



The Victorian Transport Plan and Melbourne's Population Boom

It has taken barely two years for one of the biggest shifts in the Victorian public transport debate to occur.

As recently as 2007, the State government was shoring up its opposition to public transport expansion with a do-little plan—*Meeting Our Transport Challenges*—that was chiefly about hosing down expectations of major public transport improvements. The attitude of the government was most clearly expressed by Director of Public Transport Jim Betts in a widely-reported statement in October 2005, that there was no intention to build any new urban rail lines in the next decade. So, while the 'MOTC' plan released in 2006 did promise new orbital bus routes and some catch-up work on the existing rail system, there were few actual additions to public transport services.

Since 2007, however, the government has been seriously wrong-footed by train and tram patronage growth that it did not expect, did not plan for, and in fact actively planned against (by scrapping surplus Hitachi trains and Z class trams between 2001 and 2005). Faced with substantial political damage at the hands of angry commuters, the government has had to rethink—if ever so slightly—its stance against service expansion. The *Victorian Transport Plan*, released in January this year, was its response. Outwardly, it signalled a new era of major rail construction and expansion of service.

Yet behind the spin and glamour of its big project announcements, the old do-little attitude remains. The main beneficiaries of the big projects are peak-hour commuters to the CBD—the one 'market segment' where the mode-share battle is already won. Virtually nothing is said about boosting off-peak services, or improving the network that connects people to places other than the city centre. One of the orbital Smartbus routes promised in MOTC in 2006 has been quietly cancelled, and another shortened. And six months after the Regional Rail Link gained Federal funding, its supposed users still do not know how it is supposed to operate.

Recently, a new dimension has been added to the debate: the question of how to accommodate the huge forecast growth in Melbourne's population. But it is this question that reveals how limited the 'VTP' really is—that it's really just a political response to angry peak-hour commuters in overcrowded

trains, and not a broader vision to make our transport sustainable. Sure enough, much of our population growth is to be accommodated in new suburbs on Melbourne's fringe, areas which the VTP says are to be provided with new motorways on the one hand, and hourly bus services on the other. Clearly, ongoing car dependence for the vast majority of Melburnians is "all part of the plan": not just today but also in 2030, and indeed in 2100 if the laws of physics permit.

The good news, however, is that desire for better public transport, and awareness of the need to change old habits, is not restricted to peak-hour commuters. This attitude shift has not yet bitten the government, which has yet to sustain political damage on this wider front, thanks to its ability to hold expectations at a miserably low level. But next year's State election will be the first to take place in this new 'growth era' for public transport. Voters, many of whom have lived in other places and know good public transport when they see it, will not let do-little bureaucrats and politicians off the hook forever.

Shoring up car use on the Peninsula ⇒ Page 6

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Keeping in touch:

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Call or email the office (see above).

Commuter Club

PTUA members can obtain cheap yearly Metcards. See www.ptua.org.au/members/offers.

Internet

Our website is at www.ptua.org.au. The PTUA runs email lists for member discussions, and to stay up to date with PTUA events. Members can also view archived newsletters online. See: www.ptua.org.au/members/resources.

Committee

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Tony Morton—Secretary
Kerryn Wilmot—Treasurer
Michael Galea
Ian Hundley
Mark Johnson
Jason King
Tim Long
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David Robertson
Vaughan Williams

Branch convenors

Paul Westcott—Geelong
Jeremy Lunn—Eastern Suburbs

Contact

All committee members can be emailed using the format `firstname.lastname@ptua.org.au`.

Member Meetings

Melbourne

Dates / times as advised
Ross House
247 Flinders Lane, City
More details: see below

Eastern Suburbs

Third Tuesday of every month, 7pm
'The Barn' (behind Box Hill Baptist Church)
3 Ellingworth Parade (off Station St)
Box Hill

Geelong

First Saturday of every month (except Jan), 10:30am
Multimedia Room
Courthouse Youth Arts Centre
Corner Gheringhap and Little Malop Streets, Geelong



PTUA Annual General Meeting

The Annual General Meeting of the PTUA took place at Ross House on Monday 9 November. The highlight of the meeting was a video montage of news clips and other media coverage of the PTUA's activities. Members were invited to count the number of times the 'Myki machine falls apart' clip was used in the year's news bulletins!

