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News

Newsletter of the
Public Transport Users Association

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Panel Rejects Freeway as Report Goes AWOL

The 243-page report of the independent panel hearing into the so-called Scoresby Corridor was sent to Planning Minister Rob Maclellan in April. The Minister was supposed to release the report to the public a month after receiving it. To the frustration of the PTUA and the other 40 community and environmental organisations that supported our submissions, the Minister suppressed the report, refusing to release it in spite of FOI requests by the PTUA. In reply to our FOI request, the Department of Infrastructure claimed that to release the report would not be in the public interest because "it would be likely to engender confusion in the community".

The PTUA has received information that the panel report has, in fact, rejected the freeway and supported public transport initiatives instead. This explains the Minister's reluctance to release the report with an impending state election. It would surely be a terrible thing to "confuse" the residents of the outer east and cause them to question whether the freeway is the best response to the area's transport problems.

The panel's report has vindicated the PTUA and other groups, which had argued for alternatives to the \$800 million-plus freeway. It had also exposed the misinformation and errors circulated over many years by freeway advocates.

We understand the panel to have concluded that:

- * The proposed Scoresby Freeway would do little to improve traffic congestion in the area, even on roads like Springvale Road, because most traffic is local and radial (heading to or towards the city), with very few people making cross trips such as from Dandenong to Ringwood.

- * There is no evidence that the Scoresby Freeway would help the economy of the eastern suburbs.

- * The Freeway would generate additional traffic, in-

crease pollution and create pressure for urban development in environmentally sensitive areas.

- * A balanced package of alternatives incorporating a major upgrade of public transport could have provided a viable, less expensive alternative to the Freeway. It should have been evaluated by the Department of Infrastructure planners responsible for the EES, but wasn't.

- * The Rowville rail line could be built for as little as \$100 million.

- * The freeway would create pressure for a further freeway through the Eltham/Warrandyte "Green Wedge".

The Government response to the panel report has not yet been forthcoming, suggesting that the Minister would prefer to hide the verdict. It is clear that with considerable opposition from residents, community and environment groups, and now several of the local councils, the proponents of the freeway are now on the defensive. With a little imagination and courage, the government could turn the problem posed by the report into an opportunity. Why not accept the umpire's verdict and agree to give residents of the outer east the public transport they deserve, and also introduce low-cost, high-benefit local road schemes, like eliminating road-rail level crossings?

Meanwhile, the deafening silence on the whole issue from the State opposition continues.

Members, especially in the eastern and southern suburbs, are urged to write, ring and visit their local MPs and urge the immediate release of the panel report and for the government to reject the freeway in favour of the public transport measures recommended by the panel. You can also help by writing to newspapers and local councils.

Vaughan Williams

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Keeping in touch...

PTUA office

Ground Floor, 247 Flinders Lane, Melb.
Telephone: (03) 9650 7898
e-mail: ptua@alphalink.com.au

Committee Meetings

Monthly on Thursday evenings.
Please call the office for details.

