

Inquiry Name: Inquiry into Expanding Melbourne's Free Tram Zone

Adam Ford
[REDACTED]

SUBMISSION CONTENT:

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The free tram zone is a terrible piece of public transport policy, even inasmuch as it might be good political theatre.

I am drawing again here on the latest raft of data from Charting Transport. But also on the anecdote of tonight's experience on the 57 tram from the CBD, time approximately 10.05pm. And we can all agree 10pm is hardly peak hour. But we can all agree that these days that at 10pm, the CBD centre is still very much alive in the retail/entertainment core, as indeed it was this Monday.

Grab a Partner for the Elizabeth Street Shuffle

Stop 1 - Elizabeth Street Terminus (where trams still open their doors one foot in front of shear walls that people wanting to get on are already queueing in front of - this is probably only the city's third largest tram terminus, but that's another whinge), the tram is essentially FULL, at 10pm on a Monday night.

In fact the 57 can routinely be full at the CBD end all the way up to the last tram. We are told we have a network that is demand-responsive to this, but I have been reporting evening overcrowding on this route to PTV routinely for well over a year now.

Stop 2 - We are so full that we have to leave passengers behind. It is a 14 minute wait until the next 57 is along. We are so full that "train style", passengers have to alight in order to let other passengers off. Some of those passengers almost do not get back on. This appears to add significantly to loading times, we miss the lights at the intersection. At 10 pm, there is of course no passing traffic on Lt Collins Street that was worth holding up a full tram for.

Stop 3 - Possibly up to 30% of the tram evacuates, most of them clearly tourists leaving a full but no longer overcrowded tram. The entire tram was empty at the terminus. So all these people have just:

- travelled a maximum of two stops
- paid no fare

- paid basically no Australian tax to support the infrastructure
- overcrowded the infrastructure for those who are forced to pay (residents traveling beyond the CBD)
- increased the travel time for those same people traveling significant distances and for whom the journey time is significant, and who do compare this trip with a car-based alternative
- prevented people who may have been intended long distance travellers from using the tram, even though the tram was not full once it left the CBD
- increased the journey time for these same people by at least 14 minutes
- gotten less exercise
- reduced CBD street life

Now consider that ALL that is specifically now dialled into our fare structure. And consider that almost every tram journey in this city (step up 78 and 82) passes through the CBD. This is what we have done to basically every single tram journey in this city through the incentives provided by the absurd free tram zone.

Applying the 'EVIL' Test ...

So, let's say for a minute you were EVIL. And let's say you wanted to systemically make people use their cars as much as possible, and you realised how much gridlock the city would be in if all the people who currently use trams started travelling by car everywhere, and you were trying to formulate a policy that made almost every tram trip in the city less competitive with the car, well then I ask you ... can you actually come up with a better policy to achieve specifically this than the Free Tram Zone?

The Charting Transport data showed “The Melbourne CBD itself has had a 12% shift to public transport – and actually a 7% mode shift away from walking (which probably reflects the new Free Tram Zone in the CBD area).”

So the Free Tram Zone is a gimme to those who need it least. Tourists first, Office Workers on well above average earnings second, and inner city residents third (and increasingly this means the well to do, not working Melburnians).

And I'd remind you that all these people pay the same taxes as everyone else. The same taxes as the everyone elses who ARE able to access the decent public transport, and who need it least. These former people have basically never had a new bit of public transport built for them during my lifetime, and the latter have had BILLIONS spent on them. Again, from the same tax pool.

And the Free Tram Zone inconveniences EVERYONE who needs that least also - those who could do without the extra 5 minutes on the CBD leg of their commute because it will take them 30 minutes just to get to their station in Zone Two. The people for whom the car remains the most viable alternative.

Consider that EVERYONE who has had to travel TO the CBD has already had to pay. Almost all are buying a daily ticket. CBD tram trips for these people are effectively FREE ALREADY. What we DON'T need is signs all over the city saying to these people "hop on a tram for free instead of walking two blocks".

We are Governed by the Media

This is SO COMPLETELY INVERTED in terms of how we ought to be setting our transport priorities. It just makes my blood boil that nobody far enough up the public transport tree in this state clearly has either their eyes philosophically properly on the main goals to say "whoah!" on this.

This entire idea should have been philosophically inadmissible to any transport planner looking to make this city a fundamentally better place for everyone to live.

This pointless revenue shedding measure only exists because it's the kind of policy that it's very easy to get the media to go "rah rah" around during an election campaign. Literally. It makes no broader public policy sense, it serves no public policy objective worth spending any money on.

This is yet another symptom of what I am going to call the Zone One Mentality or Greenspartyism - advocating world's best public transport only for your wealthy inner city mates who all own homewares depicting W class trams they've never ridden.

It is not a fit or proper policy for a party that claims to be about either social justice or sensible transport advocacy. IN. THE. BIN!

If we **MUST** have free trams in the CBD, we should have designated free shuttle trams (w-classes, please) that run up and down Elizabeth, Collins and Bourke to assist in alleviating the crush loads. And that is all.

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File1:

File2:

File3: