

VTAG

VICTORIAN TRANSPORT ACTION GROUP

Email: info@victransport.com.au Facebook: www.facebook.com/victoriantransportactiongroup



Melbourne's Tram Plan Response

Filling the Gaps

March 2024

Summary

Melbourne's Tram Plan (the Plan) is a welcome document as the Government acknowledges the importance of trams to our city. Many other cities abandoned trams, much to their regret. Melbourne not only retained but expanded its tram network. The Plan is an essential start to an overdue discussion on ensuring we realise the network's full potential.

Yet the Plan fails to meet the basic requirements the Victorian Transport Action Group (VTAG) would expect. It offers a limited assessment of the substandard state of the tram system, including the lack of level access stops, the ageing tram fleet, deteriorating infrastructure and the lack of on-road priority. The Plan also needs to provide details of the many initiatives previously announced by the Government. The Plan's lack of detail undermines the Government's stated intent to transform our tram legacy into a modern light rail service.

Following our review, VTAG recommends that the Government embrace a few modest initiatives to provide tangible evidence of its commitment to an improved tram service, including:

- 1. Confirm its commitment to previously announced projects (listed in Table 1) and provide indicative timeframes for completion.**
- 2. Redirect routes 3, 5 and 12 (detailed in Table 2) with the opening of MM1 to improve the distribution of tram services through the central area.**
- 3. Direct Infrastructure Victoria to undertake the specific planning process as part of the next state infrastructure plan to canvas a range of possible network enhancements.**
- 4. Revise the selection of stops for upgrade to level access to include the practical considerations of technical feasibility and constructability to ensure that as many stops as possible are delivered as a priority.**
- 5. Expand the corridor-based approach being applied to upgrade stops to include the implementation of traffic priority along the selected corridors.**
- 6. Adopt a 15mins, or at least 20 mins, as the maximum headway for all Melbourne tram routes.**

VTAG has embraced the Plan as an invitation to engage with the Government and Department on the next steps to transform the system into an accessible and efficient service. A service that will further encourage urban consolidation and provide an attractive alternative to less efficient and less sustainable forms of travel.

VTAG will seek regular meetings with the Department to ensure every effort is made to create a Melbourne Tram Plan worthy of the name.

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Introduction

VTAG has prepared this submission in response to *Melbourne's Tram Plan* (the Plan) published by the Victorian Government in August 2023. VTAG commends the release of a plan for Melbourne's iconic tram network.

The current network is a valuable legacy and must be maintained as an essential asset. It is the responsibility of this generation to build on this legacy and ensure the tram network is fit for purpose for future generations. The Plan is a start, but a more detailed and action-oriented plan is needed if our trams are to deliver their full potential.

The Plan, as outlined in Horizon 1 – Current Actions, is modest in the extreme. Previously announced projects and policies have been omitted, causing confusion and concern over the government's intent. It is unclear whether the Government remains committed to these previously announced initiatives.

The Plan's initial actions include:

- Action 1 – Plan and deliver improved tram accessibility.
- Action 2 – Prepare for the arrival of Next Generation Trams.
- Action 3 – Plan for network reform.
- Action 4 – Prepare for change.
- Action 5 – Plan, test and then implement systems and technology.
- Action 6 – Plan, test and implement measures to improve reliability and performance of the tram network.

The Plan omits tangible actions beyond the welcomed purchase of the Next Generation Trams. The critical actions proposed for the first stage foreshadow more planning than action – more than two decades after the state's metropolitan strategy, *Melbourne 2030*, announced a tram plan would be prepared.

Melbourne can claim credit for retaining trams while other cities discarded their networks, yet we are now victims of this history. The cities reintroducing trams demonstrate best-practice applications of modern light rail technology, equipping their cities with attractive and sustainable transport. Melbourne must move beyond its legacy to expand and modernise this vital asset to encourage the urban consolidation needed to address the triple challenges of greenhouse gas emissions, housing affordability, and better public health.

VTAG's purpose in preparing this submission is to highlight and accelerate the discussion of crucial interventions needed to upgrade the existing tram network. The primary role of Melbourne's trams is to support an urban environment rapidly consolidating into a higher-density urban form. The transformation of inner and middle Melbourne requires shifting

from the current accommodation of cars towards more appropriate forms of travel, including walking, cycling and public transport. This will, in turn, reduce greenhouse gas emissions from the transport sector, reduce urban sprawl, and encourage the construction of new housing. In this context, trams play an essential role.

