

1923.

VICTORIA.

R E P O R T

FROM

THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON RAILWAYS

ON THE PROPOSED

GENERAL SCHEME OF TRAMWAYS FOR THE METROPOLIS ;

TOGETHER WITH

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE AND PLAN.

RETURN to an Order of the *House*,

Dated 24th July, 1923, for—

A COPY of the Report from the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Railways on the proposed General Scheme of Tramways for the Metropolis ; together with Minutes of Evidence and Plan.

Mr. Barnes.)

Ordered by the Legislative Assembly to be printed, 24th July, 1923.

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REPORT.

THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON RAILWAYS, to which the Honorable the Minister of Public Works (the Hon. F. G. Clarke, M.L.C.), in accordance with the requirements of section 34 of the *Melbourne and Metropolitan Tramways Act* 1918, No. 2995, referred for inquiry the General Scheme of Tramways for the Metropolis, has the honour to report as follows :—

PROVISION FOR A GENERAL SCHEME OF TRAMWAYS.

1. Section 34 of the *Melbourne and Metropolitan Tramways Act* 1918, No. 2995, required the Melbourne and Metropolitan Tramways Board to prepare, as soon as practicable, "a general scheme for the future development of tramways for the service of the metropolis." The Board was engaged for about two and a half years collecting data as to the density of population in Melbourne and suburbs, the spaces available for residential and industrial expansion, the location of suburban railways and tramways, and the transport facilities likely to be required by the public in the inner and outer areas during the next 20 years. Mainly on this information it prepared its general scheme. In no other large city, so far as the Board could ascertain, had provision been made for a scheme of passenger transport covering a period of 20 years ahead. Nevertheless, the Board considered that this requirement of its Act was an advantageous one, inasmuch as the public would know the routes of proposed tramways and would erect their dwellings, factories, or places of business near those routes, so as to have a cheap and regular means of travel close at hand. In addition to mapping out transport facilities for the ever-increasing population of the metropolis, the Board, in devising its general scheme, had to provide for the linking-up and co-ordination of several separate electric tramway systems which had been constructed in the outer suburbs in recent years. Some of the natural routes for these essential connecting lines are occupied by cable tramways, and therefore the conversion of the cable system—which system has been in operation for 40 years and is becoming obsolete—to an electric one formed an integral part of the problem confronting the Board. There are in Melbourne and suburbs 46 route miles of cable tramways, and it is estimated that it will cost about £4,200,000, including rolling-stock, to convert them to electric tramways. There are also some 71 route miles of electric tramways under the control of the Board, exclusive of 5 miles of Government electric tramway between St. Kilda and Brighton and $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles between Sandringham and Black Rock. In addition the Board has obtained authority, either direct from Parliament or by Order in Council, to construct in the near future about 20 miles of electric tramways, making in all some 137 route miles under the control of the Board. The present population of Melbourne and suburbs is estimated at 774,000, and it is assumed that at the end of the next 20 years it will have increased to approximately 1,100,000. But the tramways proposed to be provided in that period are expected to suffice till the population of the metropolis reaches 1,500,000. The present metropolitan area served by either railways or tramways is 61,965 acres, and the average density of population is 11·6 per acre. When all the tramways set out in the general scheme are constructed the area will be 89,303 acres, with an estimated average density of population of 11·8 per acre. Allowing for the existing tramways and those recently authorized and about to be undertaken, the route miles of tramways per 100,000 inhabitants is 17·3. When the new lines are wholly provided as set out in the general scheme it is anticipated there will be 24·3 route miles per 100,000 of the population, or 4,111 inhabitants per route mile, as compared with about 6,000 to-day. It was, therefore, claimed by the Board that its general scheme will amply provide for the future requirements.

