

The Commonwealth Transport Spectacular

Victoria's Transport minister Peter Batchelor awarded the public transport operators, contractors and staff at Melbourne's Commonwealth Games a 'gold medal for an outstanding contribution to the games success'.



IMAGINE RUNNING 260 buses over 360 routes, with significant changes to patronage numbers and runs delivered just hours before the day starts — and that's just the start of the public transport task for the Commonwealth Games Family.

Then there's the public pressure to ensure nothing goes wrong, especially not an Atlanta Olympics situation of buses going the wrong way up freeways captured on TV.

While the Victorian government, its rail, tram and bus contractors carried the 1.8 million public to and from venues while maintaining usual work and school services, the Games Family (athletes, officials, workers and dignitaries), were carried on a special bus and coach service operated by a joint venture of Sita Coaches Pty Ltd and Roscar Management Consulting Pty Ltd.

With the Sydney Olympics, Goodwill Games, Rotary International Convention,

annual Grand Prix and regular major sporting events, Australia's public transport sector has built a world class reputation for maximising public transport usage at major events, cost effectively.

Despite the massive increase in public transport usage, more than twice Melbourne's usual peak on most days, Metlink surveys found 90 percent of people using public transport rated the service as excellent or good. And that contributed to the highest usage of public transport at any games, transporting up to 80 percent of visitors.

The Games Family Transport contract was awarded in April last year, giving Sita and Roscar with just under a year to prepare. They developed a management team of Dominic Sita and Ross Walker JV Partners; Guy Thurston (Transport Operations Manager); Ron Lunt (Project Manager); Trevor Reeves (Operations Support Manager) as well as adding a new floor to their West Footscray offices to handle the management and operations task. This team reported to Rebecca Sturgeon (Program Manager, Traffic and Transport) and James

Cook (Program Coordinator, Bus Operations) at the Melbourne 2006 headquarters at the World Trade Centre (M2006).

For 26 days leading up to, through and after the Games, Sita had to provide 24 hour a day availability of services.

Early planning tasks involved co-ordinating with the Commonwealth Games — Bus Operations team to determine service levels according to the Games program and the size of teams. This led to developing the scale of the transport task and the routes to be mapped.

For the Games task, 263 buses and coaches were employed with around 500 drivers, 55 supervisors, 20 maintenance staff, 20 cleaners and 50 security guards and so forth.

Most of the buses and drivers came from operators around Melbourne and regional Victoria. Most of the regional drivers had a good knowledge of Melbourne's road network through school excursions and charters to Melbourne.

The Commonwealth Games meant that many of the usual roads and parking areas were not able to be used. For instance the marathon and road cycling events required major diversions to the main roads between and near many Games venues. To address this, more than 360 maps had to be developed to cover every possible route and its alternatives. Each A3 size map had not just a map of the streets, but also directions giving right and left at every



Games —

turn, plus precise instructions of where to load and unload passengers.

Auxtrix scheduling software was used to develop the rosters and bus movements across the multiplicity of bus routes on a daily basis. This software performed extremely well under the programming of Terry Fletcher (Head Scheduler) and his team of Schedulers (Steve Lucas — Westbus and Trevor Ross — Translink). The scheduling team had the enormous task of programming the service levels for this event and providing bus linkages across the network, taking into account the need for layovers, security checks, vehicle types, fatigue management, etc.

Overlaid across this complexity of routes and daily service provision, was the need for levels of security not seen even at the Sydney Olympics.

Sita had to move 80 buses, which continued doing their standard route services, out of their West Footscray depot which was 'locked down' under Games security requirements.

For the duration of the games the standard Sita services from Melton to Footscray and East Melbourne ran from the nearby depot of Sunshine Tours, located at Deer Park.

From March 4, the Sita depot was locked down with 24 hour a day security on all gates and CCTV around the yard. Entrances were monitored every minute of the day and night.

All drivers and staff were required to be fingerprinted and all buses were required to be X-rayed, including the 160 buses which came into the yard on 4 March for the initial Games work. After the X-ray, every compartment was then required to be security sealed.

