



## 2022: Election year

In this day and age it's difficult to predict the future with any great certainty, but this much is known: it's less than a year to the State Election, and the Andrews Government isn't slowing down on major infrastructure.

Level crossing removals, the Metro Tunnel, the Suburban Rail Loop, and numerous smaller-scale public transport projects are underway – along with a number of major road projects.

The government loves the Big Build, and despite the disruptions it causes, it seems the public does too.

Recent media coverage suggests that Metro 2 – the proposed rail tunnel connecting the Werribee line via Fishermans Bend, Southern Cross, Parkville with the

Mernda line – is also being considered.

This makes a lot of sense – not just from a rail capacity perspective, but also because heavy rail is the only possible way that the Fishermans Bend precinct can be a success. Any number of bus and tram routes and road upgrades simply won't cut it.

But if infrastructure is going gangbusters, what about public transport **services**?

On all modes, at most times of day, service frequency remains low for a city Melbourne's size, particularly outside the CBD and inner suburbs.

Meanwhile, the lasting effects of COVID-19 mean that CBD commuting growth is likely to be flat for some years, as many workers switch to part time work

from home.

The pressures recently felt on the inner core of the rail network will see some relief, allowing investment to be directed at suburban public transport, which can provide improved access to jobs, education and other opportunities.

A greater focus on reforming the bus network and upgrading service frequencies is vital to ensure Melbourne doesn't become a city of transport haves (rail and tram) and have-nots (infrequent buses).

And while there is a view that Melburnians won't catch buses, this is largely unfounded. Where high quality frequent direct reliable bus services are provided, we use them in spades.

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Service uplifts for trams and trains, particularly outside peak hour, will also help make public transport a viable option for more journeys – and ensure that the

most is made of all the new infrastructure being built.

And while the PTUA firmly believes that the focus for new initiatives should now be on services, there's certainly scope for smaller-scale projects such as tram extensions to better connect the network, and of course

getting on with the job of providing a fully accessible tram network.

Both sides of politics should be looking at these issues, and trying their best to avoid being distracted by diversions such as Trackless Trams.

## 40 years on, time to replace the 7-day Pass

2021 marks the 40th anniversary of Melbourne's public transport fare zones and tickets allowing travel for a specific time: 2 hours, daily, weekly, or longer.

Zones were revolutionary, bringing Melbourne's trams, trains and buses under a common ticket and fare system for the first time. This helped lead to higher patronage, as passengers could buy one ticket to cover a connected journey on a bus, train and tram.

But there has been a huge impact of COVID-19 on public transport demand. A recent Monash University Public Transport Research Group paper predicts patronage will most likely return to 80% of normal.

CBD commutes are expected to remain at lower levels, with probable widespread shift to part-time Work From Home arrangements for many office workers.

The PTUA believes the State Government should reform the fare system to make sure public transport remains attractive as we come out of COVID, including for off-peak, non-work journeys.

A key proposal is removing the 7-day Myki Pass and replacing it

with an automatic fare cap at a reduced cost of 4 days, or fewer.

Currently the 7-day Pass provides a week of travel for the cost of 5 days, and needs to be pre-purchased and loaded onto a Myki card.

For many people, the days of commuting 5 days a week to the office are over. A cheaper weekly cap would help improve the attractiveness of public transport for both work and non-work trips.

Weekly fare caps are used in cities such as Sydney and London. Unlike prepaid weekly Passes, they can be used by those who are not sure of their travel patterns at the start of the week.

The PTUA also believes the 30% off-peak discount should be returned, and made permanent. The discount was a temporary measure introduced in 2020, and ended in August.

Other fare changes worth consideration are removal of the Free Tram

Zone, to relieve CBD tram crowding and delays, and either replacing the train-only Earlybird fare with the off-peak discount, or making it multi-modal.

V/Line fares should also be reviewed to remove discrepancies with metropolitan fares such as the big price jump when travelling from Melbourne to outside Zone 2.