Membership Enquiries

Graeme Gibson: (03) 9650 7898

World Wide Web

Our home page is on Vicnet at
<http://www.vicnet.net.au/~ptua/firstpt.htm>

Committee Members

Paul Mees — President

John McPherson — Vice President

Les Chandra — Secretary

Wendy Everingham — Treasurer

James Forsyth

Alan Hardie

Tim Hoffman

Mary Jamieson

Tim Mattingsbrooke

Anna Morton

Anthony Morton

Demitri Pimenides

David Robertson

Christina Sindt

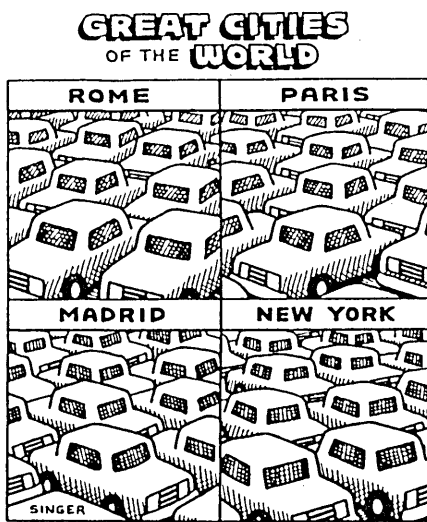
Vaughan Williams

CityLink court action nears climax

Last edition, we advised that the Federal Court had sent Peter Allan's appeal against the City Link tax breaks back to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal to be heard on the merits. Unfortunately, the AAT refused to hear the case until Transurban's appeal to the Full Federal Court against this decision was heard (the appeal hearing is on 30 August). This required Peter to go back to the Federal Court for an order called a 'writ of mandamus' compelling the AAT to hear his case. At the hearing of this application on 12 July, the AAT backed down and agreed to hear Peter's case. The Tribunal has scheduled a preliminary 'directions hearing' for 17 August, and we are expecting a hearing date to be set for September or October.

The "speedy" retrial of Phil Morey's challenge to the City Link prospectus came on for hearing at the Federal Court on 21 July. Transurban made Phil an offer of settlement, which he accepted—basically because it would by now be too late for his case to affect City Link, even if successful. Unfortunately, one of the conditions of settlement was that the terms not be disclosed. However, the resolution of this case now leaves us free to concentrate on the more promising case, the challenge to the tax breaks. If the challenge is successful, it will strip City Link of its tax-free status, and require the consortium to pay hundreds of millions of dollars in back-tax.

Tony Morton



Trams crawl at freeway lights

All over Melbourne trams get a poor deal at traffic lights in favour of keeping cars moving at a (slightly) faster rate.

One of the worst examples of this practice is at Mt Alexander Road, the city end of the pre-City Link Tullamarine Freeway.

It is here that trams heading towards the city are held up for a considerable time and things look certain to get worse, as Transurban will be anxious to get as much traffic as possible through their overhead cash registers by discouraging tram travel.

At the same time, Transurban will get the opportunity to punish motorists choosing not to use City Link as they approach the city heading south along Mt Alexander Road.

Perhaps the best solution to this mess would be electronic remote switches which tram drivers could use approaching a red light. This system is currently used in European cities such as Zurich.

Members are asked to contact their State MPs and demand that such switches be fitted to trams instead of the ineffective loops used at present. Please advise the PTUA office of any positive response.

Peter Behan

Democrats Sell Out

Fares Still to Rise

The Australian Democrats reached agreement with the Government on the GST on 28 May. The Democrats have reneged on their commitment to the PTUA and other groups to oppose a GST on public transport.

This will unfortunately lead to rising fares, falling patronage and ultimately service cutbacks. The Democrats had the chance to encourage the usage of cheaper and greener public transport. Instead they have further eroded the price competitiveness of the system and encouraged more motor vehicle usage, with all the drawbacks in-

herent to such a route.

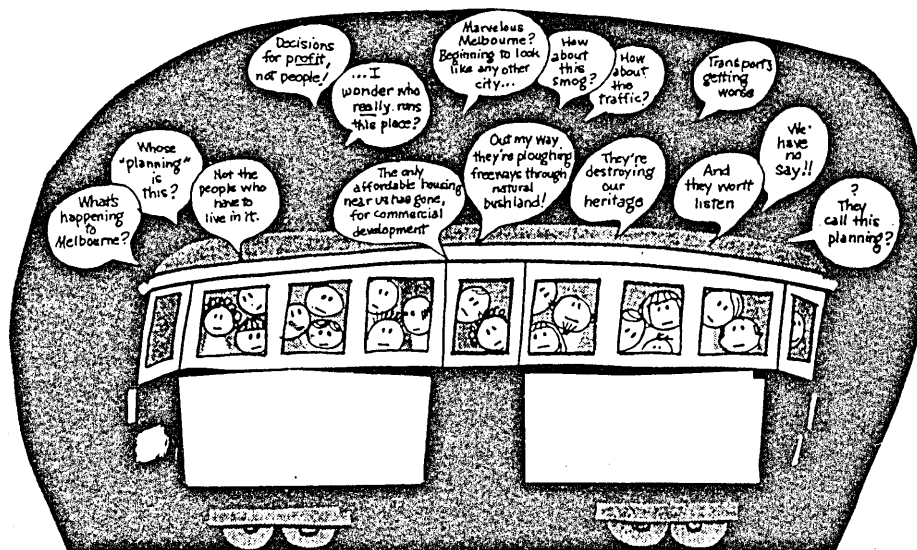
Worse, the Democrats have won no concessions by way of *quid pro quo* in the area of public transport. Users will be losers as a result of this Democrat deal.

