

## Forum Summary by Chair

Doing more with less should not be regarded as exceptional behaviour – it is what should be expected of governments, making sure that investment on infrastructure and the delivery of services is carried out as efficiently and cost effectively as possible: it is simply good governance. The pressure to do more with less is increasing however as economic pressures intensify, driven increasingly by a range of environmental factors including climate change, global warming, environmental degradation, resource depletion, species loss which will intensify in coming years. These present serious challenges on their own but the government's ability to respond will be weakened by high levels of debt and the loss of many government businesses such as the Port of Melbourne and other government monopolies that had been a valuable source revenue and are now privately owned monopolies.

Further concerns have been raised by Dr David Hayward, *TheAge* 4<sup>th</sup> December 2024 about the sustainability of the state's finances and the "inability to contain expenditure on the day to day business of running the state". This concern is echoed by economist Saul Eslake noting that the cash situation, which is the most appropriate measure of financial health remains "mired in red ink". This is occurring at a time when economic conditions are expected to worsen in the short term at least at a time when the risk of external factors such as livelihood crises, pandemics, debt crises, geoeconomic confrontation and wars is becoming increasingly likely.

All of the above have significant implications for the transport sector, particularly public transport which requires large injections of funds to upgrade much of the system, and other infrastructure such as country roads where maintenance funding is urgently required at a time when new priorities, such as housing are emerging and increasingly competing for scarce government funds. It is also at a time when there is increasing pressure to reduce transport emissions and achieve targets set by the federal government and others.

Doing more with less will therefore be forced upon state governments whether they like it or not, but doing more with less cannot be progressed in an ad-hoc way; it requires a vision with goals and measurable targets supported by a plan to achieve them, which for the transport portfolio must be for the transport system as a whole. It must also be carried out in a way that takes into account the many risks we should anticipate in a rapidly changing and increasingly volatile world. This requires new thinking, not just about the goals and what to do to achieve them but most importantly how to do it, to overcome all of the forces that are wedded to business as usual that resist change, to manage the change process itself and provide the resources and expertise to carry this out.

It is important to ask firstly what is the future that needs to be planned for, secondly what is the visionary response and goals for our city, and thirdly what underlying principles should be established to support them from a transport perspective.

It has become increasingly clear that the future will be world of declining fortunes, one in which communities will be forced to reduce their environmental footprint and consume less of everything on a planet that will over time support fewer and fewer people. The need to

do more with less will apply to travel and transport more generally. The days of unlimited travel are over. We need to travel less, less often, over shorter distances, do so more efficiently and in a way that places less demand on supporting infrastructure and services.

In this context greenhouse emissions must include all emissions ie from “cradle to grave” including those generated offshore for the mining, manufacturing, servicing and disposal of transport assets and infrastructure.

This must be the overriding goal that drives our transport policies and strategies in the future but

- must be achieved at least cost to the transport system as a whole as quickly as possible at least risk and
- outcomes must be delivered in a way that meet community services obligations.

Political leaders and policy makers will need a strategy that shows how this can be achieved physically, financially and politically implemented in a way that is clearly understood, that addresses economic and political risks. There is also a need to create mechanisms that make our politicians accountable. Policies, goals and actions must be transparent and outcomes measurable in environmental, social and economic terms. Without this politicians will be tempted to use the transport portfolio for political purposes. The need to do more with less must be reflected in a new transport charter that guides our thinking and actions. The challenge is getting it done and overcoming many barriers that resist change.

The focus must be on behavioural change. There are many ways in which this can be achieved using a variety of levers with a systems based carrots and sticks strategy. This is a huge challenge because many parties with a vested interest in business as usual will resist change and we have to find ways of overcoming them. It is also important to link transport with the city plan and use it to help reshape the city in a way that reduce the need for transport and travel in the first place and make it more sustainable.

Whilst priorities can be established for different transport elements/segments they must be consistent with the overall vision and ranked based on their contribution to the system as a whole. There are many ways in which this vision can be achieved. For personal travel people can drive more efficient motor vehicles, use them less often (car sharing/ride sharing) or not at all using virtual travel/working from home), by using more efficient modes of travel – walking, cycling, scooters or skate boards and their electric and folding variants, public transport or combinations such as bikes, scooters, skate boards using public transport. There are plenty of options but no simple single fix solutions. The key will be to use these opportunities in a way that achieves optimal outcomes in terms of emission reductions for the transport system as a whole.

Actions and priorities discussed briefly in this forum are consistent with those recommended in earlier TfM forums, papers and submissions and It is unnecessary to repeat them, however it is important to stress that whilst there are no simple single fix solutions there is a need for a comprehensive plan that reflects fundamental principles based on international accepted principles of best practice and apply valuable lessons here.

Despite numerous submissions and advice from government departments and community advocacy groups over many years the state government still lacks a realistic vision for the future and continues to plan for population and economic growth and the agenda has been captured by the business lobby and other groups that have a vested interest in maintaining business as usual. Given this situation It is not surprising that transport outcomes in Melbourne and this state as a whole continue to decline.

Past experience in Melbourne and other cities has demonstrated the beneficial role the community can play in contributing to public policy, particularly transport and city planning. Restoring this is the challenge but will require new thinking on the part of the community about what the problems are in the first place, how to solve them, and the way they see themselves as change agents and problem solvers. It is worth reflecting on the message from our president Nick Low which he made at our forum in 2016.

***The current situation as I see it is something like this. There is great and widespread dissatisfaction with Melbourne's transport system..... There is also an underlying shared sense of what is needed.***

***But the actual 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 ourselves 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. Our first focus is transport, especially public transport – the most egregious example of planning failure, but as I indicated, the matter goes far beyond transport, into city planning.***

- ***We all know excellent examples of well-functioning transport systems that exist in cities elsewhere. Last Thursday I was in Vienna. I rode a beautifully integrated system of trains, trams and buses.***
- ***In the campaign against the so called East-West Motorway we have seen what citizens can do when united behind a single cause.***

It is worth taking this a step further.

If we are to be successful we must compete with interest groups that have captured the transport agenda and are using it as a business opportunity to suit their needs (the Transurbans and Cbus's and others), often using a slick sales pitch, marketing and good political connections to achieve their aims at the expense of the broader community. If the community is to win support for the kind of strategies proposed today it is necessary to match this. We cannot rely on logical well reasoned arguments and presentations. It will require a new story line/narrative that captures the imagination of everyone including the politicians and policy makers. This must be presented to government with a unified voice and strength in numbers. We are seeing some progress on this with the bus campaign carried out by FOE, and at a local government level by Meri-Bek council. The challenge will be to establish levers that create the momentum for broadly based system change but it is up to the community to do this, to stand up, be united and demand change – it will not come from government unless it feels it has to act in response to community pressure for change.