

The purpose of this submission, written by the Upgrade Upfield Corridor Committee (UUCC) is to highlight infrastructure and other issues that affect public transport services, in particular the Upfield rail service, in the Upfield corridor of Melbourne's northern suburbs.

UUCC is a public interest group which seeks to improve public transport services in the northern suburbs of Melbourne specifically, and in Melbourne generally. It grew out of organisations which were formed about 20 years ago to oppose the State Government's intention to close the Upfield suburban rail line.

Several submissions forwarded to the inquiry have already discussed issues related to the provision of public transport infrastructure in Melbourne and Victoria. UUCC supports the thrust of these submissions, particularly in respect of the need for Australian Government funding of urban public transport, and either the removal of taxation concessions for private vehicle use or the extension of these concessions for public transport use. These submissions include those from:

Prof. Graham Currie (No. 34)
City of Yarra (No. 85)
Australasian Railway Association Inc (No. 87)
Northern Transport Links (No. 102)
Dr Paul Mees (No. 135)
Public Transport Users Association Inc. (No. 136)

Background

The Upfield train line is part of the Melbourne suburban rail network, running from central Melbourne through the suburbs of Macaulay, Flemington, Parkville, Brunswick, Coburg, Merlynston, Fawkner and Campbellfield. The line shares the junction at North Melbourne Station and the city loop tunnel with lines from Craigieburn, Sydenham, Werribee and Williamstown. The maximum number of trains that can travel through this tunnel (as stated by the Department of Transport), constrained by existing infrastructure and procedures, is 24 per hour. The current maximum number of trains travelling through the tunnel is 21.

The tram lines in the corridor are:

City to East Brunswick (via Nicholson Street);
City to East Coburg (via Lygon Street);
City to Moreland (via Lygon Street and Moreland Road);
City to North Coburg (via Royal Parade and Sydney Road);
City to West Coburg (via Flemington Road, Royal Park, Grantham Street and Melville Road);

Several bus services operate through the corridor in an East-West direction.

In the late 1980's the then State Government decided to close the Upfield rail line, and replace it and the Sydney Road tram service with a tram service along the rail line easement. From the early 1970's the rail service had been was running at a capacity less than that of the metropolitan network. Weekday and Saturday services ceased at 7pm. and there were no

Sunday services. Much of the line infrastructure was outdated and in need of replacement or repair. A campaign by community and public transport advocacy groups eventually convinced the State Government to abandon plans to close the line and to upgrade the infrastructure and services to the standard of the rest of the network. Following the upgrade, the service was re-opened in 1998 with the addition of night and Sunday services.

Upfield rail line - current situation

Unlike every other line on the suburban network the Upfield line does not have additional peak hour services. The current peak hour frequency, 20 minutes, is the same as the non-peak frequency.

The frequency reduces to 30 minutes after 7pm irrespective of the fact there are now large numbers of city commuters who work much later than the traditional 5:30 "knock-off" time.

A cancellation of a peak hour service on the Upfield line results in a wait for commuters of up to 40 minutes (or up to an hour as there have been instances where two consecutive have been cancelled). This greatly inconveniences commuters who need to be at work, keeping an appointment or collect children from schools or child minding centres.

Waiting times are often extended because of the late running of services. Recently a speed restriction has been placed on newer Siemens trains because of issues relating to their braking systems, resulting in late running, which cascades through the network.

In the period since the re-opening of the line, passenger numbers have dramatically increased (as they have on the network generally), particularly in the past three years. However during this time there has been no increase in service frequency unlike most other lines which have received additional peak hour services in the past year.

The only change to the Upfield service in the last decade has been the replacement of 3 carriage sets with 6 carriage sets in peak periods. However all peak hour services are now regularly overcrowded, and this situation is exacerbated whenever services are cancelled or run with only 3 carriage sets.

Overcrowding occurs also when major events, including football and cricket matches, concerts and festivals occur in Melbourne at night (usually on Friday and Saturday). No additional services are timetabled on the Upfield line to transport the additional number of people returning home from these events, the usual 30 minute service frequency applies.

Premium stations are staffed from first train to last train. At these stations tickets can be sold over the counter, information can be provided to passengers, and internal waiting rooms and toilets are open. They are generally safer for passengers than non-premium stations which, despite having the same infrastructure, have none of these services or facilities available. Non-premium stations can be difficult to use for elderly and disabled passengers.

The Upfield line, with only three premium stations, has the lowest proportion of premium to non-premium stations (23%).

Upfield rail line - infrastructure needs

There is a need for more premium stations on the line (most stations were fully staffed until 1997). Currently there are 7 non-premium stations between Coburg and the city, a distance of about 10km.

Another specific infrastructure need is the construction of a station at Camp Road Campbellfield. In this area is a large shopping centre and the Melbourne Greyhound Racing Complex, it is also an employment hub, and the line intersects with a bus service which connects between Greensborough & Broadmeadows. The proposed station would be located between Gowrie and Upfield stations which are 4km apart.

West Coburg tram - current situation

In the morning peak it is not unusual for passengers at tram stops in Dawson Street and Grantham Street trams to be prevented from boarding these trams because of over crowding resulting from an inadequate frequency of services (about 4 minutes). While 4 minutes should be adequate, the services are single car sets and do not have the capacity of multi-car sets that operate on other lines.

