

THE CITY OF
GREATER GEELONG

SUSTAINING AND STRENGTHENING THE TAC L2P LEARNER DRIVER MENTOR PROGRAM

MAY 2026

Contents

Executive summary	3
Sustaining and Strengthening the L2P program	4
Context and Importance of the Program	4
Key Issues Requiring Victorian Government Action	5
1. Funding increases do not keep pace with CPI	5
2. Annual funding cycles undermine cost-efficiencies	6
3. Annual funding uncertainty limits sponsorship and partnership commitments	7
4. Funding does not meet demand in greater Geelong	7
5. Funding does not reflect the complexity of participant needs	8
6. The reported 10% funding shortfall understates the true gap	10
7. Compliance and volunteer management costs are not funded	11
8. Heavy Reliance on an Unpaid Volunteer Workforce	12
9. Increasing time and cost of supporting young people at risk	13
10. Misalignment between DTP Program Requirements and Council Governance Frameworks	14
11. Escalating Compliance Requirements Without Supporting System Capability	14
12. Centralised Police Check Process Limits Local Efficiency	14
Learner Feedback	16
What the Data says	17
Case Study Snapshots	18
What the City Is Seeking	19
References	21
Appendix 1: Learner's Voice	23
Appendix 2: Letters of Support.....	25

The City of Greater Geelong acknowledges the Wadawurrung People as the Traditional Custodians of the land, waterways and skies on which this submission relates. We pay our respects to their Elders past and present, and acknowledge their ongoing connection to Country.

Executive summary

The TAC L2P Learner Driver Mentor Program (L2P program) is a critical pathway to independence for young people in Greater Geelong, Surf Coast and Golden Plains Shire who cannot access a supervising driver or a suitable vehicle to complete the 120 hours required for a probationary licence.

Funded by the Transport Accident Commission (TAC), managed by the Department of Transport and Planning, and delivered by local government and community organisations, the program plays a key role in improving road safety while enabling access to employment, education, training and community participation, particularly for young people in Greater Geelong's northern suburbs where entrenched socio-economic and transport disadvantage limits access to opportunities.

Since 2009, the City's L2P program has supported **662** learner drivers to achieve their licence, with volunteer mentors contributing more than **60,000** hours of supervised driving. Current delivery remains substantial. In FY24/25, the program supported an average of **91** active learners per month, delivered **457** supervised driving hours per month, managed **235** learners across the year, processed **248** applications, and supported **74** licence outcomes.

Demand for the program exceeds funded capacity, with approximately **180** young people currently on the waiting list, and demand is expected to continue to grow in line with population growth across the region. At the same time, the participant cohort is becoming increasingly complex, with more learners experiencing mental health challenges, trauma, housing instability, disengagement and other barriers that require sustained, trauma-informed support for both learners and mentors.

This paper outlines why the current funding and accountability settings are no longer fit for purpose. Funding increases are not keeping pace with rising operating costs, including wages, fuel, insurance and vehicle servicing. Annual funding cycles and limited flexibility constrain efficient planning, particularly in relation to fleet management, and increase the administrative burden through repeated submissions and partnership negotiations. City experience indicates the funding shortfall is closer to **17%**, and the current model does not adequately resource the additional effort required to secure and manage supplementary funding.

The program's sustainability also depends on a large volunteer workforce (typically **100–120** mentors locally) and strong child safe and safeguarding practices. Compliance and volunteer management requirements, including screening, training and record-keeping, are not fully resourced and add to administrative workload. Current KPI and reporting settings further contribute to this burden and do not capture the full scope of program delivery, including the broader pipeline of learners and the non-linear nature of engagement. Centralised systems and processes can also create inefficiencies where they do not align with existing council frameworks.

The City is seeking a reformed, multi-year funding and accountability model that reflects regional delivery costs, increasing demand and participant complexity, reduces avoidable administrative burden, and ensures volunteer-led delivery and child safety requirements are appropriately resourced.

The following provides a summary of the City's key requests, with further detail and supporting evidence outlined throughout this paper.

- Implement a fully funded program model that reflects true delivery costs, removes provider co-contribution, and includes CPI indexation and flexibility for cost pressures.
- Provide multi-year funding certainty to support efficient fleet, workforce and program planning, and reduce administrative burden.
- Increase and better target funding to meet demand, recognising regional disadvantage and ensuring equitable access in growth areas.
- Recognise participant complexity within funding and program settings, with resourcing aligned to higher support needs.
- Reform KPI and reporting settings to reflect non-linear engagement and the full learner pipeline, including a return to quarterly reporting.
- Fully resource compliance and volunteer management, including child safety, mentor recruitment, training and support.
- Streamline program requirements and strengthen delivery capability, reducing duplication and improving efficiency through better alignment with local governance frameworks and targeted support for staff and volunteers.

Sustaining and Strengthening the L2P program

The City of Greater Geelong (the City) is a vibrant and diverse community located in Victoria's south-west, encompassing both urban centres and a range of growing suburbs. As one of Victoria's largest regional cities, greater Geelong is characterised by a strong focus on supporting the social, educational and economic wellbeing of its residents. The region includes communities with varying levels of access to resources and infrastructure, with particular challenges faced in the northern suburbs where socio-economic disadvantage and limited public transport options can restrict opportunities for young people.

The TAC L2P Learner Driver Mentor Program (L2P program) is a vital initiative in greater Geelong, designed to bridge the gap for young learner drivers aged 16–21 (and up to 23 in specific circumstances) who do not have access to a supervising driver or a suitable vehicle.

Delivered in partnership with the Transport Accident Commission (TAC), the Department of Transport and Planning (DTP), and local community agencies, the L2P program provides participants with supervised driving practice to help them achieve the mandatory 120 hours required for a probationary licence. This support not only enhances road safety but also opens up pathways to employment, education, and community participation for

young people who might otherwise be excluded due to transport barriers.

This paper has been written to present a case for development of a funding model for the L2P program that is fit-for-purpose, reflects real service delivery costs, and responds to demonstrated regional demand and complexity as evidenced by the Geelong L2P program and supported by conversation with other regional providers.

CONTEXT AND IMPORTANCE OF THE PROGRAM

Since commencing in 2009, the TAC L2P Program has delivered sustained and measurable benefits for young people across the Geelong, Surf Coast Shire and Golden Plains Shire municipalities. Over its first **17** years, the program has supported **662** local learner drivers to obtain their probationary licence, with volunteer mentors contributing over **60,000** hours of supervised driving.

The L2P program plays an essential role in improving access to employment, education, training, and social participation, particularly in areas where public transport limitations and socio-economic disadvantage compound transport exclusion.



Geelong L2P 10 Year Celebrations 2025

KEY ISSUES REQUIRING VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT ACTION

Nearly a decade ago, Youth Affairs Council Victoria's (YACVIC) *Supporting young people's access and equity through the L2P program* (February 2017) identified a series of structural challenges that continue to affect L2P program delivery today, including transport disadvantage linked to social isolation, the disproportionate impact on young people facing multiple forms of disadvantage, unmet program costs not covered by base funding, pressure on local government and community providers, and the increasing complexity of supporting vulnerable learners within a volunteer-based model.

The report also highlighted the growing demands associated with mentor recruitment and retention, rural and regional isolation, and the need for supplementary resourcing to maintain child-safe, high-quality delivery. That these issues remain evident almost ten years later, now compounded by increased compliance requirements, cost pressures and heightened participant complexity, provides compelling longitudinal evidence base that the program's structural settings have not kept pace with delivery realities.

The persistence of these challenges over time reinforces that incremental adjustments are no longer sufficient, and that reform of funding, performance and governance arrangements is required now to ensure the L2P program can continue to meet its equity objectives and sustainably support the young people it was designed to serve.

The ongoing success and sustainability of the L2P program in Geelong and across the state is still threatened by these pressing challenges, these are challenges that require urgent attention from the Victorian Government.

Without targeted action to address these challenges, the program's capacity to support disadvantaged young people and deliver positive community outcomes will be significantly compromised.

1. Funding increases do not keep pace with CPI

The most recent **2.5%** funding increase does not keep pace with CPI and therefore represents a real-terms reduction in program capacity. This is particularly evident when compared to the City's enterprise agreement, which typically includes annual wage increases above **2.5%**, for example, the *City of Greater Geelong Enterprise Agreement (No.12) 2024* provides for fixed salary increases of 3.0 per cent effective from the first full pay

period on or after 1 July 2024, 1 July 2025 and 1 July 2026, reflecting broader wage growth pressures in local government.

