

Tram & Bus Strategic Review.

Melbourne's tram system is collapsing. Staff shortages, due to budget restrictions, lead to hundreds of cancellations each day. Waiting times of half an hour or more during peak periods are not uncommon.

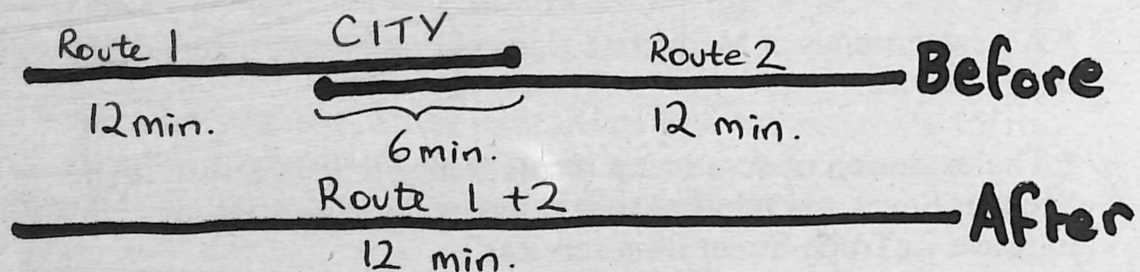
Something has to be done. The government's response has been to appoint a "tram and bus strategic review", consisting largely of union representatives, with a couple of bureaucrats. The Review has produced a series of proposed changes to the tram system, which the government intends to implement on 1st July..

The proposals were devised by Union representatives, without prior community consultation, let alone surveys of customers. The Public Transport Corporation's own planning and marketing people had no input. Although it contains some good ideas, the Review is basically planning service cuts and associated changes that will dramatically reduce the quality of tram services.

"Cross-linking"

The key to the Review's proposals is "cross-linking" of tram routes. This involves joining up two separate tram routes that terminate at the same place (usually the City). This "saves" resources by:

- * reducing service over the section where the two linked routes previously ran in common (usually main city streets); and
- * cutting out "layover" (waiting) time at terminals, that allows trams that are running late to "catch up".



How cross-linking "saves" resources

In some cases, cross-linking can create a better service. The best example is moving the Swanston Street tram terminus to Melbourne University, providing more services to the University. However, in many cases, the opposite occurs: services become less frequent and less reliable.

"W"-Class trams.

The Review has also decided to replace historic "W"-Class trams on some routes with the unpopular "Z"-Class trams (these were built in the 1970s, originally painted orange and have seated conductors). "Z"-Class trams will replace some or all "W"-Class trams on Swanston and Collins Streets in the city, and on Chapel Street and Glenferrie Road.

This appears to breach the promise made by the Premier only last year that no further "W"-Class trams would be taken out of service.

Swanston Street Walk.

If Swanston Street Walk is to succeed, public transport, and especially services to Swanston Street, must improve. The Review proposes the opposite: two of the eight tram routes now serving Swanston Street are to be removed! The Public Transport Corporation rightly boasts of "2000 trams running straight down Swanston Street every day" (e.g. advertisement in "The Age", 27/3/92 p10), but the Review proposes cutting this number severely.

The Review proposals thus seriously undermine the viability of Swanston Street Walk.

The good news.

Some of the Review's proposals would improve services; these are supported.

* A new terminus at Melbourne University will give students and staff a better service.

* The extension of some tram routes from Flinders Street, round Spencer Street and into LaTrobe Street will create a "loop" which will improve LaTrobe Street tram services.

* Some additional services will be provided in the "shoulder" of the peak and this is welcomed.

* Trams will be reinstated to West Maribyrnong (Route 57) on Sundays, and a bus service provided to Melton.

* Linking the Port Melbourne light rail service (route 111) with the Mont Albert tram (route 42) along Collins Street will increase services to Port Melbourne (although it will make them less reliable).

* Some other proposals have advantages, but more information is required to determine whether these outweigh the disadvantages, e.g.: linking the South Melbourne (12) and West Preston (11) trams; a "shuttle" service in Royal Parade and introduction of larger (articulated) trams on the busy Airport West (59) route.

The bad news.

