

Action for Public Transport (NSW)

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The Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
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Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

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Dear Secretary,

Inquiry into the investment of Commonwealth and State funds in public passenger transport infrastructure and services

Introduction and Terms of Reference

On 4 December 2008 the Senate referred the following matter to the Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Committee for inquiry and report by 18 June 2009:

The investment of Commonwealth and State funds in public passenger transport infrastructure and services, with reference to the August 2005 report of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Environment and Heritage, Sustainable Cities, and the February 2007 report of the Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Committee, Australia's future oil supply and alternative transport fuels, including:

- a. an audit of the state of public passenger transport in Australia;
- b. current and historical levels of public investment in private vehicle and public passenger transport services and infrastructure;
- c. an assessment of the benefits of public passenger transport, including integration with bicycle and pedestrian initiatives;
- d. measures by which the Commonwealth Government could facilitate improvement in public passenger transport services and infrastructure;
- e. the role of Commonwealth Government legislation, taxation, subsidies, policies and other mechanisms that either discourage or encourage public passenger transport; and
- f. best practice international examples of public passenger transport services and infrastructure.

The inquiry will be advertised in the Australian on 17 December 2008 and the committee has invited submissions by Friday 27 February 2009.

This Submission

Action for Public Transport is pleased to make this submission in response to the Committee's call.

The terms of reference and the other documents quoted cover a vast array of topics. As a small group of non-professional people, but not without expertise, we do not have the time or resources

to produce more than a series of “dot points” under each heading. Also, we have generally confined our comments to New South Wales. We hope that you will be able to add the flesh and breathe some life into these bare bones.

General

We suggest that the priorities in the findings of the Senate's reference documents, House of Representatives Standing Committee on Environment and Heritage, Sustainable Cities, (August 2005) and the Report of the Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Committee (Feb 2007), may now be somewhat dated, having been overshadowed by the alarming predictions of experts on climate change. It is becoming apparent that climate change will over-ride every other consideration in urban design in the immediate and long-term future.

Comments by Terms of Reference

(a) an audit of the state of public passenger transport in Australia;

- should include demand-side metrics – at least minimal mention of on-time running
- market share
- patronage growth (in passenger-km)
- new track/buses/ferries "in the pipeline"
- current and historic average speed and speed comparisons for each of the capital cities
- coverage of urban area – "keeping up with sprawl?"
- auditors should speak to representative sample of passengers, especially for qualitative issues
- ticketing systems (NOT the technology!)
- ideally zonal tickets, as distinct from distance-travelled tickets, for all operators and modes roughly proportional to trip distance – NOT to/from CBD
- internet sales
- timetable span of hours – responsive to day of week variability
- public involvement in, and consequent level of "ownership" of, strategic planning
- rationales and rationalisations for providing concessions
- General Property Trust's land grab bid for building on road and rail space in Newcastle
- governance
- the biggest problems in NSW seem to be (i) a dysfunctional State Government, distracted by factionalism, (ii) inter-agency rivalry (iii) an obsession with "moving" people and goods, rather than providing "access" with better land-use planning, which would minimise the need for movement
- there are many seemingly minor annoyances on the suburban and inter-urban rail system covering aspects such as unmanned stations, locked toilets, cleanliness, gaps in service, absence of weekend fares, lack of water on inter-urban trains, etc. While small by themselves, together they build a powerful disincentive to travel by rail.

(b) current and historical levels of public investment in private vehicle and public passenger transport services and infrastructure;

- share of budget/GDP/Gross State Product approach to use
- distributor services e.g. Parramatta Loop, Newcastle fare-free zone should be included

(c) an assessment of the benefits of public passenger transport, including integration with bicycle and pedestrian initiatives;

- "Integration"... same place/time/colour scheme/timetable /tickets
- New capital works for casual users – non-commute trips
- "health" should include longer working life, i.e. tax-paying
- (integration of bicycles and pedestrians with public transport) – It appears that bicycles will not be permitted to be carried on Sydney's new CBD Metro, as they are on CityRail trains. This would represent a disintegration of the modes, as cyclists frequently require the use of their bicycle at either end of the train journey.
- The Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal of NSW (IPART) has produced many reports over the past decade and more on the financial and social benefits of public transport. The Committee should refer to their web site <http://www.ipart.nsw.gov.au>

(d) measures by which the Commonwealth Government could facilitate improvement in public passenger transport services and infrastructure;

- since most of the State's funding comes from the GST, handed down from Canberra, is there much point in trying to distinguish between "State" funding and "Federal" funding?
- support standards setting activities
- ensure their investment leads to comprehensive improvements
- less "robbing Peter to pay Paul" and "fixes" that avoid the root cause
- "carbon credit" type schemes to provide choices for current car drivers
- quality, reach and capacity all need to work
- Parking Space Levies or equivalent needed for capital city CBDs, with restriction on how much ends up as car parking elsewhere

(e) the role of Commonwealth Government legislation, taxation, subsidies, policies and other mechanisms that either discourage or encourage public passenger transport;

- the perverse FBT rules which encourage the excessive use of company cars
- US "Commuter Check" approach – employers "sell" transit passes to staff (pre-tax earnings), discounted further for priority areas (e.g. poor air)
- understanding "congestion" dimensions: a traffic dynamic; undersupply/underprice/over-demand for economists; a sign of land-use planning failure; a sign of CBD success; a sign infrastructure is achieving best utilisation
- values inherent in terminology used (roads are for vehicles to drive through)
- the currently lower sales tax for 4WD vehicles encourages the purchase of unnecessarily larger fuel-wasting vehicles for city use.
- Commonwealth subsidies for public transport could be provided from low-interest borrowings, the loans to be repaid by future generations, who will be the primary beneficiaries of such capital expenditure.
- the taxation structure for travel modes is highly discriminatory and favours company car purchasing

- introduce a tax incentive for public transport ticketing – e.g. being able to salary sacrifice to purchase public transit tickets tax-free should be compulsorily available from every company.

(f) best practice international examples of public passenger transport services and infrastructure.

- metro technology in inner-city areas properly (not developer driven)
- coordinated with re-development e.g. Copenhagen
- light rail
- European quality of design
- US "Commuter Rail" modus operandi for outer areas
- Vancouver SkyTrain – unstaffed – technology to deliver service, not for own sake, parking tax funding, Transit Orientated Development integration with other modes
- VTPI assessment approaches. This refers to the Victoria Transport Policy Institute, an independent Canadian research organization dedicated to developing innovative and practical solutions to transportation problems. The website has an encyclopedic array of issues and solutions – <http://www.vtppi.org>
- ensure that integrated ticketing with new networks is discussed. It is madness that the private Light Rail does not have integrated ticketing with the government TravelPasses.
- in new contracts for extensions such as the Airport Line, it is inequitable to have such high station access fees and it should be brought into line with charges on the rest of the network.
- the Federal US government brought in an Act around 1991 that meant that they committed to a huge proportion of transport funding (20 percent?) for cycling and mass transit.

Conclusion

Please let us know if you would like any further explanation of the above items.

We would welcome an invitation to the public hearing in Sydney on Friday 6 March.

Yours faithfully

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 Secretary
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