As the number of nominations for PTUA Committee was equal to the number of positions available, there was no election held this year. The Committee welcomed two new members, Michael Galea and Ian Hundley, and farewelled retiring members Myles Green, Bronwen Merner and Fiona Rae. In addition to the elected Committee

members (listed above), Paul Westcott will continue as convenor of the Geelong Branch, and Jeremy Lunn will continue to convene our Eastern Suburbs branch.

Following the formal business of the AGM, there was a period of general discussion in which the Committee answered questions from members. Most member questions focussed on the new Myki system, about which there is clearly a lot of uncertainty—see articles on page 5 of this issue.

Ample finger food and drinks rounded out the evening. Many thanks to our dedicated Committee caterers for helping make this a success.

Members' meeting: 14 December

Our final members' meeting for the year takes place on Monday 14 December, at 6pm at Ross House. In keeping with the spirit of the season there will be light refreshments, and the opportunity to discuss issues of concern to members.

Meetings are open to PTUA financial members only, but we encourage you to bring a friend and sign them up on the night!

The meeting schedule will be changing for 2010: more details next issue.

Climate action heats up

A few short days after this newsletter is published, world leaders will gather in Copenhagen to thrash out a new global agreement to curb greenhouse gas emissions. At the time of writing, expectations are being actively managed downwards, with leaders at the recent APEC meeting in Singapore suggesting only a “political agreement” many emerge from Copenhagen, with legally-binding details to follow in 2010—perhaps.

According to some commentators, failure to conclude a binding agreement in December 2009 may be a blessing in disguise. Author of the landmark 2006 report for the British government on the economics of climate change, Nicholas Stern, told the Financial Times that he would “much prefer a framework that had to be filled in [next year] than something agreed with weak targets that would be difficult to unravel.”

Despite being elected on a wave of concern about climate change, the position being adopted by the Rudd Government has been criticised both within Australia

and internationally. Kevin Rudd was named personally by the G77 group of developing nations who criticised the failure of developed nations to commit to an emissions reduction target “that saves the world,”—that is, at least 40% below 1990 levels by 2020.

Australia’s ‘unconditional’ offer of only 5% compares very poorly to pledges of up to 40% by 2020 by European nations such as Norway. Meanwhile, our ‘conditional’ offer of up to 25% contains so many escape clauses that many analysts suggest it is meaningless. For example, the offer is conditional upon (among other things) “global action which mobilises greater financial resources;” yet development agencies such as Oxfam accuse the Australian government itself of holding back on financing climate change adaptation in developing countries.

Back home, the Rudd government was trying for a second time to get its heavily-criticised Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme (CPRS) through a hos-

tile Senate. On one hand the Greens offered to support the bill provided that emission targets were strengthened to bring them into line with those recommended by scientists. On the other hand, those Liberals who want a CPRS at all have demanded additional compensation for polluting industries (on top of proposed reductions in fuel excise) and a permanent exemption for agriculture. The Nationals, and many Liberal Senators, continue to show little inclination to support the CPRS in any form. Amid the farce playing out in Canberra, science-based targets seem to be all but forgotten.

Australians who are concerned about the lack of commitment to ensuring a safe climate will have an opportunity to show their frustration at the Walk against Warming on 12 December in various locations around the country.

For details visit

www.waw.org.au

www.walkagainstawarming.org

Summer: Here we go again?

Train users may be in for another long hot summer, with many of the problems that plagued the system last summer still unresolved.

Chaos ensued last January and February when heat-related failures coupled with strained relations between Connex and rail unions resulted in some days having hundreds of cancellations. The heat resulted in air-conditioning failures on a large number of Comeng trains (a little more than half the fleet), and buckled rails on some key parts of the network, resulting in some lines suspended. Added to this were electricity supply problems, which resulted in signal failures and power cut to trains.

