The Urban Challenge

The urban challenge of the 21st century is how to make our cities viable and sustainable places to live, work and visit. Around two thirds of Australians live in capital cities. This number is rising. The increase in population is accompanied by a growing trend toward urbanisation and many other challenges including traffic congestion, a rising road toll and climate change.

To meet these challenges and ensure Australian cities are sustainable places to live, work and visit, we need to improve our public transport networks. Light Rail is an alternative pathway to create enjoyable and sustainable urban lifestyles.

Why Light Rail?

- **Traffic congestion** – Trams can transport more than 10,000 people per hour in one arterial traffic lane that would otherwise only move 800 cars.
- **Pollution and noise levels** – By using renewable energy, trams have the ability to produce zero emissions.
- **Greater mobility for people** – Trams can rapidly and safely bring people to different areas of the city and suburbs.

Light Rail – The Solution

Light Rail should be at the forefront of transport planning. Action should be taken to integrate Light Rail into existing public transport systems to provide greater mobility and accessibility for residents.

Governments at a State and National level need to take a strategic approach to town planning policies and development by implementing initiatives to improve the public transport systems offered in Australian capital cities and urban centres.

A Success Story from France

France is known throughout the world to have a successful Light Rail system.

With almost 20 towns and cities using Light Rail as a key mode of transport, this success is attributable to a unique combination of dedicated funding, strong political will and an integrated approach to land use and transport planning.

It is believed that the most important element in the French tramway systems has been the introduction of a payroll tax dedicated to local public transport.

The Versement Transport (transport tax), levied since the 1980s on all businesses, has been used to fund tramway infrastructure and operations. The tax provides local authorities with millions of euros that can be used for the development and operation of public transport.

In Lyon, which has a population of around 1.4 million, this converts to more than €100 million per year. In addition to this funding arrangement, local leaders such as city mayors also champion public transport projects and an integrated land use policy is in place.

The combination of strong political will and effective planning policy allow for greater coordination of all transport modes, from pedestrians to heavy rail. These three elements have distinguished French Light Rail systems from those in other countries.
**Light Rail Around the World**

Approximately 400 Light Rail systems currently operate in 50 countries worldwide. With an additional 100 projects in the pipeline, it is clear that Light Rail is experiencing a global renaissance.

**Europe**
In Central and Eastern European cities with populations over one million, Light Rail networks transport 25-33 percent of public transport users. In cities with lower populations between 500,000 and one million, Light Rail transports about 50 percent of people using public transport.

**USA**
Throughout the United States, the cities of Denver and Dallas have experienced the benefits of Light Rail. In Denver, the 8.5km light rail system that opened in 1994 has been tripled in length to 25.3km. The Dallas system has also experienced significant expansion, growing from 17.6km to 78km long. In 1996, the Dallas system carried around 1.4 million passengers. It now transports more than 18 million passengers per annum. A number of extensions to the current Light Rail systems are planned between now and 2018 in these major cities. The most notable is the FasTracks project in Denver, where $4.7 billion will be spent to add 190km of light rail and additional bus services.

**Australia**
Locally, Melbourne, Adelaide and Sydney operate Light Rail systems and a 13km line is being introduced in the Gold Coast. The line is scheduled to open in 2014.

Melbourne’s 250km Light Rail system is the largest in the world. A $10 billion network, it operates 1773 trams, services 501 stops and during 2008-09, experienced an increase in passenger numbers of 19.8 million or 12.5 percent.

The Victorian Department of Transport views its Light Rail system as a means to reduce road congestion, minimise the need for inner-city parking and improve Melbourne’s overall liveability. It also sees the tram network as a tool to combat forecast traffic issues linked to Melbourne’s forecast population growth to five million by 2030. As part of the Victorian Transport Plan, 50 new low-floor trams will be added to the network from 2012 to help transport more locals and visitors around Melbourne.

**Light Rail’s Success**
Light Rail’s success can be attributed to a number of factors.

- Electricity-powered trams are one of the most sustainable forms of land transport.
- Light Rail’s operational flexibility allows services to easily meet changing demands by running single or multiple car trams when and where required. Further, Light Rail can operate on dedicated or shared corridors, neither of which necessitates large areas of land or road space.
- Light Rail is an alternative mode of transport that improves transport systems in urban and suburban areas. In addition to being a service that combats road congestion and greenhouse gas emissions, tram networks have the ability to blend in and complement urban sceneries as they improve mobility. A very quiet mode of transport, Light Rail has proven to be a powerful tool for urban renewal and regeneration with people choosing to live near tramlines.
- Light Rail encourages active lifestyles such as walking and cycling, promoting healthier lifestyles.
- Light Rail is highly accessible for disabled persons as trams are built with complete or partially lowered floors.