Our response to the Plan has been to document the pragmatic and specific interventions from previous State plans and policies. In this submission, VTAG is not proposing much that is new but reminding the state of prior commitments that have been omitted from the current plan. If trams are to play a role in meeting the State's goal of zero emissions by 2045, these previous plans and policies warrant attention within the plan's first Horizon 5. We expect the Government to clarify whether it remains committed to these projects and, if so, provide a timeframe for implementation.

The following section further outlines the shortcomings of the Plan. The balance of our submission follows the structure of the Plan. Initiatives are organised according to these themes:

- Tram network.
- Tram stops.
- An energy efficient network.
- Renewing fleet and infrastructure.
- Improving tram performance.
- Improving customer experience.

Filling the Gaps of the Government's Strategic Response



VTAG commends the Government for the \$3.9 billion investment into the tram network, including the \$1.85 billion for 100 next-generation trams. Yet Melbourne's Tram Plan provides little detail of how the balance of these resources (\$2 billion) will be deployed and what further investment will be needed to bring the network up to the standard of the other Australian light

rail systems. The Plan, as it stands, fails to articulate the gap between today's tram services and the modern, attractive service needed to encourage and support a consolidating city and provide an alternative to more energy-intensive and space-hungry forms of travel.

Melbourne urgently needs a plan that outlines the government's priorities for expanding and modernising the tram network. Integrated planning requires a plan that goes beyond strategic objectives and provides specific details of how the tram service will be transformed over the coming decades. A robust plan would build upon the previous announcements, existing structure plans and initiatives found in the multiplicity of the state's transport and land-use plans. Melbourne needs a plan that provides the detail necessary to ensure that the future tram network is integrated with other transport and land-use projects across the metropolitan area.

The Government has stated that it intends to make "Good decisions, made faster". Yet this intention is not evident. Decisions to provide the tram infrastructure needed to support urban development, such as light rail to Fishermans Bend, have, at worst, been abandoned or, at best, delayed to some unknowable timeframe.

VTAG is seeking an action plan with tangible outcomes. The strategic positioning of the Plan is too limited, and the outcomes too vague to provide a meaningful basis to hold anyone accountable if the promised outcomes fail to materialise.

This document is not a comprehensive critique of Melbourne's Tram Plan. There are many opportunities where the network can be extended and improved to great effect – most of these proposals are not canvassed in this response. The scope of this response is limited to those initiatives previously supported by the government and to highlight those that should be prioritised for immediate action for reasons that will be addressed in the following sections.

Tram network

Melbourne has undergone significant change since 1981, when urban consolidation first became an objective of Melbourne's planning scheme 1. Over the last two decades (2001-2021), the inner city's population has grown by 160%, significantly outpacing metropolitan Melbourne's overall growth of 46%. Yet, beyond the introduction of larger trams, there has been little change to the level of service or extent of the tram network during this period¹.

Urban consolidation is occurring broadly throughout the area defined by the tram network, but more rapid development is needed. The government has recognised Victoria is experiencing a housing crisis with latent demand exceeding supply. The Victorian Housing Statement² expresses the challenge in these terms:

The status quo isn't an option. If we don't act now, Victoria will end up falling short – by more than 25,000 homes each year over the next ten years. That means more house prices skyrocketing, more families priced out of the market, and more competition for rental properties.

It all comes back to supply. It's a simple reality: as a country, we need to do more to build enough houses for all of the people who need them. Because it's only when there are enough homes to go around that more people will be able to afford them.

Part of the solution to this crisis is encouraging development in designated urban renewal areas, such as Fishermans Bend and Arden. These brownfield areas allow development to proceed without the usual objections from a pre-existing population. By necessity, this development must be transit-oriented – there is little demand for higher-density housing without access to good public transport. Yet the Government has failed to provide the expected public transport infrastructure for these priority development areas on the CBD periphery.

The following sections discuss the tram projects needed to accelerate urban consolidation and improve accessibility throughout the inner and central city areas. The first section details projects previously announced but are not documented in the current plan. The second section discusses the network changes that should occur when Melbourne Metro 1 (MM1) opens. The third section discusses other changes that warrant detailed examination and, if appropriate, endorsement as a guide for other city plans.

