



Workshop 6 Report: Delivering sustainable public transport

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ABSTRACT

After a discussion of the meaning of 'sustainable public transport', this Workshop discussed issues of need, system design, institutional arrangements, environmental improvements and social aspects of service. Land use/transport integration was seen as critical for long term strategic direction setting for public transport, backed by sustainable financing/funding arrangements. These need to encompass such revenue sources as externality pricing, user pays, beneficiary pays, wider value capture, asset sales and other opportunities. Such matters are just some of the important examples of governance/institutional design considerations that underpin sustainable public transport, an area the workshop recognised as needing much greater future focus. Ways to grow public transport use, and improve service delivery efficiencies and performance, in both trunk and local markets were discussed, with a particular focus on flexible transport systems. Whether these services should target specific niche markets or pursue a wider customer base was an area of some disagreement requiring further research, in a low density developed country setting. The different roles played by flexible transport systems between developed and emerging countries were notable. The workshop developed a set of general principles intended to further promote sustainable public transport.

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1. Context

This workshop continued the Thredbo Conference aim of broadening the public transport discussion agenda beyond contracting and privatisation into wider public policy arenas. To that end, Workshop 6 looks at some aspects of the fundamental public transport value proposition, framed through the lens of sustainability.

The Workshop had 16 participants from seven countries, coming from governmental, academic, NGO, investor and industry backgrounds. This mix provided for a very enlightening discussion. Thirteen papers informed the Workshop, encompassing theory, policy analysis, methods, case studies, ex ante and post hoc project evaluations.

Workshop participants initially structured their discussions around defining what is meant by 'sustainable public transport' and then explored various elements of sustainability, framed around

the workshop papers. This discussion encompassed issues of need, system design, institutional arrangements, environmental improvements and social aspects of service, concluding with proposals for policy, research and for future Thredbo Conference agendas.

2. Sustainable public transport

Given the focus on sustainable development since the time of the Brundtland Commission report (WCED, 1987), and the important policy rationale for public transport that arises from its contribution to various elements of 'sustainability', it is surprising that workshop participants were unable to identify an accepted definition of 'sustainable public transport'. Any such definition should link back to the Thredbo 11 Workshop 2 discussion of high-level social goals, towards the achievement of which public transport contributes (Stanley & Longva, 2010). These goals provide a fundamental basis for assessing public transport achievement. In summary, participants in that Thredbo 11 workshop thought that public transport systems and services should be judged against their contribution to the following six social goals (elaborated in more detail in Stanley & Longva, 2010):

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Fig. 1. Understanding personal travel needs.

1. Economic competitiveness
2. Fiscal sustainability
3. Environmental sustainability
4. Social inclusion
5. Liveability, health and safety
6. Regional development

The relative weighting of these goals will differ between jurisdictions but their generality is reflected in numerous national/urban transport policy goal statements.

Against this background, Workshop 6 participants defined **sustainable public transport** as:

Collective transport that, in an on-going way:

- *meets personal travel needs and facilitates strong communities*
- *supports economic development and equitable social participation*
- *promotes environmental health and*
- *has appropriate institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement (including sufficient sustainable funding) to deliver.*

In terms of the primary role of meeting personal travel needs, Fig. 1 indicates that Workshop participants recognised public transport (PT) provides mobility, which helps people achieve accessibility to a range of activities that, in turn, enable them to meet those fundamental human needs identified by authors such as Maslow (1954). Mobility is important to the achievement of Maslow's five categories of human needs. Because of these connections to human needs and wellbeing, the workshop started from the value position that public transport services need to be equitably distributed (in line with the social leg of the sustainability definition), while also continually seeking to reduce their environmental impact or footprint. Funding, governance and institutional arrangements need to be aligned to deliver a sustainable PT system on the ground.

3. Land use/transport integration

Workshop 3A at Thredbo 12 highlighted that, with the demand for transport being a derived demand,¹ the question of *integration* is always going to be fundamentally important to a successful outcome. That workshop identified a number of areas that require integration, with land use/transport integration being seen as particularly important for maximising the long-term public value of public transport systems. The importance of desired long term

land use directions playing a leading role in land use/transport integration was an important conclusion from Thredbo 12 Workshop 3A. Thredbo 13 Workshop 6 participants underlined this point, noting that major transport projects developed in isolation of land use development goals may lead to unintended adverse long-term consequences, such as, for example: not identifying the kinds of public transport system/service development initiatives that are likely to be of most long term value city-wide; accentuating urban sprawl; loss of prime agricultural land. The lack of papers reaching back to integration of land use and transport was noted by Thredbo 12 Workshop 3A participants as a shortcoming and an area that requires attention in future Thredbo Conferences.

Stanley (2013) picked up this issue at Thredbo 13 and, using a current Melbourne case study, showed how an integrated land use/transport strategy is likely to lead to many different public transport development priorities than might emerge from a narrower (public) transport problem-focused approach (e.g. that targets mitigation of road congestion and over-crowded public transport services). In particular, the paper linked structural economic changes taking place in Melbourne to preferred development patterns likely to promote desired economic, social and environmental outcomes, indicating that this wider perspective suggested a much stronger growth role for the city's middle suburbs, in the pursuit of more compact growth.

Public transport service improvements are a key element in the delivery of this development pattern in Melbourne, which is a substantial change from the past pattern of the city's dominant fringe-oriented growth. Focussing primarily on more narrowly defined public transport demand/supply considerations, however, would lead to a much stronger focus on improving radial public transport services to the central business district. While that is an important priority, particularly to support the achievement of further agglomeration economies, maximising Melbourne's growth potential and sharing the benefits of this growth across the city requires a more holistic focus. This goes to the heart of the issue of how the strategic public transport 'needs identification' process should be undertaken. Workshop 6 participants recognised that this process should be an essential component of an integrated long-term land use/transport strategy, not simply a process that considers (public) transport needs in narrow terms.

4. Governance/funding for sustainable public transport

Thredbo 12 Workshop 3A participants agreed that local government acting at a regional level should usually be responsible for driving the process of land use/transport integration, based on the principle of alignment of primary decision taking responsibility with the jurisdiction in which the costs and benefits of those decisions are most concentrated. In some cases this may mean a single local authority, if that authority covers the entire geographic space on interest. In others, it may require some means of local authorities working together to act regionally, as in Vancouver. Higher levels of government (national, state/provincial) often have legitimate interests in land use/transport integration, particularly because of impacts on the high level social goals identified above.² It is such impacts on high-level social goals that justify funding flows from the national government to support outcome achievement at subsidiary layers of government, particularly in those

¹ Derived from the demands for the particular activities that people desire to undertake.

² Workshop 3A at Thredbo 12 gave some relevant examples, such as the national economic significance of city economic performance in the knowledge economy and the impacts of poor land use/transport integration on this performance.

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