There is a sleeper replacement programme underway to replace aging wooden sleepers with concrete, which if relaid properly largely resolves track

buckling issues. While this programme is not expected to be finished for another fifteen years or so, maintenance company MainCo told the Select Committee on Train Services in July that problem areas of the network have been targetted as a priority—which is why you might see curved sections of track with all their sleepers converted to concrete, but straight sections with only some replaced.

The concrete sleepers, like those used for Regional Fast Rail upgrades, are not gauge convertible. While this is immaterial in the short term, it will raise problems in the future due to the mess of incompatible rail gauges created in Victoria in the 1990s, and the need to move more freight onto rail. The PTUA’s position is that all new concrete sleepers should be gauge convertible, as the ad-

ditional cost involved is minimal.

While the government has committed to upgrading the Comeng train air-conditioners, we understand that only a handful of test units have been fitted in time for this summer. Meanwhile Connex and the RTBU have made their peace and agreed to a new Fault Management Protocol, which assuming it rolls over to the new operator, Metro Trains Melbourne, should help reduce the number of cancellations due to minor faults.

The net result? Premier John Brumby says all will be well, but we’ll have to wait and see. In preparation for hot days on the way, all regular train passengers would do well to check their alternative routes home, such as researching buses or trams that connect to parallel rail lines.

Extended clearways no solution for tram travel: PTUA study

A new PTUA study confirms our long-held contention: Trams in Melbourne are slow because the system is engineered to make them slow.

The five-month travel time study found no noticeable improvement in tram travel times from extended clearway hours on Sydney Road in Brunswick—but plenty of lost time due to red lights.

For some time, PTUA Secretary Tony Morton has been travelling to and from work with a stopwatch. The aim is to measure—carefully and scientifically—what it is that’s making Melbourne trams so slow. This is done by counting up the ‘dead time’ on tram journeys: the lost time when the tram isn’t actually picking up or dropping off passengers, yet is not moving.

Previous travel time studies showed that while trams do spend time in traffic queues in places where trams and cars share a lane, that’s not the biggest source of delay. More often, a stationary tram is just waiting for a red traffic light to turn green.

In 2007, a study on the Lygon Street tram found that even not counting boarding time, trams are delayed twice as long within the City of Melbourne boundaries as in the suburbs. This is surprising at first, because in the CBD, trams and cars occupy separate lanes.

But it starts to make sense if it is accepted that the biggest problem is traffic lights, not car congestion.

The conclusion of that study—that trams spend up to one-third of their travel time just waiting for red lights—was presented at a Melbourne transport conference in 2007, and is available from the PTUA website under ‘Papers and Submissions’.

The latest study is aimed at a newly controversial question: whether clearways improve tram travel speeds in ‘peak shoulder’ times.

In July this year, the clearway finish time in Sydney Road was extended from 6pm to 7pm. Measurements prior to this show that northbound trams took an average of 9 minutes and 12 seconds to travel the length of Sydney Road Brunswick. Since July, the same trams have taken an average of 8 minutes and 58 seconds. The 14 second difference is not statistically significant, and may well be down to pure chance (see below for details).

We have also collected data for morning peak travel to the city, and for travel in Royal Parade, immediately south of Sydney Road. This evidence confirmed the earlier finding: that trams are delayed more by red lights close to the city than by traffic queues further out.

In Sydney Road the trams averaged 16.5kph in the evening, but in Royal Parade they only averaged 15.1kph. Yet Royal Parade has a barrier to keep the cars off the tram tracks—so there is no traffic for the trams to be caught in.

When people in officialdom talk about delays to trams, then, just talking about ‘traffic congestion’ is far too simplistic.

There was also the opportunity to time the tram in the middle of the day on weekends, a time when trams are known to be significantly affected by traffic queues. While a significant amount of dead time was observed—typically around five minutes—this is similar to the delay that occurs to Swanston Street trams on a regular basis, without any traffic queues.