West Coburg tram - infrastructure needs

There is also a need for this line to be extended beyond Bell Street to serve the suburbs of North Coburg, Pascoe Vale and Hadfield which have no close fixed rail transport. The line could run along Derby St and West Street, serving both residential, commercial and retail areas along the route and providing these areas with a direct fixed rail link to the inner northern suburbs and city.

Other tram services - current situation

The other four tram services, while not as stressed as the West Coburg line peak services, are still under considerable pressure to maintain punctuality because of demand. Week day peak and non-peak frequencies are less than those of thirty years ago despite the increase in patronage. The reduction in frequencies was partly compensated by the introduction of 2 car sets (B class) which increased capacity of each service. However it is common for the North Coburg morning and evening peak hour services to be crowded to the extent that boarding is impossible between the CBD and Brunswick.

Other tram services - infrastructure needs

There is a need for additional tramcar sets, to allow for increased peak hour frequencies on all Upfield corridor tram lines (and other Melbourne tram lines which also suffer from overcrowding).

Bus services - current situation

Buses which intersect the Upfield rail line and/or the five tram routes in the corridor generally run along east-west roads in the suburbs from Brunswick to Campbellfield. They fulfil both the roles of providing for cross-suburban travel generally, and also as feeders to

the fixed rail services; though, due to the multiple route intersections it is not generally possible to formally coordinate connections to all these in the bus timetables.

Bus services - infrastructure needs

For an effective ‘network effect’ which facilitates travel to and from all locations in the region, it is necessary to have buses with a frequency as high as possible; and at least as frequent as the services to which they provide interchange. Otherwise the waiting time between services can be as long as the trip itself.

The most pressing need for bus services in the Upfield corridor is an increase in frequencies and span of service hours. Many services currently have poor or no services in the evening and on weekends. A review of bus services in the southern part of the region has been promised, but has not yet been announced.

In terms of physical infrastructure, most bus stops do not have shelters, seats or timetables. The needs to be an improvement on this. Updated timetables must be available at every stop.

Communications systems - current situation

Melbourne's train, tram and buses services are operated by separate companies. This results in:

- The network not being seen and managed as an integrated system, but as separate systems that operate independently of the others, and in certain areas, in competition with them;

- For each mode a lack of information about other modes, including timetables, current operating situation, routes and destinations that would benefit passengers when trip planning and travelling;

- Furthermore staff generally do not have knowledge about transport modes other than their own (and sometimes are not even knowledgeable about their own services). This can be frustrating for commuters when there are disruption to services and passengers seek to find alternative means to travel to their destinations.

- One recent improvement for Melbourne travellers is the display screens at the “superstops” that provide operating information about tram services (e.g. next Toorak tram due in 2 minutes). Similar display screens are in the train city loop and some suburban stations but the information is often incorrect and different from that provided by announcements. Neither modes displays information about other modes, such as next connecting service.

Other transport systems

The following is a response to the sixth item in the terms of reference relating to best practice international transport systems.

Well run urban transport systems:

- have an extensive coverage of the urban area (e.g. Tokyo trains);
- provide frequent services (e.g. Hong Kong trains and buses, Tokyo trains, London underground trains);
- run according to the timetable with few or no cancellations (e.g. Hong Kong trains and buses, Tokyo trains);
- have a wide time span (time coverage) of services (e.g. Hong Kong trains and buses, New York buses, Tokyo trains);
- are affordable (e.g. Paris trains, Singapore trains and buses, Washington trains);
- are comfortable (not overcrowded) and clean (e.g. Munich trams, Oslo trains and buses, Singapore trains, Vienna trams, Washington trains);
- have simple ticketing procedures which are multimodal (e.g. Hong Kong trains and buses, Paris, Berlin);
- are safe (e.g. Beijing trains and buses, Helsinki trams, Singapore trains and buses, Vienna trams);

Services that stand out are:

the airport to the city train in Oslo, which is integrated into the suburban network, provides carriages that are roomy enough to easily transport luggage, and are frequent and comfortable. The train terminates in the airport terminal. Also provided to Kuala Lumpur and Hong Kong airports

Conclusion

Cities need well functioning public transport systems to:

- prevent inner and middle urban areas from being destroyed by road infrastructure and traffic congestion;
- to reduce the emission of greenhouse and other polluting gases, which contribute to global warming and respiratory illnesses;
- to improve the efficient transport of goods and services across the city by increasing the use of public transport by people and goods, thus reducing road congestion.

This submission has provided details of how the lack of infrastructure expenditure over several decades on public transport has adversely affected services in the Upfield corridor, an area which is reasonably well provided by fixed rail and bus routes. In general:

services on Melbourne's public transport network (including services in the Upfield corridor) have deteriorated, partly because of lack of infrastructure expenditure necessary for new and replacement vehicles, communications and signalling systems, and associated infrastructure;

Commonwealth expenditure on urban public transport ceased in 1985;

the bulk of new transport infrastructure expenditure (Commonwealth and Victorian) has been on roads and freeways; and

the public transport network has not been extended to the post 1950's growth areas of Melbourne, including Bulleen/Doncaster/Templestowe, Mulgrave/Rowville, and the Mornington Peninsular.

While Victorian expenditure on transport infrastructure has been biased in favour of road transport, it may be that states do not have the financial capacity to build, maintain and operate urban public transport systems. We believe that the Commonwealth must provide funds for public transport infrastructure as it does for road transport infrastructure. Furthermore, the historical bias over recent decades for road transport infrastructure should now be reversed in favour of public transport infrastructure.

Prepared by Jon Saul and Denis Watson,
On behalf of Upgrade Upfield Corridor Committee.