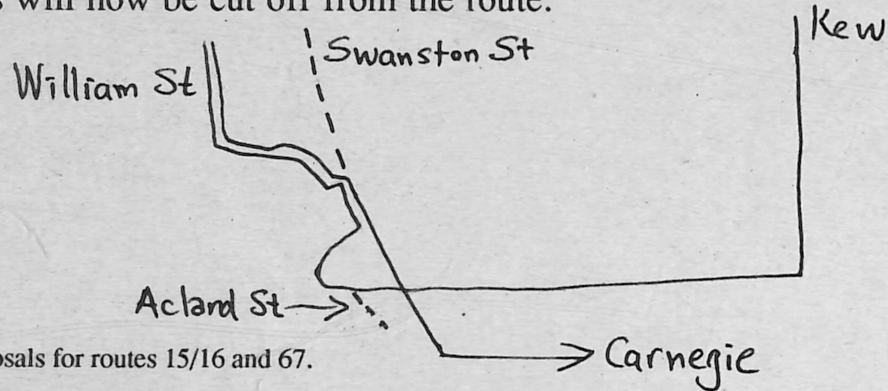
A number of the Review's proposals will have serious adverse effects on the quality of tram services, especially those serving Swanston Street.

- * Service frequencies will decline on busy St. Kilda Road, and Swanston, Collins, Elizabeth and (possibly) Bourke Streets.
- * A quarter of passengers who can now travel directly to Swanston Street by tram will have to change vehicles on each trip to reach Swanston Street.
- * Route structures will become more complicated and many route numbers will change, confusing patrons and requiring millions of dollars expenditure on new maps, timetables, destination signs, etc.
- * Historic "W"-Class trams will be replaced with the unpopular "Z"-Class vehicles.
- * Longer cross-linked routes will increase unreliability.
- * Service frequency cuts, unreliability and the use of "Z"-Class trams will increase overcrowding.
- * The popular Swanston Street to St. Kilda Beach tram (route 15/16) will virtually disappear: it will be taken out of Acland Street and rerouted up William Street, instead of Swanston Street.
- * The overall result will be the biggest decline in tram service standards in living memory.

Taking trams out of Swanston Street.

Two tram routes, those to Carnegie (route 67) and St. Kilda Beach (15/16) will be taken out of St. Kilda Road and Swanston Street and diverted along Kingsway and William Street. The St. Kilda Beach route will also be combined with the Kew-St. Kilda route (69), creating a long, unwieldy route, that no longer serves Acland Street.

This is crazy: Swanston Street Walk and Melbourne Central are designed to make Swanston Street the heart of Melbourne, and at the same time, tram services are to be diverted away from Swanston Street. Outside peak period, William Street is the deadest street in town! Acland Street is the site of the two busiest stops on the No.15/16 tram: these stops will now be cut off from the route:



Review's proposals for routes 15/16 and 67.

Interestingly, the Review proposes that the two routes should continue to operate as at present on Sundays, when none of the shops in Swanston Street are open!

To reach Swanston Street, passengers on the two affected routes will have to change vehicles (on both inward and outward journeys) and wait at the lonely Domain Road interchange for up to 12-20 minutes for their tram, possibly in that dark or rain. How many would be prepared to do this?

The Review did not survey the affected passengers to find out. However, the Public Transport Users Association has surveyed 300 patrons. 13% supported the change, but 70% opposed it. 20% of passengers said they would stop using public transport if their tram service was rerouted to William Street.

The rerouting will result in big reductions in service for passengers wanting to travel from Flinders Street Station to destinations along St. Kilda Road. Some of the lost service will be restored with a part-time "shuttle" service from the city to St. Kilda Junction, but there will still be a big decline in service. For example, the number of trams to St. Kilda Junction in peak period will fall by about a third (even with the Review's proposed "shuttle"). The number of trams connecting Flinders Street Station with the section of Brighton Road between St. Kilda Junction and St. Kilda Town Hall will drop by 60%, and there will be no direct connection at all to the section of Brighton Road south of St Kilda Town Hall.

Creating routes that are too long.

The longer a tram route is, the more unreliable it gets, because lots of small delays accumulate to form big delays (This may be why Dr. Juri Pill, the chief planner of the Toronto Transit Commission indicated his opposition to making routes longer on his recent trip to Melbourne. It is certainly the reason London abandoned many of its cross-linked bus routes 20 years ago).

