

CORRECTED VERSION

SELECT COMMITTEE ON TRAIN SERVICES

Inquiry into the factors leading to and causes of failures in the provision of metropolitan and V/Line train services

Melbourne — 5 October 2009

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Mr P. Hamilton, manager, transport, City of Casey.

The CHAIR — I welcome you here this afternoon. Thank you for switching your diaries around a little bit and getting here a little earlier. We have made a bit more progress than we expected, so it is terrific that you have been able to accommodate us. We appreciate that. Mr Viney has stepped out for a minute but will be back in a couple of seconds. We are dealing with, as you know, train services. The hearings are particularly in relation to the factors that cause and lead to failures in the provision of metropolitan and V/Line train services. All the evidence taken at this hearing is protected by parliamentary privilege as provided under the Constitution Act 1975. There are some extended privileges under the Legislative Council standing orders. However, any comments you were to make outside of the hearing would not necessarily have that same privilege accorded.

The evidence being taken is being recorded by Hansard. In a few days time you will receive a transcript of the proceedings and be able to advise us if there are any errors in that transcript, but obviously there are to be no changes to the substance of the matters that are discussed and the answers given. I might at this stage invite you to perhaps make some introductory remarks to the submissions we have received, and then we will proceed to some questions.

Ms STRAIN — Thank you for inviting us here today. We are pleased to be able to present. My name is Suzie Strain. I am the executive officer of the Metropolitan Transport Forum. Cr Martin Zakharov is the secretary; he is a councillor at Maribyrnong. Paul Hamilton is from the City of Casey; he is one of our members who is a manager there.

I do not know if you are aware of the Metropolitan Transport Forum. It represents 18 metropolitan local governments. It has taken a keen interest in transport in the past 15 years. It has put out a number of publications and some research trying to look for more sustainable and effective transport in Melbourne.

We thought we would start by reiterating some of the main points of our submission. Then Paul will provide some examples from his experience at the City of Casey council to enlarge on the experiences in the growth areas.

To quickly run through and reiterate some of the main points of the MTF submission, which I am sure you have seen, as to the MTF's long time support of the rail network and the fact that rail particularly can move large numbers of people in order to support the job-intensive CBD and entertainment-intensive sporting precinct — the sort of Melbourne we talk about in Melbourne 2030 — I think we feel we have inherited this quite magnificent rail system, the extent of which is perhaps unappreciated and which suffers from a lack of maintenance and due attention to the particular strategic advantage it confers on Melbourne.

A main platform of the Metropolitan Transport Forum has long been better linkage between land use and transport. We feel there is little effective integration. There are so many facilities not connected to rail which really have high destination density, I suppose you would say — the shopping centres, tertiary institutions, hospitals — many of them in the Melbourne suburban areas with very poor transport connections, making them very car dependent. I think it is probably timely to alert, and it is hardly news, that things like climate change and fuel shortages are going to make them far more costly to service, and the people who depend on them, both the providers and the users, are certainly disadvantaged.

A question we have asked is about how rail is installed in growth areas with Melbourne expanding the way it is. I guess we feel it is important to get the transport in ahead of time and have just noted that so many of the things that get into subdivision developments these days are provided with the subdivision development and are well-planned; the headworks are done and the institutions that support our water, sewerage, power supplies and the like are active in making sure there is capacity in their system to support the growth areas.

I am old enough to remember when Melbourne was not like that. There have been some major advances made in laying out subdivisions with the proper drainage and all these sorts of works. I think even in many cases modern cabling is put in, but our public transport still lags behind in terms of the regulations and institutional requirements to get these things in place in time.

I understand one of your main interests is the failure of services, the capacity problems we have at the moment, the patronage surges which have given us so much overcrowding, and I would like to make the point that in the year 2000 the state government had a goal of 20 per cent use of public transport, 20 per cent of mechanised modes by 2020, and we have been informed by the department that we are in fact just in line with that goal, so if we had taken that goal seriously and were preparing our capacity to cope with it, the unprecedented patronage

surge would not have been unexpected; in fact, we are only in line with the goal that was set nine years ago. I suppose the MTF would like to urge you to take these goals seriously and to try and get capacity into the system, and again I suspect there is a lot of latent demand there that cannot take up the services they might like to because of the overcrowding at the moment.

