

As you were: will Mr. Turnbull now act?

In what proved to be an extremely tight Federal election result, the Turnbull Coalition Government has been returned with a wafer-thin majority - either one or two seats, depending on the outcome of a recount in the North Queensland seat of Herbert where the result may turn on as few as 8 votes.

A Coalition loss at this election appeared almost inevitable 12 months ago. That it did not occur is a vindication of Malcolm Turnbull's successful challenge to Tony Abbott for the Liberal Party leadership. At the same time, commentators agree, the narrowness of the result stems from Mr Turnbull's own failure to disavow more of Mr Abbott's policy 'captain's picks', that led to such a precipitous fall in the government's popularity after its 2013 election victory.

On transport and cities specifically, Mr Turnbull's rejection of the ruinous Abbott roads-only policy still appears more about style than substance.

While there have been a handful of welcome rail funding announcements in conjunction with the election (for suburban rail upgrades in Brisbane and Perth, and light rail projects in Canberra and the Gold Coast), the bulk of Federal public transport investment is still occurring as a side effect of the Abbott 'asset recycling' measure in return for privatising state assets. Even this is outweighed many times over by spending on

roads, much of this on projects known to have scant economic benefit (as discovered by the Grattan Institute and reported in *The Age* on 4th April).

In Victoria, the Federal funding picture has not improved at all since our Public Transport Not Traffic campaign sent 'cardboard cutout Malcolm' on a tour of Melbourne's suburbs in May and June. We still face the perverse situation where the Metro rail tunnel - once assessed as 'Ready to Proceed' by Infrastructure Australia in 2011 - gets just \$10 million in discretionary funding, yet the defunct East West Link - notwithstanding its 0.45 benefit-cost ratio - has reserved for it a supposed \$1.5 billion 'locked box' commitment.

The Labor Opposition, and its Victorian Government counterpart, do not emerge unscathed from this campaign either. Despite the nationwide swing, in Victoria the Coalition lost no seats and actually gained from Labor the seat of Chisholm, centred on Box Hill and Chadstone. Some Liberal MPs have tried to blame this on the cancellation of the East West Link two years ago, but this is simply not borne out by the random pattern of booth-by-booth swings, whether in the seats of Chisholm or Deakin that swung to the Liberals, or in Menzies just to the north of the

Eastern Freeway that swung solidly to Labor. Most commentators agree that other factors were decisive here - principally demographic change, the retirement of a popular local MP, and the mishandled CFA dispute at state level.

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PTUA's Daniel Bowen with 'cardboard cutout Malcolm'.

Keeping in touch...

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Internet

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

Committee

Anthony Morton – President
Tim Long – Secretary
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Michael Bell
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Geelong Branch:
Paul Westcott – Convenor

Ballarat Branch:
Ben Lever – Convenor

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

E-mail the office (see above).

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

Membership rate rise

Our recent successful campaign against the East West Link tollroad reminds us of the value of an active community campaign led by dedicated campaign workers.

To date, the Association has been able to fund ongoing campaign work, including employment of a part-time community campaigner, by drawing on accumulated members' funds combined with many generous donations. We are now however at the point where maintaining our campaign work at this level depends on maintaining sustainable and reliable income at a level higher than at present.

The Committee has reviewed our current membership rates against those for comparable advocacy organisations and has resolved that a one-off increase in rates is warranted, with the funds used to secure the ongoing employment of a part-time campaigner.

Accordingly, as of 1 September our annual membership rates will be as follows:

- Concession / unwaged: \$25 per year
- Bronze: \$50 per year
- Silver: \$100 per year
- Gold: \$200 per year

Household memberships of the PTUA will continue to be available at the Silver or Gold rate.

We expect that these revised membership rates will support the PTUA maintaining its role as an independent community advocate for sustainable transport policy in Victoria.

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At the same time, the ambiguous result in Victoria contains lessons for all parties at both Federal and State level on transport policy.

The eastern suburbs and the greater Geelong region, that were in contention in this election, will see very little benefit from either the Metro tunnel or the level crossing removal programme.