The Review proposes the creation of cumbersomely long routes that will increase unreliability:

- * St. Kilda to Bundoora via Bourke Street (route 96 + route 88);
- * North Melbourne to William Street to St. Kilda to Caulfield to Kew (route 15/16 + route 69 - discussed above);
- * Footscray to Ascot Vale to City to Glen Iris (route 82 + route 57 + route 6).
- * West Coburg to William Street to Carnegie (route 55 + route 67).

The Review suggests that it can "contain" increased unreliability by "reworking" timetables (i.e. making them slower). This has already been tried (on the Brighton to City bus routes last year and the Bulleen to Garden City route this year) and has not worked. The simple fact is that making a route longer makes it less reliable.

Increasing waiting times and overcrowding.

Cutting service frequencies increases waiting time. Long waits make public transport unattractive, especially for short trips. Many of the trips tram passengers make along St. Kilda Road, Swanston Street, Collins Street, Elizabeth Street and Bourke Street are short, but these are precisely where the Review proposes to cut services! (Although the final situation for Bourke Street is unclear).

An indication of the Review's cavalier attitude to this issue appeared in its first paper: "This proposal removes one route from Elizabeth Street. However, with the proposed (bigger trams) loading problems are not envisaged". What, one asks, about the longer waiting times?

On some streets, the Review talks about introducing "shuttle" services, but these will only make up for some of the lost service (if they replaced all the lost service, there would be no "cost saving", as indicated in the diagram on p.1.).

Passengers in Collins and Swanston Street/St. Kilda Road will fare even worse: they will get longer waiting times and *smaller* trams, leading to

overcrowding and longer waiting times! This is because "Z"-Class trams, which are to be introduced on these routes, hold around 20% fewer passengers than "W"-Class trams:

	Seats per tram	Total capacity (including standing)
"W"-Class	48-52	150
"Z"-Class	42-44	125

Source: Public Transport Corp. information brochure, 1990.

Confusing passengers with complicated routes.

The route structure proposed by the Review is quite complex and will be difficult for passengers to understand. For example, on Sundays, trams will run from Acland Street, St. Kilda, to the City via Swanston Street; on other days, the same tram will leave from Carlisle Street and run via William Street!

Tram route 15, which now travels from Brunswick to St. Kilda Beach (one of the few existing "cross-linked" services that provides a popular link) will instead run from Brunswick to Toorak. At least half of Melbourne's tram routes will receive new numbers (e.g. some East Burwood services will retain their current number, 75, while others will be numbered 163), which will confuse tourists and other irregular users of public transport. To cater for the new route numbers, all "Z"-Class trams (and possibly some "W"-Class trams) are to be fitted with (harder to read) "dot-matrix" destination boards, at a total cost of around \$5 million.

The Footscray to Moonee ponds tram route (No. 82) will be broken in half by the Review proposals. Any passenger wishing to travel from, say, Highpoint City shopping centre to Moonee Ponds, will have to change trams. This makes the service less convenient.

The real solution to our tram problems.

We should be improving tram services for Swanston Street walk, not making them worse. We need to:

- * Implement the positive Review recommendations (especially the terminus at Melbourne University);
- * Increase service frequencies, especially along St Kilda Road in peak period, and across the whole system evenings, weekends and "between the peaks",
- * Ensure that all timetables services are actually delivered, by having adequate crews available;
- * Improve tram reliability, with better "fairways", real priority at traffic signals and more "catch-up" time at terminals.

The solutions are set out in greater detail in two policy documents published last year: *Greening Melbourne With Public Transport* by the Public Transport Users Association and *Moving Melbourne* by the Inner Metropolitan Regional Association.

This, of course, will all cost money, although not as much as one might think. Off-peak services can often be provided using crews and vehicles idle outside peak periods.

The first source of funds should be increased revenue from higher patronage. Swanston Street Walk is a golden opportunity for a big increase in public transport patronage. The other source of funds is genuinely improved management and work practices (which the Review purports to be, but is not, being a disguised service cut instead). These would enable the existing number of tramway staff to provide a greatly expanded service.