

## **City of Yarra submission to the Inquiry into the investment of Commonwealth and State funds in public passenger transport infrastructure and services**

1. The City of Yarra is an inner Melbourne municipality with approximately 75,000 residents, encompassing the suburbs of Richmond, Fitzroy, North Fitzroy, Clifton Hill, Collingwood, Abbotsford, North Carlton, and Alphington. Its population is one of the most economically diverse in Melbourne with significant communities of new Australian residents and also high numbers of tertiary educated dual income families.
2. Public transport is acknowledged by all community members as a significant feature of their lifestyles; providing connections for many residents for employment and recreation opportunities. For a number of Yarra residents, public transport is the only transport option other than foot or bicycle.
3. The City of Yarra welcomes the opportunity to participate in this inquiry, and to make a submission for consideration by the Senate. The terms of reference for the inquiry have been individually addressed as detailed below. City of Yarra Councillors and officers would be pleased to give evidence at a public hearing.

### **An audit of the state of public passenger transport in Australia**

4. Public transport patronage in Victoria has reportedly surged in over the last twelve months.
5. In Yarra we are considered to be blessed with considerable public transport options: tram, train and bus routes all travel through the city, assisting residents in reaching their workplaces, in and around Yarra, and also bringing customers and employees to workplaces within Yarra.
6. However, we continue to stress the need for more public transport, largely based on the fact that it is becoming harder for Yarra residents to travel by public transport, as public transport carriages and vehicles become full further and further away from the hub of the CBD.
7. Trains and trams may stop at stations and stops, but it is not possible to board a packed city-bound train or tram, and our research is showing that more Yarra residents are choosing to walk or cycle to work to ensure they meet their employee obligations. While this sustainable choice of transport delivers many other benefits to the residents, including fitness, and budget savings, it reduces the options available to families, restricting the reasonable distance within which they can seek employment opportunities.
8. For the operators of the Public Transport system, this change is not necessarily visible. They notice that the trains and trams are full, not *where* they are full. So when Yarra residents call for more trains, it is not because they are being greedy, rather that they are seeking to be able to maintain their access to the system, and to participate in the demanding system which now describes Victoria's economy. The more flexible work hours required in many workplaces requires a

system that can also be flexible, and not bound to previous definitions of peak “hours” which have now become peak “periods”.

9. The big picture view of transport mode choices for Yarra residents then, is that the system is failing them equally as it fails users in the surrounding suburbs. Solutions to fill missing links in the public transport system are critical to the economic participation of Yarra residents, despite the apparent wealth of options available to them.
10. Yarra residents have also noted an increase in traffic peak periods. Increased public transport use has been inexplicably accompanied by an extension in the peak hour busy periods. While more people are using public transport, more people are also using their passenger vehicles to travel to and from the CBD. Despite the increase in the number of train services running through Yarra from both the east and the north, public transport remains overcrowded and the major vehicle routes to the city remain heavy.
11. For public transport to assist in the delivery of the economic foundations of our community, peak period timetables must be extended beyond the nominal 7:30 to 8:30 am and 5 - 6:30 pm periods. Public transport must provide users with options to accommodate a range of start and finish times for work, and reasonable likelihood of getting to work in the event of a cancellation of the service, be it due to unplanned events, crashes, breakdowns, equipment, staffing, or other resourcing issues.
12. Yarra has one of Victoria’s most diverse economic demographic distributions. With significant numbers of households in very low income circumstances, accessibility to a variety of work options is critical to these families.
13. Public transport is a critical element for these families to be able to change their circumstances by participating in the education and employment sectors. While Yarra also has a strong business community, much of the new employment generated in the municipality is biased towards more highly educated workers. Similarly, while on the map, Yarra residents appear to be located close to a number of tertiary institutions (Melbourne, RMIT, ACU), not all students who apply to these institutions achieve the entry criteria. To provide opportunities for work and tertiary education, it is necessary for these families to have reasonable access to outer suburbs.
14. For a significant number of Yarra residents, transport modes do not include access to a private vehicle. The reduction in public transport service availability due to facilities being at capacity significantly disadvantages these residents from community, economic and social participation.

