

Dandenong goes it alone

The City of Greater Dandenong has allocated \$100,000 to provide a six month trial of weekend bus services to Dandenong, Springvale, Noble Park and Keysborough. The bus services will operate hourly until 10:30pm on Saturdays and till 6:30pm on Sundays and public holidays. Standard fares will apply.

Some areas will benefit from Sunday and public holiday services for the first time. While the service levels are still far from ideal, the route structure is reasonably straightforward and the initiative represents a genuine and significant benefit to residents of the Dandenong region.

The PTUA is excited by this precedent. To our knowledge, this is the first time (at least in recent memory) that local government has directly planned and funded a regular, integrated public transport service. We hope the service will be successful and help to demonstrate the pressing need for weekend public transport in the outer suburbs. Unfortunately, as an hourly service, it is difficult to co-ordinate effectively with trains and is unlikely to carry significant numbers of passengers with access to cars.

However, what is disappointing is the fact that it has been necessary for local government to take the step of financing public transport itself. This has only been needed because of the gross neglect by the State government of the transport needs of the community in general and the Dandenong region in particular. One household in eight in Greater Dandenong do not own a car yet the region experiences some of the world's worst public transport. Entire suburbs are without any Sunday services at all.

Nevertheless, we hope Dandenong's initiative will encourage other councils to undertake similar experiments.

Metro transport plan gutted

After years of waiting, the Metropolitan Transport Plan was finally launched on November 25th, a day after it had been leaked to the media by the State Opposition.

Drafts of the plan showed a lot of promise. Of particular interest was early material proposing the kind of re-organisation and upgrade to the bus network that would have made services genuinely useful to people all over Melbourne. (See PTUA News, May 2003)

All this material is gone, cut from the document during two years of slashing and burning by the Department of Infrastructure. What we are left with is a generally vague and ultimately profoundly disappointing document.

All we are left with is a short list of (unfunded) "priorities" (many already announced):

- a handful of SmartBus services, mostly consisting of lengthy orbital bus routes
- a few station upgrades, including North Melbourne (and others previously announced as part of the Mitcham to Frankston tollway)
- a third track from Caulfield to Dandenong (but no commitment to increase train fleet, holding capacity or driver numbers to allow more services)

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Keeping in touch...

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The PTUA members' discussion list is at
www.yahogroups.com/group/ptua

Stay up to date with PTUA events via the PTUA
News mailing list
www.yahogroups.com/group/ptua-news

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Committee Meetings

Meetings are on the fourth Thursday of each month.
Members are welcome to observe. Please call or e-mail
the office for details.

Geelong Branch

Geelong branch Convenor Tim Petersen has recently been appointed the head of a working group for a public transport strategy for the Geelong region. The strategy is being jointly funded by the regional body G21 and the Department of Infrastructure. The Geelong branch hopes that the plan will clearly set out measures to improve Geelong's public transport and be a useful tool in lobbying for upgraded services.

The draft "Fast Rail" timetables, which had been scheduled to be released for public comment "late this year", are still (at the time of writing) behind closed doors.

Despite the PTUA's insistence that more frequent and useable services be a key part of the fast rail upgrades, all responsibility for service provision and timetables seems to have been shifted from the main project group to V/Line. The State Government will doubtless face a bunch of very angry commuters if it fails to take the opportunity to upgrade service levels along with the infrastructure.

Geelong branch web site ⇒ www.ptua.org.au/geelong

Want cheap tickets?

The PTUA is investigating joining the Metlink Commuter Club, to offer discounted yearly tickets to our members. As well as the usual benefits of yearly tickets (no having to fiddle with ticket machines when you travel, travel in all zones on weekends) the discount of 10% on the normal yearly price brings it down to the equivalent of about 9 ½ monthlies, or about 36 weekly tickets.

The catch? Having to pay up-front for a year, but the substantial savings help make up for that. We are interested to know how many members might like to take up this offer. If you're interested (no obligation at this stage) please contact the office on 9650 7898 or office@ptua.org.au



Copy deadline for the next PTUA news is 15th January 2005

Newsletter contributors: Daniel Bowen, Peter Cook, Chris Loader, Alex Makin, Anna Morton, Tony Morton, Tim Petersen and Vaughan Williams. Printed on recycled paper by Flash Print, Collingwood.

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Fare Changes Sabotage Periodicals

Once again, a fare rise has coincided with an announcement of service cuts over the summer period.

