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Mr Tim Pallas MP,
Treasurer, State of Victoria,
Level 4, 1 Treasury Place
East Melbourne, 3002

22nd March, 2019

Dear Minister,

Submission to State Government on 2019-2020 transport budget priorities

The Metropolitan Transport Forum (MTF) is a transport interest group for Melbourne metropolitan local governments. The MTF has been established for 20 years and has a membership of 25 (of 31) metropolitan councils, and meets regularly to discuss transport topics of interest and relevance to local governments and their communities. The MTF also acts to liaise between local and state governments, and advocates on behalf of member councils on key transport issues of metropolitan significance. The MTF works closely with the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV).

The MTF informs, researches and debates transport issues with metropolitan local governments throughout the year, and makes a regular input to the state budget discussion. The relatively poor attention to buses, in the midst of a vigorous transport and infrastructure program, has highlighted our concern that, despite significant transport investment in rail, 2/3 of Melbourne only has access to buses and may see little benefit.

The MTF appreciates that the state government has made a major investment to deal with Melbourne's transport issues, following a long period of low investment and rapid population growth which has exacerbated problems across all forms of transport.

The MTF has long held the position that Melbourne needs more public transport and acknowledges the major investment in the Melbourne Metro rail tunnel and the level crossing removal program, and believes these much-needed projects will build significant future capacity. Getting the rail-based networks rationalised and capable of supporting future growth is a major step forward in sorting transport problems, but these can only fully deliver viable public transport commuting options for many Melbournians if the supporting bus networks are in place.

The MTF also welcomes the enhanced Doncaster Busway proposals, provided that the State government considers the busway as part of a broader Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) network, to provide a dedicated bus network between the CBD and Doncaster. Various bus routes can be planned including integrated access to the CBD north and the Carlton/Parkville National Employment and Innovation Cluster (NEIC). Bus rapid transit systems (providing a mass transit as distinct from a neighbourhood service) are the next logical step for Melbourne buses with successful examples in other Australian cities such as Brisbane and Sydney.

The MTF highlights the importance of improved bus services as a vital part of the investment scenario, and a real opportunity for the State to get much better value from the current system. The current network is limited by low frequency and reliability, short service day, circuitous routes and poor rollout in response to urban development. While there have been some moves to redress this by route rationalisation, the process is slow and hampered by lack of funding.

There are compelling arguments to support better buses

- **Equity** – over two thirds of Melbourne has bus alone as public transport. Overcrowding has seen greater investment in the transport-rich inner and middle suburbs, while the outer suburbs receive a decreasing share;
- **Efficiency** – overall buses could do a greater part of the transport task. Some routes are well patronised, but many aren't, and this is in a city where trains and trams are regularly overcrowded. More people on buses are less vehicles on the road. The current network is not meeting the needs of the community in terms of providing access to where they wish to go, or through providing good value for the ongoing operational investment;
- **Economy** – many households suffer from poor access to opportunities and car dependence; outer suburban households are forced to spend a greater share of income on car and private travel, including multiple vehicle ownership per household. Likewise major institutions and employment centres (schools, universities, hospitals, shopping and service centres) cannot fully service or benefit from the full catchment potential patronage.
- **Jobs** – an existing bus manufacturer Volgren operates in Dandenong and has capacity to expand. Additional manufacturing would respond to greater bus demand - a very welcome opportunity to counteract the decline in manufacturing jobs;
- **Response time** – more buses to satisfy demand can be organised in months, not years;
- **Innovation** – demand responsive, mobility sensitive, bicycle carrying, electricity powered, varying sizes - there are opportunities to innovate with buses in ways that have not yet been taken advantage of but have been demonstrated overseas in both North America and Europe;
- **Integration** - networks working together can achieve much more than functioning alone. Modern communications can facilitate this. While each mode of public transport is characterised by a certain operating environment, the mode used, where well integrated, should make little difference to the overall public transport trip. Modern buses in other cities with dedicated roads and stops can be barely distinguished from trains, in fact often called rubber wheeled trains, e.g .Adelaide's O-Bahn. A goal of integration is to link timetables and communications for seamless transfer, and significantly extend the service range;
- **Social model vs mass transit model** – bus route design has been largely based on a social or local model resulting in circuitous routes and lower frequencies. With some 70% of Melbourne bus dependent, it is time to streamline buses for efficient connectivity, which is the basis for all other forms of transport. Other ways, quite possibly cheaper, to attend to social or local need include the use of demand responsive systems and smaller vehicles; these innovations could be trialled in currently unserved areas;
- **Network performance** – better station access by means other than car will put less pressure on commuter parking at stations, and release that valuable land for higher order uses.

The previous term of this State government committed \$100 million for buses over the four years; this was welcome but hardly compares to the billions allocated to road and rail. The MTF urges the state government to embrace bus as a valuable and essential component of the public transport network, as an essential tool to manage congestion and fund accordingly. In the light of the many billions promised for major road projects, the MTF seeks a matched commitment of billions for buses as a reasonable ask. This could be spread over a number of years and enable buses to fulfil their potential as a key component of Melbourne's public transport network. Priorities could include the following

- Extend the higher functioning mass transit bus routes into a broader network with service standards consistent with train and tram
- Maximise communications and coordination with train
- Support users with better real-time on-line information
- Work with VicRoads and councils regarding bus priority
- Work with councils to develop patronage

Lastly the MTF notes that there *are* examples of successful and well-patronised bus services in Melbourne which demonstrate that buses are a mode worth investing both time and resources, and that there are opportunities to learn from and capitalise on the success of these existing operations. For example, the existing DART bus routes (905, 906, and 907) including SmartBus orbital Route 903 are current examples of well-patronised services as a result of previous funding to improve frequency, reliability and priority on the road network. Airport Bus and the route 401 connecting North Melbourne station to the university / hospital precinct likewise demonstrate where buses can efficiently and relatively quickly satisfy latent travel demand, simultaneously improving mobility and easing congestion.

MTF representatives would be most pleased to discuss further, please contact myself, Chair Cr Martin Zakharov at Cr.Zakharov@maribyrnong.vic.gov.au or Executive Officer, Susie Strain, mtf@mtg.org.au or 0414 893926

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Zakharov', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Cr Martin Zakharov, Chair, Metropolitan Transport Forum
PO Box 89, Elwood, VIC 3184
mtf@mtf.org.au

cc: The Hon Jacinta Allan MP, Minister for Transport Infrastructure; the Hon Melissa Horne, Minister for Public Transport