Both these initiatives are vital for the state as a whole, but they are not panaceas. More needs to be

done to spread the benefits of better public transport beyond the individual corridors targeted for major works. This includes things as mundane as the roll-out of frequent bus networks or boosting off-peak train frequencies.

There remain many in the community who support the East West Link, apparently in the belief it would speed up car journeys into the city, or at least divert all those other motorists who are clogging up their daily commute yet who

are thought to have entirely different destinations. On the available evidence a new road would do neither, but we cannot afford to conclusively demonstrate this by building one and watching the money and benefits evaporate.

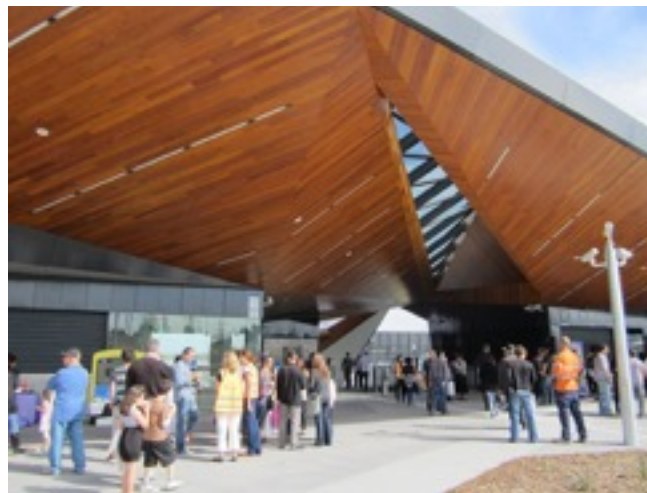
If Mr Turnbull is to be fair dinkum about building prosperous 21st century cities, he should open the 'locked box' and fulfil the mandate from the community for a generational boost to urban public transport.

More frequent buses in Plenty Valley

As this PTUA News goes to press, a new bus network has just commenced operation in the Plenty Valley region, covering the Whittlesea and Nillumbik municipalities.

Highlights of the revised network include:

- A 10 minute weekday peak frequency along Plenty Road between South Morang station and Bridge Inn Road in Mernda (presumably as a shadow service for the future rail extension). This is provided by a combination of two new routes 381 and 382.
- A 10 minute weekday peak frequency through Mill Park Lakes and via South Morang station to the current route 86 tram terminus in Bundoora. This is provided by a combination of two new routes 386 and 387. It could serve as a shadow service for a future extension of route 86, currently the



South Morang station will get better bus services. Photo from PTUA Victoria via Flickr

subject of a community campaign by local residents and Whittlesea council.

- Improved coordination of east-west route 570 with trains at Thomastown station.
- A more uniform service standard with buses running seven days a week, and daytime frequencies of 20 minutes to 40 minutes. (As we have seen elsewhere, this is a substantial improvement for many

routes though still well short of ideal.)

The new routes replace the existing routes 520, 562, 565, 572 and 573. As with previous major network changes in the eastern and western suburbs, we are keen to receive feedback from members and the general public on how the new network functions.

Please email office@ptua.org.au with your stories.

More information on the changes can be found on the PTV website at ptv.vic.gov.au/projects - follow the link to 'Network changes happening in 2016'.

(PS. We notice that the timetables on the PTV website have restored the functionality that allowed travellers to view combined timetables for bus routes sharing a common corridor. We are encouraged by these small but important signs of network planning improvement at PTV.)

Transport for Victoria: just how many coordinating authorities do we need?

In a low-key announcement in June, the Andrews Government flagged the creation of a new transport agency - Transport for Victoria - which would assume a coordinating function for statewide transport policy, assuming the planning roles of both PTV and Vicroads.

The PTUA has for a long time emphasised the need for a single, focussed and agile coordinating authority to plan public transport in Victoria. There are ample models for such authorities overseas: some of them cover all planning for both roads and public transport (including Transport for London and Vancouver's Translink), but most focus on public transport alone (including

Transperth, the ZVV in Zurich, and many similar authorities throughout Europe).