Democrat Senator Lyn Allison has said that they "much regret [their] failure to persuade" the Government on this matter. The Democrats had power of veto over a GST on public transport and did not need to "persuade" the Government of anything. Senator Allison has offered vague promises to look at the question of FBT for company cars

and tax-deductibility for public transport in the upcoming business tax debate. However, it seems clear to the PTUA that promises from the Democrats are not worth the paper they are printed on.

The GST deal has seen the resignation of the Democrats' state transport spokesperson (and PTUA committee member) Vaughan Williams, highlighting deep division within the Democrats over both the specific PT issue and the broader tax package. Vaughan declined to comment.

Wendy Everingham



The Propaganda of Privatisation

George Orwell's novel *1984* has a chilling scene in which the dictator Big Brother cuts the chocolate ration, and the propaganda press reports "spontaneous" demonstrations thanking Big Brother for increasing the chocolate ration. Much of the reporting of the recent privatisation of the rail and tram networks displays about the same level of critical analysis.

Currently, the Public Transport Corporation receives approximately \$300 million per annum in capital and operating grants. The higher figures of up to \$700 million that are often quoted incorporate accounting adjustments like debt payment on past government borrowings for public transport. These are irrelevant to privatisation, because the

private consortiums are not taking over these obligations

The government has announced that, in their first year of operation, the three private consortiums will be paid a total of some \$400 million, plus "recoupment of concession fares" as an additional unspecified payment (this is included in the current \$300 million figure). Gradually the payments to the private operators will decline, but over the life of the contract, the total amounts paid out will be more than at present, not less, just as was the case in the UK when British Rail was privatised.

The other area of misinformation is the patronage targets set by the private operators. These 'targets' for impressive-sounding increases in patronage

have not been taken into account in setting the subsidy level. In other words, the operators are under no obligation whatsoever to achieve them. History shows that they are most unlikely to do so.

The National Bus Company took over a Met network that carried 16 million passengers per annum. National carried 14 million passengers in 1997-8, a decline of over 10%. The State Government, however, claims that National has actually increased patronage by 15%! Big Brother would be proud of the propaganda machine that can so shamelessly make such claims, and the media that allows the machine to get away with it.

Paul Mees

Weekend Services Improve: Don't Miss the Bus!

As reported in the last edition, tram and train services on Sundays have been improved considerably. However, most weekend bus services are still either non-existent or so poor only a masochist would use them.

Residents of middle, outer and western suburbs are being discriminated against by State government public transport policies.

Trams throughout Melbourne's inner suburbs now run every 12 minutes on Sundays. This is great news for people who live near trams, but what about the 75% of Melburnians who live in ar-

reas served only by buses (if you can call it a service)? Most buses don't run that frequently even in peak hour, and don't run at all on Sundays. Why are people in the suburbs being discriminated against?

The example of the Premier's own electorate, which includes Burwood and Surrey Hills, is a good one. The local tram services along Whitehorse Road and Burwood Highway run every 4 minutes in peak hour, every 8 minutes during the day and every 12 minutes on Saturdays and (now) Sundays. The trams run until midnight every day of

the year. Meanwhile, bus services through most of Melbourne are hopeless. If you're lucky, there's a bus every half hour in peak hour, one per hour on Saturdays and nothing at all in the evenings or on weekends. But Surrey Hills is less densely populated, and has higher incomes, than many outer suburbs, so people there, if anything, have less need for public transport.

The Government has delivered on its promise for better weekend trains and trams. Now, the buses' turn has come.

Vaughan Williams

Thuggish 'Customer Service': Cooper's Police State

It is hardly news to PTUA members that trams and trains are frequented by those odious public relations nightmares we all know as ticket inspectors, now called 'Customer Service Employees' in the pretense that they are there for some purpose other than to check tickets.

