

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 D. Bowen, president,
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The CHAIR — I extend a warm welcome to Daniel Bowen and Tony Morton from the Public Transport Users Association to today's hearings. We are inquiring into the factors leading to and the causes of failures in the provision of metropolitan and V/Line train services. All evidence taken at this hearing is protected by parliamentary privilege, as provided for under the Constitution Act 1975, and is also subject to provisions of the Legislative Council's standing orders. On that basis you have qualified privilege for whatever you say in these hearings, but if you were to go out and repeat the same sorts of things, then the privilege does not necessarily hold.

All evidence is being recorded by Hansard, and you will be provided with a transcript of the hearing within a few days which you can go over. If there are some errors that you wish to bring to our attention — particularly misspellings or such like — please do so, but obviously the substantive evidence cannot be altered as part of that process. I invite you to make some opening remarks in support of your appearance here today, and then we will proceed to some questions.

Mr BOWEN — Thank you very much for inviting us in. It is obviously very pleasing to see the inquiry proceeding. We have not prepared a slide presentation, but I note that you have our submission, which I am sure has been read keenly. A couple of things have changed since early June when we did submit. Specifically related to last summer is that we now know that the Comeng train air conditioning will be upgraded to cope with the heat, the new set of operator contracts have been signed and, relating to one of our recommendations — recommendation 7 — one of our metropolitan rail lines has now been upgraded to run every 10 minutes on weekdays inter-peak, between the two peak hours, which is good.

Overall our train system is a victim of its own success to a certain extent, now that we have had patronage climbing over the past few years. We are beginning to see all sorts of issues coming out of this. The ability of the system to cope with that extra patronage is where we are seeing the stress. We have come to the view that it all comes to careful planning, or lack thereof, of the rail system and of public transport more generally.

I will give three brief examples where perhaps the planning has fallen down. These are three examples of where it directly affects customers. Obviously last summer we had the breakdown in the train system on the hot days, and part of the cause of that was faults with the Comeng air conditioning. The Comeng trains were all upgraded earlier this decade. It is still a mystery to us why, when there was apparently a known design specification that would not cope with Melbourne's hottest days in those air-conditioning units, they were not upgraded when the refurbishment of those trains took place. It would have been much easier to do it then while the refurbishment was taking place than to do it now, which obviously involves taking those trains out of service. We are going to have to see how the government and the new operator deal with this over the coming months.

Secondly, there is a lack of trains on the network. We know that in 2003 the government drafted a document called *Train Plan*. They specifically forecast patronage growth, which meant that they were going to need to not just maintain the number of trains that they had but increase them over time. This did not happen; that document was never published. It appears to have been another case of poor planning. Rather than keep the large numbers of Hitachi trains as the newer models came in, instead most of them were scrapped, so we are left in a situation where we could do with dozens of more trains. Obviously now the government is investing in bringing 38 new ones online, but in the meantime we have got to wait and deal with the overcrowding that occurs.

The third specific issue that relates to planning, which is another example of where the greater public transport network is not living up to its potential, is the lack of intermodal coordination. Bus to train connections, in particular in the middle and outer suburbs, are very poor. If the bus does meet the train, it appears to have been a matter of chance rather than good planning. We recently have been looking at some of the connections. For some stations there appears to have been some attempt made to make the buses match the train frequency, but in the vast majority of cases this is not the case. In fact it is such a special case in Melbourne for buses to meet trains we actually have a special name for it — it is called a TrainLink bus, and there are only two running in the whole city. Those sorts of issues really make it difficult for people to get around. They make it difficult for the public transport network to live up to its full potential. In fact they make it difficult for train patronage to grow outside peak hours, because most people outside walking distance to a station can only drive to the station or ride their bikes, and there is limited car parking at those stations. If you cannot get the bus to the station, you effectively cannot use the train after about 9.00 a.m. Those are, I guess, three examples of where good planning would mean that the system would run a lot more smoothly than it does now.

Dr MORTON — I will just add to what Daniel said. As our submission says, a well-run system focuses on the passenger experience and the needs of the transport task in Melbourne and Victoria. An assessment of that task, those needs and evidence of that should be the first step in any plan for public transport. So we are here on behalf of the PTUA. The PTUA is the community representative organisation for public transport passengers. We are regular users of public transport ourselves. We are a contact point for a large number of other people. We approximately have 1000 members of the PTUA. There is a broader group of people who are also regular users of public transport and who contact us on a regular basis, often due to problems with ticket inspectors, problems with their train services and so on.

We take the position that although we are not necessarily management experts and we may not be qualified with business degrees and so on — although I am an engineer so I have some familiarity with some of the technical issues, as does Daniel — we take the view that a passenger on public transport who uses the system regularly can tell the difference between a well-managed system and a poorly managed one. We submit that at present certainly the train system and the wider public transport system in general is less well-managed than it could be. This shows in some of the outcomes we get from the system. We saw some catastrophic system failures earlier this year which were the culmination of a number of similar episodes if you go back to Oaks Day or failures in relation to EastLink construction and so on that we raised in our submission. These point to a system that appears to be set up to fail on a not irregular basis. We would argue that, based on our own observations and our own evidence we have collected from other cities in the world and the way transport systems are run in those other cities, the system we have is not primarily managed in the interests of the public or in the interests of the passenger wanting to use public transport. It is a system that is managed based on a long historical legacy of certain operational constraints arising from, in the case of the system in the 40 years prior to 2005, quite low patronage. It is really set up more to do the minimum necessary to ensure passenger grievances do not reach a politically damaging level, rather than necessarily to see what the passenger wants and undertake the technical and planning initiatives to make that happen in the network with the way the network infrastructure is designed and the way that has operated. Again, there are examples which we could go into, which we will not bore you with now. But I think the question has also been put in the evidence to this committee that this ought to be a similar issue for the tram network.

