

29 January 2020

The Secretary  
Legislative Council, Economy and Infrastructure Committee  
Parliament House  
Spring Street  
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002

**Re: Economy and Infrastructure Committee Inquiry into Melbourne's Free Tram Zone**

I wish to make a submission to the Economy and Infrastructure Committee Inquiry into Expanding Melbourne's Free Tram Zone.

I am a Transport Engineer with 40 years of experience. I have lived and worked in Melbourne all my life and I have worked in several other countries, experiencing their urban transport systems. I am Secretary of the Institute of Transportation Engineers-Australia and New Zealand Section (ITE-ANZ) but the views expressed here are my personal views and do not necessarily reflect the views of the ITE-ANZ membership.

**The Free Tram Zone (FTZ) should be retained.**

Others have claimed that the FTZ has caused more crowding on trams and overcrowding at tram stops. However, this is a correlation, not necessarily a cause. Generally, travel to the city has increased and a shift from car travel to public transport is good for the environment. Much of the increase in crowding has been a result of more travel, rather than necessarily caused by the FTZ. Most research shows that transport mode choice is relatively inelastic – not very sensitive to price changes – particularly in the medium to long term, although admittedly the difference between a \$4.40 fare and free travel is likely to be a significant influence.

The FTZ incentivises tram travel over walking. It makes insignificant difference to the choice between public transport and car travel. Very few people have the option to make a car trip entirely within the CBD.

The key benefit of the FTZ is that it helps to service more people more quickly by reducing the need to swipe on and off. This is a huge advantage for tram operations and passenger convenience in the CBD area where loading and unloading passenger numbers are high. Eliminating the FTZ would lead to many tram door discussions: "Do I need to swipe on now? Where is my Myki card?".

High passenger numbers in the CBD mean that fare evasion is difficult to enforce. Enforcement on a crowded tram merely adds to confusion and slowing the service, as people try to swipe on or escape at the next stop. Eliminating the FTZ might encourage a small proportion of travellers to

walk instead of taking the tram a few stops, but this would be offset by extra tram delays as law-abiding people swipe their Myki card. Meanwhile, the less law-abiding would continue to take a free ride with little risk of being fined.

The FTZ is also a benefit to tourists. Melbourne does not have a good system of allowing tourists to use public transport when they are visiting for just a few days. At least the FTZ gives visitors the option to travel to tourist destinations, business meetings and hotels within the CBD without having to worry about getting a Myki card.

The FTZ encourages people to take the tram a few stops rather than walk. This has probably contributed to some of the increase in crowding in peak periods. However, this is offset by the benefit of quicker loading and unloading and avoiding the problems associated with enforcement in the CBD. And the benefits still remain in off-peak periods. The FTZ helps to create a connected CBD, which is good for business and tourism.

Strategically, the FTZ is symbolic. It sends a message to the community that the government wants us to travel by public transport rather than by car. You don't want to reverse this message.

Politically, it would be very courageous to remove free travel where it has been previously available.

### **(1) Should the FTZ be expanded?**

It should be expanded north along Swanston Street up to Victoria Street to cover the State Library and RMIT. This area still has high patronage and a high proportion of students. Most people would also regard it as being part of the CBD. I can't understand why this wasn't part of the FTZ in the first place!

I would also be willing to support it being extended south down St Kilda Road to Southbank Boulevard. This would cover the arts precinct, which is an important tourist destination, and assist students at the VCA and UoM Southbank campus.

Providing free services to the MCG on match days is also fully supported.

However, I would strongly advise against expanding the zone any further.

There is less crowding on trams outside the CBD. The crowding on St Kilda Road, Swanston Street, Elizabeth Street and Royal Parade should reduce when the Metro Rail Tunnel opens in a few years. It would be very difficult to shrink the expanded FTZ after that time.

Another important reason to limit the expansion is to retain the simplicity of the system. The boundary should be simple to remember. Signs are not enough; many people make assumptions based on what they think they understand or have heard, rather than examining the detail on an FTZ map. The FTZ boundary should match the recognised CBD boundary.

### **(2) Providing free fares for all full-time students**

Not supported. Students already have a discount. Outside of the FTZ, I believe everyone should pay something. This engenders respect for the system and a sense of consistency and fair play: everyone has to swipe.

### **(3) Removing fares for all Seniors Card holders**

Not supported. As above, Senior Card holders (including myself) already have a discount. If the government is seeking to provide relief to those with limited income, the proposal should be for those on the Age Pension and/or Disability Pension.

### **(4) New technologies that enable intelligent transport systems that improve the performance of the networks**

Fully supported, of course, if they are cost-effective. But what are these new technologies? There are no silver bullets.

### **(5) Effects and benefits of dynamic public transport pricing**

Not supported in isolation. A transport pricing system where users are charged more to travel in peak periods and less in off-peak periods has been strongly advocated by the transport profession and Infrastructure Victoria. This economic tool must be applied to private transport on roads before, or at the same time, as it is applied to public transport. To do otherwise would be to risk a mode shift to car travel and the consequential increase in road congestion and CO2 emissions.

The first step should be to implement tiered pricing on the existing tollways. The next step would be a road pricing system across the whole metropolitan road network. The last step would be tiered pricing on all public transport modes.

Any future implementation of dynamic public transport pricing should retain the FTZ at all times.

### **Conclusion**

Of course, the great majority of submissions to this Inquiry will support more free travel. People love to get something for free. But the vested interests must be counterbalanced by a broader view. The government still needs revenue to operate the expensive transport system – trains, trams, buses, cycling and pedestrian facilities, as well as roads. Melbourne needs an injection of billions of dollars into transport infrastructure and rolling stock. Increasing tram frequency is essential.

Hence, I strongly encourage the parliament to retain the FTZ with coverage limited to the central CBD area.

Yours sincerely

David Nash

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