While both kinds of model can be successful, the late Paul Mees argued that given Victoria's legacy of secretive, defensive attitudes and lack of passenger focus in public transport planning, any new coordinating agency should keep its focus solely on public transport in order to drive the necessary culture change.

The PTUA has taken the same view, and welcomed the creation of PTV by the Baillieu Government in 2011.

Unfortunately, PTV to date has not fulfilled the expectations set for it on paper at least, having involved only limited culture

change beyond the obvious rebranding exercise (by our count, the third since Kennett's privatisation in 1999).

Optimistically, we might suppose that having Transport for Victoria assume PTV's planning functions is an effort at producing more of the culture change that the community anticipated in 2011 but the previous government failed to deliver. We do however believe that with appropriate personnel and resources, PTV could still change for the better while remaining a 'one stop shop' for public transport network planning. We would not welcome another institutional 'reform' that turns out to be little more than another expensive turnover of signage.

The more things change...

This was published as PT Problem of the Day on the PTUA website, on November 28th, 2011. Note in particular the last paragraph.

It's been just over a year since we first presented this flowchart of all the organisations involved in public transport in Victoria.

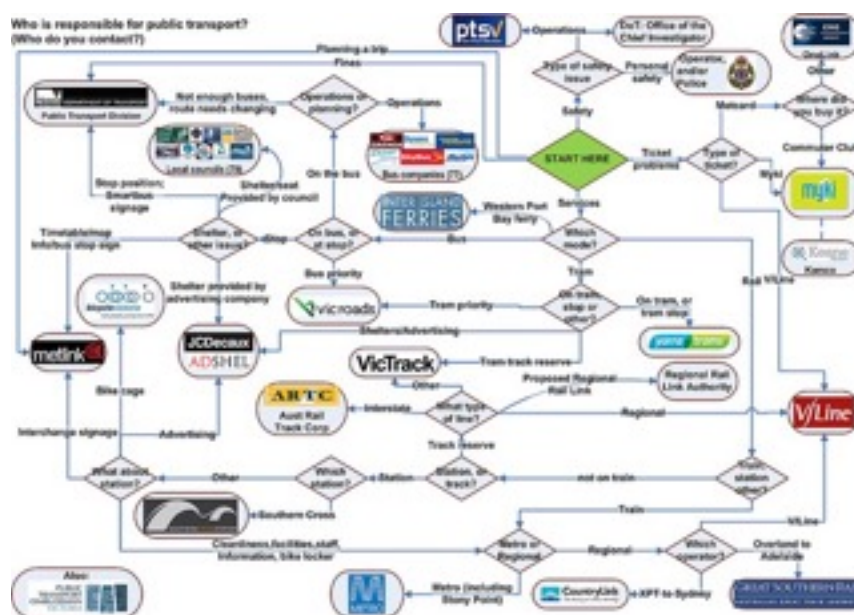
Shortly afterwards Coalition announced an election policy to streamline this maze of different bodies with the Public Transport Development Authority.

This Friday it'll be a

year since the Coalition government was sworn in. The PTDA hasn't quite materialised yet, although the relevant legislation has passed through Parliament.

We're hopeful that apart from cutting the number of bodies involved, the new PTDA also brings with it genuine openness and independence from government, as well as the best planners available to ensure an improvement to public transport management, planning, and coordination.

So hopefully before too long, provided the government lives up to its promise, this mess will be cleaned-up.



Infrastructure Victoria's Options Paper

The new state strategic planning agency Infrastructure Victoria has released an options paper, *All Things Considered*.

It is an important opportunity to reset the debate over transport infrastructure in Victoria. At the same time the risk, if careful attention is not paid to community participation processes, is falling captive to groupthink stemming from decades of encouraging dependence on cars and trucks, and neglecting public transport and rail freight.

While this has been represented in some quarters as some kind of 'priority list', it simply presents speculative options. It would be presumptuous for the agency to attempt distinguishing 'good' from 'bad' projects after only three months. The crucial first step is to get the ideas on the table.

