

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

Mr Raphael Canty

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SUBMISSION CONTENT:

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My comment on the five areas of inquiry are as follows:

(1) It is my belief that extending the Free Tram Zone is a knee-jerk reaction to a complex problem which requires more consideration for it to actually benefit Melbournians. The overall aim of changes like this should be to have more people benefit from Public Transport, so I think it is important to note that Public Transport advocates are universally against the extension of the zone.

If the aim of free tram zone extension is to enable more people to use trams, then there is some flawed logic in play. Firstly, an extended free tram zone will not make the use of trams cheaper for the vast majority of people. Those who travel from the suburbs on Melbourne's rail or bus network will still be required to pay a fare to get to the city before they use a free tram. Those who live inside the free tram zone are the only ones who will benefit from free fares, but given the high cost of living in this area, these are people most likely to be able to afford a tram fare anyway.

Secondly, the free tram zone has made trams harder to access for people using them to travel beyond the city. Making trams free in the CBD encourages more people to use them for short distances, which results in the overcrowding of services, making trams slower and less useful to people trying to use them to travel longer distances. Extending the Free Tram Zone will further exacerbate this issue and lead to worse overcrowding of trams in the zone.

Thirdly, given the free portion of routes may be walked by an able-bodied person in around 10-15 minutes, making trams free in this zone has given incentive for people to crowd onto trams for a very walkable distance. For the health of the population and the efficiency of the network, people who are able to walk should do so and leave the tram network for people who need to travel a longer distance or are unable to walk.

I implore the committee to not extend the Free Tram Zone, and instead consider removing it entirely. Along with ongoing redistribution of CBD road space towards pedestrian use, this would encourage more people to walk around the city and improve the efficiency and ease crowding on the tram network, benefitting more Melbournians than a free zone extension would.

To address items (2) and (3), I believe it is important to remember that the Public Transport system needs revenue from passenger fares to run and to continue to improve to meet the needs of Melbourne's growing population. The complete removal of fares from large groups of commuters would be detrimental to the running of the network. I would suggest that the provision of free fares should be made much more sparingly, only to those who could not otherwise afford them. For groups given concessions, such as students and seniors, a heavily discounted fare is better for Melbourne as a whole than no fare. Note that I am in full support of postgraduate students receiving this concession which they currently do not qualify for.

(4) I am absolutely in favour of such technology which seeks to improve efficiency of the network, and it would be irresponsible to not investigate the use of innovations which are available. In particular, the trial of traffic light priority measures on Route 75 is an excellent initiative which I hope will spread to further routes on the network.

(5) Melbourne's public transport pricing is extremely static and flat compared to many cities in the world. It would be wise to investigate whether alternative pricing strategies would promote a better network. Implementing a peak/off-peak fare distinction would encourage more people to travel during less busy times, which may result in less crowding at peak times. Investigating further use of zones or a pay-per-kilometre system could see fairer pricing proportional to amount of service used, rather than the current system which essentially charges a flat fee across the whole of Melbourne's metropolitan area, suburbs and regional fringe regardless of distance travelled.

I thank you for reading my submission and am encouraged greatly that there is community-consulted discussion about improving Melbourne's Public Transport network.

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File1:

File2:

File3: