

# Sunshine Coast Mass Transit Action Group Inc. (MTAG)

## March 2024

### Divisional Councillor Candidate Questionnaire

As a key advocacy groups on the Sunshine Coast, we are seeking your views on public transport and housing densification in the region. Please be advised your responses will be collated and made public as we believe all voters should be aware of your position on these two key issues prior to voting. No response will be taken to mean you agree with the following:

1. The current Department of Transport and Main Roads (TMR) Southern Sunshine Coast Public transport strategy and their decision to proceed with Rapid Bus Transit in a dedicated lane along our coastal strip.
2. The current Sunshine Coast Regional Council plan to house the large majority of the future population growth out to 2041, in the Coastal corridor between Maroochydore and Caloundra.

Name of candidate:	Walter Johnson	Date:	4 February 2024
Division contesting:	Division 8		

## Section 1: Transport

- 1 Do you think two public transport spinal networks (Heavy Rail from Beerwah to Maroochydore and a Mass Transit system from Maroochydore to Birtinya) with feeder networks running to them, is the best public transport system for the region?

YES/NO No

- 2 If NO, and you are elected, will you advocate to TMR for a different Sunshine Coast Public Transport strategy?

YES/NO Yes

If YES what?

My current position is relatively open book and would greatly depend on further engagement with the public and community of my electoral division (8). Most of which would rely on improved feeder networks. From a personal perspective, I do believe a light rail system in addition to improvements to the heavy rail line could be a net benefit to our broader region. However, I think the priority should be to improve the heavy rail line, and further emphasis on improving our current bus system to create better feeder networks, ideally reducing localised congestion. The coastal corridors are heavily trafficked, David Low-Way through Maroola - Mount Coolool is not immune, Nicklin Way is a constant congestion point (which I only see getting worse with increased density within the existing residential areas), and Kawana Way and Sippy Downs have been battling traffic and congestion problems for some time. I strongly believe any transport system, improved or new, will rely on personal perception and a broader positive attitude shift towards public transport to make them a success and viable. My understanding is people in my community have little appetite for public transport as it does not provide the same level of autonomy and freedom as compared to private vehicle use. How we resolve this will require local engagement to greater understand individual, neighbourhood and community attitudes along with consultation with key stakeholders in the transport space. If public transport is to be effective it needs to be a preferred method of getting from A - to - B for more people, more often.

- 3 Do you support a Rapid Bus Transit system in a dedicated right of way along our coastal corridor?

YES/NO Yes

- 4 What will you do to improve public transport now?

Response:

As I touched on above, my view is public attitude towards public transport lacks trust in the system to provide a comparative level of autonomy and freedom to move people from their homes, to work or to places of leisure, majority of which should all be accessible by public transport. I believe there is scope to review the size of our current buses and would suggest an analysis and study of providing smaller busses at shorter intervals. I'm no expert, but I would think smaller buses would also open up viability to move into residential areas currently not captured due to poor roadway widths, tight corners or inadequate bus stop provisions which currently rely on the standard size of our buses. I also think there could be a rewards system for residents who utilize public transport to move within their electorate and in turn reduce number of vehicles on the road, this could be done through transport cards being linked through MyCouncil, or digital ID's, reduced fares for bus usage during peak times would also be a worthy discussion however I'm conscious that people are balancing a lot in the morning (or evening)

before they even think about getting into their car, or getting to the bus to transport to work. I think either of my current suggestions and ideas could be trailed at any time.

**5 What do you think should be the priority for better public transport in the future?**

Response:

First priority is improving the current systems we have now with ideally no cost added to rate payers. I believe the suggestions I've mentioned above, and my points raised about the attitude towards public transport use are all priority avenues for improving our current bus system. Our region is growing rapidly, Council are approving a high number of dual occupancies and multi-unit developments within existing neighbourhoods which is doubling the number and frequency of cars on our roads. It is no doubt also doubling the time we spend on our roads getting from A-to-B due to congestion.

## Section 2: SCRC 2024 Draft Planning Scheme

6 Do you support the current plan to put the large majority of new arrivals out to 2041 within the Coastal Corridor? (Maroochydore to Caloundra)?

YES/NO Yes

7 What does high-rise mean to you (how many storeys)?

Response:

QUESTION 6 - Unfortunately your locked answer boxes, only allow for a Yes/ No answer to a loaded question, particularly Question 6 above which I am YES and NO. YES, I support further density within some of our coastal corridor areas for new arrivals as its logic that pressure will be placed in these areas to accommodate more people. Largely as it is amenity driven, proximity to larger goods and services and our beaches and coastal communities are some of the highest regarded in Australia and nationally recognized. I believe we can achieve a good level of increased density in parts of our coastal corridor but it needs to be supported by suitably equipped local or major centres and not isolated density lacking supporting infrastructure. I also don't want to see a proliferation of high rise along our coastal dunes and foreshores which I believe takes away from the amenity of our coastal towns and seascapes. This is where the Gold Coast has gone wrong. I also suggest NO, as there needs to be balance as majority of our coastal corridor areas are flood prone and drainage deficient. I think some of the peri-urban and smaller inland towns would greatly benefit from increased populations and ideally the upkeep in improved infrastructure would need to support this.

