

6 Major problems for Metro

The Age in July reported on a leaked Metro document which highlighted six major infrastructure problems with the rail network.

Electrical power - lack of power means the newer trains in the fleet can't accelerate as fast as they otherwise could, slowing down services.

Old signalling equipment - leading to continued signal failures across the network.

Dark territory - areas of the rail network where signallers can't easily pinpoint the position of trains, limiting the number of extra services that can run.

Outmoded technology - equipment past its design life, including some 2000 CCTV cameras.

Complex junctions - Metro claims some junctions are over-complicated, leading to increased track failures and slowing down services. They want to remove points at some locations.

Run down stations - including outdated facilities for staff and passengers, structural problems, and in some cases causing speed restrictions for trains.

Rarely have we had such an insight into the issues affecting the rail network's capacity and reliability. While old equipment isn't necessarily bad, something as basic as a lack of adequate power is clearly the result of a failure to invest in the system over many decades, by governments of both sides.



There is more in the document, of course. Notable is Metro's wish to split the network into five, the so-called "Five group railway" strategy. This would see greater separation between groups of lines: Northern (Sunbury, Craigieburn, Upfield), Clifton Hill (South Morang, Hurstbridge), Burnley (Lilydale, Belgrave, Alamein, Glen Waverley), Dandenong (Pakenham, Cranbourne), and Cross City (Frankston, Sandringham, Williamstown, Werribee).

This would be a step towards operations similar to those seen in big cities overseas, where railway lines run separately, with little or no direct interaction. Switching tracks is minimised (hence Metro's wish

to remove some junctions) and the overall capacity of the network is maximised. The benefits are clear: more reliable services, and more capacity to run them. Therefore the PTUA supports the proposal.

This is subject, however, to retaining network

elements such as points that ensure appropriate flexibility and redundancy to shift rolling stock and other resources from group to group when necessary, and where we suspect their removal may be motivated more by cost-cutting than operational efficiency.

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Keeping in touch...

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Our web site 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:

www.ptua.org.au/members/resources

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Member meetings

Melbourne:

Meetings will be advertised in PTUA News and on our website
www.ptua.org.au

Geelong:

First Saturday of every month (except Jan), 10:30am
Mary MacKillop Room, St Mary's Parish Offices, cnr. Little Myers and Yarra streets, Geelong.

Membership Enquiries

Call or e-mail the office (see above)

PTUA members can obtain cheap yearly Myki passes – see
www.ptua.org.au/members/offers

Movie Screening

Regrettably we had to cancel the Outer Circle Railway screening in July because we had a problem obtaining the appropriate equipment to be able to show the film.

We did alert as many members as possible the week before via email, as well as Twitter and Facebook, and our web site, but we are aware of a few who did not get the message and arrived at Ross House on the night. To those people in particular we apologise.

We will let you know if we are able to screen the movie at another time.

For those who do have Internet access, we encourage you to ensure you are on our email list (email the office if in doubt) or to Like us on Facebook and/or Follow us on Twitter.

Email: office@ptua.org.au

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Toorak, meet West Coburg: Tram route changes explained

PTV and Yarra Trams have been seeking feedback on some changes to tram routes in the St Kilda Road corridor, in William Street, and north along Lygon Street. The routes affected are 1, 6, 8 and 55.

The PTUA has, after some consideration, given its support to the changes. We agree with their aim, which is to move all the St Kilda Road tram routes to a uniform 10 minute frequency on weekdays, rather than the 12 minute frequency that exists at present. The higher frequency will also extend later in the evening - to at least 8pm rather than 6:30-7pm at present.

It would also allow the same 10 minute services on weekends, but PTV says it lacks the budget for this particular improvement. The PTUA will be pushing strongly for this, given that tram use on weekends is as high or higher than on weekdays outside peak hour. In our view the service improvement would largely pay for itself in passenger revenue.

Importantly, the changes do not remove service from any part of any route or lead to any noticeable reduction in frequency. For those travelling between the northern suburbs and the city, the only changes seen will be a change in route number and a boost in frequency. The existing route 1 from East Coburg will become route 6 instead (and connect through to Glen Iris), while the existing route 8 from Moreland will become the new route 1 and go to South Melbourne. Route 55 from West Coburg will be relabelled 58, and be extended from Domain Interchange to Toorak, replacing route 8.

The one real change will be to passengers travelling between South Yarra and the city on route 8. This route will now, as route 58, proceed into the city via Kingsway and William Street instead of up St Kilda Road and Swanston Street. Those wanting to travel between South Yarra and Swanston Street (or the Arts Centre) will now need to change at Domain.



