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 — 6 October 2009

Members

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Mr B. Carolan, chief executive officer, Metlink Victoria Pty Ltd.

The CHAIR — The committee welcomes Mr Carolan to the hearing this morning. As you are aware, the committee is inquiring into factors leading to and causes of failures in the provision of metropolitan and V/Line train services. The evidence taken in this hearing is protected by parliamentary privilege under the Victorian Constitution Act 1975 and also some extended privilege under the Legislative Council's standing orders. However, evidence repeated outside this inquiry might not necessarily carry that same privilege, so you need to be aware of that. All evidence is being recorded by Hansard reporters and a transcript will be made available to you within a few days for you correct any minor errors, but clearly not for substantive matters.

At the outset I invite you to make some introductory remarks. We have your submission and we thank you for that. Thereafter we will proceed to some questions.

Overheads shown.

Mr CAROLAN — Thank you, and good morning to all members of the committee. I will make some introductory remarks, which basically just work through the handout you have with you.

I have been chief executive officer of Metlink since it was formed in 2004. Metlink was created to deliver marketing information and customer information, and those sorts of services for the public transport network. Compared to some other participants in the broad public transport industry, we are a small organisation. Currently we have about 75 employees. Last year our turnover was a fraction over $35 million. Around about 70 per cent of that funding is provided by government, and the balance is provided by the operators and some other sources.

We operate under a services agreement with the director of public transport. We are Metlink Victoria Pty Ltd, so our shareholders are 50 per cent each Connex and Yarra Trams, but we operate, as I say, with all four operating entities, including the Bus Association Victoria and V/Line (slide 2) as equivalent stakeholders to the bigger metropolitan operators. Obviously, as you can see from that diagram, our services agreement with the director centres everything with the director, just as he holds the franchise agreements and the operating contracts with the operators and with the Transport Ticketing Authority.

It is fully intended that Metlink's role continue under the new franchises that are about to commence. Our shareholding, currently held by Connex and Yarra Trams, will transfer to the new franchisees semi-automatically. It is a condition of their franchise that they take on the Metlink concept, if you like, and in that sense, shareholding as well. Our function will more or less continue through the new franchises just as it has in the current franchises since 2004.

Among the roles we play — I mentioned marketing and customer information already, and behind these is a lot of market intelligence analysis. It is certainly one of our responsibilities to be involved in that sort of activity. Among that is analysis of patronage trends and, hopefully, the underlying causes for those trends. Patronage on metropolitan public transport reached a low point in Victoria around about 30 years ago. Since then there have been many years of what I would call slow but steady growth in all modes. This chart (slide 3) is not just trains, it is all three modes. It was followed by very strong growth in the last decade and the last few years in particular. The particular slide shown stops at 2007–08. In 2008–09 the network patronage was up very close to the top of that graph at about 490 million journeys through that year. The growth in the last few years has been very rapid.

In the case of metropolitan trains (slide 4), the growth follows a similar pattern. This graph follows the whole 20th century. The low point was about the same; the early 1980s was the low point for metropolitan patronage on trains, and the same pattern is followed in a sense, only more so, for trains as distinct to trams and buses. Metropolitan trains have had growth of about 80 per cent in the last 10 years, and 58 per cent in just the past five years.

This chart only graphs metropolitan patronage, but V/Line patronage has grown around about 80 per cent in the last three years, and that follows the completion of the regional rail project. I assume the committee is speaking to V/Line as part of the inquiry and you can talk to them about that as well.

The growth rates in metropolitan train patronage in Melbourne are much faster than has been experienced elsewhere in Australia, and for that matter pretty much anywhere else in the world. They really are quite extraordinary growth rates. Having said that, Brisbane and Perth have exhibited fairly strong growth in recent

years. There is a sort of hierarchy, if you like, with Melbourne followed by Brisbane and Perth which are also strong, and the other cities not so strong.

I am also aware that in some earlier days of the hearing there has been some debate about just what patronage is and how we measure it. This slide (slide 5) attempts to give you some idea of how we measure it in the metropolitan area. For train mode we carry out some statistically-based surveys to identify the proportion of people who are validating their tickets against those who are not. For the train mode around 62 per cent validate their ticket, according to the surveys, and 37 per cent to 38 per cent do not. Based on that we have a Metcard database that allows us to identify the total population of validations that occur, and we can then use the results of the sample survey to factor up the validations to patronage.