In addition, key operational costs continue to rise at a rate well above funding increases. According to the Australian Automobile Association's (AAA) *Transport Affordability Index*, household transport costs, including fuel, vehicle insurance and maintenance, rose by **10.5%** over the 12 months to June 2024, almost triple the CPI increase over the same period.

The AAA identifies fuel, comprehensive insurance and vehicle servicing as the primary drivers of these increases, with regional households experiencing particularly high-cost pressures. RACV's *Annual Car Running Costs Survey* further confirms that servicing, repairs and parts costs have increased, contributing to higher overall vehicle operating costs in Victoria.

While the current program delivery is cost neutral to the Council Budget, with all salaries/wages and operational costs covered by the DTP funding and sponsorship secured by Officers, substantial in-kind contributions are required to manage the program and provide legal, sponsorship, leasing and financial acumen for the program delivery. Additionally, the effort required to secure ongoing funding or sponsorship to the program ultimately impacts the City's capacity to meet the expectations of the program.

Annual CPI-linked funding increases are critical to the long-term sustainability of the L2P program because they ensure funding maintains its real value as operating costs increase. Without indexation, fixed funding envelopes effectively shrink each year in real terms, even when nominal funding remains unchanged. CPI captures unavoidable cost pressures that directly affect program delivery, including wage growth, fuel, vehicle maintenance and insurance, training costs, and compliance-related administration. National and state data show that inflation has remained above long-term averages in recent years, meaning programs without CPI adjustment experience a progressive erosion of capacity and service quality.

For local government delivery partners, CPI indexation is particularly important because staffing costs represent a significant proportion of total program expenditure and are typically governed by enterprise agreements that incorporate annual wage increases. When funding growth does not keep pace with CPI, councils are required to absorb rising costs internally, diverting resources from direct service delivery, volunteer support and participant

engagement. Over time, this creates an unsustainable model in which the same, or higher, performance expectations are applied to a diminishing real funding base. Evidence from the Australian Local Government Association indicates that when expenditure growth lags inflation, this results in a real-terms funding cut and increasing financial pressure on councils delivering community programs.

Indexation also plays a critical role in providing funding certainty and enabling forward planning. Programs such as L2P rely on multi-year investments in fleets, staff capability and volunteer pipelines. CPI-linked increases enable delivery partners to plan confidently, manage risks associated with cost volatility (particularly fuel and transport costs), and maintain safety and compliance standards without reducing service reach. Conversely, the absence of CPI indexation undermines program stability, increases reliance on short-term local subsidies, and ultimately risks reducing access for the young people the program is intended to support.

What the Victorian Government could do.

Introduce CPI-linked indexation for program funding:

To ensure delivery partners are not forced to absorb rising staffing and operational costs, the Victorian Government should implement annual CPI-linked increases for all relevant funding streams. This would provide councils and other providers with much-needed certainty, allowing them to plan effectively, maintain service levels, and avoid real-term funding cuts that threaten program sustainability.

2. Annual funding cycles undermine cost-efficiencies

The requirement to re-apply for funding on a year-by-year basis even with a two-year funding agreement, directly undermines the City's ability to manage its L2P program vehicle fleet efficiently, creating unnecessary administrative duplication of information and further reduces capacity of officers to maintain optimum service delivery.

Short funding horizons prevent the negotiation of longer-term vehicle leases, resulting in higher per-vehicle lease costs and reduced value for money. A multi-year funding model would enable more strategic fleet planning for the - vehicles delivering the program, and lower recurrent costs.

Australian fleet industry research and government fleet evidence demonstrate that organisations able to enter structured, multi-year passenger vehicle leasing arrangements benefit from lower per-vehicle costs,

reduced administrative overhead and improved procurement outcomes compared with short-term or annualised leasing models. By contrast, short-term or annualised funding models limit the ability to achieve these efficiencies.

Beyond the direct financial implications, the annual application process imposes a significant administrative burden on City officers. Staff are required to dedicate substantial time each year preparing funding submissions, which follow on from the annual reporting requirements for the program. This duplication of effort diverts resources away from service delivery and program management, reducing overall efficiency. The complexity and frequency of these tasks can also contribute to staff fatigue, absences and limit capacity for innovation or program development.

While we acknowledge the government's recent decision to offset unexpected fuel cost increases for providers, this situation highlights the inherent rigidity of current funding environments, where unanticipated cost pressures require specific and time-limited government intervention. National fuel price monitoring shows that petrol prices have risen sharply over recent periods, with increases of around **15–20%** recorded in parts of Australia as global oil prices, exchange rate movements and supply pressures flow through to the pump. For programs such as TAC L2P that rely heavily on vehicle use to deliver core outcomes, fuel is a non-discretionary operating cost.

These increases place direct and unbudgeted pressure on delivery partners, particularly local government, which must absorb higher running costs within fixed funding envelopes. Without flexibility mechanisms built into funding agreements, such as indexation, cost-pressure adjustment clauses or contingency allowances, programs are forced to either reduce service availability or redirect resources away from other critical functions. Greater flexibility is required to enable funded programs to respond to unexpected cost shocks, maintain service continuity and protect outcomes for participants.

What the Victorian Government could do.

Adopt multi-year funding agreements: Transitioning to longer-term funding models, such as three- or five-year agreements would enable more strategic fleet management, reduce administrative duplication, and allow for negotiation of cost-effective vehicle leases. This approach would also lessen the administrative burden on staff, freeing up resources for direct service delivery and program development.

3. Annual funding uncertainty limits sponsorship and partnership commitments

The lack of funding certainty also affects the City's ability to secure external sponsorship and in-kind support.

Potential partners are reluctant to commit funding or vehicles without confidence in the program's continuity, leading to increased staff time spent re-negotiating arrangements each year and the potential for sponsors to not renew their relationship with the City and the program.

This challenge is further compounded by the current economic environment, with cost-of-living pressures and economic uncertainty reducing discretionary giving and constraining the capacity of businesses and philanthropic organisations to provide sponsorship. Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC) data shows that, once large one-off gifts are excluded, growth in donations has remained minimal, reflecting a cautious funding environment.



L2P graduate Moo, happily sharing P Plates

Sector research and conference polling reported by the Fundraising Institute Australia and its research partners indicate that a majority of charities are finding it increasingly difficult to secure corporate sponsorships and

partnerships, citing heightened competition for limited resources and donor fatigue across the sector.

As the City is not a registered charity, securing sponsorship for this vital community service is even more challenging. This limits eligibility for certain funding streams and makes it more difficult to attract support from external partners, further exacerbating the financial pressures on the program.

In this highly competitive environment, programs like L2P face significant challenges in attracting and retaining sponsors. Without multi-year funding commitments from government, the program is at a disadvantage compared to organisations with more stable funding sources, making it even more difficult to build long-term partnerships.

As a result, the City must dedicate substantial staff time and resources to seeking, negotiating, and maintaining sponsorships each year, time that could otherwise be spent on service delivery and program improvement.

What the Victorian Government could do.

Enhance support for sponsorship and partnerships: By providing multi-year funding certainty, the Government can help delivery partners attract and retain external sponsors and partners. This is particularly important given the challenging economic climate, competition for resources, and the City's ineligibility for certain charity funding streams. Government commitment would signal stability, encouraging greater external investment and collaboration.

4. Funding does not meet demand in greater Geelong

Demand for the L2P program in greater Geelong significantly exceeds funded capacity.

City operational data shows significant and growing demand for the program, with 131 young people currently on the waiting list, and 32 applications under review. In addition, a further 129 learners are already actively participating or have recently been engaged and are ready to commence, demonstrating strong motivation and readiness to participate. This demand reflects unmet need rather than lack of engagement and aligns with broader evidence that transport remains a significant barrier preventing young people from participating in education, employment, and community life across the region.

Recent population projections for greater Geelong indicate that the number of residents aged 16 to 24 is expected to increase steadily over the coming years. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), the youth population

in greater Geelong grew by approximately **8%** between 2016 and 2021 and is forecast to continue rising in line with broader regional growth trends.

This is particularly evident in emerging suburbs such as Armstrong Creek, Charlemont, and parts of the northern corridor, where young families and new migrants are settling in large numbers. These areas often have limited public transport options, further exacerbating transport disadvantage for young people and contribute to the L2P program demand.

Based on current participation rates and City-reported waiting list trends, demand for L2P program support is expected to continue to rise, with waiting lists likely to exceed 200 within the next two years unless funding and resourcing are increased.

Statewide, demand for the L2P program has increased and continues to outstrip funded capacity. The program is now delivered by more than 49 councils and community agencies across Victoria, with multiple providers reporting extended waiting lists and wait times of up to 12–15 months in some regions. This demand pressure is particularly evident in regional and growth areas, where population growth, limited public transport options and lack of access to a supervising driver or vehicle continue to drive strong demand for learner driver support programs.