2. The general scheme, which was submitted to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Railways in the early part of December, 1922, for consideration and report, made provision for the construction of 134 miles of tramways, of which 83 are to be double-track lines, and 51 single. The cost of these new tramways is estimated at between £4,000,000 and £5,000,000 based on present prices of materials, &c. No estimate of the probable revenue, working expenses, and annual charges was prepared by the Board for these lines; but a forecast of the probable financial result of each proposal, where the expenditure is likely to exceed £20,000, will be submitted by the Board to the Committee for inquiry and report when it is intended to enter on the building of the lines. The routes of the suggested tramways were set forth on a map which accompanied

the general scheme, and a copy of that plan was published last December in the metropolitan daily newspapers. Those of the public who were interested in proposed tramway extensions were consequently able to ascertain if their lines had been included in the scheme. The principle underlying the general scheme was that suburban areas which were within half-a-mile of a railway or tramway were regarded as being already well served. Many of the proposals were extensions of existing tramways, thus providing for the expansion of the residential suburbs to the north, east, and south-east of the city. To the west of Newport, Yarraville, and Footscray, however, were lines designed to meet the requirements of the industrial areas expected to be established in the western part of the metropolis during the next few years. Then there were cross-town lines to link up the northern suburbs from Essendon through Brunswick and Northcote to Heidelberg, and thus avoid the present necessity of travellers between those suburbs having to come into the city, or nearly so, to reach their destination. These connecting lines will relieve the congestion of passenger traffic on the city sections. Provision was also made for the building of tramways in the eastern suburbs running in a southerly direction to give ready access to the beaches at Brighton, Hampton, and Sandringham. Such lines should be largely availed of in the summer months, and they will also be the means of opening up suitable areas for residential purposes between the Brighton and Moorabbin railways. New tramways were mapped out in the inner suburbs and also in the city itself. These are mainly to give much-needed additional routes into the city, which the growing outer suburban traffic will necessitate, and also to meet the transport requirements during the period of converting the cable tramways to electric traction. The latter work will be spread over about 10 or 15 years, the conversion of a suburban line, which will be done in sections, occupying some months. The cable tramway tracks are not strong enough to carry the swift-running heavy electric cars, and consequently the tracks will have to be completely re-laid. Portion of the cost of this conversion will be borne out of the renewals, reconstruction, and reserve accounts of the Board, which were in credit on the 30th June, 1922, to the aggregate amount of £1,000,000.

FINANCIAL POSITION OF THE TRAMWAYS BOARD.

3. As already stated, the cost of altering the cable tramways to electric traction is estimated at approximately £4,000,000, and the new electric tramways provided in the general scheme will involve a further outlay of £4,000,000 or £5,000,000, including the necessary rolling-stock. These new lines being an asset will be built out of loan funds, but the Melbourne and Metropolitan Tramways Board will, of course, have to pay interest on that borrowed money and make provision for a renewals fund and for annual contributions to a sinking fund. Such annual charges, which the Act makes obligatory, are likely to total between 10 and 12 per cent. on the sum borrowed. New electric tramways, like new railways, are not likely to pay their way from the start, though several of the tram lines should in the course of a year or two become payable undertakings. Others, however, will take longer to get on the paying list. But the point is that it is improbable these new undertakings will, as a whole, yield a surplus for several years. The financial position of the Board has therefore some bearing on the pace of future tramway construction in the metropolis. For the year ended 30th June, 1922, the surplus from the operation of the metropolitan tramways (cable and electric systems) was £452,911. But from this sum there had to be deducted the amounts paid in rates, sick pay, interest on loans, provision for sinking funds, reserves, &c., totalling £146,694, leaving a profit of £306,217. Out of this profit, however, had to be paid £98,106, being the Board's statutory payment into the Consolidated Revenue of the State towards the up-keep of the Queen's Memorial Infectious Diseases Hospital, the Metropolitan Fire Brigades Board, and the sum paid to municipal councils for the licensing equivalent. There had also to be deducted £190,000 transferred to the Board's renewals reserve fund and £8,000 transferred to the Board's fire insurance and public risks reserve fund, making a total deduction of £296,106, and leaving a nett surplus of £10,111 for the year. The cable tramways yielded a nett surplus of £61,018 for the year ended 30th June, 1922; but on the other hand the electric tramways showed a nett deficiency of £50,908. These losses were made up as follow:—Prahran and Malvern tramways, £5,749; Hawthorn, £2,873; Coburg, £10,382; Preston, £17,835; and Footscray, £14,069. The Essendon electric tramways were not taken over by the Board till 1st August, 1922, and therefore their financial results were not included, but the Board informed the Committee that "there will be a considerable deficiency in connexion with them."

