

Small-scale trials as a means to develop a new transport strategy

Submission to the Integrated Transport Options Inquiry

30 July 2012

Dear Committee members

I believe that our best chance of building a sustainable integrated transport system lies in creating small-scale trials that can be tested and modified with minimal effort and cost.

Last year I set out on a mission to demonstrate the concept, and I'd like to describe to you what I did and what I learned in case it might be of use in some way.

Initially I focused on the potential of the Derwent River, for no other reason than it seems to be grossly underused as a transport corridor.*

* Speaking as
someone who lived
at Rosny in the 70s I
can recall precisely
how much traffic the
River can bear.

Somewhat perplexed by the findings of the AECOM report commissioned by the state government in 2009, which suggested that owing to infrastructure costs and a likely low level of patronage that ferries were not viable, I did some thinking: every other river city in the world has ferries zooming all over it, so why not Hobart? The simple (or *simplified*) answer is that it is so easy to drive into the city that for most people any alternative is unthinkable. The debate can (and does) fruitlessly go on and on. Suffice to say that looking ahead it is apparent that those days are coming to an end, for whatever reason.

I agree, however, that building five ferry terminals along the Derwent and commissioning a dozen fast ferries would be disastrous for whoever was brave enough to launch such a project. The ferries would be empty. The terminals too.

That's why I figured we should work with what we already have, expanding it gradually, incrementally, to see if we could modestly increase traffic on the Derwent without incurring a huge cost.

So I went to see the guy who runs the Yellow Water Taxi, Rod Howard. Rod has been carting people up and down the river for a few years but his business has been marginal to say the least; Yellow Water Taxis is currently for sale. Rod is the first to admit that marketing is not his strong point, and his business might do better with a little more promotional effort, but there were certainly other barriers to his expanding the service.

To begin with, there is no priority berthing point at the Hobart end of his route. Often he is forced to pick up and drop off wherever he can find space – hardly an ideal situation for 'the' Derwent ferry. *

* Rod would not expect favouritism in this regard. The issue is that there is no designated place for *anyone* to berth a commuter vessel. I've chosen to help Rod because he is currently the only operator.

If there *were* a focal point on the waterfront (say at Watermans Dock, the logical place for a pick up point) then it would be possible to erect a small bus-stop-style shelter, something that lets passers-by know that there is indeed a ferry/taxi service they might be interested in using. At the moment there is a sandwich board, and in the absence of the boat itself it is hardly obvious that such a service exists.

I then had several more conversations, with representatives from Hobart City Council, Tas Ports (on whose land such a shelter might be built), and even the former State Architect. All agreed that erecting a shelter would be a great first step in increasing traffic on the Derwent; the marketing of the service would be left to the operator, with my help, something I would be happy to undertake.

Furthermore, conversations with Clarence City Council representatives revealed plans to rebuild the Montagu Bay jetty, which opens up the possibility for Rod to use his second boat on a parallel service. The jetty is under construction now.

At about that time I began to run out of steam. As a 'civilian' I needed to resume my day job and earn a crust, so regrettably the idea has stalled. But I had the following goals in sight.

1. Manage (instigate, facilitate ...) the construction of a modest shelter at Watermans Dock to serve as a visual cue that a ferry service is in operation.
2. Double (or quadruple) Rod's patronage, making the business viable for him, and eventually get his second boat running too.

If I succeeded, and the boats were full of people each morning and afternoon, then surely there would be room for another boat, and another, with the route

expanding up and down the river as people began to see that a ferry was actually not a bad way to get to work.

This is my idea in a nutshell: start small, using what we already have. Keep tweaking until it works, then expand it. If it doesn't work, what have we lost? How much does a bus stop cost?

The same model can be applied to the wider transport issue. If there were a minibus that connected with the ferry at Montagu Bay at 5.30pm; if there were a bike shed there too; if someone built a kiosk selling milk, bread and coffee ...

Investing lots of money in a Grand Design only to have it fall flat for some reason sets the cause back immensely. I think that the key to changing people's behaviour lies in showing them how good the alternative can be, one step at a time.

Then, when the shit hits the fan, energy wise, we'll already have a working model we can build on.

If you believe that my rant is worthy of further consideration I'd be happy to address the Committee, or join a meeting to throw around some ideas.

By the way, this is only one of several ideas I am working on to entice Hobart into a low-energy future. My website explains more:

www.stratcom.net.au

Yours sincerely

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