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Transport Strategy Update 2011

1. Overview

The Carlton Residents Association (CRA) enthusiastically supports the general thrust of the draft Update of the *Moving People and Freight* policy document, first released in 2006. CRA has long-term interests in traffic, transport, parking and related issues, dating back to the 1960's and has contributed to numerous Council and State Government studies over the decades.

Many matters under review in the current Strategy are under the direct control of the State Government where the Council has only lobbying and moral influence. Over the past 50 years the 'roads lobby', led by *VicRoads*, has dominated Government transport policy directions. Roads projects have attracted 90% of transport funding to the detriment of public transport, cycling and walking. The Transport Integration Act (2010) should facilitate a more equitable distribution of transport funding across the various modes into the future.

Public opinion on transport policy is now changing through considerations of global warming, urban air quality, peak oil and economic and environmental sustainability. A sea change in thinking is under way. The Transport Strategy Update commendably picks up on this and seeks to respond to it. However the political influence of entrenched vested interests which favor the long-term dominance of roads funding over public transport must be contended with, eg. Eddington \$10 billion East-West road tunnel, which is still on the agenda.

2. Critical Issues

2.1 Population Growth

Much of the evident pressure on roads and public transport arises from the recent rapid and unplanned population growth of Melbourne, which is taken as a 'given' in the Strategy. We believe this should be challenged. Are there no limits to growth? The Lord Mayor is on the record as favoring a 'big Melbourne', however there seems no formal Council policy on this or ratepayer consultation. The population debate has gathered political momentum over the past year and is influencing Federal Government policies, particularly the urgent need to match infrastructure development to population growth and decentralisation.

2.2 Transport Priorities

Public transport, cycling and walking have priority in the Strategy which is welcomed by CRA:

- We encourage the Council to urgently implement the policies it controls, particularly that supporting cycling, walking and traffic management. However much of the action outlined in the draft document will involve agreement from the State Government which has a lamentable history on such matters eg. long deferment of proposed rail lines to Doncaster, Rowville and Melbourne Airport. Current rail feasibility studies and deferment of roads projects by the Coalition State Government are welcome initiatives.

- The influence of foreshadowed Federal Government transport funding could be helpful in redirecting State Government priorities in favor of the Strategy. A reduction in the cost of public transport would be an incentive for increased usage (to reduce traffic congestion), when service levels are addressed.

2.3 Private Motoring

Private commuter motoring through largely driver only vehicles (90%) dominates road usage, particularly during morning and evening peak periods in Carlton and elsewhere:

- Recent changes to Federal Fringe Benefits Tax (FBT) arrangements with fixed 20% tax regardless of distance driven, is a disincentive to those issued with company cars to exceed 40,000km per annum to minimise FBT, as was previously the case.
- Carpark availability is a major determinate of the decision for commuters to drive to inner urban areas, rather than to take public transport. New parking monitoring policies (in-ground sensors and number plate recognition), together with earlier decisions to levy city carparking spaces are welcome initiatives.

In Carlton, the long-term occupancy of on-street unmetered 2hr and 4hr car spaces by business significantly reduces such carparking spaces for visitors, this despite the considerable under-utilised off-street parking. Much traffic congestion is generated by private motorists seeking on-street parking, rather than driving directly to an off-street parking station. Cost of off-street parking should perhaps be free for the first hour then progressively increased with time eg. as at Vicmarket. Special parking deals should be implemented for business to encourage off-street parking.

- A car free CBD, as exists in many major cities across the globe, has merit and should be considered for medium term implementation. Success of the Bourke St. Mall and planned closure of Swanston St. are example which could be progressively extended further. A 'congestion tax' together with a reduction in city carparking facilities would provide useful disincentives for private motorists to drive to the CBD.
- Car share facilities, now spreading throughout the city, provide an alternative to private car ownership, particularly for apartment dwellers without on-site carparking facilities. Reducing the level of car ownership will further reduce traffic congestion and car parking demands.

2.4 Cycling and Walking

The Strategy places due emphasises on the low impact and efficiency of cycling and walking, and the need for pedestrian and cycle friendly streets:

- The congestion of busy footpaths by restaurant operations, advertising boards and cycle and motor bike parking requires regular monitoring. Continuous and safe cycle paths will further encourage cycling, likewise would improved cycle parking facilities at strategic locations. In Carlton, the conversion of two car spaces to bike parking at Lygon Court, earlier proposed by CRA, has proved very popular, although initially opposed by traders. Similar facilities would be welcome elsewhere in Carlton. Formal motor bike parking is also required in some areas.
- Bike hire facilities are welcome; however these facilities attract minimal patronage, seemingly due to bike helmet laws.
- Pedestrians should enjoy as-of-right priority at controlled intersections, as for road users; manual activation of pedestrian lights should not be necessary. In precincts, such as Lygon Street, Carlton, pedestrian crossings should be provided midway between light controlled intersections, to minimise dangerous jay walking.

- To lower general road speed to 40kph, and to 30kph in selected areas, is important for pedestrian and cycle safety, as proposed for the CBD in the Strategy. The feasibility of extending these speed limits throughout the City of Melbourne should be further examined.

2.5 Freight

Freight distribution in inner urban areas is a critical service to business and major contributor to traffic congestion and parking demands. Just-in-time delivery demands of some businesses should be discouraged along with the numerous competing freight operators servicing identical areas. The development of freight hubs with rationalisation of delivery schedules would bring order to this industry and limit its impacts on busy city streets.

CRA is interested to continue its long-term engagement with traffic and transport issues, particularly in Carlton. We would welcome further opportunities for input to the Transport Strategy Update as it develops.

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Traffic & Transport Reference Group