The PTUA has become concerned as a result of a large number of complaints about the behaviour of these people. Some of the conduct attributed to ticket inspectors (and in some cases supported by personal experience and observation!) includes:

- General rudeness and obnoxious behavior.
- Overbearing and intimidating conduct including spurious and legally baseless threats of arrest or of large fines (against passengers who have committed very minor offences or no offence at all).
- Refusal to disclose name and other details, produce identification or provide information.
- Excessive harassment of passengers (including passengers not actually on public transport at the time).
- Purported 'confiscation' of valid tickets or of other personal items such as driver's licences.
- Serious assaults of passengers.

Conversely, ticket inspectors are often uninterested in dealing with the few occasions where people are doing the wrong thing. Many so-called CSE's blithely ignore smoking passengers or

feet on seats and are totally incapable of actually providing information to passengers (like when the next tram will be when the current tram is short-shunted).

This is not to say that all ticket inspectors are bad, there are probably some who are "just doing their jobs" and we can imagine how unpleasant the job must be given its appalling reputation. But the use of ticket inspectors as some sort of privatised army or police force is totally inappropriate. Ticket inspectors do not have anywhere near the volume of training or accountability that police are required to have.

Should you find yourself on the receiving end of a 'customer service employee', the following information may be of assistance:

- You do not have to give your name or address unless you have been told what you are meant to have done wrong.
- The CSE has to provide you with identification, including their name and depot. Always ask for this identification. If they refuse to produce it, you can safely refuse to deal with them.
- They do not have the power to 'confiscate' a valid ticket or any of your other property.
- Get the names and contact details of other passengers who have witnessed the incident immediately.
- If you are assaulted, see a doctor and photograph any injuries as soon as possible.
- Contact the PTC and police and in-

sist they preserve any video evidence.

- Complain to your local MP and to the Ombudsman.

Vaughan Williams

The PTUA's role in all of this

For some time now, we have been encouraging people who have problems with the new ticketing system to complain directly to their local MPs (i.e. go to see the MP: don't just write to them!), rather than attempting to pursue complaints on their behalf. There are three main reasons for this:

1. We have found that representations by MPs have the greatest 'success rate' in having inappropriate infringement notices etc. rectified. By contrast, the PTC and its successors treat the PTUA as 'the enemy' just like the passengers we represent.

2. Large numbers of complaints are the most likely spur to MPs taking the failure of the ticketing system seriously as an issue. This applies to both the Government and Opposition, and is particularly important in the lead-up to a State election.

3. The PTUA office is staffed entirely by volunteers. We simply do not have the resources to pursue the large number of very justified complaints the ticketing system is currently generating.

We hope members will appreciate the reasons we have taken this course.

Paul Mees

Freeway Threat to Merri Creek

Federal Road Grants are available to build a totally unnecessary part of the Hume Freeway south of Craigieburn. Although the present dual carriageway road runs through industrial areas until south of Barry Road and has up to 8 lanes, the government's intention is to spend a minimum of \$250 million on a freeway bypass to the east of the present built-up areas and along the Merri Creek with its unique wildflower grasslands—so special as to be listed on the National Estate. Ten kilometres of freeway at \$25 million per kilometre! Who said public transport was expensive?

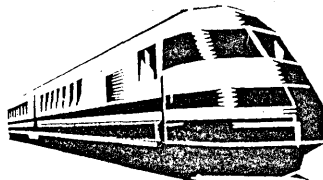
If the freeway ends at the Metro-

politan Ring Road, as currently proposed, this will create a 'bottleneck' which will be used as justification to extend the road further south. Until the early 1980s, the planning reservation for the freeway ran all the way down Merri Creek to the top of Hoddle Street in Clifton Hill. VicRoads (formerly the Country Roads Board) resisted the removal of the original reservation and would love to have it back. The current plans are clearly a 'Trojan horse' concealing the real, long-term agenda.

Our President Paul Mees led the opposition to this proposal at the Environment Effects hearing and—as in the

Scoresby Corridor case—showed how the cost/benefit ratio from investment in public transport improvements would be much greater than the small time gains for traffic moved from the present road to the freeway. Although United States Federal legislation allows states to choose to spend transport funding on transit rather than roads, no such options are available in Australia.

