

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

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SUBMISSION CONTENT:

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Submission to the Inquiry into Expanding Melbourne's Free Tram Zone

The free tram zone (FTZ) was a mistake. It should not be expanded. It should be abolished, and here's why.

The FTZ was introduced as an ill-conceived pre-election sweetener, with matched support from both major parties. It was marketed as a way to help people get around the city, and encourage infrequent tram users and visitors - those unfamiliar with ticketing and routes - to use trams.

This was during a period where fare evasion on trams in the busy inner city was rife, enforcement was difficult, and often generated unwelcome publicity. The image of Melbourne as an inhospitable Public Transport city, with "ticket thugs" waiting to accost unsuspecting visitors, was something the government was desperate to end.

The implications of the hurriedly implemented FTZ were barely considered, and have now come back to bite - hard.

With the complexity and obligations of ticketing eliminated, people now jump on trams in the FTZ to travel very short distances - where once they would have walked. People now purposefully drive to the fringe of the FTZ to park in discounted garages, and walk to the FTZ to take advantage of the free trams.

Trams in the FTZ have become unbearably crowded with people travelling very short distances. The crowding has made it harder for those who need to board in the FTZ, but whose destination is outside the FTZ - those people who have actually paid a fare, and for whom trams are a means of transport, not just a shortcut, are being displaced by freeloaders.

The problem with the FTZ is that it's free for those for whom it shouldn't be free, and paid for by all other users. Regular travellers who use the Myki system to travel into or out of inner Melbourne have paid a fare, and should be entitled to use trams in the inner city. But they end up competing with and being crowded out by people who haven't paid a fare, whose only Public Transport trips for the day are within the FTZ: inner city residents, visitors, city-fringe car parkers, and shortcut travellers who could've walked. The FTZ creates a fare inequity, and a false demand for tram capacity, that displaces and disadvantages fare-paying travellers.

Public Transport should not be free. Especially in places like the Melbourne CBD where demand is high. Public Transport fares serve two purposes: the revenue helps to pay for services, but more importantly, it puts an economic value on the service, allowing the service to be compared with alternatives - like walking, cycling, and driving. Public Transport Fares can be lower than unfavourable alternatives like driving - but should not be free.

The underlying problem that existed with Public Transport fares in inner Melbourne prior to the FTZ is they were unnecessarily complex for visitors, and not reflective of utility (convenience, availability, distance travelled). The solution is: remove the FTZ, but introduce a simple, accessible, easy to comply with, inner city, short term, cordoned fare. Make it a simple fixed amount for a single trip, and a simple capped amount for all day travel. Design it for easy of use by inner city dwellers, visitors and infrequent users - but make it compulsory and enforceable, and meaningfully higher than zero. That way, everyone will pay. Visitors and short trippers will pay using the simple, inner cordon fare, and everyone else will pay with normal Myki zoned fares.

The free tram zone (FTZ) was a mistake. It should not be expanded. It should be abolished.

And if none of this rationale is sufficient to explain why the FTZ should be abolished, ask this question: why does it apply only to trams? Why does it not apply to PTV buses and trains within the inner city? Unthinkable, for the loss of revenue and overcrowding it would cause... exactly the same reasons why the FTZ should be eliminated for trams.

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File1:

File2:

File3: