

STATEMENT BY:

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CONCERNING

THE PROPOSAL BY THE STATE ELECTRICITY
COMMISSION OF VICTORIA TO ABANDON THE TRAMWAYS
SYSTEMS IN THE -
CITY OF BALLARAT AND BOROUGH OF SEBASTOPOL
CITY OF BENDIGO AND BOROUGH OF EAGLEHAWK

September, 1970

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ABANDONMENT OF TRAMWAYS - BALLARAT AND BENDIGO

In accordance with the procedure laid down in Section 74 of the State Electricity Commission Act, 1958, there has been laid before both Houses of Parliament a statement of the intention of the State Electricity Commission to abandon the tramways in the cities of Ballarat and Bendigo and the Boroughs of Sebastopol and Eaglehawk.

Since the question of abandoning the tramways was last considered by Parliament, additional information is available, and it is appropriate that I should elaborate on a number of points mentioned in the Commission's statement.

Let me say at the outset that the Government has every intention of ensuring that the residents of the two city areas have an efficient public transport system. The tramways would continue to operate until an alternative means of transport, satisfactory to the Transport Regulation Board, has been provided for the residents of the two city areas who now rely on the trams. However, before the Transport Regulation Board can take steps to institute an alternative transport system, it is necessary that Parliament indicate its concurrence with the proposal by allowing the statement to lie on the table of both Houses, without disallowing it, during the next 24 sitting days of the Legislative Assembly.

I believe that all members of this Parliament will agree that the tramways in the two cities have outlived their usefulness. Quite apart from the financial burden which the operation of these services places on the electricity consumers of this State, the tramways are antiquated, uncomfortable and completely inadequate to meet the transport needs of cities the size of Ballarat and Bendigo. This does not decry the work of the State Electricity Commission in operating these tramways.

When the tramways were acquired by the State Electricity Commission as part of the electricity undertakings in Ballarat and Bendigo in 1934, they were already old and were in very bad condition. They had been converted to electric operation very early in the century. With the help of the Government of the day reconstruction work was undertaken to enable the trams to continue in operation for about 15 years, by which time it was expected that a more suitable alternative system of public transport would have been evolved for the cities. The Commission has done an admirable task in continuing to operate the tramways for more than twice their expected life.

A further consideration in the abandonment of the tramways is the traffic hazard which they create on the highways of the two cities. With a constantly increasing number of vehicles on the roads, trams create

a hazard, particularly in those places where the tracks are laid near the centre of the roadway. On wet nights motorists often are unsure of the direction in which trams are moving, even though the trams have very adequate lights. Also, the loops, which are an essential part of a single-track system, tend to increase this hazard.

I do not think it is necessary for me at this time to dwell upon the financial losses which the tramways are incurring. The financial position is covered in some detail in the statement which now lies on the table. It is sufficient for me to say that while patronage of the trams continues to decline (passengers decreased by 10.4% last financial year compared with the previous financial year), costs are increasing. The increases in salaries and wages paid alone in 1969/70 have added over \$15,000 to the annual cost of running the trams, and no doubt the trend will continue.

In an endeavour to prevent tramway losses becoming greater, fares were increased as from 26th January, 1969. However, the number of passengers carried has continued to decline since then and the overall revenue on the tramway systems has similarly continued to decrease. The tramway services again incurred a loss of nearly \$500,000 last financial year.

It has been suggested that the trams should be retained because they are a tourist attraction, but I can assure Honourable Members that there is no evidence to support this contention. During the five years up to 30th June, 1970, the revenue from the chartering of trams amounted to \$1,251 on the Bendigo system, i.e. an average of only slightly more than \$250 a year. At Ballarat only \$4,467 has been paid for charter trams for the same period. In both cities during the Christmas and New Year holiday period, services have been reduced because of lack of patronage and for many years it has not been necessary to provide even one special tram during the major festivals in the two cities - the Easter Carnival at Bendigo and the Begonia Festival at Ballarat.

Should abandonment proceed, a complete tramcar will be made available as a gift to the Bendigo and Eaglehawk Councils jointly and another one to the Ballarat and Sebastopol Councils, also one tramcar at Bendigo has been promised as a donation to the Australian Tramway Museum. A number of other requests have been received for tramcars and equipment, but until the systems are finally abandoned, no decision will be made on their disposal. In the normal course they will be sold.