The longest delays in Sydney Road occur in the morning peak (a clearway time) on sporadic occasions when traffic queues back up Sydney Road from Brunswick Road. The longest of these was a 20 minute delay. Yet even including these in the average, the average speed is faster than just to the south, on the reserved tramway in Royal Parade.

These results call attention to the need for traffic light priority for trams. Clearways may help squeeze more cars onto already congested inner-city streets, but claims that they speed up trams are not well-founded.

The results

Location, time and direction	Av.travel time (min:sec)	Av. speed (kph)	Av.dead time (min:sec)
Sydney Road, PM northbound, May–June 2009	9:12	16.3	1:19
Sydney Road, PM northbound, July–November 2009	8:58	16.7	1:22
Royal Parade, PM northbound	10:44	15.1	2:26
Sydney Road, AM southbound	10:20	14.5	2:01
Royal Parade, AM southbound	11:46	13.8	3:02

Observations were collected between 25 May 2009 and 13 November 2009. AM observations were collected between 8am and 8:30am. PM observations were collected between 6:00pm and 7:00pm. ‘Sydney Road’ means the section between Park Street and Moreland Road. ‘Royal Parade’ is measured between Haymarket and Park Street. All ‘averages’ are mean values.

The difference of 14 seconds between mean travel time in May–June and in July–November is not statistically significant: that is to say, it is too small to reasonably rule out that it arose by chance alone ($t = 0.77$).

The *median* travel time, at 9 minutes, is identical before and after the clearway extension.

Myki starting soon?

Our Myki meeting in October was well-attended, and along with responses from the Transport Ticketing Authority (TTA) provided afterwards, answered a number of queries members had about the new ticketing system.

At the time of writing, a thousand public servants are busy testing the Myki system around Melbourne and logging their experience for the TTA. As well, “Myki Mates” have been deployed at the main railway stations to help the test users and answer queries from the general public, the most common of which is, of course, “When will it start?”

The TTA says that ultimately it’s up to Public Transport Minister Lynne Kosky to give the green-light to switch the sys-

tem on for the general public, but this will depend on the advice the TTA provides based on what the test users find. From what we can see, there have been improvements to scanning speed, but problems remain. How fast these can be resolved is anyone’s guess.

Even the fastest scanners are likely to cause delays on busy trams, with passengers having to touch on and touch off on every trip. And because tickets will have no printed information on them at all, it will be easy to mix them up if you have more than one in your wallet.

There are some advantages of course (at a cost of \$1.35 billion, you’d certainly hope so). Access to cheap weekend fares will be made easier, and the Myki cards are likely to be more reliable than Metcards, especially for peri-

odical (‘Myki Pass’) users. And at last you’ll be able to buy tickets on trams with notes, not just coins.

But despite what politicians have said, the system won’t be noticeably cheaper for those already used to buying fares in bulk. And early-adopters will want to keep a close eye on their card balance and transactions, to make sure they’ve been charged the right amounts while the glitches are being ironed-out.

⇒ For more general information on how Myki will work, see the September *PTUA News*, page 4, and www.ptua.org.au/2009/11/18/myki-qa.

⇒ The TTA’s responses to questions following the meeting are on our web site: www.ptua.org.au/2009/10/06/myki-coming-to-melb.

Tram cancelled? Buy another ticket

In another entry for the ‘Worse is Better’ file, Myki threatens to increase costs for passengers when services are late or cancelled.

An important feature of our two-hour fares is that the ticket remains valid so long as your final journey commences before the two-hour period expires. Under the current system, this extends to the case where the service arrives late or is cancelled: as long as you got to the stop or station before the expiry time, there is no penalty.

However, the government has now informed us that the Myki system isn’t clever enough to make this provision work on trams and buses (train stations have gates that register arrival time). As a result, if a tram or bus is scheduled to depart before the expiry time on a two-hour ticket, but gets delayed beyond that time, passengers will be liable for an additional fare.

This new rule, which penalises passengers twice for faulty service—once for being delayed and again for being charged an additional fare—has been

written into the *Fares and Ticketing Manual* issued for Myki.

