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A COMPREHENSIVE OVERHAUL OF MELBOURNE'S BUSES PROMISES REWARDING OUTCOMES

- Committee for Melbourne's report on bus reform shows that **a reformed bus system could take 100 million private vehicle trips annually off Melbourne's road network by 2030.**
- 87% of Melbourne households own a car, with increasing congestion making it more difficult for Melburnians to commute to work and other important destinations. Reforming Melbourne's bus system is needed as a matter of urgency to reduce congestion and improve connectivity.
- **Bus journeys in Melbourne account for less than 2% of all trips annually**, highlighting the significant untapped potential in the city's bus system.
- **Up to 870,000 metric tonnes of transport emissions could be avoided by 2030 if 25% of new trips are made by bus**, in conjunction with bus fleet electrification.
- **Investment in bus reform is relatively productive:** the Committee has been calling for governments to review their infrastructure investment priorities to ensure the most productive and effective investments are delivered in a timely way.
- **Business and community organisations are meeting today** to discuss the report and how bus reform should be elevated as an urgent priority for Melbourne's future.

Committee for Melbourne's report *Course Correction - Reforming Melbourne's buses*, released today, provides an insight into the benefits that could be achieved if comprehensive bus reform is undertaken.

The Committee's CEO, Mark Melvin, said, if Melbourne wants to retain its status as the most liveable city in Australia as the population grows, then public transport connectivity must be addressed as a matter of urgency.

"Reforming Melbourne's bus system requires a plan to invest now, if we are to deliver for all Melburnians," he said.

"With Melbourne's population forecast to reach 6 million by 2031, we must ensure the city delivers for all Melburnians, including by offering efficient, effective and reliable public transport options".

"Cars cost an average of \$11,000 to run annually compared to around \$1,800 for public transport usage, and yet 87% of households own a car in Melbourne. We need to make it easy for people to choose public transport over hopping in a car – especially when we are facing a cost-of-living crisis."

"It is no wonder that people are forced into cars. According to our Benchmarking Melbourne 2023 report, Melburnians experience the joint second longest commute time out of 15 peer cities and spend longer waiting for public transport and making connections than in other cities."

"Only 27% of journeys to work are being made through public or active transport compared to 49% in peer cities, according to our Benchmarking Melbourne 2022 report. An improved bus network will provide equitable options for more people to choose buses to get to work across the city."

"Buses offer great opportunities for people to move around the city more effectively. They can connect people with transit hubs, shopping centres, business districts, educational institutions, hospitals, and other important destinations. By effectively integrating with other transport modes, buses can offer a viable alternative to the car for many Melburnians."

"With bus journeys accounting for less than 2% of all trips annually on Melbourne's roads, there is significant potential to increase bus patronage."

"We need to make bus travel more attractive to commuters. This *Course Correction* report shows that bus patronage can increase by implementing comprehensive reforms, including changing the routes, providing more dedicated bus lanes and increasing the service frequency.

"The report shows that, done properly, a reformed bus network could **reduce over 100 million private vehicle trips annually by 2030**. That means more people being active and connected across Melbourne."

MEDIA RELEASE

Arup Principal and Chair of the Committee's Infrastructure and Sustainability Standing Committee, Dr Joseph Correnza, said that an efficient and effective bus system increases choice, reduces congestion and supports a more equitable society by connecting more people to jobs and education.

"If we can get people out of cars and into electric buses, it will have enormous sustainability benefits.

"Buses contribute 6% of key air pollutants despite comprising just 0.5% of registered vehicles in Australia. A properly reformed system could reduce up to **870,000 metric tonnes of annual transport emissions by 2030** if 25% of new trips are made by bus and the system is electrified."

"An efficient bus network means that many more people can move around the city without a car. This can pay dividends by reducing the cost of living, congestion and travel times, and allowing people to spend more time with their families."

Mr Melvin said that while the Victorian Government has a plan that outlines the future for Melbourne's bus system, the Committee's recommendations aim to ensure that the most efficient and effective outcomes can be delivered in that context.

"Urgent action is required now, especially as the renewal process for 30% of metropolitan bus contracts gets underway with new 10-year contracts to begin on 1 July 2025," he said.

