

Transport for Melbourne – what’s the plan

Transport for Melbourne – what’s the plan, how do the major infrastructure projects that the current State government fit in? Why is it that transport solutions are invariably thought of in terms of infrastructure? Who is the government listening to for professional advice and what is the role of community advocacy groups in promoting changes in transport policy? These were some of the questions that were raised at a transport forum on 4th August 2016 organized jointly by Transport for Melbourne and the RMIT Centre for Urban Research.

The imperative for a plan is becoming more and more urgent. Traffic and transport pressures are putting a lot of pressure on Melbourne and degrading its status as a livable city and this will only increase as the city continues to grow. A city of 8 million will not be livable without a major shift to modes that take up less space and make more efficient use of existing infrastructure, but this will not be achieved by extending business as usual and certainly not by single large scale infrastructure trophy projects that benefit the few.



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We have an opportunity to create a world class transport system in Melbourne but this will require a plan that addresses longstanding systemic problems that have not been addressed for decades. There is also a need for a change in current thinking based on better understanding of transport issues that Melbourne faces now and how these can be better addressed by applying lessons learnt from cities that have been confronted with similar problems and become models of international best practice. Our concern is that the transport crisis we face today in Melbourne is to a large extent a result of our government’s failure to appreciate and apply these lessons.

- We need to think differently about transport – i.e. as a whole system that is an integral part of a city plan
- Transport itself needs an overall integrated plan
- We need to look at public transport in terms of a “service” that competes with the car
- We need to challenge the view that transport solutions are invariably thought of in terms of infrastructure
- We need to challenge the basis on which transport priorities are assigned
- We need to adopt an independent evidence based approach to transport planning and policy and
- We need to be more concerned about the quality of governance and planning transparency.

The transport problem is always seen in terms of infrastructure: ‘we don’t have enough - therefore we must pour money into building more’. But the immediate problem is that we don’t use what we have effectively and efficiently. There are many cities in the world with superior transport systems that have far less infrastructure than Melbourne.



Melbourne needs a new vision for transport and a new plan to implement the vision. The plan must start not with new infrastructure but with institutional change and better management of our public transport system and new investment priorities. We want transport on rails and transport on roads to be planned as a single integrated network. Thinking about transport must be joined up with thinking about the future shape of our city. Walking and cycling must be treated as transport modes needing safe infrastructure. We need a plan that reflects the best international practice. We also need a new freight plan.

We need a **real** land use and transport plan for the whole metropolis. A **real** plan is not just a bundle of infrastructure projects and vague aspirations illustrated with pages of colour photos and diagrams.

A **real** plan is founded on facts: facts about patterns of movement and settlement coupled with a vision for how our city is to grow into the future in a way that meets people's needs for housing and transport and their hopes for the 'good city'.

Over the last twenty years the business of governing has been handed over to politicians focused on the immediate demands of day to day politics, and to consultants and lobby groups serving those political needs. We have forgotten that democracy also needs an expert state. It is argued that State Governments, and our own Government of Victoria in particular, have forgotten how to plan.

How do we change this? Persuading the government to make such a real plan is possible. But it is argued that the community itself also has to take some responsibility for that task. It cannot be left solely to government. There is widespread dissatisfaction with Melbourne's transport system and the future of a fast growing and changing mega-city region. There is also an underlying shared sense of what is needed. But the pressure is dispersed among many different citizen groups and organisations, including Councils. There is no single voice and no unifying theme. The government listens to each group individually, and is confused by the diversity and plurality of the demands on it.

In these circumstances it is much easier for governments to go on doing what they have always done and listen to, and act on the much more unified voices of the road lobby and the urban development industry, rather than to the multiple voices of the people of this city. We, the community, need to send a clear and unambiguous message to government. We can't expect governments to do all the hard work of getting to a reasoned consensus on the future we want. We, the people, have to do that for ourselves.

This is why we formed Transport for Melbourne. Our aim is to find a way of articulating the common elements inherent in all the specific demands of the many citizen groups. If we can articulate these elements into a common theme or charter to which the many could subscribe, then this charter could be presented to government by every citizen group and every supporting organisation that it meets.

The business of forming consensus around a positive program is difficult. It will take time and a lot of effort. We have only just begun to try. But there are reasons for hope.

Our first focus is transport, especially public transport – the most egregious example of planning failure, but as indicated above, the matter goes far beyond transport and into city planning. We all know excellent examples of well-functioning transport systems that exist in cities elsewhere. In the campaign against the so called East-West Link we have seen what citizens can do when united behind a single cause. But there is a closing window of opportunity. Adverse impacts from poorly



conceived projects are very difficult to reverse and the opportunity costs from unrealised benefits that could have been achieved if scarce government funding had been better targeted to areas of real need are substantial. This has implications not just for transport and other government services but ultimately for all of us and Melbourne as a liveable city.

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