

TRANSCRIPT

STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Inquiry into infrastructure projects

Melbourne — 20 April 2016

Members

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Witnesses

Mr John Merritt, Chief Executive, VicRoads.

The CHAIR — I will reopen our Standing Committee on the Economy and Infrastructure public hearing. We are hearing evidence in regard to the infrastructure inquiry. The evidence today is being recorded. All evidence given today is protected by parliamentary privilege; therefore you are protected for what you say in here today, but if you go outside and repeat the same things, those comments may not be protected by this privilege. I welcome you, Mr Merritt. It is good to have you with us. I believe you might have some introductory comments that you may wish to make to us.

Mr MERRITT — Thanks, Mr Morris. It is good to be in front of the committee again. I note in the committee's invitation there is reference to a couple of projects, some of which I am aware have been discussed already. I think there might be specific interest in the CityLink-Tulla widening project, so I might confine my opening remarks to that and then obviously take any questions that might come from it.

It clearly is — the CTW, as we refer to it — a significant project at the moment, covering some 24 kilometres from Melbourne Airport down to Power Street. It is substantially around adding an extra lane in each direction for the full route, but there are also some intersection upgrades at Flemington Road, Bell Street, English Street near Essendon Airport and also Mickleham Road. It has some other ancillary works around Bell Street as well, and importantly it involves the introduction of a new freeway management system to help get the most out of the road. As you are aware, the project is jointly funded by the federal government, the state government and Transurban and was the result of a market-led proposal. Transurban are effectively delivering what we call stage 3 of the project, which is from Bulla Road, the existing CityLink road, to the tunnel, and the initial two sections are being delivered by VicRoads. It is an unusual project in that sense.

The context will be familiar to you. It is around the population growth that we are seeing in the west and north-west, the significant growth that is anticipated for Melbourne Airport and also the part that the road plays in directing traffic to the port as well. The project has been assessed by Infrastructure Australia, and it has a reasonably healthy BCR as well. It is expected that because of the additional lane it will provide a 30 per cent increase in capacity, which we will need as the population continues to grow, and it will provide additional capacity for trucks as well. Importantly, with the managed motorway systems in place, our evidence when we have introduced that previously is that we can expect to see a 20 per cent reduction in casualty-related crashes on the road coming there.

The context for the road, I suppose, is also significant for us in that there are a number of challenges which I think were evident in some of the diagrams that Mr Bolt used earlier around not just population growth but growth in relation to where jobs are, which puts a lot of pressure on transport-related infrastructure everywhere. I think, as part of the early discussion I alluded to, there is almost a hierarchy of solutions there. One is obviously to have more jobs closer to where people live so as to reduce the need to travel at all. Secondly, if people still need to travel, to make it as attractive as we can to travel on public transport or through active transport — walking and cycling.

If we cannot do that, our third option then is to make sure that we sweat the existing assets as hard as we can, and that is largely what underpins the CityLink-Tulla widening work. It is operating within the road corridor, and it is using what is called the hard shoulder or emergency stopping lane and using the lane management systems in converting it into an operating lane and being able to be reconfigure it during the day and night depending on the load.

So it is a really important piece of what I refer to as asset sweating in that context for us. It is also important to us because it almost certainly will give us greater reliability on the network, and ultimately, while capacity is important, it is reliability where we want to improve our performance as much as we can. I will confine my comments to that by way of introduction, and I am happy to take any questions about that or anything else I can assist with.

The CHAIR — Thanks, Mr Merritt. I just had a couple of questions I was hoping to ask with regard to the western distributor. I am just interested to know whether or not you have done any modelling on the positive or negative impact the western distributor will have on afternoon peak-hour traffic leaving the city, coming out of the city?

Mr MERRITT — Well, VicRoads is not the proponent for the project. It is being advanced by Transurban, so I am not aware of any modelling that we have done in that context.

The CHAIR — So that is not VicRoads's role, to do that type of modelling on a project like the western distributor?