**More on fares: page 5**



## Have your say!

The pandemic has caused us to hit pause on in-person member meetings – but we've now run two Annual General Meetings online via Zoom, with good attendances at each – see page 4.

We'd like to hear from members about the AGM and other member meetings as we plan for 2022, in the hope that in-person events will once again be possible.

To participate in the survey, go to this web page:

<ptua.wildapricot.org/Sys/Poll/31046>

It's just five questions, and you can leave comments for the committee in your response.

You'll need your membership logon to access it.

## Get involved!

If you have ideas about how public transport in Victoria should be improved and expanded and how we should advocate for that, or if you have skills you believe would be useful to the PTUA, we would love to hear from you.

You may decide you would like to learn about specific PTUA campaigns or activities you'd like to participate in.

Or you might like to consider joining the committee and contribute to the running of the organisation.

Anyone who would like to talk to us about these things should

email us at [office@ptua.org.au](mailto:office@ptua.org.au) to arrange a chat.

If you'd like to get to know us better, before contacting us directly, check out our website, [www.ptua.org.au](http://www.ptua.org.au), Like us on Facebook, or follow us on Twitter – see social media details below.

## Contact the PTUA

[office@ptua.org.au](mailto:office@ptua.org.au)

247 Flinders Lane, Melbourne,  
Vic 3000

PTUA email lists and archived newsletters online:  
[ptua.org.au/members/resources](http://ptua.org.au/members/resources)

PTUA members can obtain cheap yearly Myki Passes – see  
[ptua.org.au/members/offers](http://ptua.org.au/members/offers)

## PTUA member meetings

Geelong and Ballarat branch meetings are currently paused.

Other meetings as advertised in member emails and on our web site:

[ptua.org.au/members/meetings](http://ptua.org.au/members/meetings)

## Social media

You can follow us on social media to stay up to date with public transport issues in Melbourne and around Victoria.

Twitter: [@ptua](https://twitter.com/ptua)

Facebook: [fb.com/ptua.vic](https://www.facebook.com/ptua.vic)

Instagram: [ptua.vic](https://www.instagram.com/ptua.vic)

LinkedIn:

[linkedin.com/company/ptua](https://www.linkedin.com/company/ptua)

## Committee

President: Anthony Morton

Secretary: David Robertson

Treasurer: Phil Bourke

Michael Bell

Daniel Bowen

Jessica Broadbent

Stuart James

Tom Killip

Tim Long

Stuart McKenzie

Declan Martin

Anna Morton

Geelong branch: Paul Westcott

Ballarat branch: Ben Lever

## Newsletter

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Responsibility for electoral comment in PTUA News is taken by Tony Morton, 247 Flinders Lane, Melbourne.

Our thanks to Margaret Pullar and the dedicated mailout team.

## Annual General Meeting

The 2021 AGM of the Association took place on 25 November.

Once again we opted for the videoconference format, which proved moderately successful last year and was found to encourage attendance by a more diverse range of members.

Again this year, the AGM via Zoom attracted around 70 members, surpassing the typical attendance at our in-person AGMs prior to the pandemic.

The AGM commenced with a presentation from our guest speaker, Infrastructure Victoria's acting chief executive Jonathan Spear.

Jonathan gave a useful summary of the recently issued Infrastructure Strategy and the just-released modelling on potential effects of the COVID pandemic on longer-term transport patterns, and gave generously of his time to answer questions from members.

Each year the PTUA confers the Paul Mees Award on a person or group to recognise their contribution to transport activism and advocacy in Victoria.

This year we were pleased to present the Paul Mees Award to Mick van de Vreede for his longstanding work boosting public transport and environmental values in Melbourne's Outer East, including a long stint as a Councillor at City of Knox.

Mick will be well known to members who took part in or

followed the decade-long Outer East transport campaign from 1996 onward, where Mick played a key role as coordinator of the Knox Environment Society.

