

DOI on DDA

Congratulations to Victoria's Department of Infrastructure (DOI) for organising an excellent one day forum on accessible public transport. There were many stories relating to the success of local (often voluntary) community transport and demand-responsive (tele-) buses as well as the much more contentious lack of appropriate transit for those using wheelchairs. Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) compliance is a starting point but what is clear is the need for better systems to stop people becoming isolated in their homes or stranded in the streets.

Earlier this year my parents, both in their 80's, were in town. Try moving two elderly people on our transit system and then you start to realise the difficulties, and the importance of good planning. One thing that came from the conference that I had not realised is that elderly people fear falling on trams which deters their patronage.

The key problem in desperate need of resolution is the dilemma of transporting people in wheel chairs. At the moment this falls to the taxi industry, and while there are some very responsive drivers it seems that part of the problem is the booking process and part is the taxi ownership system. On a cold and wet Melbourne night I hate waiting even ten minutes for a tram – how much worse where people are waiting two or three hours, constantly being told that a taxi will turn up in five minutes. I know that the complaints we heard are true because I've heard similar ones before. It is certainly unacceptable and as one delegate noted: 'if we can move a parcel by courier across the city; we should easily be able to move people in need'.

Another problem is how do people with restricted sight know which vehicle is for them? An approaching truck for example can sound like a bus. I have seen a solar powered device that can be mounted at bus and tram stops. When a button is pressed, a beam of light is sent alerting a driver that someone is waiting at a stop. It ought not to be too hard to have various colour lights that can be selected by the waiting patrons to signal a particular bus or tram where multiple services share a route.

More on Southern Cross Station

"The other thing that could improve Southern Cross Station's ESD performance would be some car share bays to encourage integrated sustainable transport!"

Monique Conheady Flexicar 25/7/07

The Age: Opinion on Public Transport

"A commuter from the 1950s would be shocked to see how little the train network has grown. Back then public transport took priority over roads — unsurprisingly, as it accounted for six in 10 journeys compared with about one in 10 today. The city has expanded and its population tripled, so two-thirds of residents now live beyond walking distance of train and tram stops. State budgets reflected a car-dominated culture as year after year road funding greatly exceeded capital spending on public transport.

Once oil prices began to soar to the current \$US75 a barrel from a 2001 low of \$US18, and roads hit the limits of their capacity, the need for a reversal of priorities was clear. Yet funding in last year's 10-year, \$10.5 billion transport plan was still skewed to road-based options. Most of the \$2.9 billion for rail was in its later years. The Government has since brought forward some elements: the purchase of new trains, refurbishment of others, training of drivers and replacement of 30-year-old control systems to manage the extra services being promised. But line capacity increases and extensions, some promised many years ago, are still medium to long-term priorities. These are needed now, especially as commuters face paying even more for petrol if the oil price hits \$US100 a barrel as some analysts predict.

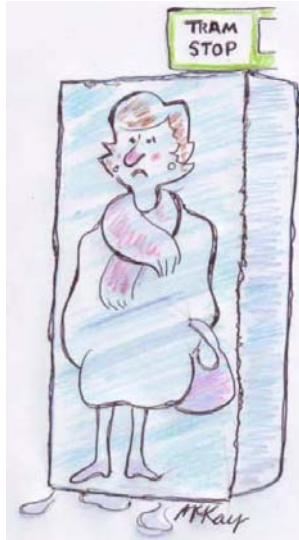
*Two years ago The Age argued the time had come to bite the bullet and divert funding from roads to rail; the reordering of priorities is even more urgent now. We have no illusions about the costs of expanding the system, but the wider costs of not doing so are greater. These include lost productivity — due to road congestion and accidents and train and tram delays — and the impacts of travel stress and delay on social wellbeing. These problems are affecting Melbourne's liveability. In the bigger picture of climate change, road users are the second-largest source of greenhouse gas emissions. It should be obvious that today's car-dominated commuting mix is unsustainable and unaffordable. Former transport minister Peter Batchelor was right in saying in 2004 that a "paradigm shift" was needed, and it is needed now. Doubling public transport patronage is not as his successor, Lynne Kosky, has said, a long-term "aspiration", but a practical imperative. The Government needs to rethink its 10-year plan and start now expanding rail lines and services. It must cater for future needs, with Melbourne to gain a million people by 2030, not just catch up to existing ones. If not, the long-suffering commuters have every right to accuse the Government of being out of touch with 21st century needs." **The Age** 27/7/07*

Public Transport in Melbourne

"I'm not for one minute asking people to put up with this for a long period of time but I would ask them to persevere ... to allow us put the changes in place." [Ref: The Age 27/7/07]

Public Transport Minister Lynne Kosky on over-crowding.

In Victoria we have the backbone of a good transit system but we just seem to lack the will to make it an excellent system. Why is there this intransigence? Hardly a day goes by without someone commenting on mismatching services. A speaker at a recent forum on German tram systems, in answer to a question, stated that two buses and two trams typically arrive at the same spot at the same time and exchange passengers before moving on. His answer was so matter-of-fact that one shivers when we consider the misconnections in our city. And shiver I did while waiting 30 minutes at Glenferrie Station for a train into the city and then 17 minutes for a connecting tram to South Melbourne Beach. Are thirty minute gaps on a main line in the mid evening really appropriate? The other problem is lack of infrastructure development in urban areas. The classic line:



'Nobody catches public transport any more, its too crowded' takes on a different meaning when the full trams glide by and the 'nobodies' are left waiting at the stops. As Peter Newman points out, in Melbourne we keep talking about extending our train lines but simply fail act: *"...Melbourne just can't seem to bring itself to put in these rail systems that they've planned..."* [Ref: ABC AM 27/6/07].

What to do? If we are serious about Congestion, Fuel Prices, Greenhouse Gases, Pollution and Peak Oil then everybody working in or for sustainable transport needs to work in concert and actually establish an excellent system.

Online: www.goingsolar.com.au/transport

To receive or discontinue receiving this newsletter please send an email to the address below.

Public Transport in the UK

"It would be truly interesting to see if a new generation of secondary route trains, coupled with some imaginative treatment of the routes they operate over, could repeat the trick of the late 1950s. Then, passengers flocked to use new generation diesel trains as a complete contrast to the grimy and dowdy steam-powered local services they had lost confidence in. Could a new generation of road commuters be tempted by a train that looks sexy and brings with it journey-time improvements and other benefits? Instead of trying to preserve secondary lines in aspic, there is a case for taking a small number and trying a few radical ideas."

Ref: ALAN WHITEHOUSE, Transport Correspondent for BBC North, writing in the October 2006 Rail Professional

"We need trains to be lighter and more efficient because this both reduces energy consumption and reduces track damage. We need track to be maintained to higher standards of precision to allow our light trains to run ... In dense urban areas we need to recognise that the highest capacity will be delivered by optimising the railway for high density traffic ... On rural and lightly used regional lines we will need to aim for much lower costs, with longer replacement cycles for infrastructure, no trackside signalling equipment and perhaps 'tram-train' style vehicles ..."

Tom Harris MP, [British] Parliamentary Under Secretary Of State For Transport, (writing in Modern Railways) Jan 07

"We should look at light rail schemes that utilise under-used or disused rail lines." "This [Parry Ultra Light Rail] would be ideal for some branch lines."

Stephen Hammond MP, [British] Shadow Rail Minister, 17/5/07



John Parry MBE inside the Parry People Mover Ultra Light Rail System in the UK