There is a step in the middle. On the train system people can make a journey that involves more than one boarding of a vehicle. People may transfer from train to train at Caulfield or Richmond or North Melbourne or Camberwell. They only enter through validators once, but they may board two different vehicles. Once we factor up to get what we call system entries on this slide, we then factor that up again by about 5 per cent to end up with the patronage number. This makes it comparable with past series.

Obviously, the means of estimating patronage has changed over the great length of time shown on the previous slide, but the way this technique works means that the numbers are comparable across that entire time period. It also means that the way we are counting patronage in this sense is then consistent for train, tram and bus where it is not so obvious that people might be making transfers between the different vehicles as it is on the train system where it may simply be across a platform; but many tram and bus passengers make the same connection. That is the methodology, and obviously there may be some questions on that a bit later on.

In saying that Melbourne's growth, as you can see by the right-hand side of that graph (slide 6) with the kink upwards, has been quite strong in the last 10 years or so. It is much harder to identify because of the scale, but you can see, if you look very closely, that Perth and Brisbane are the next best, if you like, whereas Adelaide and Sydney have been relatively flat in usage terms.

The CHAIR — As you said, this stops at 2007. Are you aware whether Brisbane has spiked further because of the bus program they have put in place in the last couple of years?

Mr CAROLAN — Yes.

The CHAIR — Has there been a more significant spike for Brisbane in 2008?

Mr CAROLAN — Yes, in the last year or two. Both Perth and Brisbane have spiked for unique reasons. Perth has spiked because of the building of the Mandurah railway; about 30 per cent of its total train patronage is just due to one new route which has been there for a bit less than two years. Brisbane has invested a lot in its inner urban bus ways, so there are spikes there. But nonetheless, the graph would not change much; Melbourne would still be comparable.

Switching tack for a moment, one of Metlink's other roles, obviously, is to give information out to customers in good times and bad. I thought it would be worth including a couple of charts that show what occurs with our website and call centre, including during the heatwave period earlier in the year. We have shown three dates just for comparison. There was the Oaks Day situation of last November, the heatwave in January and then 25 September, which was grand final eve just a week or two ago.

If you switch between the slides in your packs, you will see that there are many more website visits (slide 7) these days than there are calls to the call centre (slide 8). The website is far more important for passenger information than the call centre numerically these days by a factor of about 10. We will see on the next slide that the 40 000 is about equivalent to 4000 in call centre terms. The website visits certainly kicked up, not so much on Oaks Day last year due to the circumstances where people were already at Flemington when the issue happened.

During the heatwave it certainly spiked, and then on grand final eve it spiked even more than the average day with people wanting to know how to get to the football, and as it turned out, also because there was an incident between a train and a car on the same day and people would have become concerned as to whether services were going to be affected the next day.

The call centre is proportionately more volatile in certain circumstances, and certainly during the heatwave the call centre volumes became exceptionally volatile. You can see that from an average daily usage of around 4000 calls it jumped to well over 6000. That is an indication that people were extremely concerned to find the latest information about what level of service would be available to them, particularly as the evening peak services to get people home from work were evolving in real time, if you like, during that period.

To reiterate what I was saying about the way people like to get their information these days, Metlink has had a journey planner since 2006 via its website (slide 9). We are now up to 1 million trips a month being planned using that journey planner. The journey planner gives people door-to-door information. It is not just, 'I am at Flinders Street station'; it will give you from your home address to the final destination you are intending to get to; and it will give you the best mode of travel to get there using maybe a single mode or using effectively all four modes, including V/Line.

This is a statewide journey planner, not only metropolitan. The usage of the journey planner grows, grows and grows. Increasingly of course these days people are doing that and using mobile technology as well. This is available through iPhone technology and will shortly be available through most other 3G-enabled phone handsets. People want their information at their fingertips when they need it, just as we do in every other facet of our daily lives.