¹ A detailed analysis of the land use and transit changes associated with urban consolidation can be found here: Tracking the Development of High-Density Housing Against Transit Service Provision: 19-Year Longitudinal Analysis in Melbourne, Australia, C. De Gruyter; S. Pemberton; E. Keys. TRB 2024.

² Victoria's Housing Statement, The Decade Ahead. 2024-2024. State of Victoria, Department of Premier and Cabinet.

A. Acknowledging Existing Commitments

The Plan acknowledges the interconnection between urban renewal and tram network improvements. Yet, it fails to acknowledge existing commitments made by this government (Table 1). At best, this is an oversight that should be quickly corrected. At worst, this is an announcement by omission that these previously proposed projects have been abandoned. There may be good reasons for abandoning some or even all these previous proposals, but abandoning these projects without justification raises questions about whether any weight should be placed on the Plan beyond being an exercise in being seen to be doing something.

1. VTAG recommends that the Government confirms its commitment to the projects listed in Table 1 and provides indicative timeframes for completion.

Table 1: Current Tram Proposals

Proposal	Reference
Turner St, Fishermans Bend (Northern Link)	Fishermans Bend Framework 2018, Victoria's Infrastructure Strategy 2021-2051 Victoria's Infrastructure Plan 2021
Plummer St, Fishermans Bend (Southern Link)	Fishermans Bend Framework 2018, Victoria's Infrastructure Strategy 2021-2051 Victoria's Infrastructure Plan 2021
Spencer St Extension to Arden	West Melbourne Structure Plan 2018, Victoria's Infrastructure Strategy 2021-2051
Dynon Rd extension to Footscray	West Melbourne Structure Plan 2018, Victoria's Infrastructure Strategy 2021-2051
Toorak Rd/Domain Rd realignment	Melbourne Metro Business Case 2016
Caulfield to Rowville	Premier of Victoria, Media Release, 10 April 2018
Diversion of Swanston St routes to William St	Victoria's Infrastructure Strategy 2021-2051
Extend trams into the former Maribyrnong defence site	Victoria's Infrastructure Strategy 2021-2051

The development of **Fishermans Bend and Arden depends on providing new tram routes**. The planning for each area is premised on the availability of new tram services to integrate these new communities with the surrounding urban area, including access to employment opportunities within the CBD. The omission of these previous proposals for **new tram routes** undermines investor confidence that the infrastructure needed to support new residential development will be provided. The rapid roll-out of these tram projects is one way for the Government to meet its objective of creating "800,000 homes in Victoria over the next decade"³. The plans for Arden and Fishermans Bend alone can deliver homes for 100,000 people.

³ Victoria Housing Strategy, The Decade Ahead 2024-2034.

The proposed **tram line along Spencer St and Dynon Roads**, connecting Footscray to West Melbourne and Melbourne has new significance with the construction of the new tram depot at Maidstone (corner of Williamson and Hamstead Roads). The extension of Route 82 into the city would create additional benefits from the state's investment in New Generation trams and further encourage residential development in and around Footscray and West Melbourne, including the former defence site at Maribyrnong.

The **extension of trams into the Maribyrnong former Defence Site** was recommended as part of Victoria's Infrastructure Strategy. Yet, this proposal doesn't appear in any endorsed plans for this urban renewal site. This is an example of an existing proposal where the new plan could provide some greater clarity over its status. The site has enormous potential, but without a high-capacity, frequent public transport service, this potential cannot be realised since there is no physical capacity to serve it via the road network.

The government announced in 2018 that they would proceed with a new **light rail route from Caulfield Station to Rowville**. This project complements the Suburban Rail Loop (SRL), but the location of the new Monash station raises questions about the proposed route. VTAG notes the SRL has made no provision for this new route. Yet, the need for improved transit for the people living in the Caulfield/Rowville corridor remains unchanged, notwithstanding the SRL. Again, the plan should clarify whether this previous commitment is still current and, if so, how it has been modified in light of the SRL.

The plan's lack of detail further fuels uncertainty over whether the Route 58 route change from Domain Rd to Toorak will be made permanent⁴. The government originally proposed this network change as part of the scope of work for MM1, yet media reports indicate that the Government is now reconsidering it. Any change will have implications for other tram network changes that might be contemplated as part of the MM1 project, discussed below.

