



Level crossing removal update

The initial Frankston line level crossing works are nearing an end. Following an impressive 37 day shutdown and major works period, McKinnon station re-opened in early August (after 4 months of closure), with Bentleigh (3 months closure) and Ormond (5 months closure) re-opening in late-August. Express trains (disrupted about 10 months) resumed in early September.

Minor works continue at all three stations and along the line, and will continue until the end of the year. Attention has now turned to crossings further south, with community consultation underway on designs for removal of 9 of the remaining 27 crossings on the line.

Meanwhile Dandenong line major works have commenced, with Carnegie and Murrumbeena stations temporarily closed while the old station structures are demolished. Trains continue to operate along the line.

A key promise for the controversial "skyrail" design was that overall train disruptions would be kept to a minimum. Obviously closing just two stations is less disruptive than shutting down the whole line, but we'll be watching carefully as this project progresses.

While some have called for immediate track expansion along the Dandenong line, this is only possible with significant property acquisition, and there is a lot more capacity to be squeezed out of the current two tracks. This has become critical, with overcrowding now endemic even on days when delays do not occur.

The combination of upgraded (conventional) signalling, higher capacity trains, and (when the

metro rail tunnel opens) longer trains is expected to more than double capacity - though other works such as duplicating the Cranbourne line will be important to maximise throughput.

Elsewhere around Melbourne, options for the Grange Road, Alphington crossing have been released, and works continue at Blackburn, Mitcham, St Albans and others.



The new Bentleigh station (photo from Daniel Bowen)

Labor's promise was to remove 20 crossings in their first term, and it looks like they'll hit that target. If they get a second term, the promise is another 30.

But are they removing the right crossings?

In the western suburbs, Werribee Street in Werribee is on the plan, despite very few trains using it since the Regional Rail Link opened last year. Crossings closer in which delay pedestrians and buses on a daily basis, such as Hoppers Crossing are set to remain if Labor sticks rigidly to the list it took to the election.

A glaring omission from Labor's list on the Frankston line is the crossing that delays more train passengers from the sandbelt marginal seats than any other crossing on the line: at Glenhuntly station, where the tram/train crossing results in even express trains slowing down to a crawl. This location also gets more trains, and is more disruptive to road users (including trams) than many further down the line.

The removal of crossings benefits train users, by allowing more trains and making it easier to access stations on foot, by bike or by bus and tram, and it's good to see so much progress on removing some of the worst crossings. But the government must make sure the right crossings are prioritised for removal.

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

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Ballarat Branch:

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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

E-mail the office (see above).

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

Notice of Annual General Meeting

The Annual General Meeting of the Public Transport Users Association will be held at 6:30 pm on Thursday 13 October, in the Hayden Raysmith Room, 4th Floor, Ross House, 247 Flinders Lane, Melbourne.

Nominations for committee must be received in writing by the returning officer no later than 3 October. The nomination form is available on our website at www.ptua.org.au/members/meetings, or contact the office for a paper copy. Nominations will only be accepted from the floor at the meeting if insufficient nominations are received to fill required positions.

A reminder that you must be a current financial member to attend and vote at the AGM. You may renew your membership at the meeting if it is still current or no more than four months lapsed.

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Frankston Station Precinct

Frankston station, 44km south of Melbourne, serves as a terminus for both the electrified Metro line from Flinders Street, and the diesel line to Stony Point.

It first opened in 1882 when the line was extended to Frankston from Mordialloc. It was duplicated in 1910, and electric train services commenced in 1922. The Frankston to Stony Point line was built in 1888-89. The current station was built 1985-87. Adjacent to the station is a large bus terminus, serving more than 20 routes. There are 2 'Parkiteer' bike cages and more than 400 free commuter car parks nearby.

Frankston station has more than 1.5 million annual passenger movements, making it the 4th busiest Zone 2 Metro station behind Box Hill, Dandenong and Glen Waverley. It serves as an important hub for people travelling to destinations in Frankston and the Mornington Peninsula.