Periodicals left for dead

It’s official: the all-zone weekend travel privilege attached to periodical tickets will be withdrawn with the introduction of Myki.

The PTUA has long maintained that a fair and effective ticketing system should encourage the use of periodical tickets. These are good for the operator because they are simple to administer and provide an advance revenue stream, good for passengers because they provide unlimited travel with a single transaction, and good for the environment because they provide an incentive for regular use of public transport in preference to private cars.

Until the mid-1990s, Melbourne travellers had incentives to use periodical tickets similar to those that are now promoted in Europe. Sizeable discounts meant that weekly, monthly and yearly tickets were attractive not only to full-time workers but also to

those who travelled 3–4 days a week. And on weekends, a periodical ticket provided free travel in all zones for two adults and up to four children—an enlightened policy that recognised that weekend travel is more family-oriented than weekday travel, but buying tickets for every family member is a deterrent to using public transport, at a time when public transport is barely faster than car travel.

With the very last of these entitlements to go, the notion of a weekly ticket is fatally wounded, while the value of other periodical tickets has eroded to the point where travellers have little in the way of a positive incentive to leave the car at home more often. Concession card holders are particularly worse off, since there is no concession on the new \$3.00 weekend cap.

The government has attempted to defend these changes on grounds of ‘fairness and consistency’. But they are a slap in the face to passengers, who are entitled to expect that a system costing the state over \$1.3 billion will not leave them worse off. The PTUA will be making its opposition known at every opportunity.

Geelong branch report

Unfortunately, Stage 1 of the \$80 million Geelong bus revamp has had a troubled start. While some of the new, simplified routes seem to have worked well (despite no general increase in frequency and even some reduction), two alterations have had to be made just since September.

Buses on the new Route 14 through Grovedale and Waurin Ponds were unable to keep to the timetable from the first day, and the adverse effects flowed through to other routes. A rewrite of that timetable after a month didn't solve all the time-keeping problems with the

new routes serving the Grovedale area, so it was decided last week that most of them will no longer run through to Geelong station, that innovation having only lasted two months.

It's good to see that the quality of passenger information provided, both generally and at each bus stop on the new routes, has been significantly improved. However it does seem that some of the planning for the new routes and times has been deficient, and that doesn't bode well for the second stage of the changes due next year.

We must thank Community Services Minister and MP for Bellarine, Lisa Neville, for helping to overcome the difficulty we've had in getting information from the Department of Transport about exactly what infrastructure and service pattern is to be provided for Geelong travellers on the Regional Rail Link. After her intervention, we have been able to arrange a meeting on this, with a senior planner in the DoT.

The PTUA Geelong Branch meets monthly in Geelong city; see Page 2 for details. Paul Westcott is the branch convenor.

Attention: Frankston and Mornington Peninsula members

Despite having no Federal funds for its 'Peninsula Link', the State Government has announced its intention to proceed regardless, driving a motorway through precious native wildlife habitat and historic homesteads, in order to further entrench car dependence in south-east Melbourne and for visitors to the Peninsula. With overall car traffic volumes static or falling in Melbourne since 2005, the road has little justification other than to fill the coffers of the EastLink consortium, who have been disappointed at traffic levels so far.

Meanwhile, virtually nothing is being done to remedy the hopeless situation for public transport in Frankston and on the Peninsula. We might have hoped for some modest progress in the re-

cent bus review of the region. But despite acknowledging public demands both for increased service frequencies and for an east-west service between Mornington and Hastings, the review has recommended neither. Instead, a couple more hourly bus services will be added, on the tacit assumption that public transport is a charity service for those who cannot drive cars, rather than an environmentally friendly alternative increasingly desired by those with cars.

For the over 50,000 residents of bayside towns from Safety Beach to Portsea—many on low to middle incomes—the backbone of the public transport system is the route 788 bus from Frankston to Portsea. This runs at a hopeless 45 minute frequency on weekdays, and

a scandalous 75 minute frequency on weekends, yet even so is regularly overcrowded. If any of the thousands of regular visitors to the southern Peninsula were to attempt using public transport, this is the bus they would be dependent on. Would any sane car owner choose public transport in this situation?