While the campaign missed its primary goal of stopping Eastlink (originally the Scoresby Freeway) in favour of a rail extension to Rowville, tram extension to Knox and major bus improvements, it was more broadly successful in boosting expectations for public transport in the outer eastern suburbs, progressing a partial tram extension to Vermont South with an improved bus service to Knox City, and gaining frequent SmartBus services along Stud Road and Wellington Road.

These would not have been achieved without Mick's staunch activism, which helped bring together over three dozen local environment and residents' groups behind the campaign.

At the time of the previous AGM in November 2020 there was cause for optimism as Melbourne emerged from its long second-wave COVID lockdown into some semblance of normality.

The year 2021, as it turned out, had further surprises to spring, and while progress has been made on our campaigns alongside Sustainable Cities - with Melbourne Metro 2 now gaining a foothold on the official government agenda, and the first signs of progress on bus service reform alongside the zero-emission bus initiative - COVID has again taken the spotlight.

After a strong initial recovery in patronage, public transport was again restricted to essential

workers only during the August-September lockdown.

Public transport use is now recovering strongly once again, in parallel with road traffic, but there is little certainty around longer term recovery.

One near-term consequence evident to our Association is the collapse in yearly Commuter Club passes processed by us as agents for PTV, as people have found it unnecessary to travel regularly in 2021. This has also led to a one-off drop in our membership given some had signed up as PTUA members primarily in order to obtain these discounted passes.

But we are happy to report that after an (expected) drop earlier this year as Commuter Club memberships lapsed, our member numbers have stabilised through the remainder of 2021, with the overall drop in PTUA membership being quite a bit less than the drop in Commuter Club passes issued.

The AGM also saw the election of our Committee for the coming year, which remains essentially unchanged from our 2020 Committee.

As also noted in this issue, we are keen to reach out to members who wish to become more active with the PTUA and our Sustainable Cities campaign with Friends of the Earth, in what will be a significant election year.

*Missed the AGM? Video is now available at  
[www.ptua.org.au/members/docs](http://www.ptua.org.au/members/docs)*

## Fair fares

When economic rationalists look at public transport fares, they invariably call for single mode pricing, and hiking peak fares.

Recent reports from the Productivity Commission and Infrastructure Victoria both follow this line.

Let's be clear: public transport fares are not a 'pricing mechanism' to be micro-managed by economists in the name of efficiency (however defined).

Fares are just a humble way of collecting a user contribution toward the cost of travel. And it's important that they be simple to calculate, for the sake of those who literally have to count every cent.

Economists also like to promote the idea that – as NSW has done with IPART – each public transport mode should be priced separately.

Even with a transfer discount, as Sydney's Opal card offers, it still means passengers are being stung for switching from train to tram to bus – something they often have no choice over.

This gets in the way of proper network planning and reform – and ultimately, a better public transport service.

There was outcry in Sydney when network changes meant some bus passengers had to interchange to the light rail to reach the CBD.

Bus + Light rail might very well be the quickest way to your destination, and most efficient mode for the system to deliver you there, but few passengers would be welcoming a price rise

compared to a single fare for a bus all the way.

Thankfully Melbourne has led the way in multimodal ticketing, with fares for trams trains and buses first merged forty years ago, in 1981, and since adopted in every Australian capital except Sydney.

This is not to say Victoria's public transport pricing is perfect.

The trial of a 30% discount for off-peak fares was only in place when patronage was suppressed by COVID-19 restrictions, and was removed before it had a chance to prove its worth.

Kept for longer, it could show real benefits in helping patronage recover and in encouraging off-peak travel.

The Myki Pass system, inherited from Metcard and in turn inherited from paper Met tickets, needs an overhaul (see page 2).

Meddling with the zone system by politicians on both sides has given us nearly-flat fares in Melbourne – which mean that many short distance journeys are expensive – and the same cost

as much longer ones.

V/Line fares outside zone 2 have been largely inherited from the old pricing system, but there is now a huge jump as you leave zone 2.

