

Bus routes in Mitchell Street and the Bendigo CBD

Précis:

The Bendigo Business Council supports:

- the Bendigo Railway Station as a transport interchange for suburban buses,
- the routing of buses along Mitchell Street,
- the retention of bus stops in Mitchell Street adjacent to the Hargreaves Street intersection,
- the addressing of congestion, amenity and traffic movement issues through careful and clever design approaches and appropriate investment,
- provision for further increases in bus services and passenger movements, and
- continued monitoring of actions to ensure the needs of bus users, pedestrians and adjacent businesses are met.

Background:

The Victorian Department of Transport (DOT) in conjunction with the City of Greater Bendigo (COGB) and VicRoads has been addressing issues relating to the routing of buses and the sites of bus stops in the Bendigo CBD since 2008. Consultations have involved traders' representatives and public transport users. Some possible concepts and designs were released for public comment in mid-2009.

Discussion and debate has centred on the appropriateness of the Railway Station as an interchange or terminus for buses; the impact of additional heavy vehicles on the Mitchell Street road surface; the amenity for passengers at bus stops in Mitchell Street; congestion on footpaths resulting from passengers waiting for buses, and the impact on businesses (principally retailers) adjacent to Mitchell Street bus stops.

Significance to business:

Hundreds of businesses are located in the Bendigo CBD, providing employment for thousands of workers operating in the retail, finance, food, hospitality, real estate, health, community, civic and professional services sectors.

The roads of the CBD, particularly the High Street - Pall Mall - McCrae Street - Napier Street spine, carry significant through traffic that conflicts with traffic movements within, around and through the centre of Bendigo.

The railway station is an important commuter-hub for business and non-business journeys to Melbourne and other destinations.

Issues affecting business include:

- The need for consumers (shoppers) to access businesses.
- The need to move goods and people efficiently through our city.
- The needs of delivery vehicles in the Bendigo CBD.
- The desirability of bus stops in the CBD within close proximity to major and other retailers, banks, offices and professional service providers, Post Office, Hargreaves Mall, library, and civic offices.

Other issues:

The layout of the Bendigo CBD means that there are few 'through routes' to move people and goods from one side of the city to the other (e.g. from Spring Gully to the Bendigo Hospital; from Maiden Gully to the All Seasons Hotel; La Trobe University to Catholic College). Many such journeys pass through the CBD in particular the Mitchell Street, Pall Mall, View Street (Alexandra Fountain) intersection. Although this is a separate issue, not directly related to bus routes, this constraint does impact on vehicle congestion within the Bendigo CBD.

Position and recommendations:

The BBC expresses its concerns about current congestion issues in the CBD, particularly Mitchell Street, and acknowledges that this affects passengers, pedestrians and businesses. The conduct of some people waiting for buses can be unsavoury; efforts should be made to mitigate such behaviour. The BBC seeks a solution that provides safety, efficiency and accessibility for all.

The Railway Station and Coach terminal is the most appropriate place for a suburban bus interchange in Bendigo and that Mitchell Street provides the safest, most direct route through the CBD.

The BBC supports actions to improve traffic flow along Mitchell Street through clever design processes which may include widening of footpaths, bus-activated priority traffic signalling, and electronic signage of the next buses to arrive and depart.

Amenity for passengers, pedestrians and retailers must be improved. This should include wider footpaths, no smoking zones, clearer (fixed and electronic) signage, regular cleaning, additional rubbish bins, improved lighting, climate protection, seating, safety cameras, security call points and more.

Any design intervention by COGB and DOT should not only meet the needs of the current bus schedule, but should allow for expanded services. (e.g. a further 30-40% increase on current bus usage, more frequent scheduling of services, services to additional destinations). It should address the needs of both today and tomorrow.

The safety of bicycle riders should not be compromised in any road or footpath development.

A comprehensive and integrated solution may require an investment in excess of \$900,000. The Department of Transport and the City of Greater Bendigo should explore that adequate funds are available for a world-class, 21st century transport solution is provided for our vibrant, growing regional city.

Approved by the Board of Directors, Bendigo Business Council.

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