QUESTION 7 - Typically any structure that exceeds 3 storeys over a ground floor entry or carpark level.

8 Do you think housing densification should occur along the Heavy Passenger Rail Corridor rather than the Mass Transit Coastal Corridor?

YES/NO Yes

Explain why?

I believe there is a merit to both. Firstly it is a great opportunity to plan for affordable housing and improved local centres within and around these housing densifications which will have great access to other areas via a Heavy Passenger Terminal. I think if you can live within the Sunshine Coast region and yet commute efficiently to Brisbane for work and/ or travel that is a good outcome. Assumably feeder networks can then offer such residents the benefits of our coastal areas and keep their cars at home and coastal corridors less congested. Secondly, housing density is most always associated with transit corridors, it is both market driven and a researched and supported planning outcome.

9 If you are an existing Councillor, did you vote in favour of the current draft 2024 Planning Scheme?

YES/NO

10 If you are elected, will you vote to review the draft 2024 Planning Scheme, in particular the densification of the coastal corridor?

YES/NO Yes

**11 As a Divisional Councillor, what will you do to ensure we do not become another Gold Coast?**

Response:

I am committed to bringing the people of Divison 8 together with all decision makers to get true community consulation on matters which affect all residents and businesses. I frequent the Gold Coast often and I whilst I admit it has some nice aspects, I struggle to understand how it can ever be replicated in the Sunshine Coast. The Gold Coast already has, and always has had a larger population than our region, the Gold Coast has different inter-urban breaks to our region, their coastal communities have mostly smaller land sizes than our region and their land uses have progressed at a significantly quicker rate compared to us to this point. I have been a Real Estate agent selling homes and units within my community for 7 years, to be fair the region sells itself for what it is, and that isn't the Gold Coast. I don't want it to be another Gold Coast. I believe we can manage our growth sustainably and we should actively look to other regions to learn what can work and what does not work to support our decision making processes and ultimately support our community to ensure decisions around our growth are community centric.

**12 Do you think the current planning decision making process is too lenient toward developers, especially in regard to site coverage, set backs and density?**

YES/NO No

Why?

The planning decision and making process is set out by the State, the Local Government however prescribes such matters as site coverage, setbacks and density within our Local Planning Scheme. I don't believe the scheme is applied any more lenient to a developer as it is to say, a mum and dad knocking down a detached dwelling for a dual occupancy. All development is assessed on its merit, within context of site constraints and the applicable local plan area and relevant codes. I do however think in most recent history some large scale development proposals and their due processes have set differing precedents with regards to how height, setbacks, site cover and impact have been considered. Case in point, Sekisui.

**13 Do you think all Development Applications should require Council to notify all adjoining neighbours?**

YES/NO Yes

If YES, what will you do to try and make this happen?

Yes, I think this is a good idea that ensures planning processes are transparent, particularly as the community is wanting to be more involved in good planning outcomes, ensuring the process is as transparent as it can be, I think can benefit this. That said, the Planning Scheme framework, administered by the State only permits public notification and allows for submission during impact assessment. As Councillor, I will endeavour to equip Divison 8 and the broader community with the ability to use the current Development portal to track, monitor and review planning applications. I also see a great benefit in working with local professionals in this space to provide engagement and learning sessions to community group meetings regularly which will further equip the community with a suitable level of knowledge to enquire, review and monitor developments in their neighbourhood.

**14 As a Divisional Councillor, what will you do to achieve better development outcomes for the region and your Division?**

Response:

In the first instance I'll be reviewing the proposed New Planning Scheme and working with my division and the community through community group meetings to ensure the concerns, threats and opportunities of the region are reflected in the scheme. I will also be engaging with industry

professionals to assist myself and the community to engage in detailed conversations and learning activities to understand the affect the planning scheme will have on our streets, neighbourhoods (local plans) and wider region. I believe strengthening the communities knowledge of the Scheme will contribute to upholding better development outcomes. Above all else my strengths are open and transparent lines of communication. I have a proven track record of being a dilligent communicator underpinned by honesty and integrity. I will not profess to know it all, I never will, however I believe the best planning outcomes will come from decision which are made in the public interest. As a divison councillor I see my role as listening to the whole community, positive or negative, and support or oppose development in line with the communities expectations and feedback. I will only ever stand up for what is best for the community and will only ever know what is best by listening to the community.