

Budget blow-out

The transfer of train and tram services to private companies has failed to deliver expected running cost reductions.

This fact was made clear last month with the State Government having to find \$1 billion over five years for extra subsidies to the transport operators. No additional services will be provided in return for the payments.

University of Melbourne transport academic and former PTUA president Dr Paul Mees said that the outcome now could well have been worse than if we hadn't privatised. Particularly critical was that privatisation meant that control of services was lost. As we have seen with Yarra Trams encouraging train commuters to "Park & Ride", there is a tendency for operators to compete with one another for passengers rather than against the private car.

Transport Minister Peter Batchelor defended the privatised system, saying that despite the increase of annual subsidies from \$300-350 to \$550 million, it was still cheaper to have private operators running the service.

However PTUA research shows that in 1996/97 annual subsidies to the PTC stood at approximately \$300 million after a period of expenditure savings. The total cost of "Transport Contract services" which includes "contracted public transport services including passenger and freight rail services, light rail and tram services, bus services, and disability taxi services through public and private providers" amounted to \$317m for 1997 and \$367m in 1998.

Though there have been some train and tram service improvements since this time (particularly on Sundays) it is hard to believe that the cost could have increased so dramatically between 1998 and 2003. This makes suspect claims that privatisation has saved money or the Minister's statement that privatised operation was more economical.

See also: **State Budget** ⇒ page 3

Buses – has the bureaucracy finally got it?

A leaked document has brought to light some remarkably good work being done by the government as part of its Melbourne 2030 strategy planning.

Regular readers will know that the PTUA has been campaigning for many years to have suburban bus services improved, to give all of Melbourne the quality of service enjoyed by the few who are lucky enough to live near a tram line.

This campaigning over the years now appears to be having some effect. No longer are bus improvements seen as a "zero sum game" where an improvement to one service means cuts to another. Genuine small improvements are being seen, such as 45-minute weekday services down the Mornington Peninsula, or combined 15-minute services between Oakleigh and Monash University.

Sadly even these improvements are less useful than they might be, thanks to fares anomalies: the Mornington Peninsula service is not covered by Met fares, and the Oakleigh - Monash service is in the "wrong" zone for its connecting train service making it more expensive than an alternative (and overcrowded) route. What is more, the improvements have so far been piecemeal, with no overarching strategic view.

This type of non-integrated thinking is what made the PTUA very suspicious when we heard that as part of Melbourne 2030 the government was planning separate Bus, Train and Tram plans. We feared a repeat of past plans: non-integrated and non-strategic, with no new breakthroughs.

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Keeping in touch...

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Committee Meetings

Third Thursday of each month. Members are welcome to attend. Please call the office for details

National PT summit

At the invitation of the organisers, I represented the PTUA at the National Public Transport Summit in Canberra on 27th and 28th of March. The Summit was organised by the bus and rail industries and the National Transport Secretariat with participants drawn primarily from government and the industry.

Interestingly, I was the only user representative attending in that capacity although some other participants representing government and community bodies were also involved in user groups. This is perhaps a reflection on the PTUA's standing as the largest, highest-profile and most respected organisation of its type in Australia.

I found the summit very informative and enjoyable and the opportunity to exchange views and ideas with interstate colleagues was very valuable. Of particular interest was a presentation given by Dr Michael Roschlau, President of the Canadian Urban Transit Association (CUTA). CUTA is the national industry association in Canada and campaigns actively for sustainable transport policies.

Australia now stands alone amongst western countries in not having a national policy on public transport - perhaps the absence of a cohesive public transport lobby at a national level is a contributing factor to this. Interestingly, Canadian public

transport is the most efficient in the world, enjoying a higher level of cost recovery than most European countries and investing less public money in public transport than even Australia. Despite this, Canadian systems do manage to carry a substantial choice market and Toronto, Montreal, Ottawa and Vancouver continue to outperform their Australian counterparts (Sydney, Melbourne, Canberra and Brisbane) by substantial margins.

One message I took away from Dr Roschlau's presentation is that, while more investment from all levels of government is important, our public transport industry and bureaucracies must work harder at "doing more with less". (The fact that urban freeway building stopped two decades ago in most Canadian cities is also significant).