Mr MERRITT — VicRoads's staff are seconded to the project team. I think there was some reference to that department-based team. So there is work being done by the project team within the department around the project.

The CHAIR — Given that even with the western distributor there will be no unbroken freeway from the west of Melbourne into the Eastern Freeway other than CityLink to the Monash, can the western distributor project really be considered a second river crossing, do you think?

Mr MERRITT — Well, one of the aims of the project obviously is to relieve some of the pressure on the West Gate Bridge by providing that alternative path to the port, so as currently designed it delivers that objective.

The CHAIR — I am also interested with regard to what VicRoads's role is within the level crossing removals. I know we had you before our committee early on with regard to the level crossing removals and we had a discussion then, but I am interested to understand the role that is currently being played by VicRoads in the level crossing removals.

Mr MERRITT — As Mr Bolt articulated earlier, there is a dedicated agency, the Level Crossing Removal Authority, that is running this work. Because VicRoads had already done some preliminary works on a number of level crossings, we are delivering those early level crossing removals for the Level Crossing Removal Authority.

The CHAIR — I am just interested to know what you think of the city of Ballarat?

Mr MERRITT — It is a — —

The CHAIR — I am being rather facetious. I am wondering if you are looking forward to the move to Ballarat?

Mr MERRITT — As you are aware, the issue of where VicRoads might relocate to is a matter for the government.

The CHAIR — Indeed. Thanks, Mr Merritt.

Ms HARTLAND — I have got quite a few questions, as you could imagine. I met at the weekend with a group of residents on the Hyde, Globe and Francis streets section. On one side of them is the Mobil tank farm, and there is that group — —

Mr MERRITT — Yes, that intersection where Hyde come in to Francis and then doglegs around into Whitehall.

Ms HARTLAND — Yes. There are about 22 houses in there. A number of these houses already have VicRoads's acquisitions on them from previous projects. A number of these people want to be acquired because they just feel that they are being squished by a number of projects and if western distributor was to go ahead, they have also got the old SEC substation, which is AusNet, at the back and they have got Mobil at the front of them. They are in a really precarious situation. Considering they already have the overlays on their properties, what can VicRoads do about the issue of acquisition?

Mr MERRITT — I cannot really add to what Mr Bolt said in relation to entertaining representations from those. I am just picturing that block, and I think there is a number of houses and at the back of those there are some flats or apartments that run along — —

Ms HARTLAND — That is at the back of the Yarraville Community Centre, so that is about another 200 metres further along.

Mr MERRITT — So it is different to that. It is closer to that actual intersection.

Ms HARTLAND — It is the Hyde Street-Francis Street corner.

Mr MERRITT — Again, as Mr Bolt said, I would expect the project to take seriously whatever representation that community makes. The circumstances of those houses up until hearing you raise them earlier had not been brought to my attention before.

Ms HARTLAND — These already have acquisitions over them from previous projects.

Mr MERRITT — Yes, previous plans to widen the intersection around there to take that sharp end out, I suspect.

Ms HARTLAND — That is right, and that has been for the last several years. You may not be able to talk to this, but one of the disturbing things that I heard from the residents was that many of them have bought in the last year or two knowing that they are in a difficult situation, but it was not in their section 32s.

Mr MERRITT — I am happy to check on that.

Ms HARTLAND — They did not actually know that there were acquisition overlays on their properties.

If I can now go to the issue of high-productivity freight vehicles, as you know, these are 68 to 77 tonnes in weight, and we are now told that the West Gate Bridge can no longer accommodate these and that the western distributor will deal with them. But the western distributor is not built yet; it is not actually approved yet. I could only imagine that even if it got approved tomorrow, it would take at least five to eight years for completion. What happens to those vehicles in between time and where will they go?

Mr MERRITT — I am assuming your question relates to an article that was in the *Age* earlier this week?

Ms HARTLAND — Yes.