4. It is expected that with the growth of population the traffic receipts of the Board will increase and its financial position be thus improved. But on the other hand a disturbing factor is that each year brings the Board nearer the time when it must face a heavy expenditure on the conversion of the cable tramways, which are becoming worn out, and must cause a large outlay in renewals of the tracks, &c., if the cable lines are not converted to electric tramways. The

conversion would give a valuable asset, and probably part of the cost of that work may be borne out of borrowed moneys. Nevertheless, the Board's financial position must have a controlling effect on future tramway construction. Mr. Alexander Cameron, Chairman of the Board, was asked, when giving evidence before the Committee on the general scheme of tramways, why the Board had not in all its financial calculations taken into account the statutory contribution it has to make to the State's Consolidated Revenue. In the course of his reply he said—"There is a probability that in the future the provisions of section 88 of the Board's Act may be altered, either in the direction of the abolition, wholly or partly, of the charges mentioned, or that they may be made payable out of surplus profits, and not out of revenue regardless of profits, as at present." He summed up the Board's attitude towards the construction of future tramways in the following words:—"Speaking broadly, it is the central portion of any system which provides the surplus to cover the cost of extension, but it is the extension which produces the travel on the central portion. It is therefore sound policy, while the population is growing, to carry out a moderate programme of extension, provided that the central system is capable of providing the surplus to cover the initial loss, and that there is a prospect of the extension paying in a few years. In other words, it is necessary that traffic created by the extension will within a reasonable time be sufficient to maintain the average of the whole system, assuming that the latter is just paying, which should be the case in a system owned by and operated for the public. To expect more at present costs is useless; to require less would eventually lead to bankruptcy, for increasing fares beyond the present figure would reduce the traffic and the total revenue."

TRAMWAY OR RAILWAY EXPANSION.

5. The expected rapid increase in the population of Melbourne and suburbs opened up the question as to whether the travelling requirements of the public could be better met by the construction of additional suburban railways than by the extension of the metropolitan tramways system. The railways radiate from the city. The further they get away from the centre of population the wider the spaces between the lines. These spaces in the outer suburbs are partly built on, and the number of dwellings in such areas will gradually increase, necessitating better travelling facilities being provided for the inhabitants. There are two important reasons which are likely to operate against the construction of suburban railways to serve these outer areas. First is the restricted space at Flinders-street and Prince's Bridge stations, which are now somewhat congested during the busy hours of the day, and before many years the problem will have to be faced of relieving these stations of some of their traffic instead of adding to it. The second is the high cost of resuming land in the metropolitan area for railway purposes. When it was proposed a few years ago to extend the Sandringham railway to Black Rock it was found it would cost more to purchase the land required for the railway track than to construct an electric tramway along the streets, and consequently the latter course was adopted. Doubtless the same position will be confronted if railway extensions in other outer suburbs are contemplated. The recent electrification of the suburban railways and the reduction in the time of the journeys to and from the city make it desirable, where it is practicable, that tramways traversing the outer areas should be linked up with suburban railway stations to enable those living more than 6 or 7 miles from the city to have the advantage of this rapid travel. In preparing its general scheme of tramways the Melbourne and Metropolitan Tramways Board kept this in view.

GENERAL SCHEME MAY BE AMENDED.