Police sniffer dogs searched the yard several times throughout the Games and every person entering the yard, and their bags, were searched.

"The security presence was significant," said Dominic Sita.

"It was re-assuring, but caused even more planning to ensure people and vehicles had gone through security before shifts started."

Partly because of the security and also the complexity of routes and services, training was also greatly enhanced over previous events.

Keith Dalley (Training Solutions Strategies) as Head Trainer and two other trainers, Peter Whyte (in-house Sita) and Keith Lambert (Panorama), delivered a generic training course starting six weeks before the games. To supplement this, specific training modules were developed in conjunction with M2006 staff for specific events and locations. Matthew Joyce and Daniel Head from M2006 contributed significantly to the training and delivery task.

For the opening and closing ceremonies, the specific training modules included material for the driver briefing, before each wave of buses left either the depot, Moonee Valley or other locations. The briefings also had to include operational staff and volunteers who assisted in loading buses to ensure all the right athletes and officials caught the correct bus.

The M2006 Commonwealth Games — Bus Operations team were based at the Games Village. They co-ordinated the daily service level requirements and changes to vehicles and routes, but also supplied staff and volunteers to help load at the 18 load and drop-off zones around the village.

Generally Sita/Roscar had three supervisors and the M2006 Bus Operations team had another three to coordinate the loading and unloading.



Photo by Hayden Ramsdale

During peak and shoulder peak hours, traffic controllers controlled traffic flows around the Sita depot to ensure that buses could leave in waves along Sunshine Road so they were on time for their pick-ups.

For the opening and closing ceremonies, buses were assembled at Moonee Valley race course. This was to ensure the right mix and placement of disabled access buses and the coordination of timing. For these ceremonies, the buses went in waves of 20 at a time at ten minute intervals, with a supervisor on the lead bus of each wave of buses.

With the help of VicRoads and VicPol, buses were assisted with green lights and Police assistance along the way to the MCG. With careful planning and well co-ordinated service delivery, Sita/Roscar



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and M2006 managed to deliver 4500 athletes and officials to the MCG in around one hour.

Another small fleet of buses was based on servicing the world's sporting media based at the Melbourne Exhibition Centre and World Trade Centre. Mostly this involved 9 to 10 buses running shuttles around the major venues and hotels. But particular interest in certain events of teams led to many last minute changes and diversions.

Other times of greatest challenge related to picking up and dropping teams from Melbourne Airport. This involved lifts of 3000 people over a couple of days (and nights - some needing to be at the airport at 3 am).

Transport Operations Manager, Guy Thurston, former STA and ACTion manager and with experience of the Sydney Olympics, described these types of events as 'exciting and intense'.

"Because we had longer to plan, and the experience of other events, these Games ran smoother," Thurston said.

"We had our moments, with a number of last minute changes requiring notifications into the early hours. But we had planned for contingencies which allowed us to address each situation.



The team

"For the major events, the buses got green lights all the way to the MCG."

"Between the Sita/Roscar team and the M2006 Bus Operations team, we had strong lines of communication, clear lines of demarcation about who did what, and not too many chiefs, so we coped with the changes and made it all happen.

"The security angle certainly adds a layer of complication, but

any major event requires everyone to be well trained and responsive. This was certainly a great team effort."

Dominic Sita said that after a month you don't notice you are getting by on 4 or 5 hours sleep a night'. "I came in the Monday after the Games and for the first time in a month there was no light on in the depot and no teams working in the office or workshop.

"Then we realised we had done the job. It was just about all over except for the clean-up.

"Public Transport requires co-ordination just for every day services that repeat over and over. An extra level of training and planning for a major event is absolutely vital when there are lots of once-only trips and changes can be made with only a few hours notice. .

"It was really important that everyone, from the workshop to the supervisors and



Photo by Hayden Ramsdale



From the driver's seat

Dear Sir,

I HAVE returned from Melbourne last night, one of three Coaches from our company. To say Melbourne was a challenge would be an understatement.