Also at the moment we are looking at the climate change green paper. One of its key planks is that mode shift is very important, and if mode shift is going to be possible, the capacity needs to be there ahead of time. People cannot shift when there is no room for them to shift, to state the obvious, I guess.

The other issue that has arisen recently is the breakdowns in summer with the extreme heat and all the problems that ensued. The understanding we have anyway is that that is largely lack of long-term maintenance. I understand the operators are responsible for some short-term maintenance as built into their contracts, but the long-term cycling maintenance that goes into rail network, as I understand, needs to be better attended. Again, just as a comparison, something local governments are well aware of: a lot of long-term maintenance and cyclic maintenance goes into the road networks, and the types of failures of the system that could not be tolerated on the road network because of the legal liability implications are the sorts of things, I guess, that are tolerated in the rail network. There has been a lot of work over that with the Road Management Act to forestall and do timely maintenance, and I again encourage perhaps systems like that to be thought of with the rail network.

The only other point I would like to make is I think there is a lot of opportunity in the way the service is operated at the moment. I caught the train here today and I could think of five points which were demonstrated to me including the failure to attend to customers' needs, the lack of interchanges and the lack of data that comes out to help local governments plan better around stations and service those areas better, which certainly is an opportunity they could take up. We have concern with level crossings. If we get increases in services, level crossing closures are going to naturally increase, which is going to impact severely on the road network — not only on the car network, but also on the car movements and also on the other cross-town public transport buses and trams — so we urge you to consider the implications of level crossings and implications for the rest of the network if we manage to get our services at a more frequent level.

They are some of the main points we have tried to put in our submission which have been raised by our members over time, and I will now hand over to Paul with some reflections from Casey.

Mr HAMILTON — Casey is a member of the Metropolitan Transport Forum, but we also put in a separate submission as a council on our own. I will reproduce that submission and circulate it around in a summary format. I will not go through it line by line, but I will just go through and try and reinforce some of the issues facing Casey.

We do not pretend to be rail operators and understand what is the best way of managing the rail system, but I can comment on the impacts on our community. Casey is on the south-east fringe of Melbourne. It is part of the growth area. It is a rapidly growing area. There is a very high reliance in Casey on the private car but the rail services as well, even though they are a small component of the trips that people use.

The rail services are under a lot of pressure and are heavily utilised to the point where people struggle to get into a carriage to come back out to Casey. The service is split at Dandenong, which is just on the Melbourne side of our municipal boundary, into two corridors — the Cranbourne line and the Pakenham line. After the service is split, we have a 20-minute service in the morning. The frequency in the morning peak is 20 minutes, so there is not a high level of service compared to other areas of Melbourne. By about 7.30 the trains coming through Casey on each line are already getting to capacity. By the time you get to Dandenong and a couple of stations beyond Dandenong the carriages are becoming full, and people struggle to get onto the trains. There are a number of locations where we are asking for new stations to be installed. They have been planned. The communities are going in there and the communities are established, but still they do not have access to those stations — the key ones being Lynbrook and Cranbourne East.

There are issues also around accessing the stations and park-and-ride facilities. The government has spent a lot of money in recent times putting in additional car parks around stations, but these car parks are full by 7.30 in the morning and people are struggling to get access to trains. Our local bus services are not particularly good connections to the station. Therefore, it makes it harder for people to use public transport as a complete trip.

Going back to some of the issues that affect the performance levels, Connex undertakes passenger counts on the network. It usually does it in two periods of the year. It does sections of the rail network to work out the total number of passengers on a train through the different sectors. Of the surveys that we looked at, the surveys from October 2008 showed that on the Pakenham line coming through Casey by 7.30 a.m. there were already overcrowding issues, which continued past 9.00 a.m. The morning peak is quite crowded early on, and during the afternoon services coming out from Melbourne are already starting to be overcrowded from 3.30 p.m., and this goes on for several hours.

Another aspect of the line that affects our commuters is that it takes an hour to get from Melbourne out to Narre Warren. It is quite a long trip. If you are not able to get a seat, it is a long time to be standing. I have had experiences where I have come into meetings here — today I came in by car because I was not sure what time we were finishing — and I have left a VCAT panel hearing just after 4 o'clock and boarded the train at Parliament station and not been able to get a seat. I have been struggling to actually get in the door at Parliament station. The trick is you need to walk to the Flinders Street station to get on the train before it comes around the loop. I was caught in the doorway area out to Clayton; with a number of people still trying to get on and off I was not able to manoeuvre into the carriage. That is a typical trip for people coming out of Melbourne to get to Casey during the peaks.

