

# Annual Report 08 Issue → OverView

Welcome to this special edition of OverView

Cases up 14%

This year, we commenced referring some complaints to senior managers of public transport operators

83% of complaints finalised in 14 days

Providing an apology and appropriate recompense is an effective way to resolve a complaint

Submissions made by PTO in 2008



## Issue 2

### This edition of OverView provides a synopsis of the Public Transport Ombudsman's 2008 Annual Report.

The Public Transport Ombudsman's role is a very specific one – to receive, investigate and resolve consumer complaints where public transport operators cannot resolve them in the first instance.

This year we report on cases we have received, investigations we have conducted and other significant activities. Our report reflects the direct impact of public transport on the daily lives of Victorians, and tells the stories of some of those commuters who have complained to the Public Transport Ombudsman, or PTO.

In 2007-08, our cases are up more than 14 per cent to 1137 – mirroring the increased use of public transport services. We finalised 1342 complaints, including 249 that we investigated and finally determined. Most complainants – 77 per cent of those who responded to our survey questions – were satisfied with the PTO services they received.

To be effective, the PTO needs the assistance of both people who have a complaint, and public transport operators.

Many commuters tell us that they are complaining not only for themselves, but also for others affected when services are not satisfactory. Our report illustrates how those who complain are improving services for all commuters.

Equally important is a cooperative approach from public transport operators. This includes being prepared to explain, apologise and make good-will gestures or changes to fix mistakes and improve services. Our report this year demonstrates the constructive approach of public transport operators to resolve complaints.

We have changed a number of procedures in 2008 in order to improve outcomes for both persons who complain and public transport operators. This includes a new process that allows some less serious complaints to be referred back to senior managers within the public transport operators for a second attempt at direct resolution.

We have also made submissions to a number of government reviews, including the Eddington review and bus safety discussion paper, drawing on our information and experience.

I encourage you to read the full report – available on our website at [www.ptovic.com.au](http://www.ptovic.com.au)

Simon Cohen  
Public Transport Ombudsman

## Complaint handling 2007-08

The PTO received 1137 cases during 2007-08, up more than 14 per cent on the same period in 2006-07 (see Figure 1). The top 5 PTO complaint issues (see Figure 2) were:

- Ticketing – concerns about malfunctioning ticket machines and validators, faulty tickets, refunds, travel passes and infringement notices (fines) – 34%
- Service delivery – complaints about punctuality, reliability and cancellations, failure to pick up or set down passengers and timetable changes – 17%
- Infrastructure and rolling stock – issues such as access for disabled passengers, vehicle and carriage condition, and location of stops and signage – 16%
- Authorised officers – complaints concerning authorised officer conduct and demeanour, and the exercise of authority and use of force – 13%
- Staff – drivers, conductors, station attendants and customer service officers – with issues including announcements, product knowledge and behaviour – 11%.

Figure 1: Cases Received

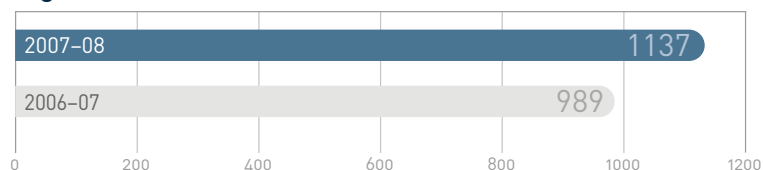
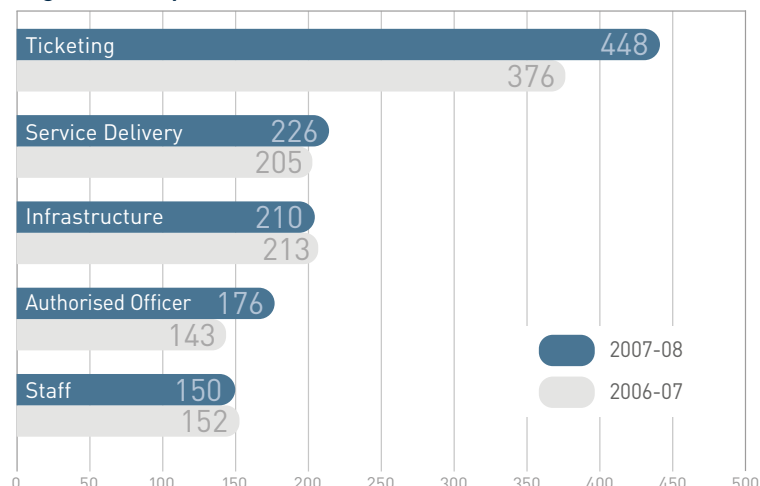


Figure 2: Top Five Issues



## What's New at the PTO – Refer for Internal Escalation

The best outcome for a person who complains is having their concern fully addressed by the public transport operator. For simple complaints which should be easily solved, it may be better for a senior public transport manager to review the case prior to the PTO conducting a full investigation.

This year, we commenced referring some complaints to senior managers of public transport operators to allow them a second opportunity to respond. We call this process *refer for internal escalation*. This is only done with the agreement of the person who complains, and we will not refer serious matters. The senior manager must contact the person making the complaint within 24 hours, and provide a substantive response within seven working days. The response

must also be provided to the PTO. People can always contact us again if they are not satisfied with the outcome, and we will investigate the complaint. We also survey each person who is referred to assess their satisfaction with the operator's further response.

Examples of outcomes for matters referred for internal escalation include:

A commuter who was provided with the wrong information, subsequently purchased more expensive tickets, and initially had a refund request rejected, was given additional tickets for future travel to the value of the overcharge.

A commuter whose train was disrupted by a points failure, and whose complaint was not responded to, received an explanation for the delay, an apology and two daily zone 1+2 Metcards.

## PTO Complaint Outcomes

The PTO finalised 1342 complaints in 2007-08, an increase of 12 per cent on 2006-07. Most of the complaints finalised were referred to public transport operators. This was because the operator had not had the first opportunity to resolve the complaint, as required by the PTO Charter. The PTO finalised 404 complaints through assessment,

investigation and resolution. This includes 249 complaints investigated and finally determined (see Figure 3).

The PTO aims to finalise complaints in a timely manner. In 2007-08, 83 per cent of finalised complaints were completed within 14 days (see Figure 4).

Figure 3: PTO Complaint Outcomes

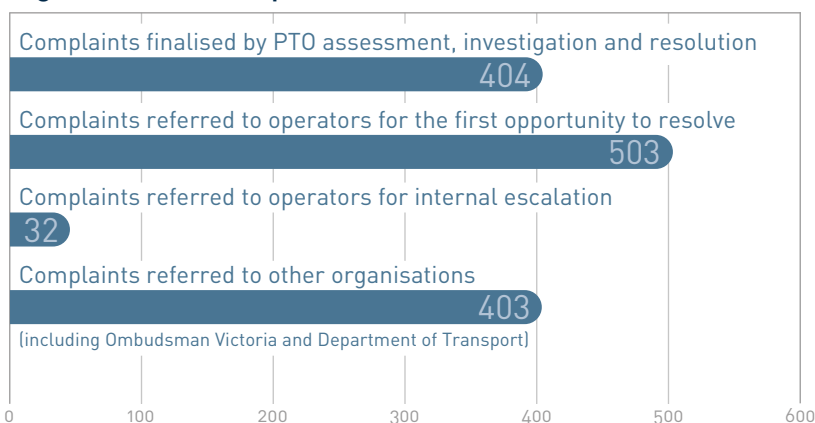
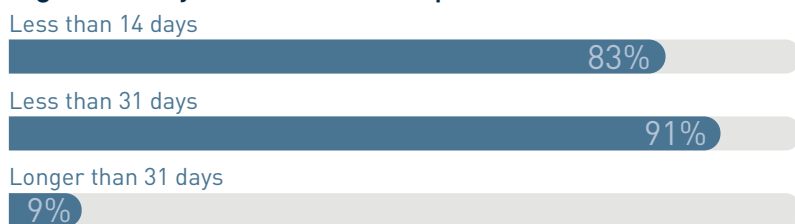


Figure 4: Days to Finalise Complaints



## Case Study

Providing an apology and appropriate recompense is an effective way to resolve a complaint when things go wrong, as the following case study from the 2008 Annual Report shows.

A commuter's daughter complained about the failure of a bus to stop at a designated stop. The complainant stated that the bus had overshot the stop; her mother had to walk over long grass to board the bus and tripped, breaking her spectacles and grazing her face. While the bus company had advised that it was very sorry for the accident, it did not agree to compensate the commuter. However, during the PTO investigation, the bus company agreed to pay \$254 as compensation for the broken glasses, and the cheque was delivered by the company owner personally. The complainant was very pleased with the resolution.

## PTO Submissions

In 2008, the PTO made submissions to various inquiries:

- A submission to the *East-West Link Needs Assessment* review following the release of the Investing in Transport report by Sir Rod Eddington.
- A submission to the Department of Transport discussion paper *Improving Bus Safety in Victoria*.
- A submission to the Victorian Parliament Law Reform Committee *Inquiry into Vexatious Litigants*.
- A submission to the Victorian Parliament Law Reform Committee *Inquiry into Alternative Dispute Resolution*.