

# 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

#### Members

Mr B. Atkinson  
Mr G. Barber  
Mr D. Drum  
Ms J. Huppert

Mr S. Leane  
Mr E. O'Donohue  
Mr M. Viney

Chair: Mr B. Atkinson  
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#### Witness

Mr D. Watson, Upgrade Upfield Corridor Committee.

**The CHAIR** — Welcome, Mr Watson. We have noted your submission and would be interested to hear a little more from you. All evidence taken at this hearing is protected by parliamentary privilege as provided under the Constitution Act 1975 and is further subject to the provisions of the Legislative Council Standing Orders. So you have qualified privilege for what you say in here. However, any comments you make outside the hearing in respect of the same matters may not be afforded the same privilege. All evidence is being recorded by Hansard and you will be provided with a proof version of the transcript within a couple of days. If there are some errors in that transcript, then you can certainly bring them to our attention. But it is not possible to change the substance of the evidence you have given. I invite you to perhaps make some opening remarks and then we will proceed to some questions.

**Mr WATSON** — Thanks very much, Chair. First of all, thanks for accepting our late submission and inviting us along to talk to you. I will tell you a little about the committee. We are a local public interest group and we are mostly concerned with public transport in our corridor. More than 20 years ago the focus of the group was the proposal to shut down the Upfield railway line. A number of community and other groups got together to oppose that proposal and eventually, for a number of reasons, the Upfield line remains and has been upgraded to the standard of the rest of the service.

A few of us from that campaign have continued on as a sort of a group that monitors and seeks continual improvement in the services we are offered on the line. My comments will be local but I think some of the things I say will have relevance across the whole metropolitan network.

I mainly want to talk about two notions of failure in our services. The first one is that over the last five years or so there has been a failure to deliver services that have been programmed, particularly on the Upfield railway line where we have seen cancellations. We are not so much talking about extreme weather events but just the day-to-day and week-to-week cancellation of trains and the impact that has on commuters and passengers and people who seek to get to work and to appointments and so on. Those failures in services have been impacted on what we feel is a failure to program the appropriate number of services for the line.

Upfield has four services to the city between 7.30 a.m. and 9.00 a.m., which represents the peak period. This is the worst service delivery in the network. A cancellation extends this frequency to 40 minutes. We have had a couple of instances over the years where we have had two cancellations together and that extends the frequency to 1 hour. When there is a cancellation the community has to wait at least 20 minutes and perhaps up to 40 minutes for the next train to come along.

The second failure we have experienced in service delivery is that sometimes three carriages replace six carriages, and that means at stations close to the city, people just cannot get on the trains and have to wait or battle with other means of getting to the city.

Basically we have six services an hour all day. Our peak service is 20 minutes. We have four services delivered to the city between 7.30 a.m. and 9.00 a.m. This is the same service that the three last stations on the Hurstbridge line get and the three last stations on the Williamstown line get. But for the whole of the Upfield line we have a 20-minute service. We can compare this with other lines: the Sandringham line, for example, has 9 trains delivered to the city in that hour and a half; and Glen Waverley has 10 trains. Those lines are basically the same length of line.

I might also mention that when patronage on our line was a lot less — in the late 1970s or early 1980s — we had peak trains at 12 minutes to 16 minutes. Somewhere along the line we have lost something. We feel there has been a failure to program appropriate services on our line. It comes back to a planning issue; at this stage I do not want to get into who is responsible for that but just say that it has not happened. Over the last five years we have seen quite a dramatic increase in the number of Upfield line passengers.

We have not done any formal surveys, but the way we see it is that there have been a few reasons for this. The first reason was that I think people were falling in with what was government policy at the time, which was to increase by 2020 the number of public transport trips to 20 per cent. I think that probably has had an impact on people, and people also think about things like traffic congestion, climate change, pollution and other things. Obviously the oil price spiked, leading to a lot more people on public transport and overcrowding on trains.

There are a couple of other things happening in our corridor. There has been quite a big population increase due to infill housing and other sorts of housing developments, and there is an increasing number of tertiary students

living in our corridor who use the train to travel into the city and their city tertiary institutions. I think there is another aspect of this that has probably come into play, which is that the people who now occupy houses in the Brunswick-Coburg corridor are more likely to work in the city rather than in the days when they worked in local manufacturing and local industry.

We accept that there are current capacity problems on the line and that might prevent us from having the increase in peak frequency that we want. But we note — and this has come out in other evidence — that if the capacity of the loop was increased to 24 trains per hour, a peak frequency of at least 15 minutes would be feasible on our line. We would probably like to see 10 minutes, but we think 15 minutes is a big improvement over 20 minutes.

To move away from peak frequency, some of the other issues that affect Upfield line passengers include — and this affects other lines — that after 7 o'clock at night the service becomes 30 minutes. A lot of city workers are still in the city at that time, and I think a 30-minute service is very poor, given that if we increase these shoulder frequencies, we might in fact be able to move some people away from peak-hour travel and reduce the overcrowding.

