



An Agenda for Geelong's Public Transport

March 2007

The Crisis Facing Geelong's Public Transport

Geelong's local public transport is failing to meet the needs of the travelling public.

While bus patronage is growing in Ballarat and Bendigo, cities less than half Geelong's size, recent figures from the Department of Infrastructure show that bus use in Geelong is declining.

The reasons for this are simple:

- Bus services are infrequent and stop running too early in the evening.
- Routes are circuitous, confusing and don't form an effective network.
- Most buses fail to make reliable connections to trains, and some don't even run to the station.
- Central bus stops that were previously convenient and easy-to-find have been scattered around the edge of the city.

Meanwhile, outside the car-based malls, the streets of Geelong's city centre that rely on pedestrian traffic show no signs of revitalisation, and no longer have any buses to bring shoppers to their streets.

Car parks at Marshall, South Geelong, Geelong and North Geelong railway stations are overflowing following recent improvements to rail services. Yet many buses from suburban Geelong still fail to connect with trains, meaning there is no alternative but to drive to these stations.

Geelong will not meet targets to increase the number or proportion of trips by public transport, leaving the city highly vulnerable to further petrol price rises, and failing to meet its responsibility to reduce its transport greenhouse gas emissions.

No authority has yet been able to develop an effective strategy to turn this sorry situation around. A joint attempt by the Department of Infrastructure and the regional development agency, G21, to develop a plan for public transport appears to have failed: an opaque and closed process developed a disappointing draft document. The final version of the plan is currently being re-written by the Department of Infrastructure without any public comment and without any release date.

Ten Steps to Turn Geelong's Public Transport Around

Given the lack of effective planning or leadership from existing institutions, this paper aims to set an agenda for public transport in Geelong over the next four years.

The following ten actions start with changes to governance arrangements and then suggest, for the interim, some of the highest priority projects for the region.

1. Establish a Geelong Region Public Transport Authority

Indicative Cost: Low

A 'place-based', local authority should be established to plan public transport in the Geelong region.

Current governance arrangements see a small number of regional staff from the Department of Infrastructure administering contracts with private bus companies from Geelong to the South Australian border. While there are occasional interventions from head office, no effective strategic planning has been undertaken for the system in the Geelong region, and there is no public reporting of patronage levels or system performance on a city or regional level.

A Geelong Region Public Transport Authority would provide an institutional basis for planning and managing local public transport (provided mainly by buses) and its links to V/Line services. It would provide a clear 'go to' agency for local councils, media and the general public for information about system performance, local infrastructure and service planning.

It would regularly report its performance against indicators such as the rate of public transport use in the region, and the efficiency of service delivery. Consultation programs that aim to achieve an agreed approach to improving public transport services within the city would help to involve the local community and create a greater sense of 'ownership' of the issue.

