

# The NUMTOTs: millennials obsessed with public transport and memes

By [Jewel Topsfield](#)

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When Angus Bergman posted on Facebook that Melbourne had the largest tram network in the world and - “also, because we are hipster as shit and drink lattes out of avocados, we also paint our trams and make them artsy” - there was a lot of love but also a frisson of rivalry.

One commentator pointed out that while Melbourne has the “largest current” network, some European cities came pretty close and “Philadelphia had y’all beat before they scrapped most of them in the ‘60s”. (He quickly apologised after being upbraided for his passive-aggressive comment.)



Meet the NUMTOTs: Luke Snelling, Mitchell Sheldrick, Adam Chandler, Matthew Rossi and Andrew Chia (Left to right) JUSTIN MCMANUS

Welcome to New Urbanist Memes for Transit-Oriented Teens (NUMTOT), a [Facebook meme group](#), whose more than 130,000 members are, to quote one of their own favourite expressions, “gay for public transport” (translation: love public transport.)

Any content, meme or otherwise, relating to cities, public transport and urban planning is welcome although the ground rules warn: “We are not explicitly Leftbook, but we are certainly left-leaning. We won’t ban you for being a capitalist, but don’t expect us to defend you either.”



Map by Mitchell Sheldrick of every weird thing that has been discussed in the NUMTOT group, including ongoing memes. MITCHELL SHELDRIK

If there was ever going to be a Facebook meme group for urban millennial geeks obsessed with pop culture and trains, it was axiomatic that Melburnians would be well represented.

The niche group - which has been profiled by everyone from [The New York Times](#) to [The Guardian](#) - was started in 2017 by a couple of University of Chicago students, reportedly following a heated online debate about the US Federal Aid Highway Act of 1956.



Illustration: Matt Golding

Of all the cities in the world, Melbourne boasts the sixth highest number of active NUMTOTs, as the Facebook group's members are nicknamed. Melbourne tram superiority is one of the hot-button topics.

Mr Bergman, a law student, said NUMTOTs from around the world were interested in the perspective of Melburnians on transport-related issues.

“We are growing at quite an alarming rate in terms of population, is infrastructure growing the way it should be?” he says. “We have experienced either ends of the spectrum - we have the largest tram network on the planet in the CBD but we don't have an accessible system to get to the airport.”



Posted on NUMTOT Facebook page [FACEBOOK](#)

NUMTOT Adam Chandler, who is also the chairman of the Melbourne Tram Museum, says “love it or hate it”, Melburnians are actively engaged with public transport.

“Shitposting is a logical extension of that given our Australian way of not taking things particularly seriously.” (Shitposting generally refers to random, mildly amusing memes or videos.)

NUMTOTs riff on everything from *Thomas the Tank Engine* to urban theorist Jane Jacobs, favourite train station toilet graffiti and the NSW Greens' proposal for \$1 metro fares.



Transit themed shitpost designed by Mitchell Sheldrick MITCHELL SHELDRICK

The pro-development YIMBY movement (Yes In My Back Yard) also features prominently. When someone posted a photo of the new sky rail in Melbourne, they stipulated “Wow reacts only”.

When the T-shirts Mitchell Sheldrick designed out of the (now infamous) Metro train seat covers went viral, someone suggested he should probably become a numtot.



It was suggested to Mitchell Sheldrick that he join the NUMTOTs after a t-shirt he designed using the Metro train seat cover pattern went viral. JOE ARMAO

He is now one of twelve international moderators of the Facebook page.

“We break up arguments, wrangle the nerds, basically deal with children,” Mr Sheldrick says.

“I have been called left wing, right wing, convict, bootlicker, communist. Some people get weirdly passionate about stuff. We had to ban people talking about brutalism and stuff like that because it literally created very heated arguments.”

Mr Chandler interjects: “Concrete buildings with no features. Who knew they could be so controversial?”



Shitpost designed by Mitchell Sheldrick MITCHELL SHELDRICK

NUMTOT has spawned multiple spin-offs including Brutalist concreteposting, Two wheeled Memes for Bicycle-Oriented Teens and the local [Urban Sprawl Memes for Hoddle Grid Teens \(USMHGT\)](#), which already has more than 550 members.

The local group, like its NUMTOT parent, is full of in-jokes. The group’s description "and always remember to touch on your myki, at the start of your journey" is facetiously attributed to Robert Risson, the tramway administrator credited with saving Melbourne’s tram system.

Mr Sheldrick has even arranged a meet up of Melbourne NUMTOTs and USMHGTs (admittedly a more awkward acronym) at the Tram Museum.





Image posted on Urban Sprawl Memes for Hoddle Grid Teens [FACEBOOK](#)

“I have met a lot of people from the group,” he says. “It’s been weird.”

Luke Snelling, who is studying urban planning, says students love the NUMTOT memes. “It’s a way of connecting the planning and transport community.”



**Jewel Topsfield**



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