

RESPONSE TO PROPOSED BANYULE CITY COUNCIL INTEGRATED TRANSPORT PLAN

BY THE PUBLIC TRANSPORT USERS ASSOCIATION

Review of the 2003-2013 Integrated Transport Strategy

It would be useful for a published review of the Integrated Transport Strategy which formally expired in 2013 to be undertaken as it would provide valuable learning to inform the development of the Integrated Transport Plan 2015 - 2035.

It is recognised that consultation at community level has been widespread and conducted over a lengthy period. However, such consultation does not substitute for a rigorous analysis of the objectives, actions and targets of the Integrated Transport Strategy to assess both successes and failings and to provide necessary insight for strong achievements under the new document.

Timelines and changes in the environment

The previous Integrated Transport Strategy covered the 10 - year period 2003-2013. This draft Integrated Transport Plan (ITP) covers a much longer period, the two decades from 2015 to 2035.

The extended life of the ITP is highly problematic, not least because the period 2015 -2035 is likely to be very dynamic and to present significant environmental changes in addition to those listed (*Setting the Stage and Growing Pressures*, pp. 4 - 7), which will impact transport and urban development and are likely to have consequences beyond those reflected in this section of the ITP.

These additional changes will include:

- Increased adverse effects of anthropogenic climate change, including continuing increases in ambient temperature and more frequent storm events, resulting in higher levels of physical stress and demands on infrastructure;
- A larger proportion of the population residing in medium and higher density residential accommodation in activity centres, resulting in significant changes in travel patterns; and
- Changes in technology in the motor vehicle fleet which have the potential to make the road network much safer for active transport modes. It may also provide for more efficient use of the road network and thus obviate the need for significant increases in road capacity in Banyule and elsewhere in metropolitan Melbourne.

It is also recommended that interim reviews of the ITP be undertaken each five years to assess whether defined objectives are being met in a timely manner. This approach would more fully take into account expected high levels of environmental instability whilst seeking to achieve over-arching objectives with adjustments in approach as may be required as well as variations in the level of resources.

Use of performance measures

The inclusion of targets in the 2003-2013 Integrated Transport Strategy was a central and valuable element of the document. That targets have been omitted from the draft ITP is a retrograde step. The absence of targets is likely to encourage the view that there is little commitment to achieving results and that the strategies and actions are considered discretionary. The document would be likely to lose much force and authority as a consequence.

Nevertheless, it is recognised that the control the City of Banyule has over particular issues will vary substantially. This should, not, however, discourage the setting of quantifiable targets wherever practicable which recognise the degree to which their achievement is within the gift of the Council.

Land use and development

It is correctly recognised in the ITP (p. 15) that the way land is used and developed has a significant impact on transport and the choice of travel mode. However, the ITP gives rather too much credit to the supposedly beneficial effect of *Plan Melbourne* in encouraging new development to be located in areas near services and infrastructure. Further, *Plan Melbourne* does not mandate the provision of transport infrastructure and services in anticipation of residential, commercial or industrial developments.

This is why *Plan Melbourne* was able to be recruited by the Napthine government in support of the proposed East West Link despite the fact that it was a highly unsustainable transport project. *Plan Melbourne* also readily accommodates major commercial developments out-of-centre, which also puts at risk the development of sustainable public transport networks focused on activity centres in Melbourne. It also jeopardises the economic viability of retail and commercial activity in activity centres that are closest to where people live, including in the City of Banyule.

It would be of significant value if the ITP were to recognise the potential significance for Banyule of major developments in contiguous municipalities. The proposed redevelopment of the Amcor site at the intersection of Heidelberg Road and the Chandler Highway in the City of Yarra is a current case in point. Amongst other things the development may result in the establishment of 2,000 additional households with a population of 4,500 and major retail developments each with a significant footprint.

As a referral authority, City of Banyule made a brief submission to the City of Yarra (17 April 2015) on this project which quite reasonably drew attention to the possible consequences of the project for retailers in the City of Banyule. For practical purposes the project could be characterised as an "out of centre" development," as described earlier.

