



State Budget Submission

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Victoria Best and Fairest



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Transport



Public transport plays a critical role connecting Victorian workers to employment and reducing congestion on the roads and therefore significantly contributes to economic efficiency and growth.

However, Victoria's public transport system is at a crossroads. Demand for public transport has grown at an unprecedented rate with urban patronage levels exceeding capacity at peak hour, and Vline passenger levels at a fifty year high. Simultaneously, there is growing urgency around the need to address the transport sector's carbon footprint and reduce Victoria's vulnerability to high petrol prices.

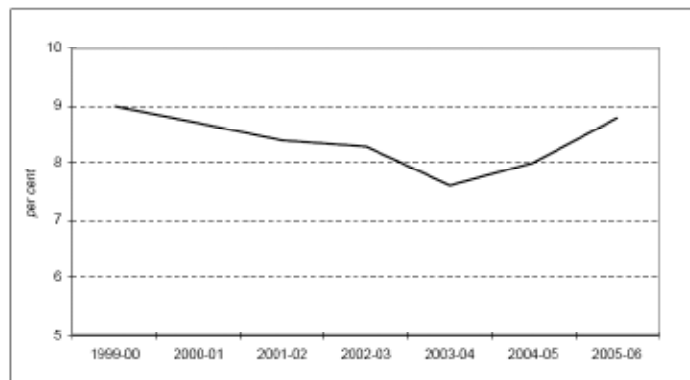
VCOSS is calling on the Victorian Government to invest in a transport system which is socially and environmentally sustainable for the whole of Victoria, not just Melbourne's inner city.

A sustainable transport system for Melbourne

Melbournians are voting with their feet and crowding onto public transport services but the public transport system is not keeping up with rapid population and patronage growth.

Despite the target of 20 per cent of motorised trips on public transport by 2020, the public transport mode share has not grown since this target was announced.

Chart 1: Public transport use as a proportion of motorised means in Melbourne



Source: Department of Treasury and Finance, Victorian State Budget 07/08, Budget Paper No. 3, Service Delivery, Victorian Government, 364.

This reflects that thousands of residents who have moved to Melbourne's fringe in search of affordable housing are forced to rely on cars because of poor public transport and land use planning. Those without access to private vehicles face severely constrained access to employment.

Forced car use is placing extra pressure on already vulnerable family budgets as increasing house prices, interest rises and petrol hikes all take a toll.

VCOSS analysis of Census data shows that inner city residents are four times as likely to use public transport to get to work than outer suburban residents.¹ In the local government areas of Mornington Peninsular, Yarra Ranges, Cardinia, Melton, Nillumbik, Wyndham, Whittlesea, Casey, Manningham, Knox, Hume and Dandenong, 5 per cent of residents or less use public transport to get to work. The high cost of cars and petrol means these households are spending twice as much on transport as relatively wealthier households living in Yarra or Port Phillip.

Despite this cost impost, promised and essential extensions to Melbourne's rail system into these new growth areas have been pushed back due to limitations in the

capacity of the rail system. These capacity constraints need to be urgently addressed to ensure that the public transport system can grow to cater for increased demand and outer suburban population growth.

In order to address current and future capacity constraints – and build the sustainable city for the future envisioned in the *Melbourne 2030 strategy* – a generational investment in rail capacity is now necessary. VCOSS proposes the Government commit to significant investment in rail infrastructure to remove capacity constraints on the network and simultaneously build rail extensions to bring high capacity public transport to fringe suburbs.

While rail performs a critical function as the backbone of the public transport system, bus services provide important links through suburban areas.

VCOSS welcomed the substantial investment in outer suburban bus services outlined in *Meeting Our Transport Challenges* including the introduction of minimum service standards. However many outer suburban areas still have infrequent and poorly coordinated services with limited hours of operation. In order to meet the needs of our increasingly casualised labour force, public transport services should be upgraded to operate at a minimum half hour service frequency until midnight. In areas of very low density flexible public transport services providing a mix of route services and door to door services are likely to be most effective.

A sustainable transport system for Victoria

VCOSS has welcomed the Government's significant investments in rural and regional public transport including the Regional Fast Rail Project, reopening of rail services to Ararat and Bairnsdale and new rural bus services. Fare reductions for rural and regional travel have also made transport more affordable for many Victorians. However, many rural communities are still without public transport services and communities beyond the Fast Rail project have not seen significant increases in service frequency. Where rural public transport services exist, they are often timed to suit the travel needs of passengers from urban centres.



As transport costs increase due to high fuel prices, rural communities increasingly need access to affordable transport services which link them to jobs in regional centres and to activities in Melbourne at a frequency and time which meets their needs. VCOSS is proposing a minimum daily link from rural towns to regional centres as well as increased services on main public transport routes.

School buses are a valuable transport resource for rural communities which could be better utilised to meet community transport needs. However, rural school buses exemption from the *Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport* means that they cannot be easily utilised to provide route public transport services between school runs. An investment in accessible school buses for rural communities would provide greater transport resources for whole communities.

These upgrades to rural transport services would be most effectively delivered within a framework of broader accessibility planning.

Preparing for the mobility needs of our aging community

The Victorian Government needs to ensure that Victoria's aging population is able to safely and affordably access health services, social and recreational activities and actively participate in community life. Currently 18 per cent of people over 60 report needing assistance with transport, rising to 33 per cent for 80-84 year old and 43 per cent of 85-89 year olds.² Investment in a range of transport options for older people will assist in meeting the diverse mobility needs of an increasingly large number of elderly Victorians.



The completion of public transport accessibility upgrades is essential to make the system usable for older people with restricted mobility as well as people with disabilities. Increased investment in tram accessibility is required to ensure that the 2012 target for public transport is achieved.

The Multi Purpose Taxi Program provides a valuable contribution towards covering the costs of transport for people with permanent disabilities including many older people. However the program subsidy cap continues to restrict the mobility of service users, especially in accessing social and recreational opportunities.

Community transport services provide a vital link to the community for many older Victorians. Yet the community transport sector receives no designated operational funding from the Victorian Government and remains largely uncoordinated and unregulated. VCOSS proposes the creation of a Community Transport Unit within the Department of Infrastructure to coordinate service planning and funding for community transport.

Recommendations

- 1 VCOSS proposes that the Government make a generational investment in Melbourne's sustainability by building:
 - a. rail infrastructure to relieve capacity constraints within the network, and
 - b. rail extensions to new development areas, including South Morang.
- 2 VCOSS proposes that the Government support access to employment and social participation by undertaking accessibility plans for fringe, regional and rural areas and resourcing:
 - a. increased minimum service levels for metropolitan and regional centre bus services to half hourly services until midnight;
 - b. minimum service levels for rural public transport services so that every community has a minimum daily return service to a regional centre; and
 - c. upgrades of the rural school bus fleet to make it fully accessible.
- 3 VCOSS proposes that the Government provide a package of public transport improvements to meet the needs of older Victorians that includes:
 - a. increasing investment in tram accessibility to ensure the 2012 deadline is achieved;
 - b. removing the Multi Purpose Taxi Program subsidy cap; and
 - c. strengthening community transport by establishing a Community Transport Unit within the Department of Infrastructure to coordinate planning, funding and accreditation of community transport services.

Endnotes

- 1 VCOSS travel cost comparisons, (unpublished), based on the Australian Bureau of Statistics 2001 Census.
- 2 Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Disability, Ageing and Carers 2003*, ABS, Canberra, September 2004.