Obviously we are here. This is an inquiry into train services. It has been asked, given that the management arrangements we have for train services and tram services are quite similar in Melbourne, why are we not having an inquiry into tram services? I think the answer to that really is that, as the PTUA, we see similar instances of sub-optimal management and sub-optimal operations in the tram system as we see in the train system. However, the tram system is less technically constrained than the train system — a train system has a lot of technical operational constraints which mean that things can very easily mushroom into major incidents, cancellations, delays and so on; in the tram system that is less true. So although we are seeing examples of overcrowding on trams similar to that on trains, cases of tram services being cancelled and of passengers waiting 10 minutes for what should be a 4-minute service — this is a regular occurrence and we will not go into those details because they are really outside the scope of this inquiry but we just make this point — the tram system has similar problems but they have not manifested themselves — —

Mr BOWEN — To the same degree.

Dr MORTON — They have not manifested themselves to be the kind of catastrophic system failures we are looking into today. Fundamentally — and we have argued in our submission — we think there is great scope and a great opportunity to put the planning of Melbourne's public transport services onto a footing more akin to what we see the best cities and the best well-run systems of Europe and North America. That is that we begin — and this is set out in some very nice technical documents from the European Union that I think have been referred to in other evidence that you have heard — with an analysis of the transport task, passenger needs and what standards of service you expect from the system. You then go and answer the engineering questions that raises. How much infrastructure do you need? How is it going to be operated? What sort of signalling system do you need for the trains? What does the air conditioning have to be rated to do? You answer those questions after you have set the basic standards for what the system should be doing. I think in Melbourne and Victoria we have an issue where the engineering tends to drive the expectations of the system rather than the other way around. I think that is enough from us at this stage.

Mr DRUM — Thanks very much for your evidence. What is your understanding of the current system's capacity? We have heard conflicting views. We have had witnesses say we are near or at capacity.

Mr BOWEN — And when you say ‘capacity’, I assume the big question is around CBD rail capacity in the peak hours?

Mr DRUM — Yes.

Mr BOWEN — Outside peak hours now we run trains every 20 to 30 minutes, so there is no real issue of capacity. It is really a question of peak hour capacity. You can stand at most platforms at Flinders Street and see trains come in at a fairly slow rate by world standards, and Flinders Street is obviously the terminus point. On some platforms you will only see about 6 or 7 trains per hour, which suggests a train about every 10 minutes, which is way below the theoretical capacity of a rail network.

The real problem stems from trying to run virtually all our tracks via the four tracks of the city loop. Running more trains direct from Richmond, Jolimont and North Melbourne into Flinders Street would unquestionably unlock a lot of that capacity. I know some people believe that you might see a doubling of capacity. We would probably say at least a 50 per cent boost could be gained out of more efficiently running the central area, and not just running more trains on the available paths but also undertaking reforms such as not getting drivers to change shifts at Flinders Street. That just adds to the time taken up on the platforms there.

You would need to look at a whole range of measures, I think, but certainly there does appear to be a substantial amount of extra capacity that could be squeezed out of the current infrastructure.

Mr DRUM — Does it surprise you guys then that here we are in the 21st century and we have our current operators effectively accepting the fact that we now have a system that is at capacity during peak?

Mr BOWEN — They do and they don’t. It seems that on the one hand they will say, ‘Yes, we have no more capacity; we are going to have to build a multi-billion-dollar rail tunnel, which will take 10 years to build. Only then will we be able to get more trains on’. On the other hand, just last year they moved to run Werribee line trains direct into Flinders Street in peak hours, which was an example of what we are proposing.

It is a matter of looking at all the other measures that can be undertaken to unlock that capacity as well as other measures to spread the peak passenger loads, such as running more trains in off-peak hours. At the moment, for instance, anyone deciding to work late and avoid the peak hour knows that come 7.00 p.m. virtually all train lines drop back to every half hour. In many cases they are still crowded and there are virtually no express trains running. Running peak-style services across a wider time band would allow more people to move their trips outside the height of the peak without that time penalty of the long wait and the long trip home.

Dr MORTON — Perhaps to add to what Daniel was saying, even if you set aside the detailed technical considerations and just look at what we would expect from the system historically, last year I picked apart the 1960 train timetable just to check how many trains were running at the time. In 1960 in the morning peak between 8.00 and 9.00 a.m. there were, I believe, 108 trains arriving at Flinders Street station in an hour. If you exclude the St Kilda and Port Melbourne lines, which of course do not exist any more, there were, I think, 94.

Now 1960 was prior to the construction of the city loop, which everyone was told at the time was supposed to — the wording was ‘double the capacity’. It may not have been a doubling of capacity, but we should at least have expected some capacity dividend from adding the city loop to that system. However, until quite recently we were, I believe, in the same period in the morning peak, from 8.00 a.m. to 9.00 a.m., running 98 trains into Flinders Street in that hour. I think as of this year we are now running a few more, so it may be over a hundred, but really there has been at most a 10 per cent increase in the number of trains we are running in peak hour since 1960. Having those extra two tracks between Flinders Street and Southern Cross, as it is now, and having those four tracks in the city loop all adds terminating capacity at Flinders Street so that, even though we have lost a couple of platforms, we have still got, I think, 14 platforms at Flinders Street.

Mr BOWEN — Thirteen.

Dr MORTON — Thirteen, thank you, Daniel. We would have expected, even if not a doubling capacity, that we could increase the number of trains coming into Flinders Street in peak hour by around about 50 per cent without having to think too hard. The fact that we have only managed to increase it by less than 10 per cent and the fact that we are now being told the system is at capacity, I think at least needs some more analysis of the technicalities that are driving that view, and perhaps it needs to be done independently.

We would certainly defer to the experts on that. I certainly am not a complete expert on rail system planning, but even from a non-technical perspective you could see that if you added something of the magnitude of the city loop to a system carrying 94 trains in peak hour, you should get something that could carry substantially more than that, and I think there are questions around why it is not.