Switching back to our role of market understanding and market analysis, we certainly attempt to understand at a slightly deeper level what passengers want and what the community wants out of its public transport system (slide 10). During 2008 we carried out some national surveys covering every city in Australia trying to identify what the communities in the different cities around Australia wanted and how they wanted their public transport networks to develop, or for that matter, their transport networks generally. We repeated part of that survey in February this year, mainly to check if the impact of the global financial crisis since 2008 had impacted on their preferences.

The response to the survey that was pretty resounding was that the community really has come to grips with the fact it wants the public transport system in Melbourne to be as effective as it possibly can be. They see investment in public transport to be of an extremely high priority, as you can readily see here, and a much higher priority even than investment in road infrastructure, which in the whole post-war era has been perhaps the thing we all thought was the community's bigger desire — that seems to have switched a bit — and also that it was more important to invest in public transport than it might have been to give tax cuts or whatever. So people understand that public transport is vital to the dynamics of the city.

Using that sort of research and some of our more general research, this slide looks just as it would have looked in any era for the last 40 or 50 years. The things that people want out of their public transport system are all focused on service levels, reliability and punctuality (slide 11). They want the journey to be comfortable and they want to feel as personally secure during that journey as they can. Increasingly these days customer information is very important to them, may I say, particularly for the bus mode. Bus travellers feel as though they have always been the poor relation, particularly with information. They expressed that preference quite strongly. But obviously we delve into these characteristics far more deeply than I have time to go through here. It gets interesting when you delve into these things more deeply — what do people really want?

Based on those last two slides, we have been among the parties advocating with our colleagues, both operator colleagues and government, that Melbourne definitely needs investment in its transport services. It needs to find ways to get the maximum it can out of the existing system, but also our view is that the community believes we also need some major investments to equip ourselves for the medium and long-term future as well.

   The CHAIR — Can I just ask on this last slide, is cleanliness an attribute that people are also raising?

   Mr CAROLAN — It certainly is raised, but it would not take on quite the same rank as these ones. I do not mean that that is a minor issue. It certainly is a significant issue. People want cleanliness, they want comfort, they want to feel as though graffiti has been kept to a minimum and so on, yes.

   The CHAIR — Linkages of the different modes, is that featured under one of these slides, or is that another one and it is not as significant?

Mr CAROLAN — Effectively, if we delve into some of the issues behind frequency and punctuality, the linkability of the networks would come through when we delve into those characteristics a little bit more deeply. People certainly want that — it is the same as us; when we go somewhere, we want the journey to be perfect if it can be. The connectivity is an important issue.

Mr DRUM — Thank you for your presentation. We have heard example after example at this inquiry from a whole range of witnesses that the system is not coordinated between the different modes. It does not seem as though Connex talks to the bus services or to the V/Line system. We hear of V/Line services coming from Gippsland that are effectively caught behind and they stop at all stations as suburban trains. We hear of trains stopping every half hour out the front of a university only to find that buses, which also operate on the half hour, leave 3 minutes earlier than every train. This committee has been sitting here wondering why this is happening. Why do we keep hearing this evidence from all of the different transport users and from all of the stakeholders?. Having said that, whose responsibility is it to coordinate the various modes of transport?

Mr CAROLAN — There are a number of questions rolled in there and a number of assumptions. Connectivity in a network as big as Melbourne's is not a minor issue; it is a seriously non-trivial issue. Some of the commentators, in the interests of making it an understandable issue, sometimes simplify it to the point that it does not help the debate at all; it actually trivialises the debate where it is a seriously non-trivial issue. We have hundreds and hundreds of bus routes, multiple numbers of train routes and train lines that those buses are trying to connect with and a tram network in the middle.

In the case of the two train networks, we have a track layout and track networks that have been in place for many years and are well overdue for significant upgrades, which are among the topics I know the committee is looking at.

As far as the stories are concerned, some of them are true and some of them are myth and legend. There will be good examples of connectivity around Melbourne. There are very many good examples of connectivity around Melbourne. I think of Caulfield station, for example. You can walk off the tram, you are 50 metres from the train station and you have a good frequency on both models with lots of services. I think of North Melbourne where there is a bus service every 4 minutes. You can walk out of North Melbourne and get a bus service straight across to Melbourne University. You do not need timetables on either mode. But there will be examples where the connectivity is less than perfect.