Friends of Merri Creek (PO Box 7, Northcote 3070 or phone Kate on 9386 9570) advocate greater use of rail for freight, and high quality public transport, as a viable approach to protect the Merri Creek and its delicate grasslands.



Country Victoria

The trains our Government forgot

The Premier's announcement on Friday, 25 June that multinational transport operator National Express had received the franchise to run the V/Line Passenger operation for the next 10 years was the opportunity for the government to also announce restored rail passenger services to Bairnsdale, Mildura, Horsham/Dimboola and Leongatha, but no such announcement was made. All these services were essential to important distant regions of Victoria with aging populations. The Auditor-General reported that bus replacement has resulted in huge drops in patronage and that private operation is no cheaper for the government.

PTUA calculations, based on the limited information made available, show National Express will receive large subsidies, greater than the V/Line network presently costs to run. Actual current subsidies for V/Line Passenger are about \$35million per year; National Express will receive approximately \$78 million in 1999 dropping to \$46 million in 2009 at the end of the contract. The 'fat' in the contract provides a substantial profit margin for the private operator

and would more than cover any extra subsidy required to reinstate the services slashed in 1993, especially when run with the efficient Sprinter railcars now available.

Now—in the run-up to a State election—the communities of the Sunraysia region, East Gippsland, South Gippsland and western Victoria discover the benefits of privatisation are a myth the current government has been peddling simply to keep people quiet. The deal with National Express offers not the slightest suggestion or hope that the government cares about its abandonment of large parts of the state in its provision of quality public transport. There is **no requirement** that National Express even consider bringing back these train services, even though they would often be cheaper than a fleet of buses.

The PTUA believes that only the return to State parliament of more non-aligned independent members such as Russell Savage in Mildura and Susan Davies in South Gippsland—both of whom focussed closely on return of train services in their last election campaigns—will force this or the alternative

government to respond to the obvious needs for quality public transport to and from the far corners of the state for health, education and tourism reasons.

In East Gippsland the Save Our Train Group based in Bairnsdale has already been seeking a meeting with National Express, and wish to include local parliamentary representatives and councillors in a joint approach. Based on a recent survey right across the East Gippsland Shire, the case for returning the train to Bairnsdale is very strong. 96% of those contacted at random support the return of the train. Most East Gippsland residents travel to Melbourne regularly, most residents would use the train if it returned and some of those who do not travel to Melbourne at present would use the train if available. Bob Bleakley and Lindsay Rowe have approached many backpacker hostels and motels in the Bairnsdale, Paynesville and Lakes Entrance areas and have received enthusiastic endorsements for the return of the train. These will go to National Express.

John McPherson

With thanks to 'On The Rails' newsletter.

LETTERS TO THE PTUA

Trams at Victoria St

The Swanston St tram service is frequent and provides a good service to Melbourne University and Lygon St, however, northbound trams are often delayed at Victoria Street. These delays are caused by the traffic light sequence at the Franklin/Swanston and Victoria/Swanston intersections. This sequence is designed to favour car traffic and is synchronised to provide a through flow for cars. By the time trams depart from Franklin St and stop at Victoria St to load and unload passengers, the lights have changed to red and a long delay (and tram bunching) results as the sequence favours Victoria St traffic.

There are several possible solutions to this problem, such as adjusting the sequence to favour trams, or placing the safety barrier on the northern side of Victoria St to remove the necessity for the tram to stop while facing a green light. As most passengers are travelling to offices on the north side of Victoria St this would benefit them as well as speeding up the trams.

Donald Barker

[Editor—We agree! This problem also applies on other routes crossing Victoria Pde such as Elizabeth St, Brunswick St, Nicholson St. Vastly improved tram priority at traffic lights is long-standing PTUA policy.]

Student Concession Cards

As you are probably aware, tertiary concession cards cost \$110. This is far beyond the means of many students who are most in need of cheaper fares. As public transport is such a vital service to many students it is essential that it remains accessible to those on a low income. Current conditions create a situation where students are forced to continue buying the only ticket they can afford—a concession fare—and risk prosecution for their actions. I believe that the price of a concession card should be reduced to something more accessible. This is an important matter that needs to be addressed.