### **Current and historical levels of public investment in private vehicle and public passenger transport services and infrastructure;**

15. For a number of years the Victorian State Government has adopted a policy of increasing residential density as part of its planning vision. In November, this policy was dramatically altered when the Premier announced the release of additional land for residential development to the north and west and south-east.

16. The Victorian Transport Plan, also announced in November failed to provide additional public transport to these new areas. A modest expansion of the rail system was announced, taking the rail line to South Morang, however, the new subdivisions are only to serviced by road.
17. For decades, expansion of the public transport system has been driven on an economic demand basis. The considerable investment required to expand a system being used as the explanation as to why expansion was not delivered. Established areas such as Manningham, where additional public transport options and frequency have long been sought were ignored with the result that only 4% of the 100,000 residents of the north east use public transport to travel to the city. The majority of other residents participating in work in the CBD drive, typically one person to a car.
18. The problems which were created in the 1960's and 70's due to the lack of provision of public transport have not become easier to solve with the passage of time. The newly announced suburbs of Melbourne@5million have similarly been left without transport options.

**An assessment of the benefits of public passenger transport, including integration with bicycle and pedestrian initiatives;**

19. While a higher than Melbourne average proportion of Yarra residents do have access to bicycles, the opportunity to use this mode as part of a multi leg trip is considerably reduced if public transport is at capacity. While there are opportunities for pedestrians to combine walking with tram, train or bus travel, only trains provide some scope for the articulation with cyclists. The strongly radial nature of Melbourne's train system limits the opportunities for cyclists, as any work or study destination which involves a peak direction train component cannot be completed with a cycle.
20. Consequently it could be argued that the public transport system is only functioning at current levels due to the preparedness of Yarra residents to cycle, and reduce the load on public transport or roads.
21. Existing public transport facilities are not well integrated for cyclists. European models where city workers keep two cycles, one at each end of their train route, are not replicated in Melbourne. Secure storage for cycles is not provided, and most cyclists prefer to keep their cycle close to hand. The impending creation of a cycle rental system for the City of Melbourne may go some way to addressing this issue, however, while future expansion to Yarra has been mooted, funding has not yet been earmarked.

**Measures by which the Commonwealth Government could facilitate improvement in public passenger transport services and infrastructure;**

22. Fundamental issues for improvement in public passenger transport services and infrastructure include ensuring that public transport is given a higher priority over private transport. This is especially critical on routes which are used by fixed route transport (trams and trains). Routes which are used by trams and buses should not also be designated as having priority for passenger vehicles. It is

necessary to also consider the impact of intersecting streets on these routes, and ensure that passenger vehicle movements in these streets do not degrade the travel times for public transport.

23. It should be noted that pedestrian and passenger safety will also be enhanced by this clear separation of transport modes, increasing pedestrian and passenger perceptions of quality, security and comfort.
24. One indicator might be how many new km of public transport are constructed each year. This could be reported on a service density basis; new areas reached; type of service provided; span of hours of the service; frequency of the service; reliability of the service.
25. All of these are important to the existing and potential users. It must be stressed that these indicators are proposed for services delivered; not investigated, reviewed, or proposed.

**The role of Commonwealth Government legislation, taxation, subsidies, policies and other mechanisms that either discourage or encourage public passenger transport;**

26. It is recommended that government take a pro-active approach to funding public transport. For many years public transport infrastructure improvements have been funded disproportionately lower than passenger vehicle infrastructure improvements.
27. This has been based on the argument that facilitating freight movements is vital to ensuring increased economic productivity. Passenger vehicle users have been the happy beneficiaries of these decisions, even during peak business periods, as new roads have become available for them.
28. It is proposed that economic modelling for infrastructure should be weighted to ensure that road infrastructure modelling is based solely around freight demands. Roads should be sized to assist freight during business periods, and passenger vehicles should be either prohibited or discouraged.
29. Modelling should reflect passenger density. The relatively high density of trains, trams and buses should attract an improved funding outcome over the lower density of passenger vehicles, even those which carry passengers. The argument that customer willingness to pay (on toll routes) removes any such bias should be scrutinised against the hidden and therefore discounted cost shifting implied in the equations.
30. Commonwealth government funding should assess not only the ability of infrastructure projects to deliver goods, but also their ability to articulate with existing infrastructure. Relocating a bottleneck from one location to another (closer to the CBD) does not resolve the problem.
31. While blackspot funding provides excellent political coverage, highlighting the upgrading of infrastructure and the potential reduction in personal injuries, similar investment in public transport infrastructure is less forthcoming. The engineering safeguards installed on the tram and train networks in the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup>

