6 February 2020

Economy and Infrastructure Committee
Parliament House
Spring Street
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002

The Executive Officer

SUBMISSION TO ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE INQUIRY INTO EXPANDING MELBOURNE’S FREE TRAM ZONE

The City of Melbourne welcomes the opportunity to provide a brief submission which details the endorsed position of Council on the Free Tram Zone, transport pricing and new technologies to improve the performance of transport networks.

In October 2019, councillors endorsed the Transport Strategy 2030. The strategy supports effective public transport pricing to manage demand. It states that reforms to public transport pricing could help relieve traffic congestion and public transport overcrowding. Infrastructure Victoria has recommended discounting and increasing the frequencies of ‘shoulder’ services either side of the peak to spread travel demand over a longer period of time. This could complement a road user pricing scheme.

The strategy notes that reducing the cost of public transport can make it more attractive and that the free tram zone may make it easier for visitors to explore the central city. It also notes that the free zone raises some issues, such as when short walking trips are substituted by a tram ride, increasing overcrowding. Overcrowding particularly affects people with limited mobility. The time spent loading a tram typically increased by around 10 per cent during peak periods and around five per cent off peak following the introduction of the Free Tram Zone.

The strategy recommends that further investigation is needed to consider whether the Free Tram Zone is the best way to enhance access to destinations across metropolitan Melbourne.

In relation to transport technologies, the Strategy supports the integration of transport services. It notes that all transport modes should function as a seamless system for the user, supported by communications technology. Further, investigations into the use of sensor technology may provide opportunities to improve the performance of the transport system.

In 2014, the Victorian Auditor-General’s Office recommended improvements to traffic signals. This included increasing the frequency of reviews, undertaking cost-benefit analysis of traffic signal modifications and connecting traffic signals with real-time information on the location and status of buses and trams, in order to provide them with greater priority and increase reliability.
Some improvements to transport network performance could be made with existing technology, such as the optimisation of traffic signals to reduce waiting times for people walking, riding bikes, and using on-street public transport. Cities around the world are reducing signal cycle times to reduce delays. In the Hoddle Grid, the typical signal cycle takes 90 seconds. In London, many signal cycle times have been reduced to less than a minute.

Sensors have been used to improve motor vehicle performance at intersections since 1982 through Melbourne’s use of the Sydney Coordinated Adaptive Traffic System (SCATS). These sensors detect the presence and number of motor vehicles and adapt traffic signal timing to optimise traffic flow. Additional sensors could maximise intersection performance for all users. Traffic signal programming and technology must be better adapted to the central city where the majority of movement is on foot, public transport and bicycle. Reducing delays for these modes delivers the greatest economic, social and sustainability outcomes.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this feedback.

Yours sincerely

Justin Hanney

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