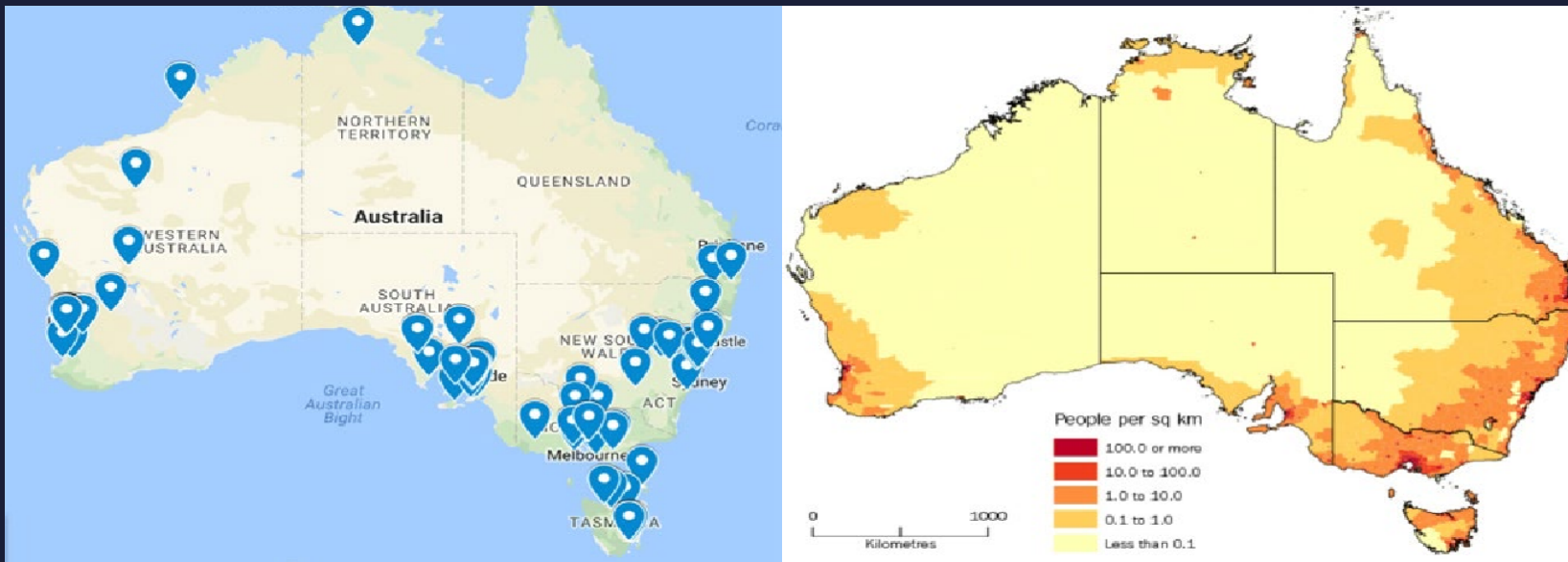


# Public Wi-Fi Provision by Australian Local Government Authorities

## National Survey Results



Viktor Grechyn & Ian McShane

2018



In November 2017, we surveyed Australian LGAs on the issues related to public Wi-Fi provision . The survey and follow-up interviews pursued **two goals**:

- 1) To fill knowledge gap in understanding **rationales, terms of provision and outcomes of local PWF services**;
- 2) To investigate **the role of evaluation in public Wi-Fi provision**.



On-line surveys were sent to 456 LGAs, with an **effective response** rate of **24% (n=111)**.

The highest response rates came from Victoria, New South Wales and Tasmania.