The Upfield line gets no additional services for major events in the city, whether for night cricket, night football, or other big events that happen. I can speak personally here, that it is difficult if you finish a match at Telstra Dome at about 10.30 p.m. on a Friday night, because there is a half-hour train service to try to get home, and you are trying to get that service with a lot of other people crowding onto Southern Cross station.

A third issue for us is a lack of timetable coordination with local bus services, and also in a sense a lack of what the previous speaker referred to as coordination of bus and train services in terms of where they meet. One particular example is that the service that runs from Moonee Ponds to Westgarth runs at a half-hour frequency, which we think is pretty low. At least if we had a 20-minute frequency it could coordinate with the trains. It actually runs proximate to three railway lines, but at either end of that line, the bus service ends up at the tram stop which is 400 metres short of Moonee Ponds station, so it does not actually meet the train station. At the other end at High Street, it stops at High Street but does not go the extra couple of hundred metres into Westgarth station. We think there are opportunities there for both time and place coordination.

There is one other small infrastructure project that we would like to see proceed, and we were disappointed that it did not happen. That is the extension of our line up to Craigieburn, which would take a lot of pressure off the Broadmeadows line and also increase utilisation of our line by bringing trains for Craigieburn along the Upfield line. The second aspect of that was a proposal that I think was floated by Connex some years ago that V/Line trains coming from Seymour and beyond could come down the Upfield corridor, which would be less crowded than the Broadmeadows corridor.

One other thing we would like to say is that our group considers that the underlying principles of our public transport system should be access and equity. That means that we consider that people who live in metropolitan Melbourne should have reasonable access to public transport to enable them to travel to any other part of the metropolitan area in a reasonable amount of time. It means making available to all areas of Melbourne frequent and reliable rail services from early morning until late at night, supported by an integrated network of frequent and reliable tram and bus services. The system must provide effective transport for all those who do not have access to private transport and an option to those who do have access to private transport.

A report that was put out by VCOSS and other groups in 2004, which was their transport plan, made the point that 33 per cent of Melburnians do not drive for one reason or another — ineligible, too young, or whatever — and 7 per cent of Melbourne households do not have motorised vehicles, and those figures are about five years old. I will end my introductory comments there, thank you.

**Mr BARBER** — I live in the area, just in case you do not know, so every morning I decide which tram, train or bus combination I am going to use to get myself to work as fast as possible. On the Upfield corridor we have got trams that run very slowly but very frequently, running in parallel with the train that runs quite quickly but rarely when compared to other lines. Have you got any feeling or any evidence as to how many people we might be able to pull off the trams and put onto the trains and possibly carry more people more efficiently if we had more regular services?

**Mr WATSON** — No, I do not, although I could probably give you a couple of anecdotes. This system worked, and actually it was used when we were trying to save the railway line. It was said people could get the train, and we did not need a tram and a train. But I think if you looked at the patronage figures of both modes today, you would see it just could not happen. In terms of the number of passengers back then, the lines for trains and trams are parallel, although they do not run parallel all the way through to the city. I think about a third of the number of passengers on the rail line or on the tram line could move from one to the other, so most in fact could not.

The second thing is that I use Jewell station, which is just into Brunswick. If a train is cancelled, if I immediately make a dash for the tram to zip into the city, I save myself no time compared to the time it would take if I waited for the next train. It is not worth it. For people further up the line, in fact it is less worth it, because as you said the trams are slow. I do not know, perhaps the train frequency would bring more people off the tram. I do not know how many, but I would hope a more frequent train service could bring more people off out of cars and using trains and perhaps cut congestion.

There are not that many effective road routes out of Melbourne. There is Sydney Road, which is a narrow road, and then it is the Tullamarine Freeway, and then right across to somewhere like High Street or Plenty Road.

**Mr DRUM** — Or St Georges Road.

**Mr WATSON** — Or St Georges Road. I think the bigger impact may well be — and I hope it is — dragging more people out of cars. Some people like to get trams, and a lot of the tram congestion would not be caused by people travelling to the city but by those travelling through to university, hospitals and places like that.

**Ms HUPPERT** — I notice in the correspondence that we received from you that you have a problem with infrastructure spending anywhere other than in Upfield. Obviously your train corridor is very important, but clearly we have an integrated transport system across the whole of the city. You have said particularly that you cannot see any point in spending any money on a tunnel because we can just run more trains through the loop. But we have heard evidence, both earlier this morning from Professor Currie and also evidence from the Department of Transport, about the current limitations to the use of the existing train system. Surely if we spent the money on improving infrastructure and put in a tunnel that took trains from the east–west link of the city loop, that would add more capacity to the loop and allow more trains from lines such as Upfield to use it.

It seems to me that we have to look at a more holistic approach to planning for transport rather than concentrating on one line. I understand that is a concern to people living in the Upfield corridor, but surely the job of the government is to take a holistic approach to transport planning and to try to work out a system that balances all those needs.

**Mr WATSON** — I do not have a problem with that. I am not suggesting infrastructure spending for the Upfield line is the highest priority for any government; I am just putting forward that these are things that could be done for our line that would improve it.