Other quirks such as Lara being in three fare zones mean that people are encouraged to drive across Geelong to Lara if catching a train to Melbourne.

The Productivity Commission does at least recognise that free fares and endless discounting is not the answer, while noting that appropriate targeted concessions are important for those who need them.

With fares – pre-COVID – contributing nearly a billion dollars per year to the running of public transport, it's an important revenue stream.

But the key is making them fair, affordable and logical, and aimed at encouraging trip patterns such as off-peak travel, while ensuring they don't put off people using the system altogether.



## Geelong branch

### Which way to the gardens?

Earlier this year, the Friends of the (Geelong) Botanical Gardens contacted the Branch convener, wanting advice about improving the poor public transport access to the Gardens, situated in East Geelong.

We were able to make suggestions about what might and might not be feasible, and provided the contact details of local DoT personnel.

The Friends group was doggedly persistent in pursuing their case with PTV (as you have to be) and, in mid-October, PTV formally amended the description of the nearest stops, on Routes 30 and 60, to read "Geelong Botanical Gardens".

Unfortunately, all of those stops are more than about 700 metres from the main entrance of the Gardens. Another problem is that the section of Route 30 in the area was recently split, so that the inward and outward "Botanical Gardens" stops are a block apart. That set-up is hardly conducive to encouraging occasional PT users.

Given those problems, complementary way-finding signage needs to be provided to consolidate the changed stop descriptions. Doing that is the job of Geelong Council, which also runs the Gardens, so we hope the Friends can get some traction there.

### Transport strategy

The G21 Regional Alliance of five local councils has commenced

the development of an overall transport strategy for the region. In the last decade or so, G21 has sponsored two public transport strategies.

The first one resulted in only a few positive changes. However, the 2015 public transport strategy was much more successful, leading to a significant shake-up of the existing bus route and service structure, which lifted patronage by over five percent.

Consulting firm Urbis has been engaged to lead the development of the new strategy. We note that Urbis has been a player in the recent push for "trackless trams" in Geelong. At least trackless trams have not been mentioned in the two consultation meetings held so far.

### Trackless trams

In fact, the notion of trackless trams in Geelong got another run in the Geelong Advertiser in October. Despite our best efforts, a couple of the more influential pressure groups remain enamoured of the idea.

They reflect the mistaken notion that expensive new technology is needed to overcome public transport deficiencies. That means the idea is unlikely to be adopted, and it diverts attention and resources from campaigns for achievable and useful improvements.

It's not the technology that stops our current bus services from running more frequently, from servicing new areas, or from operating after 9pm.

A trackless tram running every 30 minutes would be no more

attractive than a conventional bus with the same schedule.

### Fast trains?

A similar notion along recently got a run in the local media was the Melbourne-Geelong "fast train".

On a visit to Geelong, Opposition leader, Matthew Guy, revisited the Liberal's 2018 election proposal, although the absurdly precise 32-minute end-to-end run time has become 30-35 minutes.

Mr Guy's claim that the travel time he promotes can be achieved on the existing infrastructure by tweaking the signalling is not credible.

Anyway, the scheme fundamentally misreads what is needed on the 75-kilometre Geelong-Melbourne line, which is essentially a commuter railway, with a number of well-patronised stops along the way.

It is in no way equivalent to lines where very high speeds can be achieved, such as the 500 km Tokyo to Kyoto or the 400km Paris to Lyon railways.

Speed on the Melbourne line is not the issue, and a purely end-to-end express service, of whatever duration, would be of little use to most passengers.

Those who regularly travel on the line recognise that what is really needed is greater frequency, reliability and capacity.

Any express train decreases capacity on the line because fewer stopping trains can run.

That would only serve to increase the chronic overcrowding of trains before the COVID crisis.

## Ballarat branch

### Lydiard Street crossing reopens

In mid-November, the Lydiard Street level crossing reopened to traffic, around 18 months after a train smashed through the heritage swing gates.

