

Operator

SHUTTLE DIPLOMACY

028 www.truckandbus.net.au



Increasing traffic congestion and a desire to reduce car dependence as well as enabling residents to navigate the local area more easily has led Sydney's Strathfield Council to purchase a fleet of four small buses for a local shuttle service called the Strathfield Connector. We take a look at how and why the council put together and runs the shuttles.



STRATHFIELD
COUNCIL

HINO
STRATHFIELD
CONNECTOR

HINO
Possible

CS 48 UT
NEW SOUTH WALES



It seems local councils are getting into the bus business. Increasingly local government operations are putting together local shuttle bus services around key areas to make it easier and simpler for residents to travel the local area without having to get in a car or have to walk a long distance a stop for a regular public transport bus route.

So it is that Strathfield Council in inner western Sydney launched the Strathfield Connector to increase connectivity within the Strathfield Local Government Area to help ease the issues of congestion and traffic.

Strathfield Council conducted surveys and asked for feedback from local residents in 2018 to ascertain the best

way to proceed with a local shuttle bus service that would best serve the needs of residents and visitors to the area.

As the information from the research was compiled, two routes were developed to service different parts of the Strathfield Council area, specifically targeting areas that did not have any public transport options available.

After months of planning and work Strathfield Council launched the Strathfield Connector in March this year and in the seven months up to the time we spoke with the council, it has proved to be a great success.

The council formulated two routes, a Northern route, the Red Route, running

in a loop north from the Strathfield CBD and station to a large factory outlet store near Sydney Olympic Park and back around largely residential streets on either side of the extremely busy Parramatta Rd, and the Southern or Blue Route touching on the Flemington produce markets and the areas around South Strathfield.

The Red Route started in March, while the Blue route started in June.

So far the Red Route has carried more than 7000 residents to date, while the Blue Route is proving just as popular as the Red one since it kicked off on 11th June.

It's been a significant commitment for the council, which has purchased four buses to operate the services, two Hino



“THE STRATHFIELD CONNECTOR NOT ONLY CONNECTS RESIDENTS TO LOCAL SHOPS, RESTAURANTS AND BUSINESSES BUT ALSO INCREASES SOCIAL INCLUSION”

Ponchos, which seem to have become the shuttle bus standard, along with two Toyota Coasters.

Strathfield Council’s executive manager of communications, events and engagement, Naomi Searle, the feedback from residents has been very positive so far and has been very encouraging.

“With local traffic and congestion its become more difficult to get around the local area and the aim of the Strathfield Connector has been to provide an alternative, affordable transport mode that could decrease traffic and the need to use a car for short local journeys,” said Naomi Searle.

“It has proved a great service for senior citizens and with all residents as well as

with visitors who know they can get the train or bus to Strathfield station and then catch a shuttle around to various parts of the Council area,” she said.

“The Strathfield Connector not only connects residents to local shops, restaurants and businesses but also increases social inclusion by providing an alternative means of travel to attend Council run events with bus stops placed near the Strathfield Library and various parks,” Naomi added.

The service runs seven days a week, every 30 minutes from 7am to 7pm, and while it is free the council does ask for those using it to consider making a contribution to help ensure the long-term

viability of the service.

“It is expensive and while we don’t charge a fare we do encourage residents to make a contribution, however not many have so far,” Naomi said with a smile.

The service’s two Hino Ponchos were chosen particularly for their low floor, wheel chair and general ease of access allowing handicapped passengers to easily use the service. Augmenting the Poncho are the two Toyota Coasters, chosen because of the longer lead times for ordering and receiving the Poncho.

It’s been the first time that Strathfield Council has instituted its own bus service and follows the lead being taken by other local government councils, particularly

some in Sydney, including around Manly in the Northern Beaches Council area and across the Parramatta River in the municipality of Ryde, along with a number of other privately run developer funded shuttle service. C&B recently featured the privately run **Poncho** shuttle service around the **Meadowbank** area in Sydney's North West, financed by developer Payce to move residents from its massive new development on an old industrial site to rail and ferry stations in the local area.