Fares will increase on average by 2.25 per cent on 1 January 2005, which the government says is in line with CPI and with increases in other fees and charges. However, in an environment where the cost of cars is falling in real terms and where public transport users have already copped three years' worth of CPI increases a year ago, any rise in fares is unacceptable. Our fares continue to be the highest of any city in Australia, and for many trips are more costly than petrol in the car. Though service improvements must have top priority for policy change, uncompetitive fares are just another barrier to increased public transport use.

The detail of specific fare rises reveals a worrying trend. In particular, the cost of the 5 x Daily and 10 x 2 hour bulk tickets has decreased slightly, and the cost of Weekly tickets increased substantially, to make the Weekly fare the same as five bulk-discounted Dailies. This would appear to be a "wedge tactic" aimed at undermining periodical fares, contrary to the PTUA's fares policy.

Weekly tickets used to be good value even for those who travelled four days a week, because the inevitable "unplanned" trips could then be made by public transport as well for no extra cost. Our concern is that users of Weekly tickets will be persuaded to swap to 5-packs for the increased "flexibility" but will find themselves using the car more on non-workdays as a result.

As a quid pro quo the government has announced the "Sunday Saver", a cut-price daily ticket valid on Sundays. But this only exacerbates the trend toward making public transport users buy a new ticket every time they travel, a counterproductive move that will only further increase car use because of its lower marginal cost. (And of course the vast majority of Melburnians have no public transport to use on Sundays.) A better policy would have been to reinstate the free family travel entitlement for periodical ticket holders on weekends, which applied until 10 years ago.

The rise in the Zone 1 Weekly fare is equivalent to 3.6 per cent, more than half as high again as the average. Zone 1 Yearly fares have also increased by the same percentage, though Yearly fares for other zones have decreased

very slightly. The 10-cent increases in the basic single-zone 2-hour fares are also well in excess of the average.

However, to their credit Metlink will now make the Daily 5-pack available from Premium Stations as a single 5 x Daily ticket, and there is a plan to also make these available from ticket machines at all stations. This will greatly increase the convenience of purchasing these tickets for passengers who find them useful.

Also beneficial is a proposal (not yet given a firm date beyond "early 2005") to reprogram validating machines so that the second validation of a 10 x 2 hour ticket on the same day gives you the equivalent of a daily ticket. On the other hand, the abolition of the "after 3pm" rule (which provided an extra day's travel on periodical tickets validated late in the day) is just another blow in the "death by a thousand cuts" that appears to be planned for periodical tickets.

The drop in the cost of tertiary student concession cards to a nominal \$8.00 (the same as for primary and secondary students) was announced in the 2004 Budget, and will take effect from the beginning of next year, a great win for university and TAFE students.

Summer service reductions again

The PTUA is disappointed to learn that the traditional reduction in train services for the Christmas / New Year period is to extend until 21 January this year - one week longer than usual.

Apparently, this is to make it easier for Connex to manage its train driver shortage, by having drivers take leave in January so

that they are available to drive trains later in the year. This makes sense as an excuse, but doesn't change the fact that users are bearing the cost of bad management decisions taken by privatised operators. Last year some services, particularly towards the end of the "holiday period" were overcrowded.

Trams will run on reduced timetables until 8 January and buses until 22 January. As a result, even those who are lucky enough to have usable bus services for most of the year will be without them for most of January. Inner-city dwellers with access to the tram network come out by far the best from the holiday arrangements.

Metropolitan Transport Plan (cont'd from page 1)

- yet more investigation and feasibility study into rail extensions to South Morang and Epping
- upgrades to track and signalling to ease bottlenecks such as those around Clifton Hill

While some of these are worthwhile, it must be emphasised that the government has given no commitment whatsoever to fund them.

And they fall well short of being the kinds of initiatives to boost patronage around Melbourne and give people (particularly in the

outlying suburbs) a genuine alternative to driving their car.

There is no mention of Rowville or Doncaster Rail (instead more investigation into trams to Doncaster – which would provide inadequate capacity to ease congestion on the Eastern Freeway). No extensions to tram routes that currently fail to connect with the rail system (eg Glen Iris, East Malvern). And while more SmartBus routes are welcome (and in particular the improvements to operating hours and frequency), there is no proposal to give Melbourne a usable, comprehensive bus network.