Mr LEANE — Daniel, originally in your submission you were saying that the system could be a bit of a victim of its own success as far as the extra patronage, which obviously has caused the overcrowding problem and caused the dwell times to affect some of the timetabling, and one of the reasons that you put it down to was a lack of trains. With the 38 new trains coming into effect, hopefully at this stage early next year or into the middle of the year, does your association get a chance to put in a priority wish list? Obviously new trains will be able to open up new timetables with extra services. Does your association get a chance to put a wish list to the Department of Transport of where you would like to see those extra services with the availability of new trains? How often does the DOT actually give you a briefing? Does it do it on a regular basis or not?

Mr BOWEN — It is more an informal relationship we have with the DOT. Part of the issue is that a lot of the planning in the department takes place outside the public eye. In many cases we might be privy to information about future plans, but equally we might not. We certainly get to have our say informally with our contacts in the department. I guess 38 trains is a substantial growth to the fleet — something like 25 per cent — so you should be able to make a fair impact on the overcrowding. It really depends on some clever rail system planners aiming those 38 extra trains at the most crowded lines and making sure they take the edge off the crowding. We will certainly be talking to contacts in the department, but there does not appear to be any formal way that the department takes that sort of input on those sorts of issues.

Mr LEANE — Just as a follow-up to Dr Morton, you were saying this transport system is a system set up to fail. How do you explain periods like the last three months where there has hardly been a cancellation or a major problem with the system? When you do have those periods when it is actually running quite well, do you get much input from your membership during those periods of time?

Dr MORTON — We think we have been very fortunate over the last few months in that regard. But I think people are still getting onto overcrowded trains, and they are still complaining about it, and there are still load breaches happening all over the shop.

Mr LEANE — What are breaches?

Mr BOWEN — The department has a theoretical figure of 798 people per six-carriage train. That is not the absolute capacity of that train, but if the number of people on the train goes above that, that is meant to trigger action on the part of the department and the operator to put on more services or otherwise relieve that crowding. That is a load breach. It is the point at which, in layman's terms, it starts to get uncomfortable on that train.

Dr MORTON — It is the point where there is a signal to the fleet planners that they ought to be thinking about buying more trains. That is one level of patronage on a single train. There is a level above that where it really gets uncomfortable. There is a level above that where it actually becomes unsafe. I do not know if we are quite in a position to say where those numbers are. We understand the crush load on a Comeng train is, I think, 1300. That would certainly be beyond the pale in terms of overcrowding. The figure that you would accept as a maximum on the basis of passenger comfort and safety would probably be less than that figure.

The figure of 798, though, is the level where you see a trigger. As we understand it in the way the system is managed at present, that is the trigger where you are supposed to be thinking about increasing the fleet so that it avoids going up to that level where it becomes a safety and comfort issue. The numbers there are not well defined in the current system.

Mr LEANE — Something must have been triggered, because there are 38 new trains coming into the system.

Dr MORTON — That is it; it finally has been triggered. I think we should have been thinking about getting those 38 new trains quite a number of years earlier.

Mr BOWEN — The surveys that are regularly done — in fact I think there is one commencing this week — on train loads show that some of the trains on some of the lines get up to around 1200 people per train. We are now clearly way past the trigger point where more needs to be done to relieve that crowding.

Just to get back to your question about the failings of the system, even when the system is running at high reliability, the failure in some respects does not just relate to the train turning up on time or the train not being too crowded; it also relates to the wider use of the public transport system. If someone decides to make their trip into the city at 10.00 a.m., to give an example, they know that they cannot catch a bus to the station. They have to drive to the station. They get to the station and the railway station car park is already full. That in some respects is also a failure of the public transport system as a whole: it cannot deliver that person by public transport to where they want to go. It is not just a matter of the train operator performing well; it is also a matter of people being able to use public transport to get where they are going.

Mr LEANE — So your association would be pushing for increased car parking at stations.

Mr BOWEN — We would prefer people had an option to reach where they are going exclusively by public transport. We would say there is already a substantial level of car parking around Melbourne's railway stations. The problem is that they are all full by 8.00 a.m. or 9.00 a.m. and you cannot build enough that would completely fulfil the demand across the day. Let us get people into the railway stations in a smarter way — feeder buses running every few minutes right across the day along arterial roads would be one way of giving more people access to the rail network.

Dr MORTON — Around the world you tend to find relatively few well-run systems that carry a lot of people on their system where people get to trains primarily by driving their car and parking at the station. We are not such a good example in that regard. Usually the way people get the trains in those systems is they actually get onto a bus or a tram and get that to the station. The public transport system is actually designed to get people, more or less, from door to door. It is not quite from door to door, obviously.

Mr BOWEN — To the end of the street anyway.

Dr MORTON — To the end of the street — that is the kind of level that people will accept. There is a role for expanding car parking at stations, particularly at particular locations. It tends to be a very expensive measure. The cost of one car parking space for one car at a railway station starts from about \$17 000. I think one seat on a bus or tram can cost you less than that as long as your system is well patronised.

Certainly the ways people get to stations in large numbers, we think the public transport system should be working as a multimodal system. It is notionally a multimodal system at the moment, but it does not really function as one from the point of view of the passenger.

Just to add to the question of whether the system is failing or not, it is not failing in the sense that people are not happy with the system but they are not unhappy enough that it is becoming an embarrassment to the people who run, manage and operate the system. We are managing to sustain it at that level where people are just not unhappy enough, and that, I suppose, is the level at which we have sustained our public transport system for some time. As long as people do not get too unhappy with it and start to make it an embarrassment for the government or the operators, it can be managed as a political issue on that kind of level. It does not mean, though, that people are happy with it or that public transport is doing what it could be doing for the people of Melbourne and Victoria.