There is also the issue of a high level of trains running off schedule: they are running late. By running late, anything within 6 minutes is considered to be running on time. Across the overall network the average performance is 7.2 per cent of trains run beyond the 6-minute frequency, but on the Pakenham line this is close to 13 per cent or 14 per cent. What it means is that the trains have long headways in between — 20 minutes or more in between. When the train comes in more than 6 minutes overdue, when it comes in 10 minutes overdue, all the people who were going to get the next train are getting onto the train that comes through late. It is leading to the overcrowding issues and it is making it much harder.

Casey is an area where significant growth is going on. Our population at the moment is about 240 000. We are planning for a community that could be anywhere between 350 000 and 400 000 depending on what happens with the change in the urban growth boundary. If it remains as is, in the next 20 years we could have over 350 000. If the urban growth boundary changes, it could be another 50 000 people in Casey. In Cardinia, which is through to Pakenham — from Officer, Beaconsfield through to Pakenham — currently the population is around 65 000 or 70 000. It is planning in the same sort of period to be going to 150 000 people. That is a significant number of people who will need access to train services, so the level of service and the frequency of trains will need to increase considerably to pick up on that.

We touched on the fact that in Casey's land use planning we have allowed for additional stations to be provided. Lynbrook station is one. The estate around in Lynbrook has been established for a number of years. Lynbrook station has been announced in the Victorian transport plan. We are hopeful now that it could be constructed; in the next one to two years that should be opening.

An issue that we have with the scope of the works, though, is that, whilst the government has allowed \$35 million for a station, which is a very substantial amount, what it will be putting in is two platforms, car parking and a weather shelter that is probably not much bigger than this table. We have two other stations in Casey that have similar levels of service — the Hallam station and the Merinda Park station. They are not manned, they do not have public toilets and they have minimal weather protection. As I said, people travel for an hour out of Melbourne to get to these stations. There are no public toilets. If they are caught short, there are issues as to how they deal with that. The fact that they are not manned and they are in isolated locations is a security concern. We are suggesting that all stations in Casey should have a minimum level of service. We would be hopeful that the government would take that into account.

The Cranbourne East station is one that has been planned for a number of years. It was an election commitment of the incoming Bracks government in 1999. It was later changed to an extension of the train-link bus service, which links from Cranbourne station — which is end of the line at the moment — out to where the Cranbourne East station is planned. We have a bus that meets every train, inbound and outbound, but we do not have the station as yet. The community is developing around that area. We need to make sure that the stations go in as the community goes in, otherwise they will bypass the trains and just keep going in their cars.

The key issues for Casey really are the provision of the additional stations, making sure that all the stations are manned and have facilities such as public toilets and increasing the parking at the stations, but recognising also that you will never be able to build enough car parking spaces at the stations. We really need to increase the local bus services feeding into the stations.

Attached to the submission that has been circulated today is a letter we received from a resident dated 17 September. It was an unsolicited letter that was sent through seeking assistance from council. The resident lives in Narre Warren, within 3 kilometres of the station. They would prefer to be able to catch the bus to the station. They work in Melbourne and need to be here by 9 o'clock and work until 5 o'clock. The resident is finding that the local bus service is not reliable enough to meet with the train service and is not able to use it as the mode of transport to get to and from the station. They are also finding that the car park at Narre Warren station is full by 7.30 a.m.; by a bit after 7 o'clock it is already filling up.

This person is able to catch a 5 o'clock train from Flinders Street back to Narre Warren. But, as I said, it is a one-hour trip. When they get to Narre Warren there is a local bus service that goes through their estate, reasonably close to their house. But there is only a couple of minutes difference between the time the train comes in and the scheduled departure time for the bus. That is at 6 o'clock or just after — at 6.05 p.m. the bus moves out. If the train is delayed at all, they miss that bus. The next bus is 40 minutes later. It is quicker to walk home but this is a lady who needs to think about her personal safety. It is a one-hour trip to Narre Warren. If the train is 5 minutes late and you miss the bus, it is a 40-minute wait until the next bus or you walk. These are the issues that we are dealing with.