I am not sure I want to buy into the counterarguments from other people who have spoken to this committee, which you have just put, that we should look at capacity issues and other operational procedural issues before we start to spend big money on big infrastructure projects. One point about the rail tunnel is that it is servicing areas of Melbourne that are already serviced by public transport, whereas we have other areas on the fringes of Melbourne which are not serviced by public transport, or at least by trains; it is all probably poorly serviced by business. If you do not have infrastructure spending, that is where the focus should be.

In terms of the holistic aspect, we have criticisms of the Eddington report, but one of the problems with that was that the terms of reference were to look only at the east–west corridor rather than the metropolitan network as a whole. There are areas of Melbourne that that report just does not cover. If we are going to look at a whole-of-Melbourne approach, we need something broader than the Eddington report. It ignores totally, for example, the Mornington Peninsula area. We do not want to see that money spent in the first instance when capacity issues and other procedural and operational issues can be looked at, because it is a lot of money and it would crowd out other spending, not necessarily for Upfield, but for —

**Ms HUPPERT** — What you are talking about is a holistic approach, not just looking at heavy infrastructure but the other things the Department of Transport is looking into at the moment too, which are issues such as

stabling in areas like Craigieburn, increasing the signalling and all those sorts of things that are being done, although not just in your area. But you are in favour of that whole approach?

**Mr WATSON** — Absolutely. Just as an example, a simple operational issue relates to the dwell times of trains at Flinders Street. They sit there for 3, 4 or 5 minutes, and that takes up capacity right through the loop and throughout the network. That is something we believe could be looked at and rejigged.

**Mr BARBER** — How many times have they tried to close down the Upfield line over the years?

**Mr WATSON** — I do not know. I have been associated only with the campaign that started in 1989. That campaign went on for some years.

**Mr BARBER** — So they tried to close it down in 1989?

**Mr WATSON** — The proposal was through 1989, and I think the line was finally given its reprieve and was eventually updated in about 1997. That was actually one long campaign.

**Mr BARBER** — So you did actually get some expanded services at the end of that campaign? You were successful in that?

**Mr WATSON** — Yes, we were. What happened before that was that the line was running limited services, stopping at 7 o'clock and it ran no Sunday services.

**Mr BARBER** — And now they go later and they run on Sundays.

**Mr WATSON** — The span of services is the same as on any other network now. It is just the peak frequencies that we get very upset about, and other issues like shoulder frequencies.

**Mr BARBER** — So you were successful over that something less than 10-year period in the run-up to 1997?

**Mr WATSON** — It was a long campaign, there were a lot of issues and a lot of parties were involved. I am not saying we were necessarily the most significant factor in that, but we were a big factor.

**Mr DRUM** — How often does your group meet?

**Mr WATSON** — Once a month, and sometimes more often. In preparation for this hearing there was actually an extra meeting, but once a month otherwise.

**Mr DRUM** — How many active members would you have in your group?

**Mr WATSON** — About half a dozen — five or six — but they are probably left over from the campaign, and we have I suppose a core group that could help out if you wanted to run some sort of campaign; that is probably up to 100 or more people that we could call on to help out with station handouts, surveys or something else.

**Mr DRUM** — Do you have a vehicle that you can use to be able to have your voices heard? If you need to get your views or message across to government or to departments, do you have a conduit that is available for you?

**Mr WATSON** — Not one particularly; it is as we think is necessary. Our most recent activity — and there has been a lot of activity in this area — was to produce submissions to inquiries such as this. We presented one to the post-Eddington one. We presented one to the Senate inquiry recently. We have done something for the bus review. We are about to do another one for the bus review that is coming up for the services south of Bell Street. We talk to other people from time to time, but being an amateur group we are a bit restricted in our time and everything. We try to be as active as we can.

**Mr LEANE** — My question is similar to Mr Drum's questions. Is there a relationship between the UUCC and the Public Transport Users Association?

**Mr WATSON** — No, there is no formal relationship. I am not sure, but I think some of our other people are members of the PTUA.

**Mr LEANE** — Yes. I appreciate what your committee does and the success, in part, of saving the line. Is there any politics between the two groups?

**Mr WATSON** — No. I think they are more a general group and we are a particular group that just happened because of the events going back 20 years; they just threw up our group. There are no politics or issues between us. We agree with a lot of the things they say, and I think they probably agree with a lot of the things we say, but we do not coordinate or meet at all.

**Mr O'DONOHUE** — Mr Watson, excuse my ignorance, but what is the distance from Upfield to Craigieburn?

**Mr WATSON** — I could not tell you in kilometres. It is probably about three stations distance. There is a station at Roxburgh Park now. I think there was a proposal also to put one at Somerton if the route came down through Upfield.

**Mr O'DONOHUE** — And then that rail corridor is there?

**Mr WATSON** — The rail corridor is there. It would need some track work, some infrastructure work to complete the track through. There is a big stabling yard at Somerton and there would be some work to do there.

**The CHAIR** — Any further questions? No? You got off lightly!

**Mr WATSON** — Thank you.

**The CHAIR** — As I indicated, Mr Watson, the Hansard transcript will be sent to you for you to have a look at and send back to us. Thanks very much for making your time available and for your submission.

**Mr WATSON** — Thank you very much for having me.

**Witness withdrew.**