Mr BARBER — The growth in patronage has not exactly happened overnight. It has been put to this committee at various times that is now increasing dwell times which slow down the trains and therefore remove capacity. Have you seen any of the measures that have been introduced in the short term, such as timetable upgrades, bringing on platform staff, or even as you have spoken about timetabling patterns that waste capacity? Have you seen any of those measures implemented during this last four or five years, and can you quantify the benefits, if any?

Mr BOWEN — Again part of the issue is that some of these measures are taking place but there is no transparency about their effectiveness.

Mr BARBER — Timetables are transparent.

Mr BOWEN — Timetables are transparent, that is true. However, since they have put platform staff on at Parliament station in the evening peak, for instance, they have not gone and revised the timetables to match the saving in dwell time. I guess you could say that the performance figures have improved slightly but it is not clear whether there is a correlation there. We still do not have platform staff loading and unloading wheelchair passengers on and off the trains at busy city stations. There appear still to be missed opportunities that have not yet been implemented.

We know that Connex has trialled a test unit of three carriages with a modified layout that is meant to reduce dwell times. Again informally, they are telling us that this seems to have been successful but that has not been quantified publicly in any way.

I guess we see in systems around the world, and Sydney springs to mind where they put more staff on the platforms at busy CBD stations and had a definite saving in dwell time, where a number of these measures can be tried and should be tried transparently to make sure that if the taxpayer is going to fund these extra staff at Parliament station, this is the return. This is why it is of benefit.

Dr MORTON — I suppose we are often quite hesitant to cite Sydney as an example of good practice in running trains, but I think in this particular case of deriving benefits for operations from having staff at stations, not to mention benefits for passengers of having a staff presence, we think they are doing a reasonable job there. They are getting the dwell times at the platforms down, and the planning experts will tell you that reducing dwell times is key to increasing the capacity of the system.

Mr BARBER — They seem to have made a lot of announcements about timetable changes. There was the reversal of the city loop, and you mentioned the Werribee experiment. Have you been able to observe improvements as a result of those small measures?

Mr BOWEN — We understand that the performance has lifted. With the reversal of the city loop, for instance, it stands to reason that if you eliminate that conflicting move between the trains running in different directions at that time of the morning, you would see an improvement in performance. But the flipside of it is that passengers who want to travel into the city beyond Flinders Street are seeing delays at Flinders Street on their trains before they proceed around the loop.

It comes back to what we referred to before: the fact that drivers often change trains at Flinders Street. They end and start their shifts there. This evidently has not been looked at for the change to the Clifton Hill loop, and you could very well argue that it should have been implemented at the same time as reversing the loop to make sure that those trains come into Flinders Street and then just keep going within 30 seconds rather than sitting there for 3, 4, 5 minutes, as some of our members are telling us happens regularly.

Mr BARBER — As a result of all of these things, have they run more trains, particularly around peak hour and to peak places?

Mr BOWEN — My understanding is that the changes to the Werribee line and the Clifton Hill groups did result in a handful of extra trains being run. But again it comes down to how many trains they had to spare, which is virtually zero now. As the 38 new trains come in, that will be, as I said, a substantial boost in the capacity of the fleet. What is going to be really important is that they do a complete rewrite of the timetable to make sure that they are not just slotting in extra trains where they can fit them into the current timetable but they are wiping the slate clean and starting again with more regular stopping patterns and a more even frequency.

To give another example, I live on the Frankston line. In the most recent changes to that line they added in an extra morning peak hour train. The problem is that it runs 3 minutes after the previous train and I think 12 minutes before the following one. The result is that new train is not quite empty but it certainly is not taking the loads that it could and should be taking in the middle of peak hour for a train that is coming through at 8.00 a.m.

Ms HUPPERT — You mentioned earlier that the train system is a victim of its own success, and we heard from evidence earlier today about how it compares very favourably with train systems around the country as well as internationally in terms of rising patronage. Clearly, as you have said, the train system is doing something right, and like you I am a regular user of the train system. Apart from the occasional delay caused by human interaction such as sick passengers and the like, I find it convenient.

A lot of things have been said about the amount of delays, the amount of cancellations, but my understanding from looking at the figures that have been provided to us by the operator is a lot of those relate to ill passengers and interactions on the line — that is, looking after the passengers to make sure that they are well cared for. In fact one of the people who gave evidence earlier today talked about the duty of care of the train operator. Surely in that sense the delays that are caused by those things are justifiable delays and as the representatives of public transport users you would think that that is appropriate action to be taking, to make sure that the trains are appropriately clean and that passengers on the trains are looked after in the case of incidents such as that?

Mr BOWEN — Yes, the last thing we would want to see is an ill passenger booted off the train onto an empty platform and left to fend for themselves.

Ms HUPPERT — Which I understand is what happens in some other systems that perhaps work to the timetables with more reliability.

Mr BOWEN — I suspect most of those highly patronised systems around the world would have some form of station staff who could help you wait for the ambulance. The question is: as patronage continues to grow, how can the system successfully deal with that patronage? How can we minimise those delays to ensure that when an incident does occur the delay is minimised, rather than the snowball effects that you see now where there are frequent trains running down the track and one little thing happens — if someone gets ill, or if a car overruns a boom gate — does this result in a few minutes delay or does it result in a 10–15 minute delay which snowballs? Does it result in an hour delay? Can you prevent these incidents happening in the first place, and when they do happen can you deal with them more successfully? Obviously, eliminating level crossings is one way that you can minimise the interaction between the road network and the rail network; that would pretty much eliminate those sort of problems with cars getting onto the tracks. Putting staff with basic medical training in stations may well mean that if someone does keel over on the train, they can be helped off the train and have someone to provide assistance and wait with them till the ambulance comes.