As far as whose responsibility it is, it is all of us — the operators. Ultimately we all come together under the director of public transport, so it flows from the director through to all of us to make sure that we continue to work on connectivity.

Mr DRUM — Do you have a view on the model that has been picked up by Perth where they come under the one transport authority, which was recently picked up by Brisbane under the one transport authority? Do you think that would assist with coordination?

Mr CAROLAN — We have the same model. The "director of public transport division of the Department of Transport" does not roll off the tongue as neatly as TransLink or TransPerth, but it is the same model. There is no difference between the three models.

Mr DRUM — So if theirs is better coordinated than ours, it is because — —

Mr CAROLAN — If it is.

Mr DRUM — If it is.

Mr CAROLAN — There is no significant evidence that either Perth or Brisbane are exemplar cities in terms of modal coordination.

Mr DRUM — The evidence given to this committee is most certainly saying that.

Mr CAROLAN — That may be so, but I would say there is no evidence that they are exemplar cities in terms of modal coordination. They have many very good characteristics of their transport systems, but perfect modal coordination is not necessarily one of them.

Mr LEANE — As far as unpredictable human factors in a system, as far as a serious illness on a train or an unfortunate incident of a suicide, how does that affect the system? To put it into context as well, I would have thought there would be certain protocols that any operator would have to follow, and as part of that protocol they would be interacting with police, with the ambulance, all those sorts of things. In that context, yesterday the Public Transport Users Association said that we have to find better ways to deal with it so we are not holding up the trains. Are there better ways to deal with it? Are their protocols that have to be followed for the obvious reasons of health and legal reasons? Again the question is, is there a better way to deal with it?

Mr CAROLAN — Again, there are a few issues tied up in that question. Different systems around the world and around Australia have protocols for these issues, and so does Melbourne of course. In some jurisdictions the ability of the operator or the transport authority to take a very strong lead in what those protocols should be would be stronger than it is here where our police and emergency services have, if you like, a slightly dominant or overriding role, so there would be some systems where the transport authorities have a slightly more dominant role. But having said that, the protocols in essence everywhere would be on the same continuum. They might be a little bit stronger or a little bit weaker depending on the jurisdiction, but the protocols would exist — what you do in circumstance A and what you do in circumstance B and so on — just as they do here.

The importance is that whatever the protocol is at an operational and a safety level, I think we would all agree that it is very important that we try to transmit the best information we can to customers. That, I guess, is always difficult in those circumstances, but we can try to address it. This is one area where technology increasingly will help us. There are opportunities to transmit information on board; there are opportunities to transmit information through mobile phones and so on. I am sure we can continue to improve in that sense, but that has to then work around the operational protocols as well.

Mr O'DONOHUE — Thank you for your evidence this morning. Do you know when myki will be introduced onto the metropolitan network? It has been rolled out in some country areas. Do you know when it is going to be introduced, even on a partial basis, into the metropolitan network?

Mr CAROLAN — You mean precisely when it will be introduced?

Mr O'DONOHUE — Yes.

Mr CAROLAN — No, I do not. It will be introduced later this year, which is all I am aware of as I am sure you are. The minister's statements are that it will be introduced later this year.

Mr O'DONOHUE — Do you anticipate early November? Is that a possibility?

Mr CAROLAN — It is later than 5 October, so yes, of course it is a possibility.

Mr O'DONOHUE — Of the 38 per cent of trips not validated, how many of these would be fare evasion?

Mr CAROLAN — On trains?

Mr O'DONOHUE — Yes.

Mr CAROLAN — Our estimates are that fare evasion on trains is a little bit less than 10 per cent of trips made on trains, so that means there are a lot of people who do not validate but who have a perfectly valid ticket. That does not really surprise us. It is an unfortunate characteristic of our system, because we would preferably have everyone validating who should validate. But there are a lot of people who have long-term periodicals; there are quite a few free pass-holders; there are some people with serious disabilities who are not required to validate. The gap is not all that surprising, and a number of those people do not need to validate in the sense of the physical access to the system. We all know that at the city stations you need to validate to get through the barriers, but there are many suburban stations where you do not, so if people are making a journey between pairs of suburban stations where they do not need to activate the barriers and they have a weekly or a monthly ticket, they may not validate.

