

REGIONAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT STATEMENT

Service SA Expansion Strategy Regional Impact Assessment Statement

1. Issue

Service SA is expanding its Customer Service Centre and Customer Contact (Call) Centre network to increase access to services through a broader regional and CBD presence. This effectively introduces a broader range of Government services from previous Department for Transport and Urban Planning, Transport SA Registration and Licensing Customer Service Centres.

Service SA is assuming operation of the:

- Six remaining Transport SA regional customer service centres located in Mt Gambier, Naracoorte, Berri, Kadina, Murray Bridge, and Port Pirie,
- Transport SA CBD customer service centre on North Terrace, and
- Transport SA Customer Call Centre.

2. Regions

The major towns impacted by the expansion strategy are those where Service SA is assuming operation of the existing Transport SA locations including Mount Gambier, Naracoorte, Berri, Kadina, Murray Bridge and Port Pirie, as well as the surrounding districts.

3. Stakeholders

- Local communities of Mount Gambier, Naracoorte, Berri, Kadina, Murray Bridge, Port Pirie and the surrounding districts,
- Local Councils of impacted areas,
- Small business community of impacted areas,
- Department for Transport and Urban Planning (DTUP),
- Existing Transport SA Customer Service Centre staff (Note: These TSA staff will be proclaimed as DAIS staff),
- Service SA staff, and
- Other SA Government agencies.

4. Consulted

The formulation of the expansion strategy involved extensive consultation with the:

- Department of Transport and Urban Planning (DTUP), and
- Department of Treasury and Finance (DTF).

Consultation was also undertaken with the following groups, who provided in principle support to the project:

- Department of Justice
- Office of Consumer and Business Affairs (OCBA)
- SA Water
- South Australian Housing Trust (SAHT)
- Department of Primary Industries and Resources (PIRSA)
- Department for Environment and Heritage (DEH)
- Department of Water, Land and Biodiversity Conservation (DWLBC)
- Department for Administrative and Information Services (DAIS)
- (Former) Department of Human Services (DHS)
- Department of Education and Children Services (DECS)
- Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology (DEFEST)
- (Former) Department of Business, Manufacturing and Trade (DBMT)
- Office of Local Government
- Office of Regional Affairs
- Office for the Upper Spencer Gulf, Flinders Ranges and Outback
- Office of the Southern Suburbs
- Local Government Association

Specific support through co-location and service provision opportunities are being explored with OCBA; SAHT; SA Water; and DWLBC, all of whom have indicated their strong support.

Service SA also consulted with Wendy Campana, Executive Director, Local Government Association who provided in principle support to the expansion strategy.

5. Consultation

The expansion strategy was circulated to all SA Government agencies and provided the opportunity for feedback and suggestions. This was used in determining the final scope for the expansion strategy.

The Service SA Steering Committee, comprising senior cross-agency representation was updated regularly on the development of the expansion strategy and were provided with the opportunity to have input into the process.

Individual meetings were held with existing Service SA agency clients and the Executive Director, Local Government Association.

Service SA also receives written communication, on a regular basis, from rural areas (including from Local Councils, Local Members etc.). These communications are commonly enquiring of the possibility to establish a Service SA Customer Service Centre in their community. One recent communication of this nature was received from the Clare and Gilbert Valleys Council.

No consultation via public meetings has been undertaken.

Market research was undertaken in 2003, by surveying customers of the existing Service SA Customer Service Centre outlets located at Gawler, Port Augusta, Port Lincoln and Whyalla. This research aimed at ascertaining the level of support within regional communities for the services being provided. 903 self-completion quantitative surveys were completed over a five working day period.

The market research found that:

- Of the Service SA Customer Service Centre customers surveyed, 90% agreed that an expanded Service SA network would be of benefit to other residents of South Australia and 68% strongly agreed.
- 81% of respondents stated that they would prefer to obtain government information over the counter and face-to-face payment is still the preferred method of bill payment for 77% of those respondents.
- 91% of respondents surveyed at the Gawler Customer Service Centre indicated they were particularly likely to interact with government through a single customer service point like Service SA.

The Port Augusta Service SA Customer Service Centre is a key example of government reinvestment impacting positively on a vulnerable community. The Port Augusta Customer Service Centre was officially opened by the Premier Mike Rann on 3 September 2003. This centre is located with other SA Government services including Office of Consumer and Business Affairs, Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Reconciliation, together with a number of agencies grouped under Outback SA. The very positive support evidenced by the community and local businesses alike demonstrates the value of a single customer service location in meeting community needs and building a positive image of government.

