

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Expanding Melbourne's Free Tram Zone

Melbourne—Thursday, 9 July 2020

(via videoconference)

MEMBERS

Mr Enver Erdogan—Chair

Mrs Bev McArthur

Mr Bernie Finn—Deputy Chair

Mr Tim Quilty

Mr Rodney Barton

Mr Lee Tarlamis

Mr Mark Gepp

PARTICIPATING MEMBERS

Dr Matthew Bach

Mr David Limbrick

Ms Melina Bath

Mr Andy Meddick

Dr Catherine Cumming

Mr Craig Ondarchie

Mr David Davis

Mr Gordon Rich-Phillips

WITNESS

Mr Peter King, Chief Executive, Melbourne Convention Exhibition Centre.

The CHAIR: Welcome to the Economy and Infrastructure Committee's public hearing for the Inquiry into Expanding Melbourne's Free Tram Zone. We welcome any members of the public watching via the live broadcast. Before we begin I would just like to read a short witness statement.

All evidence taken at this hearing is protected by parliamentary privilege as provided the *Constitution Act 1975* and further subject to the provisions of the Legislative Council standing orders. Therefore the information you provide during this hearing is protected by law. However, any comment repeated outside the hearing may not be protected. Any deliberately false evidence or misleading of the committee may be considered a contempt of Parliament.

All evidence is being recorded. You will be provided with a proof version of the transcript following the hearing. Transcripts will ultimately be made public and posted on the committee's website. We welcome the opening comments, but I ask that they be kept to a maximum of 5 to 10 minutes to ensure we have plenty of time for discussion. Could I please remind members and witnesses to mute their microphones when not speaking to minimise interference. If you have any technical difficulties, please contact the committee with the contact details that have been provided to you. Could you please state your name for the benefit of our Hansard team and then begin your presentation. Thank you, Peter.

Mr KING: Thank you very much. It is Peter King here. I am the Chief Executive of the Melbourne Convention Exhibition Centre. I think I will be fairly short here. You have received some documentation or a letter from our trust. The Melbourne Convention Exhibition Centre is one of the world's renowned business events destinations, I guess, and Melbourne does such a great job in delivering great business events along with other major events and everything, which we are well aware of—it is one of the great strengths of Melbourne. The location of the convention and exhibition centre, I think, is one of the major benefits to our ability to deliver such a great experience for our delegates, both international and interstate, as well as our local visitation.

We generate about \$1.1 billion worth of economic activity for the city and the state out of the activities of our business on an annual basis. We have somewhere between 2.5 million and 3 million visitors through the venue. It is a public venue [Zoom dropout]. Around approximately 150 000 of those delegates are associated directly with events, conferences, exhibitions, and about 250 000 of those delegates are from overseas or from interstate. So the fact that the tram stops one stop short of the Melbourne Convention Exhibition Centre is highly inconvenient and does not make a lot of sense when you are talking to people [Zoom dropout] in particular. The ease of getting around the city is one of the great benefits—getting access to the hotels and restaurants and bars and things like that—but being able to jump on a tram and come directly to the convention centre is a huge bonus, and as I said, stopping one stop short at the moment is confusing. Theoretically these people all have to go and get Myki cards to be able to access the tram to get that one extra stop. We have had examples of people being fined, which is embarrassing and creates a pretty poor impression of the state I think in that case.

Also I think from a business perspective we have a lot of major events that from a community perspective are important. The Good Friday Appeal kids day is probably an example of that. We created a day on Good Friday where the whole of the Good Friday Appeal is conducted within our venue. We have been doing this for six or seven years now. We get about 100 000 people through the venue on that day. The telecast and everything is done from the venue. So we basically give the venue over to the Royal Children's Hospital appeal. That has become a massive event, and again accessibility for people from all over Melbourne to come to the venue would only be enhanced if they could use the free tram zone.

I think that is all I have got to say, really. It would be a significant benefit to all of our delegates and attendees if they could comfortably travel that one extra stop and be able to use the facility without being challenged.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr King. Very informative and concise. We like that on the committee.

