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 The Mercury editorial (4/3/17) highlights the key issues of Hobart’s traffic congestion. As emphasised in the Moving Hobart Forum last Thursday it is a matter that concerns the traffic into the city from Kingston, Bridgewater, New Norfolk and Sorell flowing along the Southern Outlet, Brooker and Tasman Bridge

Various proposals have looked at improving traffic flows by improvements in public transport, light rail, tunnels and a Western Bypass.

Bob Cotgrove has advocated a Western Bypass diverting a proportion of traffic from the Davey/Macquarie couplet to a bypass linking the Southern Outlet to the Brooker Highway.

A 2012 GDH Report by the Department of Infrastructure, Energy and Resources for the Hobart City Council included an analysis for a tunnel with a similar link. The Report concluded that in 2031there would only be 1180 vehicles per day (pm) and 1000 (am) in a tunnel.Additionally,14% of the traffic on the main feeder routes (essentially Davey and Macquarie) were currently through traffic as distinct from CBD bound

 It follows that with this low percentage of through traffic a Western Bypass as consistently urged by Bob Cotgrove is not justified. Hans Willink in 2015 costed the tunnel proposal at $600m.Rex Gardner’s support of a similar tunnel project (Sunday Tasmania 4/3/17) has the same objections. The Western Bypass would involve property purchases, overpasses that would be in excess of the tunnel’s costs.

The Legislative Council Standing Committee on Integrated Public Transport in 2012 heard from Ms Hazelgrove then CEO of Metro who outlined the Adelaide passenger bus service model where the State Government owns most of the buses and depots, ticketing infrastructure and radio network. She raised the scenario where the Tasmanian Government could sell the Metro and contract out the services.

This proposal could be matched with that of the Northern Suburbs Light Rail Group which advocates renewed stations on the currently closed railway which could be linked to the Metro in an integrated public passenger service.

The Minister for Infrastructure, Rene Hidding, in 2015 blamed the proliferation of car parks in Hobart’s CBD and resistance to dedicated bus lanes on city arteries as the reason for cars as the preferred option for commuters. He held that for $35.8 million government service contract with Metro plus $3.5million for new buses it should be carrying more passengers. He told the Legislative Council’s committee into government business enterprises that buses “provided the biggest bang for your buck over light rail” on the basis of the PricewaterhouseCoopers report then questioning the viability of light rail.

The earlier ACIL consultant’s report into light rail was seriously flawed which included the failure to undertake a market survey of potential users but relied on Metro passenger numbers supplied by DIER. The ACIL study also omitted the effect of future housing development along the line of rail.

This omission has been highlighted by research from Professor James McIntosh of Curtin University which showed from an analysis of passenger rail in Perth and Melbourne that proximity to rail services generally increases property values across residential and commercial sales of between 10-20%. Hobart Architects Paul Johnson and Wesley Hindmarsh back the light rail project in Hobart as it would increase the number of potential sites for affordable housing and create a string of high value communities and economic activity along the length of the rail corridor.

Both the Hobart City Council and former Mayor Kristie Johnson have both advocated a passenger light rail service could resolve congestion on the Brooker Highway;Sue Hickey claiming the cost of keeping the Highway up to date with increasing traffic would be exorbitant.

The current traffic congestion situation has only been met so far with short term band aid solutions. The Minister Rene Hiding has urged the Hobart City Council to back the Davey Street clearway proposal under the State government’s Hobart Traffic Congestion Plan. One of the stumbling blocks appears to be pedestrian access on these routes which should be resolved speedily. A problem also exists with filter lights on key crossing points such as Elizabeth Street. At both Federal and Burnett intersections there is a missing filter on the both sets of lights. As State Growth administers traffic lights an audit is needed of other intersections where congestion results from insufficient filters.

The solutions to Hobart’s traffic congestion developing over the years require a whole of government approach. It should not left to the far sighted bodies like the Hobart City Council and the University of Tasmania (looking at sustainable transport solutions for its student accommodation in Elizabeth Street) to tap community support and suggestions to persuade the State government to get in on the action.

Waiting in the wings is Mona’s involvement in the Macquarie Point development which includes a light rail connection as part of an exciting revival of that site.

To avoid cars eating Hobart the old solutions of bypasses and tunnels need to be discarded in favour of light rail, improved public transport and an integrated transport policy spearheaded by the Tasmanian State government as part of urban renewal over a 20 to 50 year period.

John Livermore

Transport Consultant

Editor Transport: Laws of Australia