You will see another handout there which covers some key facts regarding journey to work trips. As I touched on earlier, in Casey the majority of trips are by private vehicle. The issues we have with the level of service of public transport, whether it be buses or trains, is such that people choose to use their cars. Only about 6 per cent of trips in Casey are by public transport. We have about 100 000 people in the employment field and of those 75 000, or 75 per cent, travel out of Casey. Only 25 per cent of the jobs are located in Casey itself.

Workers travel to destinations outside of Casey, typically in the corridor of Dandenong, Knox and Monash and across into Braeside. A lot of those trips are not to an activity centre serviced by train but some of them are. There is a reliance on bus services. Any of the work the government is doing about upgrading Dandenong as a transit city needs to take into consideration linking local bus services with the opportunities of catching a train to Dandenong. About 6 per cent of our employees travel to Melbourne as a complete trip. That is just some general, practical evidence.

The CHAIR — Thank you.

Mr LEANE — There are a lot of advocacy groups for public transport. This morning we heard from the UUC and the PTUA. I am interested in their interaction with the MTF. Considering the nature of your grouping with the ETC and other groups like that, are there members of the MTF who are members of the ETC and how do you interact with them? I am also interested in the genesis of the MTF — how it formed and currently what expertise it draws on as far as rail operation expertise is concerned?

Ms STRAIN — Your first question is about the other local government group?

Mr LEANE — Yes, your interaction with them.

Ms STRAIN — I think at the moment Manningham is a member of both the ETC and MTF. I suppose the ETC feels its interests are largely confined to the east so has chosen to remain slightly distinct with that eastern focus whereas the Metropolitan Transport Forum I guess has taken a metropolitan-wide view. It has tried to deal with the inner city issues, the medium issues and the interface councils as well. We are certainly sympathetic with each other and talk quite frequently. I think we are due to go to the next meeting so we coordinate on issues, share information and support each other where appropriate. I think it is just a geographical focus: the ETC has chosen to attend largely to the issues in the east and feel they have not got the energy to embrace it all. We try to be metropolitan-wide.

Cr ZAKHAROV — The Western Transport Alliance is in similar situation where some are in both and some are separate. We probably deal with slightly broader issues of course, being a metropolitan-wide group. But we try to foster communications; it is one of the main things we do.

Ms STRAIN — Your second question was what we draw on.

Mr LEANE — Yes, as far as drawing on rail operation expertise from the MTF's point of view.

Ms STRAIN — We certainly have a lot of expertise sitting in the councils, and we also work quite closely with the Department of Transport; we meet with them regularly. I think I have referred to this and circulated the notes: we actually hosted a rail capacity forum about 18 months ago where, working with the Department of Transport, we drew together academics and people from the NGOs; we had some consultants join in as well with some of their expertise. We ran a rail capacity forum looking at overcrowding and issues of the patronage increases and also the way the network was operated because, as you know, there has been a variety of opinions around about whether we could manage more trains on the network and these sorts of issues.

We hosted that within the Department of Transport. It was chaired by Lester Townsend, from the DSE at the time, who has taken a keen interest in public transport. It was very well chaired and mediated and people were able to talk comfortably with each other about some of the issues. We had the operators there as well. I actually circulated the notes with our submission. I guess we have tried to take a broad strategic view. Being in the position of having a good support base of local governments, we also try to talk productively with the various sectors. While we might not have all the expertise within our organisation, we do have some good links into expertise. For example, recently we spoke to Connex and Yarra Trams about their tenure and their views for the future.

Mr LEANE — That is good. Similar to the question I asked the PTUA today, with the introduction of the extra trains and the opportunity of a new timetable with extra services, will the MTF and the City of Casey take the opportunity to put a wish list into the DOT about where you would like to see extra services? Is that a process — —

Cr ZAKHAROV — Absolutely, yes. We are preparing a budget submission at the moment with a lot of detail in exactly that area, especially around headways and what we feel is possible. We tend of course to focus on local government issues like planning and so on, interchanges — those sort of things come up a lot. But certainly we would definitely have some strong opinions about that type of thing, yes.

Mr DRUM — Paul has been able to give us an explanatory snapshot of the issues surrounding Casey, but as the forum actually consists of 18 councils, would you consider that most of the issues Paul raised to be similar across this whole group of councils? Is there anything unique out there in Casey, other than it being a growth area? Are those the issues that are commonly raised when you have your meetings?

