

21 October 2021

Melbourne's key transport issues

Melbourne is globally recognised as one of the most liveable cities in the world. It is safe, boasts a diverse economy, delivers excellent health and education services, and as we emerge from the pandemic - will again host world-class sporting events and cultural experiences.

Despite Melbourne's status, mobility throughout the city had reached a tipping point prior to COVID-19. Rapid population, tourism and trade growth had put the transport system under immense pressure. Peak hour commutes on public transport had become uncomfortable, while road traffic congestion had worsened. These conditions are expected to return as full social and economic activity resumes.

Engagement with members, stakeholders and ministers throughout 2021 has reaffirmed several issues that authorities could address to help ensure Melbourne's transport system continues to meet community needs. The issues highlighted in this brief have also been addressed in Committee for Melbourne's (the Committee's) 2020 report, [Transporting Melbourne](#).

Integrated transport planning

Melbourne does not have a comprehensive integrated transport plan. Despite plans that seek to provide a roadmap for how Melbourne should grow, none offer a thorough strategic framework detailing how the city will grow in the long-term. The Victorian Government's key plan which aims to guide Melbourne's growth out to 2050 - *Plan Melbourne* - is a document which has merit. However, the city requires a strategic plan with greater depth and clarity.

The Victorian Auditor-Generals Office confirmed in August 2021 that the requirements of integrated transport planning outlined in the Transport Integration Act 2010 have not yet been met.ⁱ

Integrated transport planning sits at the heart of the Committee's *Transporting Melbourne* report, which called on the Victorian Government to design and publish a comprehensive, integrated transport plan for Melbourne, which considered land-use and economic development. Such a plan would provide greater certainty for the settlement, investment and development activity.

Asset optimisation

Optimising existing transport infrastructure could be prioritised, especially as Melbourne and Victoria emerge from the pandemic in a financially constrained environment.

Asset optimisation could delay or negate the need for new major transport projects. Utilising data and sophisticated analytical tools, and implementing transport network pricing (discussed below), could help manage demand during peak periods. Such investments would avoid long payback periods and finite resource consumption often associated with major project investments.

As part of [Victoria's Infrastructure Strategy 2021-2051](#), Infrastructure Victoria recommended optimisation initiatives across a range of infrastructure assets. *Transporting Melbourne* too highlighted the need for greater asset optimisation. A comprehensive, integrated transport plan would articulate which transport infrastructure should be optimised before major new projects are embarked on.

Metropolitan bus network

Policies aiming to increase patronage on the metropolitan bus network could help reduce road congestion and overcrowding on Melbourne's train and tram networks, especially during peak periods.

About 70% of Melbourne's bus routes run at below a third of their capacity during morning peak period.ⁱⁱ Changes to the fare structure, service frequency and service quality could help rebalance the transport network, while unlocking benefits for the environment and community health.

With one full bus the equivalent of removing 50 cars off the road,ⁱⁱⁱ making bus fares cheaper than train fares and providing more direct services to major employment precincts could have great impact. Such reforms would also be a cost-effective way of expanding Melbourne's public transport capacity without investing in new infrastructure.

Transforming Melbourne's bus fleet could help drive down greenhouse gas emissions. Achieving zero emissions across the state's bus fleet would help the government meet its legislated commitment of net zero emissions by 2050. Preparations are underway to pursue this initiative, as outlined in [Victoria's Bus Plan](#).

Transport network pricing

Implementing a new pricing regime for Melbourne's transport network could help reduce congestion and overcrowding, improve efficiency and achieve optimum value-for-money for infrastructure investment.

Transport network stress will likely continue unless the costs for using the network are modified. Pricing structures that influence commuters' modal choices and travel times could ensure Melbourne's transport network is more efficient.

Fair and well-designed incentives that re-shape travel patterns would help optimise the use of existing assets and minimise the need for new infrastructure construction or additional capacity in the short to medium terms. Infrastructure Victoria's [Fair Move: Better Public Transport Fares for Melbourne](#) articulates the benefits transport network pricing reform.

Zero emission vehicles

Establishing an environment conducive for [zero emission vehicles](#) (ZEVs) would help drive uptake and reduce the greenhouse gas emissions produced by Melbourne's transport sector.

Victoria's *Climate Change Act 2017* establishes a long-term target of net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050,^{iv} while the Federal Government's current policy is to reach net zero emissions "preferably" by 2050.^v The wholesale transition of the public and private vehicles fleet from combustion engine vehicles to ZEVs would help achieve these goals.

With a clear vision and decisive action that address challenges associated with upfront ZEV costs, charging infrastructure, electricity grid stability and community apprehension, a cleaner transport future is in reach.

Active transport

Pursuing an ambitious active transport strategy could encourage more Melburnians to live active and healthy lives, while reducing transport network congestion and greenhouse gas emissions.

With social distancing and mobility restrictions enforced due to COVID-19, community interest in active transport has increased. VicHealth survey data has revealed that three in four Victorians (76%) want local and state governments to adapt infrastructure so people can walk, ride or scooter.^{vi}

For increased active transport uptake, a safe and accessible network of walking and micro-mobility paths are necessary, along with storage facilities located at stations and key employment precincts. City of Melbourne is leading the way with plans to transform Melbourne into Australia's premier bicycle city by creating more than 50 kilometres of protected bicycle lanes.^{vii}

ⁱ Integrated Transport Planning, Victorian Auditor General's Office, Melbourne, 2021, p. 1, https://www.audit.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-08/20210804-Integrated-Transport_0.pdf, viewed 14 October, 2021.

ⁱⁱ Fair Move: Better Public Transport Fares for Melbourne, Infrastructure Victoria, Melbourne, 2020, p. 17, <https://www.infrastructurevictoria.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Fair-Move-Better-Public-Transport-Fares-for-Melbourne-Final-2.pdf>, viewed 15 October, 2021.

ⁱⁱⁱ Victoria's Bus Plan, Department of Transport, Melbourne, 2021, p. 1, <https://transport.vic.gov.au/getting-around/public-transport/buses>, viewed 14 October, 2021.

^{iv} Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, Victorian Government, revised 2021, <https://www.climatechange.vic.gov.au/victorias-greenhouse-gas-emissions-reduction-targets>, viewed 14 October, 2021.

^v P. Karp, Marise Payne says net zero is government's 'broad position' as she plays down Nationals' climate revolt", *The Guardian*, 20 June, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/jun/20/marise-payne-says-net-zero-is-governments-broad-position-as-she-plays-down-nationals-climate-revolt>, viewed 14 October, 2021.

^{vi} VicHealth 2020, *Footpaths & bike lanes key to active travel post coronavirus*, media release, Melbourne, 27 August, viewed 14 October, 2021, <https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/media-and-resources/media-releases/footpaths-and-bike-lanes-to-help-active-travel>

^{vii} City of Melbourne, revised 2021, <https://www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/parking-and-transport/transport-planning-projects/Pages/transport-strategy.aspx>, viewed 15 October, 2021.