I have been on a train where a lady fainted — she fell out of her seat — and the driver was fantastic. He was able to help her sit up properly and made sure she was well enough to wait for the ambulance, and the ambulance arrived within 10 or 15 minutes. But that was the middle of peak hour at an unstaffed station. If the station had been staffed, she might well have been able to — voluntarily, you would hope — move off the train and wait on the platform with someone. We would have had two or three extra trains queued up behind us along the line. It is not a matter of being heartless and booting an ill person off a train, but it is a matter of working out how, at least in some instances, you can deal those sort of circumstances better and minimise disruption.

Mr O'DONOHUE — Dr Morton, you talked before about what efficiencies a lay person would expect and therefore what additional services could be run through the system. Do you think that work has been done, either by the department or externally?

Dr MORTON — In terms of an expert analysis?

Mr O'DONOHUE — Yes.

Dr MORTON — I think the department and the operator have done a certain amount of analysis; there is no doubt about that. But the outcomes of that analysis do not give the general public or the passengers a great deal of confidence, given the issues I raised earlier, that this analysis has been as full or as rigorous as it ought to have been. And I believe there has been other evidence presented to that effect. We would be arguing that there should be some independent analysis done to corroborate or to make appropriate findings on what our system is capable of doing.

Mr O'DONOHUE — Given that, do you have an opinion on the transport plan and whether perhaps some of the commitments made in the transport plan should have been held over until that detailed analysis had been completed and further efficiencies could have been identified?

Dr MORTON — The Victorian transport plan does strike us to some extent as a wish list of infrastructure projects that is driving the planning of the transport system rather than vice versa. What we do not see in the Victorian transport plan is a statement to the effect that we will adopt an operating standard for our public transport system that says to people living in X part of Melbourne, 'We will be able to get you by public transport from your local bus stop into the city in a similar time that it takes to get you there by car, plus or

minus 10 per cent. We will design the infrastructure and plan our services on that basis of that standard'. That is not what the Victorian public transport plan says. The Victorian public transport plan says, 'Here is infrastructure project A, infrastructure project B, infrastructure project C; we are going to build these and they are going to look really good, and it is going to give us more infrastructure to run services on'. But it does not actually say anything about what is going to be done with that infrastructure once it is in place. There is the obvious implication that once we have the regional rail link and once we have the Footscray to Domain tunnel for the trains there will be more trains running, but we do not know how many more trains, how frequent they are going to be, where they are going to go or what this actually means in terms of Mr Average Citizen going from A to B by public transport. How long is it going to take them? Are they going to be able to do it easier by car or is it going to be easier by public transport? We do not see a lot of answers to these kind of questions. We think that some kind of more thoroughgoing analysis prior to deciding on infrastructure projects like that would have made more sense from the point of view of what the system is actually doing for us.

Mr BOWEN — I would just like to add that interestingly as part of the east–west transport needs study by Sir Rod Eddington there was a report commissioned from SKM called *Transport Supply and Demand*. It had a section on rail capacity and it specifically outlined a number of steps that could be taken on each line on the rail network to upgrade services without necessarily spending up big on infrastructure. It is not clear whether the advice in this report has been taken on board by the department; perhaps it has, perhaps it hasn't. But again there is no transparency there. We do not know. One of the things that the report did specifically recommend was, again, moving driver shift changes out of Flinders Street station. We do not know if the work to do this is under way or not because no-one is saying anything. It is not clear whether the recommendations that are out there to upgrade rail capacity are actually being acted upon before we go and build the tunnel.

Mr DRUM — I will put this question to either gentleman. In relation to your recommendations where you have listed a whole range of things, they revolve around one transport authority. You obviously believe that is the way to go. Are there any negatives associated with that model? Do you understand? We sit here and hear evidence of how a train will pull in and the bus left 3 minutes ago even though they both leave on a half-hourly basis; there is just no coordination. We are a little bit aghast at the lack of coordination and cooperation that exists between the two different modes. If they were brought under one umbrella as in Perth, and as recently happened in Brisbane, would there be negatives associated with that that we have not yet heard of?

Dr MORTON — I suppose with any new public institution that you create there is always the danger that it could become complacent and mired in bureaucracy in the future and that would negate the positive initiatives that led to it being created in the first place. We would in no way want to propose recreating the lumbering old PTC — the Public Transport Corporation — that was very heavy on middle management and not really focused on meeting passenger needs, we would argue.

I think the best example of these kinds of authorities that you do see overseas is the kind of lean, mean planning office that does not necessarily have a lot of people in the authority per se. Most of the people are actually front-line people out there driving trains and buses and doing all the detailed operational matters but you do need a few key people in there who basically oversee the timetables, make sure everything coordinates, oversee that the fares have been distributed appropriately and been set at appropriate levels and that the system is competing with the alternatives. Getting a public transport system that competes with car travel, from the point of view of the person going from A to B, is really what counts. You just have to have a culture in there of a few people who understand that and are working for that objective. Under that you can have private operators or you can have public operators or whatever kind of contractual arrangements work best, but the real key is to have a few people in there.

From that point of view, I guess you do need to have constant innovation and renewal in these kinds of institutions to make sure you do not go stale. You just have to make sure that there is a refreshment of management and so on periodically to make sure that does not happen. As long as everyone understands what the objective is and what the mission of the authority is, that should try and promote the sort of culture that we currently do not have in Melbourne.

Mr DRUM — If we just go on to some of the heat problems that we associate with last year, again we have heard conflicting evidence in relation to the causes of the heat problems. We have heard the air conditioners were faulty because they do not operate over 35 degrees. We have heard that the Hitachi manuals — the actual manuals on the refrigerants that were responsible for the breakdown — say they operate within — —

Mr LEANE — Did we get those manuals?

Mr DRUM — Yes, the documents. Dr Mees gave us the documents.

Mr BOWEN — I must say it was not clear to me from that evidence that that was necessarily a limitation or a specification of the entire air-conditioning system. I am not an air conditioning expert — —

Mr LEANE — Neither was Dr Mees.