Despite being an important and busy transport hub, the Frankston Station precinct had developed a reputation as an unloved, unfriendly and unsafe place. Locals had been appealing for improvements for decades, with no success. Numerous governments had promised, and failed, to deliver upgrades to the station precinct – the most recent promise being made by Liberal leader Ted Baillieu before the 2010 election.

That finally changed during the 2014 Victorian state election campaign, when the Labor party

seized an opportunity to win favour, and promised \$50 million towards a station precinct makeover. The promise was immediately matched by a \$33 million funding offer by the incumbent Liberal party, and locals finally celebrated, knowing that no matter who won the election, change appeared more likely than ever to be coming to Frankston.

In 2015, the newly elected Labor state government made good on its promise, kicking off a \$63 million



Frankston Station (photo from Wikimedia Commons)

investment into a precinct revitalisation project. The plans include rebuilding the train station, redeveloping the bus interchange in Young Street, improving pedestrian access and connections to destinations throughout the precinct, reconfiguring and upgrading the nearby road network and retail streetscape, and establishing a permanent Victoria Police presence. Earlier plans included a multi-story car park, but this appears to have been dropped in favour of improved management of existing parking.

Plans for Young Street, adjacent to the station, show improvements to the pedestrian subway, wider

pedestrian paths, more opportunities to cross the road, dynamic bus bays with real-time passenger displays, sheltered waiting areas, improved lighting and CCTV surveillance. Work commenced in June 2016.

Plans for Frankston Station itself are not yet confirmed, but are expected to include a rebuilt station with improved shelter, ticketing, way-finding, seating, DDA compliant access, an additional platform, and significant track and signal reconfiguration associated with future electrification and relocation of stabling to Baxter.

Throughout this process the PTUA has been concerned to preserve connectivity of trains and buses: a proper multimodal network requires convenient interchange with services in close proximity. It appears the planning

taskforce agrees, and is recommending the consolidation of bus facilities in the existing Young St location rather than the alternative option of relocating to Fletcher Rd on the far side of the car park. We believe that application of good urban design practice will meet the dual goal of retaining bus interchange in Young St and improving urban amenity in this part of Frankston.

More info about Frankston Station Precinct Redevelopment:

economicdevelopment.vic.gov.au/transport/rail-and-roads/public-transport/frankston-station-precinct-redevelopment

Belmore Road buses

On 27 July 2014 a revamped route 302 bus service from Box Hill to Melbourne CBD was launched on the Belmore Road/Earl Street corridor together with a new 304 service from Doncaster Shoppingtown.

The Monday to Saturday route 202 service between Box Hill and East Kew was abandoned on the corridor along with the 201 service from Doncaster Shoppingtown to the Melbourne CBD via Belmore Road and High Street in Kew. (The 201 was reinvented in 2016 as a service between Box Hill Central and Deakin University in Burwood).

These were elements of a wide-ranging revamp of Transdev-provided services which was rolled out on a cost-neutral basis. This meant that no additional resources were applied to provide improved service quality. Frequent heavy loadings on these services since July 2014, especially during weekday peak times, shows the positive impact that improved service offerings can have. This may be attributed to greater service frequencies, both during peak and non-peak periods, better than average service span seven days a week, and broadly acceptable running time, assisted by the introduction of dedicated bus lanes in Victoria Street, East Melbourne.

Even with these changes the services are sub-optimal. An additional CBD - bound morning peak 302 service which originates at Burke Road in Kew was introduced later to alleviate overcrowding and to reduce ad hoc express running which particularly affects morning patrons in Kew and East Kew.

Most recent available data suggests that route bus patronage in Melbourne is in decline. According to the most recent state budget papers PTV targeted total passenger numbers of 129.5 million in 2015-16 but were expecting only 120 million. This follows actual patronage of 124.5

patronage right across the metropolitan area if good quality services were to be provided. Increased traffic gridlock will be the inevitable consequence of their continued absence.



Boarding a 302 bus (photo from Ian Hundley)

million in 2014-15. In a large city with a rapidly increasing population this adds up to policy failure.