As Honourable Members are aware, the Transport Regulation Board, at the request of the Minister of Transport, conducted a public enquiry into the public passenger transport facilities in the two cities. The Board, in its report of June, 1968, concluded, and I quote, "the present form of street passenger transport in both urban areas is not in the best interests of the local communities. The local tramway systems are limited in their area of operation and cannot cater for developments which have occurred. Their rehabilitation is not practicable". The Board went on to recommend -

"(1) that the electric tramway system in both cities at present operated by the State Electricity Commission of Victoria should be discontinued as soon as alternative motor omnibus services can be provided; and

(2) that the Board should be given approval to call for applications by public advertisement from persons interested in providing alternative road transport facilities."

There is no prospect of the tramway systems in Ballarat and Bendigo being reconstructed. At Ballarat there are over 16 miles of existing track, and at \$115,000 a mile it would cost \$1,860,000 to replace this track. At Bendigo the cost of reconstruction would

be \$1,270,000 for 11 miles. These costs are based on the experience of the Melbourne and Metropolitan Tramways Board. It will be noted that these estimates do not provide for any expansion of the present systems.

The rolling stock in Ballarat and Bendigo is very old - all except a few cars are over 50 years old, and even the newest are at least 45 years old. Consequently, they would need to be replaced. New cars for one-man operation have not been built in Australia for many years and there are no modern designs available and no construction standards. It would, therefore, be necessary to start from the drawing board. Probably each new car would cost \$40,000 or more, and if 25 cars were built for Ballarat and 21 for Bendigo, the cost would be \$1,840,000.

Thus the total cost of reconstructing the tramway systems would be about \$5 million. Capital charges on this amount would be of the order of \$450,000 a year, so that the annual loss would then be nearly double what it is now. Even this large expenditure would not provide an adequate service for the developing city areas which extend far beyond the existing tramways systems. In Bendigo it has been estimated that 70% of the population lives more than $\frac{1}{4}$ mile from a tram service, and in Ballarat 60% of the population is in the same position. A new tramway system, therefore, is quite out of the question and the provision of a motor omnibus service is the only suitable alternative.

The Government is firmly convinced that private bus operators will be able to provide a satisfactory bus service for the cities of Ballarat and Bendigo. Except for the Melbourne and Metropolitan Tramway Board's services, and a few Victorian Railways' buses, bus services throughout Victoria are privately owned and the public is being served effectively. When the Geelong tramway system was abandoned in 1956, it was replaced by privately operated buses which now provide a very wide cover over the whole of the Geelong area. While experience shows that privately operated buses can be expected to give an adequate service to the residents of Ballarat and Bendigo, the Transport Regulation Board has made further enquiries with the aim of assisting Parliament in its consideration of this question.

Naturally the Board could not anticipate Parliament's decision in this matter, and would, if Parliament concurs with the Commission's plans, and in accordance with the Transport Regulation Act, call for applications from parties interested in providing bus services. The Board has, however, had some discussions with bus operators who might be in a position to apply in response to the Board's invitation. These discussions indicate that local bus operators are interested and a private bus service of a high standard would be available to replace the tram services in the two cities as and when they are abandoned. The Board would consult with the local Councils before fixing bus routes and services.

As stated, local bus operators at Ballarat have indicated that they would be applicants and would be able to provide service covering all existing tram routes. Regular bus services starting before 7.00 a.m., with the last bus from the city at about 11.00 p.m. would be operated. A 20-minute to half hour service would be provided during the day and a 40-60 minute service after the evening peak period. There will be additional trips during peak periods. On Saturday mornings a half hour service would be provided, while on Saturday afternoons, Sundays and holidays buses would run at 40-60 minute intervals. Also, a late service would be provided on Saturday evening.

For Bendigo the present bus operators have also indicated that they would be applicants and could provide a similar kind of service. Generally, the service would be half-hourly during the day and every 40-60 minutes after evening peak, until the last bus at about 11.00 p.m. There will be additional trips during peak periods. Here also the operators would provide Saturday afternoon and evening as well as a Sunday service.

The abovementioned frequency of service would provide a satisfactory transport system in each of the cities.

The operators at both Ballarat and Bendigo have said that they would purchase at the outset sufficient high standard buses - the most modern available in this country - to make up a material portion of their fleets. These new buses would be used for the basic services, while the buses in the existing fleet would be used to supplement services at peak periods and to provide standby spares.

