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Geelong Regional Public Transport Authority

A Proposal by the Geelong Branch of Public Transport Users Association

What's the current situation?

- There is a continuing crisis in public transport in the Geelong region. According to the Department of Transport (DoT), general bus patronage in and around Geelong declined markedly a few years ago, and since then there has been no clear evidence of anything but stagnation or very slow growth from a low base. This situation has occurred in spite of concern about car dependence, fossil fuel consumption and the need for sustainable transport is greater than ever.
- Currently, DoT regional managers don't have the opportunity to strategically plan the system in any thorough-going way. Most major changes and reviews are done by consultants arranged by the central DoT administration.
- There is no public reporting mechanism by which people can be informed about the performance of the Geelong region's transport network (in regards to service provision, patronage or environmental goals), and therefore there is little local awareness or ownership of any policy goals.
- The recent consultants' recommendations to the DoT on changes to the bus system created a new route structure without any clear governing principles for them, or for establishing ongoing network planning, leading to the likelihood that poor route structures will re-emerge as Geelong grows.
- Viclink has recently become responsible for providing information for public transport operating outside metropolitan Melbourne, but it doesn't have any significant planning or administrative function, and it doesn't have any advocacy role.

Why have a regional authority?

- Major regional centres (eg of 50,000 people or more with their own town bus networks) should also have their own authorities to provide a single institutional backup for their distinct public transport systems, which often operate under their own "brands" such as Geelong Transit System (GTS) and Bellarine Transit System (BTS). Unfortunately, due to lack of strong institutional support, these brands have become virtually redundant during the last ten years.
- A regional authority could increase the effectiveness of system planning, provide a local voice and encourage local involvement in and ownership of transport.

What would the authority be responsible for?

- Establishing clear service planning guidelines and standards relating to town bus services and their links to the V/Line network, including routes, stops and timetabling;
- Seeking public feedback and facilitating ongoing consultation and shared decision-making;
- Reporting periodically (eg through regular formal reports) on the performance of the system, including progress towards patronage and service targets;
- Providing information to the public and the media on system performance, delays, arrangements for special events etc; and marketing the system;
- Working with Viclink to ensure that clear and up-to-date public transport information is provided to travellers, by distributing the necessary system information locally and posting timetables at all bus stops.

What form could the authority take in the Geelong region?

- Called “Geelong Region”, “Barwon” or “Geelong and Bellarine” “Transport / Transit / Public Transport Authority”.
- It would cover the current Geelong Transit (GTS) and Bellarine Transit (BTS) services.
 - ◆ These services could be given a common branded name reflecting the name of the Authority (with the GTS and BTS services identified through other means).
- Be expanded to include non-V/Line bus services in all areas included in the G21 region (including Colac Otway and Golden Plains Shires.)

What reforms are needed if no regional authority is set up?

- The Department of Transport’s Geelong office will require some existing or additional staff to be dedicated to auditing, planning and supervising the Geelong region’s public transport network.
- One officer should be publicly appointed as a dedicated “Geelong Region Public Transport Manager” and there should be a clear contact for media that is well informed on local issues.
- These dedicated local DoT officers should have responsibilities (based on those envisioned for the authority) to:
 - ◆ Plan and regularly review bus routes, stops and timetabling;
 - ◆ Seek public feedback, and facilitate ongoing consultation and shared decision-making;
 - ◆ Set targets for patronage and service coverage and quality;
 - ◆ Produce at least an annual report on the performance of the GTS and BTS, including progress towards targets;
 - ◆ Provide information to the public and the media on system performance; delays; arrangements for special events etc. and market the system; and
 - ◆ Distribute local information (brochures, posters etc) and post timetables at bus stops and work with Viclink to verify information provided to travellers.