

Will new trams and trains keep up with fast growing demand in Melbourne?

The Victorian Liberals' announcement of \$3.9 billion for new trams and trains over the next 10 years appears unlikely to meet growing demand, according to analysis of the announcement from the Australia Institute.

The "Naphthine Government [is] building better public transport for a growing population," the Victorian Liberals said in a press release last week.

"New trains and trams will allow an extra 150,000 passengers to be carried each week day," Victoria's Minister for Public Transport, Terry Mulder said.

With the Australian Bureau of Statistics projecting 19 to 23 per cent growth in Melbourne's population by 2024, talk of investment in public transport infrastructure has been widely welcomed by commuters in the lead up to the state election this weekend.

But according to TAI researcher Tom Swann: "it's unclear how these new trams and trains will be enough to keep up with fast growing demand for rail travel in Melbourne."

There are currently over 1.1 million journeys a day on Melbourne trams and trains. Increasing capacity for 150,000 new journeys a day would grow patronage by 13 per cent, if the new capacity is fully used -- slower than population growth.

The Liberals may mean the new carriages will carry 150,000 people to and from their destination each day. Patronage would then increase by 300,000 a day, or 27 per cent growth.

But even this would not keep up with growing demand from trends like increased density and petrol prices. Public Transport Victoria expects demand for public transport to grow 48 per cent for trains and 42 per cent for trams in the next 10 years.

The Liberals are not alone here. Labor and the Greens have promised to buy *fewer* new trains and carriages than the Liberals, and did not provide capacity figures. However, Labor promises a plan for long term purchases, while the Greens promise to get more out of existing carriages.

"It's common for politicians from all stripes to announce funding for new services, without showing whether the new funding is enough to keep up with growth" Mr Swann said.

"If services do not increase as fast as the population grows, this is effectively a cut to services. If services grow slower than demand, people will miss out."

"Governments nationwide face the challenge of planning for population growth. It's important everyone can see how we're tracking, or we run the risk of services expanding too slowly."

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