Emma Burt

[Editor—We consider the present price of tertiary student concession cards to be outrageous and support the price being reduced to a small administrative fee. The present situation effectively denies concession fares to tertiary students, especially those that do not use public transport often enough to justify such a large upfront cost, which defeats the purpose of offering concession fares in the first place.]

Cheaper to Destroy the Environment

This letter is actually being produced while on hold to the Met InfoLine (10 minutes so far). Being keen cyclists and not enjoying the futility nor the environmental disaster that is driving during peak times, we recently decided to combine cycling and train travel as a regular means to travel to and from work. Our homes are in Hawthorn and Middle Park and workplace in Springvale. Unfortunately, this method is too expensive.

To drive: 40km/day @ 10 litres/100km = 4 litres per day, fuel cost is 65-70c/litre, so lets round up to \$3 per day to drive.

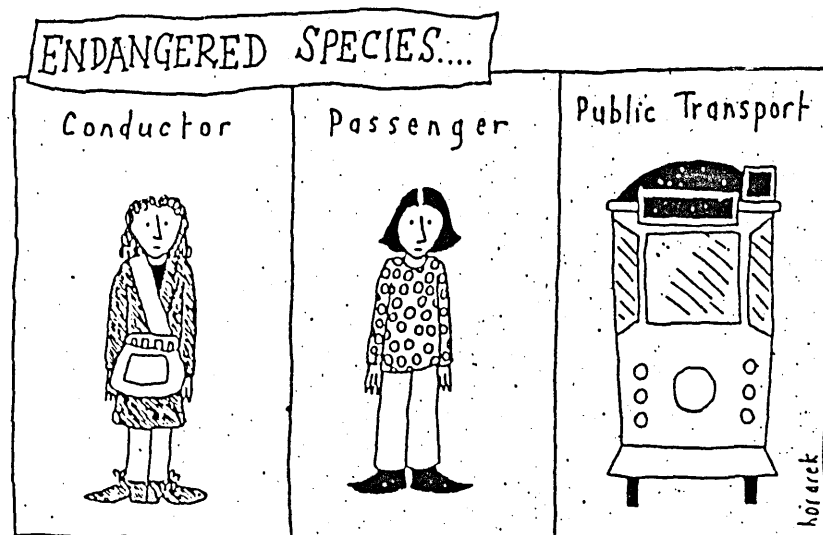
To cycle/train/cycle: At peak times one must purchase two tickets—one for the passenger, one for the bike. The nearest station on the Dandenong/Pakenham line is Toorak. I must purchase two Zone 1/2 all day tickets @ \$7.10 each. To ride/train/ride costs \$14.20 per day.

Therefore it is 473% more expensive to be environmentally responsible in my daily travel to and from work.

This leaves us disgusted at the thought that we must drive due to economic logistics. It leaves one wondering whether the State Government has any environmentally sustainable policies in place to promote public transport use, or any economists investigating the cost-price elasticity of demand for public transport. Naturally, after 15 minutes the robot on the infoline was not at all interested in discussing the matter.

Tim Wraight & Robert Christie

[Editor: While a bicycle can actually be carried on a concession ticket, and the above calculation does not consider some of the costs of driving besides fuel (registration, insurance, maintenance, and the car itself), we recognise the poor price competitiveness of the system. Australia has some of the cheapest petrol in the world. The PTUA supports free carriage of bicycles on trains in the counter-peak direction as well as during off-peak periods to encourage the train/bike combination, and better bicycle facilities at stations.]



In Brief.....

More Benefits of Privatisation

The National Bus Company has surreptitiously closed a city-bound bus stop at Grattan Street, on the Lygon Street route. This stop is the transfer point to the No. 402 bus, a major access point to the Lygon St precinct and Melbourne University as well as the Royal Womens Hospital.

A PTUA member who contacted National Bus to complain was advised that the stop was removed due to "safety concerns". The stop in question was used by cable trams and public buses from 1886 to 1993 with no safety problems whatsoever.

Isn't privatisation wonderful?

