



LA TROBE
UNIVERSITY

STUDENT UNION

Run by Students, For Students

2026

Priced out:
The cost of parking
at La Trobe



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From Our Exec

Every week, we hear the same story from students.

Students are skipping classes, arriving late, or choosing online options – not because they want to, but because they can't afford to park or don't know if they'll find a space.

Others are paying \$20, \$30, or more just to attend university for a few days a week. For students living on campus, many are shocked to find they must pay again just to park where they live.

With the current Cost of Living crisis, things are getting worse, quickly.

This is not what university should look like.

Students are doing everything they can to make study work – balancing jobs, placements, family responsibilities, and long commutes. But the current parking system makes that harder. It adds stress, creates uncertainty, and puts pressure on students who are already struggling with the cost of living.

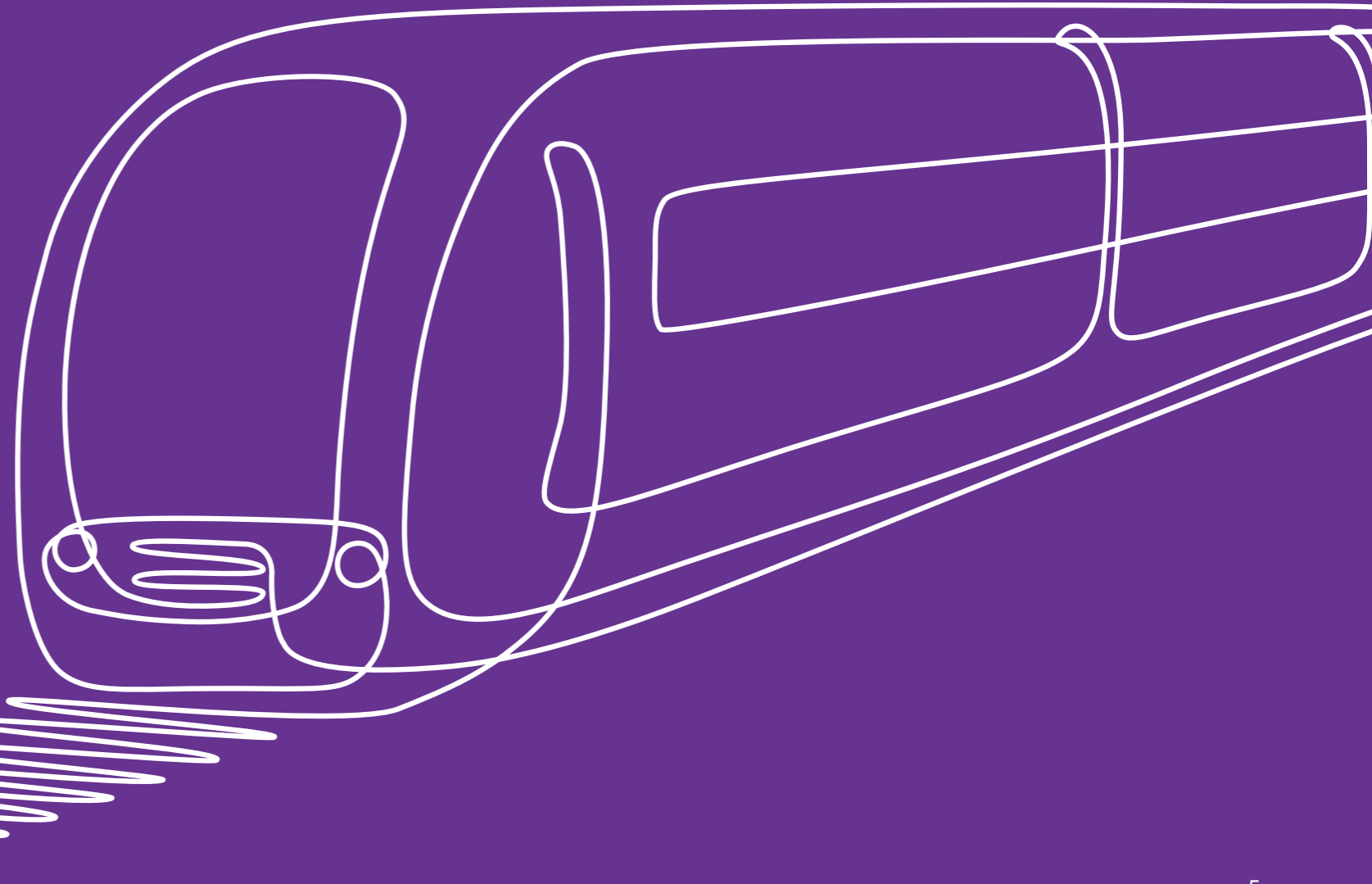
We hear from:

- Students circling car parks and arriving late to class
- Students parking far away and feeling unsafe walking back at night
- Students skipping campus altogether to avoid the cost
- Students leaving on-campus accommodation because parking is unaffordable

This is not just about convenience. It is about being able to access education fairly.

Students are not asking for something unreasonable. They are asking for a system that reflects how they actually live and study today – one that is fair, affordable, and transparent.

This report is the student voice. It shows clearly that the current system is not working, and that change is both needed and possible.



Executive Summary

Students at La Trobe University's Melbourne Bundoora campus are facing significant financial pressure just getting to campus, with parking costs playing a major role.

Our survey findings show:

95%

would attend campus more often if parking was cheaper or free

80%

of students drive, largely due to limited transport alternatives

68%

of students spend over \$20 per week on parking

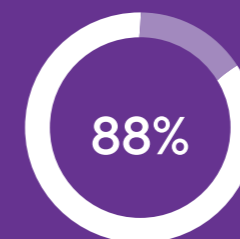
67%

rely on daily parking, as permits are unaffordable upfront

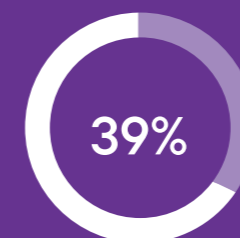
The system disproportionately impacts:

- Students on lower incomes
- Students attending multiple days per week
- Students with irregular schedules
- Students living on campus, who face a double charge

For students living on campus in University owned accommodation:



88% who own a car still pay for parking, despite already paying accommodation fees



39% only learned about parking costs informally, often after moving in

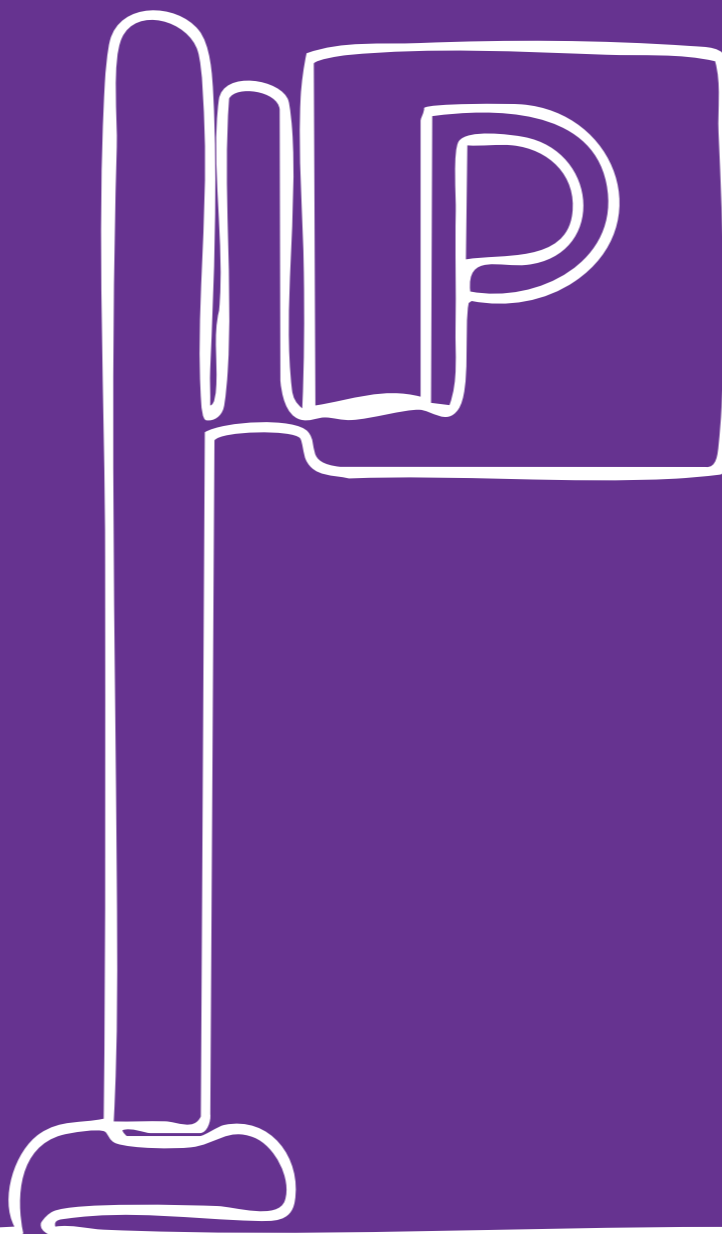
Transport alternatives are limited:

- Public transport serves only 16% of students
- 61% travel more than 30 minutes each way
- Walking and cycling are not viable for most students

The current pricing model does not reflect modern student life. It rewards daily attendance while penalising flexible and part-time study patterns.

Parking costs are not just an inconvenience – they are an equity issue, disproportionately affecting first-generation students, CALD students, international students, and students with disability.

La Trobe Student Union has undertaken this study to better understand student views and experiences around parking, with particular attention to issues of affordability and fairness. Parking concerns have consistently ranked among the most pressing issues raised by students over several years, making this survey essential for providing updated evidence base to university leadership.



1 Key Findings

Financial impact is severe

- Around 68% of students spend over \$20 each week on parking alone.
- 91% of students said they would attend campus more often if parking was cheaper or free.
- Many students report being forced to park off campus or in areas where they risk fines and their safety because they cannot afford regular fees.

The cost of parking

La Trobe Melbourne Bundoora currently charges for parking between 8:00am and 5:00pm on weekdays. In 2026, the standard white zone rate is \$3.10 per hour, capped at \$8.45 per day. Student annual permits are available for approximately \$338.

Parking before 8:00am, after 5:00pm, and on weekends is free.

The most common way students pay is through casual daily parking, which 67% of respondents use. At the standard rate, a student attending campus three days per week would spend approximately \$25.35 each week.

A student attending five days would spend \$42.25. Over a full semester, those costs add up considerably.

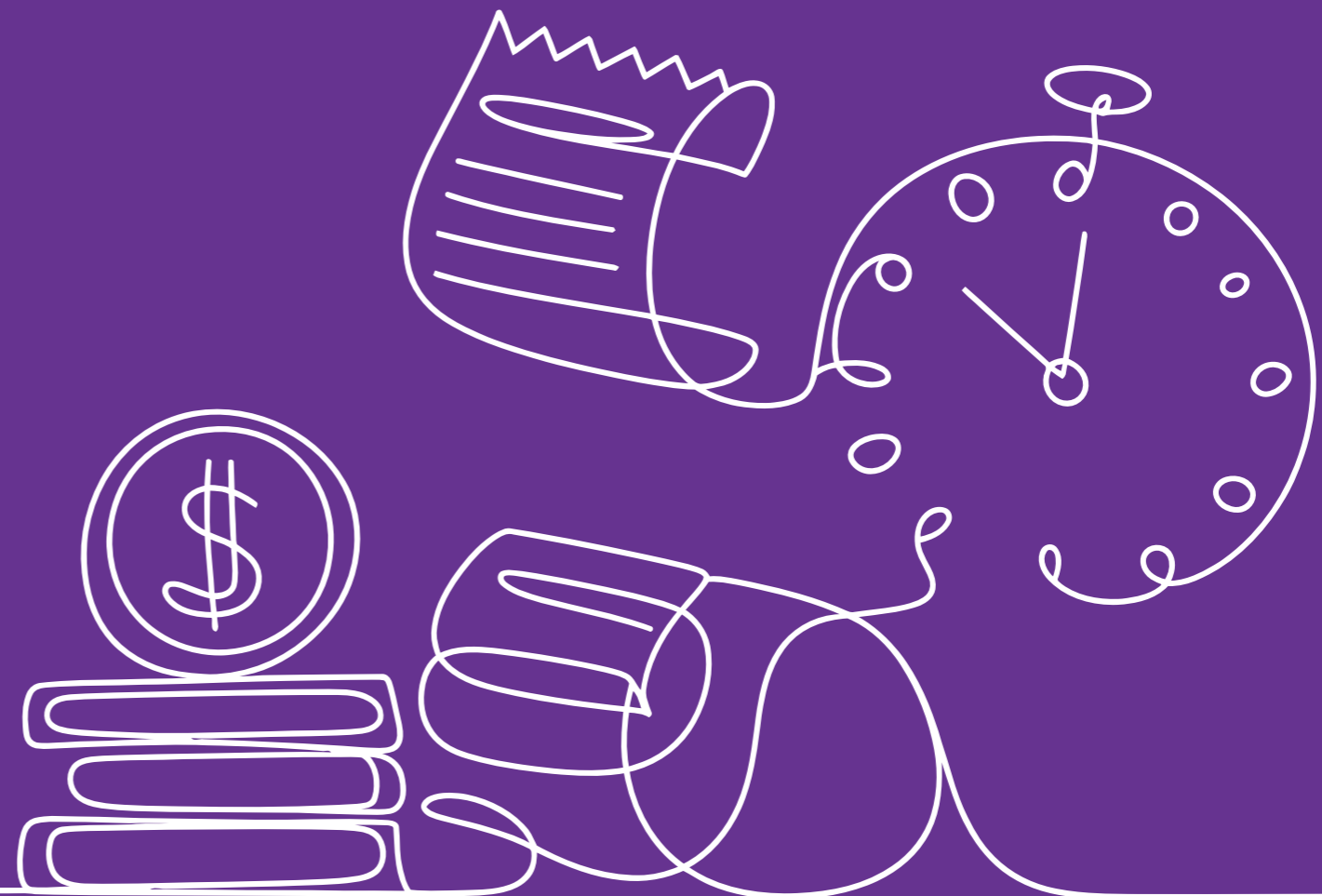
Students who pay casually have the option of using the pay machines on site or the Cell-O-Park app. Cell-O-Park is the company employed by La Trobe University to manage their car parks and they do not charge per day. Instead, it consolidates all parking charges and bills users at the end of the month. While this may work for people on a regular wage, for students on a tight budget or in insecure work, this can mean an unexpectedly large bill arriving all at once, with little opportunity to adjust spending in the meantime. 24% of students said they would like to be billed instantly, not monthly.

The current system rewards students who come to campus every day since those students are more likely to benefit from an annual permit. Students who attend less regularly end up paying more per visit. This is a problem because many students have irregular timetables, work part time, attend placements, or have caring responsibilities.

How much students are spending

Among the 438 students who provided cost information, the picture is concerning. Around 7% spend less than \$10 per week getting to and from university. Around 23% spend \$10 to \$20, 34% spend \$20 to \$40, and 32% spend more than \$40 per week. That means 66% of students are spending over \$20 every week just to access their education. These figures only include direct transport costs such as petrol, myki, and parking fees, and do not account for additional expenses associated with driving such as insurance, maintenance, registration, and depreciation.

66% of students are spending over \$20 every week just to access their education.”



Fines and financial risk

Parking costs do not stop at daily fees. Fines are also a real issue for students.