Mr BARTON: Thank you, Peter. I think your business is one of Victoria's secrets. I do not think that the public understands the enormity of what happens down there and some of the conferences you hold. Some of

those conferences bring in many thousands of people from overseas if that is correct. I am convinced that it would benefit your business and it would benefit people who are experiencing Melbourne if they could get that extra free tram stop. And just to the committee and those watching, this is what we are talking about; we are one stop short. Tens of thousands of people have to go and get a Myki card to go one extra stop, and I do not think that is a good look for us. I think it is something that Victoria as a whole can afford, and I think the commercial activity being generated there would more than offset it. Excuse the statement. There you go, thank you, Chair. Peter, anything you want to add to that?

The CHAIR: That is fine. It was a short statement, so that is okay. But, no, I get your point about that.

Mr KING: I do agree.

The CHAIR: I think Peter and I probably agree with that sentiment, but Mr Quilty might have a different opinion. It is important we hear all sides within this committee.

Mr QUILTY: Thanks for that. So basically the argument here is you want to spend \$15 million of taxpayers money so that visitors to the convention centre do not have to pay for a tram. Don't you think there might be other solutions to that? Could we include Myki passes in the cost of a ticket to a convention just as a standard thing? You could just flash your invitation or your receipt when you are on the tram to the convention centre and you get off the tram for free. That would probably be a fraction of the cost of a free tram zone. What do you think?

Mr KING: There are alternatives that we could look at like that. You are never going to capture everybody, and it does I guess logistically have some challenges, but that is a potential thing that could be done. The cost of that would need to be understood by the organiser of the event. So if there is a cost associated, who would bear that extra cost? If it is simply a case of just flashing your badge and say you are part of an international conference and hence not getting fined, then there would have to be some sort of agreement to enable that to happen. We do about 1500 events a year, so there is a lot of associated logistical issues I suppose, but you are right, it could be done in that fashion, but it would probably have to be looked at closely.

Mr QUILTY: I am pretty sure, hearing from Yarra Trams just before, they are very keen not to have an extended free tram zone, so they would probably be quite happy to come to some sort of arrangement there I would think.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Quilty. I think your video connection is a bit slow, Mr King. Feel free to close the camera if you wish to do so, because the audio is quite clear.

Mr KING: I might try and do that. I will turn off the video. There you go.

The CHAIR: That might be easier.

Dr CUMMING: It is more of a comment than a question. Your presentation was very clear that you just want an additional stop. I did not get the impression from Yarra Trams that they did not want an expansion of the network; I got the impression from the last presentation that there was a lot of congestion on that network and there possibly are opportunities to expand it. I guess also my other comment is it is not just international; it is that everyone when they visit Melbourne CBD would love to, when they are visiting a hospital, especially from country Victoria, when they are visiting hospitals in Melbourne—sometimes you need that respite to be able to go to other places, and to have those free networks would be wonderful. But obviously for myself—in the west, we would love the opportunity to get into the city really easily and the exhibition building, rather than taking the gauntlet of the tram that takes almost an hour and a half. Tim, it would probably be easier for us to get into the country than it actually is to get into the city from Footscray via a tram, so I see any expansion as a good idea for everybody.

Mr QUILTY: Catherine, if they spend \$15 million on this expansion, they will not be spending it in the west, so it is the trade-off.

Dr CUMMING: That is where I am pushing, Tim. It has to have a proper expansion.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Catherine, but like I said, I do not want this to turn into broad debate by the committee. If we could stick to Mr King's submission. I think Mr King has raised some important points about

the tourism and events sector being affected, and others have a different view about the additional costs or the alternate methods. That was raised. If there are no further questions for Mr King, I might actually allow Mr King to conclude his submission.

Mr King, on behalf of the committee, I wish to thank you and the Melbourne Convention Exhibition Centre for your submission and presentation. We understand the angle you are coming from, so we really do appreciate it. If anyone does have any further questions, we will contact you, but thank you very much for that.

Mr KING: Thank you, it is a pleasure, and I think I would support Mr Barton in the sense to help us to unlock the secrets of the Melbourne Convention Exhibition Centre, because there is a huge amount of things that go on there that I think the people of Melbourne would benefit from having easier access to. I would be very supportive of that. Thanks for your time.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much for your submission.

Witness withdrew.