One outcome from the summit is an agreement between the leading bus and rail industry associations to co-operate in forming a CUTA-like organisation here in Australia. I hope that the PTUA will be able to provide input and play a key role in the formation of such an organisation.

I was pleased by the high level of consensus amongst summit participants on the need, and the strong community support, for an effective public transport system as an alternative to the motor car and the need for the Federal government to provide leadership and funding to achieve this for all Australians.

- *Vaughan Williams*

Copy deadline for the next PTUA news is 1st July 2003

Newsletter contributors: Daniel Bowen, Vaughan Williams, Tony Morton, Matt Cook, Peter Parker, Les Chandra, and Peter Cook.
Printed on recycled paper by Flash Print, Collingwood.

Our thanks to Max Nicholson and the rest of the dedicated mail out team.

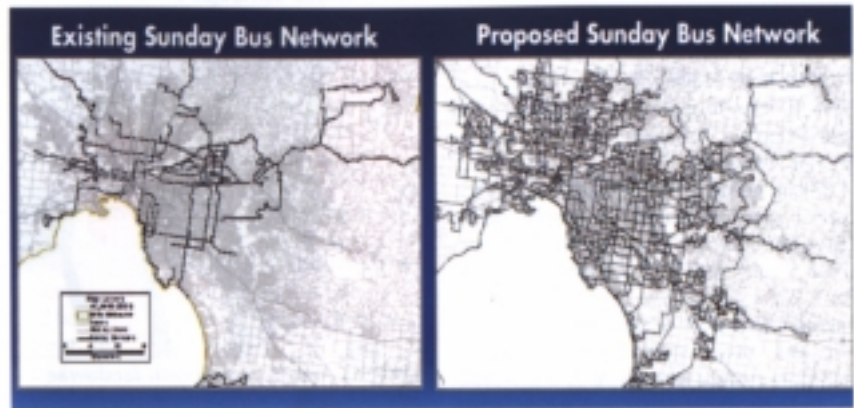
Buses

(continued from page 1)

Well it seems we were wrong. The PTUA has been given a preview of the Bus Plan component of the Melbourne 2030 transport strategy and it is very good. In fact, we would say it is the best transport strategy that we have seen from any government for many years. We agreed not to discuss the details of the plan until it was released, but the bus industry has made public many of the details.

Some of the key features of bus plan as reported by *Australasian Bus and Coach* include:

- Premium services operating with basic 15 minute headway running 5 am until midnight, with genuine traffic priority and real-time passenger information systems
- Local services operating at least 6 am until 10 pm, with “improved frequencies”
- Four new orbital bus routes
- “Small but significant” improvements such as running routes right into railway stations



- Sunday bus services extended to the entire metropolitan area.

The economic benefit of bus plan was estimated at \$3.7 billion over 20 years and passenger growth forecasted at up to 308%.

The PTUA heartily endorses the main themes of Bus Plan. A *network of frequent bus service connecting* with each other and the train and tram systems is the only way that public transport in Melbourne can be made competitive with the car.

There are a few minor details with Bus Plan that we might not entirely agree with at this stage, but we are sure these can be worked through to ensure a

positive outcome. The PTUA looks forward to participating in this process.

With the government now battenning down the hatches over cost blowouts in its planned re-privatisation, the challenge now for public transport is to make sure that this excellent document is not allowed to gather dust in the bottom drawer. We trust it will not.

***Australasian Bus and Coach* have a web site at www.busnews.com.au. The maps above are reproduced from their magazine.**

State budget

More roads – scraps for PT

The 2003-4 State Budget was handed down on 6th May and, sadly but not surprisingly, contains little for public transport.

We can be thankful that rumoured 25% fare increases were not included, but that is about all. Once again, massive amounts are promised to road construction with small amount for public transport. The funding for the Pakenham Bypass alone consumes more public money than all the public transport initiatives put together.

There are some very small positive initiatives, including upgrades to route 700, introduction of some weekend bus services in a handful of outer suburbs, and some small improvements to rail freight, but fundamentally this is a

freeway budget with little serious movement on public transport.

Gap filled by 109 extension

The tram 109 extension to Box Hill finally opened in early May. This extension fills one of many “missing links” in the tram system all over Melbourne, and is something the PTUA has been campaigning for since the early 1990s, so we are very pleased to see its completion.

The “kerb access” stops are an interesting initiative, and clearly much safer for passengers than earlier designs for accessible stops. Should they prove successful, they should be considered in due course for introduction elsewhere in Melbourne.

We do have some concerns about the sub-optimal tram to train/bus interchange facilities that have been provided. This could be improved, with plenty of space in the mall itself to allow trams to terminate next to the station complex, rather than down the mall and across three lanes of traffic.

And we believe that the cost of the extension was unnecessarily high and should be disregarded for the purpose of benchmarking against other projects, largely because of the DoI’s insistence that Whitehorse Road be widened, and the late design and implementation of the kerb access stops.

None of these criticisms detract from how pleased we are that this tram extension has finally been built, and we look forward to many more.

Yarra trams: BYO seats?

Yarra Trams has a slight problem at the moment, in that their trams have become too popular.

Crowding on Route 96 in particular, and on other routes to an extent, has been getting worse, both in peak and off peak.

During off peak, the option exists to schedule more trams (not that they appear to be doing this), but in peak, it requires some effort to find a few more trams to spread the load around and ease the sardine effect, without forcing a greater proportion of tram passengers to stand than at present.

Unfortunately, this has not happened.

In March, Yarra Trams began a trial of removing approximately a third of the seats in a B class tram, reducing the capacity of that B class to something resembling that of a Citadis tram of about the same length.

In theory, would provide space for about a dozen more passengers, though this is certainly not the case just now. Yarra also wants to “trial” this scheme in 10 more trams, though it is a fairly safe assumption that if the seats are removed, they will not be around when it comes time to put them back if the trial is not accepted by passengers.

Due to the use of Citadis style “bum racks” where real seats used to be, it is debatable whether capacity has increased at all, since the most comfortable way to use these seats is to have your feet out, taking up the space of two standing passengers.

Even if it did increase capacity, it creates a situation that any tram passenger should take offence at. Efforts have been made to make passengers less comfortable when efforts could have instead been made to find and run more trams. If this is Yarra Trams’ and the DoI’s first response to dramatically increased peak patronage, perhaps we are lucky that the same hasn’t yet happened to that extent on elsewhere on the system.

The PTUA would not automatically oppose changes to seating configuration to provide more space for passengers with prams or shopping jeeps, however

the number of seats being removed is totally unacceptable. We simply don’t believe that Yarra Trams has made an effort to find more trams, though it is not too hard to say that without looking for them, they don’t have them, and that’s the case just now. Some options that they could consider are:

- Splitting Route 112 into 11 and 12, and running Route 12 with W class trams again (after unnecessary speed limitations are removed). This would free up about a dozen trams from the St Kilda section of the 112.



Should Yarra Trams passengers bring their own seats?

- A realignment of maintenance rosters to eliminate the practice of scheduling routine maintenance during peak hour, both at M>Tram and Yarra, could free up a few more trams. These could be redeployed on their own networks or leased between the two companies as required
- Implementing proper tram priority (see “It’s Time To Move” page 19 for details) to cut tram travel times and therefore free up a few trams per route that can be redeployed where they are required

M>Tram have claimed that their routes are more-or-less at capacity now, however the PTUA has observed several trams out of service for routine maintenance during peak hour at a single depot (Essendon). M>Tram did

concede that this is not necessarily best practice.

Tram priority

Tram priority has clear benefits – to tram users who get a faster ride, and to operators who require less trams and drivers to provide services – or the same number of trams to provide a more frequent service.

Rough calculations indicate that the total cost for implementing total tram priority on a route such as the 96 might be, at the most, about the cost of buying a single tram. This kind of work would clearly pay for itself.

One year ago, Hubert Guyot, CEO of Yarra Trams, publicly suggested something similar. “We have to give absolute priority to trams with 100 to 200 people. This is what exists everywhere in the world, but there’s no priority here in Melbourne”. The key component of his proposal that the PTUA still objects to is the concept of moving tram stops to mid-block locations. These are inconvenient for passengers, more of whom walk to tram stops from locations on intersecting roads than from the road the service runs along, and more passengers would have to walk further to access the tram if the stops were moved as he suggested.

However, we have no argument at all with working towards tram priority.

“We have to redesign the share of the road between the tram and the car,” said Mr Guyot. “At the moment one tram is considered as one vehicle and one car is considered as one vehicle. I’m sorry, but one tram is up to 200 people and one car is up to four people -- but it is usually less than two”.

Well said Hubert. With your trams more crowded and slower than ever, now is the time for Yarra, M>Tram and VicRoads to work together to fix it.

To find out more about tram priority, see the PTUA’s publication “It’s Time To Move”, page 19. Copies are available through the Office.

Country trains return...

to Ararat...

Passenger trains are due to return to Ararat in late July. It is almost certain that there will be two return services each day between Ararat and Melbourne. What's less certain is the arrival and departure times of these trains. Terry Mulder, shadow transport minister, has suggested the present proposal doesn't suit businesspeople, students going to Ballarat, or tourists.

Mr Mulder also thinks the proposed services should run at different time to

cater to these groups of people. The Wimmera-Mallee Rail Service Association believes this is a bad idea. Association secretary Phillip Jones said recently, "...the majority of the passengers using the trains to and from Ararat will travel by coach to and from west of Ararat", and that the present proposals take all the users into account.

The PTUA believes that both are right - and wrong. It is simply the fact that *one* morning train can't serve both markets. This makes it clear that at several trains

are needed: an early one to enable Ararat area people to commute to Ballarat and make day trips to Melbourne, and a later one to connect with buses from the Wimmera. Surely this is not too much to ask for?

...and East Gippsland

Bairnsdale and Stratford are to see passenger trains once more, beginning mid-way though the year. Two return services will run each day, including the area's first Sunday morning trains to Melbourne.

Ombudsman Prepares to Open

The Working Group advising on the establishment of the Public Transport Industry Ombudsman has now wound up and presented its final report to Transport Minister Peter Batchelor. The Group, made up of industry and consumer representatives, reached a consensus on most issues of importance. It is anticipated that the Ombudsman will open for business later in the year.

The PTUA is optimistic that the Ombudsman will provide an independent avenue for complaints resolution, particularly on the actions of aggressive ticket inspectors. We hope

that the Ombudsman will also provide an important voice for public transport users in reporting on systematic problems.

Of course, the Ombudsman is one of many reforms that will be necessary to produce an effective, efficient and passenger-friendly system of fare collection. The Government should now shelve any plans for expensive new ticketing hardware and proceed with re-staffing of the system (necessary as an urgent safety priority in any event). The Government must also enforce the operator's contractual obligations with regard to their own

complaint handling. The PTUA is aware of many complaints that are still not responded to or even acknowledged promptly or at all.

We would like to record our thanks to our colleagues in the consumer movement and the public transport industry for their goodwill and constructive participation in the process, and also to the Energy and Water Ombudsman Fiona McLeod and her staff for their capable and professional auspicing of the Working Group.

Knox: win for PT campaigners

Prominent campaigners for better public transport and opponents of the Mitcham-Frankston Freeway have been swept to power in the City of Knox elections held in March.

The three new councillors are Mick Van de Vreede, Ben Smith and Adam Gill. PTUA members will recognise Mick as the President of the Knox Environment Society and a long-standing ally on our Outer East campaign. KES member Ben Smith did a lot of work in the Aston By-election campaign in 2001, working in the community to get public transport on the agenda. Adam Gill is from the

Australian Democrats and has strong anti-freeway, pro-PT credentials.

Of the existing councillors, independents Karin Orpen, Jenny Moore and Gary Scates have been re-elected. All three have expressed pro-PT opinions in the past, so overall, public transport supporters have a strong voice on the nine-member Knox Council.

Despite the Labor ascendancy at State level, not one candidate who identified as an ALP member was successful in this local election.

