3 March 2009

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Australia

Dear Committee

Submission on investment of Commonwealth and State funds in public passenger transport

We moved to Western Australia from Switzerland about 7 years ago. Our experiences in both countries have convinced us that Perth has still a long way to go before its public transport system matches that of comparably sized cities in Europe. Therefore, we're offering our comparison between the public transport systems of Switzerland and Western Australia as an example the Senate Committee may like to use as it considers the role of the Commonwealth in Australia's public transport system as a whole.

A Public Transport is not just a matter of a few train carriages. It is a whole system. In this respect Transperth is still far, far away from a real public transport system appropriate for a developed country. Two years ago a spokesman of Transperth wrote a long letter in the local newspapers, praising Transperth as the best public transport system in Australia and one of the best in the world. We suspect this spokesperson has probably never been to Europe, certainly not to Switzerland.

We would like to list the following "foundations" of a real public transport system, with some suggestions for how Perth's, and by extension Australia's, public transport might be improved.

Reliability

1. Public transport must be reliable from Monday to Sunday throughout the whole year. It is unacceptable that a line is cut off for a weekend because of maintenance. If a bolt has to be tightened or some sleepers have to be replaced, one of the two tracks must always be kept open. It is only a matter of planning and management in the first place (when railway is built) that this is possible. We lived in Switzerland near a railway line with more than a thousand (!!) trains passing EVERY day even if the tracks needed some maintenance. Why should this not be possible here in Perth with only a small number of trains circulating?
2. When a line is cut off there is (sometimes) a note at the stations telling the customers that they should take instead bus so-and-so at the corner of

that-and-this road. Perth covers more than 5000 km^2. If you do not live in the area you have no idea where this bus stop is and you really do not carry the whole street directory of Perth with you all the time.

3. On the replacement bus (as on every bus) it is not allowed to bring your bicycle. Whole families are stranded on there Sunday's ride because the train ceased operating that weekend.
4. At the train stations there is information displayed about the next train's departure. As this is only a copy of the printed timetable it happens that the minutes on the display come down to zero and start with let's say 15 again. But no train shows up. It is cancelled without notice and the passengers wait another 15 minutes.
5. Same situation at some bus stops (if there is a timetable displayed). The expected bus is not late; it does not arrive at all!

Ticket System

1. Frequent passengers should get a discount. Owning a SmartRider Card does not yet mean that one is a regular traveler. Every day users of the public transport should be rewarded for their patronage.
2. Frequent users should have the option of buying a ticket valid for an unlimited number of rides within a specified time period so that they do not have to tag on / tag off every time they catch the train. In Switzerland you get ticket passes for a month or a whole year with an appropriate discount.
3. In Perth, we find that passengers are not treated as valued customers but as potential evaders. If somebody forgets to tag off they are charged, or rather fined, with the maximum fee. This amounts to punitive measure rather than an encouragement.

Timetables

1. The railway lines extend from the Perth City centre to the outskirts and each is treated entirely separately, with the result that you have to study two timetables (one for each line). For Cities like Zürich you get combined timetables in a single, small booklet that contains all connections at one sight. The same exists for whole Switzerland including hundreds(!) of lines.
2. All departure times at a specific station should be unchanged during the day except for maybe a doubling or even tripling of the frequency during the rush hour. For example the train ALWAYS (i.e. EVERY day) should depart at the same minutes after the hour. This makes the timetable much simpler and the mentioned booklet possible.
3. The online timetables are faulty. For example if you want to ride from Meltham to Kelmscott you get the advice to change trains at McIver although Claisebrook, the next station on the line, would be the better option. As a consequence the average passenger will miss the connecting train because there's barely sufficient time to navigate the McIver station platforms before the connecting train arrives. You only make it as a sprinter and not an average, let alone a disabled person.

4. If you go to live in another suburb, you first have to find out what buses (and from and to where) exist there. An overall map with all trains and buses is urgently needed (see attachment as example from Zürich)
5. In Switzerland there is at EVERY bus and tramway stop and at EVERY train station a timetable (and an overall map as well) on display specifically made for this stop.

Infrastructure

1. People like some comfort. If they should be lured into catching the train. It is unacceptable that many of the carriages have a very limited number of seats. Standing at rush hours from Joondalup to Perth jammed like crayfishes in a cage is not very tempting, with the consequence that the private car is preferred.
2. At many stations there is only one way in/out with the result that for longer trains the passengers have to walk quite a bit as all of them have to go through the same narrow exit (and tagging off means an additional delay). More accesses to the stations have to be built.
3. The new underground train station was praised by Transperth as one of the world's best. In fact, there are thousands of similar ones in different countries. The location is a good example for a wrongly planned station. If you change trains from Mandurah to Midland you have to undertake a 250m walk: first up to the main station, than across all other lines via a single overpass, before even beginning the walk to the underground platform. A half-finished bridge on the west side of the main station should be extended to give access to EVERY platform to avoid this unacceptable, time-consuming detour (a very cheap solution to an annoying situation).
4. If the number of passengers rises (which is the goal) there are three options for the infrastructure. It is very costly to change things if the planning and realisation went into a dead end:

- Higher frequency of the operating trains (but this is limited by the two single tracks)
- Longer trains (no way if there is one exit only)
- Double storey carriages (even the new Mandurah line missed out on this option as the power lines and maybe even the tunnels are built too low)

Many more train lines have to be built if we do not want to get an unmanageable (car) traffic situation in the near future. In the Metropolitan area of Zürich (about half the size of the Metropolitan area of Perth) there is a network (apart from hundreds of bus and tramway lines) of 22 lines (the equivalent in Perth would be 44 lines!!!).

5. Not all trains should concentrate in the centre of Perth. Ring lines, connecting outer suburbs without having to ride first into the Perth centre are needed (like the existing bus lines 98 & 99 – which get stuck in the traffic jam).
6. There is an urgent need for public transport (bus or even better train) from

and to the domestic and international airports. The shuttle bus from the airport is a rip-off concentrating on guests from overseas who do not realize that a taxi for two people is not dearer than the shuttle bus.

Interconnections

1. The illogical detours as detailed above have to be avoided and the needed measures taken to improve the situation/infrastructure.
2. Buses are generally very well connected to the train stations but they get stuck in the daily traffic jams. Specific bus lanes (like in some parts of the freeway and for example in Inglewood) are highly recommended even if this means a loss of a traffic lane for the private cars.

Summary

Perth and WA is far from having a suitable public transport system. If we want to avoid a collapse of the whole system (public and private sector) there is an urgent need to act and to invest in our future even if the times are rough at the moment with the world wide financial crisis. To get an idea what a real public transport system is the planners and stakeholders should get informed by experts from Switzerland.

[Editor's note: An example of ticket systems available in Zürich can be seen at http://www.zuerich.com/en/page.cfm/zurich/zuerichcard_x. More about Zürich's public transport system can be found via links in the Wikipedia site http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zürich#Transport