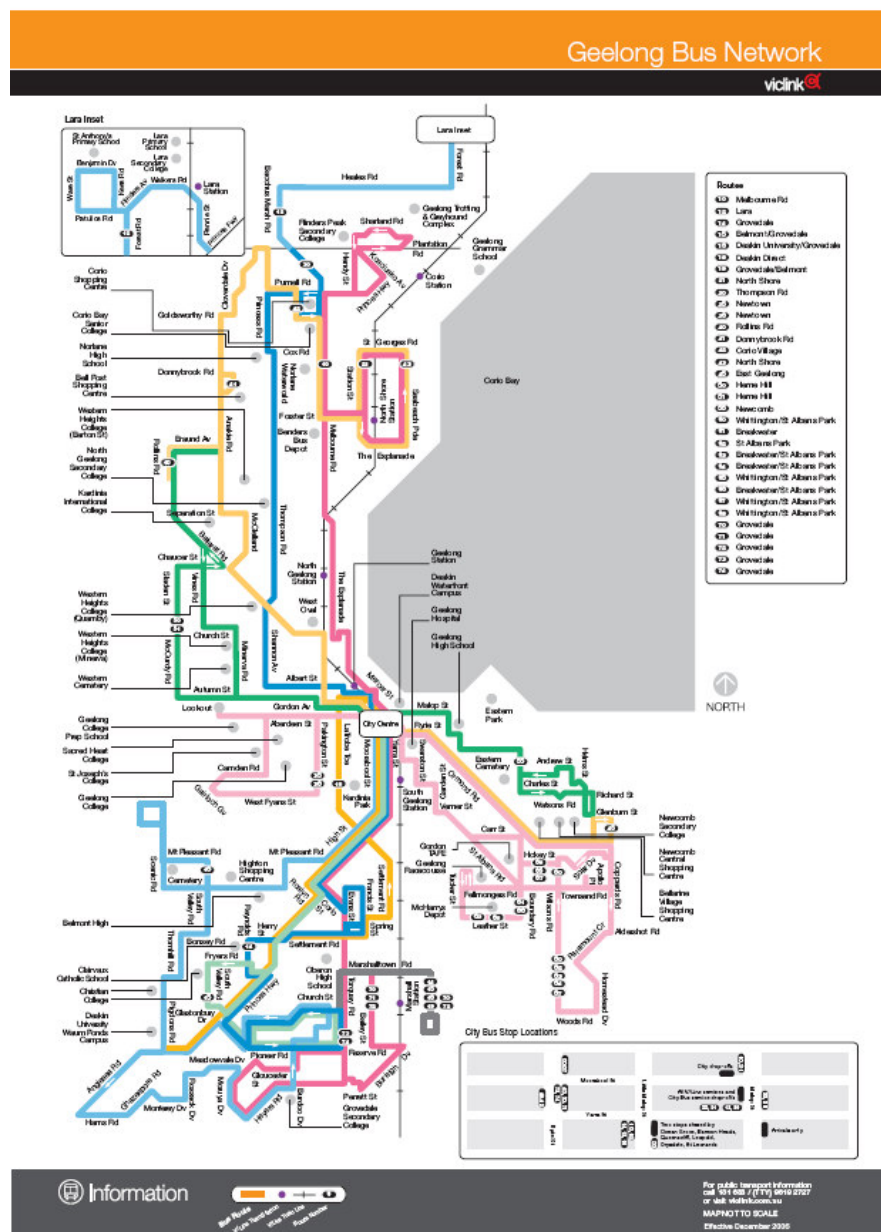
A clear designation of responsibilities between the Authority and existing agencies would ensure that unnecessary duplication does not occur. See the paper *A Regional Public Transport Authority for Geelong* for further information.

2. Bus Route and Service Review

Indicative Cost: \$70,000-100,000

Bus routes in Geelong are confusing, circuitous (meaning people “travelling through” are frustrated by unnecessary delays), and fail to form a network that allows travellers to make easy trips across the city. A route and service review is desperately needed to restructure the network and make it simple, convenient and efficient.

See the following route map from the *Victorian Fares and Ticketing Manual* (p. 54). Routes in the southern parts of Geelong are particularly confusing, circuitous and difficult to follow.



As with Geelong's suburban routes, bus routes to the Bellarine Peninsula can also be confusing and indirect. Routes change according to the time of day, and buses run at varying low frequencies that result in long and unpredictable waits at bus stops for passengers. Once on the bus, deviations from the main road frustrate and delay passengers.

Many bus route problems were created by the gradual evolution of bus routes to serve new areas and facilities, without reviewing the route structure of the system as whole.

A Geelong- and Bellarine Peninsula-wide review of routes is required to guide future route upgrades and ensure that funding is spent effectively and on the highest priorities. In consultation with the public, this should be conducted by consultants with internationally-recognised expertise in transport planning.

3. Suburban Bus 'Seed' Funding

Indicative Cost: under \$4 million per year

More frequent services are needed to provide high-quality public transport to built-up areas like suburban Geelong.

It is widely accepted by public transport planners that for passengers to 'walk' up to a service without having to consult a timetable, a service must be no less frequent than every 10 minutes, or 15 minutes as an absolute maximum. Most buses in Geelong run less than every half hour or hour, leaving passengers waiting for up to three to six times this recommended time.

Current bus services also stop too early in the evening (and often start too late in the morning): for example, many buses stop around 7pm on weekdays and around 5pm on weekends, well before trains from Melbourne have finished and making it impossible to get around Geelong by public transport.

Every major bus route should be upgraded to services running at least every 15 minutes from around 6am till midnight. This would create a fully-functioning network where people could easily change between services to access any point in the city.