Mr MERRITT — Again, I think the article arose from the publication of an interactive map that we have produced to help the industry know weights and roads. We have been part of a trial for some time now allowing a limited number of high-capacity vehicles to use the bridge. That trial is still ongoing, and obviously critical to the trial is just how the bridge fares under that load. I do not think there is a suggestion that if they cannot use the bridge, they can be diverted to the streets. So if they cannot use the bridge, they cannot be used.

Ms HARTLAND — Just this week, I understand that last mile access has been granted to a number of routes. That is along Francis Street. So my question in relation to that was about when and if you consulted with the Maribyrnong council in regard to this in this change of road condition. And were local residents consulted on this issue?

Mr MERRITT — I will have to take that question on notice about last mile access.

Ms HARTLAND — In particular, because I am aware from speaking to the Maribyrnong Truck Action Group that they actually had a meeting with VicRoads last week and they were not told that there would be a change to that last mile access.

Mr MERRITT — Well, I was at a meeting with the Maribyrnong Truck Action Group myself in last fortnight, and that is true; we were not discussing additional access. As I say, I will take that on notice on that issue.

Ms HARTLAND — So just continuing on this issue, are you saying that this is not happening or you are trialling it? What is happening with these vehicles?

Mr MERRITT — So as part of a trial a limited number of businesses have been able to use a limited number of high-productivity vehicles on the bridge.

Ms HARTLAND — So they have not been banned from the bridge?

Mr MERRITT — No. Well, those nominated businesses can use them, but no other businesses can.

Ms HARTLAND — So how many of these vehicles are going over the bridge?

Mr MERRITT — I will take that on notice and get the number for you.

Ms HARTLAND — All right. So when will this trial finish?

Mr MERRITT — I have not got the exact date, but I am happy to find the detail of that too.

Ms HARTLAND — So the trucks have not been banned, and they will not end up on Francis Street and Somerville Road et cetera.

Mr MERRITT — No. I mean, I will have to go and get the information, particularly in the context of this first and last mile access, for you, and I am happy to get the details on where the trucks are running and what the situation is in regard to them. I know that a lot of the concern of Francis Street residents, as expressed to me, is not so much the size of the trucks but the volumes of the trucks, the fact that we have a lot of trucks carrying containers, particularly empty containers, on that route all the time really, and that the trucks that are doing that work are more often than not older, noisier, more polluting vehicles. So that is a separate issue to these high-capacity trucks, which are invariably almost brand-new, far quieter, loaded not empty and far less polluting. So certainly if there is a basis to have that discussion with the residents, I agree they should be able to have that discussion.

Ms HARTLAND — I understand the style of truck, and I understand all those arguments about it, but when you look at the corner of Williamstown Road and Francis Street, how is one of these trucks going to get around the corner? That is the kind of information the community wants to know — just about how that is actually going to happen. I am sure will come up with something else in a minute.

Ms TIERNEY — Are you comfortable with the level of impact that the CTW project is having on the public during the construction?

Mr MERRITT — Our job at VicRoads is to get people to their destinations in an as reliable and timely way as we can, so the disruption that the necessary works are causing to those people travelling in and over the bridge is not something that I am comfortable with, but the levels that we are currently seeing or have seen over the first four weeks of the project are consistent. In fact they have been generally well inside the level of disruption that the modelling anticipated.

I do not wish any of those people driving in on that journey any extra minute on the journey — we will get the work done through the project as quickly as we can — but to date the additional travel time caused by the works has been within the modelling marks that we set.

Ms TIERNEY — You might have known that we had some members of the school council from Strathmore secondary in earlier, and they are not happy about the consultation process. They believe that they were told after the decision was made, so that is one issue and I would like some comment from you about that. But the second issue is the impact of what is being proposed on their school. I would like to know what mitigating approach VicRoads has offered or looked at with respect to that.