Boom gates have been installed in what's being called a temporary measure, while the remains of the swing gates have been taken away and put into storage until a permanent solution is found; this permanent solution will no doubt reflect the ATSB's final report on the incident, which is yet to be handed down – but what that solution is remains to be seen.

It's worth noting that the signalling arrangements around Lydiard Street are fundamentally unchanged for the time being; a human still needs to press a button to activate the crossing, and that seems to be happening at least 2-3 minutes before a train actually approaches, leading to some fairly significant wait times for drivers and pedestrians looking to cross the tracks.

Given that there is still no

Accessible crossing within the station itself, and people in wheelchairs or pushing prams must use the Lydiard Street crossing to get between platforms, these lengthy waits only exacerbate the Accessibility issues.

### New bus interchange

The new bus interchange at Ballarat Station opened in mid-December, meaning buses no longer drop off, pick up, or idle along Lydiard Street and Ararat Street – instead entering and exiting the station precinct via Nolan Street.

Unfortunately passengers can't walk straight from the bus stop to adjacent Platform 2, since a big fence has been erected to stop this – sending passengers for a longer walk via the station building. A gate with some myki readers should be installed to allow quick and easy interchange.

Accompanying the opening of the new interchange will be some small upgrades to the bus timetables – most routes received an extra service or two in the evenings, allowing people to do things a little later in

central Ballarat, or catch a later train home from Melbourne.

Route 24 in Sebastopol will also receive an upgrade from hourly to half-hourly between about 9am and 3pm, likely utilising spare school bus capacity.

This will be very useful for passengers running errands during the day, but with no bus arriving in central Ballarat between 8.30am and 9.00am, this service is a bit lacking for those who want to catch it to work.

These incremental improvements to the bus network are welcome, and will have benefits for passengers, but they fall a long way short of the comprehensive route reform that Ballarat needs.

We need routes to be straightened out, padding to be cut from timetables, frequencies increased to line up with the trains, and services late enough in the evenings to allow a hospitality worker to catch the bus home after a shift. We will keep pushing for these reforms in the leadup to next year's state election.



## Stopping *all* stations – the whole network in a day

If you thought your daily commute on public transport was long - then think again.

University students Leo Whitehead and Patrick Grave have recently visited 213 stations on the electrified Metro network in a mammoth 20 hour effort.

Their inspiration for the task was created by their frustration with public transport delays, and then the idea was placed into motion with a helping hand from Leo's background in computer sciences, which allowed him to analyse a number of timetables with computer algorithms in order to try and find the fastest route across the city..

Speaking to ABC Radio Melbourne, Leo stated that this was not the first time the pair had attempted this, however their first effort was thwarted by a missed connection 16 hours

in, which would have made the final few hours of their journey impossible to complete in time.

Leo did admit that despite the effort involved, the trip did become tedious - not helped by the fact that neither of the pair deem themselves as train enthusiasts.

Highlighting the use of cross suburban bus connections, the duo were able to catch buses between line termini.

Bus services might be the poor cousin of Melbourne's public transport network, but they do manage to go where the trains can't – even if they often are indirect and not very frequent.

While most of the journey went smoothly, there were several issues presented, including long waits of up to every 20 minutes between train services – though they did note that this sometimes provided welcome time to refuel on food.

Rail replacement bus services also presented a hurdle as summer line closures ramp up

for ongoing network improvements.

Looking to the future, network extensions such as the Airport, Melton and Wyndham Vale lines could mean that reaching every station in a single day is impossible, given the sheer size of the metropolitan area.

Perhaps other contenders for this challenge could try and visit all stations in the metropolitan area, which includes the western suburban V/Line services, or even wait until the completion of the Metro Tunnel to add another five stations to their daily tally!

Overall this was a fantastic challenge to discover how our rail network operates, and we send our congratulations to both Leo and Patrick.

*Picture: Rob Leeson / Herald Sun*