The PTUA is encouraged by the prominence given to new measures to improve the capacity and coverage of Melbourne's rail network, including high-capacity train signalling and extensions to Clyde and the new Wallan growth corridor, and the extension of tram route 48 to Doncaster.

Also given prominence on the list is the rollout of more frequent bus services in growth areas, although the proposed 20 minute frequency standard may not provide the expected benefit. If the leafy quarter-acre blocks of Balwyn and Surrey Hills can support trams every 10 minutes, outer suburbs deserve as good a service from their buses.

Other aspects are less encouraging. Unfortunately there are signs that Infrastructure Victoria still relies

heavily on the same bureaucratic sources of advice that held back major improvements a decade ago.

In 1986 or even 1996 one might be excused for wondering where new public transport passengers would come from. But in 2016, amidst population growth and congestion, it should be obvious new train, tram and bus users will emerge as soon as we provide the appropriate infrastructure and services.

Planners, ignoring the generational shift in public transport use this century, told the consultants on the Doncaster and Rowville studies five years ago to assume the lines wouldn't attract new passengers. This report still relies on that out-of-date advice to relegate these extensions to secondary status.

Another important area for improvement is the report's attitude to freight transport. Infrastructure Victoria must now assert its independence and work with experts in this area, including from the great freight hubs of Europe. This is vital to ensure efficient and sustainable systems for freight movement in the future, in place of more, bigger trucks in our streets.

The freight section recites the usual wish list of big roads from the road lobby, which purport to reduce freight costs for businesses. Yet experience shows every big road ever built fills up with the same private cars that hold up trucks today. Infrastructure Australia has already warned against pushing so-called 'freight roads' that only fill up with cars. We cannot do the same thing again and again while expecting different results. In the interests of better freight movement, more effort

must go into non-car alternatives for passenger travel.

The narrowly drawn objectives for freight transport are of concern. An authority working in the public interest must not judge freight initiatives solely by how much they reduce business costs: just as important is the need to reduce the energy intensity and pollution, noise and safety impacts of freight transport. Melbourne's west has some of the highest rates of air pollution and hospital admissions for respiratory illness in the entire country: public agencies must respond to that, and not just by building more hospitals.

Early reactions to the report have highlighted the presence of the East West Link, or a road resembling it, in the list. It is there for a familiar reason—someone asked for it to be in there. It is clear Infrastructure Victoria does not buy the previous Napthine Government line that big inner-urban roads somehow boost economic activity in the city centre. The paper alludes to a possible moderate benefit for freight, which we believe would not survive a proper independent analysis in any event.

Despite these concerns, we consider the *All Things Considered* report an important start for the agency. Infrastructure Victoria has made a promising start by collecting ideas from a lot of stakeholders. It should now go about fulfilling its mandate, to analyse these in a transparent manner with all evidence and assumptions subjected to proper public scrutiny. We look forward to seeing this important work done in the interest of all Victorians.

Geelong branch report

When the new Geelong bus system was inaugurated last year, PTV undertook to review it after a year. Despite this, there is no sign that any general review will occur, although there have been reviews involving four specific areas.

Local state politicians seem none the wiser and PTV staff have conveyed differing information about how and when any review might take place. In the meantime, bus stops on new routes continue being made permanent. It seems that PTV views the new system as immutable. We continue to pursue the issue.

One of the routes which has been reviewed is the one running to the

northern Bellarine Peninsula (Route 60), which suffered an unexpected cut in its off-peak frequency beyond Drysdale from one hour to eighty minutes. Needless to say, patronage has dropped.

A North Bellarine Transport Acton Group (NBTAG) was formed in response to the downgrade and, with the assistance of the Geelong Branch, has done an outstanding job in getting the government and PTV to inaugurate a trial off-peak shuttle service (Route 60A) between Drysdale and the terminus at St Leonards which, combined with existing through-routed buses, provides a 40-minute frequency.

NBTAG fought hard to get the trial and, importantly, to ensure that PTV publicised it effectively. NBTAG has organised some events and media coverage to give the trial the greatest possible chance of success.