Ms HUPPERT — I have to say I use the journey planner on a regular basis. I find it a fantastic tool.

I am just wondering how much benchmarking you do in comparison with other major metropolitan train systems around Australia and around the world. We heard some evidence yesterday that was very favourable about Metlink and that one of the reasons that passenger numbers are remaining high even though the oil prices have gone down is the sort of information and service that Metlink provides. I just wondered whether you benchmark the sort of work that you are doing against other jurisdictions and how that compares.

Mr CAROLAN — To some extent we have. It is actually an area where we would like to do a lot more. For some reason in public transport, particularly within Australia, it can sometimes be quite difficult to do as much benchmarking as you would normally think would be desirable. I am not 100 per cent sure why that is the case. I think it is something to do with the original state rights model, if you like, where everyone is a bit precious about their own jurisdiction. Since Metlink has existed we have certainly been trying to change some of that. We certainly try to collaborate with colleagues in TransLink in Brisbane. Just recently we have been talking to colleagues across the Tasman in New Zealand for some collaboration there. But it is not always easy to do the benchmarking because, consistent with my previous conversation, Mr Drum, you do not always know whether you are comparing apples with apples. It is sometimes quite difficult to make sure that you are comparing the same concepts across the different jurisdictions. To make that collaboration and benchmarking worthwhile actually takes quite a lot of effort to get it established on a proper footing.

Mr BARBER — When I am at a tram stop there is a map of the tram network there. There is no map that indicates that 100 yards away there might be a train station or that a bus sometimes runs down the street next to where that tram stop is. Do you think that is something that could be improved?

Mr CAROLAN — I am sure information can always be improved. With regard to the tram stop, we have been responsible for a signage rollout through all the modes in Melbourne, so the tram stops these days will certainly have an indication by way of an arrow or some signifier that it is near a bus route or a station. It will not have a map at the tram stop, I agree. Oftentimes stations do not have maps of the nearby bus routes or networks either. They will have a map of the train mode. I am sure there is more and more we can do with information. It is a never-ending journey. Every time we think we have improved information to a certain point, passengers' expectations grow around about as fast for the next latest and greatest. I agree with you; we can improve it. It is something we will continue to work on.

Mr BARBER — There is no actual map of the public transport system on your website, though, either schematic or scale. There used to be one, and since 2006 I have been going to that website and have seen an error message saying that this function, a scannable map, is no longer available. Recently I have seen a message that says it is coming soon.

Mr CAROLAN — The previous very large network-wide public transport map was a labour of love for those who needed to produce it. As soon as it is produced, it is out of date, because a bus route will change somewhere or another. It is very expensive to produce in its old printed form. It is certainly something that I wonder whether, in its printed form and therefore that base that becomes scannable, is the right answer for the modern world. But we certainly agree that there need to be multimodal maps. Particularly at a local level we produce multimodal maps with each municipality around Melbourne. We do that in conjunction with them so we know what are the local attractions in that municipality. We produce those and they are readily available. We will continue to assess whether we need the metropolitan-wide network map or whether there is some other way to do it better.

Mr BARBER — When it comes to the customer information factor here, do you break that down into subsections — subquestions, if you like — of that value feature, and do you monitor how people are valuing that over time? Is this a tick-a-box survey, rating them 1 to 5, or are there components within it to understand what each component consists of?

Mr CAROLAN — That is paraphrasing from many different pieces of research, some that we do regularly as a monitor and some that do as specific one-offs. As I think I would have said before, the one thing we know about customer information is that people want it, they want it now and they want more and more of it. Part of our role is to attempt to then reduce that to what is reasonably deliverable and obviously at a reasonable cost. People want information, they want it at home, they want it in printed form, they want it on their phones and they want it when they are on their system, and so they should.

