Economy and Infrastructure Committee Inquiry into Expanding Melbourne's Free Tram Zone

University of Melbourne Submission

January 2020

Introduction

The University of Melbourne welcomes the opportunity to provide input into the Economy and Infrastructure Committee inquiry into Expanding Melbourne's Free Tram Zone.

Our submission provides comment on two of the Inquiry's Terms of Reference:

- **Item one:** the expansion of the free tram system; and,
- **Item four:** new technologies that enable intelligent transport systems that improve the performance of the networks.

Extension of the Free Tram Zone

The University supports the extension of the Free Tram Zone along Swanston Street and Royal Parade so that the University of Melbourne's Parkville campus is accessible within the Free Tram Zone. We have previously advocated for an extension of the Free Tram Zone to University/Swanston St and University of Melbourne/Royal Parade. We also support the extension of the Free Tram Zone along St Kilda Road, to at least incorporate the National Gallery of Victoria, Arts Centre Melbourne and the University of Melbourne's Southbank Campus.

The University of Melbourne is a foundational institution for the City of Melbourne and a major driver of the city and state economies. The University's city campuses (Parkville and Southbank) support a significant student population and are a place of employment for thousands of workers. Extending the free tram network to integrate the University's city campuses would not only serve to reduce barriers to sustainable transport options, it would reflect and reinforce the symbolic connection between Melbourne and its namesake university.

Melbourne's public transport network is central to ensuring that students can safely and reliably commute to and from university, allowing them to utilise the educational opportunities on offer. Extending the Free Tram Zone would encourage a greater two-way flow of human traffic between the University of Melbourne's campuses and the CBD, facilitating the movement of students and visitors in and out of the city for study, work and recreation. In particular, an extension of the Free Tram Zone would enable the following benefits:

- **An extended Free Tram Zone would remove barriers to accessible transport.**
  Many students struggle to meet the costs associated with travel to and from university each day, and these numbers are even more pronounced for Indigenous students or those from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Extending the boundaries is a step towards making university education even more accessible for students. In addition, the area around the University's Parkville campus is home to a large number of student accommodation facilities and the 2016 Census noted that nearly 45 per cent of the population of Carlton is made up of students attending a university, tertiary, technical or further education institution.[1] An extended Free Tram Zone would make the city and services in the CBD more accessible for these students.

[1] Australian Bureau of Statistics, *2016 Census QuickStats Carlton (VIC)* Code SSC20492

- **An extended Free Tram Zone would help enhance student experience.** Research conducted with our students in 2019 identified that the journey to and from campus is a key factor influencing the campus experience and, to an extent, student attendance.[2] Student attendance and engagement in the on-campus experience directly impacts academic performance. The University is therefore supportive of any measure that could encourage attendance and greater engagement with the on-campus experience. The University of Melbourne Student Union has also previously advocated for an extension of the Free Tram Zone and in 2018 over 1100 students signed a petition in support of an extension. The University also has students who undertake subjects at both the Parkville and Southbank campuses, and in many cases this means students travel to and from one campus to the other in the one day. Anecdotal feedback suggests that these students are currently walking a part of the way to avoid paying tram costs, and so the proposal to extend the Free Tram Zone would benefit these students both in terms of cost and time. It would also enhance their experience of university and sense of belonging to university life irrespective of their home campus.

- **An extended Free Tram Zone would better enable travel to the Melbourne Biomedical Precinct.** The Melbourne Biomedical Precinct brings together hospitals, research, teaching and biotechnology organisations in the north of the Melbourne CBD, including the University of Melbourne. The Victorian Government's ten-year strategy to develop the precinct means that the work of the 49,000 people employed at the Melbourne Biomedical Precinct will only grow in importance. Extending the Free Tram Zone will unlock the area for researchers, patients and students and ensure the commute of people undertaking the precinct's world-leading research is accessible.

- **An extended Free Tram Zone would enable enhanced collaboration opportunities between students and staff at the University of Melbourne and RMIT.** Despite tram travel between the University of Melbourne and RMIT consisting of just four stops, it is expensive for students and staff to travel between these institutions. In 2017, the City of Melbourne, University of Melbourne and RMIT University formed the Melbourne Innovation Districts partnership, aimed at supporting urban innovation in Melbourne for the benefit of the whole city. This district will also include Melbourne Connect, a new model for collaborative innovation which will place high calibre research, industry entrepreneurs and higher degree students in a single purpose-built precinct. Melbourne Connect is currently under construction on the site of the former Royal Women's Hospital and is due to open in late 2020, meaning easier travel within this district will be even more important. Mobility is a critical enabler of innovation and free tram travel along this corridor will better enable collaborations within the Melbourne Innovation District and enhance our capacity to contribute to shared research, innovation and entrepreneurship.

[2] Throughout 2019 UoM has been undertaking research with students to better understand the critical factors to a positive campus experience, with a view to refining design standards to ensure that the University's physical infrastructure is positioned to improve and enhance student life.

- **An extended Free Tram Zone would help to facilitate a more welcoming environment for Melbourne's international students and tourists.** The University of Melbourne was named Victorian Exporter of the Year at the 2019 Governor of Victoria Export Awards and is a large contributor to Victoria's international education sector. In 2018, the University had 24,166 (Equivalent Full Time Student Load EFTSL) international students and we welcome students and staff from 140 different countries. By early-2022 the University will have completed its New Student Precinct – a whole city block dedicated to supporting a quality campus-based student experience. The precinct has been deliberately designed to facilitate a greater sense of connection with the University's surrounding communities and the city. The inclusion of arts and cultural facilities will provide a new 'northern node' for Melbourne's significant cultural institutions to program into. It is intended that the precinct will deliver a diverse calendar of cultural programming and events that will engage both students and the broader community, providing greater access to the University's knowledge, collections and campus amenity. Of note is Science Gallery Melbourne, a new state of the art gallery exploring the collision of art and science. The gallery will be the first and only Australian node of the acclaimed international Science Gallery network and is due to open in late 2020. Science Gallery Melbourne is designed to engage 15-25 year olds with science and will be an attractive destination for visitors to Melbourne. An extended Free Tram Zone would incorporate the stop outside Science Gallery, and the new student precinct, thus facilitating easier access for visitors. An extended Free Tram Zone would help make the city an easier place to navigate for both students and visitors to the precinct, simplifying the ticketing system, reducing confusion about using Melbourne's trams and encouraging international students and visitors to further contribute to the Victorian economy.

New technologies that enable intelligent transport systems that improve the performance of the networks

The University of Melbourne is at the forefront of research into new technologies to enable intelligent transport systems. The Transport Technologies Research Group within the Melbourne School of Engineering conducts research focused on contemporary topics in transportation engineering including public transport, connected and automated vehicles and roadways, multimodal mobility-as-a-service systems, disruptive shared mobility services, and city logistics. The findings of such research can be used to inform future transport planning and performance.

The Australian Integrated Multimodal Ecosystem (AIMES) serves as a platform for these research efforts. AIMES is a world-first living laboratory based on the streets of Melbourne and currently operates over a network of smart sensors connecting all parts of the transport environment within a six square kilometre grid on the streets of inner-city Carlton, Melbourne. AIMES can test highly integrated transport technology and works to capture commuter, vehicle and public transport's movements to avoid dangerous activity, enhance sustainability, improve safety and reduce congestion. AIMES is led by the University of Melbourne and has more than 50 industry, technology and government partners including Cisco, Cohda Wireless, the Transport and Accident Commission and the Department of Transport.

The AIMES ecosystem provides a unique platform for collaborative trials of technology which integrates the movement of all road users (vehicles, cyclists, public transport and pedestrians) with transport infrastructure. The ecosystem enables in-depth testing and implementation of connected transport technology, offering a platform for government, industry and academia to work collaboratively to explore better transport outcomes such as real-time information to users, real-time proactive operational management and prevention of traffic incidents and congestion. The AIMES ecosystem will also be extended to the Fisherman's Bend precinct as part of the University of Melbourne's new engineering and design campus to be developed there.

The AIMES team would welcome the opportunity to further brief the Committee on this ongoing research, and how it may help inform future public transport planning and performance.

Conclusion

The University would welcome the opportunity to further discuss our submission or otherwise assist with the inquiry. For further information Mr Allan Tait, Vice-President Administration & Finance and Chief Operating Officer, can be contacted on atait@unimelb.edu.au.