Mr BOWEN — I think you could easily argue that it was a limitation of that specific component of the system but not necessarily the entire air-conditioning system. Sorry, go on.

Mr DRUM — That document had these machines operating up to 52 degrees, which is quite unbelievable when you think about that. There is a huge difference between 35 degrees and 52.

Mr BARBER — How many air conditioners do work when it is hot rather than just when it is nice and cool?

Mr DRUM — We were told that in Adelaide and Perth the same refrigerant is used — the one that is apparently to blame for not working here works over there.

Then we heard about the union trouble and the fact that there was a well-orchestrated union campaign as another way of taking industrial action. What is your take on that as the peak group that has been affected by all of these cancellations? Where do you think the truth lies on all of these stories that we keep hearing as evidence?

Mr BOWEN — I suspect there is no one factor that has come into play here. It is a combination of a range of things, everything from perhaps a not very well specified air-conditioning system to a protocol for drivers reporting faults that needed revision — and seems to have consequently had revision — to a lack of information provided to front-line staff about disruptions and alternative routes for passengers, so that in many cases passengers on the ground waiting on a hot, stuffy platform had no idea what was happening or how to get home by other means. I do not think there is one particular aspect that is entirely to blame; a whole range of things seem to have occurred all at once and created this intolerable situation last summer.

Dr MORTON — Yes, everything stands or falls as a system, and certainly it can be hard to attribute that failure to any particular component in that system. I have been led to understand there are a lot of similarities between the air-conditioning systems here and in Adelaide, although the Adelaide trains all run on diesel. Ours run on electricity and that does have some implications for the design of things like air-conditioning systems, but I understand there are more similarities there than just the refrigerant being used, so it makes sense to inquire into why they seem to have survived better in the kind of weather conditions that we saw.

Mr VINEY — Irrespective of the specifications, the systems failed.

Mr BOWEN — It is a range of factors. It is the air conditioning plus the — —

Dr MORTON — There are technical factors, there are operational factors, there are cost factors, there are maintenance factors; some combination of those factors has not been working. But I think as train operators and planners authorities are accountable for these factors and can manage these in an ideal world to actually work; in other places this has been managed.

Mr DRUM — Just in relation to the heat, the history that Dr Mees gave this inquiry two weeks ago effectively showed another year — 10 years previously — when we had five days over 40 degrees. He went back and researched the daily papers and there was not one skerrick of a mention of any train failures. Effectively he was saying that it is not just the heat. He fully expects the system to work well this year because the industrial dispute has been put to bed.

Dr MORTON — Yes.

Mr DRUM — It is difficult for this committee because we keep hearing conflicting evidence, and that is why I am asking you. You are fully conversant with all the issues, where do you stand?

Mr BOWEN — It is also important to keep in mind that five years ago patronage was a lot lower than now and if you cancelled a train it did not have the same sort of impact in the middle of the peak hour that it does now. Additionally, we have seen in the past that there have been issues on the system which have not gained a great deal of attention. The problems of New Year's Eve before Melbourne switched to all-night tram and train services were pretty much invisible to many people because it was only if you were out on the night and you experienced it yourself that you knew about it. Eventually it got attention and the problem was fixed. Just because it is not reported in the papers does not mean it did not happen.

Dr MORTON — At the same time, of course, every system failure that has been due to industrial action I think has been reported in the papers. We certainly had a few of those back in the day. It could be right that we have not seen similar failures of that magnitude due to technical factors. But, of course, nothing is completely due to technical factors or completely due to industrial factors or anything. It is a whole operational system that proceeds from a certain kind of management culture. If you are doing things right, then things do not fail, or things fail but you manage the failures. You have buses on standby when the trains do not work and things like that. They do that elsewhere.

Mr VINEY — Would you agree that crowded trains and trams in the system have been a problem in the system for a pretty long time? It is not something that has happened in the last few years, is it?

Mr BOWEN — No, that is true.

Mr VINEY — Particularly in peak hour.

Mr BOWEN — Obviously it is a peak hour issue in particular, although increasingly we are now seeing crowding outside peak hour. There are some lines now where if you try to catch a train out of the city at 9 o'clock at night you will find it is quite crowded.

Mr VINEY — But do you have anything other than anecdotal evidence? Have you done other research? Are you able to present some of that research to us?

Mr BOWEN — I suspect — —

Mr VINEY — I have anecdotal evidence too. In the 1980s I was a connie on the trams. I reckon that if when I went back to the farm I had put as many cattle on the cattle truck as I used to put passengers on the tram, I would have been reported to the RSPCA. There have been massive overcrowding problems for a long time.

Mr BOWEN — I think there have been.

Mr VINEY — That is anecdotal.

Mr BOWEN — I was a regular tram user in the 1990s on St Kilda Road. It was not a rare occurrence to be unable to fit onto a tram in the evening. It is an ongoing problem. It has not necessarily popped up overnight. It is not necessarily unique to this decade, but given Melbourne is a growing city, and in particular the CBD is thriving now, I think it is reasonable to expect that you would see much greater patronage now than has been seen in the past.

Mr VINEY — We have seen that, and that has been presented to us — a near doubling of patronage, particularly on the rail system, in 10 years. In your view is the predicted 20-odd per cent increase in trains in the system one of the key factors in alleviating that problem?

Mr BOWEN — There is continuing demand to travel in and out of the CBD at peak hour on trains, so yes, so long as the extra trains are used in an intelligent way and they are timetabled well into the system — and, as I said before, there is preferably a rewrite of the timetables so the frequencies are even and we pump plenty of trains through at critical times on the busiest lines — then yes, we should see a great deal of relief.

Mr VINEY — But the changes to things like timetables and signalling and platform usage and all of those kinds of improvements are small-scale improvements, are they not? To achieve improvements to cope with the big volume increase we have had, somewhat unexpectedly — people might argue the degree to which there was expectation but I think the significance of it has been generally accepted as being unexpected — requires significant infrastructure investment in rolling stock and in the fixed network.