Ms STRAIN — Yes, I would say those issues are echoed across the councils, certainly across the growth areas. Hume and Whittlesea are both members and both are suffering very similar issues — rapid growth, certainly investment in public transport not keeping pace with growth, which is compounded by difficulties getting to the stations with the bus networks and things like that not combining with the rail services. I would say we would certainly echo Paul's experience.

Mr HAMILTON — Possibly the advantage we have in the morning is that we can get a seat because we are at the start of the line. If you are anywhere further in than Dandenong or Springvale, then you know you are not going to get a seat because they are all already taken. Coming back out from the city, it depends on where you are jumping on and off. Certainly for our residents who are coming back, if they are leaving town, it is a long way to stand. But it is not just our residents that are in those crowded trains coming right back through. As I said, in my experience the train was out to Clayton before I was able to move down the carriage and everyone else who travelled that section was in that same situation.

Ms STRAIN — The other thing we find is that Whittlesea is now well beyond the end of the Epping rail line. That line will now move to South Morang as we know, but there is still development in Mernda and going further north. At least Casey and Hume are on the main rail line and they do have a service as such, but there is actually no service in the growth areas in Whittlesea at all. The reservation of land is there.

Mr DRUM — One of the frustrations that we have in Bendigo in relation to parking is when you go to pick somebody up from the station. You only plan to be there for 3 minutes to pick up somebody who is turning up on the train, but you cannot get a parking space because all the commuters have taken them. It has far-reaching consequences.

Cr ZAKHAROV — For sure. As you move towards the city, down every rail line you find all those issues actually increase. More and more people cannot get a park further out, so they will try the next one further in and you get more and more congestion. A lot of the inner city councils are finding they have big congestion issues around stations now, just because of those sort of problems.

Ms STRAIN — The other thing that relates to that is that there was a lot of support from our members for getting rid of zone 3 because that used to distort the parking a lot. You have probably heard that from other people but certainly we hear that. Banyule, for example, is constantly saying that they will get parking imbalances and local congestion because people will be moving to a zone 1 station and all these sorts of things. I am from the Sandringham line and we have got two stations on the end which are in zone 2 and the rest of it is zone 1, so obviously people drive to a station at the end of zone 1 and distort the parking. So that is another issue.

Cr ZAKHAROV — Sure, we could go through lots. There are big problems with interchanges: they are not really working as well as they should. Those types of bus-tram-rail modal changes are very difficult, and they do not always work at all.

Mr DRUM — Have you any idea why would that be the case? Why would we not be able to get interchanges working better and in coordination?

Cr ZAKHAROV — You would think so. I do not know if you want to go through it. I think they could look at simple things like communication set-ups for drivers of different transport modes. A train is running late and the bus goes before it arrives — those sort of things happen all the time.

Ms STRAIN — I think a lot is expected of the bus network, too. They run to different headways. One of the submissions that we are putting through to the state government for the budget is to consider running the same clock face for all services. Some research we did some years ago for the north-east area strongly recommended operating a 15-minute clock face, so that all the services were at 15 minutes or half an hour and you could adjust your services around that. It would be much easier for people to use and much easier for the bus services and things to at least start to move towards some sort of coordination. Whereas at the moment you might have, on my line for example, 15-minute rail frequencies and then the local bus has a 20-minute frequency. you might get one to coordinate but it is very difficult to run it as a coordinated service. Because the buses are often running through the local networks and trying to meet trams, that is not necessarily the only thing they do. I think you have got to start thinking about what that bus is doing and run it for that purpose. I think then you would probably start to get a dedication to the task and that would become a priority.

Mr BARBER — I have a question for Mr Hamilton. From this chart you have given us, about 52 per cent of your workers either live and work in Casey or come over to Dandenong next door, whereas only 10 per cent have had to go through this experience of going all the way into the city and possibly standing up for a large part of it. When you are designing new subdivisions or new suburbs out in Casey, at what point is the government able to tell you about the likely public transport provision that will be made for each of those suburbs or subdivisions?

Mr HAMILTON — The process we go through is that we develop what we call a precinct structure plan which sets the blueprint for how the area goes. Through that process we make sure that the network, whether it be road or where we think a station should be, is identified in the precinct structure plan; and typically collector roads are designed to make sure that there is an efficient network for buses to get through. In Casey's situation we have two locations where we are expecting stations to be placed and we are trying to plan communities, taking that into account.

