

**Parliament of Victoria, Economy and Infrastructure Standing Committee,
Legislative Council
Inquiry into Expanding Melbourne's Free Tram Zone**

Summary

In the text below:

- I support the expansion of the current Melbourne Free Tram Zone, to extend to more areas outside the Hoddle Grid¹.
- I provide a brief analysis of the travellers within a Free Tram Zone
- I suggest that in conjunction with this expansion of the current Free Tram Zone, there is the introduction of a free express shuttle bus for some travelling between the extremities of a few routes in the proposed new extended Free Tram Zone².

Introduction

The scope of this enquiry by the Parliamentary Economics and Infrastructure Standing Committee, does not limit itself to the mere extension of the current Free Tram Zone. It also considers the introduction of free public transport on all routes for full time students and holders of Seniors Cards in Victoria.³ All of the above-mentioned concessions are worthy of examination. If introduced they will have varying impacts on the State Budget. In my discussion below, I shall assume that the extension of the current Free Tram Zone around the Melbourne Central Business District (CBD) is the least costly in dollar terms and I shall limit my argument to mainly supporting this measure.

I start my submission with the following questions:

- Do we want less pollution in the city?
- Do we want to reduce the number of motor vehicles going through the city?
- Do we want more business to be driven to the Melbourne Central Business District (CBD)?
- Do we want to assist those on low incomes?⁴

If your answer was 'Yes' to any of the above questions, please consider seriously the extension of the current Free Tram Zone as an instrument to bring about some or all of these outcomes. Such a measure if implemented, would I believe, engineer a significant increase in the Public Good at a relatively low dollar cost to the community.

¹Area between Flinders, La Trobe, Spring and Spencer Streets in the CBD

² My suggestion is that we extend the Free Tram Zone, but not necessarily the number of trams.

³Media Release November 26 2019; Economy and Infrastructure Standing Committee, Legislative Council

⁴This will include many full time students and holders of Seniors Cards

I believe that, in general, increased use of any form of public transport would achieve some of the above-mentioned goals. In particular, increased use of electric trams in preference of emission generating motor vehicles, such as buses, would assist in the aims stated above, to even a greater extent. A number of cities that abolished trams are now regretting that move. A larger Free Tram Zone, in and close, to the CBD would, I submit, increase the number of commuters using trams to move about this area.

Past and Present

In 2015, the relevant bodies agreed to create the current Free Tram Zone within the Hoddle Grid and to extend this zone to a small number of areas outside the boundaries of the Grid. Since that time, it has been used by many.

The current Free Tram Zone is defined by tram stops from the State Library in Swanston St., to the corner of Flinders St., and Swanston St. From west to east, it is from the Docklands to and along Spring St., to the intersection of Victoria Pde and Nicholson St.

It also runs along William St., to the intersection of Peel St., and Victoria St. It turns west from Elizabeth St., into Victoria St., at Victoria Market and continues to Peel St.

It includes all tram stops within the Hoddle Grid.

Since 2015, many have reaped the benefits of this measure.

Moving to the Future

Now five years later, I believe that this successful, Melbourne measure, needs to be reviewed, as a number of significant changes have taken place between 2015 and 2020. A number of these changes are listed below:

- Increase in population,
- Increase in tourist numbers,
- Increase in the number of residents in the CBD and adjacent areas,
- Increased development and increase in size of organisations just on the fringe of the CBD. Some examples of such developments and increases in size are: the new Comprehensive Cancer Centre, The Southbank Campus of the University of Melbourne, RMIT University Campus and the Sports Precinct.⁵

Because of these changes over time, in the text below, I put forward a case for the support of extending the current Free Tram Zone to include a greater area.

⁵. The above is not an exhaustive list

Proposal 1 - Extension of the Current Free Tram Zone

I feel that consideration needs to be given to the following areas to make up a new, extended Free Tram Zone. I respectfully suggest that The Committee extends the current Free Tram Zone to the following:

1. To Hospitals and the Australian Catholic University, in or near Victoria Pde. From the Docklands, through the Hoddle Grid, along Spring St., along Victoria Pde., to East Melbourne's Hospital Precinct at St Vincent Hospital, The Eye and Ear Hospital to the east, along Victoria Pde., to the Freemasons Hospital, various hospitals in Clarendon St., close to trams in Victoria Pde and the Australian Catholic University Campus in Victoria Pde.

2. To the Sports Precinct

(i) Along Flinders St., to the Sporting Precinct via the tram track through the park to where the track emerges into Olympic Bvd.

(ii) Along Flinders St., along Wellington Pde., to the corner of Wellington Pde., and Clarendon St. This being the closest point on a tram route to The Mercy Hospital., St Vincent's Private Hospital and the Melbourne Cricket Ground.

3. To Parkville

(i) Along Elizabeth St.,

From Flinders St., along Elizabeth St and along Royal Pde.; past the Parkville campus of the University of Melbourne, its residential colleges, the Comprehensive Cancer Centre, Royal Melbourne Hospital, The Womens Hospital to the corner of Royal Pde., and College Cres.