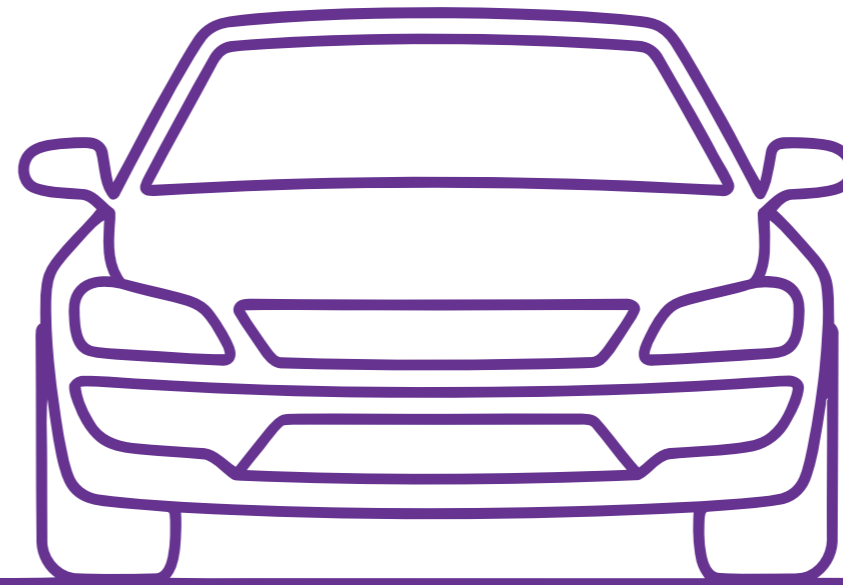
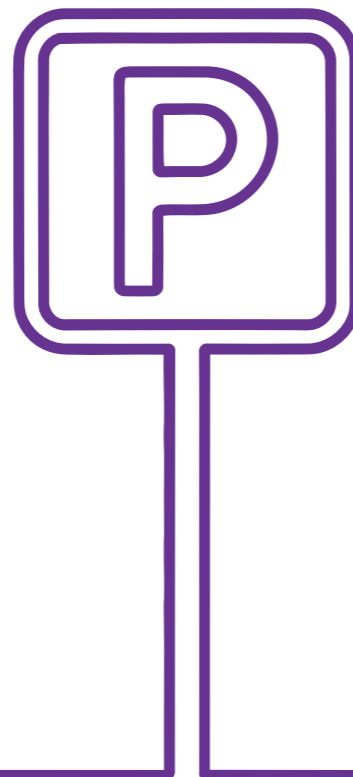
- Around 33% of students receive one to three fines per year.
- 3% receive three to five fines per year.
- 2% receive more than five fines per year.
- 62% had so far avoided fines.

“In 2026, a parking fine at La Trobe Bundoora costs \$122, approximately fourteen times the standard daily parking rate.”

Worryingly, 9% of students say they do not pay for parking at all and simply hope they will not get caught. This shows that some students are taking financial risks because they cannot afford to do otherwise. The consequences of this can be severe. In 2026, a parking fine at La Trobe Bundoora costs \$122, approximately fourteen times the standard daily parking rate.

For students already struggling with transport costs, accommodation, and general cost-of-living pressures, even a single fine can create substantial financial stress.

When looking at parking costs specifically, the figures are striking. A third of students pay between \$10 and \$20 per week just for parking. Another 26% pay \$20 to \$30, and 15% pay over \$30 per week. Around 6% of students avoid the car parks entirely by parking off campus, and 3% risk fines by not paying at all. This shows that some students are being pushed into difficult and risky situations because they simply cannot afford the fees.



“\$20 a week for parking three days only. Too much. Way too much.” — Kaira*

When Kaira moved into La Trobe’s Bundoora campus, she had no idea she would also need to pay for parking on top of accommodation fees. Paying around \$20 a week just to park three days became another major cost during a cost-of-living crisis.

After morning work shifts, Kaira often circled full car parks before arriving stressed and late to class. Eventually, the uncertainty and cost pushed her to attend classes online instead of in person.

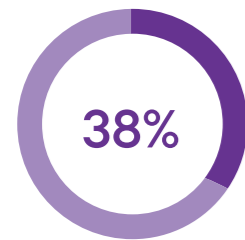
When she did come to campus, she often had to park far away. Walking back at night using her phone torch, Kaira described feeling “like a lost person” in the dark.

2 Key Findings

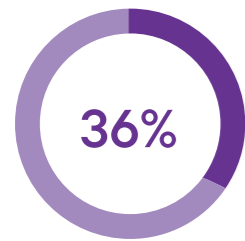
Parking costs do not affect all students equally

Parking costs fall much more heavily on students who already face barriers to education.

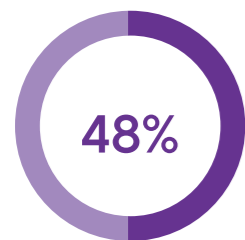
Our survey showed:



38% of students are the first in their family to attend university



36% are international students



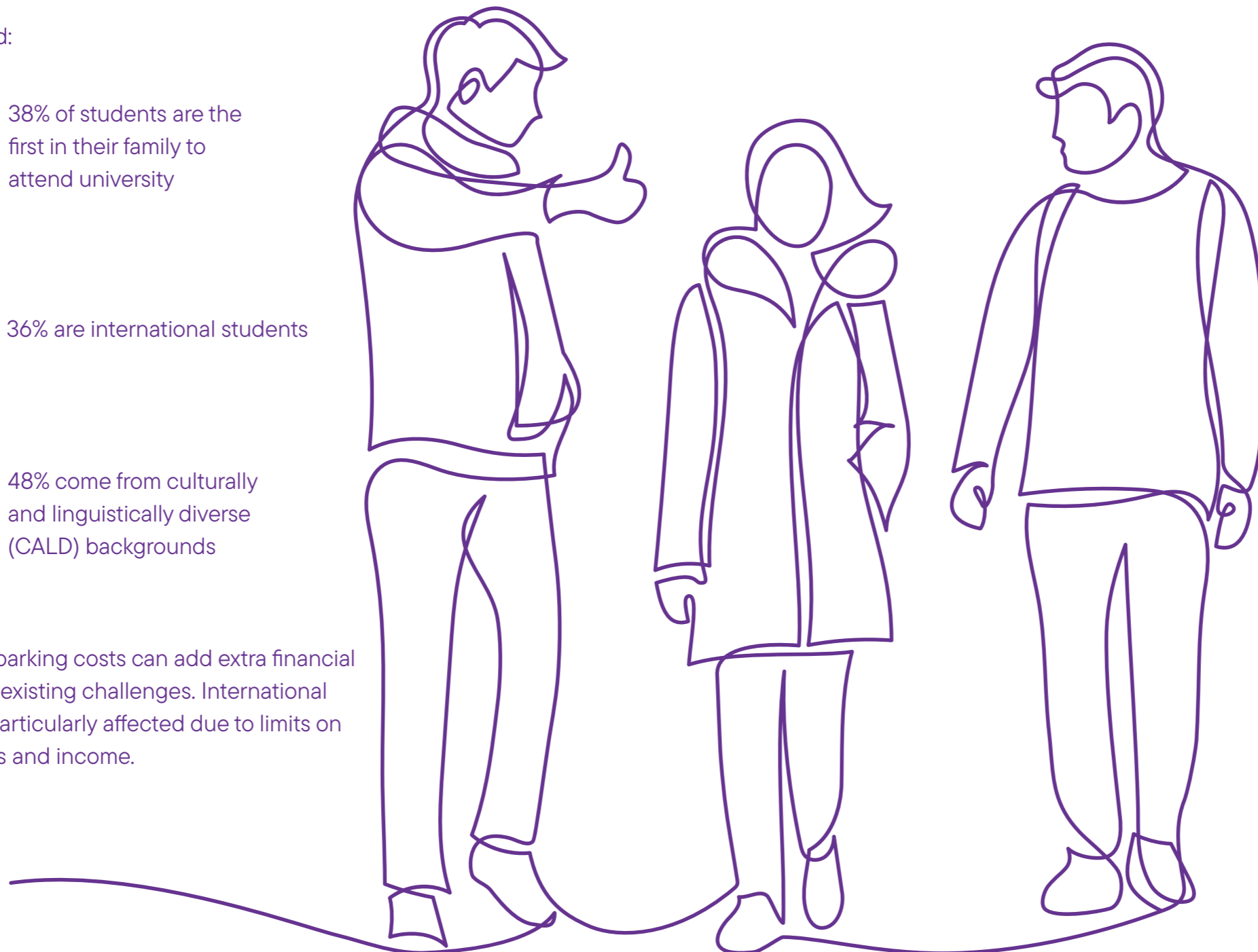
48% come from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds

For these groups, parking costs can add extra financial pressure on top of existing challenges. International students may be particularly affected due to limits on their working hours and income.

“Overall, the current system risks making university less accessible for the students who need the most support.”

Students with disability are also significantly impacted. Around 13% of respondents reported living with a disability, including sensory, intellectual, psychosocial, physical and other disabilities. Many of these students rely on consistent, close and accessible parking to get to class safely and on time. When parking is expensive or hard to find, it creates additional barriers to their participation.

Overall, the current system risks making university less accessible for the students who need the most support. Parking costs are not a neutral inconvenience. They are an equity issue.