The City of Knox is a keystone in political support for the Mitcham-

Frankston (nee Scoresby) Freeway. Most of the crucial northern half of the Scoresby Freeway reservation runs through this municipality. Key public transport issues affecting Knox are the Rowville rail line (PTUA project 1 in "It's Time To Move"), the proposed tram extension to Knox City, safety and staffing on the Belgrave train line, and improving what are currently the poorest bus services relative to population in Melbourne.

We will all be watching the new Knox Council with interest.

See also: Scoresby court case ⇒ page 7

Govt to Monash people: Get a car

Government planners who are hostile to improving public transport services have always sought to hide behind the fig leaf of “demand-led” public transport. In effect they say: when people turn out in droves to use our lousy services, we’ll improve them, but not before.

Sustainable transport advocates insist that public transport planning has to be “supply-led”: that people will use public transport in large numbers only when there is an adequate supply of services.

Those few of us who work at Monash University and get there by public transport know how little is really meant by the appeal to demand-led planning.

Monday 3 March marked the start of the academic year, the day when buses to Monash go from being moderately unpopular to being overwhelmed. For example: every year around this time, without fail, all the route 630 buses from Huntingdale start to run at least 10 minutes late. Any bus that arrives at Huntingdale between 8am and 10am will find twice as many people waiting to board as will fit on the bus.

This is despite the modest extra services that are put on this route during term time.

Yet every year, it is equally certain that within a few weeks the chaos will have abated. Somehow things settle into an awkward steady state where there are just enough passengers to fill the buses but no more. The rest have got the message from our public transport planners and bought cars instead.

This state of affairs is agreeable to the Department of Infrastructure. Bureaucrats can point to the fact that, for all but a few weeks each year, the existing bus services are adequate to meet passenger demand. Thus in recent years there have been numerous proposals to improve the service to Monash, with more buses or even a long-awaited train line, but all have been actively opposed.

The Monash experience shows that, despite the demand-led rhetoric, our government is actually engaged in supply-led planning - but not of the sort that sustainability advocates call for. The effect of DoI policies is to restrict supply in order to keep demand for public transport low.

This is particularly evident in the case of suburban bus services, but it’s true of all Melbourne public transport to some degree. Judged by its actions, the bureaucracy simply doesn’t want people to use public transport. Those service improvements that have come about were imposed on the bureaucracy by political fiat: a welcome intervention, but not a sound basis for long-term planning.

So the next time someone tells you they can’t improve the frequency of your local bus service because “there’s no demand”, remind them of what happens every year on the 630 bus to Monash - and if they’re from the DoI, ask them when they plan to extend train services from Huntingdale to Monash and Rowville (at a cost equal to about three kilometres of freeway).

The Bracks Government simply cannot be serious about getting 20% of trips onto public transport by 2020 if its bureaucrats continue to work against it.

- *Tony Morton*

Support grows for station re-staffing

The Municipal Association of Victoria has joined calls to return staff to railway stations and improve safety on public transport.

Association president Brad Matheson said that restaffing stations would boost peoples’ confidence in the public transport system. He said it would also help the Government deliver its long-term transport goals which include increasing passenger numbers and creating activity centres around transport hubs.

A spokesman for Transport Minister Peter Batchelor said that he would talk to the Association about its ideas, but said that there were no short-term plans to reintroduce staff.

However the Association, which represents local councils, said that it expected to campaign on the issue. This could be in concert with the Rail Tram



and Bus Union, which had begun its own lobbying. Cr Matheson said that security cameras were no solution, saying that “I’ve had people ringing this week telling me you don’t feel any solace on a cold, remote, dark platform with a security camera there”.

The PTUA has long supported increased staffing at stations. Apart from the passenger safety benefits, staffing has been shown to reduce fare evasion and gives the public transport system a “human presence”.

The government’s only announcements so far have been Crime Stoppers noticeboards (which might actually decrease perceptions of safety) and extra closed circuit TV cameras at some stations.

Letter to the editor

Letters may be e-mailed to newsletter@ptua.org.au – no attachments please – or sent to the office – see address on page 2.

I would like to comment on your article “Runaway Train” March edition.

