

Geographic gets its kicks on Route 96

From East Brunswick to St Kilda, it's a great trip, says magazine

By **CLAY LUCAS**
TRANSPORT REPORTER

IT MIGHT have just been named one of the world's top 10 tram rides, but that wasn't impressing passengers aboard the number 96 tram between St Kilda and East Brunswick yesterday.

"It gets that packed after five you can't get a seat. Sometimes you can't even stand it's that packed," said Ian Bowman from Sunbury, en route to Southern Cross Station.

But if you made it on board before 5pm, it was a great journey, he said.

Few would realise how great in the eyes of outsiders:

Melbourne's route 96 tram has been named in *National Geographic's* new *Journeys of a Lifetime* coffee-table book, which lists the world's top 500 journeys.

Among the planet's top 10 "trolley car" rides is Melbourne's route 96.

It is a distinction shared with routes as far-flung as Hong Kong, Budapest and San Francisco. Seattle's waterfront service, run with some of Melbourne's old W-class trams, also made the list.

The route 96 tram is Melbourne's busiest, with 35,000 passengers a day. At peak times, 19 trams work the 14-kilometre route, which takes

50 minutes to travel from East Brunswick through Carlton and the CBD and then past Albert Park before finishing at Acland Street in St Kilda.

The 96 once terminated at the corner of Bourke and Spencer streets, but took over the old St Kilda train line after it closed in 1988.

Back then, Beverley Grant from Middle Park, who spoke to *The Age* as she waited for her tram, thought the Cain Government's move to replace the train with a tram was a con.

"We all thought we were losing our beloved rail line," she said.

But two decades later, all had turned out well: "Now it's such an interesting line. You have the sophisticated working people, the young people with their radios in their ears. Then you have the backpackers



TOP 10 TRAM RIDES*

- TORONTO'S 501 Queen Street car
- SEATTLE'S George Benson waterfront streetcar
- NEW ORLEANS' St. Charles streetcar tour
- SAN FRANCISCO'S Streetcar F
- LISBON'S No. 28 tram (pictured, left)
- MELBOURNE'S Tram 96 (below)
- BUDAPEST No. 2 tram
- BERLIN'S Tram 68
- AMSTERDAM'S No. 2 tram
- HONG KONG'S trams

*IN NO PARTICULAR ORDER

going to St Kilda, hauling their huge packs. And then there's still some of the down-and-outs from the old St Kilda."

The Public Transport Users Association welcomed the listing. "Trams are the envy not only of other cities, but also of middle and outer-suburban

Melburnians, many of whom wish they had public transport half as good," president Daniel Bowen said.

But like many Melbourne tram routes, the 96 was overcrowded and could be faster, he said. More needed to be done to make sure trams had

traffic light priority at all intersections.

This would cut journey times between 20% and 50%, a PTUA study found last year.

More than 100 intersections around Melbourne give trams priority, after being targeted in the State Government's Think Tram program. Mr Bowen said many more needed upgrading if commuters were to be enticed out of their cars. Linda Munsy, from St Kilda, won't be easily convinced. Yesterday, waiting for the tram, Ms Munsy said she only got the 96 because it was marginally more frequent than other services. "I'm not a great fan of public transport," she said, "it's just so unreliable."

ONLINE

▶ See a slideshow of the tram route at theage.com.au