As population growth continues, particularly in growth areas with limited public transport, the gap between demand and funded capacity will widen further unless funding settings are adjusted. Without sufficient resources, it is simply not feasible to expand participant numbers to meet rising demand.

Failure to adequately fund the L2P program has direct consequences for young people's post-school pathways. In regional cities such as Geelong, access to a driver licence is often a prerequisite for:

- entry-level employment, apprenticeships and traineeships
- access to TAFE and post-school education
- participation in shift-based or location-dispersed work.

Young people in greater Geelong have identified transport as a significant barrier to participation in work, study and activities. Without timely access to the L2P program, young people remain on waiting lists during critical transition periods, increasing the risk of disengagement from education and employment and limiting long-term workforce participation.

Without adequate support, the region risks entrenching disadvantage among its youth, undermining broader economic and social development objectives.

What the Victorian Government could do.

Increase funding to meet growing demand: With rising costs and increasing demand in areas such as greater Geelong, the Victorian Government should regularly review and adjust funding allocations to ensure they reflect actual program needs and population growth.

This would prevent service rationing and ensure more young people can access vital programs like L2P.

5. Funding does not reflect the complexity of participant needs

A significant proportion of Geelong L2P program participants are drawn from some of the City's most socio-economically disadvantaged communities, particularly in the northern suburbs of Norlane and Corio, along with Whittington in Geelong's south-east.

These communities are consistently identified through SEIFA as among the most disadvantaged in Victoria. Norlane is ranked as the most disadvantaged suburb in the state based on 2021 Census data, and Corio and Whittington also rank among the state's most disadvantaged localities. The locations experience household incomes around half the state average and significantly higher rates of unemployment and mental health challenges.

This socio-economic disadvantage often presents as limited access to reliable transport, fewer educational and employment opportunities, increased rates of housing instability, and a greater prevalence of social isolation and mental health concerns. These factors are recognised contributors to increased vulnerability to disengagement and involvement in anti-social behaviour, particularly for young people transitioning into adulthood. Young people growing up in these communities may lack the financial means to pay for professional driving lessons, or may not have access to a licensed supervising driver or a suitable vehicle within the household. Additionally, families may be under significant financial pressure, where immediate priorities such as securing employment or meeting basic needs take precedence over learning to drive. In these circumstances, some young people experience pressure to become mobile quickly to support family responsibilities or

maintain employment, which can increase the risk of poor decision-making, including driving without a licence or relying on unlicensed or unsuitable supervising drivers.

During the critical transition to work, these barriers can have a compounding effect. Without a driver licence, young people in disadvantaged suburbs face significant challenges accessing entry-level jobs, apprenticeships, traineeships, or further education, many of which require travel outside their immediate neighbourhoods, often at hours when public transport is unavailable or unreliable. Prolonged exclusion from employment and education pathways increases the risk of disengagement from pro-social systems and limits opportunities for lawful participation in community life.

The lack of a licence can also limit the types of job opportunities available, particularly in industries that demand mobility or shift-based work, further entrenching cycles of unemployment and disadvantage.

This can result in young people remaining disconnected from education and employment, missing vital experiences and income that support long-term independence, stability and wellbeing, and increasing vulnerability to pathways associated with justice system contact.

Moreover, the absence of transport options can intensify social isolation and reduce participation in community life, which is particularly concerning for those already at risk of disengagement.

Limited mobility can restrict access to structured, supervised activities and supportive environments, increasing the amount of unstructured time spent in settings where the risk of offending or victimisation is higher.

In the *2024 Geelong Preventative Health Survey (GPHS)*, loneliness was reported by approximately **25%** of the total greater Geelong population, already slightly higher than the Victorian average of around **23%**. However, this issue is substantially more pronounced among young people.

The survey found that around **60%** of young people in greater Geelong report feeling lonely, which is markedly higher than both the municipal all-age average and broader Victorian data for young people.



Comparative Victorian research indicates that around **40–45%** of young people aged 15–25 across Victoria report loneliness, positioning young people in greater Geelong as experiencing disproportionately elevated levels of isolation relative to their peers elsewhere in the state.

This disparity highlights the heightened vulnerability of local young people and the additional engagement, wellbeing support and flexibility required to deliver effective programs such as L2P program in the greater Geelong context.

The reason for this is because this level of isolation is strongly associated with poorer mental health, reduced confidence, and diminished capacity to engage consistently in activities requiring routine, trust and social connection.

For programs such as the L2P program, these conditions translate into a need for substantially higher levels of wrap-around support, engagement effort and flexibility in delivery. Learners experiencing isolation may require more intensive relationship-building, additional encouragement to attend sessions, and greater tolerance for non-linear participation caused by mental health episodes, competing life pressures or disengagement.

As a result, program delivery in greater Geelong increasingly involves not only coordinating driving hours, but also responding to the broader social and wellbeing needs of young people, reinforcing the importance of funding and performance frameworks that recognise participant complexity and the additional staff and mentor time required to achieve safe and sustainable outcomes.

These high levels of isolation and social vulnerability among young people also help explain the observed patterns of learner attrition and inconsistent monthly participation in the L2P program, reinforcing the need for more flexible KPI settings that recognise non-linear engagement rather than relying on rigid activity thresholds.

What the Victorian Government could do.

To better reflect the complexity of participant needs in programs such as L2P, the Victorian Government could take several key actions:

- **Adjust funding models to recognise participant complexity:** Allocate funding based not just on participant numbers, but also on the complexity and vulnerability of those served. This could mean introducing a tiered funding structure, where additional resources are provided for programs supporting young

people with higher levels of social isolation, mental health challenges, or inconsistent engagement.

- **Fund additional staffing and administrative capacity:** Recognise the increased staff time and administrative effort required to support complex participants, secure supplementary funding, and maintain program quality. Direct funding for administrative roles would allow program staff to prioritise trauma-informed practice, participant engagement, and mentor support, rather than diverting time to fundraising and grant management.
- **Incentivise flexible performance frameworks:** Move away from rigid key performance indicators (KPIs) based solely on participation numbers or hours. Instead, develop KPIs that account for non-linear engagement, retention challenges, and the time required to build trust and routine with vulnerable young people.

By taking these steps, the Victorian Government would enable service providers to deliver more responsive, effective, and sustainable programs that address the real-world complexity of young people's lives, especially in areas like greater Geelong where social isolation and vulnerability are particularly acute.

Refer [Appendix 2: Letters of Support](#).

6. The reported 10% funding shortfall understates the true gap

While current settings suggest a **10%** shortfall, City experience indicates the gap is approximately **17%** based on current delivery data of the Geelong L2P program. Noting that this rate is variable depending on factors that are out of the City's control and include accidents in quick succession that can substantially increase that shortfall. There is currently no buffer in the funding to cover repairs and given the nature of the program, it can be assumed that car accidents by learner drivers are highly likely.

This gap is presently being offset through a reduction in paid lessons available to learners, reliance on strategic partnerships, together with supplementary small grant funding. The City must actively pursue additional grant opportunities that align with our purpose to ensure we can maintain the high-quality service we take pride in offering our learners and mentors.

While historically the City has been successful in securing sponsorships and grants, this funding is typically restricted to direct program expenses such as fuel and vehicle lease costs. With all vehicles already sponsored, there are

limitations around sponsor recognition, creating challenges for how we can attract higher value financial contributions.



L2P learner driver Sonam and volunteer mentor Jeff

Securing funding to support administrative expenses, remains the most significant challenge. Increasing administrative capacity is critical to the program's ongoing success, ensuring participant safety, and upholding best practice standards.

The current City budget requires **~60,000** in sponsorship and does not include the cost in-kind cost to simply sustain delivery carried by City officers. We anticipate this will rise in the coming year due to cost-of-living increases including the current fuel position. Importantly, current funding does not resource the additional staff time and administrative effort required to secure and manage this supplementary funding.

This funding gap has a tangible impact on program delivery and staff workloads. Staff are often forced to divert their attention from core program activities, such as recruiting new mentors and supporting existing mentors, engaging and supporting participants, and maintaining compliance, to focus on fundraising, grant applications, and sponsorship management. This shift in priorities can reduce the quality and consistency of service provided to young people, as staff must juggle competing demands within limited hours. The administrative burden also

increases stress and contributes to staff fatigue, making it harder to retain experienced personnel and maintain program momentum. In turn, this can affect participant outcomes, as less time is available for trauma-informed practice, relationship building, and addressing complex needs.