Transport Minister Peter Batchelor was keen to emphasise that it wasn't a "shopping list" of projects. To us it looks like an extremely short shopping list.

But more significantly, it lacks any vision. The government may claim to be aiming to achieve 20% of motorised trips in Melbourne on public transport by 2020, but they clearly have no idea how to achieve it. It simply won't happen while so many suburbs continue to have no usable public transport.

Metropolitan Transport Plan: little for the Outer East

The Metropolitan Travel Plan contains nothing but further deception and broken promises for the outer east.

In 1999 the ALP Transport Policy promised a comprehensive public transport plan for the outer east including "increased frequency and spread of bus services" and improvements to travel times on the rail network, as well as the Knox tram extension and a feasibility study into the Rowville

Rail Line. (Rebuilding a Transport Network, Labor's Plan, 1999).

Five years later the Bracks government has delivered no specific action plans for public transport in the outer east or made any attempt to deliver on broken promises.

The only possible glimmer of hope is a SmartBus on Stud Road (Melbourne's seventh highest patronised bus service). However

upgrading this service has been a priority for the last three years...

It is clear that the outer east deserves better than a plan that clearly fails to deliver. It is also clear that residents need to step up their campaign to demand better.

Join the Outer East Branch meetings or register your interest for a local area committee and become involved! The Outer East needs you! (See below)

PTUA Outer East Branch

The PTUA Outer East Branch was officially formed in July 2004 and has continually aimed to provide a local and vocal presence through well-patronised public meetings and other activities.

The Outer East Branch has the ambitious goal of demanding that the government improve public transport in the outer east. It is only due to the dedication of the branch committee and its active members that so much has been achieved in 2004.

Much more does need to be done.

In 2005 the Outer East Branch will focus on establishing a number of Local Area Groups. These committees will meet locally to focus and discuss local issues, covering the following areas:

- Maroondah / Yarra Ranges
- Knox
- Monash
- Manningham
- Greater Dandenong / Casey

These groups will only be worthwhile if members become actively involved in demanding better public transport. Both local councils and the state government must realise that public transport is important to the outer east.

Please help us in 2005 in whatever capacity you are able to. Email Alex Makin (convener, Outer East branch) alex.makin@ptua.org.au or contact the PTUA office for more information.

See also ⇒ www.ptua.org.au/campaigns/outereast

Victory for transport activists in local elections

Candidates vowing to work for transport policy change have scored unprecedented successes in local council elections held in Melbourne on 27 November.

In the City of Yarra, the PTUA sought commitments on transport issues from all election candidates and published an election scorecard. We are delighted to report that a majority of successful candidates had scores of 3 out of 5 or better, having committed to support the main elements of our proposed motion to Council. The five councillors (out of nine) who signed up to our motion are Steve Jolly (Socialist), Annabel Barbara (ALP), and the three successful Greens: Kathleen Maltzahn, Jenny Farrar and Gurm Sekhon.

While the transport activist group Campaign for a Better City failed to get its candidates elected, its preferences were pivotal in determining the makeup of the new council, and CBC is to be congratulated for helping put transport on the campaign agenda.

Former PTUA President Paul Mees gained a sizeable primary vote in Nicholls Ward, but was ultimately defeated due largely to a swing against the Greens.

However in Langridge Ward, preferences from former PTUA Vice-President John McPherson ensured the election of Steve Jolly, the highest-scoring candidate on our scorecard other than John McPherson himself. Steve was an active member of the campaign

against the widening of Alexandra Parade in the mid-1990s.

The PTUA has made contact with the successful candidates, who we hope will soon deliver on their commitments. For more details on our proposed motion and the candidate scorecard, see our website:

www.ptua.org.au/campaigns/yarra

Pro-public-transport candidates have also scored victories in other local elections. New councillors in the City of Moreland include former PTUA Vice-President Jo Connellan and prominent environmental and social justice campaigner Andrea Sharam.

In the City of Melbourne, Greens candidate Fraser Brindley has been elected, replacing David Ristrom.

Spencer Street closure – passengers suffer again

The recently announced late evening closure of Spencer Street Station is yet another example of the state government's disregard for public transport users. From 29 November to 17 December, and beginning again in January for an indefinite period, after 10pm on weekdays Spencer Street will be closed, and most trains will not run through the City Loop.

Upfield line passengers, who already endure some of the least frequent train services of any line, will have to endure much longer journey times than usual on a replacement bus service.

