

Friday 24 August 2012

Hon. Tania Rattray MLC (Committee chair)
Tasmanian Legislative Council
Parliament House
Hobart TAS 7000

Please accept this submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Integrated Transport Options. It is made by me as a university lecturer with several years' experience teaching, researching and providing community engagement in areas relevant to the development of sustainable transport options in southern Tasmania, and as invited chair of the Community Advisory Panel for the Hobart light rail evaluation in 2010-11. I address the matter for inquiry under the two key areas identified in the terms of reference with further comment added under two additional headings.

1. The public transport system currently operated by Metro Tasmania

This provision of public bus services in Tasmania's metropolitan centres is critically important. Its effectiveness as a GBE as well as value as a social good therefore deserves greater attention and support than has been provided to date. This observation is true in light of pressing concerns such as peak oil, climate change and social inclusion as well as the usual good sense around congestion and mobility.

Issues to consider here include whether or not Metro Tasmania might be better served through greater responsibility to community stakeholders (including via their more direct involvement in governance of goal-setting, reporting and management). Likewise, Metro Tasmania's remit might seek to more actively expand the type of provision and use of its services (e.g., to include shuttle buses, bus-rapid transit, linked-up services, and more of the alternative fuels such as hydrogen, battery stacks and biodiesel).

Improvements through the provision of a more integrated public transport will see Metro Tasmania explore the use of IT developments such as the NBN and smart technologies to influence and assist transport behaviours towards the more frequent, flexible and effective use of public transport. Integration will also include a reduction in the rivalry and conflict amongst different providers and between transport modes as they all work together to increase and optimise the design, delivery and use of public transport in Tasmania.

2. Any other appropriate and innovative transport systems

There have been several interesting alternative proposals mooted as transport options for southern Tasmania. Some such as a second-hand monorail from Sydney do not warrant

further investigation. Others such as a tram in North Hobart are interesting perhaps but likely to add to congestion unless well integrated with other significant developments as suggested below. Despite the vested interests of a vocal taxi industry, increased availability of licenses in the state is sensible (especially compared with ratios interstate). The argument to open it up to greater competition and more diverse service provision also seems hard to contest.

Cycling represents another, worthwhile option as a relatively modest investment offers major returns in public health and wellbeing as well as in the transport arena. The key to success here requires cycling to be seen not as an alternative but as an add-on to existing transport options. Hence we need integration that permits cycles on buses; bus service schedules that connect with feeder services and permit change-over with different transport services and modes in timely manner. There is a spatial element too as bike loops at major interchanges and network planning in terms of multi-mode travel with on and off road bike paths can assist commuters travelling to key nodes, such as Glenorchy, and then using other transport options to travel distances that are less walkable. Facilitating well-planned, multi-modal solutions rather than the familiar one-eyed view on and subsequent conflict over transport options is essential.

Light rail is readily seen to be one of the most sustainably viable options adopted by similar cities in Australia and around the world. Its inclusion as one well-integrated component in the southern transport system is highly desirable on various grounds. Greater Hobart already has some of the critical infrastructure; there is an available corridor with adequate land nearby for a park 'n ride facility; public support is grounded in an historical legacy of passenger rail use; the state's tourism industry will benefit from such novel transport developments (as already evinced by David Walsh's own investment in providing alternative access to MONA via bus and water ferry); and investment in it can guide and facilitate urban growth that optimises sustainable outcomes.

However, the possibility of investing in a light rail infrastructure development in Hobart continues to get closed down very quickly and soundly – even when Infrastructure Australia monies are being seen invested by the Commonwealth in light rail similarly for other cities around the country (viz. Gold Coast, Western Sydney and Geelong). This anomaly begs investigation in its own right with factors to consider including the state's conservative stance evinced in its continued support of car dependency and its inability to grasp opportunities for improved decision-making around transport policy and planning in southern Tasmania.

3. The continuing problem of car dependency in southern Tasmania

The case for resisting the supremacy of the private motorcar in Australia (as elsewhere) has already been well made. Still, Jan Gehl's own recommendations to the state and community seem to have had little impact here. Cars will remain important to the southern Tasmanian transport system but their dominance is now being challenged (and understandably so). Reversals are being seen worldwide including in major cities in the USA. Most Australians want to be less car-dependent but feel unsupported or unable to make the necessary transition. Hence they require strong leadership from their governments working together with private sector investing in technology, urban renewal and community development.

Tasmania's state government seems beholden to DIER's demonstrated and intensifying preference to invest significantly greater amounts of money in roads than other transport infrastructure. The recent announcements of spending on an upgrade simply of the Brooker

Highway is more than double what the establishment of a new light rail service between Hobart and Claremont will cost! Private car ownership (or not) is a key factor contributing to social exclusion as well as the state's vulnerability to peak oil and climate change along with the usual deleterious impacts on the environment, social wellbeing and health.

Geography and history have contributed to Greater Hobart's problems here (and so its need for improved public transport) through a dispersed settlement pattern, segregated land-use types, urban development that has been car-oriented, and location of affordable housing on the urban fringe. It's time for some sharper vision and better leadership (as well as looming necessity) to steer our transport system (and all aspects of our lives and society attending it) into a brighter future.

4. Opportunities for improved decision-making in transport policy and planning

The opportunity for change exists in innovative proposals such as a light rail which might link the city CBD to some of the state's most needy communities at the same time as addressing various issues noted above. Opportunities can be lost though when poor decision-making prevails.

In the 2011 light rail evaluation, emphasis on a business case saw its reliance on cost-benefit analysis. The consultants, ACIL Tasman, in their final report note several "non-quantifiable benefits" deemed to be "important for consideration" that they decide not to include in the analysis proper but describes as:

"... key benefits:

- The social benefits of congestion alleviation.
- Impacts on socially disadvantaged people (above and beyond how their travel is impacted as discussed in the previous chapter).
- Benefits associated with the creation of TOD areas, above and beyond the benefits to those living in these areas who are able to access a light rail service (as outlined in the previous chapter).
- Environmental pollution benefits that go beyond the small carbon effect calculated in the previous chapter.
- Tourism benefits."

(ACIL Tasman 2011, p.9).

These significant benefits were precisely what had provided the grounds for considering the evaluation of a possible light rail for Hobart in the first place. Their complete exclusion from the final decision-making process is contradictory and the outcome was unsatisfactory as a result.

Opportunities to address familiar threats and problems, to engage in and act on productive relationships with multiple stakeholders, and to make timely, intelligent investments that will lead the state's urban growth into a sustainable future (e.g., in TODs or transit-oriented developments) all continue to arise. To make the most (or indeed anything) of them, it is imperative that decision-making processes are not confined to stale or limited approaches, methods, views and inputs which get reflected in the outcomes produced. Stakeholders' involvement and input needs to be acted on and not simply noted or perhaps simply dismissed as can (and in the recent past has) happened in the state's attempts to progress transport options.

I am available to discuss any aspects of the above in further detail and thank you for leading this critically important inquiry.

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

Dr Stewart Williams

(University of Tasmania lecturer

Chair, Community Advisory Panel for the Hobart light rail evaluation, 2010-11)