

Melbourne Transport Strategy

Response to the Draft Strategy from Carlton Residents Association

Overview

The Carlton Residents Association (CRA) congratulates the City of Melbourne for its landmark draft document “Melbourne Transport Strategy” (MTS). We believe the document has accurately captured the sea-change in public opinion on transport issues for Melbourne. Long-term State and Australian Government policies of funding roads infrastructure and providing taxation support for motoring has undermined the development of public transport, cycling and walking. Current transport policies are unsustainable in the face of traffic congestion, freight distribution, air pollution, greenhouse impacts, increasing oil prices and other economic considerations. The long held belief that roads, freeways and tunnels will solve Melbourne’s traffic congestion and associated problems is no longer tenable eg. City Link, Eastlink. The powerful roads lobby, led by VicRoads, has won the lions share (90%) of funding over the past 50 years, it enjoys great political patronage and sets policy directions. All this is now directly challenged by the MTS. Already there has been much negativity from the roads lobby to MTS in attempts to undermine new and sustainable directions in transport policy. CRA urges the City of Melbourne to now forcefully advocate the MTS to Victorian State and Australian Governments. The State Government basically ignored the Northern Central City Corridor Study (2003) which covered much of the policy ground now canvassed by MTS. While the challenges ahead might appear daunting, MTS promises sustainable new and exciting directions for Melbourne’s transport into the future.

Critical Issues

CRA believes the following issues are critical to the Transport Strategy:

- **Role of VicRoads:** the dominant role of VicRoads in the Department of Infrastructure (DOI) must be challenged. It answers directly to four Ministers and is outside Departmental supervision. In contrast, public transport responsibility is buried within the DOI bureaucracy and lacks clout. The DOI organisation chart (p158) is a recipe for the problems now self evident. CRA believes a “Sustainable Transport Authority” should be developed to take over responsibility for all transport modes and be answerable to a single Minister.
- **Transport Funding:** the Australian Government provides funding specifically for roads infrastructure. It views public transport as a State responsibility. However, within Australian Government Departments there is a growing recognition of the need to include sustainability considerations and public transport within the funding mix. The MTS highlights these critical matters in funding. Nowhere is short term political thinking favouring roads funding more evident than within marginal electorates eg. Eastern suburbs of Melbourne. Governments appear to believe there are votes in roads but not public transport. CRA suggests community opinion is now turning on this matter and politicians should take heed.
- **Heavy Rail:** there have been no new heavy rail projects in Melbourne for decades. The long argued rail line to Doncaster remains deferred indefinitely; extending the City Loop to the north of the city seems a pipe dream. MTS again raises these important public transport infrastructure projects, including

within its expert review reports. CRA strongly supports these critical rail projects and urges strong representation to the State Government on them. The issue of whether there is spare capacity within the City Loop for increased train movements requires clear resolution.

- **Taxation:** Australian Government tax and tariff laws provides generous considerations to motoring but little for other transport modes. GST was applied to public transport while sales tax was reduced to the GST level for cars. Although taxation anomalies have been challenged for many years without effect, MTS again emphasises that these concessions are inappropriate and unsustainable given the economic and environmental challenges now facing the community. CRA strongly supports the suggested review of Australian tax and tariff laws for motorists and the removal of GST from public transport.
- **Free Public Transport:** there are cogent arguments in favour of free (or very cheap) public transport. Currently large expenditures are absorbed by road trauma, road infrastructure, public transport ticketing and policing. Free public transport could be funded from the resulting savings in these factors. The cost to the community of driver only commuter motoring is emphasised by MTS. Already cheap Seniors travel is well patronised and recent experience during the Commonwealth Games shows the community will leave the car at home and commute by public transport given reasonable incentives. CRA urges that the State Government be lobbied to experiment with “car free” days, with associated free public transport, so car based commuters experience alternative transport modes. We support the long-term car parking levy to discourage car driving commuters. However, while car expenses remain tax deductible, drivers are insulated from the economic impacts of their travel choice.
- **40kmh Speed Zones:** the MTS plan to introduce a widespread speed limit of 40kmh throughout the CBD is enthusiastically supported by CRA. We suggest this zone be extended to strips such as Lygon Street, Carlton, where speeding motorists are a hazard to pedestrians and cyclists. Already 40kmh speed zones successfully operate in Fitzroy and Collingwood eg. Johnson, Brunswick and Smith Streets.
- **Freight:** the legitimate expectation for expedient freight deliveries is frustrated by traffic congestion. MTS plans to transfer commuter car traffic to other transport modes could dramatically improve freight movements.
- **Walking and Cycling:** MTS emphasis on these modes of travel is strongly supported. Plans to improve bike and pedestrian pathways are welcomed.