Mr MERRITT — I was not present when they were commenting. I think it is a matter of record that the first discussions with the school occurred in the middle of 2014, when the project was first mooted. When the contractors were preparing to tender for the project in the second half of 2014, some of them met with the school. Then there have been discussions during 2015 both from VicRoads staff and others. There was a public forum in the second half of 2015 and there have been further discussions this year, but I am aware that as far as some members of the parent community are concerned, they are not aware of some of that discussion and believe that it has been inadequate.

I think the second part of the question was what are we doing about it to mitigate it. We have been working with the education department primarily around mitigating the impact of this. The committee may be aware through the discussions or through the presentation earlier that by bringing the Bell Street ramp up and over the Pascoe Vale Road off-ramp it necessarily elevates it and brings it closer to the school. We are not acquiring any land — it is Crown land there — but it does bring it to the border and it is reasonably close to the portable classrooms that are there and creates some issues of overshadowing in the morning over those classrooms.

We are working with the department and with the school. We are more than open to anything that we can do that would assist the school in moving those classrooms, if that would help. We will certainly be ensuring that there is a mitigation of any dust and noise during the construction work there. The new ramp will have a 2 to

3-metre noise wall to ensure that the noise does not get any worse, and the works themselves have been modelled in accordance with EPA requirements in terms of noise and air. We do remain very keen to work with the school to do whatever we can to mitigate the impact of this on the kids at school.

Ms TIERNEY — As you would be aware, that school is on a compact piece of land and it is pretty well totally utilised as it is, so it is going to require some thinking out of the box in terms of a very popular school under pressure dealing with a situation that has got a number of issues connected to it. I know you were not there at the time, but have you had an opportunity to review what has happened — those that are very clear about their view about it not being an appropriate way to consult a learning community — so that this does not happen again?

Mr MERRITT — I have certainly had a chance to review who met with whom and where and what information was put to them, and I am aware of the issues that you put before around the really tight envelope on which their school is located and in fact the history of the school going back to the late 50s and early 60s, when it was really battling to get built and battling all the way as the Tullamarine Freeway was built and the creek was moved and the increasing traffic on Pascoe Vale Road. It is a long history of this school struggling and obviously achieving pretty good outcomes in the midst of that, so I have a great deal of empathy with the way that they have articulated their case in their correspondence to me.

The point that you raise is a really critical one. Every bit of infrastructure that we are expanding at the moment, even in this case where we are not taking any school land — we do not need to; we are working within the Crown land that we have got — and every piece of work that we are doing now through this mature city of ours causes a level of either physical or perceived disruption and accompanying angst. We are constantly reviewing and working out how we get better at engaging with those communities in a more timely way and in a way that is more respectful of their circumstances and that gives them greater control over the outcomes that they see affecting them, because this is just one case of many instances like this that we are dealing with and we will continue to deal with on every major project that we do now.

Mr FINN — Mr Merritt, thank you for your time today. I turned the radio on this morning, as I have been known to do from time to time, and I heard on the news about the trucks being put off the West Gate Bridge and some suggestion that the bridge was not actually capable of carrying them. Now it is not a new story; the bridge has had various degrees of speculation as to its usefulness over recent years. What exactly is the real story? Is the bridge up to carrying the amount of traffic that it is expected to carry these days?

Mr MERRITT — The bridge has been the subject of a lot of investment to strengthen it, but every bridge has a load limit to it. It does not matter how big or small it is; they all have limitations. This bridge has its limitations, and we guard and protect it really closely. The VicRoads team that is responsible for the bridge sits right under the bridge and spends all day, every day and night, making sure that the bridge is up to the task that it is set.

But I think as previous discussions will have said, it carries a significant load — around about 200 000 vehicles a day, and about 20 per cent of that is heavy — and what the engineers are particularly looking at is when the bridge is under full load in the peak. It has five lanes in each direction. It is carrying around about 8000 to 8500 vehicles per hour in the peak, so the composition of those vehicles is really critical to it. That is why when it comes to seeing what we can allow on, they are trialling and modelling what the composition of the traffic on the bridge is to make sure that we get the most out of it but we also protect it.