PTUA Meets National Express

On 21 July a PTUA delegation met the National Express transition director Peter Strachan and head of communications Kate O'Shea at their invitation for a one-hour discussion. We found them generally well informed about the ingredients of high-quality public transport but, regrettably, rigidly against the return of tram conductors. We assured them that tram conductors formed an essential part of Melbourne's tram system and that pressure from many quarters would continue for their restoration. National Express have won the franchises for the operation of Swanston Trams, Bayside Trains, V/line Passenger and had already bought National Bus Company. They will certainly have the dominant position in public transport provision in Melbourne and Victoria for the future. The PTUA remains opposed to the privatisation of public transport, but we felt it was legitimate to respond to National Express's request for a meeting to do what we can for public transport patrons.

Heavy Traffic Increases Risk of Lung Cancer

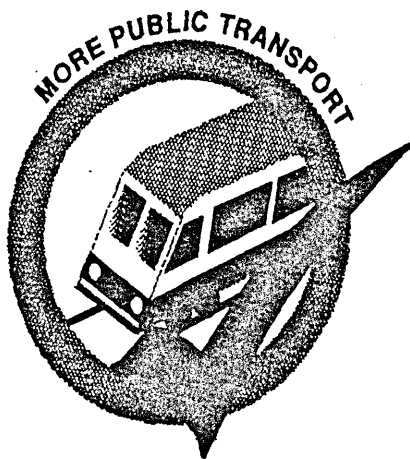
(from The Sunday Times News Service, London)

Researchers in Sweden have established a higher risk of lung cancer for men living in areas with the highest levels of air pollution. Smoking or non-smoking had no effect on the results. This is the first study to isolate the particular effects of traffic pollution near people's homes.

RACOF, Richmond Action Coalition on Freeways, points out that Australian studies show heavily trafficked Richmond already has deaths from lung cancer at nearly double the Australian and Victorian average. This makes cleansing technology on the single Burnley vent stack imperative—but not according to the Environment Protection Agency.

PTUA Office Opening Hours

Due to understaffing, the PTUA office will be closed on Mondays until further notice. We are usually open 10 am to 3:30pm, Tuesday to Friday. If we are not there, please leave a message and we will get back to you. Members interested in helping in the office, contact John McPherson in the office or on 9650 7898.



Swanston Street is Still a Walk

As this newsletter goes to press Swanston Street remains open and pedestrianised on a full time basis, and the City of Melbourne has not been able to solve the safety issues surrounding the proposed reopening. Swanston Street is a transit mall that caters for hundreds of trams every day and many thousands of passengers, yet is supposed to open safely in the evening for a few hundred cars to cruise around while an intensive tram service still runs.

Quite rightly the Public Transport Union remains dissatisfied with safety provisions, and has continued to demand safety zones at all stops in Swanston Street, the busiest tram route in Melbourne. The PTUA raised safety issues from day one in April when Lord Mayor Costigan made his sudden announcement that traffic should infest Swanston St once more. We believe that running two regimes, one by day and one by night, will be ultimately too confusing for tram passengers and even car drivers who will need to cope with complicated turn bans and restrictions on the use of the street.

As one of the few car free areas in the city Swanston Street does not need safety zones in its current configuration. To install them would be both retrograde and expensive, as kerb gutters in bluestone would need to be cut back to enable night time traffic to pass behind newly installed railings. Council officials have estimated a full re-opening could cost \$7million. Councillor Martin Brennan is now calling on the Council to recognise the folly of allowing cars back in and to rescind the April resolution. He has our full support.

John McPherson

Copy Deadline for the next PTUA News is 1 October

Newsletter Production Team:

Vaughan Williams, John McPherson and Tony Morton

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Our thanks to the dedicated mailout team

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A Warm Welcome to All Our New Members

Membership Drive

As a way of becoming more involved with the PTUA, we are actively seeking members to help us distribute membership forms. Maybe you know someone with a stall who would like to display some leaflets, alternatively you may like to monitor your local library's supply of forms or maybe even leave some at your local railway station. Anyone wanting to help, please give me a call at the office (9650 7898) and I can send you some leaflets in the mail.

Wendy Everingham

Changed your address?

Make sure your PTUA News follows you when you move!

Cut out or photocopy this form, fill in and return to us at
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