The infrastructure we would have control over, which is the road network — cross-sections of a road to make sure it facilitates a bus — is put in place through the precinct structure plan for our council's approval of the network. As to when a bus service will be introduced or when a train station will be constructed, we have no power over that. That is a state government decision, and it is really up to the government as to when it will make that announcement. There are no commitments ahead of time as to when those services will be introduced.

We do have estates rolling out. For quite some time we will have no bus services at all, and for a longer time after that we will have minimal bus services. The Lynbrook estate has been in place for a number of years, and

the station is not there. The Cranbourne East estate, which is developing to one side of the Hunt Club estate, is the one side where Cranbourne East station is expected to be. We are currently trying to quarantine, through a planning process, the land immediately next to where the station would be, because we are not really sure what size the station will be and what sort of footprint it will take.

Mr BARBER — And yet you want certain types of development around the station at the same time?

Mr HAMILTON — Yes. The transit-oriented development concepts are what we are trying to achieve around the stations and also around activity centres, but it is quite a difficult process for the council, as the planning authority, to be approving developments that will go in with higher density or less parking, or whatever way you want to deal with it, to attract that, but there is no tie to when that public transport will be provided.

Mr BARBER — So when you get these minimal bus services, how long is it generally from the time a subdivision is built to when the minimal service is in place; and where does that bus take you if there is no train station to take you to?

Mr HAMILTON — At the moment the buses would be rolled out as a local network; so typically as the estates filled in enough that there was potential to put a link through, then there would be an incremental adjustment to the bus service. Those buses tend to go back to an activity centre and the activity centre may or may not have a station.

As to how long you wait for the bus service to go through there, part of it relates to how well the road network links to somewhere else, but the majority comes back to a decision as to when the bus contracts are expanded and provision is made. It can be quite some time, and by that I mean that we would have estates that have been there for several years and still do not have a bus going through there.

Mr BARBER — Could this explain why Casey is now increasingly reluctant to see the urban growth boundary expanded in your municipality?

Mr HAMILTON — Casey certainly does have a concern about the investigation area that has been identified, because it sits further out on our boundary in an area that is going to be difficult to service; it is set in between the two train lines but without particularly good connections to either, and by the time you get to that area of Casey it is probably 10 kilometres between the two trains lines. To be able to get local bus services that link to a train station and then link to where you are going as a place of employment, it is not going to be a very efficient network.

Mr BARBER — So it is fair to say that transport is a major part of the concern in relation to that expansion for your council?

Mr HAMILTON — The council had a number of concerns with the expansion. It came back with a preferred option, which was a consolidation of the investigation area to a northern part of what was initially planned, and that would have allowed you to get some connections back, future connections into Cardinia where there is an employment corridor planned, as well as connections back towards the north. The southern section of the investigation area is land which we believe has a high agricultural value. It is land which is serviced by the third pipe, so serviced by class A recycled water, which means it has drought-proofed market garden and agricultural-type land, and we believe there is probably better value to the community as a whole to continue to maintain those areas for that purpose rather than to continue to extend the urban growth boundary. The council has a position that has allowed some expansion but not to the extent that the total investigation area has envisaged.

Cr ZAKHAROV — I might add that other councils, for instance, Hume, have had issues around this same problem of transport; in Hume's case it is a SmartBus link, which then moves, and they settle on planning around that line, and then it is another road suddenly.

Mr BARBER — That is the problem with building a suburb around a bus line, which can be moved, as opposed to a train line, which is very unlikely to be moved.

Cr ZAKHAROV — Yes, but unfortunately the local government ends up wearing the issue.

Mr O'DONOHUE — Mr Hamilton, you have not mentioned the issue of level crossings in your submission. You previously mentioned train capacity and said the train network in Casey is operating at capacity, particularly during peak hour, and that you would wish to have more trains, but of course that would mean the booms would be down, for example, at Clyde Road and Pakenham railway line and other places in the city of Casey which are having traffic congestion problems. Do you want to talk about that issue of grade station and level crossings?