Mr FINN — So we could perhaps see in the not-too-distant future certain sorts of vehicles banned on the bridge?

Mr MERRITT — Well, I think there is always a push for heavier vehicles, and the bridge will have its limitations in being able to take high volumes of heavy vehicles. The issue of managing traffic on the bridge is obvious. It is not the heavy truck; it is how many heavy trucks are on the bridge at any one time. It has always been managed very closely, and it will continue to be managed to ensure that it carries as much as it can but that it is protected.

Mr FINN — If heavy trucks are banned on the bridge, where do you anticipate those trucks will go?

Mr MERRITT — Well, if they cannot run on the bridge, they cannot run. This is the challenge of these high-productivity freight vehicles, which is something we were talking about before. This is not a West Gate Bridge issue. For all of our routes we are constantly looking at the bridge tolerances on those key freight routes in from the country, and indeed around the country as our economy changes, to make sure that we can get the most amount of freight on the least amount of trucks that we can.

Mr FINN — Do you anticipate that if those heavy trucks were banned, we would see them using the inner west to get to their destinations either in town or on the other side of town?

Mr MERRITT — I think, as I was trying to allude to before, the issue is that they are not allowed at all. If you cannot get them down a designated route, they do not have the option of going down a back route.

Mr FINN — Fine. You are a man who has dedicated his professional life to getting people from one place to another with the least amount of difficulty possible. Do you see that the need for a road linking the east and west of Melbourne is inevitable?

Mr MERRITT — I think that what is inevitable is continued upgrade of infrastructure around Melbourne, but I do not know that it is for me to comment on any particular road at any spot around that.

Mr FINN — I will give you an example. I was at home the other morning just north of the airport, up near Sunbury, and I had to get to Lilydale, which is not exactly around the corner from my place. I drove down the Tullamarine Freeway, got off at Brunswick Road, drove through Brunswick, Carlton and Fitzroy and finally got onto the Eastern Freeway. Surely it would make life a lot easier for somebody in my position if we could just drive down the Tulla, get in a tunnel and drive to the start of the Eastern Freeway. It would also surely relieve those inner suburbs, which are always chock-a-block, of their traffic congestion now.

Mr MERRITT — I understand where you are going. I have not spent my whole working life moving people around, only the last couple of years, but in those couple of years what is evident is that there is a pretty high level of individual requirements for individual routes between certain origins and destinations. That does not mean those roads would be built. They have to be assessed under a benefit-cost ratio, because everything has a cost. Ultimately this work in movement is around choices. Generally the task of governments now and into the future will be to try and make the choice, to choose those roads that provide the greatest benefit against the cost.

Mr FINN — But you would have to say a tunnel would stop that constant stream of traffic that leaves the Eastern and runs into Alexandra Parade and into various other places around Fitzroy, Carlton, Brunswick. That would cut that significantly, would it not?

Mr MERRITT — The bulk of that traffic which is coming of the Eastern of course is not transiting across the top of the city. It is either dropping down Hoddle and then venturing off into the city or making the full route through. Another portion of it then drops down one of the other north-south routes — Smith, Wellington, Brunswick, up to Lygon, Nicholson. On the numbers I have seen, that is our issue really on the Eastern, and that is why all of our work at the moment is trying to get better flow both on Hoddle and the upgrades that we have made over the last couple of years on the bus run from the park and ride at Doncaster, down Hoddle and into Victoria, because we are trying to provide a viable alternative to get as much of that. But the bulk of those numbers are dropping down into the city. You are right, though — that was another spread which is picking up north and taking the Brunswick Street road and finding its way through there.

Mr FINN — And then of course there are people from the eastern suburbs wanting to go to the airport. That is not an insignificant number.

Mr MERRITT — No, there are numbers there, and they are currently running through Alexandra Parade. That is right.

