



SUBMISSION TO THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL SELECT COMMITTEE ON TRAIN SERVICES

MAY 2009





1. Executive Summary

The Eastern Transport Coalition (ETC) has constructively submitted to many Victorian and Commonwealth government forums, reviews, inquiries and consultation processes in the most recent years regarding the provision of sustainable transport options for the eastern region of metropolitan Melbourne.

The respective communities represented by the ETC have been vocal supporters of improved public transport in Melbourne's eastern metropolitan region. This is well documented by outcomes from community surveys, community engagement and consultation.

A recent survey of 592 rail commuters across the ETC catchment area validates this assertion:

- 71 per cent of commuters using the Doncaster Park and Ride want a rail line to Doncaster;
- 51 per cent of commuters using Belgrave station want more services along the Belgrave / Lilydale lines;
- 50 per cent of commuters using Box Hill station want more services along the Belgrave / Lilydale lines;
- 33 per cent of commuters at Monash University want a rail line to Rowville, and 24 per cent want more services along the Dandenong line; and
- 52 per cent of commuters at Glen Waverly want more services on the Glen Waverly line.

Historical underinvestment in rail infrastructure and services has led to a relative decline in public transport usage when compared to annual vehicle kilometres travelled in private vehicles. Much of eastern metropolitan Melbourne is characterised by very high levels of car ownership due to insufficient public transport options, causing an over – reliance on private vehicle use and infrequent and less reliable bus services – where they exist. The health, social and environmental costs associated with inadequate public transport services are growing due to this imbalance.



In its recent inquiry into the costs of congestion, the Victorian Competition and Efficiency Commission (VCEC) found that the economic costs associated with road congestion in Melbourne is between \$1.3 billion and \$2.6 billion annually¹.

In contrast, investment in rail infrastructure and service improvements will substantially reduce economic costs caused by congestion, improve access and equity for outer suburban residents and provide substantial environmental benefits.

A clear example of this was demonstrated by the pre feasibility study commissioned by Knox City Council into the provision of a rail line to Rowville². The study showed that a rail line to Rowville, would have the capacity equivalent to removing more than 2400 cars from local roads per hour or an entire lane of the Monash Freeway. The study indicated a rail line to Rowville would cost approximately \$450 million, reduce greenhouse emissions, road congestion and air pollution. Travel times to and from Melbourne’s CBD were estimated to be reduced by up to 40%.

The ETC advocates a suite of options and mechanisms to aid governments achieve what should be considered universally accepted sustainable transport priorities.

For the purpose of the Terms of Reference adopted by the Legislative Council, the ETC’s core mandate can be broadly categorised to three key areas:

- Rail Network Expansion;
- Rail Capacity Expansion; and
- Rail Operational Improvements.

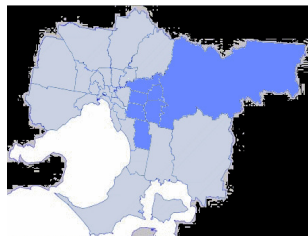


Figure of metropolitan Melbourne. The darker blue shade reflects the municipalities represented by the ETC (Greater Dandenong, Knox, Manningham, Maroondah, Monash, Whitehorse and Yarra Ranges).

With the burgeoning financial and social impacts of an ageing population, along with rapid economic contraction requiring both stimulus spending and reskilling of the labour force, coupled with the health impacts of air pollution and the upcoming process of pricing carbon into the economy, the time is right for governments to take a generational opportunity to invest in sustainable transport.



2. Rail Network Expansion

There has been very little rail network expansion in metropolitan Melbourne for many years. The ETC acknowledges the government's intention to extend the Epping rail line to South Morang³ as announced in the Victorian Transport Plan, with initial funding appropriated in the 2009 / 10 budget.

Whilst welcoming implementation of the Doncaster Area Rapid Transit (DART)⁴ - which is intended to replicate what heavy rail would deliver - the ETC remains committed to its adopted position which supports the provision of a heavy rail line to Doncaster. The ETC is disappointed that appropriations have not been made to implement such a project.

