

MMHN June 23, 2021, Forum Report:

Ferries of Melbourne: Past, Present, Future – Good, Better, Best MMHN events seek to inform, engage, and persuade both the public and responsible authorities, especially those who fail to acknowledge the economic, cultural and social importance of our maritime legacy. We advocate by formal submissions – wherever and whenever ever we can – and public events.

Our June event was almost scuttled by lingering constraints of a COVID-19 lockdown, but MMHN decided that, rather than postpone the event, we would re-locate to the iconic, marvelously accommodating and COVID-safe, Magnet Galleries in Docklands. We are most grateful to Magnet Galleries for enabling MMHN to proceed with this eagerly anticipated forum which effectively encapsulated **MMHN's Ferry Agenda**. The program had three elements:

First, Bruce Gooley, well-known U3A presenter, researcher and writer on maritime heritage, comprehensively described and illustrated Melbourne's energetic, colourful, successful and safe ferry scene in days gone by. Many were astounded at the vitality and popularity of waterways transportation in the 19th century and surprisingly this enthusiasm for punts and ferries continued well into the 20th century – the glory days of Melbourne's ferries. We thank Bruce for his absorbing reflection on this rich history.

Second, MMHN Board member, maritime lawyer Assoc. Prof. Dr David Goodwin (VU), led an Expert Panel discussion to unpack the current ferry situation: what they are doing and what further needs to be done. Panelists included ferry operator **Matt McDonald** (CEO Searoad Ferries), ferry regulator **Gareth Johnson** (Transport Safety Victoria), ferry infrastructure Jamie Gillingham (Development Victoria), and waterways management **Adam Buchholtz** (City of Melbourne) and joining us by Zoom was safety and licensing **Brad Roberts** (Australian Maritime Safety Authority).

Third, the audience effectively set the agenda for the discussion by presenting provocative, well-informed questions to the expert panel for comment. Questions sought responses from those exerting influence or power: *How can we enable an expansion of Melbourne's ferry services? What is getting in the way? How can these impediments be overcome?* Issues raised included infrastructure (deficit and neglect), zealous regulation and constraint, the unhelpful plethora of responsible authorities – and the frustrating state government amnesia around recognizing waterways as a public asset. MMHN promotes collaboration – and it is often lacking among responsible authorities. Our hope is that MMHN Forums facilitate greater understanding on what matters to the informed public and this exchange will have a positive effect on those making decisions.

Fourth, another important contribution to the Forum came from participants in MMHN Interns Program – three Monash University Business Masters students, Khushboo Majmundar, Ashik Shajahan and Srikar Vishnu, who conducted an investigation over recent months into **The current state of our ferries**.

Feedback It has been very pleasing to receive feedback from Ferry Forum participants and this is summarised below. MMHN sincerely thanks everyone for their insights which will hopefully facilitate a revival of Melbourne's ferries system. Aspects raised included:

- **Re-Focus** The need to find ways to encourage Melbournians and Victorians, local and state government to turn towards and re-focus upon waterways activation – our rivers, the Yarra or Birrarung, and the Maribyrnong, Victoria Harbour and the Estuary. Reference was made to the implementation of the Melbourne Water Yarra Strategic Plan which awaits ministerial adoption in due course. MMHN and multiple stakeholders, including relevant municipalities along the river, were consulted at length about this this Yarra Plan and we trust this level of engagement will result in a greater focus on the benefits of both heritage and waterways activation of this important undervalued public asset.
- **The Infrastructure Deficit** The need to improve and invest in waterways access infrastructure to enable public access to ferries and ferries access wharves. Wharf dimensions dictate the size of vessels that can use them. Parks Victoria has focused on recreational boating and not ferries, consequently specific wharves need to be strengthened to facilitate ferry expansion

City of Melbourne Council (CoM) is working with Development Victoria on a ferry terminal opposite Marvel Stadium on Harbour Esplanade to support ferry services in Port Phillip Bay and on the Yarra. The CoM is also spending \$3m on waterways infrastructure and a Marine Services Depot planned on the south side of the river (Bolte West Precinct) to enable ferries and other vessels to refuel, service and provision. Particular attention also needs to be given to beautification of the riverbanks – the riparian zone and beyond. We should aspire to have a world-class, clean, safe, accessible, attractive and inviting waterfront

- **Regulatory Re-think** The need to re-think issues of safety and speed on waterways, which currently constrains optimum activation. A regulatory balance must be struck to enable ferries yet maintain public safety. Speed of ferries is obviously important but so is customer experience. People continue to love water transportation. Suitable wharves would need public transport connections and car parking.
- **Ferries as Public Transport Option** The need for the State Govt to extend MYKI service ferries and provide the same level of subsidies to ferries that is provided to trams, trains and buses. Cost is an important consideration – but ferry operators report customers appear willing to pay a premium for the ferry experience.
- **Water as a Network** The need to recognise that waterways are in effect an under-utilised communication network – requiring minimal maintenance. A new Ferry ‘station’ is currently being built at Victoria Harbour. Development Victoria operated a successful ferry service from Dockland to Federation Square servicing both sides of the river for three years before it inexplicably ceased. The type of vessel is mostly restricted to a low profile due to low bridges.
- **Rationalisation and Collaboration** The need to address the pressing need to rationalise, streamline, or more efficiently co-ordinate of the multiplicity of state responsible authorities and government agencies for activation to occur on our waterways. There is an urgent need to facilitate a shift to a collaborative governance model amongst the state responsible authorities or government agencies. There is currently a general concern about the absence of such coordination and collaboration.