Mr FINN — Given that the latest diagram that we have of the western distributor shows that it will actually run onto the Tullamarine Freeway and into another entry to the city to the west, it is quite feasible to suggest that the western distributor could in fact create more congestion on the Tulla, particularly the Bolte Bridge and surrounds. How would VicRoads cope with that?

Mr MERRITT — Perhaps I could separate out the two. First of all, I think as I answered earlier, the western distributor project is being managed by a dedicated team there, and they are working very closely with the City of Melbourne in relation to any impacts it might have and how to mitigate that. But as we touched on earlier in the context of the CityLink-Tulla widening, we are adding significant capacity to the Tulla at the moment through this project.

Mr FINN — But not, as I understand, where the western distributor would meet the Tulla?

Mr MERRITT — No, we are adding an extra lane in each direction the full length of the Tulla.

Mr FINN — But for those wanting to cross the Bolte Bridge, that would not have much impact, would it?

Mr MERRITT — Oh yes, it will. Yes. One of the key issues for us in this project is, if you picture your journey in the morning and indeed in the afternoon as you are coming, say, from the airport, and where Footscray Road joins into what I call the Bolte section there, you will be aware that we have got a congestion coming all the way back from where the road hits the West Gate. It often sees cars banked up there, and you are arriving at a reasonable — —

Mr FINN — Quite often past Mickleham Road.

Mr MERRITT — You are arriving sometimes at a reasonable speed to that and finding congestion all the way back, so the work that is underway at the moment is designed to alleviate that build-up back over the bridge and that very dangerous spot, which is complicated by some additional weaving that occurs at the Footscray Road entry and exit as well.

Mr FINN — You mentioned that there is a lot of work going on within the department on the western distributor. We have the Premier and various ministers out talking this project up, and of course Transurban is very, very enthusiastically talking it up, as anybody with much money to make does. Given that all that is happening, do you get the feeling the deal is already done? If the deal was not done, why would the department, the government and Transurban be all working so furiously on the one project?

Mr MERRITT — I am not sure that is for me to comment on. I am not a party to the negotiations around the project.

Mr FINN — Thank you.

The CHAIR — Mr Merritt, I have couple of additional questions. When we were speaking to the Strathmore school council we had a discussion about the cost differentials between the different options that were available. I was wondering if you might be able to provide those to the committee.

Mr MERRITT — I will check with the project team, just out of respect to the team. As I mentioned earlier, it is a three-way partnership between Transurban, the federal government and ourselves, but I will take the question on notice on the options. This is particularly in relation to the Bell Street ramp, I think.

The CHAIR — Yes, indeed. That is correct, indeed. I was also interested in your view of the Abbots Road, Dandenong, level crossing removal, where the road is just going to be closed to remove the level crossing. I was wondering if VicRoads had any view on that.

Mr MERRITT — I will have to take that on notice, Mr Morris.

The CHAIR — That is fine. One final one from me. I was wondering whether or not you have provided advice to the government on the potential relocation of VicRoads to any site, whether it be Ballarat or other.

Mr MERRITT — There has been a request from government to us to furnish cost-benefit analyses on various options.

The CHAIR — Very good. Would you be able to provide that to the committee?

Mr MERRITT — That would be a matter for the government.

The CHAIR — Thanks, Mr Merritt. Further questions?

Ms HARTLAND — Just a couple of others. Following on again about Strathmore high, certainly in my discussions and their presentation today, yes, they have had conversations with VicRoads, but it would appear that the conversation they have had did not actually tell them that this is what was going to happen. Now I found them to be a really reasonable, rational group of people. I am not sure whether you have met with them, but I really would urge you to meet with them, even if you could go to the site, because I think possibly what is in the files is around the whole range of discussions, but again the community has heard one thing and VicRoads believes that they have told them something else and it is not matching, and I do not understand how that can happen, so I really urge you to do that.

If we could go back to the issue of the heavy productivity vehicles. I just really need to know how quickly you can get back to us about that, because we need to get that out to the community.