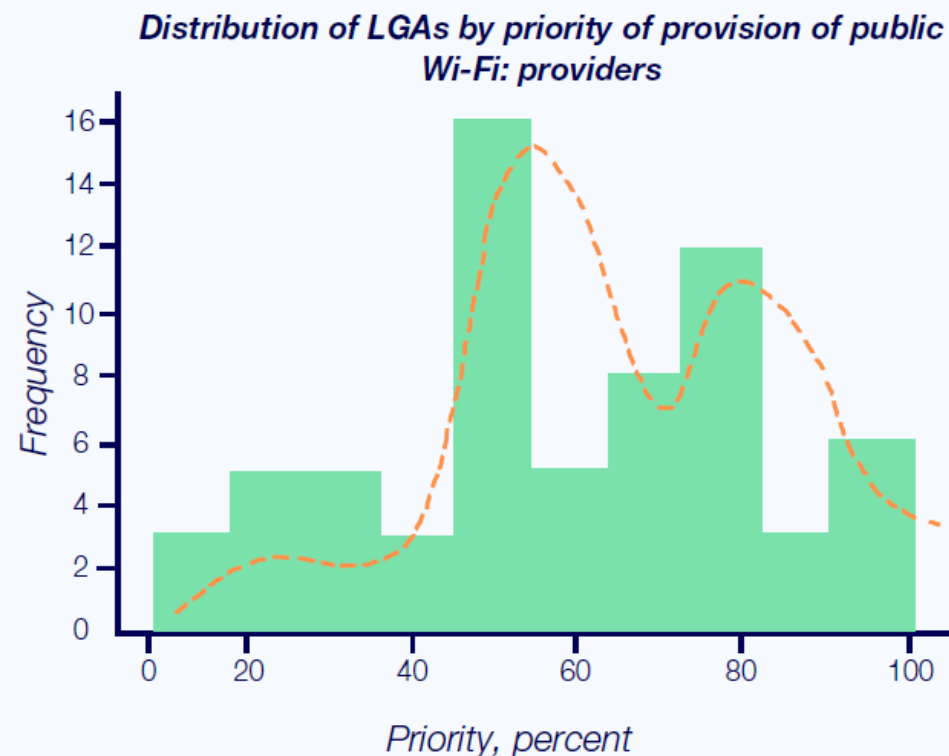
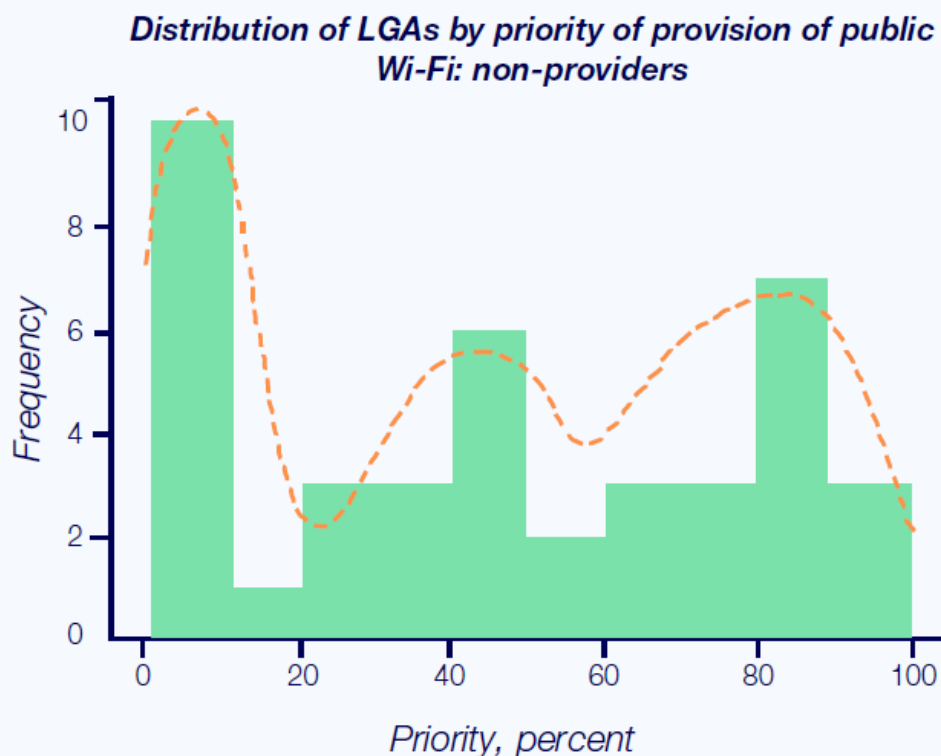
**62% (n=69)** of the 111 LGAs participating in the survey **provided public Wi-Fi**.

**37% (n=41)** LGAs responding to the survey **had a digital strategy** or equivalent document, although only half of the strategies (n=20) addressed public Wi-Fi provision.