However, this would be a radical change from current service levels. We therefore suggest that, guided by the Route Review proposed above, at least three major trunk routes should be implemented as the first priority.

The map below shows the three proposed routes, with some of the major destinations highlighted along the way.



These routes feed railway stations, serve major retail centres, universities and large residential areas, and run directly along major arterial roads. They are also likely to form the main routes of any upgraded future bus system.

These routes should run at least every 15 minutes from 6am until late evening, then at least every 30 minutes till midnight, seven days a week. This is approximately the same service standard already employed on ‘Smartbus’ routes on major arterial roads in Melbourne’s outer suburbs.

Based on conservative industry standards, the total cost of these new routes (excluding fare revenue) would be under \$4 million per year.

The significant resources freed from parallel sections of existing routes should be redeployed to create new routes or to upgrade services in other parts of Geelong. As seed funding, the additional fare revenue received from passengers attracted to the improved services should be ploughed back into further improving the system.

4. Bellarine Peninsula Bus ‘Seed’ Funding

Indicative Cost: \$4.6 million per year

On the Bellarine Peninsula, some bus services only run approximately every hour, and others run even less frequently.

Despite the pressure of high petrol prices and high levels of travel to Geelong from major towns like Torquay, Ocean Grove and Drysdale / Clifton Springs, this level of service provides little alternative to driving for most residents of the Bellarine Peninsula and the Surfcoast. They could be faced with waiting periods of up to an hour when the equivalent trip by car takes only half that time.

The structure of the current routes also means that travelling itself can take significantly longer than the equivalent trip by car, thanks to circuitous routes and deviations from main roads.

We therefore propose that three routes, running every half hour from 6am to midnight, 7 days a week, run along main roads (and to the major shopping centres) to:

- Torquay / Jan Juc;
- Ocean Grove; and
- Drysdale / Clifton Springs.

Buses could also service possible park and ride facilities on the outskirts of each town.

On conservative industry standards, the cost of introducing these three new routes to this standard (including buses, but excluding fare revenue) would be approximately \$4.6 million per year.

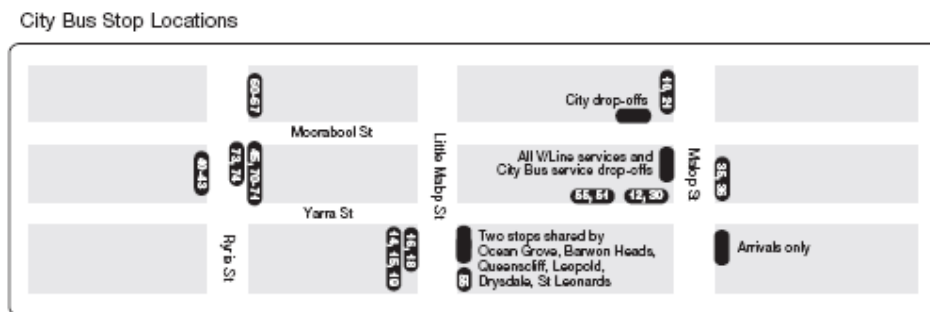
The significant resources freed from parallel sections of existing routes should be redeployed to provide circuit “feeder” buses within townships, and to upgrade service frequency to other parts of the Bellarine Peninsula, such as to Portarlington and Queenscliff.

As seed funding, the additional fare revenue from passengers attracted to the improved services, should be ploughed back into further improving the system.

5. Review Bus Stops and Circulation in Geelong’s CAA

Indicative Cost: Low

The central bus stops that were previously convenient and easy-to-find in Geelong’s city centre, have been scattered around the edge of the city since works on the street surface made it necessary to move them. Due to indecision over the best location for stops, the inferior temporary stops remain and are still being used. This has also increased travel times of buses and passengers.



Note that the diagram (from page 54 of the Victorian Fares and Ticketing Manual) is not to scale, making the stops look closer together than they actually are.

A limited number of bus stops should be remarked (at minimal cost) at the intersection of Malop and Moorabool, to allow buses to stop and drop off and pick up passengers. Beyond the time required to do this, there should be no need for buses to sit there any longer.