The push for the Peninsula Link together with the neglect of bus services is just one example of how the Victorian Transport Plan is working to increase the share of car travel at the expense of public transport. We are keen to get in contact with PTUA members in this area to give this issue the prominence it requires.

⇒ **Keen to help? Please email office@ptua.org.au**

In brief. . .

New operators

As we went to press, trains and trams were being handed over to new operators Metro Trains Melbourne and KDR. While we don't expect much to change other than the signs (see last issue), we would be interested to hear your experiences of new operators doing things differently—for better or worse. Email your stories to

office@ptua.org.au.

Last train was a bus

Connex and the media have accurately reported that the last Connex *train* to run in Melbourne was the Pakenham service arriving at 1:15 on Monday morning. But the last Connex *service* to arrive at its destination was officially the Werribee service—replaced with a bus due to work at Laverton station, and arriving at Werribee

at 1:20. There's some irony in the fact that Connex's last scheduled Melbourne service was a substitute bus.

Station guards

The PTUA is cautiously supporting the State Opposition's plan for Protective Service staff to be deployed on Victorian railway stations. Our position remains that (friendly) staff be available on all stations not only to maintain security but also to assist passengers.

PTUA and the Henry Tax Review

As this newsletter goes to print, the Henry Review of Australia's Future Tax system will be putting the finishing touches on its report to federal treasurer Wayne Swan.

The PTUA lodged two formal submissions with the Review. We pointed out that taxes on motor vehicles and fuel in Australia are relatively low compared to many countries, and they fall well short of the 'social costs'—such as pollution, health costs and extensive land use—that road users impose on the rest of society.

An analysis of transport taxes commissioned by the Review found that the economically optimal level for fuel tax is probably much higher than current levels and that transport tax reform could boost productivity in the Australian transport sector and the

economy more broadly. The analysis also pointed to the potential for shifting existing charges such as registration and insurance to a distance basis rather than the annual basis which currently disadvantages people who use their vehicle less than average and cause below-average congestion, pollution and accident costs in the process.

While welcoming this analysis, the PTUA pointed out that revenue from transport tax reform must not be squandered on continued road expansion that inevitably locks in car dependence, but instead be directed to improving transport alternatives. Imposing road user charges on motorists without also improving public transport services could be a major financial burden on those households already facing the high

costs of forced car ownership resulting from inadequate public transport. The PTUA therefore urges governments to direct revenue from such charges to improving public transport and to providing targeted tax/transfer relief to vulnerable groups (not to indiscriminate fuel tax cuts that mainly benefit higher income households).

The federal government's response to the Henry Review is expected sometime in 2010. We hope that both federal and state governments respond correctly to the looming challenges of peak oil and climate change and implement a package of reforms that reduce reliance on private motorised transport. Their response will be a key test of their true level of commitment to reform and sustainability.

Public transport is good for your health: Movember at the PTUA

PTUA committee member Jason King participated in Movember—growing a moustache to raise money for the Prostate Cancer Foundation and the BeyondBlue depression initiative.

Here he has taken his rather impressive moustache to the PTUA office. (That's Geelong Branch Convenor Paul Westcott in the background, trying to stay out of the photo.)

⇒ au.movember.com/mospace/85213/



Calling all volunteers

The PTUA is always in need of volunteers to help out in our office at Ross House. Are you able to spare a couple of hours around lunchtime one day each week, to provide general office support such as answering a few phone calls and emails? We provide basic training to assist people with answering queries. Please contact office@ptua.org.au to discuss further.

Copy deadline for the next PTUA News is 5 February 2010.

Newsletter contributors: Tony Morton, Daniel Bowen, Paul Westcott and Jason 'Mo' King.

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Victorian Transport Plan, one year on
Climate action heats up
Our tram travel time study
Myki update

Season's Greetings to all our members

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If you are reading a friend's newsletter and would like to join and help the fight for better public transport, it's \$25 per year (\$12 concession). Call the office or see www.ptua.org.au/join.

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