B. Melbourne Metro Changes

The Plan highlights the critical nexus between the MM1 and the tram network. The MM1 project creates the opportunity to redistribute tram services through the inner city better to align with the city's development that has occurred since the opening of the underground rail loop in the 1980s. MM1 is due to open in 2025, leaving little time to plan and implement these network changes. VTAG is concerned that if the government fails to progress these changes, including several new track connections, the nexus between the MM1 project and these network changes and the associated benefits will be lost.

2. VTAG recommends redirection of routes 3, 5 and 12 (as shown in Table 2) for introduction with the opening of MM1 to improve the distribution of tram services through the central area.

Table 2: Melbourne Metro Complementary Tram Changes

Route	Proposal
Route 3	Re-route to William St
Route 5	Re-route to Spencer St (requires Park St connection)
Route 12	Operate permanently via Latrobe and Spencer St

C. Other Changes and Extensions

VTAG welcomes the recent announcement⁴ of new tram infrastructure along Victoria St, which will provide a new east/west service along the northern boundary of the CBD. Yet this announcement further highlights the Plan's shortcomings as it does not mention this project or the network changes that are to follow.

VTAG notes that these new works will enable at least two network enhancements, as detailed in Table 3.

Table 3: Other CBD and Inner Area Tram Route Enhancements

Route	Proposal
Route 67	Re-route to Victoria and Abbotsford Streets. (requires Victoria St direct connection at Victoria Market and Abbotsford St direct connection to Royal Childrens Hospital turnback.)
Route 78	Extend from North Richmond to Arden Station via Victoria and Abbotsford Streets. (Requires completion of tram "missing link" in Victoria St between Latrobe and Swanston Streets).

The above changes will provide significant passenger benefits. Route 67 diversion (presently terminates at Melbourne University in Swanston St) to Victoria St at the City Baths provides a direct connection from Swanston St and St Kilda Rd routes to North Melbourne and Royal Childrens Hospital.

Route 78 extension from its present North Richmond terminus provides a direct linkage from the job-rich areas of Cremorne, Victoria Parade and St Vincents Plaza medical precinct across the north side of the CBD to Queen Victoria Market, North Melbourne and Arden Station.

Over the years, there have been calls for other tram extensions and network changes. VTAG is aware, for example, of the Rail Futures Institute's study of the tram network and the numerous proposals arising in local government and other area-based plans. These proposals broadly fall into three main categories for improvement:

⁴ Swanston and Victoria streets precinct upgrade. February 2024. Public Transport Victoria.

1. Enhanced network integration. There are many examples where tram routes terminate short of existing railway stations. A program of short network extensions would greatly enhance the connectivity between the light and heavy rail systems.
2. Supporting urban renewal. Numerous urban renewal opportunities exist that, if combined with a tram extension, could proceed as transit-oriented developments.
3. Network enhancement. Numerous proposals exist to better align the tram network with urban development over the last fifty years.

Each proposal requires assessing the network change within the context of the urban development outcomes sought in each case consistent with planning integration principles and the Transport Integration Act 2010. Following an initial assessment, projects deemed appropriate for Melbourne's needs should then be formalised in an appropriate planning instrument (for example, a structure plan or through an amendment to the PPTN) as a future tram route. This would allow other parties to plan other developments and projects in an integrated way.

The Plan states that network extensions should support strategic planning policies including the seven national employment and innovation clusters (NEICs) identified in Plan Melbourne. The Parkville NEIC is currently served by trams and will directly benefit from the opening of MM1. New tram routes have been proposed to support the Fishermans Bend and Monash NEICs as discussed. The remaining four NEICs are not served by the current tram network, nor are there current plans for this to change.

The suburban NEICs (Werribee, Sunshine, La Trobe and Dandenong) and their associated rail stations, bus interchanges and key destinations are therefore opportunities to develop new catchments for LRT-style services, using existing technology or new technology such as the trackless trams which have been trailed in Perth and elsewhere. New networks designed to serve these suburban NEICs could draw on the patterns of connectivity evident in the CBD and inner suburbs of Melbourne in terms of their service intensity and distribution, rather than focusing on connecting suburban centres together.

