

Free Tram Zone Inquiry

RTBU Submission

January 2020



About Us

The Australian Rail, Tram and Bus Industry Union (RTBU) represents workers employed across the public transport and freight industries. We represent approximately 8000 members from all grades and classifications from administrative and salaried office workers through to operational and traditional blue collar roles. These include metropolitan train and tram operations, regional passenger services, infrastructure, rolling stock manufacturing and maintenance, as well as rail freight.

As a result broad coverage and a dense and active membership the RTBU understands issues in public transport from the lived experience and perspective of those that do the work. Representing transport workers at all levels in different roles gives access to a holistic understanding of the impacts of issues and the way they affect other areas of our network – an insight often missed through the lenses of management.

Our members take ultimate pride in running a fair, safe, efficient and reliable network. Day-in, day-out they go above and beyond to service the community that relies on public transport and freight services. As such, members want their thoughts heard on the topic of their areas of expertise and in consultation with members the RTBU works tirelessly to synthesise these views.

Community Public Transport

Public transport offers an essential service to the community. The benefits of this transport are traditionally difficult to quantify in a way that accurately represents the full extents of its value. Not only does it help take cars off the roads and offer lower carbon options for commuters, an efficient, interconnected and reliable public transport creates economic multipliers for the city.

By offering better access for the community to use public transport (be they physical, psychological or financial barriers) not only can we increase the intensity of commerce in our cities, we also boost the opportunity offered to members of the community.

Linking people with jobs, shops, schools and hospitals, sports and entertainment, dining and events we enrich our city and as a society generate value for us all to share in.

The RTBU encourages a move towards better resourced, more frequent, reliable, and connected public transport that puts people front and centre.

Why are we making this submission?

The Victorian public transport network is operated by our members. RTBU members are proud to keep Victoria moving, improving the mobility and experience of other citizens day in day out. While the RTBU will always fight to uphold working standards across the industry, we do this with a holistic view of the experience of passengers as well as the amenity the service can provide.

In recent years, RTBU members have been instrumental in providing 24 hour public transport services, have helped smooth out the disastrous technological implementation of Myki, supported major disruptions by offering customer service, updates and community liaison and community education. Members have also enhanced communications and live updates including platform and in-service announcements for commuters, facilitated signalling upgrades that have seen improvements to train services, opened new stations that have for too long missed out on much sought after customer service, and fought for and won greater gender balance in our historically male dominated industry. We have also improved passenger accessibility, worked to increase awareness of safety across the network and supported the rapid passenger growth and expanding network without additional staffing resources to meet this booming demand.

Free Tram Zone

The free tram zone unlocks the Melbourne CBD. Its introduction has seen more people welcomed onto public transport helping to bridge a hurdle for many who have not traditionally relied on the mode.

It has provided people with flexibility to improve their transport mix and has helped absorb the growing number of car journeys otherwise made within the CBD.

It has made the hop-on hop-off concept a reality, allowing workers and tourists alike to fully engage with the CBD through a reduction of barriers to access.

The success of the free tram zone is testament to the value it offers the community and should certainly be expanded.

The reasoning

Melbourne is becoming exceptionally congested. Street parking is limited and density is increasing. Key services and features such as universities, hospitals, public space and entertainment are located around the key activity hub of the CBD. As we look to maximise economic opportunity for both citizens and businesses alike, we must rethink how public services are delivered.

Expanding the free tram zone to include the proposed areas will provide greater flexibility, opportunity and access for people who find themselves within the zone helping to reduce car journeys within the CBD. We connect health hubs with educational institutions, communities with open spaces and encourage tourists to explore other culturally significant parts of our city.

Whether the Free Tram Zone is expanded or retained in its current form, capacity must be increased for trams inside the Free Tram Zone. The Free Tram Zone as it stands is a victim of its own success. Overcrowding of trams within the Free Tram Zone demonstrates that this service is valued and utilised by the community, however, there is insufficient resourcing. Other submissions to the inquiry have requested that the Free Tram Zone be discontinued to frustrations about overcrowding; these concerns would be more equitably addressed by increasing the capacity or frequency of trams.

