



SkyBus: An efficient and affordable choice for airport transit.

Contribution to Australian Government Productivity Commission
Economic Regulation of Airport Services

April 2011

Introduction

SkyBus appreciates the opportunity to provide this contribution to the Productivity Commission's *Economic Regulation of Airport Services inquiry*.

SkyBus carries out a critical function in providing a regular and reliable service for the Melbourne Airport-City route and is an integral part of Melbourne's transport network.

SkyBus has a clear vision for the future, including a strategy for doubling passenger capacity within the next five years. Moreover, the company has highlighted areas for investment that could develop this even further, as well as identifying areas that pose a risk to the provision of what is an affordable and attractive transport option.

About SkyBus

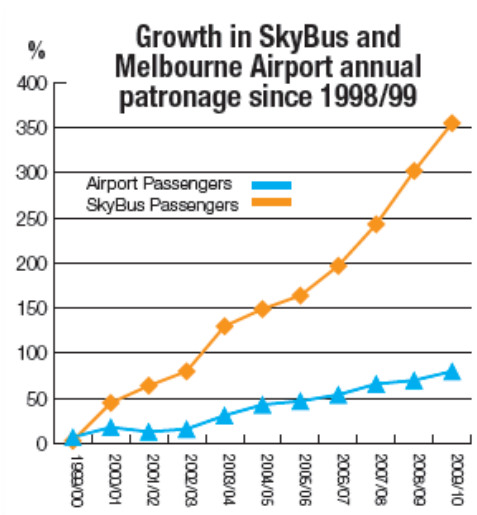
For more than thirty years, SkyBus has operated a world-class, express bus service between Melbourne Airport and Melbourne's city centre.

SkyBus is committed to ensuring it maintains and improves its delivery of safe, comfortable and dependable transport. SkyBus provides its staff with the knowledge and skills to act as ambassadors for our city and its people remain focused on delivering quality customer service in a friendly and caring manner.

SkyBus is often the first contact visitors have with Victoria and we are committed to leaving them with a first impression that is friendly, caring and efficient.

Following several upgrades to vehicles, on-road priority and service frequency, SkyBus patronage has increased by around 350 per cent from 1998/99 to 2009/10. Over the same time period, air passengers increased by around 75 per cent.

SkyBus now carries in excess of 2.2 million passengers a year, equivalent of more than half Melbourne's population and around 8.3 per cent of all Airport passengers (up from around 3 per cent in 1999).



The SkyBus story demonstrates once again that higher frequency bus services attract significant patronage growth, and can significantly increase public transport's market share of travellers, reducing the impact on Melbourne's road network – predominately reliant on the Monash Freeway/CityLink for airport traffic.

The Melbourne market

A look at SkyBus' patronage over the past three years speaks to Melbourne's emergence as a destination in its own right.

In 2006, a SkyBus transported more than 913,000 interstate and international passengers between Melbourne Airport and Southern Cross Station.

Three years later these figures climbed to more than 1.12 million interstate and international passengers.

The vast majority of these visitors waited less than ten minutes for their bus to arrive and were in the heart of the city (or at their departing terminal) in 20 minutes.

As the Melbourne market has grown, so too has SkyBus. In 2010, SkyBus' total patronage represented more than a four-fold increase in passengers during the last 10 years.

The flexibility of bus transit and significant investment on SkyBus' behalf has seen it seamlessly extend its number of services (now 250 services each day) to cater to this demand – and at no cost to the taxpayer.

SkyBus operates 24 hours a day, 7 days a week – the only airport public transport service in Australia to do so.

The next five years

Over the next five years, SkyBus will continue to grow. SkyBus expects its **capacity to double again to carry four million passengers.**

Further significant upgrades could be made to the existing SkyBus service over the next five years to improve its frequency and reliability, as well as further increasing its share of airport passengers to 12-13 per cent.

While a higher share is achievable, there will be an upper limit on patronage due to the spread of metropolitan origins and destinations of airport users. An express service from the CBD is an attractive option for people travelling to the airport from the city centre, and also those with ready access to Southern Cross Station by train, particularly to the south and east of the city centre.

