

VTAG

VICTORIAN TRANSPORT ACTION GROUP

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Australian Government
Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development,
Communications and The Arts
Canberra

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Attachment to on-line submission

National Urban Policy (NUP)

Victorian Transport Action Group (VTAG) response to the Draft NUP

June 2024

Victorian Transport Action Group (VTAG) strongly supports the Vision, Goals, Objectives and Principles proposed in the Draft NUP. VTAG also notes that data is currently being collected for a State of Australian Cities publication later in 2024. This will be valuable data VTAG looks forward to seeing.

At the NUP Webinar held on 11/6/24, a request was made that feedback on the Draft provide guidance and recommendations on key areas on which the Policy should focus. VTAG specifically identifies a limited number of such areas with a short explanation of each. Further background material on each topic can be provided if sought.

In developing a NUP framework, emphasised is that the Federal government has limited Constitutional powers over cities, the primary source of federal power being financial support to States and local governments for implementation. Therefore, as already identified, it is vital for the federal government to work closely with and through these two tiers having primary responsibility for city development.

VTAG Recommendations for key areas of focus for **implementation** of the NUP are:

Freight - National and State

The extent of trucks on capital and regional city roads vastly reduces city amenity and imposes costly strains on cities to cover road damage and address impacts of accidents. Capital and regional cities would be greatly supported by enhanced federal focus on emission reduction in the

freight task by the Commonwealth funding the shift of freight from road to rail - thus improving city amenity and freight efficiency while reducing transport costs, road maintenance and road trauma for cities and especially for regional cities. **Federal leadership on rail gauge standardization in partnership with States and private sector stakeholders is required** to create a seamless standard gauge rail freight network across the nation to promote the shift from road to rail.

As a general proposition, rail is ideal for transporting bulk commodities and containerised cargoes, especially between regional terminals and urban ports. Less than 20 freight trains, each of 50 wagons, can fill a 50,000 tonne grain ship compared with at least 1,000 trucks. Similarly, rail/port shuttle trains 600 metres in length carrying import and export containers between metropolitan hubs and city ports can carry 84 TEU (20-foot equivalent units) whereas 21 Super B-double trucks or 28 standard B-doubles are required to perform the same task.

Bigger trucks may result in fewer trucks where there is no rail competition such as for many metropolitan freight tasks. However, where a rail freight alternative exists, such as freight hauls to urban ports, bigger trucks tend to increase overall truck numbers because mode share is not fixed. Bigger trucks induce mode shift from rail unless rail freight can also adapt to transporting heavier loads and doing so more efficiently. As trucks get bigger, their unit costs decrease making them more competitive with rail freight.

The outcome has been a significant increase in overall truck numbers resulting from a large mode shift away from rail for most medium and shorter length hauls. Particularly inhibited, has been growth in short distance rail movements of both import and export containers between metropolitan hub terminals and ports, especially in Sydney and Melbourne. This may have been an unintended consequence. However, the result has been worsening traffic congestion and urban amenity, deterioration in the condition of local and main roads, increase in road costs and in death and serious injury from accidents involving heavy vehicles and overall increased diesel emissions.

The challenge of transport decarbonisation in the context of climate change further strengthens the case for more freight on rail and achievement of improved rail productivity, competitiveness and energy efficiency. "Australia's emissions projections 2022", Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, Canberra, notes that, despite the impacts of COVID, transport contributed 19% of Australia's greenhouse gas emissions in 2020. Our understanding is that road transport causes 84% of all transport emissions (road freight 21%) compared with 3.5% for rail transport. In this context, we note that, to date, no fuel efficiency standards have been proposed for vehicles with a gross mass exceeding 3.5 tonnes.

It is of concern that BITRE in its Australian aggregate freight forecasts – 2022 update (Summary), includes a projection that road freight is expected to grow by some 77 per cent from 2020 to 2050,

whilst rail freight is expected to grow by just 6 per cent over the same period. Plainly, this trend is unsustainable.

These factors point toward the need for sustainable rail solutions that will significantly reduce emissions, reduce road damage and improve road safety while reducing line haul costs to users and the nation. Required is for rail to operate within different metrics – principally increased axle loads, longer trains in most cases and faster turnaround at terminals. This usually requires infrastructure enhancement and freight precinct development with rail access, allowing rail operations and systems to regain competitiveness with modern heavy road vehicles. In urban areas, it also makes essential the physical segregation of freight lines from those carrying frequent passenger trains. For its part, private sector rail operators have been investing in new and much more fuel-efficient locomotives and new wagons.

In summary, rail freight will play a major role in achieving Australia's objective of net zero emissions by 2050. Getting more freight on rail will be vital in reducing our carbon footprint. For comparable freight tasks, rail uses one-third of the diesel that trucks do per tonne of freight with one-third of the emissions. Increased use of rail freight as the freight task grows also has significant economic benefits, including reduced supply chain costs and cost to health budgets.

Freight and Logistics - State and Local

Trucks and smaller delivery vehicles (vans etc) serve a vital role in servicing our urban areas. However, the current uncontrolled access to the centre of towns and cities at all times of the day leads to congestion, safety and amenity issues. **Federal leadership together with State and Local Government support could result in more efficient and sustainable freight plans** for all urban areas. City of Stockholm is a good exemplar of what can be achieved with partnerships between all levels of government and the private sector. Ref: Stockholm Freight Plan www.stockholm.se/godstrafik

Active Transport and all Public Transport Modes

Enhance Federal and State funding for active transport and all public transport modes (rail, tram, bus) to achieve carbon emission reduction and improve accessibility with a particular focus on improved DDA access through a program of federal funding to States for this purpose. VTAG also recommends a specific ongoing federal funding program to local governments for implementation of active transport projects. Many such programs and projects have been already identified in urban planning but are not able to be implemented due to insufficient funds.

Conclusions

VTAG notes that if the above three focus areas were expeditiously funded and implemented, there would be a significant improvement in many measures of success for urban areas:

- climate change mitigation and lower carbon emissions
- safety and amenity improvements with improved public health and reduced health costs
- improved access to jobs and improved productivity
- improved equity

towns and cities that are more attractive, vibrant and safe for all (the 8-80 City Principle that calls for all places and spaces to be designed for all ages).

VTAG acknowledges the attraction to political parties and the general public of major projects, such as Big Build in Victoria. However, we submit that decision-makers must not ignore the hundreds of lesser public transport initiatives that can have a transformative impact on the lives of the community. For example:

- increasing service frequency can deliver reliable and frequent transport in areas where previously residents have relied upon private transport for work, education, sports etc.
- Extending tram or bus services to terminate at railway stations or other transport hubs; thus increasing convenience and facility and avoiding walks of several hundred metres to board an alternative transport mode. Particularly for disabled persons.
- Providing informative and extensive feedback on travel status of services builds confidence in the services and alleviates anxiety about traveling by PT.

Yours sincerely

Glenyys Romanes AM
Chair, Victorian Transport Action Group

VTAG Values Statement

About the Victorian Transport Action Group (VTAG)

This submission is made by the Victorian Transport Action Group (VTAG), an independent forum focused on solutions to Victoria's transport challenges.

Members of VTAG have expertise across passenger and freight transport, urban and regional planning, State and Local Government, I.T. and the environment, engineering, architecture and urban design.

Australia is facing a climate crisis. VTAG advocates for policies and projects that demonstrate meaningful reductions in emissions and prepares Victoria for a low-carbon future.