**39% (n=24)** of respondents have **evaluated their public Wi-Fi** provision. In **8 cases** evaluation led to **increased investment** in public Wi-Fi infrastructure, while **12 resulted in no change to provision**, and 1 evaluation led to the termination of the project.

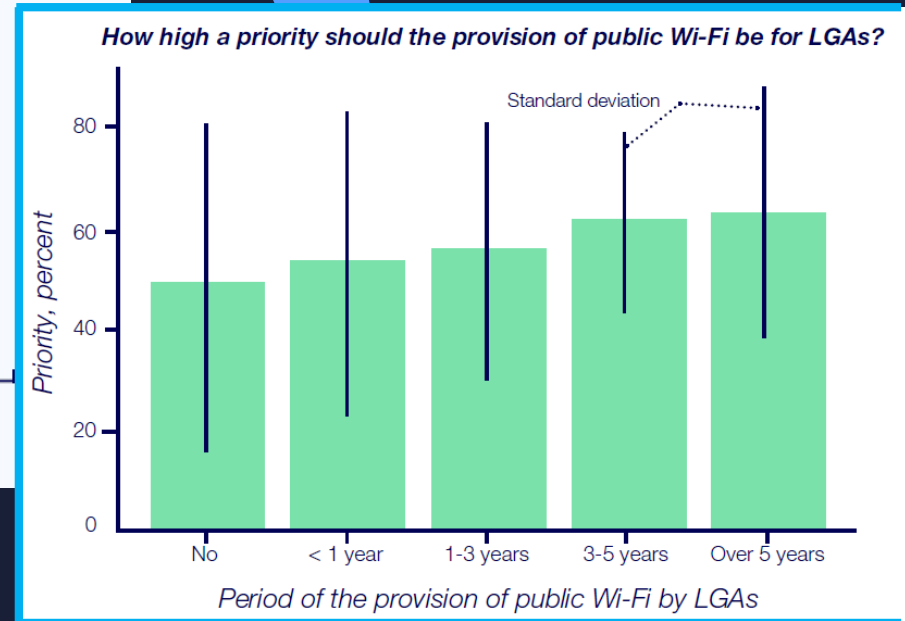
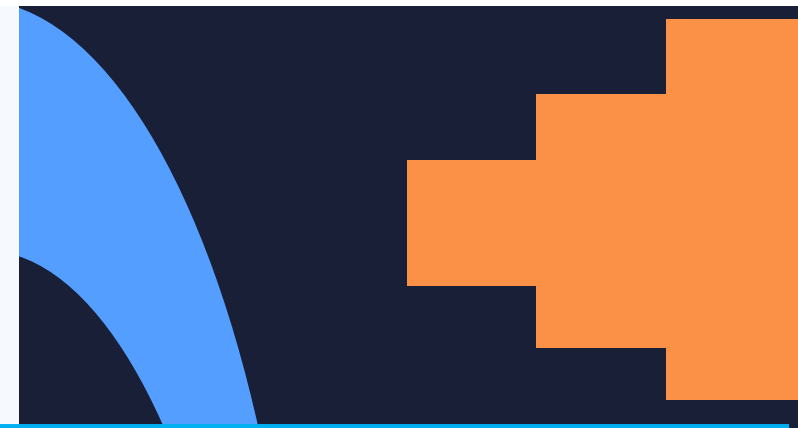
