

Melbourne has been supplied with street transport since 1885 when the first cable tram ran in this city. This system was operated on charter by the privately owned Melbourne Tramway and Omnibus Company. Later when the Councils operated their own electricity plants they introduced the electric trams system to use the surplus. Such was the case also in Bendigo, Ballarat and Geelong - Trusts were formed then to administer these enterprises.

The Melbourne and Metropolitan Tramways Board was constituted on 2nd July, 1919, to take over and operate all existing and proposed tramways within a radius of ten miles from the G.P.O., Melbourne, with the exception of two lines operated by the Victorian Railways. The extensive cable tramway system, together with the sole remaining horse-car line (both formerly operated by the Melbourne Tramway and Omnibus Company Limited) were taken over from an interim body, the Melbourne Tramways Board, on 1st November, 1919. The electric tramways of the Prahran and Malvern Tramways Trust, the Hawthorn Tramways Trust, the Melbourne Brunswick and Coburg Tramways Trust, the Fitzroy Northcote and Preston Tramways Trust, and the Footscray Tramways Trust, were taken over on 2nd February, 1920, together with the cable tramway of the Northcote City Council. The tramway section of the North Melbourne Electric Tramway and Lighting Company Limited was purchased on 1st August, 1922. The F.N.P.T.T. and the F.T.T. had not commenced running when taken over by the Board.

During the conversion from the cable system to electric, buses were used to carry the passengers. In the Carlton - Collingwood area buses were retained in place of the cable system. During the period between the takeover and 1949, lines were extended, new routes were opened and in this year the passenger movement reached its peak. 383,000,000 passengers were carried. The Instrumentality was in a healthy state financially, having assets of some \$24,000,000. The Board could also list among its assets a modern, well equipped workshop, capable of building and repairing trams.

At this period the Tramways Board employed 6,796. Its fare structure was reasonable - 1 section fare 2d. Services were from a 3 minute in the peak periods to 5 minutes in the off-peak. Of the 733 cars (total stock) 93% were available for peak traffic.

1971 -

Passengers carried on Board's vehicles - 132,000,000. This despite the fact that the population increase from 1949 (1¼ million) to 1971 (2¼ million) had nearly doubled. Financially -- the Board is in the 'red'. -No new trams built in Preston Workshops since 1956. Fare structure from 10¢ for a one-section fare. Number of employees 4323. Number of trams 654 of which 89% were available for peak loading. Services from a 3 minute peak to a 12 minute off-peak extending to 30 minutes after 8.00 p.m.

WHY THE DEGENERATION? -

The Tramways Board blames the increases in the number of cars registered from 1949 as the major factor in the decrease in patronage. Whilst the Union could agree to some extent that this is part of the problem, we also know that the policy of the Board in introducing a series of fare increases (nine fare increases since 1949) has played a big part in driving passengers away from this service.

The pattern has been very clear and consistent since the first increases in 1949 - 1950 -- fare increases--less passengers. Every fare increase has meant a loss of 4% - 5%. Less passengers need less trams. Following this through to a logical conclusion - less trams mean less staff needed. And so the cycle continues!

The blame for this degeneration cannot be placed on the Tramways Board alone. The great bulk of the blame must be related to the attitude towards a State enterprise taken by the Government of this State and also the policy of the Federal Government towards Social Services and, after all, this Instrumentality IS a Social Service.

Let us take the attitude of the State Government up until 1971. They have used this utility as a 'milking cow' right from its beginning. Again I quote from the Tramway Board's Annual Reports:-

June 1949: "Since the inception of the Board on 1/11/1919 £3,343,036 (\$6,686,072) has been paid to consolidated revenue to recoup the State Treasury for amounts payable to the Infectious Diseases Hospital, the Fire Brigades Board and the Licensing Reduction Board."

By October 1955: "This amount reached £4,281,189 (\$8,562,378). Whilst still paying this appropriation the Board had been forced to increase fares."

Again, let us consider the Board's Report of 1967:- "Scholars concessions granted by Board (Education responsibility) \$765,000; Pensioners and other Social Service Concessions \$435,000; Disabled ex-Servicemen, Blind persons \$120,000; and roadway maintenance (road building) \$930,000 - totalling \$2,250,000."

Because of these concessions imposed on the Board that year, the Board's deficit was \$980,636. Had the Board been reimbursed or had these concessions been allotted to the departments responsible, the Board would have shown a handsome profit.

Yet fare increases still imposed these burdens on the travelling public.

Including gifts ??? to Councils in various years, the staggering sum of \$30,000,000 has been milked from the coffers of the Tramways Board since 1919, or rather from the pay envelopes of the workers who must of necessity use this means of transport.

So, were any of the increases justified?

Certainly, the policy of any Liberal Government is to fully support the big monopoly interests in rubber, petrol, oil and motor car industries, always at the expense of the State owned enterprises and the method of applying this policy is to allow State enterprises to degenerate to the extent where rehabilitation is too costly and virtually impossible. That is when private interests are invited to take over.

Take the public transport systems of Geelong, Ballarat and Bendigo. This is what occurred in these cities. Geelong was handed over to private enterprise in the late fifties; Ballarat in 1971; and Bendigo in early 1972!

What of Melbourne?

In the recent Transport Plan for Melbourne mention was made of an increase in the number of trams and buses in the future but there will be no future if this present trend continues.

What is needed to be done MUST BE DONE NOW!!

That is - a completely new attitude to public transport, not only by the State Government, but by the Federal Government as well.

Federally to treat this as a Social Service to be subsidized fully or rather to have grants of capital to enable rehabilitation to take place.

Immediate release of capital by State Government of \$6,500,000 to enable the Board to purchase 100 new trams (\$65,000 each) to give a more attractive, more comfortable vehicle. This would encourage the return of passengers lost.

The rehabilitation of Preston Workshops so that trams can again be built to complete the replacement of the rest of the fleet (900 trams are needed).

By providing more freedom on the road to public transport, which can be done by providing median strips to give trams their own roads thus ensuring a faster service.

The gradual phasing out of fares, thereby taking the load off public transport passengers and transferring it to the whole of the community.

The role of Public Transport is being recognized all over the world today. Recently the Press published a statement that \$120 million was being set aside in England for this purpose.

Fixed rail transport can provide a fast, efficient, Australian owned, Australian made, pollution free means of travel IF the Government realizes its responsibility to the workers, pensioners and school children of this State, NOW!