Mr BOWEN — There is going to need to be some really careful planning in the near future, and it does not just relate to how you supply train services; it also relates to the demand that is going to be ongoing. For instance, I am sure the Melbourne City Council has figures on how many people it expects to be coming into the CBD each day. Will these continue to be peak hour, 9.00 a.m. to 5.00 pm-ish workers or will they be visitors coming in from suburban Melbourne in the middle of the day? Do you need to boost peak hour capacity on the rail system or can you continue to grow capacity and meet demand for visitors who are not coming in to start work at 9.00 a.m. and going home again at 5.30 p.m. by providing more services right through the day and into the evening and on weekends?

Mr VINEY — But these are all questions the government has considered. There is a range of problems that I think we jointly understand. It seems to me there are only two ways of managing the surge in demand. One is a series of small-scale improvements to get better bang for our buck out of the existing system, and then some significant investment to improve the general infrastructure. It seems to me that is essentially what is planned in the Victorian transport plan. What I am asking is: do you generally agree with that thrust — that there can be some small-scale improvements to get better grunt out of the system and then some significant investment? I am trying to understand what we are disagreeing on. Are we disagreeing on — —

Mr BOWEN — I am not sure we are disagreeing.

Mr VINEY — I am sorry, but you have been presenting a whole series of questions around the government's management of the system, and what I am telling you is that we can accept there is a problem. In my view there seems to be two ways to deal with the problem — —

Mr BOWEN — The short-term and the long-term.

Mr VINEY — That seems to be what your submission says. Are we disagreeing about the choices of investment? Do you think there should be different transport or different tunnels? What are we different on?

Dr MORTON — If I can respond, there clearly ought to be long-term plans to beef up the infrastructure we have. If we look at Melbourne in 2020, if it is going to have — —

Ms HUPPERT — That is what the transport plan is.

Dr MORTON — There is that. We should have had that kind of long-term plan 10 years ago, and we did not.

Mr VINEY — Maybe; we are not responsible for what we did 10 years ago — —

Dr MORTON — The present government was not in government 10 years ago, but — —

Mr VINEY — What we are responsible for as parliamentarians, whether it is in government or not, is what we are facing today, and what we are facing today is a system that has had this surge in increased patronage.

Dr MORTON — Where we have a disagreement with the current thrust of planning is that it appears to us that the plans that are in place at the moment seem to have come out of a mode of thinking that says, 'Okay, here is an infrastructure project, here is a solution, now let us go about justifying that'.

Mr VINEY — You said that earlier; I wanted to pick you up on that.

Dr MORTON — Because of this huge surge in patronage, which has taken the whole planning establishment completely by surprise, we have had a bit of a crisis management response to that. That has been justifiable to some extent. We have had short-term measures to get some extra trains in the system to relieve overcrowding. We have had longer term measures to beef up the infrastructure so that this kind of patronage climb can continue. There are questions around how much patronage into the central city in peak hour can continue to increase. After all, there is only a limited number of desks in offices in the central business district, and there is an increasing number of people who reside in the CBD and therefore live close to where they work and do not have to take the train into the CBD in the morning. There will be a saturation point in the demand for peak hour CBD-orientated rail travel, but we are probably not there yet. We can see that there will be some substantial increases in that kind of patronage.

We are not seeing any kind of measure in the Victorian transport plan that we can see that is addressing some of the other issues that we see are to do with the demand for travel outside peak hour and to destinations other than the CBD. We have seen a little bit of action there in relation to the orbital SmartBus routes and some of the other SmartBus networks, which really need much more consideration than they have had to date. I do not think there is a much of a perception of crisis around off-peak transport and non-CBD transport, because at the moment it is still relatively easy to do that by car in Melbourne, with some exceptions. Because it has not generated the political problem that CBD train travel has we are not seeing as much effort devoted to solutions. We would argue again that solutions should not be driven by political imperatives; they should be driven by independent consideration of the transport task and what kind of planned response is appropriate.

Mr VINEY — That is an assertion, not evidence before the committee.

Ms HUPPERT — That is your assertion that that is what has happened or what is happening rather than being actual evidence.

The CHAIR — I have got Mr Barber. Can I just say before I take you, Mr Barber, I am absolutely bemused by the fact that everybody was caught by surprise by the increase in patronage when in fact it was all a government target.

Mr BARBER — I think your evidence is quite clear — despite being seasoned observers of Melbourne's public transport system, you guys are telling us you do not really understand how the government is going about planning public transport for the future. Would that be a fair summary of what you have been telling us this morning?

Mr BOWEN — If it is going on to a high degree, it is invisible to us, yes.

Mr BARBER — Thank you. So at the very least the government Department of Transport is an appalling communicator when it comes to telling people what it is doing.

Mr BOWEN — They are certainly telling us what they would like to build, but that does not answer the question of what is going to happen in the next five years, say, before the tunnel gets funding and actually happens.

Mr BARBER — Thank you. And across a whole range of other matters that you have talked about as well — if the government has some incredibly cunning plan, it has a reason for hiding it and only showing you a little bit at the time!

Dr MORTON — That is it. Maybe somewhere in the depths of the Department of Transport there is someone who has come up with a passenger service standard for public transport based on getting people from A to B in similar time to car travel within the urban growth boundary et cetera, but if there is, we have no evidence that that exists anywhere in the department or anywhere else in public transport planning.

