



Geelong Branch

Submission on V/Line's Draft 2006 Geelong Line Timetable

April 2005

The Geelong Branch of the PTUA welcomes the chance to comment on the draft 2006 timetable for the Geelong line. This submission follows our February 2004 'Fast Train Update' paper (available at www.ptua.org.au/geelong).

V/Line and the State Government must publicise the proposed changes more effectively to gather the widest user feedback. While some passengers have been reached by seat drops and on-train information sessions, many train users are still not aware that the draft timetable exists; for example, no posters have been displayed at stations. It is also unfortunate that the weekend timetable has not been released. It needs to be made public in sufficient time for comment to be made on it as well.

Frequency

While the 3-4 minute reduction in average travel time across the timetable is welcome, it is disappointing that no significant increase in service frequency is proposed. The two extra services per weekday (plus an extra on Friday night/Saturday morning) are pleasing but clearly inadequate. If the current draft is accepted, rail travellers in the off peak will still find themselves waiting between trains for the time it would take them to drive to Melbourne.

The hourly base service of the current timetable was introduced in the early 1980's. In the meantime there has been a major increase in travel between Geelong and Melbourne; service levels should be upgraded to reflect this. V/Line's own research has shown that more train travellers want improved service frequency than any other timetable improvements.

Half-hourly services are best practice between similar cities to Melbourne and Geelong. For example, there are half hourly services between Brisbane and Robina (Gold Coast) and between Sydney and Gosford. Independent advice to the Rail Projects Group indicated that patronage on the Geelong line was very close to the level at which European operators would introduce half-hourly services. V/Line can and must "lead with supply" to increase rail patronage.

In one case train frequency will actually be cut under the new timetable. There is currently more than one train per hour in the early afternoon, but the draft timetable eliminates the present 1240 (12:40pm) service to Geelong and Warrnambool. To avoid such cuts and to begin to move towards half hourly services, V/Line should start by running services every half-hour between the peaks (during the middle of the day).

Hours of Operation

The proposed addition of an extra service from Geelong to Melbourne at 2230 (10.30pm), compared to the present last departure at 2115 (9:15pm), is commendable, and will make the

service more flexible for travellers returning to Melbourne. Progressive improvements should continue to be made beyond the life of the 2006 timetable.

In the interests of consistency and of fostering a “memorable timetable”, the weekend timetable should match the proposed last train time on weekdays.

However, the draft proposal that the last train to Geelong will leave Spencer Street at 2300 (11:00pm), except Friday night (Saturday morning), is a particularly poor one. This is 35 minutes earlier than the current 2335 (11:35pm) train. A train must be run at 2400 (midnight) or the present service will be effectively cut, to great community anger.

Without a midnight train, the proposed two hour gap between the 2300 service and the welcome 0100 (1:00am) service on Saturday mornings and special event days is also far too long.

Extending Services

The draft proposal to extend all but one service to South Geelong is very welcome. It is currently frustrating for travellers who use South Geelong to receive only a part time service, and the draft timetable ends the ‘curfew’ that now applies to them.

However the draft timetable transfers ‘part-time-service’ status to the new Marshall station. The proposed commuter services offered to passengers are much too limited. Obviously there is some uncertainty over the patronage of the station, but best practice indicates that a comprehensive service should be provided from the beginning, even if passenger numbers are initially low. When metropolitan rail services are extended, they usually run all the way through to the new terminus, and Marshall should be the same.

As many trains as possible should stop at Marshall station, otherwise many passengers will avoid using the train, or drive on to South Geelong or Geelong which have a more frequent service. New bus connections to Marshall station from Deakin University and Waurn Ponds Shopping Centre will also suffer without regular trains to Marshall; for example, no train to Marshall will allow passengers to reach the shopping centre or university before 9:00am.

Clockface Timetabling

The move towards ‘clockface’ timetabling in the proposed timetable is welcome, with many trains in the off peak period departing Geelong and Spencer Street at the ‘same time’ past the hour. It has also meant that gaps of more than an hour between services (eg to Melbourne in the evening) have been filled. It is also good that a limited number of train patterns also seem to have been established.

However true clockface timetabling does not just mean that trains depart at the same time past the hour. They also need to arrive at intermediate stations at the same times too. This is not only important as a memory aid; it also greatly assists linkages with connecting public transport modes.

Running hourly (rather than half-hourly) trains with different stopping patterns makes operating a clockface timetable impossible. A stopping train leaving on the hour is going to arrive at a different time to a semi-express or express train leaving on that same hour. Under the proposed timetable there is a variation in arrival times at Geelong Station of up to 9 minutes, making regular and efficient bus connections very difficult. This must be improved

if coordinated feeder buses are to make their contribution to patronage growth and reduce the pressure on station car parking.

