



10 July 2008

East-West transport options review
Department of Transport
GPO Box 2797
Melbourne VIC 3000

Dear Madam/Sir

East West Link Needs Assessment

I am writing to provide a brief submission to the East-West transport options review ("the review"). My comments primarily concern the impacts of any decisions made regarding new infrastructure and other changes.

Background – PTO scheme

The Public Transport Ombudsman ("PTO") can receive, investigate and resolve complaints about the provision of public transport services provided by members of the PTO scheme. Our members include train, tram and bus companies, and others involved in providing public transport services, such as Metlink, the Transport Ticketing Authority ("TTA") and the Southern Cross Station Authority ("SCSA").

The PTO's jurisdiction includes complaints as to the provision or supply of, or the failure to provide or supply, public passenger transport. We receive under this category complaints about over-crowding, service reliability and cancellations, some of the indicia of a system under stress. In the last four years we have seen an increase in complaints about overcrowding of more than 100%. Against our complaint categories of cancellation, reliability and overcrowding there has been an increase of more than 50%.

In complaints we receive, complainants have raised issues of:

- lateness for work and the impact of this on their employment
- safety and amenity issues associated with crowded public transport
- the lack of information given to passengers about delayed or cancelled services, including where the cause is systems work designed to improve services into the future.

Our information is consistent with the findings of the East-West Link Needs Assessment as they reflect considerable strain on the public transport network.

Impacts of implementing new projects

Even implementing small infrastructure and other improvements in public transport services can have temporary but significant impacts on commuters. These include periods of delayed services, replacing trains and trams with buses, reduced services and other necessary arrangements to permit remedial or new work to be carried out. For commuters this will mean increased travel times with the pass-on effects to their families and employment. We also expect, with the implementation of projects outlined in *'Meeting our Transport Challenges'*, that some commuters will be significantly impacted upon.

If new infrastructure works result from the review, planning for the impacts of changes on current services will be critical to maintaining public support for projects during implementation periods. This includes:

- ensuring any transitional arrangements are comprehensive and well planned, to minimise the disruption. The transitional arrangements also need to be sufficiently flexible so that implementation delays or changes will have minimal or no additional impacts on commuters and others.
- ensuring accurate information is provided to the community about temporary changes to services, the reasons for those changes and the benefits that can be expected from the work being undertaken, This is both so that the community can prepare for the impacts, and to manage any expectations both during and following implementation.
- providing effective complaints processes, including independent review, so that concerns can be examined and properly addressed. Complaints will provide important information for ongoing refinements to refine communication with commuters and others affected by new projects. Complaints will also inform ongoing reviews of and improvements to arrangements put in place to manage the impacts of new projects.

I therefore recommend that, whatever options are finally implemented, this aspect of managing the impacts of change be incorporated and planned for from the outset.

New providers of public transport services

Depending upon the final outcomes of the review, new public transport services may be delivered by operators who are not presently providing public transport services. This may include, for example, private companies who own and/or manage new rail stations (as was the case with Southern Cross Station). It may also include a new public authority providing public transport services (as was the case with the Transport Ticketing Authority)

Given the role of the Public Transport Ombudsman, should new operators provide public transport services, it will likely be necessary for them to become a member of the PTO scheme. This is both to ensure a seamless complaints process for commuters and others, and to place these operators on the same footing as other public transport service providers.

This is a matter the review may wish to consider in finalising decisions following the review.

Conclusion

I trust the above information is of assistance. If you wish to discuss any matter noted above, please contact me on 8623 2121.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'SC', written in a cursive style.

Simon Cohen
Public Transport Ombudsman