Mr BARBER — I do not think the questions you are asking are unreasonable. I just want to ask you this though: you hark back regularly to a public transport authority model which you say is very successful in various places around the world. V/Line is a public transport authority in the sense that it has got control a lot of the network, it has got a board of members whose names we can see in the annual reports and who presumably are accountable to somebody for the performance of their activities. They do coordinate buses and trains; at least until they hit North Melbourne and other stations they are responsible for their activity. You cannot compare it directly to the metropolitan trains, but in the sense of the factors you were talking about, such as openness, organisational health, organisational culture, the ability to plan, do you think there are signs they are doing better under that model than, say, what we have been getting here? Is there anything good you can say about V/Line and its structure?

Dr MORTON — Certainly in the past I think the way in which V/Line has operated its train and coach services as a multimodal entity has been somewhat successful. For example, I used to travel to Daylesford on a regular basis; I would get the V/Line train to Woodend and then at Woodend there would be a V/Line-branded coach. It was actually operated by a private coach operator in the area, but it was in V/Line livery, so you could quite clearly see it was part of the same system. That then took you to Daylesford, and that was coordinated with the train, so that system was integrated in much the way we would like to see metropolitan transport

integrated in fact. Some of that multimodal integration has come about on the V/Line side of things. It is certainly far from ideal, but it is a little bit ahead of the game as far as Melbourne's transport is concerned, I suppose. I do not know that we necessarily go out and say that V/Line is the epitome of how public transport ought to be run.

Mr BARBER — But there are elements of it.

Dr MORTON — There are, yes.

Mr BARBER — Which you think point to the direction that we should be going if we are going for a public transport authority.

Mr BOWEN — You will certainly find that the buses to Daylesford still connect properly with the trains at Woodend, but if you try that in any of Melbourne's suburbs, more likely than not you will find that there is no connection and no attempt at coordinating bus and train services.

Mr VINEY — That is not right. That is just not right.

Mr BARBER — What about other aspects, such as planning and the way they involve the community in setting service levels?

Mr BOWEN — There does seem to be a certain level of consultation with the community, yes. From V/Line you will regularly see senior V/Line management riding the trains and talking to the customers. There is a regular attempt to communicate directly via newsletters and that sort of thing. So, yes, that may well be the way — —

Mr BARBER — Is it any more transparent how they are doing their planning though? They must be doing some planning.

Mr BOWEN — Yes. Arguably not. That is true; there is not a great deal of visibility.

Dr MORTON — Of course we have had regional fast rail in the past decade. I think that may well be the first active planning process that V/Line and regional public transport in general has had for a very long time. Up until then I think the story of regional trains in particular was one of gradual contraction and closure. I do not think there was any evidence of any forward planning for any future expansion if people suddenly decided to start coming back to trains.

We did see, though, with regional fast rail there was a government initiative which perhaps could have been better targeted. It wound up being better targeted than it started out being, I think. The focus gradually came to be more on service frequency and connections between services and passenger outcomes than it was on engineering and technical factors like how fast the trains were. That has evolved to become something that has been a great success in attracting patronage to the regional train system.

Mr BOWEN — And to their credit V/Line did actually have a public consultation process when they were developing that new timetable. They put out draft timetables, they asked for comments from local communities and from anyone who was interested and wanted to submit their suggestions. They may not have taken everyone's ideas into account, but they certainly were open and transparent in showing what they were up to as they developed those timetables.

Dr MORTON — So they have done some things right. I do not know that they have necessarily always been as transparent as we would have liked. Certainly they have done some things which we think have been counterproductive, like tearing up that second track from Kyneton to Bendigo, for example. If there had been more community involvement at the start, then maybe some alternatives to some of those engineering measures that were implemented might have gone ahead that would have put us in better stead for the future, but that is an argument we can have separately, I suppose.

Mr O'DONOHUE — Mr Viney referred earlier to the 2003 Train Plan. Could you elaborate on what that plan contained? I think you mentioned something about it anticipating patronage growth.

Mr BOWEN — I think we actually put a copy of that graph in our submission somewhere. I will see if I can find it: it is at the bottom of page 14. The Train Plan only reached draft stage, but it was based around assumptions such as the 20 per cent by 2020 targets for public transport use around Melbourne. The graph shows that they anticipated that if they were going to meet that target, then patronage would grow. It talked about how many trains they were going to need and that sort of thing. As I said, the Train Plan only reached draft stage and was never officially released, but it appears to have forecast a lot of the patronage growth that subsequently happened.

Mr O'DONOHUE — Earlier we heard about that unprecedented, unplanned and unexpected growth, but actually that is not — —

Mr VINEY — By 2020.

Mr O'DONOHUE — That is not actually true.

Mr VINEY — Well — —

Mr O'DONOHUE — The growth was — —

Mr BARBER — This seems to indicate that we would be 30 trains short in 2008.

Mr BOWEN — I do not think it was ever expected to suddenly leap up in 2020. It was always going to be a slow climb from 2003 up to 2020. I guess you could say in some ways perhaps it has been unprecedented. If the figures are right, then we are carrying more people by train than ever before and probably longer distances, too. You could say it was unplanned, because we clearly have a shortage of trains, but unexpected it appears not.

Mr O'DONOHUE — In particular I take up the Chair's point previously about 20 per cent of trips by 2020 being by public transport.

Mr BOWEN — It is an admirable goal. It looks like we are now on track to see that happen, and thankfully we are getting these extra trains to cope with that load. Yes, either you have a goal that you want to reach or you do not. If you have a goal of 20 per cent of trips by 2020 and you do not cater for that, then perhaps it appears that you were never intending to reach that goal.

Mr DRUM — Maybe they were just telling lies and it turned out to be the truth.

Mr VINEY — No, no.

Ms HUPPERT — No.

The CHAIR — No. Are there any further questions? I thank you for your attendance today at the hearing and for your comments on quite a range of questions. As I indicated to you, the transcript will come to you and you can have a look at it and shoot us back any concerns you have in terms of misspellings and so forth, but you cannot change the substance of the material. Thank you for being with us.

Dr MORTON — Thanks very much for hearing us.

Mr BOWEN — Thank you.

Witnesses withdrew.