3. VTAG recommends that Infrastructure Victoria undertake the specific planning process as part of the next state infrastructure plan to canvas a range of possible tram network enhancements.

Tram Stops



VTAG is concerned that the rollout of universally accessible, level access stops has effectively stalled. Currently, only 28% of stops meet accessibility standards. The Department had a legal requirement under the Disability Discrimination Act (1992) for all stops to be fully accessible by the end of 2022. The Auditor General reported in 2020 that the Department was unlikely to meet this requirement by 2023 and that, based on the current upgrade rate, the network is unlikely to be fully accessible until 2066 – over 70 years after the accessibility

standards became a mandated requirement.

Progress is being made in upgrading the tram fleet to modern, accessible vehicles. The first low-floor trams were introduced in 2001 – more than 20 years ago. Today, low-floor trams comprise approximately 38% of the fleet, increasing to 75% following delivery of the 100 Next Generation Trams. An additional 145 vehicles are required for the whole fleet (excluding heritage trams) to meet the current accessibility requirements. In VTAG's estimation, the Government will be forced to replace the balance of the older vehicles with modern equivalents as a direct follow-on from the delivery of the 100 G class trams. These older, non-conforming vehicles will be increasingly difficult to maintain and fail to meet community expectations. The absence of a comprehensive fleet strategy is yet another shortcoming of the Plan.

While progress is being made to renew the fleet, there has yet to be a plan to upgrade tram stops. The Department recently reported⁵ that there are currently 460 level access stops – the same number reported in 2020 as part of the Auditor General's review. There has been no material increase in the number of accessible stops over the last four years, nor is there any current plan to roll out new stops.

Today, 20 years after the first low-floor tram entered service, only Route 96 is nearly fully accessible (there is one stop without level access). PTV advises that Routes 11, 19 and 109 usually operate with low-floor trams, but less than half the stops along these allow access. Other tram routes (such as Routes 5, 6, 16, 48, 58, 72 and 86) operate with a mixture of newer and older trams, with only 25% of the stops allowing access.

Based on current trends, Melbourne is on track to have a fleet of modern, accessible vehicles within the foreseeable future. Yet, given the lack of progress, there is no

⁵ Email from the department 23/1/2024.

confidence that these vehicles will be paired with the level access stops needed to create an accessible service.

The Plan has proposed an innovative approach to upgrading stops. Previously, funding was for level access stops at key locations and implemented stop-by-stop. This scheme has been replaced by a corridor approach, where groups of about sixteen stops will be upgraded together.

VTAG understands that the Department of Transport and Planning is now planning to build new accessible stops in Footscray/Maribyrnong, Thornbury/Northcote, Fitzroy/Collingwood, and around the CBD. There is no program for the remainder of the network.

Off track: the struggle for people with disabilities on Melbourne's tram network

Disability advocate says there is 'no political will' to make accessibility upgrades as Brunswick residents plan rally

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▶ Brunswick resident Christian Astourian on Sydney Road. He has helped organise a rally to mark the start of transport equity week and call for accessible tram stops in the area. Photograph: Nadir Kinani/The Guardian

The lack of political will to modernise tram stops has seen the upgrade of stops stalled leaving many people without access to tram services.

(Source: The Guardian 15 Sept 2023)

Given the urgent need to accelerate the roll-out of stop upgrades, **VTAG urges the Government to revise the assessment for selection of stops to be upgraded to level access to include the practical considerations of technical feasibility and constructability to ensure that as many stops as possible are delivered as a matter of priority.**

VTAG notes that Melbourne's network has a much higher density of stops than is found on comparable networks, and therefore, some rationalisation of stops is appropriate. Furthermore, the rationalisation of stops, together with the construction of level access platforms, provides the opportunity for additional on-road priority measures as discussed later in this submission.

An Energy Efficient Network

VTAG commends the Government for powering the existing tram network with 100% renewable energy.



We encourage the Government to recognise that trams, and public transport more generally, are more energy-efficient than private and shared motor vehicles. Therefore, the energy efficiency of the transport sector is improved by encouraging a shift in travel to public transport away from personal and shared cars. Making the tram service as attractive and accessible as possible is, therefore, an important task.

A key aspect of achieving mode shift is to ensure the integration of tram stop rationalisation with stop design and adjacent streetscape design, co-ordinated with the work of local authority urban design work to upgrade the walkable catchments around tram stops.

