

The Executive Officer
Economy and Infrastructure Committee
Parliament House
Spring Street
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002

Submission to the Victorian Parliament Economy and Infrastructure Committee

INQUIRY INTO EXPANDING MELBOURNE'S FREE TRAM ZONE

To the Economy and Infrastructure Committee,

I write to confine my position on the recommendation to expand Melbourne's Free Tram Zone currently in practice in the CBD to be performed in strict moderation. The prime boundaries of the Free Tram Zone since its introduction in 2015 have included limitations extending within the Central Business District to Docklands. Historically, the zero-fare route best known as the City Circle Tram has followed a strictly similar routine since 1994, limited within the Free Tram Zone, in contrast to the majority of the Yarra Trams fleet finalising outside the City of Melbourne.

Within the Free Tram Zone, its alternatives to the operator Yarra Trams have included the Metro Trains suburban loop fixed within five stations being a centralised point for all metropolitan rail lines. Southern Cross present in the City Loop stations function as the main terminus for both regional and interstate rail travel. Commuters exiting the Free Tram Zone are expected to purchase an extended Myki pass prior to entering the tram while those travelling within the zone are not obligated.

As of its most recent report, Public Transport Victoria's Annual Report 2018-19 highlights Metro Train services as being the most prominent source of patronage for travelling commuters compared to tram and bus operators. Despite this, the tram network being the largest operational line globally retains the performance of an estimate 5000 serviced trips daily during its 24-hour service. Since the introduction of the initial Free Tram Zone, it has been estimated to have resulted in \$10-13 million in revenue loss. This being almost a third of the estimation \$38.9 million farebox revenue loss within fare evasion among PTV during the 2018 fiscal year. The recently proposed pledge by the City of Melbourne's free tram extension as announced by Lord Mayor Sally Capp was as expected to cost an additional \$9.5 million annually.

As for most part to help reduce traffic congestion, Yarra Trams have made temporary extensions for the Free Tram Zone for special events of public interest such as the AFL Grand Final and other major sporting events.

The common assumption towards free transportation within the City of Melbourne would that the incentive could encourage usage to substitute to public transport rather than potentially using motor vehicles. However, eliminating the financial consideration of the fare would not alone justify consumer habits to quickly shift. The similar analogy could be based on the competition regarding free government services and the private sector.

Generally, service effectiveness can deter commuter usage which in most cases within the CBD can range from travel times during peak congestions. Today given the journey time within the City Loop, this has resorted with higher rate of commuters preferencing trains despite the accompanying Myki travel fee. Preferences and demand of travel destinations would also be a common factor towards the origins of overcrowded trams.

On the other hand, the decline within the government consolidated fund will need to be found primarily to support staffing. Recently Victoria has seen multiple industrial action regarding remuneration from the major Rail, Tram and Bus Union covering over 35,000 employees. Due to these industrial actions against both the private operator and government department this had resulted in entire network delays, shutdown and revenue loss.

Upon this advice of what areas of improvement could appropriately constitute benefit it can be suggested that multiple alternatives can be provided can include options such as –

- Creating a specialised “Melbourne Tourism Myki”, holding the similar approach to the Danish ‘Copenhagen Card’. The practice currently functional within the Denmark capital allows free transportation through a one-off payment for an all-inclusive temporary use of transport. The service is however limited to select tourist attractions within the Copenhagen region in addition to its reach within harbor buses and an international airport. The card is priced starting from 55 EUR for an adult pass that can range from 24 to 120-hour options.
- Improving safety and access within popular tram interchanges that allow both reduced time between tram stop and amount of route stops. At many stops this can lead to overcrowding and traffic congestion especially when frequently stopping. Growing tram patronage that interferes with the stream within motor vehicle lanes have resulted in both the safety of tram commuters. I suggest that tram stops in the future are designed in a manner that be integrated with pedestrian spaces that allow safer and more indirect passage. It would also be supportive of the corresponding aims cited in the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth) to provide accessible transport would encourage the greater usage.
- Re-introduction and privatization of the previously closed tourist orientated Melbourne Visitor Shuttle to offer its previous routes or a reconfigured express route to various Melbourne landmarks. This could additionally be extended in future notice to reach a scope outside the City of Melbourne where tourism may promote greater injection in other areas of interest within Metropolitan Melbourne.
- Modification of current road rules within the Central Business District and improved usage of intelligent traffic signal systems. This can include the extension of hook turns within roads for motorists, allowing greater passage for tram movement. Usually the programming of traffic signals can prioritise or slow the flow of transport movement depending on usage.
- Repel the Free Tram Zone initiative and have the City Circle Tram to be reconfigured to allow commuter free travel within the central city in multiple hotspots. Although being limited within the Central Business District, the initiative could genuinely be only considered free for those primarily stationed only within the area. Those travelling from outside the Free Tram Zone would have most likely already purchased a Myki or used means of paid transport. It is also noted that encouraging reduced destinations could lead to overcrowding within public transport corridors both imposing pedestrian, driver and the flow of tram fleet speed on the road. Given the lack of physical separation between vehicles and trams primarily in the CBD, it should be prioritised to allow greater pedestrian passage when moving from tram stop to sidewalk. The Victorian Government could aim to prioritise this lost funding to focus on extending the value of the City Circle route and fleet.

Thank you for your consideration into this submission. Should there be any further queries about my recommendation please do not hesitate to contact me at [REDACTED].

Yours Sincerely,

[REDACTED]