It is suggested that City of Banyule's response to the development plan should have focussed more strongly on the likely effects on any failure to upgrade route bus services in the area, in particular, as well as Hurstbridge line rail services, in anticipation of the substantial increase in residential population and new retail and commercial activity. The consequence of the project proceeding without such improvements being factored in will be to greatly increase traffic congestion on Heidelberg Road and Grange Road to the detriment of residents of

Banyule. It can be imagined that further car-centric development at locations such as Doncaster Hill in the City of Manningham and Northland Shopping Centre in the City of Darebin would have similarly adverse effects on Banyule, as will any continuation of the pattern of development seen in recent years in suburbs to the north of Banyule.

As Heidelberg, Ivanhoe and Greensborough are the three most significant activity centres in the City of Banyule with major commercial and other activity which attracts significant visitor numbers each day, as well as growing resident populations, it is recommended that they be given particular attention in the ITP. Baseline data on daily visitor numbers to each of these centres, as well as trips generated by local residents, and the mode split for these trips, should be collected when the ITP is introduced. The effectiveness of initiatives to convert existing passenger motor vehicle trips to public transport and active transport could then be tracked over the life of the ITP.

Whilst there are gaps in the network and sub-optimal service frequencies Heidelberg is generally well served with train and bus services (routes 513, 546, 551 and 903). It attracts significant visitor numbers but road traffic is increasing much more than it should be given the general quality of public transport at Heidelberg.

As discussed below, particular attention should be given in the ITP to the adverse contribution of the Austin Health precinct which is dominated by motor vehicle trips by patients, visitors, staff and service providers. Austin Health has a very large staffing complement, estimated to be about 7,000, together with large daily visitor numbers. Particular care will also need to be taken to restrict the provision of parking for major proposed residential developments in the Heidelberg precinct to ensure that trips by motor vehicle are minimised.

Ivanhoe, also on the Hurstbridge line, is reasonably well served by train services. However, it is not as well served by connecting route bus services (Routes 510, 548, 549) with weekend services being particularly poor or non-existent.

Provision of route bus services

It is recommended that identified weaknesses in the bus network be highlighted in the ITP. Non-exhaustively, these include north-south routes which cross the Eastern Freeway to the City of Boroondara to Ivanhoe (currently the sub-standard route 548) and to Heidelberg, which has no such service.

City of Banyule also needs to be vigilant that it does not miss out in the re-organisation of existing route bus services. Changes for the 901, 902 and 903 SmartBus services which if they had proceeded earlier in 2015 as proposed, would have seen a significant reduction in services for residents in Banyule. The current problem is one of limited funding for additional bus services to improve service quality in established suburbs and to provide new services in expanding suburbs. In these circumstances there can be a disposition to focus on routes with high patronage levels and to beggar those locations with identifiable need but no established record of strong patronage growth.

Route bus connectivity with railway stations in Banyule

Most recently reported data suggests that Banyule should give much greater attention in the ITP to how people connect with train services in the municipality, with the objective of increasing the numbers of people connecting by sustainable transport modes.

PTV's survey of metropolitan rail patronage for 2013/14 showed that relatively few adult patrons in Banyule connected with the rail service on the Hurstbridge line by route bus or cycling. Of the 19,520 adult weekday patrons from the nine stations in Banyule only 1673 (8.6%) caught a connecting bus and 145 (1.6%) cycled. 8516 (43.6%) walked to the station. Of the most significant activity centres Heidelberg and Ivanhoe only attracted about 10% of their rail patrons by connecting route bus. The situation is a little better in Greensborough where 26.4% of rail patrons connected by route bus. Comparisons of the PTV surveys for 2011/12 and 2013/14 indicate that the proportion of rail patrons in Banyule connecting by bus and by cycling has declined. Motor vehicle dominance of connecting journeys to each of these activity centres will not be resolved unless provision for connecting buses and cycling is improved significantly.

