

To whom it may concern,

Re: Inquiry into Expanding Melbourne's Free Tram Zone

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input into the inquiry into Melbourne's Public Transport.

With respect to the expansion of the free tram system, Council officers believe that the cost of the current operation and proposed expansion of the free tram zone would be better spent on improving public transport within outer suburbs, where there are higher percentage of private motor vehicle trips.

The travel and transport patterns in the City of Whittlesea has identified many issues and challenges within the municipality. These are:

- Residents are heavily reliant on private motor vehicle trips for transport.
- Traffic congestion is the primary community concern.
- Traffic congestion and a lack of access to public transport are more critical to residents in the northern part of the municipality, including Epping North and Wollert where public transport is limited to local bus services.
- Public transport usage suffers from a lack of accessibility and infrequency of service, reliability and general access.
- Rat-running through local residential streets by motorists seeking alternatives to clogged arterial roads impacts adversely on resident's local amenity.

By 2041, the Whittlesea City Council's population is forecast to increase by approximately 153,000 to 388,000 people (an increase of 65 percent). The impacts traffic congestion within the municipality are set to get worse if the transport infrastructure and services are not timely improved.

From an individual cost perspective, the main beneficiaries of the current free tram zone in the CBD appear to be CBD residents, students or tourists. Those who commute to and from the CBD by train don't benefit from the "free" trams. This means that the residents within the outer suburbs would have to incur the cost of a service that they don't benefit from.

Furthermore, the free tram zone has a limited ability to reduce private motor vehicle trips as CBD residents, students and tourists tend to rely on modes other than private vehicles to travel within the CBD area. The free tram zone encourages these groups to take up a tram instead of walking for shorter trips, leading to overcrowding of trams. This reduces accessibility to those commuters with special access needs. To address the overcrowding issues, there will also be a need to provide additional/ larger fleets, further increasing the cost of tram operation.

Council officers consider that the following improvements to public transport within the municipality would result in better and cost-efficient movement of people within our transport network than the proposed expansion of the Free Tram Zone. These include:

Ten Minute Premium Bus Service

As an interim measure until the train line is extended from Lalor to Wollert, a 10-minute premium bus service from Lalor railway station to Craigieburn Town Centre via Wollert will improve the daily lives of 6300 local residents in the proposed bus catchment in Epping North-Wollert. Importantly it will give users frequent access to the Mernda Train service and easy access to employment and essential services in the Epping Central Metropolitan Activity Centre.

Activity centre accessibility

Activity centres are the second main destination by City of Whittlesea residents. Major points of traffic congestion occur at activity centres. A review of bus routes will pinpoint how public transport services can provide levels of service to improve accessibility thus lessening congestion.

Bus network expansion

Council is advocating for a review of existing services to improve reliability, frequencies, span of service and more direct bus routes to help build utilisation of the bus network. There are opportunities to service popular destinations, such as activity centres and transport hubs, by building on popular routes and increasing frequencies on key routes such as the Plenty Road corridor. For example, popular destinations such as the Austin Hospital are not directly serviced by existing bus routes. Increased frequencies are needed along key north-south routes by building on popular routes in these corridors such as the 555 Epping to Reservoir.

Interchanges - Amenities, Bus and tram stops, and Priority treatments - Priority: High

Amenities - These include coordinating timetables to facilitate mode to mode trips, safe and comfortable transfer between transport modes. The provision of WiFi on vehicles and especially at interchanges would also enhance the comfort of users.

Bus and Tram stops - Improvements to bus and tram stops such as hard stands, shelters, tactiles and connecting footpaths will ensure that people can access bus and tram services in a comfortable and safe manner.

Priority treatments - Treatments such as bus and tram priority would increase reliability of these services.

Timely delivery of these transport enhancements would have significant benefits in reducing traffic congestion and providing residents with an option of a reliable, frequent, safe and comfortable public transport system.

Regards

Troy Knowling