Renewing Our Fleet and Infrastructure



The Plan needs to provide a clear path for modernising the tram fleet. The next tranche of vehicles that will replace the oldest vehicles in the fleet is mentioned, but details need to be provided about how and when all older Z-Class and A-Class trams will be replaced.

The Next Generation Tram project will introduce 100 G-Class trams into service starting in 2025. The Plan notes that these new vehicles will replace “some” aging high-floor trams. Assuming these new trams will replace old trams on a one-for-one basis, by 2029, the fleet will comprise 300 low-floor trams, 213 high-floor trams (Z-Class, A-Class, and B-Class), and

13 heritage (W-Class) trams. By 2029, most high-floor trams will be over 35 years old and not meet current accessibility standards.

The Auditor General has previously reported⁶ on the department’s failure to meet its legal obligation to ensure all tram stops meet accessibility standards by 31st December 2022. The Plan, as it stands, will also see the Department miss the 2032 legal requirement to ensure a fully accessible tram service. There is an urgent need to plan to replace the remaining Z-Class, A-Class and B-Class trams. By 2029, all these vehicles will be operating beyond their design life, and none meet current disability standards.

Table 4 - Melbourne’s Tram Fleet (Current and Planned)

Class	Capacity	Low Floor	Introduced	Quantity
G	150	Yes	2025 (Planned)	100
E	210	Yes	2013	100
D2	140	Yes	2004	21
D1	90	Yes	2002	38
C2	180	Yes	2005	5
C1	120	Yes	2001	36
B2	110	No	1988	130
A	65	No	1984	69
Z3	70	No	1975	114
W8	75	No	1951	13
			Total Fleet	526
			Total Low Floor Fleet	300

Source: <https://yarratrams.com.au/our-fleet-today>, Melbourne’s Tram Plan

⁶ Victorian Auditor-General’s Office, Accessibility of Tram Services, October 2020
VTAG Melbourne’s Tram Plan Response (March 2024)

Improving Tram Performance

VTAG welcomes Melbourne's Tram Plan objective to "improve journey times and deliver faster, more reliable tram travel for passengers". Yet, in a serious omission, the Plan provides no detail of what will be done and when.

A passenger's journey time from point A to B comprises five key elements:

- Access time – the time needed to access the entry tram stop from the journey origin, Point A.
- Wait time - the time spent waiting for the tram to arrive at the stop.
- In-vehicle time – the time spent on the vehicle between entry and exit.
- Egress time – the time needed to access the final destination, Point B, from the exit stop.
- Transfer time – the time spent transferring between stops and the additional wait time.

Pragmatically, there are limited opportunities for significant change in access and egress times. These times are governed by physical geography, the interplay between established land uses and the tram network. VTAG recognises the rationalisation of stops as platform stops are rolled out, which may increase access and egress time. This can be offset, to some extent, by tram and platform design and a reduction of in-vehicle time due to less frequent stops. Overall, if the rationalisation is well planned, the accessibility will improve, and overall performance will also improve.

Melbourne's Tram Plan focuses on giving tram services "more green light time" to speed the trams to reduce in-vehicle time, and to deliver more reliable tram services, reducing unexpected wait time. Currently, Melbourne's tram network, the world's largest, is one of the slowest in the world, notwithstanding the introduction of modern trams. Yet the Plan lacks any specifics of how this problem will be tackled.

VTAG recommends expanding the corridor-based approach for stop upgrades to include a corridor-wide implementation of traffic priority. Coordinating the introduction of new level access stops with the introduction of separation kerbs and priority traffic signals would increase efficiency. At minimum, a dedicated program is needed to materially improve trams' on-road performance and reduce the in-vehicle time component of the overall journey time.