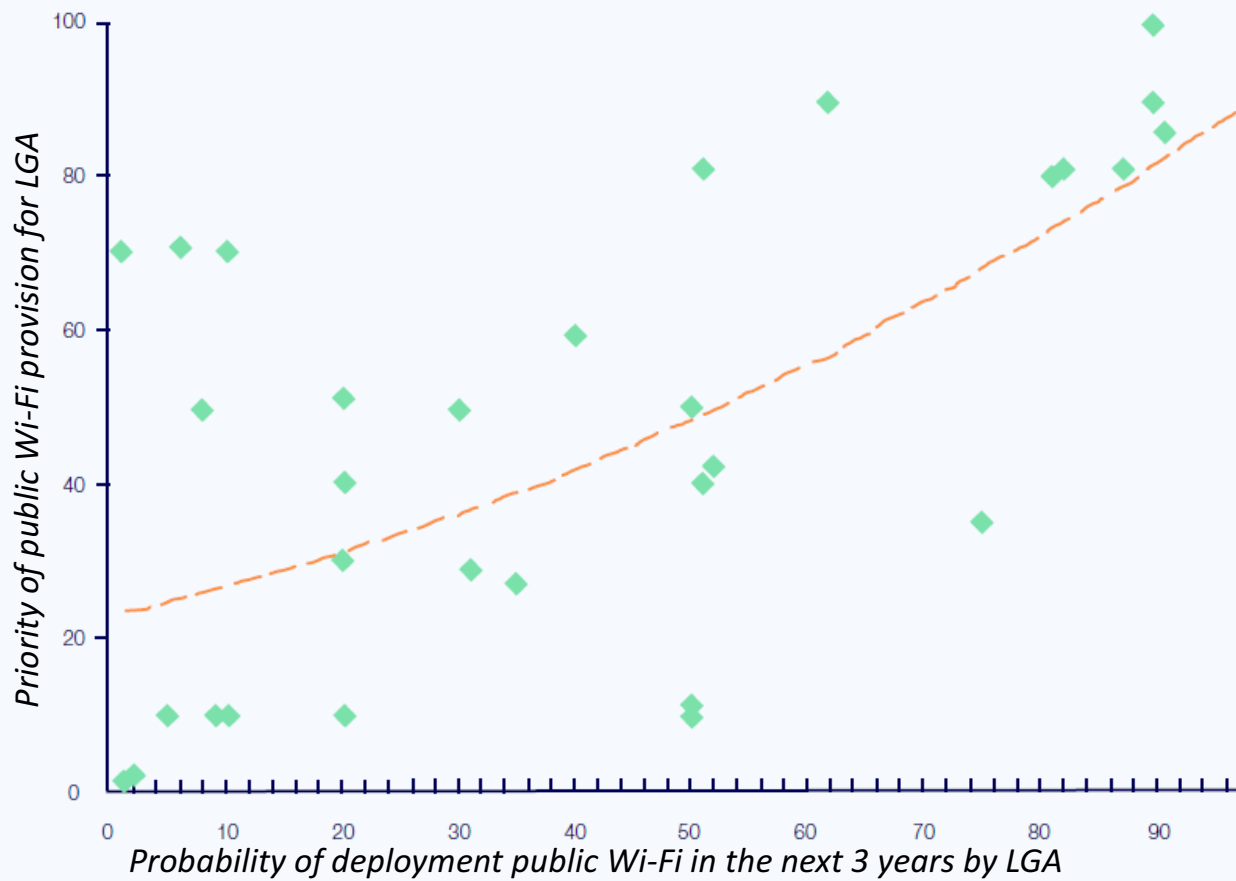
**6 LGAs** among those which evaluated public Wi-Fi provided consent for follow-up interviews and were subsequently **interviewed**. Some kind of **quantitative evaluation** was undertaken **in 1 case**; in other cases, it were casual evaluations based on either technical performance of public Wi-Fi, users' feedback or personal assessment.

We asked respondents to rate the priority of providing public Wi-Fi on a scale, with 0 representing the lowest priority and 100 the highest.



Prioritisation of public Wi-Fi provision by non-providers and providers

**Non-providers**, on average, **assess the priority of public Wi-Fi provision as very low**. The survey did not gather any data on factors that inform this ranking. What is clear, though, is that when provided, **relative priority of public Wi-Fi as a council service increases over time**. This may point to the increasing exposure to and value of public Wi-Fi over time, or a tendency to rate a service important simply due to its longevity.



There is an observable trend: the higher is the probability that public Wi-Fi will be provided in the nearest 3 years, the higher is the assessed priority of its provision (the coefficient of determination, or R-squared=0.54).





**Encourage tourism** is dominant rationale for public Wi-Fi provision.





## Reason for providing public Wi-Fi

Encourage tourism Promote digital inclusion

Promote digital inclusion

Encourage or facilitate business activity

Respond to ratepayer/resident demand

Encourage innovation

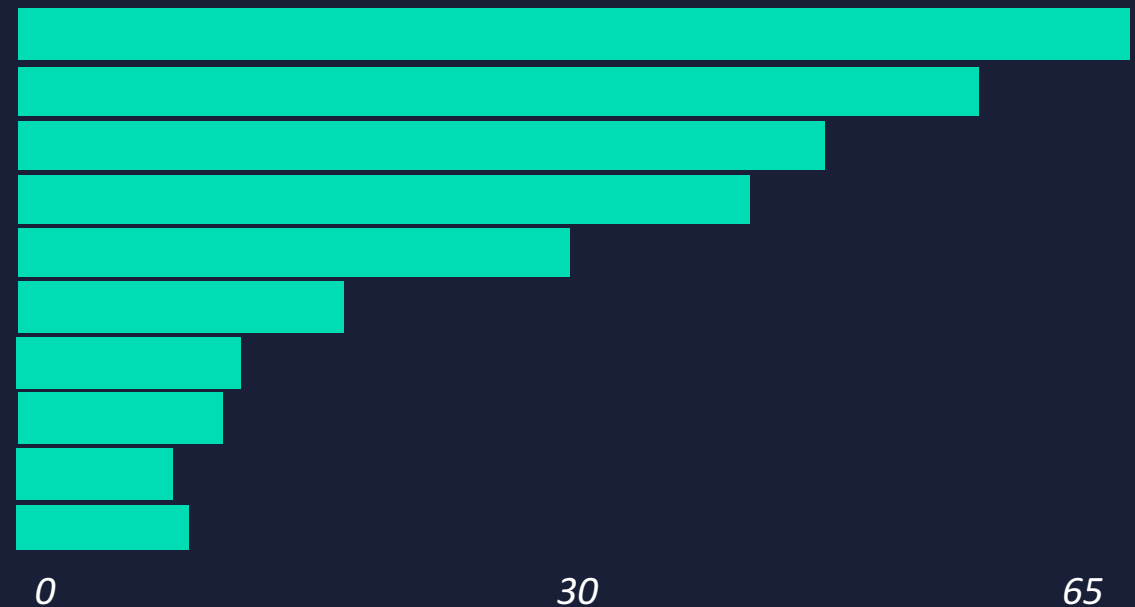
Connect to the council's website

Other rationales

Because other LGAs are providing public Wi-Fi

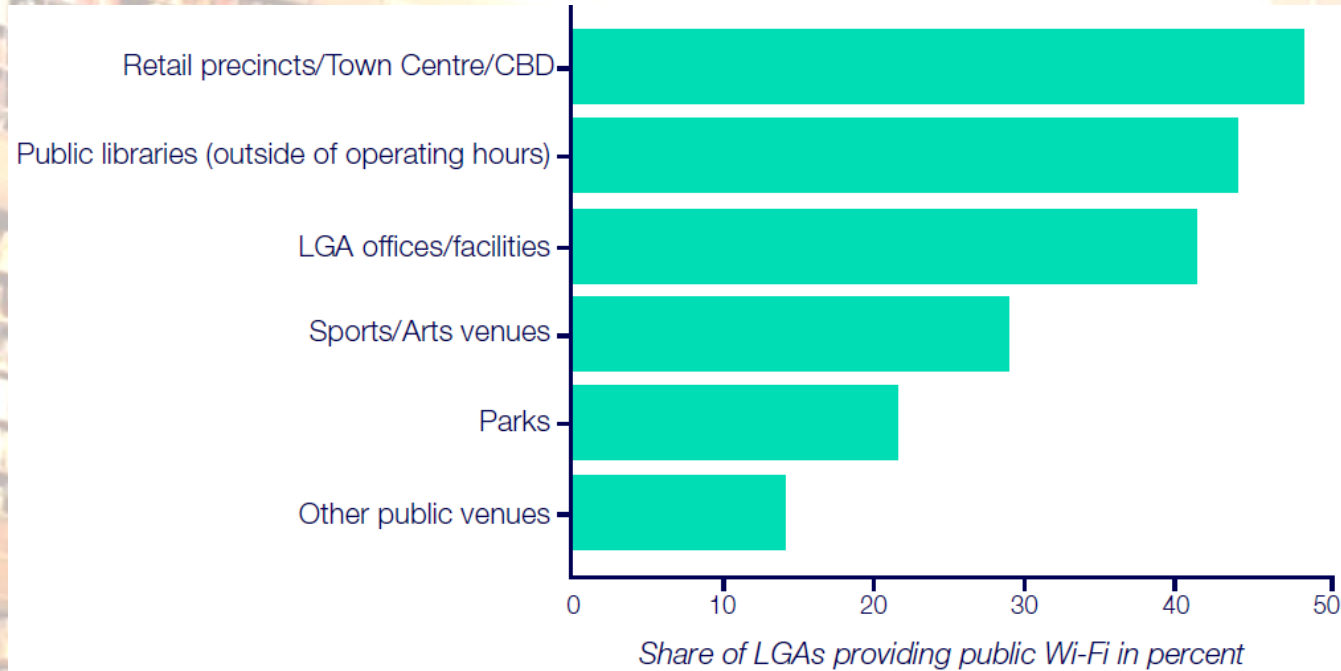
For use in urban management

Collect information from the community

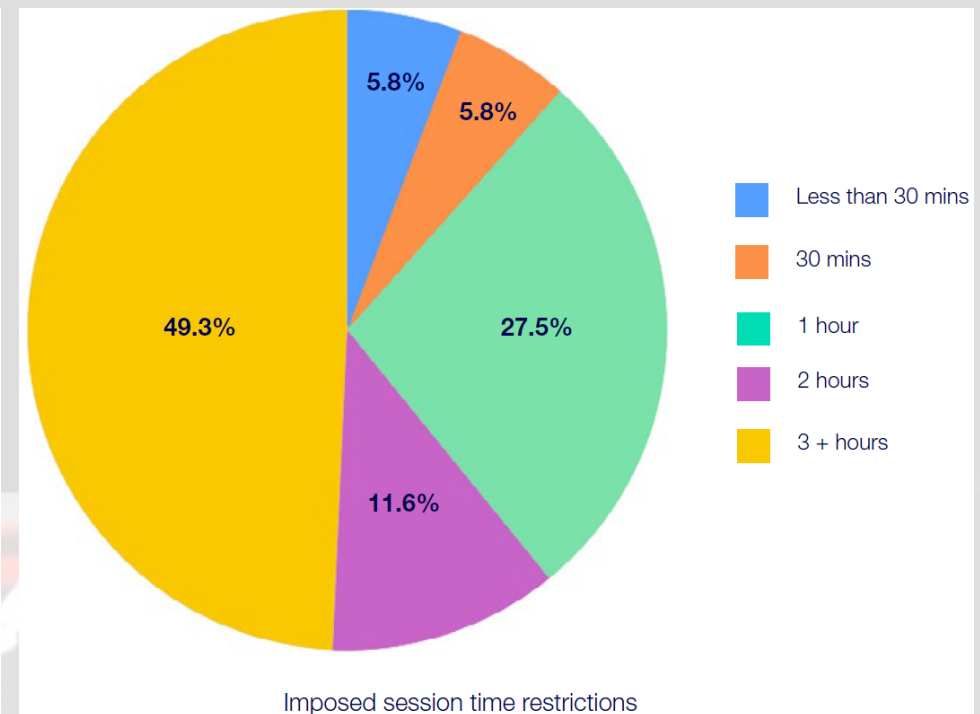
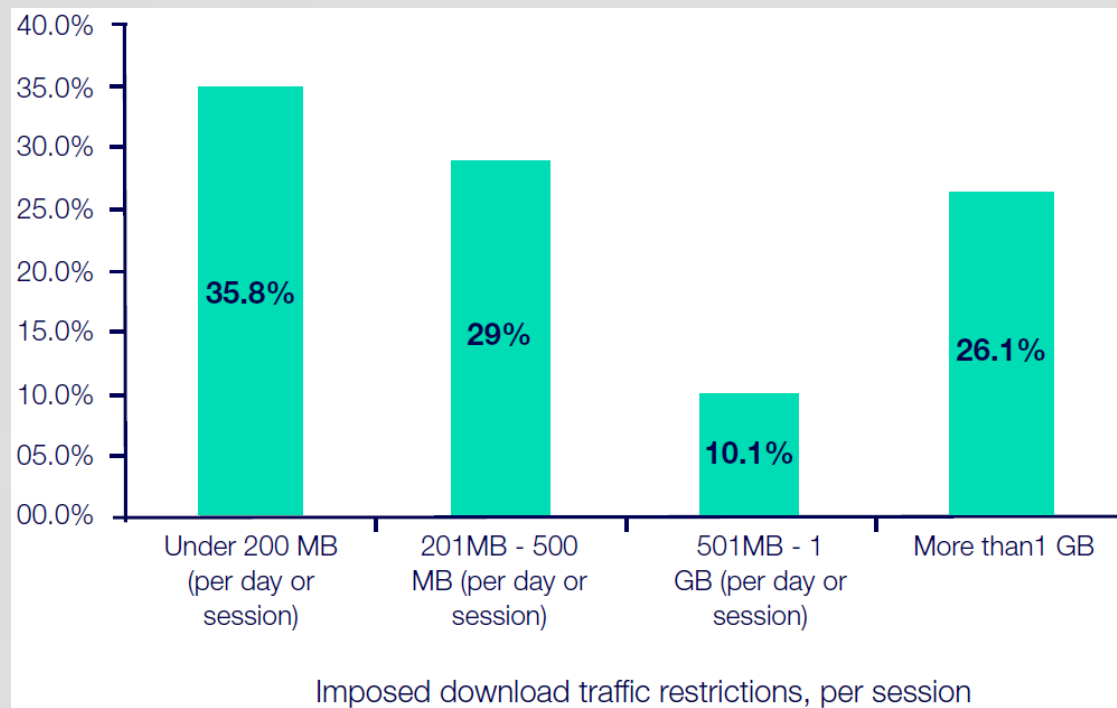


Share of LGAs providing public Wi-Fi, in percent

# Places for providing public Wi-Fi







We did not include the option "unrestricted Wi-Fi" in the survey, taking the assumption that any public Wi-Fi network is restricted to some extent, so we could not distinguish LGAs providing 3+ hours and 1 Gb+ public Wi-Fi from those providing unrestricted Wi-Fi.

But later we learnt that two LGAs in Australia (Gold Coast in QNSLD and Greater Geraldton in WA) provide completely unrestricted and unlimited Internet connection available though public Wi-Fi.



## Follow-up interviews



Officers from 6 LGAs were interviewed after the completion of the survey: Brisbane – QNSLD, Cowes – VIC, Cowes – VIC, Randwick – NSW, Shire of Irwin—WA, Uralla-NSW.

Officers were asked about undertaken evaluation and its role in decision-making, data and/or reports which they could share, details of public Wi-Fi deployment, personal assessment of public Wi-Fi network, personal opinion about role and importance of evaluation in decision-making.



## Follow-up interviews

### Methodological difficulties: data availability

So the evaluation is ... our assessment at the start was if we're going to be a major tourism arrangement. **It's very hard to be a major tourism arranger and not free Wi-Fi** because when international tourists come in they just come off the beach in Barcelona where they can get their free Wi-Fi, come down here and you can't get free Wi-Fi.

**It's practically intangible task to undertake some formal evaluation, find correlation.** There was a state-wide framework implemented about four years ago it was called The Local Government Performance Reporting Framework and all councils had to report on a range of indicators. **But it's a matter of how accurate it is**

**(Bass Coast)**



## Follow-up interviews



### Methodological difficulties: little area of coverage

I think (quantitative evaluation) would be difficult. As I say, take-up in the other town has been limited. And I think that would be a good question to ask maybe if the extension of the service through the main shopping centre was to take place. I think you might be able to measure that. **At the moment I wouldn't be able to quantify – yeah, based on the present coverage.**

(Uralla)

We have the statistics already for our libraries that say this many people visited, the average time that they were there was this long, how much they used in terms of browsing and things like that. We don't have anything that will say what was the foot traffic or what was the economic activity in the area to correlate with to see if there's a clear benefit. **We don't have that capability at the moment.**

(Randwick)





# Follow-up interviews

## Assessment of technical performance

The evaluation was basically feedback from the community saying this is crap, doesn't work, never works. And all the issues that came with that service.

When it came up for renewal, we to the same people... but got them to get new technology and the scope was pretty clear that it had to be fast, reliable, and unrestricted... And the feedback was outstanding. We go through four terabytes worth of data a month on the public Wi-Fi.