Ultimately, the pressure to secure external funding undermines the City's ability to deliver the L2P program as intended, risking further disadvantage for already vulnerable youth.

What the Victorian Government could do.

The Victorian Government could strengthen the L2P program's capacity to support vulnerable young people, maintain high standards of safety and practice, and reduce the risk of service erosion due to funding pressures and administrative overload by:

- **Fully funding the actual cost of delivering the L2P program:** including a realistic buffer for vehicle repairs and other unforeseen costs. This would address the true funding gap (closer to 17% rather than the reported 10%) and remove the need for providers to divert resources away from core program activities.
- **Eliminating the expectation of provider co-contribution from funding agreements:** recognising that relying on supplementary grants, sponsorships, and internal support is unsustainable and detracts from program quality and staff wellbeing.
- **Explicitly resourcing administrative and compliance costs within the funding model:** allowing staff to focus on critical activities such as mentor recruitment, participant support, trauma-informed practice, and compliance with child safety standards.
- **Streamlining grant and sponsorship processes:** to reduce administrative burden on staff, freeing up more time for direct service delivery and relationship building with mentors and participants.

7. Compliance and volunteer management costs are not funded

The City currently manages and supports 100–120 volunteer mentors, in addition to maintaining full compliance with Victorian Child Safe Standards, Working with Children Checks, police checks, training, supervision, and record-keeping. This workload has increased following recent child safety reviews and audits, requirements which the City already meets and is fully compliant with, but which add significant unfunded administrative and governance

burden. The current funding model does not recognise or resource this growing and critical work.

While the recent program-wide child safety review has strengthened assurance and consistency across the L2P program, the resulting uplift in compliance requirements has also introduced additional administrative burden for delivery partners such as local government, which already operate within robust, legislated child-safe and volunteer management frameworks, reinforcing the need for better alignment of systems, processes and proportional regulation.

Strong mentor engagement is a cornerstone of the City's L2P program, with dedicated volunteers playing a pivotal role in supporting young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. Mentors not only provide practical driving instruction but also foster positive, trusting relationships that often serve as the first stable adult connection for participants. Through consistent guidance and encouragement, mentors help young people build confidence, resilience, and life skills, contributing to improved social and employment outcomes. The success of the program is largely attributed to the quality and commitment of these mentor relationships, which underpin participant retention and achievement.

However, the effectiveness of mentor engagement relies heavily on the City's ability to invest administrative time in nurturing these relationships, through ongoing recruitment, training, supervision, and support. This direction of staff effort ensures mentors are well-prepared, feel valued, and are equipped to navigate the complex needs of participants, particularly those experiencing trauma, disengagement, or housing instability. Staff also play a crucial role in safeguarding both mentors and young people, maintaining compliance with rigorous child safety standards and responding to emerging challenges.

Despite the proven impact of strong mentor engagement, the current funding model fails to adequately resource the administrative and governance work required to sustain these relationships. Staff are often stretched thin, balancing compliance obligations with the need to support mentors and participants.

This lack of appropriate funding places the program at risk, as critical activities, such as mentor supervision, trauma-informed practice, and relationship building, are compromised by competing demands and limited hours.

Despite the 2025 Child Safety review clearly highlighting that most program coordinators are struggling to juggle volunteer retention, youth support and program targets, and explicitly recommending that TAC/DTP 'review eligibility, targets, and funding allocation', there has been no tangible action to address these issues.

Funding levels and key performance indicators remain unchanged, and the compliance framework to give limited recognition to the resourcing required to deliver the program safely and effectively.

This ongoing lack of response highlights a critical gap in supporting both volunteers and young people, and forms a key part of the City's advocacy for urgent improvements to program funding and management.

Furthermore, delivery staff face persistent anxiety about inadvertently missing critical compliance steps, such as maintaining timely contact with young participants and mentors, completing accurate reporting, meeting childcare safety regulations, and addressing vehicle maintenance or accidents. These risks are compounded by escalating fuel prices which have almost doubled the cost of running the program's vehicle fleet, adding further strain to staff workloads. Staff are also required to be available seven days a week, from 7:30 am to 10 pm, to accommodate flexible scheduling and provide supervised nighttime driving practice, which is necessary to meet learner licensing requirements, while maintaining child-safe and duty-of-care compliance. This extended on-call responsibility significantly increases the risk of fatigue and burnout, impacting staff wellbeing and program delivery.

Without targeted investment in the administrative backbone of the L2P program, the City's ability to deliver high-quality outcomes for vulnerable youth is undermined, threatening the long-term success of both participants and mentors.

What the Victorian Government could do.

To address the lack of funding for compliance and volunteer management costs, the Victorian Government could:

- **Recognise the variation in delivery costs between providers:** especially between local government and not-for profit staffing costs (Awards payments) by reviewing and adjusting administrative funding to reflect the true costs of compliance, volunteer recruitment, training, supervision, and ongoing support.

- **Revise funding models and key performance indicators:** to better acknowledge and resource the administrative workload required to deliver the program safely and effectively, especially given the increasing complexity of participants' needs.
- **Take action on recommendations from recent program reviews:** including reviewing eligibility, targets, and funding allocation, to ensure that both volunteers and staff are adequately supported, and that program quality and compliance standards are maintained.



L2P learner driver Aye with volunteer mentor Jude

8. Heavy Reliance on an Unpaid Volunteer Workforce

The L2P program is fundamentally dependent on a large and committed volunteer mentor workforce.

Across Victoria, mentors are required to complete mandatory screening, training and ongoing compliance requirements, and to commit regular unpaid time, often one to two hours per week over a minimum 12-month period, to support learner drivers to achieve the required 120 hours of supervised driving.

Mentors are not provided with honorariums or compensation for their time, travel, or participation in training, beyond access to limited centrally delivered mentor training places.

While the City and other delivery partners invest significant effort in volunteer recruitment, onboarding and retention, the increasing administrative and compliance burden placed on volunteers is a growing risk to program sustainability. Volunteer-based delivery models of this scale require active support to remain viable.

Refer [Appendix 2: Letters of Support](#).

What the Victorian Government could do.

The Victorian Government should give consideration to introducing targeted volunteer support mechanisms, such as funded local training delivery to support individual and complex needs, recognition payments, and full reimbursement for all out-of-pocket expenses.

This would strengthen mentor recruitment and retention, protect program capacity and recognise more accurately the cost of delivering the L2P program.

9. Increasing time and cost of supporting young people at risk

A growing proportion of participants present with complex needs, including disengagement, non-responsiveness, anxiety, trauma or unstable housing. This reflects a broader and well-documented increase in mental health challenges among young people across Australia.

National data show that mental health conditions are now the leading cause of disease burden for young people aged 15–24. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics and the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, around **38.8%** of young Australians aged 16–24 experienced a mental health disorder in the previous 12 months in 2020–2022, with anxiety and depressive disorders the most common. This represents a marked increase compared to earlier periods and underscores the growing complexity faced by youth-focused programs.

Recent changes to the L2P program's eligibility criteria and priority assessment framework have materially altered the profile of young people entering the program. The revised approach has appropriately strengthened the focus on disadvantage; however, it has also resulted in a significantly higher proportion of participants presenting with complex needs, including mental health challenges, social isolation, housing instability, disengagement from

education or employment, and limited informal support networks.

While this shift aligns with broader equity objectives, it has increased the level of engagement, case management and support required to enable participation and sustain learner involvement over time. The rise in anxiety, depression, and trauma among participants means mentors and staff must be equipped to recognise, respond to, and support complex mental health needs, often beyond the scope of traditional program delivery.

For many young people, their L2P program mentor may be the first consistent and positive adult relationship they have experienced. Managing these relationships requires careful coordination, additional staff time, and trauma-informed practice to support both the young person and the volunteer mentor.

Across the past decade, mental health has consistently ranked as a top-tier national concern for young people in Australia. Successive Mission Australia Youth Surveys show that mental health has repeatedly featured among the leading issues identified by young people, including being ranked as the top national issue for multiple years prior to 2020 and remaining within the top four national concerns in more recent surveys. The 2025 Geelong Youth Survey, which received more than 3,300 responses from young people aged 12–25 across 57 suburbs, identified mental health and wellbeing as a leading issue, with **30.7%** nominating it as a key personal concern and **14.5%** reporting they are living with a mental health condition. This local evidence reinforces national trends and highlights the level of psychosocial complexity present among many L2P participants, which directly influences engagement, retention and progression within the program.

As the prevalence of mental health issues continues to grow in this age group, the demand on staff and volunteers for trauma-informed and mental health-aware practice is only likely to increase, further amplifying the need for targeted funding and support.

What the Victorian Government could do.

Given the increasing complexity and needs of young people participating in the L2P program, the Victorian Government could introduce a suite of targeted supports to better equip program providers, mentors and volunteers. This could include

- Delivering regular, centrally funded training to upskill program staff and volunteer mentors in trauma-informed

practice, mental health awareness, and case management strategies, ensuring they are prepared to support participants with complex psychosocial needs.

- Providing access to specialist resources, clinical supervision, and debriefing for mentors and staff working with high-needs participants, to promote wellbeing and prevent burnout.

10. Misalignment between DTP Program Requirements and Council Governance Frameworks

The L2P program is administered by the DTP, with delivery coordinated locally by councils and community organisations. However, program directions relating to volunteer management, documentation and compliance are often issued as centrally defined requirements that do not align with established council governance, risk, volunteer management and child-safe frameworks.

This misalignment requires councils to operate parallel systems and processes, increasing administrative effort, duplication and compliance risk. In practice, local providers already maintain robust, legislatively compliant volunteer management frameworks that meet or exceed minimum requirements.

What the Victorian Government could do.

The program governance model should be inverted so that delivery partners' existing policies and systems are accepted as the default, with additional DTP requirements applied only where a demonstrable gap exists.

This would materially reduce administrative burden without compromising safety or accountability given the high compliance standards that local governments and many of the large charity and community providers that deliver the L2P program must adhere to.

11. Escalating Compliance Requirements Without Supporting System Capability

Delivery partners report that compliance requirements for the L2P program change regularly, introducing new reporting, record-keeping and assurance expectations. However, the central IT platform used to manage the program (Jupiter) does not currently have the functional capability to consistently support these evolving requirements.

As a result, providers are required to implement manual workarounds, maintain duplicate records and undertake additional verification processes outside the system. This

increases staff workload, creates inefficiencies and heightens the risk of error.

No new compliance or reporting requirements should be introduced until the Jupiter system is demonstrably updated to support them. A system-first approach would reduce duplication, improve data integrity and allow delivery partners to focus on program outcomes rather than administrative burden.



L2P learner driver Sasha and volunteer mentor David

12. Centralised Police Check Process Limits Local Efficiency

Under current arrangements, Refresher National Police Checks for L2P program volunteer mentors are managed through DTP-directed processes every three years rather than being delegated to delivery partners. This approach duplicates processes already routinely and effectively managed by councils and community organisations under their existing volunteer screening frameworks.

Centralised processing can introduce delays, reduce responsiveness and limit the ability of local providers to manage volunteer onboarding efficiently, particularly in

periods of high demand or when rapid mentor recruitment is required.

The current process carries a child safety risk. Outcomes from police checks need to be monitored closely and shared immediately, any information sharing delays limit the providers ability to respond promptly presenting a significant child safety risk.

Delivery partners should be authorised to manage police checks locally, consistent with their existing volunteer screening practices, with DTP retaining oversight through audit rather than direct administration. This would improve timeliness, reduce duplication and support faster mentor onboarding.

Furthermore, the full cost of obtaining and maintaining police clearance for all volunteer mentors should be embedded in program costs and covered under allocation to providers.

What the Victorian Government could do.

The Victorian Government could empower delivery partners, such as councils and community organisations, to manage police checks for L2P volunteer mentors locally, in line with their established volunteer screening frameworks.

By shifting from a centralised, DTP-administered process to a model where DTP provides oversight through audits rather than direct administration, local providers could streamline onboarding, respond more quickly to demand, and reduce duplication.

This would also mitigate child safety risks by ensuring outcomes from police checks are shared promptly and efficiently. If this change is adopted, the Government should consider allocating additional funding to reimburse volunteers for refresher checks, as these costs are currently covered by DTP every three years. Ultimately, this approach would improve timeliness, support faster mentor recruitment, and enhance the safety and effectiveness of the L2P program across Victoria.

Learner Feedback

Listening to learner feedback is vital for ensuring the L2P program continues to meet the real needs of young people across our community. The insights and experiences shared by learners have shaped both the analysis and recommendations presented in this paper, highlighting the barriers they face, the transformative impact of the program, and the importance of program flexibility, support, and accessibility.

By placing learner voices at the centre, we have identified key areas requiring attention, such as the need for funding models that reflect genuine delivery costs, accommodate participant complexity, and recognise regional disadvantage. This paper seeks the government's support to deliver targeted investment and funding certainty, ensuring that the L2P program remains responsive and impactful for those it is designed to serve.



L2P learner driver Alexander

The following is a summary of the themes identified through feedback obtained from learners completing the Geelong L2P program:

- **Independence and Improved Opportunities:** Learners consistently highlighted that gaining their licence through the L2P program provided critical independence, enabling them to travel to work, study, and social activities without relying on others or unreliable public transport. This newfound freedom was described as life-

changing, opening up employment and educational opportunities that were previously inaccessible.

- **Mentor Support and Personal Growth:** The value of mentors was emphasised, with learners noting that mentors not only taught them safe driving skills but also provided emotional support, encouragement, and practical advice. Many participants reported increased confidence, persistence, stress management, and social skills as direct outcomes from their mentor relationships.
- **Barriers to Access:** Several learners mentioned that, prior to joining the program, they had limited or no access to driving practice due to lack of family support or resources. The L2P program filled a crucial gap for those facing social, economic, or logistical barriers, reinforcing the need for funding models that recognise participant complexity and regional disadvantage.
- **Program Flexibility and Support Network:** Positive feedback was given for the program's flexibility, with mentors accommodating work and study schedules. The program's administrative team was praised for regular check-ins and responsive support, showing the importance of adequate funding for volunteer management and compliance.
- **Safe Driving and Life Skills:** Learners appreciated the focus on becoming safe and confident drivers, not just passing the test. Skills acquired extended beyond driving, including improved mental health, patience, and readiness for adult responsibilities.
- **Recommendation and Community Impact:** Many participants expressed gratitude and recommended the L2P program to others, demonstrating its positive impact on individual lives and the broader community.
- These themes underscore the need for a new model that reflects true delivery costs, accommodates participant complexity, ensures multi-year funding certainty, and acknowledges regional disadvantage.

These themes underscore the need for a new model that reflects true delivery costs, accommodates participant complexity, ensures multi-year funding certainty, and acknowledges regional disadvantage.

The feedback demonstrates that the L2P program is not only essential for helping young people obtain their licences, but also for supporting their overall wellbeing, confidence, and capacity to participate fully in society.

Refer [Appendix 1: Learner Feedback](#) for learners' voice.

What the Data says

The City's L2P program continues to operate at significant scale, delivering consistent supervised driving activity each month while managing a much larger "pipeline" of learners beyond those counted in monthly KPI reporting.

In FY24/25, the program averaged **91 active learners per month**, delivering an average of **457 supervised driving hours per month**. This reflects a sustained delivery effort across the year despite fluctuating learner availability and engagement.

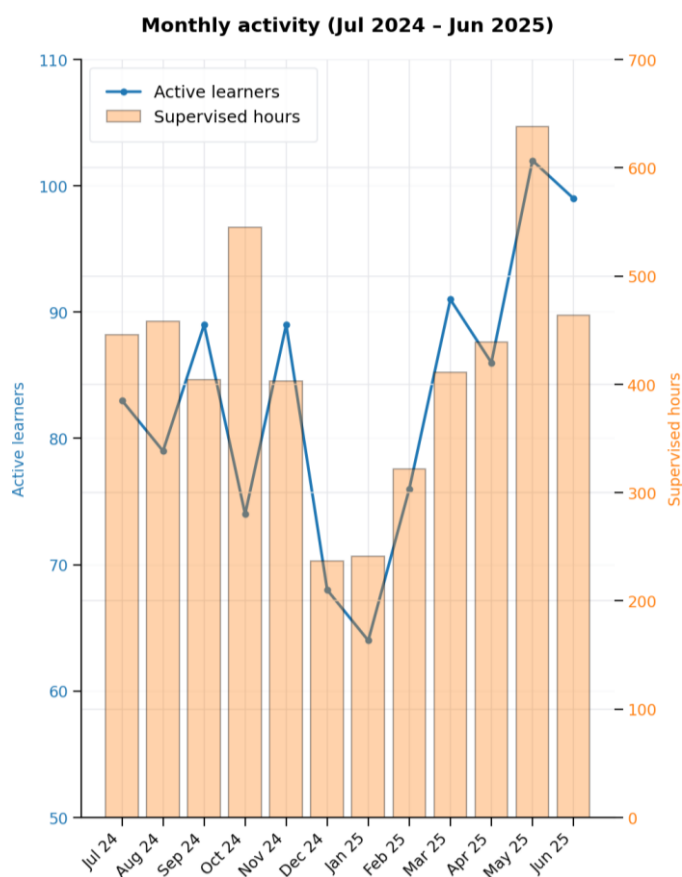
Importantly, monthly "active" figures do not reflect the full operational workload required to maintain program delivery.