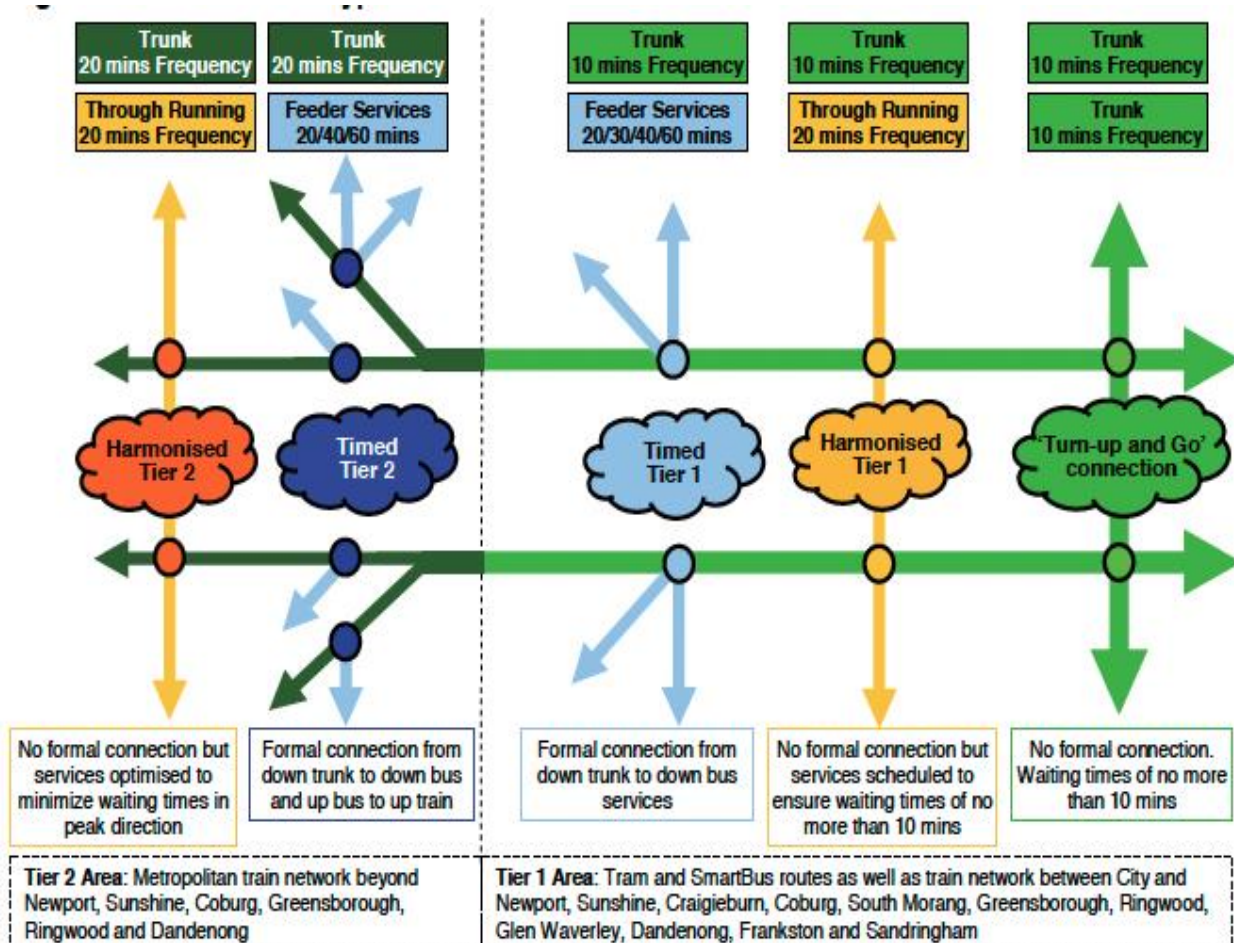
The greatest opportunity to improve tram performance quickly and cheaply is to increase service frequency to reduce wait time. Furthermore, the harmonisation of tram, train and bus service frequencies offers great potential to further reduce journey times for two or more public transport trips in one journey. The Plan does not mention multimodal integration as part of an overall strategy for improving public transport performance.

Public transport modal coordination is not a new concept. The Department’s own Network Development Plan (NDP) prepared in 2012 gave detailed consideration “to protecting and enhancing multi-modal service options and recognising the interrelationships between all public transport modes” (p. 26). VTAG notes that in a regressive step, such considerations have been omitted from the recently released bus and tram plans. It is worth re-iterating some of the key points from the earlier train plan.

Approximately a quarter of tram journey journeys involve another public transport trip. Train/tram accounts for 18% of tram trips, tram/tram 10% and tram/bus another 6%. These proportions must grow as Melbourne intensifies and overall public transport mode share increases consistent with the ambitions of Plan Melbourne.