With road closures around Melbourne and temporary 'no right turns' in the city, travelling times to venues was extended by sometimes 200 percent and more. For instance, St Kilda Road into the city where three lanes normally become two at Princes Bridge this week became one lane. The traffic would possibly be three to four times more than normal.

The number of pedestrians in the city seemed as if the world population was in Melbourne. Lots of pedestrians walking against red lights was another hazard we had to be aware of. The great number of Police controlling traffic and pedestrians was impressive. Police were helpful and friendly to us coach drivers. One needed to remain calm not to become stressed and take traffic as it was.

It was a great experience for our year 8 and 10 students and drivers, and one we will remember.

Colin George

Driver for Macphersons Coaches — Tamworth



From left Ross Walker (JV Partner), Dominic Sita (JV Partner) and Guy Thurston (Transport Operations Manager).



all the drivers had a real passion to do the job well and were willing to work harder to adapt to the changes.

"You didn't have people standing on their digs just because changes were being made, but working out how they could help.

"That passion to succeed is very important to get the job done. In the end, the measure of how well you have performed rests with — making sure buses are on time, being flexible to improvise when problems arise and making sure the service is as seamless as possible. Beyond this, the public is unaware of the operational task we are facing and in this case, regard the service highly — as was reported in the Age on 28 March." Having managed a number of major events from 2001 Goodwill Games, 2002 CHOGM Coolum Conference, 2003 Rotary International Convention and now these games, Ross Walker says the team and systems keep improving.

"A special note of thanks is due to the drivers and bus companies who worked with us on the Games as they also worked long hours during the event co-ordinating rosters, drivers and buses," said Ross Walker.

"Behind the scenes there is always much happening and the support of the bus companies was outstanding!"

"Also a number of Sita Supervisors and Administration staff were outstanding in their service delivery — they also need to be congratulated for their efforts and dedication to the task."

"Every major event throws up different challenges, so you keep building up the experience."

"We have the teamwork and expertise and systems to look to future projects — where ever they may be. This was a great event for the City of Melbourne and we trust that the delivery of the Games Family Transport task made a lasting impression" ■

Photo by Hayden Ramsdale

Free public transport a success

THERE HAS been 11 days of free public transport and members of the public who normally do not use it have jumped on board, heading for the MCG, Federation Square and other events. There were no queues for tickets, bewildered people trying to decipher ticket machine instructions or fumble for the correct change. Trains, trams and buses carried 100,000 spectators daily, plus the 400,000 people who usually use public transport to go to work.

Transport operators were flat out from the beginning of the Games, scheduling 15,000 additional bus services, 12,500 more tram services, 2,800 more metropolitan train services and extra regional trains and buses. The result was that Melbourne's roads were relieved of many of the usual peak-hour problems.

The RACV says traffic volumes were less than predicted. VicRoads reported a five percent reduction (about 10,000 cars a day) on Flemington Road, St Kilda Road, Hoddle Street, Punt Road, Kings Way and Alexandra Parade. The indication is that Melburnians will flock to public transport given the right circumstances, and one of those is when it is free.

Graham Currie, who gave transport advice for four Olympic Games and is Australia's first professor of public transport, says events such as the Commonwealth Games presented real-world experiments for the future.

It was during these big events that public transport was given the priority it should have, he says, citing increased services, free travel and warnings against car use.

Currie says Melbourne had to learn the lessons of the past 11 days. "If that's not useful for this city to understand its future, what is?"

The Commonwealth Games experience was an unusual one. Public transport was only free for Games ticket-holders, and the school holidays reduced road traffic. However the period of the Games have been a taste of what is possible, although some trains and trams were overcrowded.

The popularity of free travel is confirmed by findings that found that 88 percent thought it was a responsible thing for the Government to introduce. But Premier Steve Bracks last week dismissed support for the idea, saying people would also support free beer.

Former Premier Jeff Kennett and his planning minister, Robert Maclellan had previously considered free public transport and a 'gold coin' payment system. ■