A single bus stop should be provided near the intersection at each block, to allow convenient pick up of passengers at regular intervals for any passing bus, and to allow passengers easy access to other bus routes and destinations along the cross street.

6. Waurm Ponds Bus Interchange

Indicative Cost: Low

The intersection of Pioneer and South Valley Roads with the Princes Highway should be the location of a strategic bus interchange for Geelong's south-western suburbs.

These major arterial roads and their associated bus routes serve Deakin University, a railway station and extensive residential catchments. The interchange site itself is located next to major travel destinations: the Waurm Ponds sub-regional shopping centre and the proposed new swimming and fitness centre.

A bus interchange is required to allow passengers to change quickly and easily between services going to different destinations, and for convenient access to the adjacent shopping and leisure centres. This will maximise the efficiency of the future bus network.

The design need not be elaborate: it is likely to simply require changes to intersections, simple shelters and an area to allow buses to turn around. Planning for the interchange should be completed now, so that it can be incorporated into the design of the new swimming and leisure centre (if required) before the centre is built.

7. Better Value for Money: Trains every half hour during the day

Indicative Cost: Low-Medium

Trains between Geelong and Melbourne currently run every hour outside peak commuting times, while they run up to every 20 minutes or less during peak times. This is below international and Australian best practice for cities of similar size: half hourly services run during the day between Sydney and Gosford, as well as between Brisbane and Robina (Gold Coast).

The low frequency outside the peak discourages travellers from using the train during that period, as they can drive to Melbourne in the time they might spend waiting for the next train. This especially discourages business travellers from using the train during the day, as staff could be left waiting up to one hour between trains.

Running trains every half hour would also improve patronage on the upgraded connecting "feeder" bus services (proposed above).

The cost of upgrading train frequency should be far from prohibitive, given that many of the staff and trains required to run the services are sitting idle between the peaks. The largest costs are likely to be fuel and additional maintenance costs, but shorter trains can run during the off-peak to partly offset these. Running trains every half hour, at least between the peaks, would allow Victoria to get better value out of its existing investment in rolling stock, infrastructure and supporting services.

8. Geelong Railway Station – New Exit to Mercer/Brougham Street

Indicative Cost: under \$2 million

Geelong's main railway station is cut off from easy access to Mercer Street intersection and the new development area in the Western Wedge by a small car yard occupying the north-east corner of the station block.

A previous station masterplan signalled its intention to acquire the land for redevelopment. Buying the land (before its value climbs to prohibitive levels) and redeveloping the intersection would allow a pedestrian walkway and bus exit to Mercer and Brougham Streets to be introduced.

Allowing buses to exit from the northern end of the station would allow easier routing of buses past the station and allow more options for bus circulation through the Western Wedge, the Waterfront and Geelong's central business district.

9. Geelong Railway Station– New Access Bridge

Indicative Cost: \$3-5 million

Currently, the only public access to Geelong Railway Station's platforms 2 and 3 is by footbridge. This makes it difficult for people with impaired mobility (including wheelchairs) to get to the platforms, who must struggle to climb stairs or otherwise seek special assistance from station staff.

An additional new bridge is required (at least with lifts, and perhaps with escalators) to give access to the platform.

A recent Station masterplan prepared also envisioned that a new bridge could be extended to provide better access to the station car park (and a future redevelopment site) on the western side of the station. Any additional cost should not be considered funding for public transport, but should be considered in the bridge design.

More elaborate bridges and station refurbishments recently completed at Perth's Bassendean and New South Wales' Berowra railway stations cost around \$6 million.

10. Southern Rail Corridor Study

Indicative Cost: \$100,000+

A study is required to assess future rail service patterns and station locations in southern Geelong, as well as the feasibility of extending the railway line to Torquay.

A draft urban design plan for the Armstrong Creek Urban Growth Area has just been released, which proposes a new station on the existing line at Rossack Drive, and proposes that the area's major commercial centre will be located next to a proposed station on a proposed railway line to Torquay.

However, no feasibility study has yet been undertaken on a line to Torquay. If the line is not built, the preferred location for the commercial centre might be next to a new station on the Surfcoast Highway.

The Rail Corridor Study should be conducted in conjunction with the bus route review to ensure that any new stations and services complement the structure of the feeder bus network.

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