Light rail and bus rapid transport cause for optimism in Australian public transport

While two-thirds of Australians would like to see more investment in light rail, those with access to bus rapid transit are more likely to consider it a favourable option, according to the latest quarterly national transport survey from the University of Sydney.

When asked in the quarterly Transport Opinion Survey (TOPS) whether they would prefer public transport investment in light rail or bus rapid transit - both in a dedicated corridor away from other traffic - 63 percent of respondents selected light rail and 29 percent preferred bus rapid transport.

However, in Queensland and South Australia, where bus rapid transit is already available, respondents were more likely to consider it an attractive option for future investment: 41 percent of South Australians and 38 percent of Queenslanders surveyed favoured bus rapid transit.

“Experience of bus rapid transit increases its attractiveness to customers, a trend we have also seen in other research conducted by the University of Sydney,” says Professor David Hensher, Director of the Institute of Transport and Logistics Studies (ITLS).

“This is an important factor for governments to keep in mind when planning new public transport infrastructure.

“A dedicated corridor for bus rapid transit could be a significantly cheaper and equally effective solution to congestion as light rail,” he says.

Forty-nine percent of those surveyed saw public transport improvements as the highest priority transport issue in Australia. Despite highly publicised debates over airport development and interstate rail, only a minority of Australians (7 percent and 1 percent respectively) saw these as priority issues.

TOPS also looked at attitudes towards transport and found that Australians are more confident about the prospects of improvement in local transport than they were in the previous quarter. However, they are still less confident than they were when first surveyed in March 2010.

“Public transport is critical to the way in which our cities operate, so it is not surprising that people want to see it getting better,” Professor Hensher says.
“Public transport is the lifeblood of Australia’s cities, but its success in the future depends on convincing Australians to get out of their cars and this will not happen if public transport is not improved."

“In Sydney, for example, people spend an average of two hours a day travelling. This is a significant waste of time and energy, which is not good for people and not good for businesses. If we can do something to improve transport, we can go a long way to improving people’s lifestyle and making more productive cities."

TOPS is the only national survey to measure public opinion on transport related issues. The September 2013 quarterly report is at: http://sydney.edu.au/business/itls/tops.

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