

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

Mr Benjamin Cronshaw
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SUBMISSION CONTENT:

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I appreciate the Parliament taking time to consider how to improve public transport. Investment in public transport has many social, economic and environmental dividends. The State Government should examine all possible options to make public transport more accessible and affordable for commuters.

The Free Tram Zone is a great policy. Having a free tram service within the CBD encourages people to make the most of exploring the City of Melbourne, particularly good for tourists. There could be some advantages to extending the Free Tram Zone area. People travelling within the CBD could travel further afield without worrying about the cost. Extending the Free Tram Zone to RMIT University and the University of Melbourne (UoM) would also make the system more convenient and affordable for students. There would also be some savings from not having to employ as many ticket inspectors. The penultimate and final stations along the line to University of Melbourne seem to be popular places for ticket inspectors (clearly targeting students). I believe commuters do have a responsibility to touch on their Myki and pay the fare (rather than being, literally, "free riders" on the system). However, it does seem somewhat cruel to give out \$200 fines to students for neglecting to touch on their Myki. Extending the Free Tram Zone would be one option to streamline the system and avoid penalising students.

On the other hand, there are some issues with the proposal to extend the Free Tram Zone. Notably, those coming from outside the city (whether by train, bus or tram) would not receive any benefit from the new, extended zone. The policy could lead to greater congestion from city residents and overcrowd the system. Commuters from outside the city proper would contend with overcrowding while still paying the full daily fare. Many students study outside of the city (such as at Deakin or Monash University) and not do benefit from the Free Tram Zone either. Speaking as a UoM student, I am happy to pay the concession fare to support the public transport system. The concession rate is good value and not overly expensive. Regardless, as I commute from outside the city, extending the Free Tram Zone would not help me personally. Extending the Free Tram Zone could also lead to a decline in revenue. This could undermine the viability of the public transport system, mainly for the benefit of inner city residents.

Rather than giving up revenue, it could be invested in upgrading the system or offering more targeted discounts (such as for students or pensioners). There are proposals to make public transport more affordable, such as eliminating fares for full time students or senior citizens. This would reduce their cost of living and enable them to better utilise public transport. Reducing fares would particularly help postgraduate students, who currently must pay full fare. There is a recent program to grant free fares to people from financially disadvantaged backgrounds. This is a good, targeted approach. It eases the cost of living and transport for people that need assistance, without burdening the system overall.

There are merits to extending the Free Tram Zone. However, I believe a better approach to making public transport more affordable is not to focus on location (which helps a few people who travel exclusively in the CBD). Rather, there should be more consideration to reducing the fares for special groups who could use the assistance, such as students and senior citizens (which can help people everywhere).

There was also a point in the terms of reference on dynamic pricing. I have observed in the public transport of other countries (such as Chile and Peru) that tickets are priced according to time. Travelling during peak hour incurs full price, while there are discounts for travelling in off peak periods. If implemented in Victoria, that could be one way to spread out congestion across the day.

Thank you for considering my submission.

Kind Regards,

Benjamin Cronshaw.

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File2:

File3: