



Public Transport Ombudsman Youth and Industry Roundtable Report November 2015

**Treasure Jennings
Public Transport Ombudsman**

Youth and Industry Roundtable 2015

Executive summary

On 17 November 2015, the Public Transport Ombudsman Limited (PTO) hosted the inaugural Youth and Industry Roundtable discussion on young people and their interactions with public transport in Victoria. We decided to host the discussion because of anecdotal evidence which suggests that young people are often challenged or disadvantaged by the policies and processes surrounding Victoria's public transport system, however they also tend to have low levels of efficacy when it comes to complaining and consequently are not influencing policy or process in the same way that other special interest groups do.

The Roundtable brought together public transport operators and youth advocates interested in developing a shared understanding of the interests and concerns of young people when using public transport and exploring where improvements may be needed. The group recognised the cohort under consideration as those aged between 15- 25 years of age.

The participants agreed with our view that youth have unique qualities and should be considered a special interest group with specific strategies aimed at improving their experience and interactions.

Through facilitated discussions, the Roundtable identified areas of public transport that appear to be failing to meet the needs of young people, as well as those areas that were working well. Working groups were established to examine five key areas of interest, with issues and strategies identified for short to medium term and longer term consideration.

There is considerable enthusiasm for ongoing dialogue and action. Through the Roundtable, relationships have been established to facilitate direct consultation between operators and advocacy groups. The way forward involves a strategy for development of the following:

- Products and services that address the needs of young people
- Whole of industry training
- Communications which engage young people
- Policies and processes that enhance the accessibility of complaints mechanisms for young people

A key outcome of the discussion was the recommendation of the group to establish a 'guiding coalition' of participants to continue the dialogue and build on our ideas and solutions going forward.

The group believes that Ministerial support for any such group or committee is vital to the success of the initiative. Additionally, the group believed there is a need to explore ways that young people can be directly involved in ongoing discussions and the development of an industry wide public transport youth strategy.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Treasure Jennings".

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Public Transport Ombudsman

Youth and Industry Roundtable 2015 report

Background

Young people aged 15 to 25 are in a cohort where they are travelling independently, perhaps for the first time, and have to deal with complexities such as timetable changes, myki, authority figures such as Authorised Officers (AOs) or Protective Services Officers (PSOs) and potentially the infringements system. The rules of travel and much of the messaging around public transport is aimed at adult travellers, and youth advocates suggest that it can be challenging for young people to be across all the requirements for easy and trouble free travel.

Issues affecting youth, such as problems with concession travel and ticketing fines, often feature in systemic issues and improvement opportunities identified by the PTO, as well as in complaints received directly from consumers. The PTO has identified a general trend in youth related complaints and issues. Under her Charter, the Ombudsman is responsible for monitoring general trends and systemic issues arising from complaints and raising those issues with members and regulators as the Ombudsman considers appropriate.

The Youth Roundtable was conceived by the PTO after hearing from youth advocates and young people about recurring problems young people face when using public transport and hearing from operators about a genuine desire to address these problems as well as concerns regarding anti-social behaviour.

The initiative was facilitated by Helen Wood and Brodie Woodland of TMS Consulting and was attended by 24 participants from the following organisations:

Public Transport Victoria
Transdev Melbourne
Metro Trains Melbourne
Yarra Trams
BusVic
Ventura Bus Lines
V/Line
Centre for Multicultural Youth
Melbourne City Mission
Youth Affairs Council of Victoria

Youthlaw
Victorian Council of Social Service
Scope
Travellers Aid
Youth Support and Advocacy Service
Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission

The Ombudsman and members of the PTO team and PTO Board attended as participants.

Current youth oriented initiatives by public transport operators

The Ombudsman is aware that a number of public transport operators are currently involved in programs and initiatives for young people. A list of some of the initiatives is at Annexure A.

It is useful to look at what is currently available and where the gaps and overlaps are, to support the development of a consistent industry wide approach.

The discussion outcomes

When asked by the facilitators, the group noted the following aspects are currently working well:

- It was acknowledged at the outset of the discussion that a large number of young people use public transport safely and successfully. Youth advocates report that young people are not raising as many serious incidents involving AOs, and there is a sense that there is less 'targeting' of young people by AOs.
- This report notes that the concept of 'targeting' young people for fare evasion or anti-social behaviour is anecdotal; however the Ombudsman can confirm that some complaints to the PTO have contained this reference. For example, that young people are targeted excessively because they are often travelling with concessions, or they are harassed by AOs because of their youth. *(During sanctioned shadowing of AOs by PTO staff, there were observed instances where an AO would make a comment indicating subtle bias of this nature, although this was not the norm.)*
- Social media and other simplified communication are increasingly being used by operators to provide information to the public. Operators report that young people have the option of complaining or giving feedback via social media platforms. *The PTO is unable to ascertain how the aggregated feedback via these channels is used to improve service.*

- Key destinations, particularly in the metropolitan area, are well serviced and expanded public transport services to major events are viewed positively.
- The lower cost of metropolitan public transport increases its accessibility and desirability.

When asked by the facilitators, the group noted the following aspects currently present challenges for young people using public transport:

- The way information is presented may not engage young people, leaving them in the position of not fully understanding how to maximise their benefit from the system, or their rights and responsibilities.
- Their interactions with authority can be difficult partly because they may not fully understand their rights and responsibilities and because authority figures may not be highly regarded or may be perceived as having a negative bias.
- Aspects of the ticketing system may be difficult to understand or use and sometimes, where parents have made the purchase, a young person may have almost no understanding of the functionality of the product and the governing policies.
- The requirements for concession eligibility, particularly student concessions, are complicated and require young people to purchase and carry a particular type of identification.
- Access to and frequency of services, particularly in non-metropolitan areas, can be inadequate, creating barriers to young people participating socially, or accessing education or employment.
- The fairness and effectiveness of the fines regime. The penalty fare option may not be financially accessible and young people may be limited in their ability or confidence to use the appeals process effectively. It also lacks an explicitly educative aspect and young people may see that discretion from authority figures is applied inconsistently.
- Vulnerable youth, such as homeless youth or those with health issues or physical limitations have additional challenges in navigating the system and may also be unable to afford the cost of a ticket. Often young people have no alternative to public transport and little efficacy in accessing assistance, which can lead to negative

interactions with authority figures and compound their problems.

- Low engagement with traditional channels of complaint can mean the needs and concerns of young people are not well understood or influencing change.
- Personal safety on public transport can be concern for young people (or their parents/carers) which may dissuade young people from using it or may make the experience uncomfortable.
- Older people may have a low tolerance or negative bias for young people when they are interacting socially on public transport as their behaviour may be perceived as inappropriate or dangerous.

Working groups were established to explore the five key areas of most interest and relevance:

1. Ways of improving the public transport experience for young people
2. Penalties and behaviour change
3. Safety for youth and others
4. Engaging youth – increasing patronage and interest in key public transport messages
5. Obtaining concession fares and proof of entitlement identification

The working groups found that many of the ideas or possible solutions overlapped with one another. Therefore, each of the working group discussions were then distilled into the following short to mid-term and medium to long term ideas:

Six to 12 month initiatives

All the participants believed that increasing levels of consultation with young people on their experiences was important. While some levels of outreach is undertaken by various operators, there was not a coordinated approach to interact with young people directly on what might improve the system for them. Establishing an appropriate survey mechanism was considered a good way to make direct contact and gather ideas.

A youth engagement plan should be developed that encompassed all public transport modes: within this plan consider the following key actions;

- Audit current training of frontline customer service and enforcement staff with a view to developing a training program on the most effective ways to communicate with, educate and understand young people, including a standard for the application of discretion when undertaking enforcement.

- Use the example of the PTV Public Transport Access Committee to create a youth experience forum to provide input into public transport decision making including addressing safety concerns of young people and their parents. *The group felt that this type of committee would require strong Ministerial support and interest.*
- Explore communication channels that better align with the modes preferred by young people. Consider replicating key information with a tone and style that would be more appealing to younger people. *An example of this would be the development of 'youth friendly' information regarding myki and behavioural fines e.g. feet on seats, perhaps through the development of specific youth orientated web pages or apps over the medium term.*

12 – 24 month initiatives

- Use the findings from a wider range of relevant research, particularly within other jurisdictions, and engagement practices, such as youth forums and/or surveys, to develop a set of youth orientated standards which are imbedded in the PTV customer services standards.
- Develop a safety app, so that young people can 'call in' or raise public transport safety concerns.
- Improve young people's access to the infringement appeals processes, and look at changing from a judicial process to an administrative and educative process, especially in the first instance. *The Ombudsman suggests the operators consider if the introduction of youth liaison officers could be used to change the negative image of AOs / PSOs.*
- Provide information to young people about their right to complain and ensure the complaint mechanisms are offered via an appropriate channel using accessible and simple processes.
- Simplify the current student concession application process and/or simplify the concession requirements. *For example, some members of the group suggested that all people under 23 be entitled to concession as a way of promoting public transport usage and significantly reducing the administrative burden of processing and monitoring concession cards.*
- Continue to enhance the technology features of the ticketing and timetable information systems e.g. 'myki on your mobile'.

Next Steps

The following next steps were agreed upon by the group;

- Circulation of the contact details of the participants so that operators and advocates can make direct contact with one another should the need arise. *This has been undertaken by the PTO.*
- The formation of a smaller group to review and consider how some initiatives might be undertaken and/or develop a committee as previously suggested.
- Provide copy of this report to the Ministers of Public Transport and Youth Affairs and seek support for the development of a Youth and Public Transport Committee (or other such research function). *The PTO will undertake to distribute this to Minister Allan and Minister Mikakos.*
- Ensure the relevant outcomes and ideas of the Roundtable discussions are fed directly into the recently announced review of infringements system by the Government. *The PTO will undertake to do this as part of its submission.*

Conclusion

A coordinated approach by all stakeholders, including operators, government and advocates, is needed to ensure that public transport provides the services and support required by young people, particularly disadvantaged and isolated youth. Many of the things that are most important to young people such as social connectivity, education and getting and keeping a job, are reliant on a good public transport system. This report sets out a way forward for practical measures to support young people. And going forward, the public transport forum that has grown out of the Roundtable is well positioned to make an ongoing contribution to the development of youth policy in Victoria.

Annexure A

Current youth oriented activities and programs being undertaken by public transport operators:

Metro

Through its AO Community Engagement Unit (CEU), Metro has a number of youth oriented activities planned for 2016. These include school visits to speak about public transport, attendance at the Science Works safety day and building ongoing relationships with individual schools.

CEU members mentor young people at the ROPES diversion program run by Victoria Police. Field active AOs are becoming involved in the program as well, to give them a better insight into the lives of these young people.

Annual refresher training provided to Metro AOs includes training on youth trauma and understanding the adolescent brain, as well as tactics and tips for engaging with young people.

V/Line

V/Line is involved in a number of youth initiatives with its partners:

- Beacon Foundation – High Impact – Work Readiness program. This program supports youth targeted initiatives which support the successful transition from education to meaningful employment.
- Doxa Youth Foundation – Cadetships and Camps programs. The camps provide young children from disadvantaged families with a holiday, while also being introduced to V/Line rail safety education programs.
- Travellers Aid – Pathways to Education program. V/Line provides student travel passes to disadvantaged youth through this program.
- AFL Victoria – C/Line Cup and V/Line Umpire Academies. The V/Line Cup provided opportunities for junior country player to compete against their peers from across Victoria, and the Academies help aspiring VFL and AFL umpires to develop their skills.

BusVic

BusVic has partnered with the Transport Accident Commission (TAC) to develop a positive reinforcement program on behaviour around public transport. The program will be delivered to school students in years 5 to 9.

Individual bus companies have their own programs and initiative targeting young people. For example, bus company CDC has launched a joint initiative with the Victorian Maori Wardens Inc. Program to engage with Maori youth travelling on Westrans Werribee Bus Services. The program is aimed at providing guidance, leadership and counselling services to Maori youth while also engaging with the wider community.

In addition, CDC has a number of initiatives which benefit young people through its associations with Victorian University, Brotherhood of St Laurence and the Western Bulldogs Sons of the West program.