"There are steps that need to be taken, including reforming bus routes, aiming for 10-minute services on key routes, incorporating incentives into bus contract negotiations, as well as communicating with the public about the importance of having an efficient and reliable bus system."

"There is no doubt that Melbourne's buses get a bad rap but revolutionising the current system with a network of direct, efficient, reliable, electric buses that integrate with the train network, could fundamentally transform the way Melburnians move around the city."

"Investing in buses that connect people to other transport modes and major infrastructure, will get our assets working as hard as they can, and support those investments being undertaken through the Big Build Program.

"Bus reform is affordable and can deliver productivity and community benefits, which will support high living standards well into the future."

"This is a challenge that we must meet together, with councils, community groups, governments and businesses all having a role to play to support the much-needed reforms," said Mr Melvin.

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CONTRIBUTIONS: *The Committee thanks our members for their input into the report, and specifically the contributions of Arup and University of Melbourne and those particular contributors recognised in the report.*

Committee for Melbourne: *Committee for Melbourne is relentless in its pursuit of positive and enduring change for all Melburnians. With more than 150 members from major corporations, small and medium business, academic institutions, local government, and not-for-profit entities and through embracing three key pillars – Future Economy, Infrastructure & Sustainability, and Liveability & Urban Optimisation – the Committee exists to ensure Melbourne's challenges and opportunities are addressed to keep our city vital, inclusive, progressive, and sustainable. The Committee is a not-for-profit, member-funded entity that is politically independent and impartial, allowing us to freely and purposefully raise important issues. **To learn more visit:** melbourne.org.au*

KEY INFORMATION FROM THE REPORT

Challenges with current bus network

- Bus journeys in the city account for **1.62%** of all trips annually (Victorian Government).
- **30-minute average service frequency** of Melbourne's buses during weekday peak (Infrastructure Victoria).
- **Average bus speed is 35% lower** than signed road speeds during morning peak (Infrastructure Victoria).
- Only **52 kilometres of dedicated bus lanes** throughout Melbourne (Infrastructure Victoria).
- More than **95% of bus stops do not have a pedestrian crossing within 20 metres** (Victoria Walks).
- **Buses contribute up to 6% of key air pollutants** despite comprising only 0.5% of registered vehicles in Australia (The Australia Institute).

Bus reform benefits

- A reformed bus network that achieves the same levels of patronage as existing SmartBus services could reduce over 100 million private vehicle trips annually, or deliver 10% of additional travel demand, in Melbourne by 2030 (Arup).
- Between 330,000 to 870,000 metric tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent could be saved in 2030 (equivalent to between 1.6% and 4.4% of Victoria's total annual transport emissions) with bus fleet electrification and mode share between 1.6% and 4% (Arup).
- Early delivery of high-quality transport infrastructure and services have shown to outweigh costs by up to 18:1 in one of Melbourne's major growth areas (RMIT University).
- By consolidating the service hours currently used to deliver 80 existing bus routes into 25 new routes, spaced at regular intervals of 1.5 to 2 kilometres and operating at high frequencies 24/7, a study suggests three times more people could access major activity centres in Melbourne's west within 30 minutes (The University of Melbourne).

Committee for Melbourne recommendations

1. **Develop a compelling public narrative:** articulate to Melbourne's residents the benefits of comprehensive bus reform for individuals, the community and the city.
2. **Deliver 10-minute services on key routes:** prioritise the delivery of a core network of bus services at least every 10-minutes along key routes that harmonise with the train and tram network and invest in feeder services that connect the community with the core network, during this term of government.
3. **Have a reform plan prior to recontracting:** re-design the current bus system before the new bus contracts come into effect in 2025.
4. **Embed incentives into bus contracts:** include incentives for bus operators to increase patronage as part of the recontracting process and amend existing bus contracts that incentivise increased patronage.
5. **Re-invest in the bus network:** ensure savings or additional revenues generated from bus reform is directly allocated to improving the bus network alongside an increase in investment.
6. **Create coalitions of support:** develop strong partnerships with key stakeholders to deliver comprehensive bus reform.