Passengers on other northern and western lines will have to put up with altered services and in some cases changing trains – in the case of Williamstown line passengers,

twice, at both Footscray and Newport.



Herald-Sun

Other lines will be less affected, with trains running directly to and from Flinders Street rather than through the loop, but otherwise to normal timetables.

When the Spencer Street Station redevelopment was launched, there were questions about how it could be completed while keeping the station functioning, but we were assured that there would be minimal disruption to the operation of the station. Now, however, Leighton contractors claim the closure is essential to finish the project on time.

Although the redevelopment of Spencer Street Station is long overdue, the inconvenience to passengers over the end of year period, when people will be staying out for late night shopping and Christmas functions, is yet another let down for public transport users.

New Year's Eve chaos fixed

After the PTUA highlighted the public transport chaos in the first few hours of 2004, we will be paying close attention to how 2005 starts on Melbourne's public transport. While a lot of the new initiatives will address many of the problems from last year, we still think there is more to be done to bring Melbourne up to the standard of other Australian cities.

The government must get public transport right on New Year's Eve so people can celebrate the new year in most parts of Melbourne and be able to get home safely – without the temptation to drink and drive in the early hours of the morning.

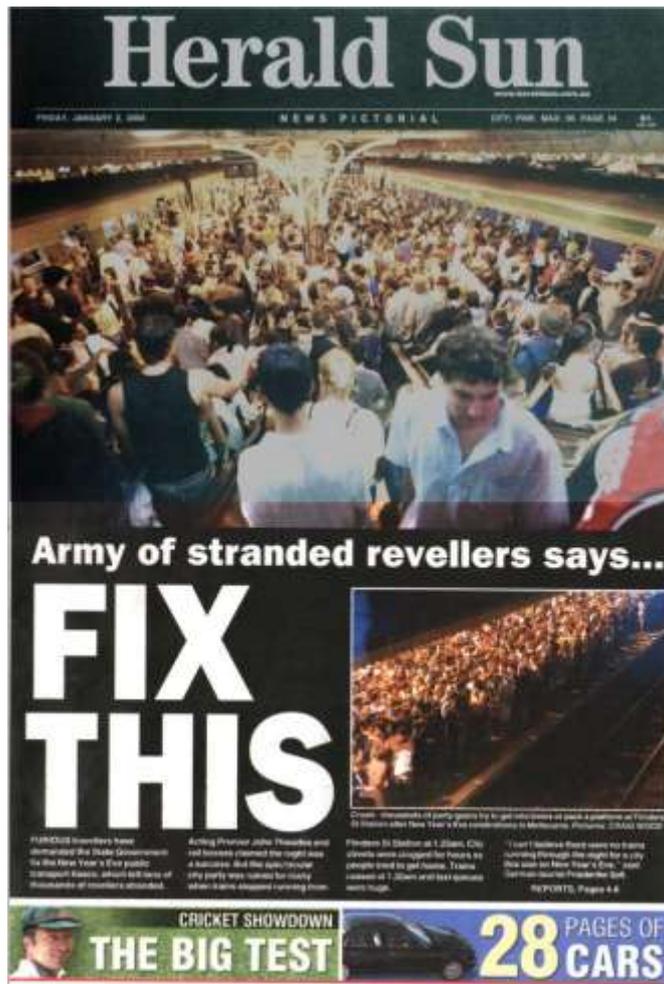
So will things be fixed this year?

Trains

Connex will run trains all night, with some extras before midnight, an initial high frequency service 12.30am to 2am, followed by hourly services until around 5am when regular services begin.

We welcome all night trains as a solution for providing easily understood transport throughout the night for party goers. With no last train, there won't be a rush and crush to catch last services, and trains will be able to get more people home safely.

However, with trains only running outbound, they've yet to address the needs of people celebrating New Year's Eve outside the CBD who might need to catch a train towards the city as part of their journey. We hope these people don't take risks on the road as a result.



Trams

The new operator agreements only require that trams be extended until 2am at 20 minute frequencies. The government has failed to understand the need for high frequency services immediately after midnight to clear the surge of people. We are hopeful that Yarra Trams will provide more frequent services, at least in the period straight after the fireworks.

We believe trams should also run all night. The extension to 2am only partially mitigates the rush to catch last services given the capacity problems last year.