For those travelling from the Toorak end of route 8, we would recommend passengers for Swanston Street change at South Yarra station for a faster train trip to Flinders Street or Melbourne Central - as many passengers likely do already. The main inconvenience will be to those going to or from locations west of Punt Road.

The revised routes (1, 6 and 58) are planned to move exclusively to higher-capacity B and D class trams as part of this change, which it is expected will help relieve the chronic overcrowding that exists on these routes. Further rollout of these trams to replace the smaller

Z class on the remaining St Kilda Road routes is expected to soon follow. This will mean that despite route 8 no longer serving St Kilda Road, the total carrying capacity of the St Kilda Road routes will actually increase. This should come as a relief to those of us who try to catch a tram from the Domain to the city in the afternoon peak (for example) and have to let two or three full trams pass by before they can board.

The PTUA will press for other chronic problems on these routes to be addressed as part of the changes. This includes the erratic spacing of trams both in St Kilda Road and on the combined 1/8 route (now to be the 1/6 route) serving Lygon Street.

We will also push for the faster provision of accessible platform stops in William Street to go with the low-floor D class trams that will run on this route - with the proviso that the existing stop locations are maintained with at most minor changes. The current stop locations are vital for interchange purposes as well as to serve the Law Courts clustered at the Lonsdale/William Street corner.

Lastly, we have minor reservations about the coinage of the new route number 58 for the merged routes 8 and 55. In our view, the existing route number 8 should be retained for the new route. This will be less confusing for the passengers between Domain Interchange and Toorak, who would be most likely to benefit from an existing route number to guide them when changing services. Passengers on the existing route 55, by contrast, will not see any change to this route other than the number.

The Regional Rail Link and suburban sprawl in western Melbourne.

The new Regional Rail Link commenced service on Sunday 21 June, with two new metropolitan stations, Wyndham Vale and Tarneit, in the City of Wyndham. This is one of the fastest growing municipalities in Australia, with a population of 201,000, forecast to grow to 384,000 by the year 2036.

The \$3.65 billion Regional Rail Link project was funded by the Commonwealth and Victorian governments. It was the largest public transport infrastructure project in Melbourne's west, which has been denied adequate public transport services for decades.

More by accident than design it is the first addition to Melbourne's train network that caters for some of Melbourne's expanding population when it is needed. Repeated calls for services elsewhere in the Melbourne metropolitan area to either catch up with suburban expansion or, better still, anticipate it, such as to Rowville, Doncaster Hill, Mernda (until recently), and Melbourne Airport have been met with obfuscation by successive Victorian governments.

To meet an essential requirement for liveability a much greater proportion of all trips need to be taken by public transport rather than by private motor vehicle than is currently the case.

However, the failure by governments to cater for suburban growth has meant that Melbourne's public transport system lags behind the requirement for services in both growing and established suburbs.

So, is the Regional Rail Link up to the task? In a way it is a fortuitous

success story, but one with major flaws. The former head of the Victorian transport department admitted that the project was budgeted for haphazardly, and it was not the consequence of a disciplined integrated transport and land use planning approach.

In fact, the announcement of the Regional Rail Link project paralleled the Brumby government's decision in December 2008 to expand Melbourne's Urban Growth Boundary by 430 square kilometres, which included sizeable increases in the City of Wyndham. This expansion of the Urban Growth Boundary was much criticised by urban planners as unnecessary to cater for population growth and because it provided *carte blanche* for even greater urban sprawl. Worse, these were followed by further incremental additions by the Napthine government.

The decision to build the Regional Rail Link was primarily driven by the need to relieve congestion in the rail network caused by increasing numbers of metropolitan and regional train services competing for limited track capacity in metropolitan Melbourne. It now provides capacity for an estimated extra 23 metropolitan services and 10 extra regional services in the morning and afternoon peak periods, which could cater for an estimated extra 54,000 passenger trips per day.

What of the future? Quite apart from issues related to the scheduling of regional services for Ballarat and Bendigo, the Regional Rail Link still provides only hourly services from Geelong on Saturdays and Sundays. Only one

extra service has so far been introduced on the Werribee line.

We also have the basic incompatibility of a regional service from Geelong providing services for metropolitan patrons, with carriages that are unsuited for fast and frequent passenger loading and unloading. Unless addressed this will become an increasing problem for on-time running as passenger numbers increase.

However, Regional Rail Link provides rail services for at least some of Melbourne's burgeoning population on the urban fringe; householders who would otherwise be burdened by the costs of heavy car dependency. It has also been complemented by sensibly scheduled connecting route bus services at the new Wyndham Vale and Tarneit railway stations, although a rail connection between Wyndham Vale station and Werribee should be built if the full potential of passenger rail services is to be optimised for the residents of Wyndham.