Mr HAMILTON — I can certainly provide some comment, yes. In Casey there are probably 11 locations, off the top of my head, that are existing at grade rail crossings and potentially may need to be upgraded over time to a grade separation. I do not expect all of them would need to be because of the traffic conditions on the roads that are there, but on the Pakenham line, Clyde Road is gridlocked in the peaks and there needs to be something done, whether it is a grade separation, duplication or some sort of treatment there. Hallam Road, which is through an industrial area next to Hallam station, is again a single carriageway arterial that needs duplicating. The implication is a level crossing. The difficulty with those locations is that they are right next to train stations. The level crossing grade separation may resolve some of your traffic conditions if your priority is for the roads, but there is a significant cost, and they also have implications as to how you access the stations. I do not know that there is an easy answer in those particular locations.

I think the issue for Casey with level crossings is more to do with what happens between Casey and Melbourne. Again, we do not pretend to have an answer but the government initially talked about a third track or triplification of the network from Melbourne back out to Caulfield or to Springvale to try and get that additional capacity in there. Right through that area there are again a number of level crossings which you potentially have to deal with. On the Pakenham line there are also freight movements, and those movements could increase. Overall, if we increase the usage of the rail network, it is going to have significant impacts on the north-south road network — and there are some big arterials that cross those lines: Springvale Road and a number of other locations.

The Victorian transport plan has talked about the tunnel through the city as a way of improving capacity through Melbourne. The view from the government and the Department of Transport is that to increase the capacity in Casey you need to deal with the bottleneck that is the city loop and through Flinders Street. I do not have enough expertise to say whether that is the answer or not, but I suppose Casey is saying our residents need a better level of service, and if it means that you need to be putting in tunnels and doing additional works, then we are saying you need to get on with it and do that. It may be that if you put a tunnel under the CBD, they need to look at that tunnel coming out to Caulfield or somewhere to provide that extra capacity instead of the triplification which will have the issue of grade separation.

It is a very difficult issue for the transport planners, particularly in relation to the arterial networks and being able to manage the high road volumes going across the rail line with the demand for better train services and more frequent times when the boom barriers are down.

Cr ZAKHAROV — This is also becoming a problem in a lot of inner city areas too. In Maribyrnong we have level crossings that are closed for 8 or 10 minutes at a time now. We might get four or five trains coming through: the metropolitan trains and country trains are all on the same track. There is no easy answer.

Just on that issue, this is probably more of an inner city problem but the amenity impact from noise especially in general is starting to become an issue. Where use of the tracks increases, we start to get people complaining about large buildings being built on the tracks that reflect more noise and there is nothing to cover it. Queensland apparently has at least guidelines on noise levels around rail, which we do not have down here. There is nothing to really go on, unfortunately, so it is another problem that will increase.

Ms STRAIN — Something that has come up on that topic is that on occasion — and it will depend on the site configuration — there might be opportunities to drop down the rail at those points, deck over and use that, release some land. If you are trying to intensify around railway lines and you have the station near the level crossing, you have some more work with the development opportunities. I think we talked about this with our Darebin member at some stage where they have activity centres they are trying to develop. There are possible works, anyway, of dropping, decking and doing some separations in those ways, which can then release some active space which will then perhaps make it worthwhile for other reasons.

The other thing I would like to say just on the issue of level crossings is I know there are issues around double-decker trains, but if you can increase the capacity of a train without actually having to have two trains, there are opportunities there for one level crossing closure and you can double the number of people going on the train. Sydney has double-decker trains and there are problems, I gather, with dwell times, but you are carrying twice as many people with just one driver. Anyway, that is perhaps something to be modelled or considered or explored a bit further. I think in Melbourne our members are coming and saying to us they are worrying about these level crossings closures.

The CHAIR — I think the dwell times have Sydney moving away from double-decker trains actually.

Mr O'DONOHUE — I just have one additional question for Mr Hamilton. You mentioned in your submission that there is no firm commencement date for the Cranbourne East station. It is listed in the transport plan as a medium-term project. Have you had any rough time line given to you from the government for that project?

Mr HAMILTON — Our understanding of medium term is 2013 to 2016, but there is no funding commitment in the current budget. We are not aware of specific plans being drawn for it. I know that they have got a consultant looking at the preliminary planning stage for the Cranbourne East line but it has not gone beyond that. We are not sure if the 2013 to 2016 time line means planning for the station or delivering the station.

The CHAIR — I thank you very much. Again, thank you for coming in early as well; we really appreciate that. The Hansard transcript will come through for you to have a look at, and if there are any issues, please raise them. Thank you for your contribution.

Committee adjourned.