3 Key Findings

Part Time attendance is Punished

- Two thirds of students rely on expensive casual daily parking.
- 15% of students hold annual permits, and only slightly less (13%) hold half yearly permits.
- Students attending campus two to three days per week pay disproportionately more over time than those attending every day.

“While permits can work out cheaper over time, the upfront cost is too high for many students.”

caring responsibilities, and those balancing part time work tend to attend campus less regularly. These students miss the savings of a full permit but still face high daily costs.

A system that does not work for most students

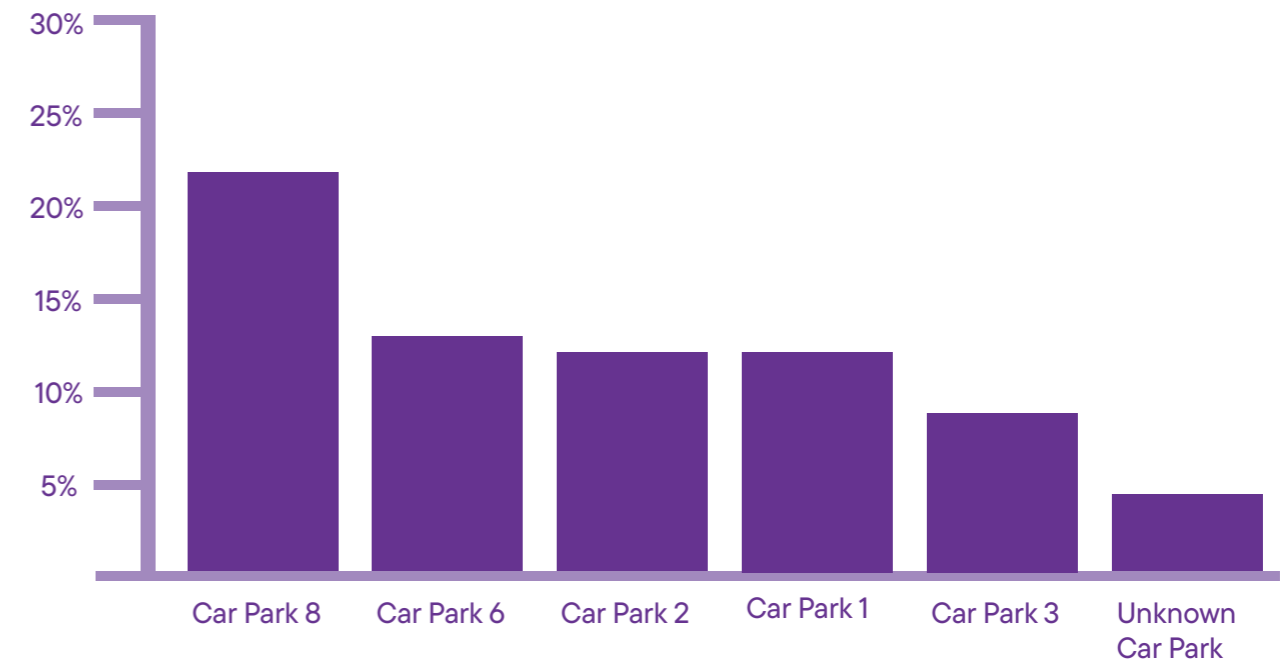
Only 15% of students hold an annual permit, and 13% hold a half yearly permit. The majority (69%) rely on casual daily fees. While permits can work out cheaper over time, the upfront cost is too high for many students. As a result, students who cannot afford a permit end up paying more eventually. This is an especially unfair outcome for students who already have less money.

The current system also penalises students with irregular schedules. Students on placements, those with

Students use a range of car parks on Melbourne Bundoora campus. Carpark 8 is the most used, followed by Carpark 6, Carpark 2, Carpark 1, and Carpark 3. Notably, 6% of students do not know which car park they use, suggesting the system can be confusing and hard to navigate. Communication about parking is also inconsistent: 42% learn about parking through signs in the car park, 24% via the La Trobe website, 22% from friends, and 10% only find out after receiving a fine.

Overall, the current system places the biggest burden on the students who can least afford it.

Car Park Usage Among La Trobe Students



4 Key Findings

Transport Choice is Limited

- Around 80% of students drive to campus not by choice but out of necessity.
- Public transport serves only 16% of students.
- 61% of students face travel times of over 30 minutes each way.

Why public transport does not work for most students

Even though Melbourne has a relatively strong public transport network, it does not serve Melbourne Bundoora campus students well.

- The closest tram stop is about a 15 minute walk from the centre of campus.
- The nearest train station (Macleod) is a 45 minute walk away, or a 15 minute bus ride.
- In practice, waiting for a bus can add another 30 to 40 minutes to the total journey time.

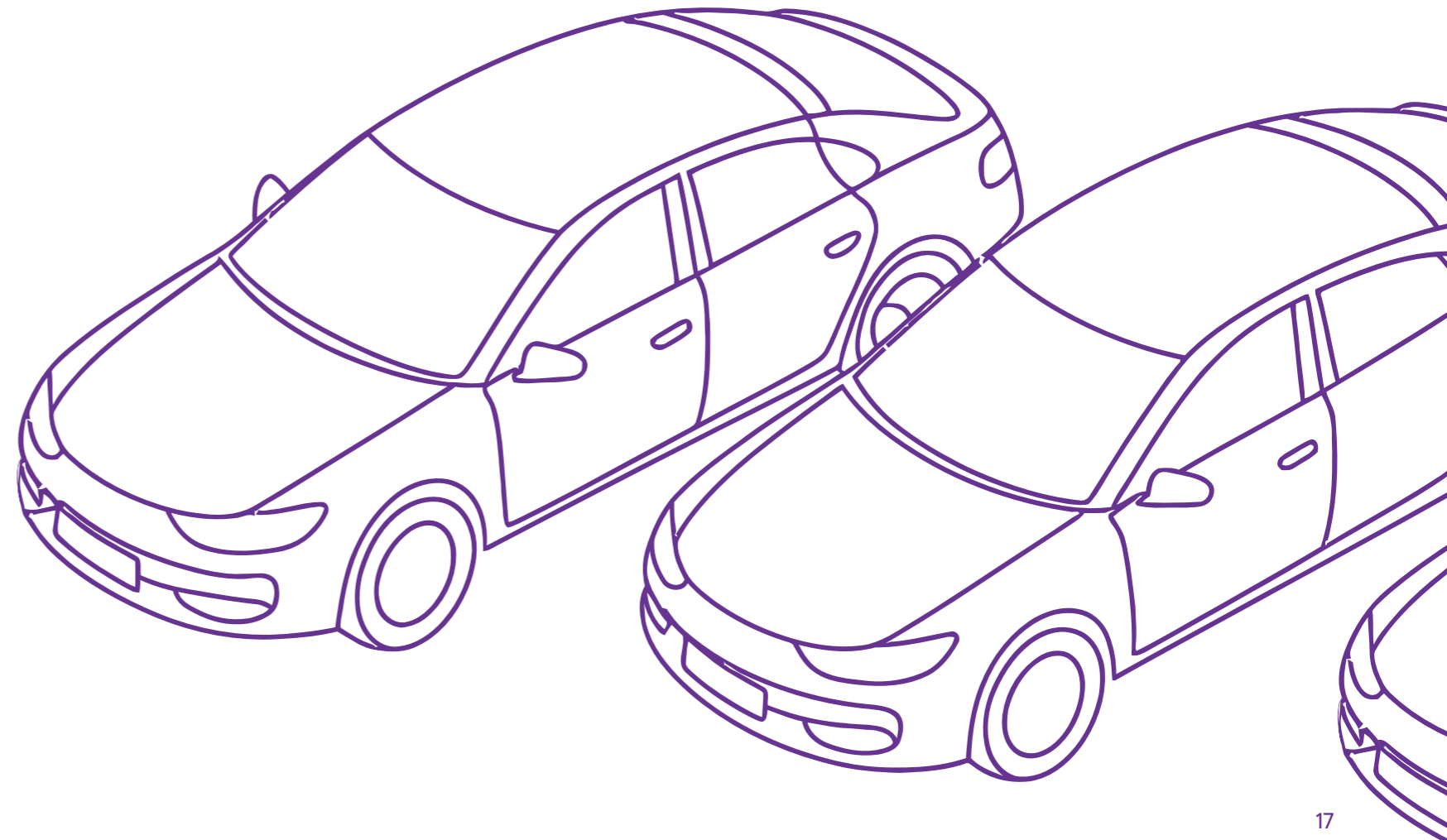
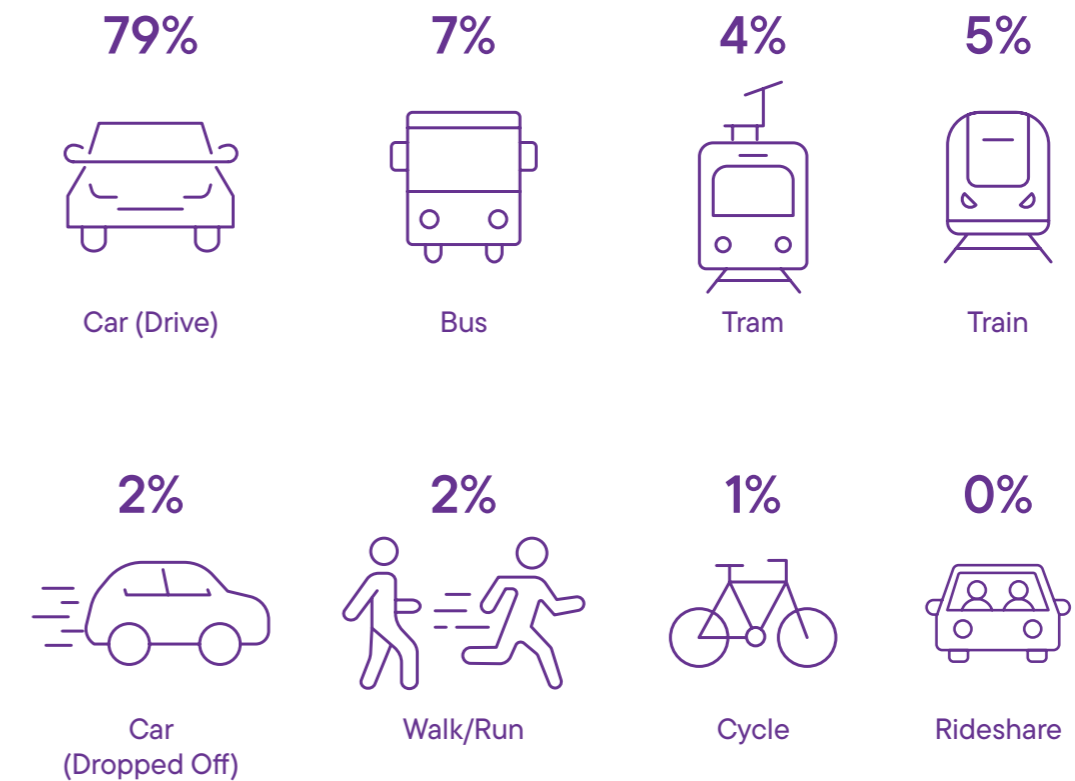
Active transport is also not a realistic option for most students. Less than 3

“Reaching campus often requires combining two or more modes of transport.”

students reported cycling to campus, and only 2% walk or run. This strongly suggests that safe and practical walking and cycling routes are not available or suitable for most students at Bundoora.

For some students reaching campus often requires combining two or more modes of transport, such as a train and a bus, a tram and a train, or in some cases all three. Journey times can be significantly longer than for students who drive, and connections do not always align reliably with class start times. A delayed bus or a missed tram can have a knock on effect on the rest of the trip, making it difficult for students to plan with confidence. The data shows that students are not avoiding public or active transport out of preference. They simply do not have reliable, convenient alternatives to driving.

Students are forced to rely on driving



How students get to campus

The data tells a clear story: 80% of students drive to campus. The remaining 20% use all other transport options combined, and those numbers are small. Only 7% of students use buses, 4% use trams, and 5% use trains. Just 2% walk or run to campus, 2% are dropped off, and 1% cycle.

Significantly, 85% of respondents live off campus, meaning the vast majority must commute to attend campus.

Why students drive

For most students, time is the biggest factor. Nearly 60% said they drive because it is the fastest way to get to campus. For many, public transport simply takes too long or is not direct enough.

Other factors matter too. Comfort was important for 12% of students, accessibility needs influenced 12%, and safety concerns affected 6%. In contrast, cost is not the main driver. Only 8% chose their transport mode because it was the cheapest option. However, the optional responses reveal a more complicated reality behind these numbers. Several students explained that they do not currently have a licence or access

“Many students repeatedly described their chosen transport mode as “the only option” available to them.”

to a vehicle, while others described balancing work, study, family responsibilities, disability, or long rural commutes with limited public transport options. Many students repeatedly described their chosen transport mode as “the only option” available to them.

This highlights something important: students are not choosing to drive because they want to spend more money. They drive because they feel they have no practical alternative. Right now, many students are effectively locked into driving and paying for parking, even when it puts pressure on their finances. The survey responses suggest that transport decisions are being shaped less by preference and more by necessity, time pressure, unreliable transport connections, and the lack of realistic alternatives for students travelling to Bundoora from outer suburbs and regional areas.



5 Key Findings

Students living on campus: Paying twice

- 88% of students living on campus still pay for parking despite already paying the University’s high accommodation fees.
- 39% of students living on campus only learned about parking charges through friends rather than through official university channels.
- 30% of students living on campus want free parking included as part of their residence fees.

For students living on campus, parking creates a significant extra cost on top of already expensive accommodation. Among the 59 students living on campus who responded to the survey, 83% own a car, and of those, 86% pay for parking at La Trobe. This means most students who live on campus are effectively paying twice: once for accommodation, and again just to park where they live.

Having a car is often not optional for these students. They need it for work, medical appointments, family responsibilities and placements. Parking is an essential cost for them, not a luxury.

Many students choose to live on campus to reduce travel stress or costs. But they then discover that parking adds a significant expense they were not expecting.

“Parking creates a significant extra cost on top of already expensive accommodation.”

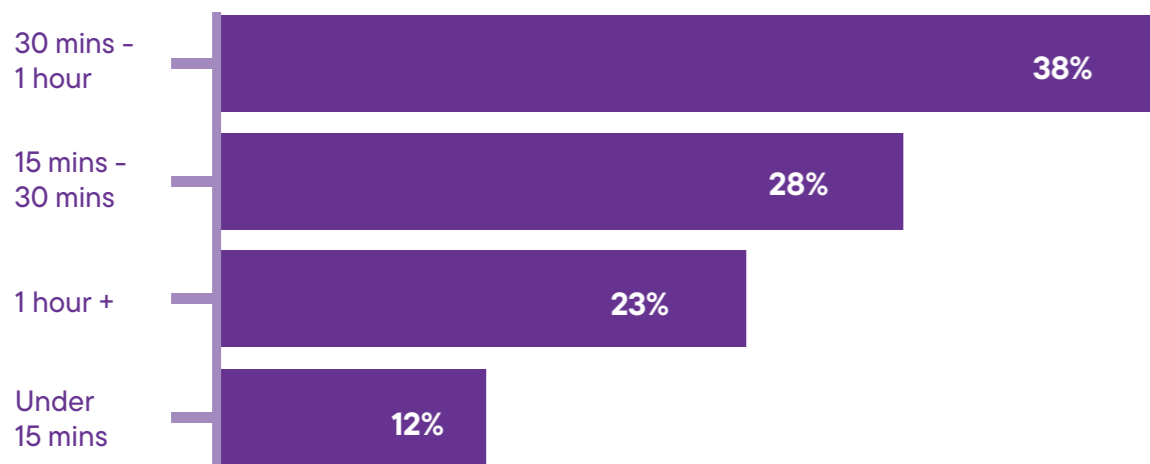
6 Key Findings

Travelling To Uni is a Key Factor

Travel times show the commitment students make just to get to class. Around 38% of students report journey times of 30 minutes to one hour, and another 23% travel for more than an hour. Only 12% can reach campus in under 15 minutes.

Overall, 61% of students face travel times exceeding 30 minutes each way. This is a considerable time pressure on top of the financial cost of parking.