Research has been undertaken by a number of agencies in the past in relation to providing services to rural communities and has drawn conclusions that were useful in developing the expansion strategy. These include the following:

- Ruralink Review conducted in SA by the Office of Regional Development (2000) found that people in rural communities would be better served through both having access to government forms and being able to conduct transactions through a local facility.
- The Government of Tasmania achieved its own improved approval rating (circa 2000) in regional locations as Service Tasmania shops received high recognition that the Government was delivery services.

- SA Government supported 1999 SA Regional Development Task Force recommendations that State Government investigate (in partnerships with local government) opportunities to deliver more effective, integrated and coordinated services in regions.
- The “Village Marketing Survey” conducted by Transport SA (1998) found that regional TSA customers wanted choice of delivery mediums and that the highest preference was for face to face counter services.
- The Social Development Committee of the SA State Parliament (1995) investigating effects of rural poverty noted that, while it is not possible for every government department to locate an office in all small communities, a local presence could be maintained by pooling resources.

6. Summary of Impacts

6.1 Economic Factors

Assuming operation of the six remaining regional Transport SA Customer Service Centres means that the investment made in these regional centres will remain and they will have the potential to grow. Agencies delivering their services through the new Service SA Regional Customer Service Centres have the potential to make savings which will be returned to general revenue.

The expansion involves the transition of DTUP staff to Service SA operations. This will result in a nil impact on staffing levels.

The growth in services provided through the Customer Service Centres strengthens Service SA’s position in retaining current staffing levels.

Service SA will continue to provide opportunities for members of the local communities to undertake traineeships in the new regional centres. As a result, these trainees will acquire highly marketable skills. Currently, Service SA supports a trainee in each of the current Service SA Customer Service Centres (Pt Augusta, Gawler, Whyalla and Pt Lincoln) and one in the metropolitan area.

6.2 Social Factors

The consolidation presents the South Australian community with significantly improved access to a wide range of government information, transactions and services through a broad and widely distributed network of locations and delivery choices.

The increased availability of face-to-face access is of considerable benefit to those community members who prefer to transact with government in person. Older people, people with disabilities and Aboriginal or people from culturally and linguistically diverse

backgrounds may wish to transact with the support of experienced customer service staff.

Regional customers can reduce the time and effort required to conduct business with government through this proposal.

The geographic expansion, coupled with a growth in Government agencies providing additional services through Service SA, will rapidly broaden services to regional communities. The consolidated network is expected to impact positively on small business and will help support regional small businesses via easier access to government services in the population centres throughout the State.

Service SA will not reduce or remove services already provided to local communities through other delivery points including Australia Post operations. Service SA aims to provide additional services to locations that do not have ready access and will provide the customers, including small businesses with a wider range of choice.

6.3 Environmental Factors

The expansion consolidates existing operations into one integrated operation. It is not anticipated that this consolidation will have a negative impact on the environment.

Improved access to government services throughout the State will reduce the need for people to travel long distances to transact government business, thus contributing to reductions in greenhouse gas emissions.

Any Customer Service Centre relocations or refurbishments will be implemented utilising ecologically sustainable development principles.

7. Mitigation

In implementing the expansion strategy, many benefits will be derived by the stakeholders identified. There are some risks involved in transferring operations to Service SA however these can be mitigated.

Service SA continues to pursue service to smaller rural towns by its Rural Agent Program, its single website and its call centre (132324 local call) solution.

There is the possibility that the consolidation of government services in larger regional towns will increase demand in these locations and attract people from smaller rural towns. However this expansion generally will increase service access to rural South Australians.

Service SA may also though provide an opportunity to increase jobs in some regional centres by broadening service delivery from the same location.

Service SA have adopted processes whereby a partnership approach with Government agencies has ensured service accessibility standards are not reduced, and in fact, are enhanced.

Service SA also has systems in place to ensure that staff are adequately trained and have ready access to service delivery instructions.

8. Coordination

Extensive coordination with DTUP is required in the initial stages of implementation in assuming operation of the six remaining regional Transport SA Customer Service Centres and in proclaiming DTUP staff working in these locations as DAIS employees.

Likewise, coordination with other government agencies is required to attain and establish processes for additional services (other than Transport SA registration and licensing services) to be delivered through the Customer Service Centres. This process has already commenced with the Service SA Steering Committee cross-agency representatives being briefed in relation to the strategy on a regular basis.

If a co-location opportunity is pursued at Berri, Mount Gambier and/or another location, extensive coordination will take place with the agencies sharing the premises.

9. Preferred Option

The preferred option is for Service SA to expand its service delivery network through assuming operation of the:

- Six remaining Transport SA regional customer service centres located in Mt Gambier, Naracoorte, Berri, Kadina, Murray Bridge, and Port Pirie,
- Transport SA CBD customer service centre on North Terrace, and
- Transport SA Customer Call Centre.

The consultative process reaffirmed this option.