



Policy Statement

Night-time safety in the CBD

Endorsed by the Melbourne City Greens as local policy of the Australian Greens (Victoria), as launched on Saturday, July 12th 2008. This policy is part of a broader Melbourne City Greens Policy Platform, to be released throughout 2008, prior to the November election.

Background

The increasing density within the City of Melbourne of licensed venues and of population in the last two decades has turned the city centre into a culturally, economically and socially vibrant space.

Coupled with that increased density has come the gradual increase in alcohol-related violence inside and outside of licensed venues. Though not a sudden out-of-control crisis, as suggested in some recent media reports, night-time safety in the City of Melbourne, and in particular the CBD, needs a swift and comprehensive review by state and local governments, Liquor Licensing and Victoria Police.

Though they have been keen to see many of the goals of *Melbourne 2030* realised, and to see the CBD turn from the relatively desolate place of the early 1990s into the vibrant 24-hour destination that it is today, state and local governments have failed to properly coordinate venue planning and licensing approvals, and to provide adequate services and protection for the increasing number of visitors to the city after dark. The number of police night shifts and the number of public transport services have remained static throughout this period of growth.

The Greens believe that the blanket '2am lockout' trial, regulated by Liquor Licensing and sanctioned by the Premier and members of the State cabinet, is a simplistic and ill-conceived response to the problem. It is a response that has the risk of harming the financial viability of smaller licensed venues more so than the larger venues, with which the greater violence-related problems are associated. In its current form, the exemptions list has rendered the trial ineffective, and tourists in particular have been left confused and frustrated by the regulation.

The most immediate and important task, even though it may affect the revenues of some venues, is to ensure that licensees do not get their patrons excessively drunk. Research has shown that without proper enforcement of existing laws relating to the responsible service of alcohol (RSA), patrons who appear intoxicated are rarely refused service.^{1,2} The first task of government is to assist in ensuring existing laws are complied with. Until every attempt has been made to ensure patrons don't reach unacceptable levels of drunkenness, other heavy-handed steps like a lockout are premature.

The time has also come for a broader review, and for sensible solutions to tackling after-dark violence in the city. The Greens offer a fresh alternative to the old thinking of the two major parties and the inactive majority team on City Council.

Green Melbourne City Councillors will undertake a broad review of night-time safety in the City of Melbourne, implement policies that promote safety and the responsibility of licensees, and work with relevant regulatory bodies and the State Government to avoid potential future knee-jerk reactions that will only damage Melbourne's vibrant nightlife.

¹ The recent 2006 Victorian Parliamentary 'Inquiry Into Strategies to Reduce Harmful Alcohol Consumption' noted that according to some studies, 'unchecked service to intoxication is the norm rather than the exception': see page 487, available at http://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/dcpc/Reports/DCPC-Report_Alcohol_Vol1_2006-03.pdf

² For the NSW experience, see Linda Scott, Neil Donnelly, Suzanne Poynton and Don Weatherburn, 'Young adults' experience of responsible service practice in NSW: An update', Alcohol Studies Bulletin, Number 9, 2007, available at [http://www.bocsar.nsw.gov.au/lawlink/bocsar/ll_bocsar.nsf/vwFiles/AB09.pdf/\\$file/AB09.pdf](http://www.bocsar.nsw.gov.au/lawlink/bocsar/ll_bocsar.nsf/vwFiles/AB09.pdf/$file/AB09.pdf)

Policies

Greens on Melbourne City Council will:

1. In partnership with the State Government and other metropolitan municipalities, increase the frequency of Nightrider bus services to departures every 20 minutes.^{3,4}
2. In conjunction with Liquor Licensing, trial an 'Audit and Feedback' scheme within the City of Melbourne that will assess existing compliance of RSA laws. Inspectors will record compliance and, in conjunction with the police, feed the findings back to the licensee, with the aim of changing the licensee's RSA practices where necessary.
3. Employ two extra Planning Enforcement Officers to ensure that licensed venues are regularly checked for compliance with planning regulations.
4. Overhaul and expand the existing Licensees Accord⁵ in full consultation with licensees, relevant Drug and Alcohol organisations and Victoria Police.
5. Oppose the '2am lockout', and oppose any further lockouts until a comprehensive and public review of night-time safety and compliance with RSA laws has been conducted.
6. Fund safe, well-lit taxi ranks in violence problem areas.
7. Work with VicRoads to implement a 24-hour 30km/h speed limit on all roads in the CBD under council responsibility, and on roads under VicRoads responsibility after 8pm, including King Street.⁵
8. Continue to implement Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) Strategy recommendations to improve visibility, lighting and safe pedestrian movement in the CBD.
9. Undertake a study of the correlation between violence and the density of men's clubs and explore planning solutions to best address problems of violence in trouble spots such as King Street.

A Green Lord Mayor of Melbourne will:

10. Upon being elected to office, request an urgent meeting of Council and Premier⁶ to tackle night-time safety issues in the CBD.
11. Use this meeting and subsequent opportunities to:
 - encourage the State Government to provide funding for the employment of additional Liquor Licensing officers to enforce license conditions within City of Melbourne venues;
 - request that the State Government meet the transport needs of patrons of CBD licensed venues by increasing train and tram services, with an ultimate aim of providing Melburnians with a 24-hour public transport service;⁷ and
 - insist that the State Government provide a Victoria Police presence in the city commensurate with the growth in late-night visitor numbers since 1990.

³ For items necessitating substantial reprioritisation of budget funds, see notes.

⁴ See the Melbourne City Greens Transport Policy (release date to be announced).

⁵ Available at <http://www.consumer.vic.gov.au/>

⁶ Under section 8 of the City of Melbourne Act (2001).

⁷ See the Melbourne City Greens Transport Policy (release date to be announced).

12. Use the media presence associated with the office to actively protect Melbourne's vibrancy and reputation by:
- opposing mandatory blanket 'lockouts' (as per section 4); and
 - acknowledging the significant contribution of unique late-license bars to Melbourne's culture.

Notes

Funding priorities

Some of the above policies will require a reprioritisation of parts of the budget of Melbourne City Council. The policies in question are the larger-scale transport initiatives, such as the extension of the Nightrider bus service. The full Transport Policy of the Melbourne City Greens will be released in the lead up to the November election. This policy will include an explanation of financial demands of Green policies on the Council budget.

Briefly, The Greens believe that Melbourne City Council should adhere to its own policy of spending Long-Term Parking Levy funds on sustainable transport options. The 2008-09 financial year, for example, will see council collect \$5m from this levy and spend it on such projects as the Yarra footbridge to the State Government's PPP Convention Centre (the demand for which will not be required until 2025 according to council's own estimation) and on maintaining the Tourist Shuttle Bus (a service that The Greens believe should be charged in order for it to achieve cost neutrality – if tourists can afford to visit our city, they can afford the spare change for a bus trip). The Greens believe that the Parking Levy can be better spent.

Council expects to collect \$74.83m in Parking fees and fines this financial year. The Greens would ensure that a substantial proportion of council's parking-related income, and more than just the income from the Long-Term Parking Levy, be spent on sustainable transport options. Options will include those that alleviate the causes of violence at night-time in the city, such as increased bus services in the early hours.