Mr BARBER — I just want it at a tram stop. Who owns that market intelligence analysis that you referred to earlier, if that is part of it? Who owns it?

Mr CAROLAN — Who owns it?

Mr BARBER — Who owns the intellectual property?

Mr CAROLAN — Most of the work Metlink does, the intellectual property, is owned by the director of public transport.

Mr DRUM — When people contact Metlink with a concern about the lack of coordination or lack of connectivity, what process does Metlink then follow? People want to get to a destination — they might come from Bendigo and they want to get to Mount Eliza — but they have problems with trying to get a train to Frankston or the bus has already departed. When they go through that experience and contact Metlink, what happens to that process?

Mr CAROLAN — It would depend on knowing a little bit more about the precise question that they might contact Metlink about. If they contact Metlink about the fact they believe, for example, a bus operator is not following his timetable properly and is being careless about following the timetable or picking passengers up or something, we would take that up with the individual operator and pursue it that way. If it was a broader question of, 'I do not believe there is a proper level of service between points A and B that allows me to reasonably make a complete trip', then we would take that up with the Department of Transport because ultimately questions of service level require the investment from the department through to the operators.

Mr DRUM — So if you thought it was simply a matter of rescheduling — running the figures and running the times slightly differently — to create a much better outcome, then you would transfer that to the director of public transport?

Mr CAROLAN — If it was something that we thought was capable of being addressed moderately easily by an individual operator, we would take it up with that particular operator. If it was a more systematic issue or something that required a policy change or significant funding, we would take it up with the director of public transport.

Mr DRUM — Again what we have heard in evidence consistently is that there seems to be a whole range of needless services that are running out of coordination with each other. We have had witness after witness — —

Mr VINEY — They referred to isolated incidents.

Mr DRUM — Mr Viney, evidence suggests that it is an isolated incident when the services are coordinated, not when they are not coordinated!

Mr VINEY — That is not true.

Mr DRUM — Our evidence tells us that it is has happened on such a rare basis that it has its own name for it.

Mr VINEY — You have been listening to different evidence from me.

Mr BARBER — There is more than one mode at a time.

Mr DRUM — We have heard on a significant number of occasions that there is a deep lack of coordination.

Mr CAROLAN — What is needed to improve public transport in any of its forms, whether it is information or connectivity or anything else, is specifics. We cannot deal in generalities; it simply does not lead us anywhere. We need to have precise details of what people are talking about at what location and at what time and then ask ourselves is the need real.

Mr DRUM — And can it be remedied?

Mr CAROLAN — And can it be remedied? Then we can address how it can be remedied and what priority it takes against other issues. Just talking in generalities does not lead us anywhere.

Mr DRUM — What you are saying is it is not a Metlink issue. Metlink would look at it and then they would pass it on to the director of public transport?

Mr CAROLAN — Metlink has a key role in being a coordinating influence. We have a key role in getting information out to passengers. We do not have a policy-making role in that sense. As I hope I have made clear, in that sense both the operators and us all come together at the level of the director of public transport. As I said before, it is just as it happens in Perth and Brisbane.

Mr VINEY — Can I just clarify something? If people are having difficulties with a particular linkage or connectivity, how would you know about that? How would your agency know about that? Do you get direct complaints?

Mr CAROLAN — The Metlink call centre, if you like, is divided into two services within the centre. Part of that is the giving out of information through the inquiry numbers, which are predominantly 13 16 38 for Melbourne and 13 61 96 for regional services. There are also 1800 and 1300 number feedback lines that relate to each of the operators but which come together at the Metlink call centre. We then feed those feedback or complaint calls out to the individual operators for attention, or to ourselves. A number of those feedback calls may relate to our own roles, particularly some of our information roles, as Mr Barber has talked about, or to the department.

Mr VINEY — In addition to your research, do you do an analysis of those calls that come in — of those complaints, if you like, or feedback calls. Do you do analysis of the type of them?

Mr CAROLAN — Yes, we do. Under our Metlink services agreement, which is the agreement we have with the director of public transport, we are required to convene a forum known as the CFIR, customer feedback industry roundtable, which we do. We convene that roundtable where all the industry gets together and discusses the feedback we are getting and what can or should be done about it. The public transport ombudsman also attends that forum, and I am sure you understand his role. He is also someone who receives feedback when it has not been dealt with adequately by an individual operator.