The operators at Ballarat would purchase sufficient additional new two-door type buses and associated ticket machines and replace the 12 existing buses with new modern vehicles as necessary. The Bendigo operators would purchase a number of new vehicles of the two-door type. With their existing vehicles which are of good standard, the new buses would provide a high quality fleet. (Photographs of the type of modern buses which would be purchased are attached to the copies of this statement which I have made available to Honourable Members.)

It is possible that bus operators from other parts of the State would also be applicants.

The standard of comfort provided by modern vehicles will, I assure Honourable Members, far exceed that offered by the trams.

It is proposed that the same level of fares should apply as those at present charged by private bus operators in the metropolitan area and at Geelong. These fares are less than the present tram fares at Ballarat and Bendigo. The proposed charges compared with the State Electricity Commission tram fares are -

1 section	-	7c	as compared with	8c	on the trams
2 sections	-	12c	"	"	13c " " "
3 "	-	14c	"	"	16c " " "
4 "	-	15c	"	"	18c " " "

The fares for children would be -

1 section	-	4c
2 sections	-	7c
3 & 4 sections	-	8c which are the same as the present tram fares

During the whole course of discussions on the future of the Ballarat and Bendigo tramway services, concern has been felt for pensioners who may not have been able to obtain concession fares on a private bus service. In common with the Victorian Railways and the Melbourne and Metropolitan Tramways Board, the tramways undertakings in Ballarat and Bendigo have provided concession fares for pensioners since June, 1958, but no concessions are available on private bus lines. To cushion the effect of the transfer from trams to buses the State Electricity Commission is prepared to make a regular payment to the Transport Regulation Board so

that this concession can continue for a period of five years in a form which will be decided by the Board. The concession would be available not only to pensioners now using trams, but to all pensioners travelling by buses in the urban areas of Ballarat and Bendigo and for journeys between Sebastopol and Eaglehawk and the city centres.

The Commission is not unmindful of the future of the employees who will be displaced when the tramway services are closed down. The staff members, of whom there are 17, will be retained in the Commission's service in duties which are suitable to their experience. The Commission would endeavour to place as many of the tramway employees as possible in alternative employment, but most would be retrenched. Details of the conditions under which retrenchments will be made and the payments to which employees all will be entitled are set out in some detail in the Commission's statement. Briefly, employees will be given three to six months' notice and, provided they remain in the Commission's service until released, will be entitled to the following separation payments:

- (1) A separation payment of two weeks' pay for each year of service.
- (2) Long Service Leave, subject to a qualifying period of three years' service, 1.3 weeks' pay for each year of service.

- (3) Retirement Benefits - a retiring gratuity of \$45 for each year of service subject to a qualifying period of three years' service and if the employee has joined the Commission's Retirement and Benefit Fund which commenced on 1st May, 1970, the amount of the retiring gratuity up to the date of joining plus 2½ times the contributions they had made to the fund, that is, their own plus the employer's contributions.

Thus, a man with 10 years' service will be entitled to a retrenchment benefit of about \$2,000. Many men have more than 20 years' service, and there are some with over 30 years' service, and therefore could receive as much as \$6,000.

Under its legislation the Commission has no obligation to accept responsibility for the removal of tramway tracks and the restoration of the roadways, but it is prepared to provide a substantial measure of financial assistance for this purpose as well as for the provision of run-offs at bus stops. Discussions have taken place with the Country Roads Board and the councils concerned, and it has been made clear that contributions, amounting in all to \$1,220,000, would be made in respect of roads within their respective authorities, and the Board and three of the four councils have indicated their agreement in principle to the proposal. The Bendigo City Council, while not disagreeing with the proposals, indicated that it was not

prepared to give its formal agreement to the provisions because it considered that the whole matter of public transport had not been resolved. The payments for track removal and road reinstatement would be spread over a period of eight years at a rate commensurate with the authorities' expected expenditure. As bus run-offs would be expected to be made more quickly, payments for these would be made over three years.

Councils and other bodies concerned with town planning agree that the flow of traffic would benefit by the absence of tram lines which would allow much greater freedom in planning the use of thoroughfares to better effect. In fact the Ballarat Council in a letter to me dated 30th September, 1969, has requested the Government to abandon the tramway system in that city and to replace it with a privately owned and operated bus system.

Attached to the written copies of this statement is a chart which shows in graphical form the progressive deterioration of tramways finance and patronage.

In recommending this matter to the House, I trust that this project will be permitted to proceed so that both these major cities can be provided with an efficient and up to date transport service.



STATE ELECTRICITY COMMISSION OF VICTORIA BALLARAT AND BENDIGO TRAMWAYS