To counter the impetus for urban sprawl triggered by the expansion of the Urban Growth Boundary, early moves are required to develop viable commercial centres in the Wyndham Vale and Tarneit railway station precincts, with associated higher density residential development. This should be accompanied by planning for additional stations between Wyndham Vale and Tarneit and between Tarneit and Deer Park to cater for the future housing growth in the area mandated by the earlier expansion of Melbourne's Urban Growth Boundary.

Inaugural Race to Town Hall

On August 11th PTUA & the Public Transport Not Traffic campaign held the inaugural Race to Town Hall. We had over 60 people participate on the day including local councillors and members of Parliament and their staff.

The idea of the event is that people leave from home, work or school at 8am sharp and travel by public transport to Richmond town hall.

People can choose to race on whatever mode(s) of public transport that suits so long as they depart at the scheduled time.

When they arrive they report back on their trip; was anything

delayed; did they have trouble getting modes to match up; all the good and the bad elements of their journey.

We took photos of all the racers with their race details to have a visual record for the future campaign.

Each racer mapped out their race on a blown up map using different colours to depict each mode of transport, so we have a visual display of where everyone had come from.

The aim of the event was to bring people together to share their experiences of public transport in

the city of Yarra and start a conversation about where local improvements can be made.

There are plans being developed to progressively run these events in other local government areas and we are open to suggestions but would like local PTUA and PTNT members to be part of the planning. If you want to be involved email eleisha.mullane@ptua.org.au or Berish@ptnt.org to let us know and we will be in touch to help you get a Race going in your area.

East West Link - just get over it.

In a bad case of *deja vu* the Federal Liberals are trying to resurrect the East West Link as part of the policy platform for the Federal election and called a rally for the steps of Parliament house on Saturday 8th August. Despite Prime Minister Tony Abbott himself declaring the State election would be a referendum on the East West link.

There was a crowd of around 100 people from the Liberals, with a number of members of Parliament and their staffers noticed in the crowd. With two days notice we managed to get around 50-60 joyful pro PT protesters ready to do it all again to make sure we don't see this project resurrected. In a nod to nostalgia many people dusted off their Anti East West

Link banners and brought them in to remind the Liberal we voted, it's done, just get over it.



Geelong branch report

The extensive changes to local bus services (almost certainly the most wide-ranging ever) remain controversial, and have led to a number of new faces appearing at Branch meetings in recent months. Although the heat has now dissipated to some extent, we are still getting complaints about various aspects of the new arrangements.

We were told in early August that the new Geelong bus schedules have led to a marked rise in patronage, to the extent that there has been some overcrowding, with associated timekeeping problems. However, no patronage statistics have been released.

Significantly, although a review of the new system was promised within a year, PTV has already conducted a consultation session in Lara concerning bus links from there to the large Corio Shopping Centre complex, which were downgraded under the new bus arrangements.

One of our local bus companies is strongly resisting the reinstatement of what has once again become, following the route changes, the

nearest bus stop to South Geelong station. PTV initially supported the reinstatement. It's an example of how some operators haven't yet come to grips with the fact that PTV is supposed to control the public transport system, not them.

Despite promises that the RRL would at least provide greater reliability, Geelong rail passengers are experiencing regular hold-ups at Deer Park West junction, and on the North Melbourne flyover when heading to platforms from 1 to 8-South at Southern Cross. Delays approaching or on the flyover have been nearly five minutes on occasions.

We hope these problems don't indicate deficiencies with the infrastructure and can be overcome by better timetabling. However it does seem that with only two tracks over the North Melbourne flyover leading to nine platform tracks at Southern Cross (or more, depending on how they are used), there is the potential for delays no matter how the timetable is written.

Peak period rail commuters have been annoyed about other aspects

of the changes: the complete elimination of peak trains which formerly expressed through all minor stations such as North Shore, Corio and Little River, and the (inevitable) fact that almost every train pick-ups (or drops-off, depending on direction) at Wyndham Vale & Tarneit. That when some peak trains are already over-full and at maximum seven-car length.

The 20-minute off-peak rail service to and from Melbourne is a huge plus. There's far less need for off-peak travellers to Melbourne from South Geelong, Geelong or North Geelong stations to be bound by the timetable. However, those using Waurin Ponds, Marshall, North Shore or Corio are not as well off, because only every second train stops at those stations.

We await with interest the arrival in the Geelong region in September of the travelling roadshow for the Regional [Public Transport] Network Development Plan. There will be three consultation sessions in Geelong itself (one for "stakeholders" only), and one session at Torquay.