Mr VINEY — Have you categorised the nature of that kind of feedback, like getting to the nub of some of the perception issues, if you like? Different members of this committee are hearing different words in the evidence that comes before us. I am interested in the data. How much of that feedback is actually about the connectivity problems of the system? Is there much in that area?

Mr CAROLAN — I would have to take the detail of that question on notice, but I can easily provide some analysis back to the committee.

Mr VINEY — That would be very useful.

Mr CAROLAN — It is certainly not the predominant area of feedback; far from it.

Mr VINEY — I keep hearing members of this committee refer anecdotally to the Frankston interchange and the problems there. I know it reasonably well, having used it. I would have to say the incidence of buses leaving before a train arrives is pretty rare, but I am sure it happens. I think you said earlier we can have generalisations about the system or specific data, and I am interested in the specific data and in identifying exactly where the problems are in relation to it.

Mr CAROLAN — We can get some analysis to you. I will talk to the secretary of the committee as to how we get that back to you.

Mr VINEY — Thank you.

Mr O'DONOHUE — I would like to go to back to your slide on call centre calls and the spike during the heatwave. Can you give me the normal wait time for people who make a call to your call centre and the wait time during that heatwave?

Mr CAROLAN — During that period? I can give you that if you can just bear with me for a second. I will work backwards: on grand final eve we had 3 per cent of calls to the call centre abandoned and an average wait time of 21 seconds; during the heatwave on that particular day — the heatwave extended over other days but

that in a sense from our point of view was the worst of the days — the abandonment rate was 7 per cent and the waiting time was about 35 seconds.

If I can add a comment to that: we would be aware from our research and our own expertise that the area where we can help passengers in times of emergency is by trying to give them certainty. Obviously we know during that heatwave things were changing all the time and that has happened on other occasions as well. There are other jurisdictions that would have a protocol where, for all sorts of reasons, in a crisis they may implement an emergency timetable which becomes known as the emergency timetable; it could need to be implemented for any number of reasons, not just extreme weather. That is something that I think we can think about and to some extent have thought about a little bit, most recently in regard to the swine flu situation a few months ago where there had to be some contemplation as to what would happen if operators suddenly found themselves with not enough staff able to be available for the service. It would be preferable to be able to move to a known level of emergency service rather than have something changing on an ad hoc basis all the time.

Mr O'DONOHUE — Which is what the current arrangement is.

Mr CAROLAN — It is certainly what the arrangement was during that heatwave. I think we would all share the aspiration to move towards something else, but during that heatwave it just was not possible to get there.

Mr DRUM — Just in relation to your website and call centre hits, how would they compare to people ringing directly through to Connex or V/Line?

Mr CAROLAN — Again I can get you the information for that, but these days the calls direct to Connex or V/Line would be virtually nil, really.

Mr DRUM — Really?

Mr CAROLAN — They are very, very low. The 136196 number advertised as 'call V/Line' is to Metlink, or Viclink in that case, if you like. The number of people who would look at the *White Pages* and ring Connex or V/Line is very, very low.

The CHAIR — Can I suggest there is perhaps a revenue opportunity for you too as a consultancy to Optus if your call centre wait times are so short! Optus does not achieve that. Neither do the banks nor Telstra nor American Express.

Mr VINEY — Parliamentary IT.

The CHAIR — No, exactly.

Mr CAROLAN — The director also requires us to have a protocol that involves a minimum number of clicks so we are required to get to a voice as quickly as possible.

The CHAIR — That would be handy. As I said, there is a real consultancy opportunity for you, and it is worldwide.

Mr Carolan, I thank you for your attendance today and for the evidence that you have given to the committee. As I indicated, the Hansard transcript will come out within the next few days. There are a couple of undertakings that you have given to the committee in terms of supplying some additional information. The Hansard transcript can obviously act as a bit of a prompt in that, although the secretary will liaise with you on that. We appreciate your preparedness to make that extra information available as well. Thank you very much.

Witness withdrew.