During a recent meeting at which the Public Transport Minister spoke, our convenor asked her whether the announced fourth daily service to Warrnambool still meant that all four services would be run by a Geelong-Warrnambool shuttle. Surprisingly, she did not know about that long-standing plan, but acknowledged that such a scheme seemed undesirable because it marked a reduction in service for long-distance through passengers.

PTUA launches Ballarat branch



Ballarat station (from PTUA Victoria via Flickr)

The PTUA has recently launched a Ballarat Branch. The Branch will advocate for better bus, train and coach services for Ballarat and Western Victoria, in much the same way the Geelong Branch has for the last 15 years.

The Branch is based in Ballarat but represents much of Western Victoria, including the municipalities of Ballarat, Moorabool, Hepburn, Central

Goldfields, Pyrenees, Ararat, Northern and Southern Grampians, Horsham, Yarriambiack, Hindmarsh and West Wimmera. It also shares the municipalities of Golden Plains and Glenelg with the Geelong Branch.

The Branch had its inaugural meeting on 21 June. Official business kicked off with Ben Lever being elected as Convenor, followed by discussion of PTV's proposed changes to Ballarat's bus network. The broad consensus was that it's good to see the network being reviewed, and many aspects of PTV's proposal will be a big improvement - but there are also a

number of concerns with the proposal that will need to be addressed. The Branch has since submitted formal feedback to PTV that incorporated these concerns.

After the discussion of the bus network, the floor was opened up to any issues people wanted to discuss. Improvements on the Melbourne-Ballarat railway line will of course be a key target, and attendees were very keen to see the return of trains between Ballarat and Geelong. However there was also a lot of support for improved coach services, connecting small towns to regional centres and allowing connections with trains.

Those who are keen to know more, and be kept in the loop about future meetings, should head to ptua.org.au/ballarat or email ballarat@ptua.org.au

Level crossing removal progress

Work is progressing across Melbourne, with the Level Crossing Removal Authority (LXRA) doing a lot of work with Metro and contractors on the various projects.

On the Frankston line, the big 37 day shutdown was due to finish on 1st August, with up to a thousand workers on-site at Bentleigh, Mckinnon and Ormond, and up to 100 buses in operation between Caulfield and Moorabbin.

Bus operations didn't get off to a good start, with overcrowding and council roadworks at Caulfield causing delays, but the service got smoother over the five week period, with adjustments obviously being made as the closure went on.

Encouraging was that large numbers of people continued to use the buses and trains despite the delays. Feedback from passengers was that by the third week in, delays were being kept to a minimum. Of course, even the best resourced bus service doesn't have the capacity and speed of trains - a reminder of why rail closures need to be minimised.

Even once the line has re-opened, some stations remain closed for rebuilding until the end of August. By the time Ormond re-opens, it will have been closed for almost six months.

Meanwhile the Dandenong line "skyrail" project is just getting under way, with gantry cranes to be assembled at Murrumbeena in the next few weeks to start constructing the new line above the old one.

While some station buildings are to be removed soon, LXRA has advised us that temporary facilities will take their place, and - unlike the Frankston line - the stations won't suffer months of closures.

Other projects have major works coming up in the near future:

Furlong and Main Roads in St Albans will see trains disrupted in October for several weeks.

A period of construction at Bayswater, Blackburn and Heatherdale saw trains replaced by buses for a week in early July, and major construction will see trains disrupted again over Christmas and the New Year.



Level crossing removal works on the Frankston line.

Photo from Daniel Bowen via Flickr

If the LXRA can deliver on the promise of minimal disruptions to train services, then the Dandenong line - which carries about twice as many passengers as the Frankston line - will have dodged a bullet.

Some fuss was made about the closure of station car parks along the Dandenong line, but the number of spaces pales into insignificance against total train passenger numbers on the line.

Overall it is good to see so many projects forging ahead, and an obvious degree of coordination in staging construction at the various sites.

Removal of more level crossings will benefit train user access to stations, bus punctuality, emergency vehicles and motorists, and where a line is largely free of level crossings, enable more trains to run.

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