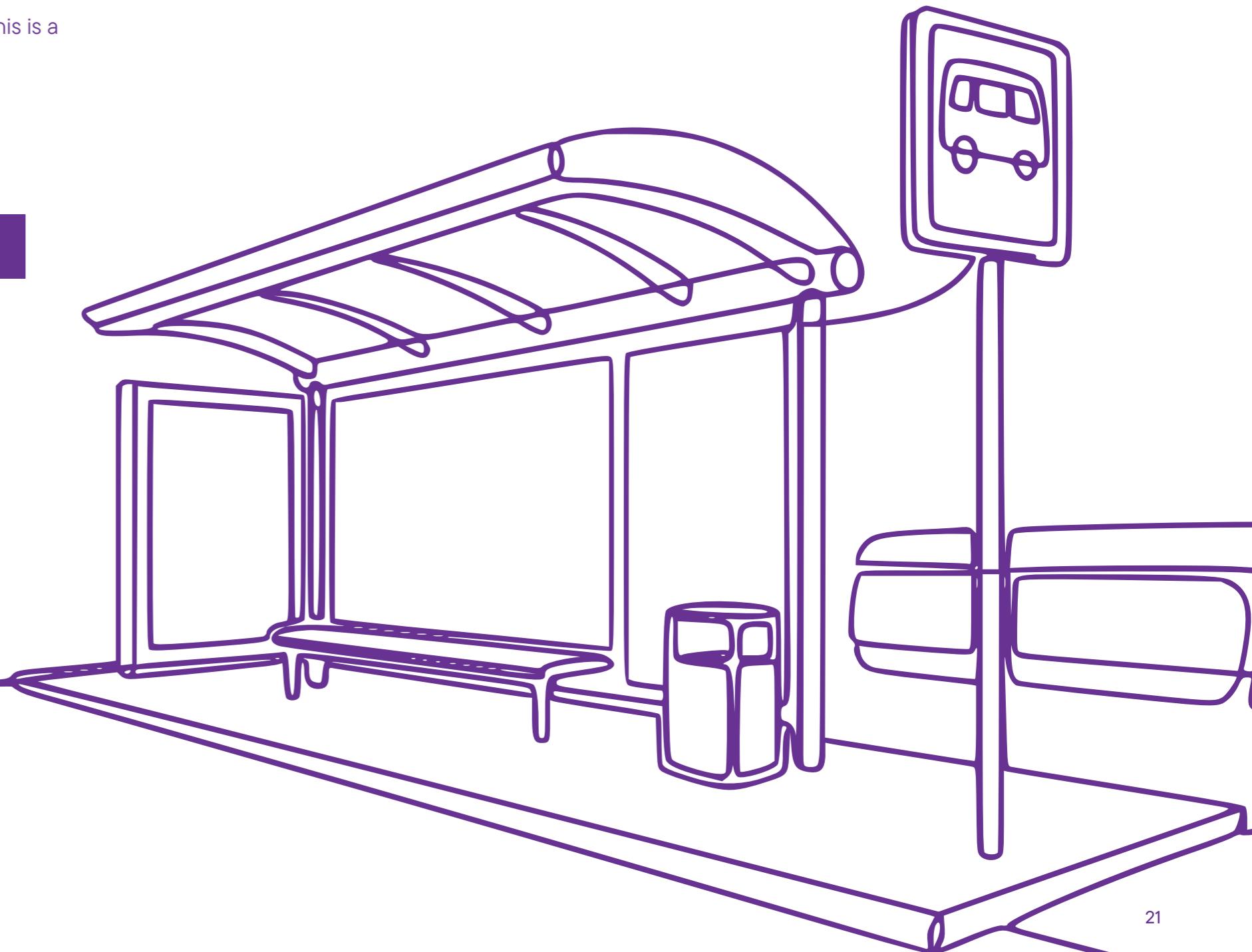
How Far Students Travel



“61% of students face travel times exceeding 30 minutes each way.”

“Very stressful! Class started and I was still trying to figure out where I could and couldn't park.” — Diya*

Diya lived on campus but still found the car parking system far more stressful than expected. White zones, red zones each restricted to different permits, with little to guide a new student through the difference.



Students who travel to campus: No real alternative

Most students (85%) live off campus and need to commute. These students face a double burden: the cost of getting to campus, and the cost of parking once they arrive. For many, driving is the only realistic option because of time, safety concerns, or the lack of adequate public transport. As a result, they have little choice but to pay for parking, even when it puts real pressure on their budget.

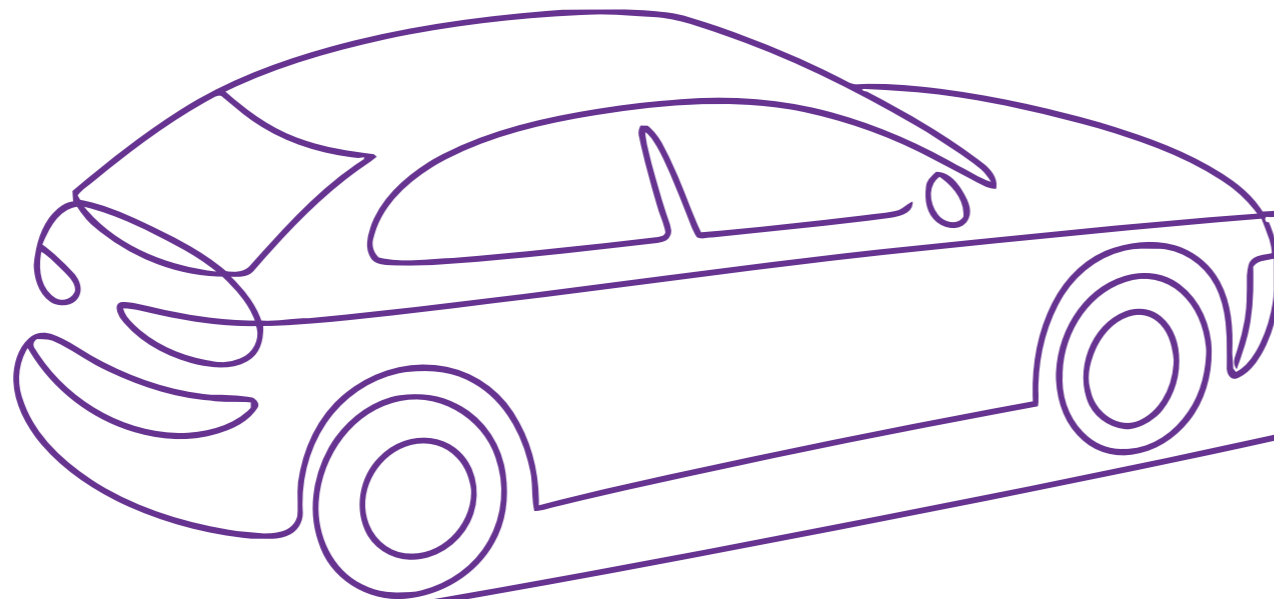
The survey found that 87% of students drive their own car, while 8% drive a parent, guardian, or partner's vehicle. Smaller numbers reported using a sibling's car or a friend's car, and 3 students reported renting a car to attend campus. Together, these findings reinforce that many students are heavily reliant on private vehicles and are carrying substantial ongoing transport costs simply to access university.

“For many, driving is the only realistic option because of time, safety concerns, or the lack of adequate public transport.”

What this means

Whether students live on campus or commute, parking costs add significant financial pressure, are often unavoidable, and create barriers to accessing university. In both cases, the current system does not reflect how students live and study and instead places additional financial strain on them.

“Security needs **NEEDS** to be improved. I have had my number plates stolen twice while living [on] campus.” — Abdi*



7 Key Findings

La Trobe's Parking Rules Are Not Clear

There are also serious concerns about how clearly parking costs, rules and punishments are communicated by La Trobe.

Among students living on campus:

- 34% found out about parking costs through friends
- 30% found out via the La Trobe website.
- 22% only found out after receiving a fine
- 12% found out through their residential agreement.

“9% [of students] only became aware of parking requirements after receiving a fine.”

This suggests that parking costs are not clearly explained when students

sign up for accommodation. Many are left surprised by a cost they were not prepared nor budgeted for.

Among students who do not live on campus, the figures changed. Nearly half of students (49%) said they only became aware of parking costs after seeing signs in the carpark itself. Another 22% found the information on the La Trobe website, while 19% relied on friends to explain the rules. A further 9% only became aware of parking requirements after receiving a fine. This suggests that for many commuter students, parking information is not being communicated proactively before they arrive on campus, and instead students are expected to discover the costs and rules themselves after already travelling to university.



