

In this submission I address two of the terms of reference:

- The expansion of the free tram system
- Providing free fares for full time students

The expansion of the free tram system

The proposed expansion would provide fare-free travel for commuting between the University of Melbourne's two city campuses: Parkville and Southbank. This change would be welcomed by both staff and students who need to move between these two campuses. The University of Melbourne's curriculum, the so-called Melbourne Model, allows students of all Faculties to engage in 'breadth' study. The Faculty of Fine Arts and Music, located at Southbank, provides a significant number of breadth subjects which means that many students need to move between the two campuses which currently has an economic impact on those who choose to use trams to do this. While the removal of the zones of travel brought the cost of our tram fares down (from being the most expensive in Australia), it is still the case that Melbourne is one of the most expensive cities for short term travel (see <https://www.ptua.org.au/myths/cheap/> and <https://www.priceoftravel.com/595/public-transportation-prices-in-80-worldwide-cities/>). Being able to catch the tram for free would significantly relieve some of the stress that university study creates for those students without the resources to cover the cost of transport. Similarly, for academics and professional staff who need to move between campuses removing the fare would be a welcome initiative.

Providing free fares for full time students

I would strongly advocate that the definition of full time student cover undergraduate and postgraduate university students. Recent work shows that students increasingly have difficulty meeting basic costs while studying. In this 2018 article in *The Conversation* <https://theconversation.com/balancing-work-and-tertiary-study-is-harder-now-than-in-2012-study-89969>, it is noted that 36% of students had problems covering the cost of public transport. In a 2007 paper reported in Watson, Barber and Dzurawiec (2014), one in eight students described foregoing basic necessities due to financial strain. They note that "[h]ow students feel about their financial circumstances is an important explanatory mechanism through which measures of objective financial circumstances can be linked to well-being". Clearly, this is not a new problem for university students and removing fares for full time students would have an immediate impact for many of them. An article published by The University of Melbourne's *Pursuit* (<https://pursuit.unimelb.edu.au/articles/financial-anxiety-widespread-among-university-students>) highlights the effect that student financial anxiety has on the wider community with "the proportion receiving some family support" rising. This article also describes the impact of work on study with many students struggling to balance both. Groups such as single parents (mostly women), indigenous and international students appear to suffer most from financial pressure while studying. This paints a sobering picture and I would suggest that any initiative which goes towards alleviating economic stress would provide a positive outcome for students and those around them.

Watson, S.J., Barber, B.L. & Dzurawiec, S. The Role of Economizing and Financial Strain in Australian University Students' Psychological Well-Being. J Fam Econ Iss 36, 421–433 (2015) doi:10.1007/s10834-014-9404-5