Over FY24/25, the program carried a total of **235 learners on the books**, with an average of **135 learners per quarter** requiring active follow-up, engagement, and coordination, regardless of whether they met the threshold to be counted as "active" in a given reporting month. This creates a structural mismatch between what is resourced and what is measured: the administrative and case-management burden is driven by the full cohort, not only those who record monthly hours.

Over the same period, the program supported **74 licence outcomes**, demonstrating strong conversion to probationary licence attainment for those able to sustain participation.

The intake workload remains substantial. In FY24/25, the program received **248 applications** for processing. Applications typically require further information, completion of an assessment and prioritisation calculation, and formal notification of outcome. Based on an estimated average of **25 minutes per application**, this represents approximately **103 staff hours** of assessment effort across the year, before accounting for follow-up, disengagement management, and re-engagement support.

Taken together, these figures demonstrate that the program's resourcing and reporting settings must account for the "whole-of-pipeline" work required to achieve outcomes, particularly given learner volatility driven by health, wellbeing, employment, housing instability, transport access and other life circumstances. A funding and reporting model that only values monthly "active" counts risks underestimating both the real delivery cost and the operational effort required to achieve licence outcomes at scale.



- ☑ Average active learners/month: 91
- ☑ Average supervised hours/month: 457
- ☑ Learners on books (FY total): 235
- ☑ Licences achieved (FY): 74
- ☑ Applications processed (FY): 248

Case Study Snapshots

Vulnerability of Sponsorship-Based Funding

The L2P program has relied on a long-term sponsor for over 10 years to support service delivery in the Geelong region. Due to depleted funds and a shift in organisational priorities, the sponsor is now considering withdrawing their support to refocus investment on organisations addressing food security, an increasingly significant community issue in Geelong, as highlighted in the 2024 Geelong Preventative Health Survey.

The loss of this sponsorship represents a critical risk to the program's operational sustainability. The sponsor's withdrawal is expected to precipitate the loss of a partnering sponsor, significantly compounding the fiscal impact. Without immediate replacement funding, the program will be forced to remove a vehicle from its fleet, directly constraining delivery capacity and the number of young people supported.

A reduced fleet would leave at least one area of Geelong without access to an L2P vehicle within a 20-kilometre radius, creating a substantial barrier for learners who already face transport and financial disadvantage. Program experience shows that learners living more than 15 kilometres from an available vehicle consistently experience significantly longer wait times, largely due to increased difficulty in pairing with volunteer supervising drivers. Fewer vehicles would also place increased pressure on the program's capacity to meet KPIs, manage high demand, and provide timely access to supervised driving opportunities.

This case study highlights the fragility of relying on continual sponsorship acquisition and highlights the need for recognition of the true operational cost of maintaining partnerships alongside delivering frontline services.

L2P as a Crime Prevention and Early-Intervention Measure

A 17-year-old Syrian born young man joined the L2P program while living in a financially vulnerable household. His mother was unlicensed, his father held a green P-plate licence, and the family did not have capacity to support legal supervised driving. Prior to joining L2P, he had been driving under the supervision of his partially licensed father, placing himself and others at legal and safety risk. He was informed that this arrangement was illegal and placed himself, his father, and other road users at risk. Importantly, he accepted this information, agreed to stop driving with his

father, and committed to engaging properly with the L2P program.

He was paired with a volunteer mentor and began logging supervised driving hours legitimately. After approximately 40 hours, his mentor took a short break for a planned holiday. In his mentor's absence, having now turned 18, the learner attempted to fast-track licensing, falsifying a significant number of hours, attempting and failing multiple driving tests. Rather than immediately exiting him from the program, L2P staff explored the broader context. It emerged that his father had since left interstate, his unlicensed mother had begun driving out of necessity and had crashed the family vehicle, and the pressure on this young man to obtain a licence and financially support his family had increased significantly.

The program's primary concern shifted to preventing further harm, both to the young man and to the wider community. Exiting him from the program at this point would likely have resulted in him continuing to drive unlicensed, untrained, and unsupported, increasing the risk of traffic offences, injury, and legal involvement.

Instead, L2P focused on keeping him engaged in the system and supporting him to graduate as a safe, legal driver. He was paired with three volunteer mentors to accelerate access to supervised practice and was provided with the maximum number of professional driving lessons available through the program.

This tailored response required increased administrative oversight, regular monitoring, and intensive support for both the learner and volunteers to ensure compliance and track progress. It is this outcome-focused and individualised support, vital for learners with complex needs, which becomes most at risk when limited program resources are redirected from frontline service delivery.

Within two months, the learner successfully accumulated the experience needed to pass his driving test and exited the program as a safe, licensed driver.

This case highlights the L2P program's value as an early intervention and diversionary response. By addressing unlicensed driving and supporting lawful pathways for young people facing social and financial pressure, the program strengthens road safety outcomes, prevents offending, and reduces contact with the justice system.

What the City Is Seeking

The City recognises that, with targeted investment and funding certainty, the L2P program can continue to deliver strong social, economic and road-safety returns for both young people and the State. However, achieving this requires a funding and accountability framework that reflects the realities of regional delivery, volunteer-based models and increasing participant complexity.

To ensure the ongoing sustainability and effectiveness of the program, the City has provided a range of suggestions on what the Victorian Government could do to support sustainability of the L2P, the City specifically seeks consideration of the following reforms:

1. A Funding Model That Reflects True Delivery Costs

Provision of a funding model that reflects true delivery costs for providers, removing expectation on providers for co-contribution to the base delivery of the program. This should reflect the significant resourcing required for volunteer recruitment, training, screening, retention, compliance, and the growing complexity of participant needs, including mental health, wellbeing and socio-economic pressures.

2. Realistic and Evidence-Based KPI Settings

Current KPI settings do not adequately reflect the operational reality of the program. To achieve 115 'active' learners per month, the City must engage with a substantially larger cohort due to natural attrition and variability in learner participation.

- In practice (based on FY24/25 data), 135 learners per quarter resulted in an average of 91 active learners per month. Based on calculations using averages over the past 12 months we would need to have 167 learners active in a quarter to achieve 115 learners active in a month (KPI expectations). This is taking into consideration the adjustment for 'HIGH' priority.
- To support this level of activity, around 235 applications must be processed, assessed and actioned, while at any given time only approximately 90 active learners, on average, were ultimately counted toward KPI reporting.

A significant number of learners temporarily disengage following intake, and a notable proportion exit the program altogether due to factors beyond the program's control. These include hospitalisation, episodes of poor mental health, work or caring responsibilities, housing instability, or an inability to meet the minimum monthly driving requirement of 60 minutes. While temporarily disengaged learners may remain administratively 'on the books,' they

are excluded from KPI counts despite continuing to require active case management and support. During these periods, staff maintain regular contact with learners to monitor wellbeing, address barriers to re-engagement, and support their return to active participation when possible.

A funding and reporting model that only values monthly 'active' counts risks underestimating both the real delivery cost and the operational effort required to achieve licence outcomes at scale.

Compounding this issue, eligibility criteria were tightened at the same time as KPI and reporting changes, resulting in a cohort with higher and more complex support needs, further impacting participation consistency.

3. Reporting Frequency and Administrative Burden

The shift from quarterly to monthly reporting has materially increased administrative workload without improving service quality or safety outcomes. Monthly reporting does not allow sufficient flexibility to account for individual circumstances that temporarily prevent driving activity, despite learners remaining engaged with the program.

The City advocates for a return to measuring learner activity on a quarterly basis, acknowledging that engagement can fluctuate from one month to the next, supporting the setting of more realistic and achievable KPI's. This is consistent with previous arrangements, that better reflected participant journeys, reduced administrative burden and allowed delivery partners to focus on outcomes rather than compliance.

Additionally, requests for data on an annual basis that were not previously specified create further unplanned administrative pressure and should be clearly defined and limited.

4. Multi-Year Funding Certainty

Multi-year funding agreements are essential to enable efficient fleet management, workforce planning and volunteer pipeline development. Short-term or uncertain funding undermines the ability to secure vehicles, retain skilled staff and invest in mentor recruitment and training.

5. Recognition of Regional Demand and Disadvantage

Funding allocations should explicitly recognise higher demand, longer travel distances, and workforce constraints experienced in regional settings, ensuring equitable access to the program for young people outside metropolitan areas. The existing regional loading does not currently allow for this and needs review.