6. Section 34 of the *Melbourne and Metropolitan Tramways Act 1918* allows the general scheme of tramways for the metropolis to be amended from time to time to meet any altered local conditions that may arise. This is a necessary power, as it is impossible to foresee all the changes which may take place over so long a period as 20 years. Such power will be exercised with caution, and there must be good cause submitted for an alteration in the route. The fact that the general scheme when adopted provided for the construction of a tramway along a particular road gives the owners of property in that street no direct vested interests in the tramway which might assist them in any claim for compensation should the tramway route have to be altered later on in the public interests. No variation, however, will be made in the general scheme unless the Melbourne and Metropolitan Tramways Board first submits the proposed alteration, and the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Railways, after hearing evidence from those concerned, also approves of the change in the route. It is hoped that the publication of the general scheme will cause persons building factories, shops, dwellings, &c., to concentrate along certain streets instead of spreading over a wide area, as this concentration will economize public expenditure on water and gas mains, sewers, road construction, &c. Mr. Alexander Cameron, Chairman of the Board, in stating on its behalf the attitude of the Board towards proposed amendments of the scheme, said in evidence before the Committee—"The Board has made the best effort it

could to produce a scheme in advance to meet future requirements. The conditions may, however, vary, new circumstances may arise, and if it can be shown that a variation of a route is desirable the Board will be prepared at any time to consider the suggested amendment."

RECOMMENDATION OF THE COMMITTEE.

7. The Committee heard evidence from Mr. Alexander Cameron, Chairman of the Melbourne and Metropolitan Tramways Board, on the general scheme. It also received several applications from municipal councils, progress associations, and tramway leagues, to be heard either in support of the tramways mapped out in the scheme to serve their respective districts or to advocate slight deviations in the routes. There was a widespread but mistaken impression that the sooner a proposed tramway could be inquired into the earlier would be its construction. It is for the Board to determine the order of construction, selecting those which it considers to be the more urgent to meet the needs of the public or the traffic, and then submit each proposal in turn to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Railways as a special construction scheme with the view of Parliament authorizing the work. After hearing the evidence of Mr. Cameron on the general scheme of tramways, the Committee decided to defer any evidence on the local lines till they come before the Committee as a special construction scheme. It was considered that to hear evidence now on all the details of the general scheme and decide on the routes of tramways which may not be constructed for 10, 15, or 20 years, when the local conditions may have so greatly changed as to justify an alteration in the route, would be a waste of time. There is no occasion to duplicate inquiries into these proposals—to have one now and another when the work is about to be undertaken. The latter is the proper time to hear the local views in the light of the then existing circumstances. Moreover, the Town Planning Commission, which has recently been appointed, may make recommendations which will affect some of the proposed tramway routes.

8. In the opinion of the Committee the Board will be better able to deal with the public as regards tramway extensions through having a pre-determined plan than if no general scheme had been prepared. The Board has shown much industry in collecting data as to existing means of travel in the metropolis, density of population, areas available for residential and industrial sites, the travelling habit of the public, handling the growing tramway traffic in the city and its approaches during the busy hours, ready access to beaches in the summer months, the physical configuration of the metropolis, &c., on which it based its general scheme. It also displayed much care and thought in preparing that scheme, which is a novel work, with the view of meeting the public convenience as far as practicable during the next 20 years. Under the circumstances referred to in the preceding paragraph of this report the Committee recommends the adoption of "the general scheme for the future development of tramways for the service of the metropolis" as prepared by the Board and submitted to the Committee for consideration and report.

VIEWS OF THE RAILWAYS COMMISSIONERS.

9. The Railways Commissioners when consulted by the Committee as to the effect of this general tramway scheme on the railway revenue practically took the same view as the Committee, pointing out that the Board's programme "cannot be completed for a number of years, and as the existing conditions may materially change before the Board is in a position to present evidence to the Committee on many of the extensions it is thought that a detailed report on the present situation would probably be of comparatively little practical value when the proposals are submitted individually to the Committee."

R. F. TOUTCHER,
Chairman.

Railways Standing Committee Room,
State Parliament House,
Melbourne, 19th April, 1923.

[*Minutes of Evidence are not printed.*]