Passenger trips by private car and public transport

There is a strong focus in the ITP on the pressure placed on transport infrastructure within Banyule caused by trips through Banyule, especially from expanding suburban growth to the north, including in the City of Whittlesea. It is a fact that too many such trips are made by passenger motor vehicle rather than by public transport. This is partially due to inadequate public transport services and also because many northern suburbs are employment poor where suburban sprawl has been permitted to proceed in the absence of the timely provision of public transport infrastructure and services.

However, it is also significant that too many local trips (including trips within Banyule or from Banyule to a neighbouring municipality) are made by private motor vehicle. For instance, analysis of travel to work responses in the 2011 Census shows that of the 13,900 residents of Banyule whose work location is within the municipality, only 530 (less than 4%) travelled to work by public transport. In sharp contrast, 5,200 (47%) of the 11,000 Banyule residents working in the City of Melbourne travelled to work by public transport.

It is also clearly observable that during both morning and evening peak periods virtually all the traffic on the heavily overloaded Rosanna Road is comprised of private passenger vehicles, many of which should be converted to public transport journeys.

It is clear enough that the major gap in transport provision in outer Melbourne, not least in the north and north-east, is the lack of public transport, not roads capacity. In this context, Banyule City Council's support for the North-East Link (ITP, p. 25) is ill-advised given that if it were to be built it would make significant areas of northern and north-eastern Melbourne even more car dependent than they are now.

Added to this are other locally determined factors such as most trips by school children at school starting and finishing times are now being taken by private motor vehicle which also imposes extra pressure on both local and arterial roads in the municipality. There are understood to be 45 schools located in Banyule with about 23,000 students enrolled. So the

numbers are significant, and relatively little has been achieved so far with walking to school and similar programs. This should be given high priority in the ITP.

Public parking

The ITP notes (p.7) that there is increased demand for car parking around schools, activity centres and railway stations. This should be interpreted to be a function of the high proportion of predominately local trips that are taken by private passenger motor vehicle. The response to increased "demand" for higher levels of car parking around schools is substantially in the gift of the Council. There is relatively unexplored scope to initiate the behaviour change programs to reduce such demand rather than to cater for it so leading to even higher levels of road congestion. It would also contribute to major budget savings for the Council.

The provision of large volumes of parking at railway stations is a poor option. Such parking would claim land for which there are superior uses and, in any event, would only satisfy a small proportion of all connecting trips with the rail service, as well as contributing to additional congestion on the road network. As discussed above, the solution lies with improved route bus connections, as well as good facilities for walking and cycling.

Upgrades on the Hurstbridge line

Advocacy for upgrades in the capacity on the Hurstbridge line (p. 23) are well advised, including track duplication and upgrading of the signalling system. With track duplication it would be worthwhile to campaign, in the first instance, for the duplication of the single track between Heidelberg and Rosanna. Also, advocating for the upgrading of the signalling system should be a key item in the ITP. It should be seen as a major priority to increase capacity across the whole metropolitan rail network and particular reference should be made to the use of moving block signalling technology to achieve these capacity improvements.

Green travel plans and large employers

The Council should engage directly with employers in the municipality to encourage them to establish green travel plans. This process should most sensibly commence with the larger employers, including Austin Health. Public transport initiatives are not central in Austin Health's most recently published sustainability report (2013-14) in which it devotes its attention primarily to issues of fleet management and the provision of electric vehicles. There is, however, reference in the sustainability report to a "commuter club" public transport fare program and a review of travel policy concerning public transport fare reimbursement.

There are larger employer bodies which do take a responsible approach to transport policy and programs for employees and visitors and it is recommended that the Council should engage with these bodies to drive the necessary changes in the City of Banyule.

There are also perverse incentives in Commonwealth tax law which heavily subsidise employee travel to work by private motor vehicle, primarily through tax-advantaged vehicle leasing arrangements available to employees and employers. Banyule City Council should add its voice in opposition to these arrangements, and encourage local employers to do likewise, as it is a very significant impediment to reducing trips to work by private motor vehicle.

Public Transport Users Association
Ross House
247 Flinders Lane
Melbourne
Vic 3000

Email: office@ptua.org.au

14 August 2015