6. Leaner Needs and Child Safety Compliance Must Be Properly Resourced

The City fully supports the strengthened focus on child safety and compliance following the recent program-wide review. However, the additional administrative and assurance requirements cannot be met within existing funding allocations without compromising delivery capacity. Full resourcing of child safety compliance and volunteer management requirements is required, including centralised provision of training to support program providers and mentors meet the complexity of learners needs.

7. Cost Indexation

Funding should include indexation that, at a minimum, keeps pace with CPI to account for rising operating costs such as fuel, vehicle maintenance, insurance and training, ensuring program viability over time.

Next steps

The City welcomes the opportunity to engage in further discussions with the Department of Transport and Planning to ensure the ongoing success and sustainability of the TAC L2P program in our region and across Victoria.

Investing in a robust, flexible and properly funded delivery model is essential to responding to the increasing complexity of young people's needs, safeguarding the wellbeing of participants and volunteer mentors, and delivering meaningful, long-term benefits to the community and the State.

City of Greater Geelong L2P program partners



Community Bank
Bellarine



Community Bank
Lara District



Community Bank
Leopold



Rotary Club of Greater Geelong



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Appendix 1: Learner's Voice

Listening to the voices of learners who have participated in the L2P program is essential for understanding its impact and effectiveness. By valuing and reflecting on their firsthand experiences, challenges, and achievements, we gain crucial insights that can inform program improvements and ensure it continues to meet the real needs of young people. Their stories provide authentic feedback, highlight the strengths and opportunities within the program, and help foster a sense of community and empowerment for current and future participants.



The L2P program was an incredibly rewarding experience for me, not only did I learn to drive but I learnt a lot about persistence and a lot about myself as a person (especially coping with stress). As someone who has spent the majority of her life behind the handlebars of a bike driving was quite a challenge for me, embracing that was yet another adventure, one that I enjoyed more than I had expected. Now that I have my probationary license the world is my oyster and I hope to see as much of it as I can, the sense of independence at being able to safely transport myself without having rely or intrude on others is something I have desired for a long time and to finally have it feels amazing..." Emily



"Before having a mentor, I was unsure if I could ever get my licence as I had nobody to practice with. Having a mentor gave me hope for the future and gave me confidence in my ability to drive. Getting my licence was essential in my ability to seek employment and get to my school and work placement without spending hours catching public transport (which can also be very unreliable). I loved having somebody to talk to in the car and laugh with, my mentor and I always managed to have a good laugh and I will miss that greatly." Dakota



"If it wasn't for the L2P program, I wouldn't have ever got my hours up and I wouldn't have passed my driving test. My Mentor didn't only just teach me all the things to do with driving, we also talked about things we liked doing and our family. We got to know each other on a friend level and I felt so comfortable being with someone, who

was a great teacher with driving and also a really friendly person. dirk would always book in lessons for me straight after we had finished one, I looked forward to my lessons as it wasn't awkward between us and I felt super safe in the car with Dirk. I couldn't thank the team enough, for helping me achieve a goal I did not believe I could do.

You guys are honestly the most, understanding, trustworthy and reliable team. I am so grateful to have been a part of the team, maybe one day I could be teaching someone along side you guys." Alysha



"I am extremely grateful for the experience that I had with the L2P program as a young individual who felt as if the opportunity to get my licence was limited. My mentor provided me with reassurance and confidence throughout my whole entire journey with driving, allowing me to look forward to my lessons with many laughs shared... This program has not only helped myself but also my older sister to now have the freedom to be able to drive alone and take care of others on the road, but also to be safe due to all the mentors knowledge that has helped along the way..." Monet



"The L2P program for me was nothing less than incredible. I do not know I what I would've done or where I would've been without the program. My mentor was very kind, considerate and understanding and worked around my full time work schedule to allow me to have drives that not only worked for me but also made me feel comfortable. We worked slowly in stages building my confidence and worked our way to Melbourne airport which I previously would've done everything I could to avoid it. The support network within the program is incredible, April and Jen are always a phone call or email away and are super attentive, regular check ins made all the difference. I am so grateful for the L2P program. Many thanks to my mentor and the program for not only helping me acquire my confidence and hours in driving but also for shaping me into the person I now am." Bridie



"The program helped me get my license. My driving mentors were a perfect match for me... They taught me how to be a safe driver. The best thing about becoming more confident driving is that mentors take you for drives so that we learn how to be good drivers not just past the driving test which has been helpful in my experience as a solo driver. I would recommend the program to everyone..." – Ananya



"Getting my licence has helped me with being completely independent! I can now drive myself to and from work, but it also opens up my social life a lot more with getting myself around town and catching up with friends!... The whole experience has been awesome from start to finish, I would 100% recommend this program to anyone who was struggling like me to get their licence!" Victoria



"... having a mentor has not only enhanced my driving skills but also helped me develop greater patience and focus. Beyond driving, Lauren offered valuable advice on managing stress and staying calm in various situations, which has benefited many aspects of my life. I loved the sense of freedom and independence that driving offered, though navigating heavy traffic was challenging at times... Ultimately, getting my license will give me the freedom to travel independently, making it easier to manage my daily responsibilities and explore new opportunities." Madison



"... my mentor helped me with so many skills, understandings and control of the car... We had lots of great conversations and chats while driving which made the environment feel more comfortable and relaxed. I loved being able to drive on highways, and harder areas and seeing how my skills were improving. Having my licence will open up much more career opportunities for me, and my mentor made sure to fit me in at least once a week to get me to my goals." Alyssa



... Mentoring has not only allowed me to become a safe driver, but has also helped me to develop my social skills, improve my mental health, and has provided a space to safely reflect on my journey. My mentor has been an incredible support when it has come to education and work advice and support, and has also really helped me to understand myself as a person and get to know my strengths. He has given me many other perspectives, and that is something I am extremely grateful for... Getting my license has already made a large difference in my life. I have had a space that is my own, have been able to attend study, have been able to apply for many more jobs (securing interviews for those too), and have overall had much more freedom. Greg and L2P have been wonderful." Mackenzie



... mentoring has helped me go outside my comfort zone and push myself as well as learn valuable skills helping me be more independent... My mentor was very helpful and instructive, and learning to drive has helped me immensely. I can now drive to work and uni and doctors appointments which has been extremely helpful." Theodore



These experiences reinforce what the data already shows: for young people who face barriers to supervised practice, the L2P program is a practical, safe and highly effective pathway to independence. Sustaining and strengthening the program through fit-for-purpose, multi-year funding will protect volunteer-led delivery, improve access for those on waiting lists, and ensure more learners can reach work, study and community life with confidence and safety.

Appendix 2: Letters of Support

To whom it may concern,

I am writing to formally express my strong support for the advocacy paper, "Sustaining and Strengthening the TAC L2P Learner Driver Mentor Program." Having served as a volunteer mentor in the Geelong region since February 2024, I have seen firsthand how this program functions not merely as a driving school, but as a vital community service that bridges the gap between disadvantage and independence.

My commitment to this program is rooted in a deep respect for road safety and a desire to contribute to my community as a safe adult, especially for those who may not have positive adult influences. I have been personally impacted by the road toll, which drives my passion for teaching the next generation. I was fortunate to be taught to drive by someone with an incredibly broad range of experience, including defensive driving, heavy vehicles like cement mixers, motorbikes, and now navigating retirement while towing a caravan. This background has given me a nuanced understanding of how different road users interact, and I value the opportunity to share these considerations with young people to make our roads safer for everyone.

Growing up in Geelong, I have watched our home evolve into a large, thriving regional city. However, we still lack the transport accessibility of metropolitan areas. In Regional Victoria, a license is a fundamental necessity. For many of the disadvantaged youth I work with, the lack of a car or a supervising driver is a significant barrier to the jobs and culture our city offers.

The impact of the L2P program is best illustrated by one of my learners. A 21-year-old woman from one of Australia's most disadvantaged postcodes, she struggled to find the hours or the confidence to pass her test while balancing a busy household without the L2P Program's assistance. Over the 60+ hours we spent driving together, we built a mentorship that went beyond technical skills; I learned about her job, her home life, and her aspirations. Since passing her test on the first attempt, her life has changed. She can now maintain her employment after a family relocation, transport her younger siblings to school and appointments, and as a bonus, she is now able to grow her small side business by transporting her goods to local markets. Her license was the key to her self-sufficiency.