Buses

Much the same as last year, half hourly Nightrider services until

4.30am, with some hourly extras on some routes. They will run in both directions, therefore providing the only city-bound transport overnight

For the two thirds of Melbourne not living near the train and tram network, Nightrider buses will be the only form of public transport available after midnight. With only 9 routes leaving the CBD, coverage will be sparse and connections to taxis (normal practice with NightRider) will be unworkable.

At the time of writing we've yet to hear whether Trainlink buses will connect with every train, and we understand no other bus routes will operate in Melbourne.

In conclusion

It's obvious that, after the severe and very public embarrassment last year, much planning has gone into making this year's New Year's Eve transport a success. While it's not perfect, it's a vast improvement, and we will be watching the results carefully.

New Year's Eve is only one night of the year, but it is critical for public transport to serve special events like this well, to encourage occasional users who might never otherwise use public transport to consider becoming regular customers. The improvements this year show that real upgrades can be achieved.

The PTUA's photos and accounts of last year's New Years Eve shambles:

⇒ www.ptua.org.au/news/2003/nye/

In brief

More name changes: Ballarat this time

Following on from the plan to rename Spencer Street Station as Southern Cross Station, the Bracks government has announced yet another pointless name change: the Ballarat railway line is to be renamed the Eureka Line, when the "Regional Fast Rail" upgrades are completed.

While we have no doubt that Spencer Street (when finally finished) will be a vast improvement over the old station, we have our doubts that the newly

dubbed Eureka Line will be accompanied by the kind of boost to services that will see large numbers of people choose to use it.

Jolimont bottleneck easy

The state government has found a new batch of excuses for not building the South Morang rail extension: now it's blaming bottlenecks elsewhere on the Clifton Hill lines.

Obviously some areas need improvement – in particular the single track from Clifton Hill to Westgarth, which delays numerous

trains on both the Epping and Hurstbridge lines (see "Trains still a mess", below).

But one claimed bottleneck – at Jolimont – could be easily fixed for free by simply running all Clifton Hill trains clockwise through the loop at all times.

If trains can be made to move through Flinders Street with few delays, the inconvenience some passengers might face could be made up for by the ability to run more frequent peak hour services.

Trains still a mess

We sympathise with the passengers on the morning train from Hurstbridge on 25 November who, according to one irate radio talkback caller, took two-and-a-half hours to get to Westgarth before changing to a tram. The cause of the problem was apparently an outbound train that had broken down on the single track past Eltham. The further delay at Westgarth was also due to

the single-track section across the Merri Creek. Patrons should question why the government puts a high priority on building a third track to Dandenong (which at best might provide one or two more express trains for peak-hour central-city commuters) but sees no reason to fund the duplication of these single-track bottlenecks, which cause unacceptable delays all the time.

People subjected to experiences like this might be forgiven for thinking that our public transport bureaucrats, in true Yes Minister style, regard passengers as an impediment to efficient operation. It is incumbent on our Transport Minister to take his eyes off his freeway plans once in a while and devote attention to our neglected public transport system.

Craigieburn extension: no stop at Coolaroo

Work has now commenced on the long-overdue electrification of the Broadmeadows line to Craigieburn. It is unfortunate that this is proceeding by half-measures, despite the rather excessive \$99 million price tag. (The Cranbourne electrification in 1991 cost \$22 million for about the same total length of track. Even with inflation it should cost less

than half what the Department of Infrastructure are spending.)

In order to adequately serve its catchment area, the Craigieburn line should have stations at the major arterial roads it intersects: Barry Road, Somerton Road and Patullos Road. These three proposed stations have long been planned and can be seen in the

Melway street directory. However, the current project will only provide one extra station: the Roxburgh Park station at Somerton Road. The government can easily afford the two additional stations that are needed: Coolaroo (Barry Road) and Patullos. No fancy architectural edifices are needed: just a platform from which passengers can board and alight.

Tell us what you think

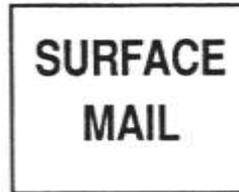
The PTUA committee are keen to hear your thoughts on public transport to help us plan our activities for 2005 and better represent the membership. Please

don't forget to fill out the survey (inserted in this newsletter), fold, seal and send it in. Alternatively you can fill it out on our website at www.ptua.org.au/membersurvey

As an added incentive, we'll give away gift memberships to three random respondents who reply by 12th January 2005.

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Inside:

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 - Survey: tell us what you think

Seasons greetings to all our members!

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