(ii) Along St Kilda Rd., from Grant St., to Swanston St., and along Swanston St., to the current terminus at the corner of Swanston St., and Faraday St. This would take free travel past the Southbank Campus of the University of Melbourne, the RMIT University city campus, past numerous student housing apartments, past the Parkville Campus of the University of Melbourne, past Melbourne Connect and past the Dental Clinic.

I submit that a greater area for free tram travel would add to the number of people using trams in this zone.

Increased use of trams in an extended Free Tram Zone will:

- Create a feeling of welcome to the users
- Reduce stress.
- Decrease the number of motor vehicles travelling within that area.
- Create more pure air in a busy, highly populated and congested area.
- Reduce in cost of compliance:-

(i) Save on salaries paid to ticket checkers, who are responsible for ensuring compliance with respect to payment of fares by tram users.

(ii) Create savings in the books of various agencies, namely, Fines Victoria, Victoria Police and the Magistrate's Court, who do the follow up work on debt

recovery and compliance with respect to non-payment of fares.

- Provide a service to a greater segment of the population and tourists
- Encourage and provide better managed journeys for push bike riders and pedestrians

If the measure is adopted, I submit, any resulting reduction in dollar value of fines collected and fares foregone, as compared to before the introduction of the increased Free Tram Zone, would be offset by a reduced cost of compliance and increased economic value.

The beneficiaries of the suggested measure would include:

- People who are on low incomes⁶
- Frail and infirm people
- Pregnant women
- Patients travelling to hospitals
- People with a disability, who find it hard to walk even short distances
- People, who cannot use alternative transport as they do not have a driver's license, nor own a car or find hire cars too expensive
- People who are carrying goods⁷, such as books, computers musical instruments, shopping bags
- People who are carrying small children, who are unwell, asleep or tired
- People who must attend to study, medical appointments, business appointments in the area and cannot afford the cost of parking fees
- Traders and professionals, who want to attract clients to their premises in the area
- Residents of the city within the Free Tram Zone and nearby⁸
- Tourists or others not familiar with our Myki Ticketing System
- Those who are not able to top up the credit on the Myki system, whilst on the tram
- Those who cannot purchase a Myki card on a tram

Increased use of trams, in preference to using other forms of public transport vehicles, would reduce the congestion, reduce the emission from motor vehicles and provide a more manageable/safer environment for those walking, or on push bikes.

⁶Providing free transport on all tram routes to those in this group, such as full time students and Seniors may not be affordable at this stage. This paper only puts up a case for the cheaper dollar cost to the Budget by extension of the current Free Tram Zone. This measure, if implemented, will also provide **some benefit** to these groups.

⁷Given that the Southbank Campus of the University of Melbourne houses the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music and the Victorian College of the Arts and the Parkville Campus of the University of Melbourne houses many rehearsal rooms and performance spaces for this Faculty, there are many performers and students who need to take their instruments on the tram between these campuses. For this group the extension of the Tram Free Zone for the full journey between the two campuses is of great importance and will provide a significant benefit.

⁸Many will be students either from overseas or the country or Seniors

Proposal 2 - Analysis of Tram Travellers within the Free Tram Zone

I have used public transport in this city for over 60 years. I often find when travelling to the CBD, or its environs, the trams are over crowded. Furthermore, if I wish to use my car, there is not only slow travel on the roads, but also the difficulty of finding a suitable parking spot, that is reasonably priced.

In this Paper, I support a measure that will increase the number of tram users, however, I do not propose that we increase the number of trams on the tracks. Because trams travel a fixed path along the laid tram tracks, such a move would slow down the already slow tram travel even more than it is at present. Trams simply⁹, cannot pass the tram in front. In busy areas, such as along St Kilda Rd., Elizabeth St., Victoria Pde., Swanston St., Bourke St., Collins St., and Flinders St., it is not unusual to see trams stacked along the track, as if they were part of a long train. Every time the tram in front stops, the ones behind do likewise. To simply increase the number of trams would result in a slower journey for all trams on any common parts of their designated routes.

I see the tram travellers using the free zone as three distinct groups:

Group 1

Those who travel through the CBD having boarded before the Free Tram Zone,
or
those who boarded within the Free Tram Zone and travel past its boundary.

This group pays fares. They still must have a validated Myki when the tram is outside the boundary of the Free Tram Zone. They do not derive a dollar benefit from any Free Tram Zone travel.

Group 2

(i) This is a group of users, who board and alight within the Free Tram Zone.

(ii) Passengers, who travel the full distance of the Free Zone. They board the tram at one end of the Free Tram Zone and alight at the other end.

In dollar terms both 2(i) and 2(ii) would benefit from an extended Free Tram Zone. It would enable them to travel for longer, without paying a fare.