century have provided a considerable buffer of public safety.

32. However, where road funding to address black spots and blacklengths is often used to provide incremental improvement to roads, such as resurfacing, widening, kerb construction, lighting, full drainage, these programs are not available to the rail system. Consequently, as the tram and rail systems have uniformly aged, their suitability for purpose has uniformly degraded, and rather than smaller in-fill retrofit programs being required, the entire system can be described as being in a chronic pre-collapse state.
33. This lack of investment in the rail system in particular, but also in much of the light rail network has so impoverished the system, that it appears daunting to correct it. Where in the period after construction, sufficient redundancy may have existed in the system to allow steady upgrade, now, repair works on a section results a dramatic failure to provide what is considered by the public transport users, (and also by the road users – who do not want to share their valuable road space with the public transport users now using their vehicles) as an essential service.
34. Tram and train users now travel considerable distances to their places of employment. When the systems were first laid down, many users would have been near locals, covering relatively short distances of 5-10 kilometres. (“Locals” of course would have commonly walked up to an hour each way)
35. It is also noted that some facets of the taxation system contribute indirectly to the use of private vehicles as the preferred means of transport for sectors of the community. Two examples are the generous taxation provisions which encourage the life-style choice of imported four-wheel drive vehicles over fuel efficient locally produced vehicles for city commuting, and the FBT system which promotes the users of leased vehicles to travel greater distances to attract a more favourable tax treatment.

### **Best practice examples of public passenger transport services and infrastructure.**

36. Several cities are noted for their public transport services and infrastructure. Vancouver and Toronto are highly recognised. It is also noted that as part of its Olympic bid, Beijing constructed a new rail system.

## **City of Yarra's Key Recommendations to the Inquiry**

37. It is recommended that the Commonwealth government take a pro-active approach to funding public transport. For many years public transport infrastructure improvements have been funded disproportionately lower than passenger vehicle infrastructure improvements.
38. The problems which were created in the 1960's and 70's due to the lack of provision of public transport have not become easier to solve with the passage of time.
39. As the tram and rail systems have uniformly aged, their suitability for purpose has uniformly degraded, and rather than smaller in-fill retrofit programs being required, the entire system can be described as being in a chronic pre-collapse state.
40. For public transport to assist in the delivery of the economic foundations of our community, peak period timetables must be extended beyond the nominal 7:30 to 8:30 am and 5 - 6:30 pm periods.
41. Solutions to fill missing links in the public transport system are critical to the economic participation of City of Yarra residents, despite the apparent wealth of options available to them.
42. The reduction in public transport service availability to City of Yarra residents due to facilities being at capacity significantly disadvantages residents in lower economic groups from full economic and social participation in the community.
43. One indicator might be how many new km of public transport are constructed each year. This could be reported on a service density basis; new areas reached; type of service provided; span of hours of the service; frequency of the service; reliability of the service.
44. It is proposed that economic modelling for infrastructure should be weighted to ensure that road infrastructure modelling is based solely around freight demands. Roads should be sized to assist freight during business periods, and passenger vehicles should be either prohibited or discouraged.
45. Modelling should reflect passenger density. The relatively high density of trains, trams and buses should attract an improved funding outcome over the lower density of passenger vehicles, even those which carry passengers. The argument that customer willingness to pay (on toll routes) removes any such bias should be scrutinised against the hidden and therefore discounted cost shifting implied in the equations.
46. The taxation system which favours the purchase and use of imported and non fuel efficient cars for private and commuter use should be reviewed.