Media coverage is generally indicative of the extent of public awareness – and it is clearly gaining traction around ferries. TV, radio and print media picked up the ferry story triggered by our Forum.

Channel Seven News broadcast a story: *Push to expand Melbourne's ferry services to help battle congestion* featuring the CEO of Port Phillip Ferries, Murray Rance – See [fb.watch/61V3ed1odx](https://www.facebook.com/watch/61V3ed1odx). Port Phillip Ferries were unfortunately not able to join our panel but you will see from this news story that MMHN's efforts to raise awareness of the potential for boosting ferry services were acknowledged.

ABC radio Sammy J interviewed Jackie Watts:
www.abc.net.au/radio/melbourne/programs/breakfast/breakfast/13393268.
The interview can be found at 1 hour 45 minutes into the program.

The *Herald Sun* also contained an article on 23 June entitled *Push for commuter ferry services to deal with Melbourne's traffic and public transport congestion*.

Docklands News June edition featured an article *Ugly, but ferry reliable*
www.docklandsnews.com.au/columns/detail/history_17524/
www.docklandsnews.com.au/columns/detail/maritime_17517/

MMHN will continue to advocate on expansion of ferry services as an important maritime issue. We will plan second Ferries Forum that will look at other matters such as Ferries of Port Phillip Bay, infrastructure deficits, propulsion and comparable international examples.

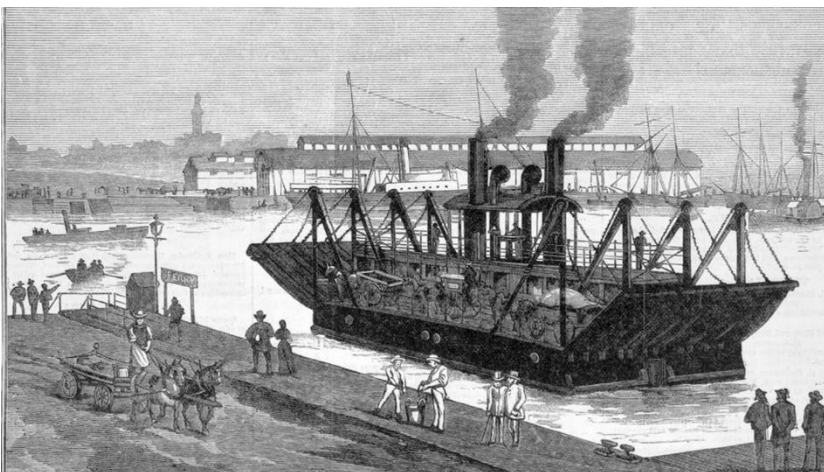




MMHN June 23, 2021 Forum.



Williamstown Steam Ferry circa 1970



The steam ferry at Spencer Street, part of Melbourne's rich maritime history.



Former Sydney Ferry now operating as a commercial tourism vessel in Victoria Harbour.



Geelong Searoad Ferry

Event invite



MELBOURNE
MARITIME
HERITAGE
NETWORK

Change of Venue

Ferries of Melbourne: Past, Present, Future – Good, Better, Best?



Williamstown Steam Ferry, 1970 - Flickr



Geelong Flyer – Baird Maritime

Dear All

Despite continuing COVID complications, MMHN is pleased to advise that our Ferries Seminar is going ahead - in a larger venue - at **Magnet Galleries**, SC G19 Wharf Street, The District, Docklands. Magnet Galleries is easy to access by public transport (it's at the end of the Bourke Street tram line, and there's plenty of parking - see map below). The usual indoor mask rules will apply.

We are looking forward to hearing from all our speakers

- Bruce M. Gooley, researcher, writer and lively presenter
- Matt McDonald, CEO, Port Phillip Ferries
- Murray Rance, CEO Port Phillip Ferries (Little Group)
- Brad Roberts, Australian Maritime Safety Authority
- Gareth Johnson, Transport Safety Victoria
- Nial Cunningham, Development Victoria

And we have a special treat! Three Monash University students have undertaken an assessment of the current state of Melbourne's ferries with considerations for the future – come and hear what they think!

When: 23 June 2021

Time: 5.00 pm – 7.30 pm

Where: Magnet Gallery, SC G19 Wharf Street, The District, Docklands

Directions: Free Tram Zone, Stop D11 (last stop). Tram Nos 86, 70 and 35 and City Circle tram.

Car parking available in Waterfront Way and Pearl River Road

Due to COVID-19, numbers are limited. RSVP essential by
19 June: info@mmhn.org.au