Group 2(i) travellers would have a greater number of stops, where they can board and alight without paying a fare.

Group 2(ii) would travel a greater distance at no charge, provided that they

⁹Even if shunting of trams is possible at some part of the journey, it is slow. It merely allows the tram in question to change direction but not pass any tram in front and continue along the original route. It holds up the journey of all the trams behind it. This is most often done when a tram cuts short its original journey for some reason or other. The passengers on the tram that changed direction need to change to the tram behind, which then becomes more overcrowded than it was previously

board and alight at the extremities of a Free Tram Zone.

Group 3

Those who board the tram before the Free Fare Zone and continue past the Free Tram Zone, must have a validated Myki card when outside the Free Tram Zone. Like those in Group 1, they do not derive a dollar benefit from the Free Tram Zone being made available over a larger area. In fact they may be disadvantaged by the increased time for the trams to travel in an extended Free Tram Zone and possibly by the increased congestion on the tram.

Above, I have defined three distinct groups of travellers. Each group will have a different journey pattern. Each will travel through some or all of a Free Tram Zone. This classification may be of use when modeling to predict a possible dollar cost to the Budget if an Extended Free Tram Zone is introduced. I submit that given the considerations, I have discussed already, such a cost will be relatively small compared to the economic benefits gained.

Proposal 3 - Introduction of an Express Free Bus for Travel from one extremity of the to another of the Free Tram Zone.

Congestion on public transport often is a fact of life. I read in the RACV e-News, dated January 22, 2020, an article¹⁰ on how to avoid congestion on trams for those who are travelling through the Free Tram Zone. I agree with some of the strategies outlined in the article.¹¹

Creating an alternative, free express shuttle service for the whole journey within the Free Tram Zone for a few given routes¹², would reduce this problem of overcrowding to some extent. Conversely the trams may remain overcrowded, but it may permit more people to board the trams in an extended Free Tram Zone. In either case there is a resulting increased economic good. Such an express shuttle service of course will provide a benefit regardless of

¹⁰ E-News Jan 22, 2020
RACV email to members

'.....But free doesn't always mean an easy ride. [Free city trams](#) can cause crushing crowds in the CBD until you get to the city edge where freeloaders get off. [PTUA](#) spokesman Daniel Bowen says you can often avoid the crush by simply hopping on the wrong tram.

"If you're in Bourke Street and need a number 96 tram but they're all packed then don't wait for the next 96," he says. "Instead hop on [an alternative] tram and hop off at the city edge where the free travellers hop off which leaves a seat on your number 96 when it arrives."

Walking back a stop in the wrong direction might also help you snag a seat on a crowded tram. At busy stops such as outside Flinders Street Station, it's wise to walk to a previous stop to board a tram.....'

¹¹ The article describes the groups who only travel within the Free Tram Zone as freeloaders. I disagree with that. Although they do not pay in dollar terms for their trip, they are contributing to the economic good as discussed above.

¹²Example – St Kilda Rd to the Swanston St and Faraday St Terminus

the size of the Free Tram Zone. However the benefit will be larger for a larger free travel area.

I suggest that an introduction of a few free express shuttle buses from and to the extremities of an extended Free Tram Zone would benefit all groups of tram travellers, who I have defined above. Such a bus would carry those who travel from one extremity of the Free Fare Zone to another. I do not feel that the bus needs to follow the exact route of the tram through the Free Tram Zone. Group 2(ii) would benefit most from this arrangement. For them there is the potential to save both time and money. Group 1 and 3 travellers may save time, but not dollars. Yarra Trams already run buses on special days, such as when there is strike or a disruption along their tracks.

If Group 2(ii) and Group 3 tram passengers were off loaded on a free bus in such an arrangement, Group 1 and Group 2(i) travellers, may benefit by having fewer fellow travellers on the tram, whilst in the Free Tram Zone.

Those waiting at tram stops may have a better chance of boarding a tram. However, the level of congestion on trams in the Free Tram Zone will depend on the balance between who uses the free express shuttle bus (if introduced) and the number of additional passengers able to board a tram.

In Brief

I believe that the initial initiative, in 2015, of having a Free Tram Zone in the CBD area, generated much good. Now in 2020, five years later, I feel that it would be of great economic and social benefit to have its area increased.

In an effort of to deal with a possible cost to the Budget and the possible increased numbers of travelers on trams in an extended Free Tram Zone I have provided:

- A possible analysis of tram travelers in a Free Tram Zone to perhaps be useful in modeling cost of this measure in the Budget. It highlights the fact that not all, travel for free, in a Free Tram Zone.
- An additional suggestion for a free express bus, from and to some of the extremities of the Free Tram Zone. (This would enable more passengers to use the existing number of trams,whilst traveling in the Free Tram Zone and possibly to travel in more comfort.)

I thank you for reading. I hope all or some of the suggestions in this submission meet with the approval of the Committee and are recommended for implementation.

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January 24, 2020.