get a few suburbs over for work, shopping or to see friends. Almost 400 km of major road corridor would get a high-frequency “turn up and go” bus service for the very first time.

### Funding free public transport

Our plan would cost \$338 million over four years, which would be re-allocated away from wasteful road projects, private consultants and tax cuts for property developers.

Just three recent wasteful road widening projects are set to cost Council almost \$1 billion:

- Adding two extra lanes to just 650 metres of Lytton Road cost Council [\\$115 million](#),
- Widening just 3km of Kingsford Smith Drive [cost \\$635 million](#),
- The wasteful and disruptive Moggill Rd / Coonan St “upgrade” has [blown out again to \\$234 million](#).

We would make big developers pay their fair share and reverse the LNP’s big tax cut for big developers to create a better life in this city for everyone.

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announced they would cancel any Metro funding which is not contractually committed.