

Report to the Future Melbourne (Transport) Committee

Agenda item 6.5

COVID-19 Recovery – Importance of Transport Options

17 November 2020

Presenter: Alison Leighton, Deputy Chief Executive Officer**Purpose and background**

1. The purpose of this report is to update Councillors on transport options to aid in the economic recovery of the central city.
2. Prior to March 2020 public transport was the most popular way to get to the central city (65 per cent of all trips in the AM peak) and walking was the most frequent mode within the central city (89 per cent of weekday trips). Up to 18 per cent of vehicles entering the city during morning peak hours were bicycles.
3. Following the introduction of COVID-19 restrictions, public transport patronage has fallen to 26 per cent of pre-COVID levels. Bicycle use has increased sharply since restrictions were introduced, but not to the central city for commuting. This is likely tied to the majority of the corporate workforce in the central city working from home since March 2020.
4. Since the recent relaxing of restrictions, the use of the road network across Melbourne has rebounded to 84 per cent of pre-COVID levels. On 11 November 2020, average pedestrian activity in the City of Melbourne was down by 74.8 per cent compared to the same time last year.
5. The *Transport Strategy 2030 (2019)* contains Council's main transport policy. It includes policy to get more people walking, catching public transport and riding bikes to travel to and around the city. These modes are the most space efficient in a busy city.
6. Council's *COVID-19 Reactivation and Recovery Plan* includes a range of transport measures including the delivery of 40 kms of new protected bicycle lanes, working with the Victorian Government to build confidence in the public transport network and installing shared zones in the city's 'Little' Streets to enhance the walking and outdoor dining environment and improve safety.
7. It is expected that as the city continues to reopen and reactivate the adequate provision of both on-street and off-street parking will play an important role in attracting visitors back to the municipality in the immediate and short term future.
8. The Congestion Levy, administered by the State Revenue Office, came into operation on 1 January 2006. Its purpose is to impose a levy on parking spaces in the central business district and inner Melbourne to reduce traffic congestion. In 2019/20 the State Government collected \$101 million revenue via the congestion levy. In the central city, car park operators pay an annual levy fee of \$1460 per space. This is equivalent to \$4 per space per day.
9. In response to the pandemic, on 10 September, 2020, the Victorian Government waived 25 per cent of the congestion levy, with car park owners and operators also able to defer any outstanding balances until 31 March 2021.

Key issues

10. The City of Melbourne is at the heart of the state's public transport network. Boosting use of public transport is vital to the city's recovery. It is the most efficient mode to support the return of the corporate workforce, as well as visitors, students and shoppers to the city. A key challenge is the public's concern about whether public transport travel is COVID-safe.
11. Council officers have been working constructively with the Department of Transport to fast-track the delivery of the protected bicycle network across the city to provide more people with a safe travel option. A behaviour change campaign to promote the use of bicycles to travel to and around inner Melbourne is also under development to align with the rollout of the new infrastructure. This program is funded by the Department of Transport to run in cooperation with the cities of Port Phillip and Yarra. Officers are also working to re-introduce the shared eBike scheme in Melbourne, Yarra and Port Phillip. Further work is required to ensure employers are able to provide COVID-safe end-of-trip facilities for their employees riding to work.

12. The Victorian Government is also currently working on initiatives to build confidence in the community to once again use public transport. These initiatives include new ticketing options, policies on masks, cleaning and social distancing, a “welcome back” campaign, trials of real-time occupancy information for passengers and reintroducing the normal timetable in place before the pandemic.
13. As the community’s confidence in the public transport system is rebuilt, private vehicle parking within the municipality will play a vital role in attracting visitors to the City of Melbourne. Options such as a temporarily reducing on and off-street parking fees and extending on-street timed zones should be examined as to their potential to incentivise visitors to return to the city in the short term.
14. Extension of the State Government decision to waive 25 per cent of the congestion levy by a further six months with the associated caveat that this reduction be passed on to the customer will further contribute to attracting and incentivising visitors back to the city.
15. The return of the city’s workforce will also play a critical role in the economic recovery of the city. To this end, Council officers have commissioned Roy Morgan to undertake research into the return of the city’s workforce to better understand the factors influencing their decision to return to work in the city and what role transport plays in that decision.

Recommendation from management

16. That the Future Melbourne Committee:
 - 16.1. endorses management to work closely with the Department of Transport to promote the safe use of the public transport network
 - 16.2. endorses the Chief Executive Officer to write to the Victorian Government seeking an extension of the State Government decision to waive 25 per cent of the congestion levy by a further six months subject to this reduction being directly passed through to the customer
 - 16.3. endorses management to review options available to temporarily amend on street parking time limits and fee arrangements to incentivise visitors to return to the City of Melbourne
 - 16.4. endorses management to commence discussions with car park operators around reduced fees
 - 16.5. notes that management has commissioned research around public perceptions for the return to the city including as it relates to transport.

Attachment:

1. Supporting Attachment (Page 3 of 3)

Supporting Attachment

Legal

1. There are no legal implications.

Finance

2. There are no finance implications.

Conflict of interest

3. No member of Council staff, or other person engaged under a contract, involved in advising on or preparing this report has declared a direct or indirect interest in relation to the matter of the report.

Health and Safety

4. In developing this proposal, no Occupational Health and Safety issues or opportunities have been identified.

Stakeholder Consultation

5. The City Economy Advisory Board and its seven subcommittees were established in September 2020 to support the recovery of the city. The Board is chaired by the CEO and includes representation from external stakeholders across various industries and government. Through the Board, the City of Melbourne is able to engage directly with industry and partner on key initiatives to support recovery. This includes the Functionality of the City subcommittee which considers matters relating to the safe travel of people in the city.
6. Extensive consultation was undertaken with stakeholders and the broader community during preparation of the draft Transport Strategy. In 2018, eight discussion papers were released to the public to generate debate and discussion. This prompted 19,053 visits to the Participate Melbourne webpage, 1325 submissions and 1500 social media comments. This is the largest response to a City of Melbourne request for community input. Following endorsement of the draft Transport Strategy, an engagement process spanning six weeks was undertaken. Engagement took place both online and face-to-face at a number of locations across the municipality. This process generated 9228 visits to the Participate Melbourne webpage and 475 unique survey responses and submissions, which included almost 1300 comments on 90 different topics. Eighty-nine per cent of the 382 respondents to the survey on Participate Melbourne gave support or strong support for the outcomes in the Strategy. Of the 45 written submissions, which included 1288 individual comments on more than 90 topics, 60.5 per cent of comments were in direct support of the Strategy and a further 28.5 per cent of comments provided constructive feedback.

Relation to Council policy

7. This report is largely based on the work done for the Transport Strategy 2030. It aligns with the Council Plan Goals for 'A Connected City' and 'A Prosperous City'. The community engagement work on the Strategy aligns with the 'A Deliberative City' goal. Policies in the Transport Strategy 2030 support other City of Melbourne strategies including Climate Change Mitigation Strategy, Climate Change Adaptation Strategy, Urban Forest Strategy, Total Watermark – City as a Catchment 2014, Startup Action Plan, structure plans and council-endorsed submissions on growth areas including Arden and Fishermans Bend.

Environmental sustainability

8. This report is largely based on the work done for the Transport Strategy 2030. Environmental sustainability issues were a key consideration in the development of the strategy. It aligns with the City of Melbourne 2018 Climate Change Mitigation Strategy and supports sustainable transport as priority modes in Melbourne. The Transport Strategy 2030 includes a range of policies which align with environmental sustainability.