Going paperless - how you can help our campaigning

With growing member numbers, but only a small voluntary office workforce, we are looking for ways to most efficiently handle new memberships, renewals, enquiries, and distribution of newsletters and other news.

As part of this, we have recently upgraded the PTUA's membership database to provide more automation such as renewal notices

and improve processing of credit card payments.

While we will continue to cater for members who do not have Internet access, we would encourage those who can to renew online with a credit card to minimise the amount of manual handling required.

Likewise, we are currently more easily able to handle enquiries by email than phone.

Please also consider if you wish to receive a paper newsletter, or would prefer to read it online (it will reach you faster, and in colour!).

In this way, we can concentrate our volunteers' efforts on campaigning for better public transport, rather than paperwork.

Got a query, or can you help? Email the office: office@ptua.org.au

Letter to the editor

Dear Editor

I read with great interest on page 7 of the PTUA News for June 2015 the article entitled "Level crossings push ahead, but are we getting the best solutions?"

With the debate of lowering verses elevating the railway especially at stations seemingly becoming a hot topic, no mention was made in the article about conservation of energy. Surely this would be a long term objective.

Perhaps Ian Woodcock or someone else could re-visit this topic as follows:

1. Compare train operating costs with lowering or elevating the railway at a station verses doing nothing. This would include energy used and wasted as well as timetable changes.

2. The effect on express and goods trains as the speed limit cannot be exceeded.

2.1. Increased energy usage would occur with braking at the lowered station and subsequent powering out of the dip.

2.2. The elevated station would be traversed by momentum with a slight drop in speed and perhaps an

increase in time but no extra energy required.

Perhaps adding the conservation of energy argument to the desired outcome of eliminating level crossings will win the day.

Regards,

Glen Mills

Editor's note - Ian Woodcock gave a presentation on level crossing elimination to a PTUA members meeting earlier this year.

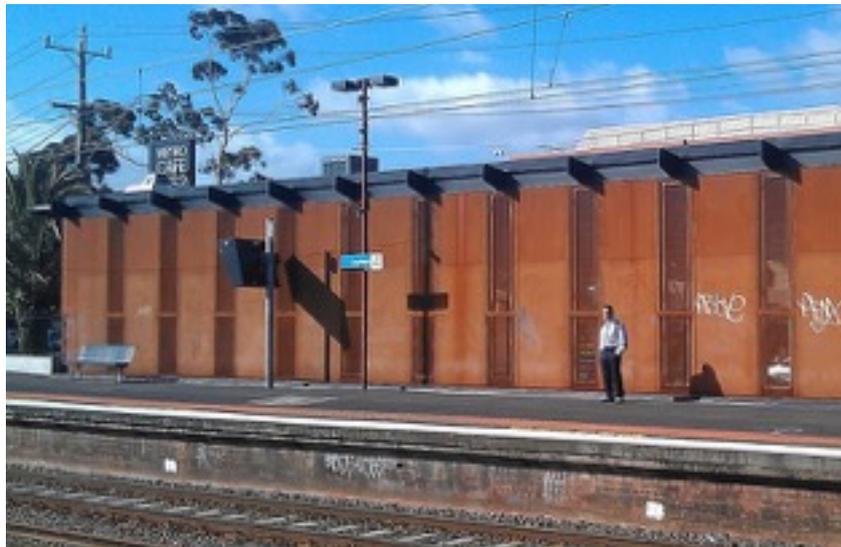
6 Major problems for Metro

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Some lines would be permanently removed from the City Loop, specifically the remaining peak and weekend Frankston trains, weekend Sandringham and Werribee services, and Glen Waverley services. Problems with this can be

minimised by running all lines at high frequencies (every 10 minutes or better, 7 days-a-week) and improving interchange facilities - just as seen in many cities around the world.

Rumours abound that Metro would like to go further: to split the system not just operationally, but also in a corporate sense. The PTUA would strongly oppose

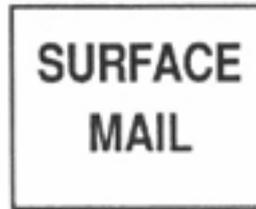


moves that bring back the mess we saw last decade when multiple companies tried to share the metropolitan rail network. It led to trains purchased and refurbished that were unable to run on some lines, a shortage of functioning trains when much of the Siemens fleet was grounded, and cases of petty behaviour from operators, who published maps that excluded stations run by their "competitors".

The proposed changes show a way forward to improving the overall rail network. But the issues highlighted have once again cast attention on the reliability and the need to modernise the infrastructure. It's important that PTV and the operators better plan how the system will run into the future, but it's equally important that the government fund the upgrades necessary to ensure our public transport copes with Melbourne's growth - by providing fast, frequent, safe, reliable services.

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