There are a number of unexplained inconsistencies in the draft timetable. For example the 0827 (8:27 am) train from South Geelong stops at all stations and reaches Spencer Street in exactly 60 minutes. The next service, the 0843 (8:43 am) from Marshall, runs express through five stations, yet takes 7 minutes longer between South Geelong and Spencer Street.

The 0926 (9:26am) train from South Geelong, stopping all stations, takes four minutes longer to reach Spencer Street than the 1026 (10:26am) train with the same stopping pattern.

The proposed 1700 (5:00pm) and 1800 (6:00pm) services from Spencer Street to Geelong are (inexplicably) one to two minutes slower than *any* scheduled service under the current timetable.

These scheduling anomalies need to be eliminated. The use of different train types might explain some of them. However the main reason for these inconsistencies is presumably the need to obtain a path through the suburban system. It exposes the problems resulting from not overhauling service patterns or infrastructure in the Melbourne metropolitan area while trying to make improvements elsewhere.

Furthermore, it is not fundamentally necessary for services to leave Spencer Street or Geelong on the hour or on the half-hour (ie at X:00 or X:30). While this does make the timetable easy to remember, it is perhaps more important for services to arrive at their destination at a convenient time, even if the start of the journey is not strictly on the hour or half hour.

Particular Services

Under the current timetable, a train arrives at Geelong at 0852 (8:52am), allowing at least some time to get to workplaces or appointments in central Geelong by 9:00am. Under the draft timetable, the equivalent train arrives at 0902 (9:02am), frustrating any 'reverse' commuting. With regular half-hourly services (or at least one extra service), a train could arrive in Geelong at approximately 0830 (8:30am).

Currently three services leave Geelong and South Geelong very close together – the 0644 (6.44am) from Geelong, and the 0646 (6:46am) and 0653 (6:53am) from South Geelong – and arrive at Spencer Street at around 0800. The proposed timetable shifts these trains to a later time. Current regular users of these services are particularly unhappy about this change.

Given that the proposed peak services will continue to leave at varying frequencies, the draft timetable should be rearranged so that the train proposed to leave Geelong at 0700 (7:00am) leaves from South Geelong at around 0646 (6:46am), which is the departure time of the existing train. Then the proposed 0656 (6:56am) train ex Marshall, which will leave Geelong at 0705 (7:05am), can be advanced to leave Geelong at 0700, so that a train will still leave on the hour.

The first morning off-peak service to Melbourne, currently departing South Geelong at 0835 (8:35am) has a significant following of passengers who are keen to take advantage of economical off-peak fares, yet still get to Melbourne only shortly after the off-peak period cuts in at 0930 (9:30am). The equivalent train in the draft timetable arrives in Melbourne at 0927 (9:27am), just three minutes too early for off-peak fares to apply. Either this service

should be declared off-peak, or the off-peak period brought back to 0915, or the service moved back to reach Melbourne after 0930.

Under the draft timetable, there is an hour gap between the service to Marshall departing Spencer Street at 1830 (6:30pm) and the 1930 (7:30pm) to South Geelong, which is followed by a half-hour wait for the 2000 (8:00pm) service to South Geelong. Even if regular half-hourly services are not provided, there should be one extra down service at 1900 (7:00pm) to make the “step down” in service more consistent.

Warrnambool Trains

A problem with assessing the draft timetable is that it does not indicate which Geelong services extend to Warrnambool. For consistency, Warrnambool trains should follow the pattern of the proposed 1645 (4:45pm) train and stop at North Melbourne and North Geelong (and South Geelong as well). This would mean that Warrnambool line trains would still take only just over 50 minutes to get to Geelong. A less preferable option is that Warrnambool services stop only at Geelong, as was the case until the demise of West Coast Rail.

Stops at Metropolitan Stations

Given low usage of the station, and the reasonable alternative of alighting at Footscray or Werribee, the weekday stops at Newport might be eliminated, unless this makes no significant difference to travel time due to the need to accommodate suburban train paths.

More regular stops at Werribee station should be considered in the future to improve connections to the metropolitan network in the same rail corridor.

Fare Integration and Bus Connections to Trains

Reiterating previous submissions from this Branch, the rail fare should allow travel on the Geelong Transit System and at least one Melbourne fare zone. This encourages the use of feeder buses, reduces pressure on car parking space and provides more cost-competitive fares. Travel in Melbourne has been included in the rail fare during recent fast rail track work, and should be included permanently.

It is disappointing that neither the Rail Projects Group nor V/Line appear to have made any active attempts to improve feeder bus services within Geelong as part of the Fast Rail Projects.

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