

TRAMWAYS IN MELBOURNE AND EXPECTATIONS FOR THE FUTURE FROM A MANAGERIAL VIEWPOINT

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The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and are not the views or the policy of the Public Transport Corporation.

Introduction

The Public Transport Corporation has and is continuing to undergo significant change as a direct result of the Government's transport reform program, 'From a System to a Service'(1). This program is a two pronged approach to revamping Victoria's public transport system. First reducing the cost of providing public transport and then by improving the quality of the services provided.

One outcome of the reform program was the creation of Met Tram. Met Tram is the business unit within the Public Transport corporation responsible for providing Melbourne's tram services. As a business unit, Met Tram has the responsibility to develop tram services that both meet the needs of the travelling public while ensuring that services provided are at the lowest possible cost.

This paper briefly outlines some changes that are currently occurring to Melbourne's tram services and some issues or changes that the Author believes may arise in the future.

Part A - Current Developments

Melbourne's Icon

Melbourne's tram system has a long and interesting history with the first cable services opening in 1885 and the network expanding as the inner part of Melbourne grew. Unlike many cities Melbourne has 'stuck with it' and it is not surprising that trams are seen as more than just a means of providing transport. The decision to retain an extensive tram network has set Melbourne apart from most other large western cities. Even in this age when cities are re-introducing light rail or tramway systems the Government's commitment to retaining and promoting many of the historical elements of the tram system continues to be a distinctive feature of Melbourne.

No transport system as extensive as Melbourne's would survive without a purpose. In 1993/94 Melburnian's made 98 million tram trips on our peak fleet of 405 vehicles (2). Usage is growing and with the urban development occurring within the inner metropolitan areas the future for the Tramway is assured.

The Tram System

The tram system provides an extensive network of routes throughout the inner metropolitan area with some routes extending to newer areas including Bundoora and East Burwood. Over the last four years key additions have been made to the network; extensions have been undertaken to Airport West and East Burwood, a City

Circle tram loop created and a new extension is underway on the Bundoora line to Mill Park terminating at RMIT's new campus.

Several programs are underway to renew the tramway infrastructure. This includes replacing rotatory converters and mercury arc rectifiers with solid state equipment, converting the overhead to pantograph operation and ongoing renewal of trackwork.

The Tram Fleet

The composition of the tram fleet was reviewed in the early part of the reform program. This review considered the current condition of the existing vehicles, the passenger needs and importantly the need to preserve a working fleet of W class trams. This review concluded that the fleet should be reduced to a total of 472 vehicles.

The fleet includes 53 W class trams dedicated to operate on the City Circle, Toorak, St Kilda Beach and South Melbourne/St. Kilda Beach services. These routes will be promoted as Melbourne's heritage routes where visitors can ride these historic vehicles through areas which themselves have been largely preserved. These services will also continue to provide for the needs of regular customers.

These W class trams have been overhauled and repainted. The City Circle trams have a distinctive burgundy livery while the remaining 43 have been repainting in their 1950s livery. Work is continuing on these trams to enable the introduction of one person operation and automatic ticketing. A further 50 W class trams are being stored 'on system' as a ready reserve to meet any future demands for services beyond the capacity of the service fleet.

The eventual fleet also includes 102 Z1/2 class, 115 Z3 class, 70 A class and 132 B class trams. The Z 1/2 class trams are currently being overhauled to extend their life for at least a further 7 to 10 years. The Z3 class is planned to undergo a major overhaul once the work on the Z 1/2 is completed.

Automatic Ticketing

All trams will be converted to one person operation and fitted with automatic ticketing equipment. This equipment will include a Ticket Vending Machine located in approximately the centre of each tram and four (six on LRV's) 'Check in' or validating machines located close to each door. The driver will be able to control and monitor the ticketing system through a console in the drivers cab. Data for the ticketing system will be passed to and from the tram via a portable memory 'key' carried by the driver.

Route Ownership Strategy

Met Tram is progressively devolving much of the management of the tram system to individual depots. This allows a much flatter business structure and one which encourages staff in all levels of the organisation to participate in the development of the business.

For this to be effective it has been necessary to ensure each depot is given clear responsibility for particular parts of the tram network. A route servicing strategy has been developed which allocates each route to a particular depot eliminating shared routes. To further streamline the business the number of classes of tram kept at each depot had been reduced to a minimum.

This strategy is currently being implemented progressively as part of a general review of tram services. The route servicing strategy is changing the means by which services are provided and so there is no impact on customers other than paving the way for on-going improvements in quality of the services provided.

Part B - Future/Emerging Issues

High Technology Modes

The biggest task for new technology is how it will be used to improve the quality of the existing service provided by the established modes. Melbourne currently has the advantage of being able to choose between three established public transport modes to meet any particular transport task. It is the Author's view that high technology modes (such as mono rails or automated people movers) will only prove to be viable in few limited

applications for specific purposes. The O-bahn bus technology may find some application as means to improve bus services utilising existing freeways or other corridors to avoid the congested 'bottlenecks'.