This accident should not have happened - there was sufficient time for a loudspeaker announcement to have been made to the passengers. I was one of the passengers on the V/Line train in 2nd carriage from the front and sustained a fracture to one kneecap and injury to my other leg. I have now been out of action for 3 months and am looking at 6-12 months before my condition stabilises.

We did not get any warning and we know the loudspeakers were working on the night as we had been given periodic indications of how soon the train would be leaving. It is my understanding that the driver only just managed to jump clear seconds before the collision.

However my main reason for writing as a member of the association is that the current situation where anyone is involved in a transport accident is that they have to pay the first \$488 of any medical expenses incurred.

The only exception to this is where they have been admitted as an inpatient to a hospital ward. Being in an emergency treatment unit of a

hospital for a number of hours does not qualify.

I feel very strongly that the association should be pushing for an amendment to the transport accident act as most commuters would be unaware of this and being a pensioner or on a journey to or from your workplace would not exempt the regular commuter from this expense.

Perhaps you could do an article on this and investigate what insurance if any the regular commuter can take out to cover it.

- Valerie Currie

The PTUA is examining the issue, and we wish Valerie a speedy recovery.

State govt misled Feds on freeway plans, says Court

On 8 April the Federal Court handed down its findings in a case brought by former PTUA President Dr Paul Mees against the State government. The court found that the Victorian government and VicRoads misled the Federal Environment Minister, David Kemp, over plans for the Scoresby Freeway (now the Mitcham-Frankston Freeway).

The State government applied in March 2002 for Federal environmental approval for the freeway, as they are required to do by law. Dr Mees argued that the application was misleading, because it failed to disclose that building the Scoresby Freeway would inevitably lead to construction of the final Ring Road link through Bulleen and Heidelberg.

Justice Gray ruled that this was in fact the case – his honour said that “the proposal for the northern section of the Scoresby Freeway was misleading in one respect. It failed to inform the Environment Minister of the strong chance that a freeway link would be built at some time in the future between the Eastern Freeway at Bulleen and the Metropolitan Ring Road at Greensborough, as a consequence of the building of the northern section of the Scoresby Freeway.”

Justice Gray said he was not able to find that the Bracks government currently has an actual plan to build such a link, because a witness from VicRoads had denied this. He did find that as recently as October 2000 Mr. Batchelor’s Chief of Staff, Lachlan MacDonald said to PTUA Vice-President Anna Morton “words to the effect that the link between the Eastern Freeway and the Western Ring Road at Greensborough would be a freeway link through Bulleen”, and that this was also Transport Minister Peter Batchelor’s view.

This result effectively invalidates the Federal environmental approval granted for the Scoresby Freeway. The Federal Environment Minister, Dr. Kemp, now has the power to revoke his earlier approval, and hold an independent inquiry into the whole issue. He should do so.

The State government also needs to commission a genuinely independent judicial inquiry into the real, long-term agenda for freeways in Melbourne, and why this agenda has not been disclosed to the community. Regardless of what Mr Batchelor and local MPs have said in the past, it is now firmly established that a freeway through Bulleen and Heidelberg would be, in Justice Gray’s words, a consequence of the Scoresby Freeway.

Stop press: On 9th of May Dr Kemp announced the environmental approval of the southern section of the Scoresby Freeway.

Time to review oil dependence

With ongoing instability in the Middle East, and the continued possibility of terrorist activity, it is prudent for Australians to consider all aspects of our national security. An important but often overlooked area is resource security. Apart from water, perhaps no resource is more important to us than oil. Uncertainty over the continued supply of cheap oil and our declining self-sufficiency in the commodity provide even more reasons why we should be reducing our dependence on oil.

With private cars being the fastest growing consumers of oil (and accounting for 56.3% of transport emissions), urban transport is the logical place to start. This of course means a shift away from the car to public transport, cycling and walking. The PTUA has long supported such a move, and advocates policies that will make public transport so attractive that it will become a worthwhile alternative to the car for many journeys.

PTUA News

Newsletter of the Public Transport Users' Association, Org. No. A-6256L

Print Post: Publication No. PP 331088/00009

If undeliverable, return to:

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Inside:

- Budget blow out
- Buses: have the bureaucrats finally got it?
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