The success of these outcomes relies heavily on our Program Officers. They manage the immense complexity of this service - from vehicle maintenance and sponsor relations to the critical task of matching mentors with compatible learners. This matching process is not "one size fits all"; it requires time and expertise to ensure that learners with complex needs are fully supported and remain engaged.

To sustain this impact, the program requires a funding model that reflects the true cost of regional delivery and the complexity of the participants. Multi-year funding certainty, cost indexation, and appropriate resourcing for child safety compliance are essential to clear the long waiting lists of learners currently seeking help. I urge you to support the recommendations within the advocacy paper to ensure this essential service can continue to move our community forward.

Sincerely,
Amy Palmer
L2P Volunteer Mentor Supervising Driver

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Amy Palmer', with a large, stylized initial 'A'.

To whom it may concern,

I've been a volunteer driving mentor with L2P Geelong since February 2024. I've volunteered for more than 30 years in different roles, and this is one of the most inspired and best run programs I've been part of. Supporting young people facing significant barriers to obtaining their driver's licence, I see firsthand how transformative this support is – not only for the young people, but for our wider community and regional economy. Being an L2P mentor goes way beyond the driving hours.

Imagine your life right now without a driver's licence. How many changes that would make to your daily life, activities you're able to be involved in, the way you manage your time and energy, even the way you're perceived by your peers. Imagine if you'd never had the opportunity to get your licence – how different would your life be now? What opportunities, choices and progression would you have been denied? What financial and social impacts would you be carrying now? And what impact would this have on the next generation?

There are many reasons young people in Geelong do not have the support for supervised driving hours to gain their licence, and the stories of those I've mentored stay with me. A young Afghan woman determined to support her mother and siblings after her father's sudden death. A neurodivergent young trans man working across multiple schools as a mentor to neurodivergent students – one of the most organised and respectful young people I've met, who's grateful to be able to get his licence so that he'll no longer need to navigate the time and autistic fatigue of taking buses across Geelong to get to his different workplaces to help others to thrive. A young Indigenous man who opens up about his recent experience being incarcerated, how it's helped him change his influences and direction, how he's taken on the training and support to be offered work as a traffic controller – if only he can get the licence the job requires.

These young people all have different stories, and face different challenges – but there's one unifying thread: a driver's licence can be a turning point. This can be the key that unlocks access to employment, education, health and mental health supports, independence, family connection, a sense of achievement, and a richer social and community life. Research shows young people with a licence are **2.5 times more likely to gain or change employment**. In a regional city like Geelong, where public transport is limited, that impact is even greater.

Consider that Geelong has areas in the **lowest 4% nationally** for social disadvantage: Norlane, Corio, and Whittington. These three suburbs form the deepest disadvantage cluster in Greater Geelong. They also have the highest concentration of L2P learners, the largest waitlisted numbers, and by far the longest wait times. That's disadvantage stacked on disadvantage – intensifying entrenched inequity and the postcode penalty these young people face every day. Every licence achieved reduces unlicensed driving, fines, and justice-system contact. L2P mentoring also provides an important opportunity to impart strong road safety awareness to these young drivers, who may not always have had safe and responsible driving choices modelled to them.

L2P Geelong's funding model needs to reflect the real cost of operating in a regional setting and the complexity of the learners it supports. I've seen our mentees facing multiple barriers – including trauma, unstable housing, disability, and disrupted education. Their progress is meaningful but not always linear. Short-term funding cycles undermine stability, staff retention, and long-term planning. As a volunteer, I see the difference this program makes to lives over and over – and I also see the strain on staff as they work so sincerely to deliver high-impact outcomes on insufficient resourcing. The solution is simple: **increased funding → more staff capacity → more mentors → more learners matched → more young people gaining the independence and opportunity they deserve.**

I urge you to provide the funding certainty and resourcing this program needs to continue its essential work for the Geelong region with consistency, certainty, and the capacity the region demands. Please look beyond the budget line to the real-world program impacts: opportunity, access, self-belief, and equitable outcomes. This is a small investment with a large, measurable social return – for the wider community, and most importantly, for the young people whose future trajectories can be transformed by the L2P program.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Sheridan Daniels". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Sheridan" being more prominent than the last name "Daniels".

Sheridan Daniels
Volunteer driving mentor, L2P Geelong
3 May 2026

3rd May 2026

To whom it may concern,

I am writing to express my strong support for the TAC L2P Learner Driver Mentor Program, based on my experience as a learner driver in 2017.

Coming from a large family with a single, time-poor parent and no suitable vehicle for supervised driving, accessing the required hours to obtain my licence would not have been possible without the L2P program. Two of my siblings and I completed the program, creating a pathway to independence for our family and laying the foundation for the opportunities and pathways we have since been able to pursue.

A key part of my experience was the consistent support from my volunteer mentor, who provided both practical driving supervision and encouragement throughout the process. This relationship helped build my confidence and reinforced safe driving skills in a way that was previously not accessible to me.

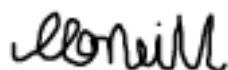
Through L2P, I was able to gain my licence, which became a turning point in my life. It allowed me to access employment and further education and gave me the independence to eventually move out of home. Without that access to independence, my life could have taken a very different path.

The impact of L2P has extended far beyond just obtaining a licence. My sister and I now work in the mental health and community services sectors, supporting others in our community, while my older brother has gone on to work as a lawyer supporting victims of family violence. Since obtaining my licence I have also been able to support four of my siblings to gain their licences, creating a flow-on effect of independence and opportunity within my family.

Programs like L2P do more than teach young people to drive. They create access to employment, education, and long-term stability. This is why adequate funding, appropriate resourcing, and long-term certainty are so important, particularly in regional communities where barriers are often greater and demand for the program is high.

I strongly support continued and increased investment in the L2P program so it can keep delivering these outcomes for young people and their families.

Kind regards,
Molly O'Neill



Sustaining and Strengthening the TAC L2P Learner Driver Mentor Program.
Letter of support.
26 April 2026

To Whom it may concern,

My name is Steve Bentley and I have been involved in the Geelong Regional L2P program for over four years as a Driver Mentor and as part of the Advisory Panel.

Over the last 40 years I have been involved in dozens of Community programs and services as a manager and as a volunteer.

I can honestly say that the L2P program is one of the most holistically beneficial programs I have been involved in. The immediate and primary benefit of the L2P program in a regional area is clear in it supporting and enabling young people to gain a licence to drive a car.

The flow-on, catalyst and ripple effects of this achievement are many, especially in a regional area where transport options are not as plentiful as a major capital city.

We note that a driver's licence is very important for employment and study opportunities and options which is such an essential thing to thrive in a regional area.

I support many young people who, along with their families, are new to Australia. Often it is the young person whom we are mentoring, who will be primary driver in the family when they become licenced, as their other family members are not comfortable with the English language or Australian conditions to drive.

The support of these young people and their families genuinely acts a catalyst for such families, new to Australia, to integrate, engage with and contribute to the communities in regional Victoria.

A secondary benefit for the young people is the general mentoring and support that we as mentors can offer. I have seen that being another guiding adult in the life of a young person can provide significant outcomes for them in career guidance, problem solving, opportunity identification, support, encouragement and goal setting. I am proud that we play an important part in guiding great young people.

Another really significant set of outcomes of the L2P program that I have observed and experienced has been for the mentors.

Especially for people in or transitioning into retirement, the L2P program provides a tangible and meaningful purpose post-employment.

Maintaining and improving mental health, community contribution, sense of purpose and general well-being of people in retirement is and will continue to grow to be a significant issue for society and Governments.

Having people contribute to society, even outside paid employment, has demonstrated to be one of the best things to help people stay healthy, well and reduce the need for premature Government funded care. The tangible contribution, outputs and outcomes of the L2P program is ideally suited to answering that "What is my purpose?" question that retired people struggle to answer.

It does concern me that we have such long wait lists in our very needy areas of the northern suburbs of Geelong. It is these suburbs that have high levels of unemployment, social disconnection and people new to Australia. In Geelong, despite being one of the largest programs, we need significantly more mentors.

Geelong has two excellent Coordinators who are doing a great job. I do observe that they are often busy working 'in the business' too often and don't have enough time to work 'on the business'. This lack of or limited administration support is impacting on our ability to source a bigger mentor pool. We previously had a dedicated administration staff person and this definitely freed up the time of the coordinators to be more forward thinking and focussed. Finally, as being part of the Advisory Panel, I do see how short-term funding and program certainty can limit what we can do. Asset planning, strategic relationship building, mentor recruitment and marketing are all impacted when funding is essentially year to year. I can see that a period of say 4 years at a time can help the program become more efficient and more effective in all the objectives and outcomes.

Thank you for the opportunity.



Steve Bentley
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