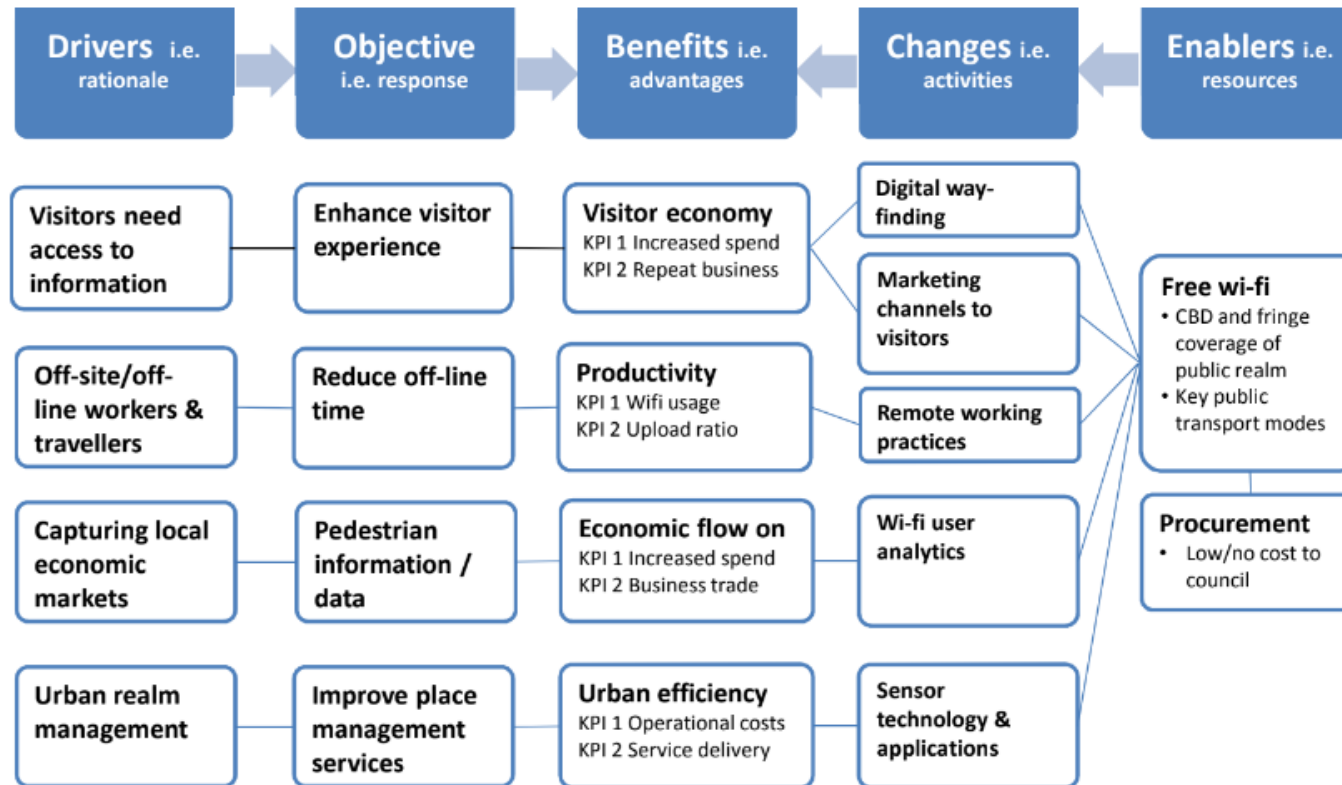
### (Greater Geraldton)

We had locals try and blame our Telstra exchange can't take any more on load so when the internet was very slow before the network came in, what's it called, anyway they tried to say that because of our free WiFi it slowed them down because everybody was using it. That wasn't true so we soon let them know we actually have put in our own equipment that doesn't go through the Telstra exchange at all so that was proven false. **Then I suppose the only negative is it's a cost to rate payers.**

### (Shire of Irwin)



## Economic benefits map Free public wi-fi



There was only one case of quantitative evaluation of economic effects of public Wi-Fi (in Brisbane), sourcing expenditure data from Westpac. However, in that case, KPIs (such as local growth in spending prior and after public Wi-Fi deployment) were used rather than econometric model.



Thank you!

M: 04 214 787 91

E: [viktor.grechyn@rmit.edu.au](mailto:viktor.grechyn@rmit.edu.au)