“[Parking] takes a lot of time and effort – usually gets us late to class too.” — Laura*

Laura described parking at Bundoora as a near-daily source of stress. Each morning meant driving through multiple car parks searching for a space, knowing every extra minute increased the chance of arriving late to class.

Laura also raised concerns about safety, describing multiple reported robberies in Car Parks 3 and 6 during afternoon hours and a lack of visible security presence on campus.

8 Key Findings

The Quality of La Trobe's Car Parks Must Improve

Students were asked what changes they would most like to see for parking on campus. The message was very clear: the overwhelming priority is lower costs. 91% of students said parking should be free. Many optional responses reinforced this frustration, with students describing parking fees as an additional financial burden on top of tuition, accommodation, and existing debt. Several students specifically argued that parking should be included within student fees or substantially discounted for enrolled students.

“Students also raised concerns about vehicle theft, ... poor maintenance, ... and the lack of practical support for disabled and chronically ill students.”

Beyond cost, students also want improvements to the quality, accessibility, and safety of parking

areas. 31% want free parking included with on-campus accommodation, suggesting many residential students feel they are effectively being charged twice. Students also raised concerns about vehicle theft, stolen number plates, poor maintenance, insufficient undercover parking, and the lack of practical support for disabled and chronically ill students.

Students are not just asking for small operational changes. They are calling for major reform to how parking is treated at La Trobe. The survey suggests that students increasingly see parking not as an optional service, but as a necessary part of being able to access university.

Parking as a source of revenue

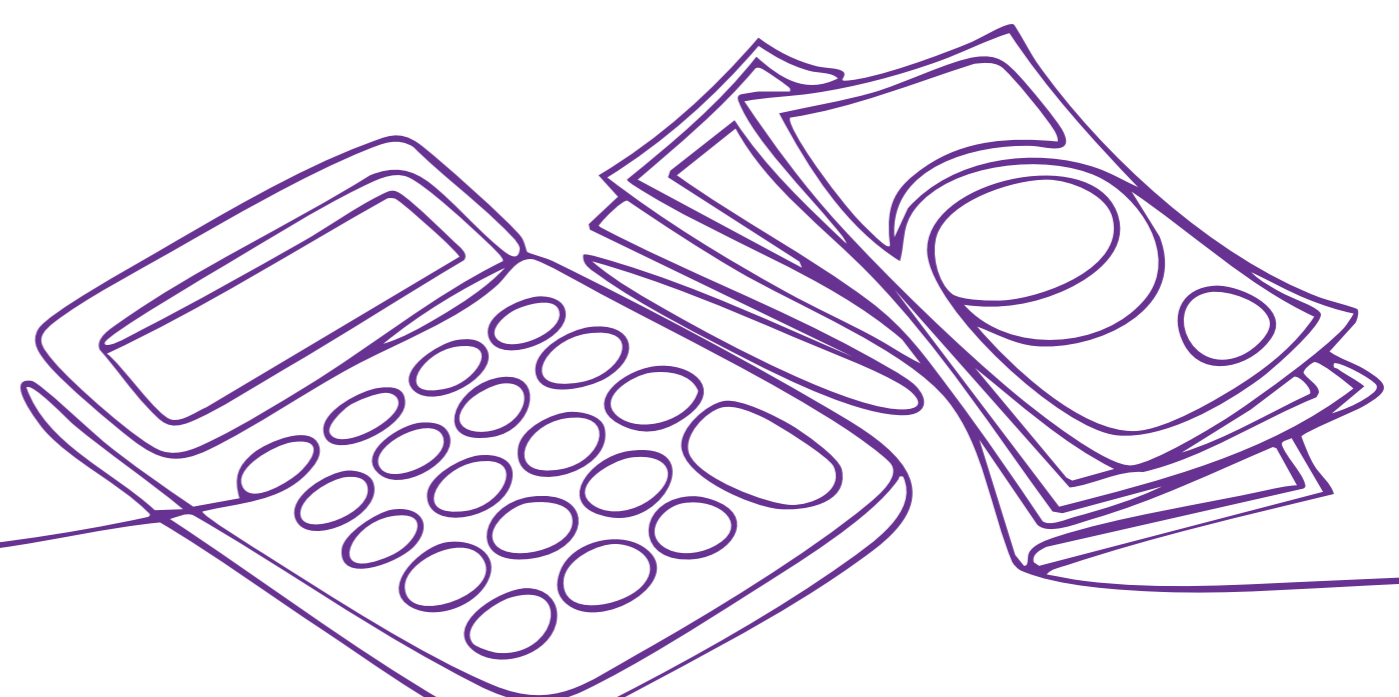
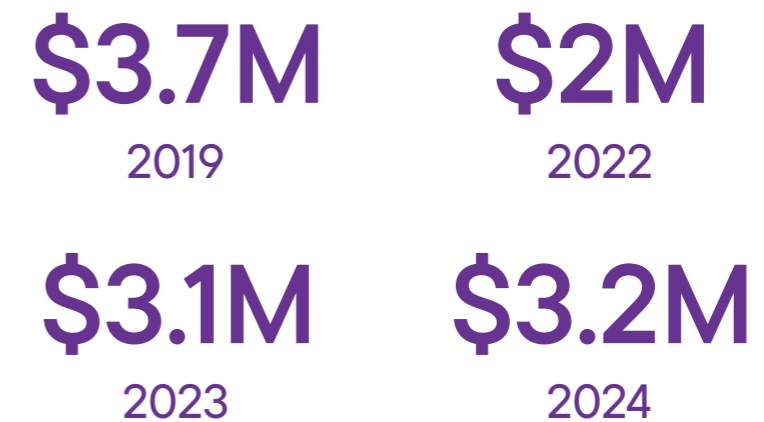
Parking is not just a service at La Trobe. It is a significant source of income for the university. According to La Trobe University's own annual reports, over the past six years, La Trobe has generated more than \$13.7 million in parking revenue.

“Over the past six years, La Trobe has generated more than \$13.7 million in parking revenue.”

This raises an important question. If parking generates millions of dollars in revenue each year, why are students still being asked to pay such high

fees? It is also worth noting that, out of La Trobe's six campuses, only Melbourne Bundoora and Bendigo charge students for parking. This means the financial burden falls disproportionately on students at these two campuses, with Bundoora students particularly affected given the scale of the campus and its reliance on car travel.

La Trobe University Parking Revenue



Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on direct student feedback. The survey results are clear. Change is needed, and change is urgent. La Trobe has both the opportunity and the responsibility to improve the current system. The experience of other Victorian universities shows reform is achievable.

1 Parking Must Be Free for Students

The most important change for students is the removal of parking fees. This would make a significant difference to student life by reducing financial pressure, stress, and uncertainty around accessing campus. Free parking would also better support student health and wellbeing, improve access to classes and services, and provide more practical support for students managing irregular timetables, work commitments, caring responsibilities, and long commutes.

La Trobe should consider introducing at least one free parking day per week, expanding the existing free time windows, and providing targeted support for students on placements and students on lower incomes.

Improve transport and parking infrastructure

The university should invest in better facilities for walking and cycling, safer and more accessible routes to campus, and clear real time information about available parking spaces. Better communication about parking options would help students make more informed and cost-effective decisions.

Fix the inequity for students living on campus

2 The current system is especially unfair for students living on campus. Students are already paying for accommodation, but many are then required to pay again for parking. This is a clear double charge.

Nearly a third of students have specifically identified free parking inclusion in accommodation fees as a priority. The university should

3 review and remove additional parking charges for residential students, and recognise that for many of them, parking is essential and not optional. Fixing this would reduce financial stress and make on-campus living more accessible.

Be transparent and communicate clearly

Students need clearer information about parking costs, why fees are set at their current levels, and what options are available to them. Right now, communication is not working:

- 23% of students learn about parking costs from friends
- 11% only find out after receiving a fine.

4 This is not acceptable. The university should clearly explain parking costs during accommodation sign-up, provide tools to help students understand their weekly and yearly costs, and be transparent about how parking revenue is used.

What other Universities are doing

La Trobe is not alone in managing campus parking, but a comparison with other Victorian universities shows that more affordable approaches are not only possible but already in practice.

The full spectrum of costs

Victorian universities offer a very wide range of parking arrangements, from entirely free to some of the most expensive casual parking in the country.

