

Sunshine Coast mass transit rally: Thousands to line beach from Mooloolaba to Maroochydore in light rail protest

Up to 3000 residents are set to line the beach to send a powerful message to the Sunshine Coast Council that it must ditch light rail as a beachfront transport option.



[Scott Sawyer](#)

Follow

October 14, 2021 - 6:00PM



Thousands of concerned residents will line several kilometres of premier coastline in a last-ditch bid to have light rail dumped as a potential new beachfront transport system.

Growing outcry over the plans was set to reach a crescendo on Sunday, October 17, when up to 3000 people were expected to line the beach from Mooloolaba to Maroochydore.

The gathered masses will be aiming to make their views heard in a final plea to the Sunshine Coast Council to scrap light rail as an option for its mass transit plan.

[Councillors were due to meet on October 20 to consider a finalised options analysis report, which recommended five options](#), including light rail, be submitted to the state government for consideration.

[Light rail had been touted as an option for the past decade for the 13km stretch from Maroochydore to Kawana](#), first by the Light Rail Taskforce in 2011, which made clear in

2012 the taskforce had not started with a project to move people, but rather to assess a light rail project which could act as the catalyst for higher densities and a shift in the region's urban development.

[Concern with the prospect of a beachfront light rail had been growing among several coastal communities](#), heightened after a recent Right to Information release which revealed a firm engaged to deliver a key report on mass transit had pledged its commitment to light rail prior to being awarded a \$439,000 council contract.

Sunshine Coast Council has repeatedly stated it had not decided on a favoured option and that all mass transit options were being considered.

The council had also been at pains to stress the state government would ultimately make the decision on what mass transit mode was introduced in the region and when.

Almost 800 pages of documents were recently released ahead of the crucial October 20 meeting.

Among the documents the results of the controversial mass transit survey revealed light rail had received the "lowest number of positive sentiments and the highest number of negative sentiment statements".

More than 3800 survey responses were received and almost 1500 people were engaged face-to-face, a report by the council's engagement consultants Articulous stated.

Detailed survey results found 36 per cent of respondents were "very dissatisfied" with the public transport master plan, while only 16 per cent were "very satisfied".

On Sunday morning members of two key groups, The Beach Matters and Mass Transit Action Group, as well as members of the public, were expected to flock to the beach to make their views known.

Mass Transit Action Group member Mark Attwell said members and residents hoped to remind councillors it was "their job to respect the community's wishes".

"When you vote on Wednesday we'll be watching you ... and we will be reminding people which way you voted (at the next election)," Mr Attwell said.



“Now might be a good time to vote no, take a little extra time to find a solution that brings the community along with them.

“This will be the biggest change in the history of the Sunshine Coast if this goes ahead.”

Mr Attwell said a light rail and associated infrastructure along the beachfront would prove the “ultimate physical barrier” to some of the region’s most-loved beaches.

“You won’t go to Alex or Mooloolaba, you’ll just go somewhere else,” he said.

He lamented the fact the community had to take the fight up with its own funds against an idea the council was exploring with ratepayer dollars.

The Beach Matters spokeswoman Rach Bermingham said the community was rallying as council officers had failed to respond to public sentiment and remove the light rail options.

She said the community wouldn’t accept any attempt to shift blame to the state government if the council failed to remove light rail and the state opted to pursue it as a mass transit mode.

“It’s now in the councillors’ hands,” Ms Bermingham said.

She said several prominent developers had expressed their concern with light rail while The Beach Matters campaign had attracted support from high profile former MPs and businessmen including mining executives and Wayne Swan.

Lifesaving legend and surfcraft identity Hayden Kenny had also thrown his support behind the cause.



Up to 3000 people were expected to line the beach on Sunday, October 17. Jenny Nixon with her dog Gidget will no doubt be among them. Picture: Patrick Woods.

[Earlier this year councillors outlined their position](#) on the controversial topic.

Several refused to take a position when asked in May, while others spoke of their preference to explore alternatives including electric or hydrogen buses and smaller, more mobile modes of transport.

[Others spoke of their concern of the impact growing congestion would have](#) on the renowned strip of beaches and said a do-nothing approach was simply not an option.

In a statement released in late-September, the council said the state government was “ultimately responsible” for the public transport network.

The statement said councillors would not be asked to vote for a preferred option or options, the final route, funding for mass transit or any changes to the planning scheme, when they meet next week.

“Further community engagement on all aspects of the Sunshine Coast Mass Transit Project will be part of the detailed business case stage, led by the state government,” the statement read.