



17 March 2009

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

The Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS) welcomes the opportunity to provide input into *Senate Inquiry into the investment of Commonwealth and State funds in public passenger transport infrastructure and services*.

As the peak independent coordinating body of the social and community services sector, VCOSS raises awareness of the existence, causes and effects of poverty and inequality and advocates for the development of a sustainable, fair and equitable society. As well as promoting the wellbeing of those experiencing disadvantage and contributing to initiatives seeking to create a more just society, VCOSS provides a strong, non-political voice for the community sector.

VCOSS works together with its members on issues such as poverty and inequality and ensures that community resources and services are available and affordable. VCOSS promotes community participation as well as strengthening the value of citizenship in our community.

VCOSS has been working in the area of transport policy since 2003. Our central goal in relation to transport policy is the achievement of a sustainable Victoria in which all residents have access to an affordable and accessible transport system which meets their mobility needs.

This submission will focus predominantly on term of reference

C— an assessment of the benefits of public passenger transport, including integration with bicycle and pedestrian initiatives.

The benefits of public passenger transport are many and varied and experienced by a cross section of communities across Victoria.

Transport is essential for people to participate in community life, to get to work or study, visit friends and family and travel to other places they want to go. Access to transport is a significant issue for many low income and disadvantaged communities, especially in outer suburban, rural and regional areas.

The release of the *Victorian Transport Plan* in December 2008 was welcomed by VCOSS as a commitment to long term generational investment in public transport infrastructure. Though we noted that many of the announcements in the plan for new transport projects are dependent on Commonwealth funding.

VCOSS strongly endorses the need for Commonwealth funding to deliver aspects of this package that support the public transport initiatives and believes the funding sought is both appropriate and realistic.

Patronage numbers in Victoria have risen significantly and are predicted to further increase. In Victoria there has been a 40% increase in patronage over the past 10 years. Much of this growth can be attributed to a growing preference for public transport over car use as well as an increase in some services across the state.¹

However VCOSS acknowledges that many people especially in regional and rural Victoria are car dependant and that until appropriate public transport alternatives are developed, these communities will increasingly face disadvantage in terms of accessibility to and affordability of many essential goods and services.

People living in outer suburban areas where there are higher proportions of households with mortgages, where car dependence is greater and where incomes are more modest are the most vulnerable to rising fuel price and interest rate impacts.

The benefits of public transport to people on low incomes is significant in that 50% of public transport trips in Melbourne are made by people on very low incomes – students, pensioners, retirees and people who are unemployed.

The ability for people to access essential services and participate in a range of social and cultural pursuits is heavily reliant on the affordability and accessibility of public transport.

Reduced impact on *climate change* is not only a major benefit of a well planned and resourced public transport system but is also one of the main reasons patronage is increasing with more people wanting to reduce their car use and a greater awareness in general throughout the community.

Transport is one of the largest sectors responsible for Victoria's greenhouse gas emissions, second only to Stationary Energy. Currently, Victoria's transport sector is responsible for 17% of the State's emissions, an increase of over 26 percent since 1990.²

¹ Department of Transport, 'Passenger numbers continue to grow on Melbourne's public transport network', 20 August 2008, www.transport.vic.gov.au

² EPA Victoria, 'Australia and Victoria's greenhouse gas emissions' www.epa.vic.gov.au/greenhouse/australia-victoria-emissions.asp, 9 September 2008.

Cycling's popularity is also increasing with a record 9 consecutive years where bicycle sales have outnumbered car sales nationally and across capital cities there has been a 28% increase in the number of people riding to work. In Melbourne this number is even higher at 48% due mostly to well planned infrastructure such as cycling lanes and secure parking.³

What else is needed?

Ensuring public transport meets the growing and changing needs of all Australians is an ongoing challenge which requires continual monitoring of service quality and incorporation of feedback from commuters around best practice standards.

VCOSS is keen to see *minimum standards* set for all modes of public transport which are universal, standardised and aspire to meet best practice in service provision.

For the purpose of this submission VCOSS would like to draw your attention to the following key areas which represent the most pressing issues of concern to our member organisations and networks of public transport users across Victoria.

- **Availability**

Infrastructure funds for additional community transport services to fill the gaps particularly in rural and regional areas for people experiencing locational disadvantage and for people who cannot access regular services due to specialised mobility needs.

Minimum service level standards need to be set at an aspirational level along with regular monitoring and feedback collected from commuters. VCOSS advocates for operating hours to be extended to 6:00am – midnight, 7 days a week with a minimum half-hourly frequencies on all public transport modes.

Increase investment is needed in all modes of public transport in outer suburbs and country areas, including regular bus services which connect towns and service regional centres.

- **Accessibility**

Compliance with the Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport needs to be met and in a timely manner. Currently Victoria is well behind targets especially in relation to trams and buses in regional areas. VCOSS would like to see the Commonwealth government provide assistance to ensure that compliance measures are actioned.

The frequency of inter town and regional bus services and connectivity of all modes of public transport need to be planned and progressed in order to meet growing patronage numbers.

³ E Fishman 'Bicycles outsell cars in Australia-sales top 1.2 million', *Cycling Promotion Fund*, 12 February 2009.

- **Useability**

Users of public transport most commonly cite information provision, safety, comfort and amenities at stations and bus stops as essential parts of the provision of high quality public transport.

The provision for secure bicycle parking at train stations at minimal or no cost to commuters should be considered in planning initiatives at a local government level across the state.

- **Affordability**

Concession rates should be available for single parents, people accessing essential health services, students, homeless young people and people travelling for job interviews.

- **Sustainability**

Generational investment in public transport is needed to meet these needs, some of which are very pressing and which include upgrading and purchasing of new stock, adequate maintenance, compliance to accessibility standards and best practice in service delivery.

Others however will require years of investment and commitment to deliver a sustainable transport system particularly to areas that are currently poorly serviced by public transport, and to new growth areas.

While efforts to more closely align transport planning with urban planning are commended, new growth areas are still being developed without sufficient public transport infrastructure. Building new suburbs that are almost solely reliant on road based transport entrenches car dependence in these suburbs from the outset.

For further information please contact David Imber, Manager Policy and Public Affairs or Loren Polzot, Transport and Disadvantage Policy Officer on (03) 9654 5050 or by email at david.imber@vcoss.org.au or loren.polzot@vcoss.org.au.

Yours sincerely



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