



RAC members are happier

ROYAL AUTOMOBILE CLUB OF W.A. (Inc)

SUBMISSION TO THE SENATE RURAL AND REGIONAL AFFAIRS AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE INQUIRY INTO PUBLIC PASSENGER TRANSPORT INFRASTRUCTURE AND SERVICES

Introduction

The Royal Automobile Club of Western Australia (RAC) represents more than 700,000 members across Western Australia.

Our membership base covers more than 1 in 2 Western Australian households and around 50 per cent of drivers in WA.

The RAC has been recognised as a trusted, independent voice by its members and the community at large.

We have been an advocate for road safety and motoring issues for more than 100 years.

In recent years as our membership base has grown and diversified, the RAC has also diversified its public advocacy beyond its traditional motoring issues core. The RAC is now a respected voice in a wide range of public policy issues such as the environment, community safety, home security, burglary and anti-social behaviour.

The RAC welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Terms of Reference of this inquiry on behalf of its members.

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

Mobility

As the peak motoring organisation in Western Australia, the RAC maintains an interest in the state of the public transport system.

Our member surveys show that more than 90% of respondents believe the "impact of the car on the environment" is an important issue. This is despite the fact that passenger cars contribute as little as 8% of the nation's total greenhouse gas emissions.

The RAC has offset its own fleet emissions since 2002 and regularly informs members on ways to reduce their own vehicle emissions through our bi-monthly "Horizons" magazine.

The RAC has broadened its traditional focus on the motor vehicle to embrace the concept of "mobility" for our members. We believe that our

members are seeking an appropriate mix of options to move around the City of Perth and the State as a whole.

An efficient and consumer friendly public transport system is an essential part of this mix.

The RAC has consistently lobbied for increased State government investments in new rail infrastructure and in upgrading existing services.

We welcomed the recent announcement of the WA government to extend the northern rail line to Butler and Brighton and we continue to urge the government to accelerate work on identifying the best, most cost-effective option to fulfil its commitment to provide modern public transport services to Ellenbrook.

In March 2008, the RAC ran a comprehensive public survey of community attitudes toward the metropolitan public transport system. A full copy of the findings of that survey is appended to this submission.

The survey found that:

- 47% of those surveyed thought the overall public transport system was excellent or good.
- 55% of respondents used public transport daily or on most days and overwhelmingly for work purposes.
- The benefits of usage most often cited were lower cost (more pronounced on the Armadale and Midland lines), less stress by avoiding traffic, environmental advantages (more prevalent on the Fremantle line) and no need to find parking.
- Of the 77% of bus users who cited they had difficulties or concerns on the bus, the biggest concern is the frequency of buses followed by poor connections, reliability, overcrowding and conditions on the bus.
- Overall, 68% of train users said they had difficulties or concerns with their most frequented train service. The most cited difficulty was overcrowding on trains, followed by lack of parking, service not frequent enough, personal safety concerns and service being unreliable.

A more recent survey (December 2008) involving a limited number of key questions on public transport use revealed that:

- 60 per cent of respondents said it was not possible for them to get to work using public transport

- 81 per cent of people drive to work and only 11 per cent use public transport
- almost one third of respondents worked in or around the Perth CBD
- Almost 80 per cent said they leave for work between 6am and 9am.
- around 35 per cent of respondents said in the past year their journey time to and from work had increased and, of these, 70 per cent said it had increased by between five and 20 minutes
- 56 per cent of respondents said congestion had worsened in the past 12 months

A media release summarising these findings is appended to this submission.

The survey also found that respondents strongly rejected the introduction of a peak hour toll on Perth's major arterial roads with almost 70 per cent opposition such a congestion tax.

The RAC does not support the imposition of congestion taxes or other tax measures to be imposed on motorists with a view to influencing them to make greater use of public transport. The RAC has supported the recent submission of the Australian Automobile Association to the Henry Taxation Review. The RAC believes sensible investments in improving the reach, performance and attractiveness of public transport should be sufficient to ensure that patronage continues to grow into the future.

The provision of public transport services has traditionally been the responsibility of State Governments. While it is open to the Commonwealth to consider supporting new public transport infrastructure it would require an approach which did not unfairly benefit nor disadvantage individual States. The RAC is mindful that the Commonwealth's historic record in relation to funding for smaller population States such as Western Australia is not particularly good.

Contact

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Attachments:

1. Public Transport Survey, Attitudes and Opinions by RAC Members and the Wider Community on Perth's Metropolitan Public Transport System, May 2008
2. RAC (WA) Media Release, "Congestion Headache for Perth's Commuters", 1 February 2009