Areas where technology is currently being utilised to advantage and will continue to do so includes computerised rostering, monitoring of trams, the provision of information and the current Automatic Ticketing System project.

People with Disabilities

The Minister for Public Transport has required that the PTC implement the recommendations of the Mobility Enhancement Strategy (3) which contains a number of initiatives to improve services for people with disabilities. This includes visible edge strips, announcements of stops and next stop buttons.

A major issue that all transport operators face is the question of wheelchair access. In the U.S.A. many buses are now fitted with wheelchair lifts and the trend in Europe is for low floor buses and trams. The low floor vehicles have proven to be of benefit to all users and the operators benefit from the faster loading times. For operators such as Met Tram with large fleets of older vehicles there will be increasing pressure for retro-fit programs.

In addressing wheelchair access it should be noted that vehicles are not the only aspect, and consideration also must be given to facilities provided at stops.

Passenger Facilities

Met Tram is currently improving the quality of the facilities provided at tram stops. Shelters are being upgraded and new shelters are being issued through a cost off-set arrangement with Australian Posters. A highly reflectorised stop flag is being installed at all stops which not only promotes the tram service but also warns motorists of passengers boarding and alighting. Full timetables are also being installed at every stop.

We have recently trialed the use of dynamic passenger information using the information from the Automatic Vehicle Monitoring System. The first permanent installation is expected to be operating by the end of the year at the new Elizabeth Street terminus. Over the next few years I hope that this installation may be extended to other busy locations.

Passengers will also benefit from good quality interchanges and services that are designed to facilitate interchange between services and modes. This must include changes between public modes as well as private modes including cars and bicycles.

Integration With Urban Development

There is growing awareness of the need to integrate public transport with urban development. The pace of change is slow and much of the current urban development continues to occur on the outer edges of the city away from convenient access to public transport. Nevertheless, there is a growing awareness of the advantages gained from access to good public transport both for the individual and for the community.

Of particular interest to Met Tram is the recent trend towards apartments in and around the central area of Melbourne. This process is, in many cases, transforming underutilised sites into high density urban developments and in the process providing new customers for our services. In many cases one of the main attractions of a site is the availability of good public transport. One such example, is the Bayside developments at the end of the Port Melbourne line. Not only does this development offer the attraction of bayside living but it is only ten minutes from the city centre by tram which leaves every eight minutes.

In the future, extension of the tram system is likely to be strongly linked to urban developments. Proposals such as the extension of City Tram to the casino and Docklands services are designed to encourage and take advantage of these new developments.

In the existing urban areas on the edge of the tram system which have largely been designed assuming a predominance of the motor car, extensions into these areas may occur but they are unlikely to be as attractive as extensions to areas which will be designed with public transport in mind.

Conclusion

Melbourne's tram system is undergoing major changes. These changes are occurring because of the need to reduce the cost of public transport to the taxpayers. These changes, however, are being done in a way to ensure that the quality of services to customers is improved and also that the history of the Tramway continues to be a feature.

References

1. *From a System to a Service*, Minister for Public Transport.
2. Public Transport Corporation, Annual Report 1994.
3. Department of Transport, Mobility Enhancement Strategy.

Questions

Bill Kingsley:- When might tram services be extended to Knox City?

Answer: The need for service is recognised, but solution is depended on funding. Most recent extensions have been paid for by the Commonwealth Government. The likelihood of funding for this is small in the absence of schemes such as 'Better Cities' which provided for City Circle etc.

Bob Pearce: Asked concerning the 'origin' of projects, whether they are conceived by The Met or imposed or suggested externally?

Answer: Both. The Met needs to look 10-15 years ahead to arrange provisions of rights of way as wider median strips in roads. Other things like City Circle are government initiatives which the Met implements.

Keith Stodden: Asked what the future of the Heritage Fleet would be if it is unable to be contracted out?

Answer: Referred to Minister on Monday.

John Shaw: Observed the problem of rough riding of Z1 class cars on route 64.

Answer: Two problems exist. First, Z1 & Z2 cars have poor suspension (which is being upgraded during the current major renovations). Second, track replacement is being done on life-expired sections. Track which is almost life expired can be quite rough.

John followed up with a second question. As to what is being done for the customers during this period of bad track/bad suspension?

Answer: Past customer relations have not been good but MET is becoming more customer focused. Complaints are being answered individually. A newsletter for customers will commence in approximately January 1995 and be published 3 or 4 times each year. As an aside, though, there is some worry about telling the public that their problems will not be fixed for 5 years or so!

Ron White: Does PTC see Grand Prix as an opportunity or a problem?

Answer: Both. Plans are being developed. Albert Park does not have a lot of parking capacity and there is some worry about the impact of a large influx of visitors. Discussions are being held with organisers to plan for the event.