Below is a table of key expansion zones and features picked up by each extension.

| Extension | Integration |
|---|---|
| Wellington Parade to Powlett Street East Melbourne | MCG, sporting (entertainment) Fitzroy Gardens (public space) Yarra Park (public space) Epworth Hospital, (health, warrants further extension) |
| Swanston Street to Elgin Street Carlton | University of Melbourne (education) Royal Dental Hospital (health) Lincoln & Argyle Square (public space) |
| Royal Parade to College Crescent Carlton | University of Melbourne (education) Royal Melbourne Hospital (health) Royal Women's Hospital (health) Royal Park (public space) University High School (education) Princes Park (public space) |
| Flemington Road to Abbotsford Street North Melbourne | Royal Melbourne Hospital (health) Royal Women's Hospital (health) Royal Children's Hospital (health) Royal Park (public space) |
| St Kilda Road to Commercial Road, Prahran | Alfred Hospital (health) Albert Park (public space) Fawkner Park (public space) |

Sidney Myer Music Bowl (arts, culture & entertainment)
Royal Botanic Gardens (public space, cultural significance)
National Gallery of Victoria (arts, culture & entertainment)
Arts Centre & Hamer Hall (arts, culture & entertainment)
Shrine of Remembrance (cultural and historical significance)

Fares

Public transport offers a benefit to our society well beyond the individual fare paid by any commuter. It is a service that keeps our economy ticking, our communities connected and provides accessibility to key infrastructure and services for those that need it most. While fares can often be burdensome to many within the community

Providing free or concession fares for all full-time students

Students of tertiary institutions studying full-time are often learning skills that will help transition our economy in the face of a changing skills base in our economy. Whether studying for the first time or returning to learn a new trade, skill or degree this education is of value to our state and its economy. Noting full time study often results in a diminished ability to work and earn money, consideration should be given to full-time students to lighten the financial burden imposed by transport fares.

Removing fares for all Seniors Card holders

Seniors Card holders have often dedicated over 45 years of their life to the Victorian and broader Australian economy. Their access to public transport should not be limited by their financial position.

New technologies that enable intelligent transport systems that improve the performance of the networks

Noting the RTBU's involvement in transitioning technologies as our industry continues its evolution, any changes that may affect the operations should be made in consultation with relevant workers impacted (both directly and indirectly) and their representatives. The RTBU supports innovations that will bring better services and commuter experiences that recognise and support the staff which make such improvements all possible. No human being should be disadvantaged through the implementation of new technologies, new technology should bring with it ADVANTAGE for all.

Additional Considerations

Staffing for the future

The past two decades has seen booming growth in patronage on our public transport system. While privatisation has led to a lack of desire to invest in additional services, staff and infrastructure requirements, the tide is turning.

With the network receiving much needed upgrades to infrastructure, the coming years will see further growth that will require a sharp change in staffing strategy to meet needs and expectations of the travelling public and the community at large.

Public transport staff not only operate the services, they are invaluable in the event of disruptions, congestion and customer service supporting new travellers and those with diverse needs.

The RTBU encourages additional staffing across public transport hubs to support booming patronage, improve the efficiency and on-time running, and assist passengers in need.

Overarching Community Benefits

Noting the benefits outlined in this submission, it must be acknowledged that there is an overarching common sense in increasing access to public transport. There is naturally the public good offered by public transport services, transportation owned by the people of Victoria for the benefit of all. There is the incentive of reducing car journeys and dependence on cars in already busy inner city streets. We can minimise the consumption of fossil fuels through more emphasis on sustainable and efficient transport options, and ultimately create flow-on economic benefits to the broader city through decreased congestion and better access and opportunity to commerce. For a brighter future, public transport must be viewed as an economic, environmental social multiplier not a generator in its own right, it creates economic opportunities and gives access and opportunity beyond quantifiable metrics currently used to measure the value and performance of our public transport investments.

Conclusion

The RTBU fully supports the expansion of the free tram zone on a number of fronts, recognising the need to better resource, prioritise and staff public transport in order to support the community which depends upon it. It reduces the barriers to trying or using public transport for non-traditional commuters, it encourages the use of public transport over cars in what is already very congested road space, creates connectivity between health precincts, universities and urban parklands, while also increasing the intensity of commerce that occurs in Melbourne's CBD.

It is critical that any expansion of the free tram zone acknowledges the need for additional tram priority lanes and lights, rolling stock to support growth in patronage and appropriate staffing to increase accessibility, education, safety, revenue protection, customer service and passenger information.