The ETC advocates the following key rail network expansion projects⁵:

- Extension of the Huntingdale rail line to Rowville;
- A fixed heavy rail line to Doncaster;
- Triplication of the rail line from Box Hill to Ringwood, and duplication of single track sections along the remaining sections of the Belgrave and Lilydale Lines; and
- New railway stations along both the Cranbourne and Lilydale Lines.

The above projects would serve to offer greater modal choice to many in the ETC's catchment area that currently have no choice but to drive to and from work, study, community and leisure activities.

Since 1969, governments on both sides have promised a rail line to Rowville. In 1999 the ALP promised '*.....a preferred train route to Rowville via Glen Waverly or Huntingdale*' (ALP Transport Policy 1999). Two years later, in government, the ALP reconfirmed its pledge by announcing a \$2 million options study (Ministerial Media Release – April 2001) including assessment of a rail line to Rowville. This commitment was again reconfirmed in parliament (Hansard – 2 May 2001).

The ETC notes the most recent budget fails to deliver any of the projects as advocated above.



3. Rail Capacity Expansion

The ability for the government to increase rail capacity is enormous. The recent announcement of the government's intent to purchase an additional twenty trains was a positive move. However, the expectation that only one will be delivered in 2009⁶ will do little to address the demands placed on rail services. This is clearly not a good outcome when considering an estimated transport budget in 2009 / 2010 of approximately \$4 billion⁷.

Accommodating a burgeoning increase in rail system patronage should be a key government priority, particularly given that it aligns with other strategic policy objectives: investing in infrastructure for growth, reducing carbon emissions and achieving social equity. Capacity expansion would alleviate much of the overcrowding that has been the result of historical underinvestment and poor planning.

Capacity expansion could be achieved by:

- Adding additional train carriages to existing services;
- Investing in duplication and triplication projects; and by
- Ensuring appropriately maintained, high quality and reliable rail infrastructure, supported by a well trained labour force.

Rail system capacity underinvestment has led to a dire situation whereby travel times are longer, trains are overcrowded, they are not appropriately maintained for changing conditions, and have contributed to making car based travel relatively more prominent.

These factors add to the serious imbalance embedded into the transport funding, taxation and incentive mix, which clearly supports car based travel at the expense of public transportation. Public transport must be competitive with private travel, on both cost of travel and journey time⁸.

Rail capacity expansion would result in faster, more frequent and reliable services, which will ultimately provide social, environmental and efficiency dividends to the community.



4. Rail Operational Improvements

The ETC notes that the effectiveness and efficiency of the rail system could be improved by maximising operational systems.

Operational improvements include (but are not exclusive to):

- Better and more coordinated signalling and track utilisation across the rail network;
- Improved maintenance of existing rail stock and infrastructure; and
- Better travel demand management and distribution across the network.

An effective component to better managing travel demand is by utilising the rail network efficiently.

Implementation of the 'Early Bird' ticketing regime (whereby free rail travel is available on work days, when a trip is completed before 7:00 am) reflects a good example of demand management across the rail network. A recent survey conducted by the ETC indicated that 79% of respondents thought the concept of 'Early Bird' ticketing was a good idea, however 94% believe the concept should also apply to trams and buses (ETC Media Release – 6 May 2008).

Many areas in the eastern metropolitan region are not well served by heavy rail, and therefore miss out on any gains attributed to 'Early Bird' ticketing. If the tickets were available on trams and buses, then more people would use the public transport network. 'Early Bird' ticketing has served to reduce demand at peak morning travel times, but does not form part of an overall travel demand management strategy.

A more integrated public transport network, across all modes throughout the day would serve to ease demand for limited car parking spaces at rail stations – a problem experienced by many commuters, and in some cases a disincentive to utilise the rail network.

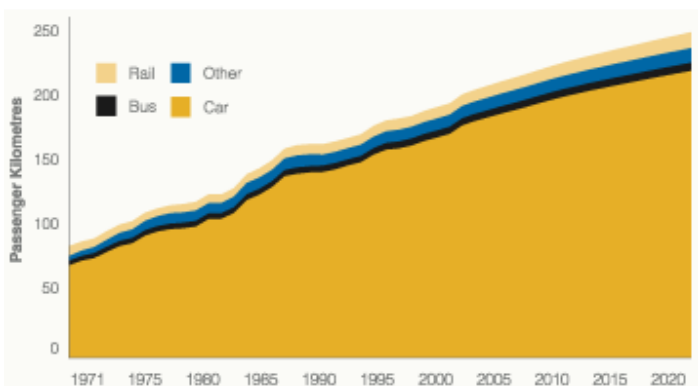


The inadequacy of car parking spaces at rail stations is also leading to commuters using parking in nearby shopping centres, causing unnecessary competition, resulting in tensions between traders and commuters. The inadequacy of rail station parking is also causing commuters to park in local streets which results in diminished neighbourhood amenity and adds to traffic congestion.

The abolition of Zone 3 was a good pricing instrument to affect public transport appeal. It achieved its purpose; to make public transport in outer metropolitan areas a realistic alternative to private motor vehicle travel. Whilst acknowledging the benefits, the ETC submits that a policy failing of the initiative was to not appropriately cater for increased public transport patronage demand.

Improved and appropriately administered rail service frequency, along with improved maintenance, would create a fertile policy setting from which to develop an informed, comprehensive and integrated travel demand strategy. The provision of such a strategy, along with other operational improvements, will result in more efficient rail infrastructure utilisation, reduce private vehicle travel and ultimately reduce costs associated with congestion.

The Department of Transport is encouraged to seriously review all operational aspects of the rail network to ensure peak efficiency. Such an approach, if developed within a framework of continuous improvement would both align with stated government objectives and cause better asset utilisation.



Urban Passenger travel by mode 1970 – 2020 (Auslink Green Paper)



5. Conclusion

Whilst cognisant of the broad Terms of Reference, ETC commentary on the '*the factors leading to and causes of failures in the provision of metropolitan and V/Line train services*' is limited to providing suggestions on how the provision of metropolitan rail services may be improved.

The ETC asserts that the Victorian public transport system could be substantially improved by investing in:

- Rail Network Expansion;
- Rail Capacity Expansion; and
- Rail Operational Improvements.

The imposition of global economic contraction has led governments to stimulatory measures to offset the expected declines in economic activity, which will lead to higher unemployment.

The ETC (whilst not commenting on the merits or otherwise of stimulatory spending) submits that in such an environment, targeted spending on infrastructure that aligns with triple bottom line principles should be prioritised.

Rail network and capacity expansion projects as advocated by the ETC meet these objectives, and provide a responsible approach to other matters, such as dealing with the challenges created by urban sprawl and communities not currently adequately connected to transport hubs.

Operational improvements need to focus on how best the public transport network can be integrated, competitive, well maintained and well resourced.

With specific regard to public transport, the Victorian Transport Plan talks a lot about the same issues as its former guiding document – Meeting our Transport Challenges.



Much of the content has not changed markedly in terms of recognising the problems, but the proposed solutions have either not been actioned or appropriated, or the proposed solutions have not been assessed by feasibility.

This is of key concern to the ETC. Projects that are attracting funding have not been appropriately assessed, whereas many of the projects the ETC advocates (such as duplication and triplication works, along with suggested network extensions) appear to have been completely ruled out.

The ETC notes this as both a policy and governance failure requiring correction.

Given the nature of this Inquiry (being driven by resolution of the Legislative Council as opposed to a government department or body) the ETC calls on the Select Committee to inform its decisions based on the projects, principles and suggestions as defined in this submission.

The ETC calls on all parties to embrace the concept that a well resourced, well integrated and competitive rail network should be at the forefront of public transportation in the 21st century.

¹ VCEC Inquiry into Road Congestion - 2007 / 2008

² Knox City Council – Rowville Rail Line Prefeasibility Study - 2004

³ Victorian Transport Plan - 2008

⁴ Public Transport Ministerial Media Release - 5 May 2009

⁵ ETC Working Documents and Fact Sheets - 2006 +

⁶ The Age (One new train due despite rise in trips) - 10 March 2009

⁷ Business Spectator – 4 May 2009

⁸ Privatisation and Regulation of Urban Transit Systems – OECD 2008