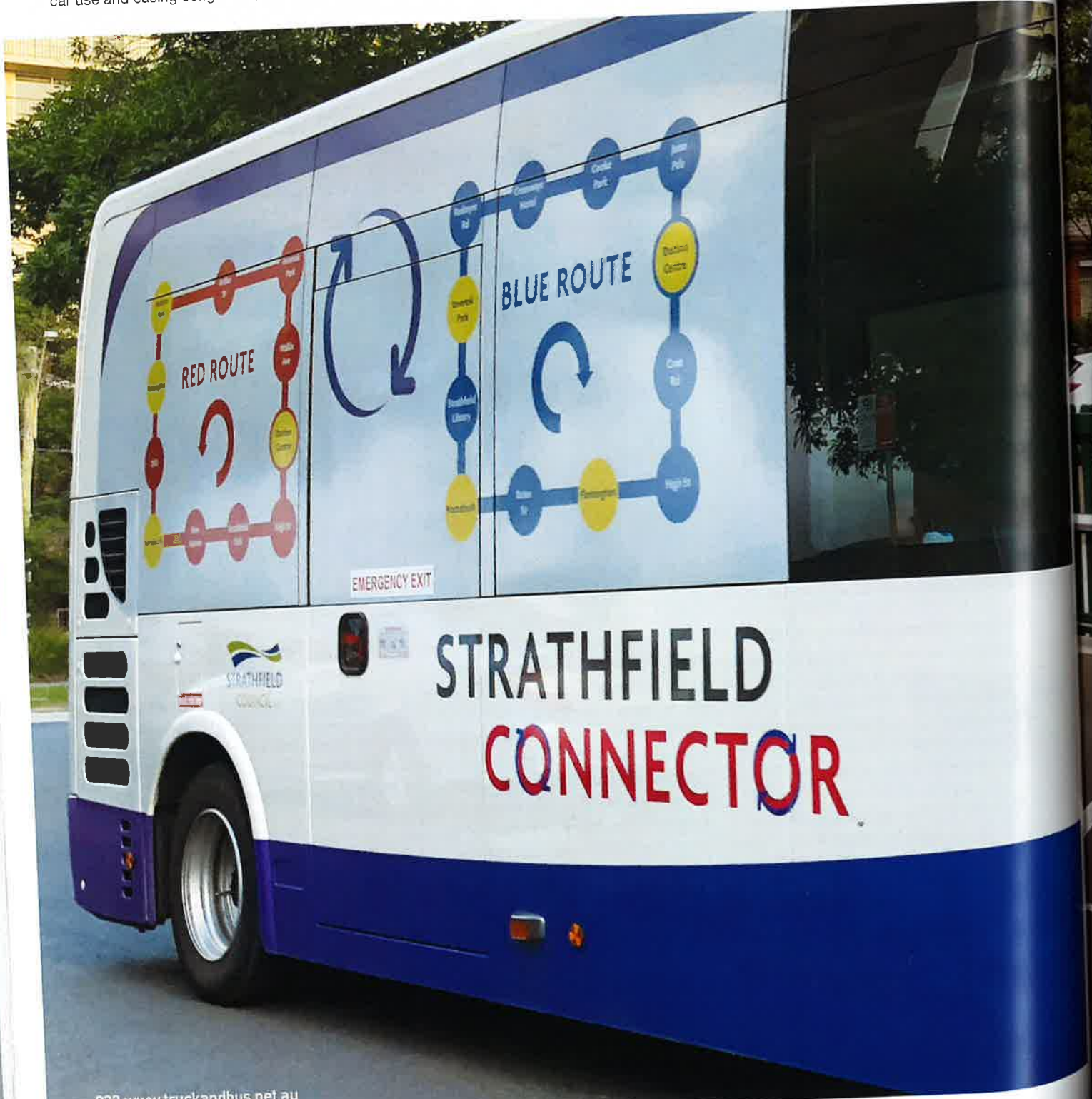
"We looked closely at the other examples of councils running similar local area shuttles and the benefits they can deliver in cutting car use and easing congestion," said Naomi.

The two Strathfield Connector Ponchos hold 26 passengers and features an ultra-low floor design with an easy accessible wheelchair ramp.

They are powered by Hino's J05E-TS 5.1 litre four cylinder turbo diesel which is mounted horizontally in the rear of the bus and is mated to an Aisin five speed automatic. The engine produces 180 hp with 530 Nm of torque. The rear location means the Poncho is quiet and very comfortable to ride and of course the rear mounting delivers that low flat floor enabling its flexibility and versatility particularly with wheel chair bound and movement impaired passengers.

Similarly the Council's Toyota Coasters are powered by Toyota's four-litre four-cylinder turbo-diesel with maximum power of 110kW of power and 397 Nm of torque at 1800 rpm, using the four speed automatic transmission. The 22 seater Coaster is not as friendly for wheelchair passengers but does come with ABS anti-lock brakes and features three-point seat belts on all seats.

The success of the Strathfield Connector is clear and with a growing number of local councils and other groups starting up shuttles like this its clear demand for small buses will continue to grow with more new models set to head our way. 🚌





STRATHFIELD
COUNCIL


STRATHFIELD
CONNECTOR


HINO
Partner

NSW
VIC
SA
TAS
ACT
NT
Q
W
A
C
S
48
UT
NEW SOUTH WALES