

Appendix A:

Submissions and comments

We consulted with the department, CDC, Dysons, Kinetic and Ventura, and we considered their views when reaching our audit conclusions. As required by the *Audit Act 1994*, we gave a draft copy of this report, or relevant extracts, to those agencies and asked for their submissions and comments.

We also provided a copy of the report to the Department of Treasury and Finance and the Department of Premier and Cabinet for their information.

Responsibility for the accuracy, fairness and balance of those comments rests solely with the relevant agency head.

Responses received

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Department of Transport and Planning	A-2



Department of Transport and Planning

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Ref: BSEC-1-26-1947

Mr Andrew Greaves
Auditor-General of Victoria
Victorian Auditor-General's Office
Level 31, 35 Collins Street
MELBOURNE VIC 3000

Dear Mr Greaves

Victorian Auditor-General's Office - Improving bus services - Proposed report

Thank you for your letter of 8 May 2026 inviting the Department of Transport and Planning (the Department) to respond to the *Improving bus services* proposed report (the Report).

Metropolitan bus services in Melbourne operate within a complex and highly variable road-based transport environment, with the majority of services operating in mixed traffic conditions alongside private vehicles, freight, cyclists and other road users.

On behalf of the Department, I acknowledge the work undertaken by your office and recognise the inherent challenges associated with auditing a complex, highly dynamic and operationally variable transport system. While the Report raises a number of constructive observations, aspects of the analysis are based on incomplete or flawed assumptions that do not adequately account for the variability and constraints associated with the bus network. The Report does not appropriately recognise the significant progress that has been made in delivering the Bus Plan and improving access to high quality public transport for Victorian communities.

The Department follows industry practice in assessing punctuality, consistent with similar domestic and international jurisdictions. Punctuality for metropolitan buses in 2024-25 was 89.6 per cent, significantly higher than the analysis in the Report and above the benchmark of 86 per cent. The Report's analysis of punctuality does not fully account for the operational, customer and safety considerations of the metropolitan bus environment, or the intent and limitations of the underlying performance framework. We are not aware of any major jurisdiction that assesses bus service performance using the methodology applied in the Report.

Planning for bus services within growth areas requires a balance of coverage and directness, with the ultimate alignment often dictated by the availability of bus capable infrastructure. Road networks in growth areas typically evolve over time as the developments are delivered, meaning the road networks are not always complete or bus capable when there is demand for bus services by new residents.



Through the 2025-26 State Budget, the Victorian Government invested \$162 million in new and improved bus services, with a focus on connecting communities in Melbourne's growing suburbs to key local destinations including train stations, schools, universities, health services, shops and employment. This includes new services in Tarneit, Rockbank, Thornhill Park, Beveridge, Werribee, Aintree and Wollert. These services have either been introduced since VAGO's assessment was completed in June 2025 or are in progress to be delivered later in 2026 and early 2027. These new services provide approximately 300,000 Melbournians with improved bus services, with almost 40,000 of them receiving public transport for the first time. An additional almost \$100 million in investment is being provided through the 2026-27 State Budget to continue uplifting bus services.

Significant progress has been made in delivering Victoria's Bus Plan, and the Department has transparently reported on these activities including:

- Awarding the Metropolitan Zero Emission Bus Franchises contracts, delivering around 600 Zero Emissions Buses (ZEB) over the next 10 years.
- As part of the wider ZEB transition, there are already 96 operating in the network including two Hydrogen buses in the regions.
- Launching the first all-electric depots in Ivanhoe and Preston. Major electrification works have commenced at several other major depots including Bundoora, Sunshine and Heatherton.
- Real time information displays installed at over 30 sites across the state. Live e-ink displays have been deployed at over 60 locations with more to come.
- Commenced deployment of Automatic Passenger Counters, to understand how people use the existing bus network to inform network design, and to evaluate bus planning and reform activities.

Since launching Victoria's Bus Plan in June 2021, more than 129 local bus networks have also been improved, giving Victorian communities access to more than 11,000 extra services each week. Improvements to local bus networks have also seen significant and sustained uplifts in patronage, meeting the needs of more Victorians, including examples such as:

- The Route 800 service uplift resulted in over 200 per cent patronage uplift on Saturdays after 12 months.
- The Route 505 service uplift resulted in over 75 per cent patronage uplift on weekdays after 12 months.
- A package of changes to support Deakin University resulted in 30 per cent patronage uplift on weekdays, 20 per cent on Saturdays and 25 per cent on Sundays.

The Department has prepared responses to each of the Report's recommendations which are enclosed with this letter.



Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Report.

Yours sincerely



Jeroen Weimar
Secretary

Date: 22 May 2026

Encl: Improving bus services - DTP action plan

DTP action plan

Improving bus services



The Department of Transport and Planning (DTP) action plan to address the recommendations from *Improving bus services*:

No	VAGO recommendation	DTP response	Due date
1	<p>To enable the department to accurately understand and respond to users' needs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – review its data collection practices to ensure its data can be used to fully understand user demand and service delivery experiences – review and update its public reporting of service delivery to more closely reflect users' experience, including but not limited to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – punctuality – reliability – transfer to train services – distance from bus services. 	<p>Partially accepted</p> <p>DTP considers its data collection practices fit for purpose to understand user demand and service delivery experience. Automated Passenger Counters are being rolled out across the network and DTP is reviewing its patronage estimation methodologies accordingly.</p> <p>DTP reports its performance in compliance with the Department of Treasury and Finance's <i>Resource Management Framework</i>. The existing punctuality and reliability performance measures are fit for purpose. DTP will consider the report's findings in the development of performance measures for 2027-28.</p>	31 January 2027
2	<p>To achieve the Bus Plan's objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – confirm its aspirational standard for households' proximity to high quality bus services – assess the gap between existing households' proximity to high quality bus services and its aspirational standard – use this information to inform bus network design, planning and resourcing, and to guide its contribution to any reviews of planning and land use provisions. 	<p>Partially accepted</p> <p>DTP already uses analysis of coverage gaps (households outside the extent of the existing public transport network) to inform the prioritisation of new and extended services. The 2025-26 and 2026-27 State Budgets funded a significant number of new and extended services within Melbourne's growth areas, as a direct result of this approach.</p> <p>However, DTP does not currently plan to a specific coverage target, as there is nuance required to balance coverage and directness of bus services. Purely planning for coverage leads to indirect, inefficient routes.</p> <p>Through development activities associated with Plan for Victoria Action 7, DTP is committed to developing and releasing a map of key strategic bus corridors with the aim of ensuring most people in Melbourne live within a 10-minute walk (800m) of public transport.</p>	31 December 2028

Response provided by the Secretary, Department of Transport and Planning, *continued*



No	VAGO recommendation	DTP response	Due date
		DTP will assess the gap between the aspirational strategic bus corridors and the existing bus services. The findings of this exercise will be used to inform a pipeline of investment for bus.	
3	Publicly report progress on the Bus Plan's progress.	<p>Accepted in principle</p> <p>DTP will continue to publicly report on the delivery of the Bus Plan in its Annual Report, State Budget Papers and on the Engage Victoria website.</p>	Completed