There are several options for improving the existing SkyBus service – all achievable within a five-year-window – that will further serve to make public transport to and from the airport a more attractive and efficient offer – providing commuters with greater choice.

Service frequency

A recent internal SkyBus survey revealed the most important feature of the service is the frequency with which it departs Southern Cross or Melbourne Airport.

While already impressive, the service frequency could be significantly upgraded, boosting capacity and reducing waiting times even further. Even on existing roadways, it would be possible to increase the frequency of service to every 2-3 minutes, if additional kerb space for loading and unloading passengers can be provided at the airport and Southern Cross Station.

Bus Rapid Transit (BRT)

BRT is seen as a creative, emerging public transit solution which can be cost-effective in addressing urban congestion, particularly in cities of low density (such as Melbourne).

Bus rapid transit (BRT) systems use buses to provide faster, more efficient service than an ordinary bus line. Such systems can be achieved by making improvements to existing infrastructure, vehicles and scheduling.

Relatively low cost road infrastructure works to improve bus priority between the airport and Southern Cross Station could include one or a combination of:

- A dedicated bus-way along sections of the route;
- Elevated roadways;
- Additional lanes on the Tullamarine Freeway;
- The current express lane could be extended and enforced using automated cameras to help buses bypass congestion.
- Bus lanes or even a bus-way could be built between the freeway and airport terminals to enable buses to bypass congestion around the terminals.
- A bus-only route behind Essendon Airport.

A BRT system utilising the existing infrastructure that links Melbourne Airport to Southern Cross Station will provide the service quality of rail transit, while still enjoying the cost savings and flexibility of bus transit.

BRT infrastructure could also be used by emergency vehicles as well as response vehicles (i.e. Road Assist vehicles, towing vehicles) allowing them to get to an incident quickly and clearing the road more quickly to reduce congestion.

25-metre articulated buses

The use of a BRT will make it feasible to adopt a 25-metre bi-articulated bus (an extension of an articulated bus in that it has three passenger compartment sections instead of two). Due to their extended length, bi-articulated buses tend to be used on high frequency core routes or BRT schemes rather than conventional bus routes.

These buses are a feature on major BRT systems in Europe and North America and are capable of carrying 100 passengers plus luggage. One of their main advantages is these buses would be able to move more people per hour, in seated comfort, than currently is the case.

Risks that are a barrier to world-class service

As previously mentioned, SkyBus is investing heavily in improving an already quality service. The introduction of a BRT and 25-metre articulated buses further serve to provide the potential of a truly world class airport transit service.

However, there are a number of risks that could setback such a scenario.

Airport fees

SkyBus pays an access fee to the airport for premium kerbside bus stops. It is important that access is maintained for customer amenity at a reasonable cost so as to maintain the bus service as an affordable alternative to other forms of transport.

Airport location

A key strength of the bus link between Melbourne Airport and the city is that it is simple to locate SkyBus at the airport. SkyBus' kerbside position is readily identifiable, strongly branded and uncluttered. It makes affordable bus transit an attractive option.

This location is matched with an easily locatable, well identified and strongly positioned placement at Melbourne's public transport hub, Southern Cross Station.

SkyBus' presence at both locations, as well as an excellent reputation built over more than 30 years, provides an uninterrupted link between Melbourne's two largest transport hubs.

To dilute this would be to diminish the role of an important service provided for Melbourne Airport and Southern Cross station and will harm Melbourne's reputation for seamless city-to-airport transit.

A world-class service

With SkyBus, Melbourne already boasts an exceptional express bus service operating between Southern Cross Station and Melbourne Airport.

Its rate of passenger growth is testament to this and provides SkyBus – and Melbourne – the opportunity to further transform this service to one that is unique in Australia and one of the very best in the world.

In five years it is not a stretch to imagine a 24-hour service capable of carrying 100 people at a time travelling a dedicated route through Melbourne's gateway, with a service leaving every 2-3 minutes during peak times and a guaranteed trip time of 20 minutes.