

Management report to Council**Agenda item 6.1****Midweek Melbourne Money Rebate Program Summary****Council****Presenter:** Andrew Wear, Director Economic Development and International**22 February 2022****Purpose and background**

1. The purpose of this report is to provide Council with a summary of the recently completed Midweek Melbourne Money rebate program (the Program), which sought to reactivate the city by encouraging Melburnians to dine out.
2. The City of Melbourne first delivered the Melbourne Money program (offering a 20 per cent rebate, seven days a week) from 11 June to 13 July 2021. This program proved to be extremely effective in driving visitation to city. Retail and recreation destinations reactivated almost three times more quickly than following the earlier February 2021 lockdown.
3. At the 17 August 2021 meeting of the Future Melbourne Committee, during Melbourne's sixth lockdown, management was requested to 'work with the Victorian government to deliver another round of Melbourne Money as soon as possible after the current lockdown.'
4. Funded jointly by the City of Melbourne and the Victorian government through the \$200 million Melbourne City Revitalisation Fund, the Program enabled diners in the City of Melbourne to claim 30 per cent off their bill when they spent \$50 or more between Monday and Thursday, up to a total spend of \$500. Diners were required to upload a copy of their dining receipt to make a claim via the Midweek Melbourne Money website.
5. The decision to restrict the Program eligibility to run only on weekdays (Monday to Thursday) followed feedback from businesses and the Night Time Economy Advisory Committee that although Melburnians were returning to the city on weekends, weekday trading required more support, as the majority of office workers continued to work remotely and therefore not patronise retail and hospitality businesses.
6. The Program commenced on Monday 15 November 2021 and closed on Tuesday 30 November, with a subsequent two day period until Thursday 2 December, to allow customers to submit final claims. This equated to a ten day eligible claim period (16 days in total) for funds to be exhausted, illustrating the incredible popularity with which the Melbourne Money concept was received in the community.
7. At the 1 February 2022 of Future Melbourne Committee, the committee requested the Lord Mayor write to the Premier seeking funding for a further round of the Program, 'looking to expand the program beyond hospitality to include arts and cultural experiences.' At its meeting on 15 February 2022, Future Melbourne Committee requested that 'a report on Midweek Melbourne Money be provided to the Council meeting on 22 February 2022.'

Key issues

8. The Program attracted a total of 166,098 claims through the Midweek Melbourne Money website. Of these, 142,667 claims were approved with a total rebate value of \$6,406,412. The average claim over the lifespan of the Program was \$158, with the average rebate provided to customers being \$45. The Program therefore contributed over \$21.5 million in economic stimulus to the City of Melbourne.
9. Customers were requested to fill out a short survey at the time of making a claim. 92 per cent of customers indicated that Midweek Melbourne Money was a key factor in their decision to return to the city. 52 per cent of customers also engaged in activities such as shopping, seeing a movie or a live performance, with 29 per cent of those people spending more than \$100.
10. Analysis of mobility data reveals that the city reactivated strongly through the period of the Program. The program's impact combined with other successful activations such as the Christmas Festival – as well as increased end of year celebratory activities such as workplace functions, family get-togethers and Christmas shopping – to generate significant momentum. The mobility data indicates that Midweek Melbourne Money provided a particularly positive impact on midweek activity in key hospitality precincts, such as Lygon Street and Chinatown.

11. Melbourne Money is a proven economic stimulus tool of great value to the City of Melbourne. As evidenced through two successful program rollouts, the program can be administered during times of economic or social uncertainty or hesitation. Future rounds of Melbourne Money are likely to be most impactful when applied:
 - 11.1. to reactivate following the Omicron variant or future variants
 - 11.2. during traditionally quiet seasonal city visitation periods such as the winter months.
12. With some additional program development, there is also potential for Melbourne Money to be expanded beyond hospitality to incorporate arts and cultural experiences.

Recommendation from management

13. That Council:
 - 13.1. Notes the huge success of the Midweek Melbourne Money program in driving visitation of people back to the city, to firstly engage in a dining experience and then enjoy other activities such as retail shopping, live performances or visits to cultural venues.
 - 13.2. Requests management work with the Victorian government to explore the potential for future rounds of the Melbourne Money program to be funded through the Melbourne City Revitalisation Fund, looking to expand the program beyond hospitality to include arts and cultural experiences.

Attachments:

1. Supporting Attachment (Page 3 of 3)

Supporting Attachment

Legal

1. No direct legal issues arise from the recommendation from management.

Finance

2. Total costs for the Program including customer rebates, third party contractors and program marketing and promotion were \$6.8 million, funded jointly by the City of Melbourne and the Victorian government through the \$200 million Melbourne City Revitalisation Fund.

Conflict of interest

3. No member of Council staff, or other person engaged under a contract, involved in advising on or preparing this report has declared a material or general conflict of interest in relation to the matter of the report.

Health and Safety

4. OHS issues in relation to COVID-19 safe practices were considered in delivery of the Program. These included delivery of the project from remote-work locations wherever possible and strict adherence to PPE practices for business concierge teams when physically visiting businesses.

Stakeholder consultation

5. To be able to complete their Midweek Melbourne Money claim, all claimants were required to answer a short survey around reasons for visitation. Further consultation included one on one conversations with 120 businesses made by the CoM Business Concierge Service immediately after the closure of the program and discussions with the Night Time Economy Advisory Committee.

Relation to Council policy

6. The Program is consistent with Council Plan objective Economy of the future, to focus on driving economic recovery and creating the conditions for a strong, adaptive, sustainable and thriving future city economy supported by a diverse mix of industries and jobs that provide dignity and opportunity. Midweek Melbourne Money also responds directly with Council's Major initiative 1: Continue to strengthen Melbourne's economic recovery.

Environmental sustainability

7. There were no environmental issues identified as a result of the Program.