The NDP proposed an “integrated service planning and coordination framework” as the most efficient way to improve service levels across a dispersed travel market. In essence, this framework proposed a harmonised set of service frequencies to ensure timetable coordination across all modes. The integrated service is shown in Figure 1 taken from the NDP published in 2012.

Figure 1: Connection types (taken from Network Development Plan, p. 32)



Melbourne’s tram network fails to meet the service level required to ensure modal coordination for many periods of the day. Most routes only meet Tier 1 service levels during peak hours.

Furthermore, Melbourne tram service levels compare poorly with the service levels provided on new light rail systems now operating throughout Australia, as shown in Table 5. Most of these new systems provide a maximum headway of 15 mins compared to 30 mins for Melbourne. Adelaide, the second worst example, provides a maximum headway of 20 mins.

Table 5 – Maximum Headways Across Australian Light Rail Systems

City	Route	Maximum Headway (mins)
Melbourne	Route 96	30
Adelaide	Glenelg	20
Sydney	L1 (Dulwich Hill)	15
Newcastle	NLR	15
Canberra		15
Gold Coast		15

VTAG urges the Government to adopt 15mins, or at least 20 mins, as the maximum headway for all Melbourne tram routes. This will align Melbourne with service levels in other Australian cities and regional centres.

Improving Passenger Experience



Melbourne's Tram Plan offers no specific initiatives to improve tram customer experience. This further demonstrates the weakness of this document.

VTAG notes that trams are part of an integrated public transport service. Much of the customer experience is determined by system-wide functions such as trip planning, passenger information, wayfinding, fares and ticketing, and the

provision of a safe and secure environment.

Aspects of service that are mode-specific, include facilities provided at stops and on-board vehicles. The most urgent matters facing customers are barriers associated with the lack of level access, discussed earlier in this document. The provision of real-time information, next-stop information has been greatly improved with the introduction of upgraded stops and new vehicles. Yet there are still many opportunities for low-cost improvements that are commonly found in world best transport systems including:

- Better stop facilities:
 - Locality maps (showing key local destinations and other public transport services within a 400 or 800m walk; multi-modal public transport network maps that enable customers to make network-based route choices – good examples of these are the maps used at London bus stops)
 - Assistance/emergency buttons
 - Wi-fi
 - Charging ports
 - Seating
 - Weather protection
 - Good night-time lighting
 - Payment facilities

- On-board facilities
 - Assistance/emergency buttons
 - Wi-fi

VTAG reiterates concern with the free tram zone. This initiative works against many of the aims of Melbourne's Tram Plan. We share Infrastructure Victoria's concern that "expanding the free tram zone will lower network performance and reduce equity"⁷.

⁷ Inquiry into Expanding Melbourne's Free Tram Zone - Infrastructure Victoria Submission, December 2019
VTAG Melbourne's Tram Plan Response (March 2024)

Conclusion

Melbourne's Tram Plan is a welcome document and an acknowledgment by the government of the importance of Melbourne's trams to our city. Many cities once abandoned Trams, much to those cities' regret. Melbourne not only retained its tram network but expanded it. As an acknowledgement, the Plan is an essential start to an overdue discussion.

Yet the Plan fails to meet the basic requirements VTAG would expect to see in a plan intended as a road map to drive significant improvement needed. The Plan offers a limited assessment of the current situation, such as the lack of level access stops, the aging tram fleet, deteriorating infrastructure and the need for on-road priority. This compromises the credibility of the more aspirational elements of the plan about the longer-term and broader scale potential of trams for accessibility transformations of Melbourne's central, inner, and critical middle suburban employment clusters. More particularly, the Plan is silent on many of the previous initiatives announced by the Government, raising more questions than it answers.

The plan nods to what might be found in modern tram systems, as seen in Sydney, Canberra, Adelaide, and the Gold Coast. These new systems demonstrate the qualities of modern light rail. Melbourne's trams may be iconic, but the system is old, tired, slow, and inaccessible despite recent investment in new vehicles.

VTAG embraces the Plan as an invitation to engage with the Department on the next steps for transforming the system into an accessible and efficient service. A service that will further encourage urban consolidation and provide an attractive alternative to less efficient and less sustainable forms of travel.

VTAG will seek regular meetings with the Department to ensure every effort is made to create a plan worthy of the name.