At one extreme is the University of Melbourne, where casual parking costs \$39 per day with no annual permits available to students. RMIT City campus is even more expensive at \$50 per day.

At the other extreme is RMIT Brunswick, where all parking is completely free for students, staff and visitors every day of the year. A permit is still required to access the boom gate, but there is no fee attached. RMIT Brunswick is the only major university campus in Victoria to offer entirely free parking.

University / Campus	Hourly Rate	Daily Cap	Annual Permit	Free Parking Details
RMIT Brunswick	FREE	FREE	FREE	FREE
Monash (Blue zones)	\$0.62/hr	\$3.10	Limited	Free Friday and Monday
VU Footscray Park	\$1.60/hr	\$4.00 2/hr	Not available	
Deakin Burwood	\$1.60/hr	\$6.40	\$365/yr	
VU Other Campuses <small>(varies by campus approx.)</small>	\$2.20/2 hr	\$5.50	Not available	
RMIT Bundoora	\$2.20/hr	\$6	\$242	
La Trobe Bundoora	\$3.10/hr	\$8.45	\$338.24/yr	
Swinburne Hawthorn	\$4/ 2hr	\$10.00	Not available	
University of Melbourne	\$6.50/hr	\$39.00	Not available	
RMIT City	\$12/hr	\$50.00	Not available	

Table: Parking rates across Victorian universities for the 2025 to 2026 academic year, sorted from cheapest to most expensive daily rate. Rates are subject to change and should be verified before use.



What La Trobe can learn from these models

The comparison with other universities highlights three practical approaches that La Trobe could consider.

A free day model (Monash University approach)

Introducing at least one free parking day per week, such as a Free Wednesday, would reduce weekly costs for many students without eliminating parking revenue entirely. Monash has shown this can be built into permit pricing in a way that is cost-neutral for the university.

Expanded free windows (Victoria University approach)

La Trobe already has free windows before 8:00am and after 5:00pm. Expanding these, or making weekend free parking more prominently communicated, would benefit students who can schedule their campus visits around those times.

A fully free model (RMIT Brunswick approach)

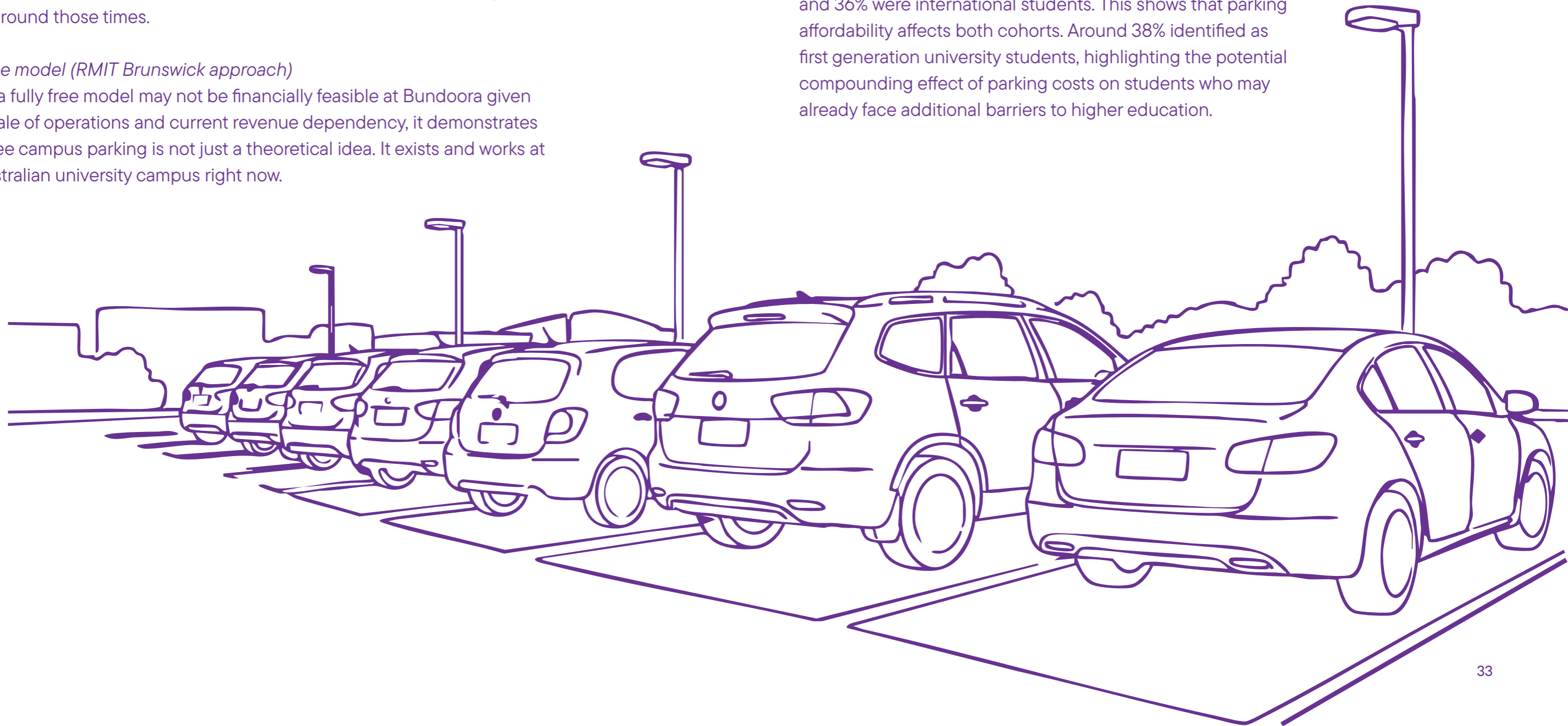
While a fully free model may not be financially feasible at Bundoora given the scale of operations and current revenue dependency, it demonstrates that free campus parking is not just a theoretical idea. It exists and works at an Australian university campus right now.

Methodology

La Trobe Student Union (LTSU) conducted a survey to record how students travelled to La Trobe University Bundoora campus. A total of 547 students completed the survey during August and September 2025.

Students represented a diverse cross section of the La Trobe student community. Among the 422 who provided demographic information, 75% were aged between 18 and 24; 18% were aged 25 to 34; 6% were aged 35 or older; and 1% were under 18. The majority (74%) were undergraduate students, with 22% postgraduate, 3% research students, and 1% in other categories.

Significantly, 64% of respondents were domestic students and 36% were international students. This shows that parking affordability affects both cohorts. Around 38% identified as first generation university students, highlighting the potential compounding effect of parking costs on students who may already face additional barriers to higher education.



Conclusion

The findings of this report are clear: the current parking system is not working for students.

Parking costs are high, unavoidable, and poorly aligned with how students study today. They are placing real financial pressure on students and, in many cases, limiting their ability to attend campus at all.

Students are not asking for small changes – they are calling for meaningful reform:

- 91% want parking to be free
- Many want parking included in on-campus accommodation
- Students are also calling for safer, better maintained, and more accessible parking options

This is ultimately an issue of fairness and access.

Right now, students are being asked to pay significant costs simply to participate in their education. For some, this means taking on financial stress. For others, it means reducing their time on campus or missing out altogether. With added costs of living pressures, this is a crisis.

La Trobe University has a clear opportunity to respond.

Other universities have already demonstrated that more affordable models are possible – through lower pricing, free days, or fully subsidised parking. La Trobe can take similar steps while maintaining a safe and functional system.

Addressing parking costs would:

- Reduce financial pressure on students
- Increase campus participation
- Improve safety outcomes
- Strengthen the University's commitment to equity and inclusion

This report provides a clear evidence base and a strong student mandate for change.



Who We Are

We are led by students, for students.

We are here for students during their time at La Trobe Bundoora.

We will make sure students feel part of a community. We will support students to stand up and speak out for what they believe in.

There's strength in numbers! La Trobe University Student Union (LTSU) is the largest student or staff peak representative body at La Trobe University. Our representation is led by and for students and incorporates the International Students Collective and MASO (Mature Age Students Organisation).

www.latrobesu.org.au

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Established in 1967, the purpose of the LTSU is to advance the education of students of La Trobe University by:

- enhancing the learning experience of students while at the University;
- promoting the interests and welfare of students;
- representing students within and outside the University;
- co-ordinating and supporting the activities of students; and
- providing amenities and services for students, other members of the University community and the public.
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Run by Students, For Students

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