Mr MERRITT — On the details of that trial and where it is at in particular, that will only be a couple of days. We have been talking about this week in the context of the media.

Ms HARTLAND — I have also just done a quick google. On the VicRoads site the VicRoads map shows Francis Street as an access route now, so there is a bit of confusion here about what is actually happening. My last question is around traffic modelling for the western distributor project, and it is around issues about what the City of Melbourne have said and what the western distributor business case regarding traffic is. In particular the CoM transport strategy outlines a decrease in total car trips to the City of Melbourne on weekdays by 130 000 vehicles by 2030, whereas the western distributor business case assumes an increase in car traffic coming into the CBD from the west by 30 000 vehicles from Footscray Road/Dynon Road alone by 2030. So there is this contradiction about what the City of Melbourne is saying they are wanting and what the western distributor is saying is actually going to happen. Considering the city is quite congested now, especially around the edges, how is the city possibly going to manage what looks like about an extra 30 000 vehicles according to the western distributor, or Transurban?

Mr MERRITT — I think with the City of Melbourne position, that is their aspiration for the city, and the work that this project has done that I have seen — in part a lot of the work is around how to move traffic not through the city but around it. The configuration of where it takes traffic onto Dynon and Footscray and then the potential upgrade of Wurundjeri, there is an attractiveness to that because it would provide a better north-west bypass than King and Spencer currently provides. So King currently, notwithstanding that it goes through the city, acts as a city bypass to the west, whereas Punt-Hoddle provides our north-south bypass to the east. So a lot of the work, as I understand it, that has been done on the project is how to maximise that efficiency so that cars are not going onto King and Spencer.

Ms HARTLAND — So if there are going to be an extra 30 000 cars entering the City of Melbourne a day and they are not coping now, how is that going to be managed? Because obviously for me the lack in all of this is that nowhere are we talking about public transport — and I know that is not your domain, but it is the issue that we are totally reliant here on a number of major road projects and doing absolutely nothing to get the people off the West Gate Bridge who would not need to be there if they actually had reliable public transport.

Mr MERRITT — On-road public transport is a huge responsibility of ours, particularly obviously trams and buses, so we are very focused on how to get people into the city in numbers. We have a limited tram route to the west compared with our services to the east, and limited bus services as well, but that is a priority for us — how to get people in in numbers. I touched on the issue before about the work we are doing on the buses down Hoddle and Victoria, where I think we are up to 50-odd buses an hour now and we are really trying to prove that up as being a viable and attractive service for people to switch to. All of our work that we have been doing on the Punt-Hoddle corridor is in part predicated on how to move the trams across the corridor as efficiently as we can and make that a really reliable service experience for people. So it is a huge issue for us.

The issue about cars moving in is just simply it does not move enough people, because the CBD will continue to grow and importantly grow in certain sorts of jobs which the economy needs, and we need high-capacity transport to move them in in the numbers are forecast there. So I agree with your comment.

Ms HARTLAND — I think there is a false economic argument here with the western distributor about adding an extra 30 000 cars into the CBD a day when obviously many of those could be public transport trips. In none of these projects does the government or agencies seem to be looking at how we can actually get people out of their cars reliably. They do not want to use it at the moment because it is not reliable.

Mr MERRITT — Reliability is the key and service frequency is critical in the survey work that we do. I think, though, what we do see in all of these issues is that our population growth now and as projected is such that we need every mode that we can get to work to carry this sort of uplift. So we cannot just rely on one or the other; we need to sweat every single mode that we have got, and we need to ultimately, as well as that, encourage as much job growth closer to where people live as we can so that we take away the need to travel in the first place.

The CHAIR — No further questions from the committee? If not, thank you, Mr Merritt, for your time today.

Mr MERRITT — Thanks very much. We have some issues we will come back to. Good to see you again.

The CHAIR — As with some of our other witnesses, we may provide you with some questions on notice as well, which we appreciate your acknowledgement of. Thank you, Mr Merritt.

Witness withdrew.