Whilst there continue to be inefficiencies in many existing route bus services which should be removed, additional resources are required for necessary patronage growth. The fact that the service standards on routes 302 and 304 are superior to many in the Melbourne metropolitan area shows that there is substantial scope for major uplifts in

To take part in our community campaign for better bus frequencies and connections, visit www.ptnt.org today!

Ballarat Branch update

The second meeting of the Ballarat Branch was held on Tuesday 9 August 2016, with 5 attendees.

The first topic of conversation was PTV's proposed changes to the Ballarat bus network. PTV had shown a first draft in June 2016, around the time of the inaugural meeting, and have just come back with a second draft. The second draft was very similar to the first; the consensus was that the changes are beneficial, however it does not address a number of concerns highlighted during the first round of consultation. Frustrations were also expressed by many at the lack of advertising for the consultation sessions, the short notice given before the consultation sessions, the short window before feedback closes and the generally poor information provided.



Bus in Ballarat (photo from PTUA Victoria)

There was also a lot of confusion as to the format of the consultation sessions. The first session was an intensive two-hour discussion, whereas the second session was just a quick drop-in session. Many people were unclear on this, and dropped in to the first session halfway through, then took time off work to attend what they thought would be the full two hours of the second.

It was noted that PTV are at least consulting more than they used to, but clearly there are some teething problems with how consultation is conducted.

The second topic of discussion was the trial of Ballarat's City Circle bus, which was primarily run by

Ballarat Council, but partially funded by the State government. The City Circle had a six-month trial, which recently ended. The overall consensus was that it was quite good, but had significant drawbacks. One of the major ones, which could be addressed if the bus were implemented beyond the trial, was poor communication - there was insufficient advertising, and much of it took place when the trial was almost over, rather than six months earlier, when it started.

Another was the lack of accessibility (the bus used was high-floor) and lack of integration into the wider bus network. One insightful comment was that it seemed to lack a clear focus - it was billed as being a shuttle for drivers who couldn't get a car park close to their destination, but regular bus users seemed to be the ones who actually used the City Circle.

The idea was put forward that it didn't function too well on its own, but it does help make the case for routes B15 and B26 (in PTV's proposal) to be joined into a high-frequency east-west service, which would integrate and interchange well with trains and other buses.

The third topic of discussion was the Night Coach service, in light of the recent decision to extend the trial. Only one attendee had used the service, and found it very convenient and relatively well-patronised (two coaches, one express and one stopper, both about a third full). The topic of timetabling was discussed - there is roughly a 2.5hour gap between the last train to Ballarat and the Night Coach, which combined with the slower speeds of the bus makes for a very late arrival home; whereas on the Geelong line there are another two trains in that gap. The general sentiment seemed to be that the 2:10am time of the bus is broadly appropriate (given the need to, for example, travel to Southern Cross from the eastern or northern suburbs after a late-finishing event) however there may be merit in introducing an extra service around 12:30-1:00am. Whether it is a train or a bus, it was felt that this may attract better patronage.

The final topic of discussion was a letter from Alex Bayley, which was designed to encourage local environmentally-minded groups to promote active and public transport to their events - currently most of them rely on the assumption that people will be driving to their events. Alex wanted the Ballarat branch to co-sign this letter to give it more impact, and will be seeking the same from Ballarat Bicycle Users Group (BaBUG). The attendees were in favour of the branch signing the letter, and in encouraging local groups to agree to it.

Geelong branch report

We have been very disappointed to be told by PTV that there won't be a public review of the new bus system which was introduced in June 2015.

When it was inaugurated, PTV said it would be reviewed after a year. Especially given the extensive nature of the changes, which we broadly supported, we always assumed, and were never told otherwise, that any review would involve public consultation.

However, PTV has now told us that the review was never intended to be a public process, and has been purely internal. The four consultative reviews held in specific areas were the result of pressure from local MPs, and not a precursor of a wider process. PTV says people who might have submitted to a public review process should make comments through the normal channels.

Patronage statistics since the changes have only been drip-fed to us in general terms. Overall, patronage is up by 12 per cent, and by 17 per cent on weekends. Highlights are a 558 per cent increase in people using buses to and from Lara station and an 81 per cent increase at Geelong station, whereas there has been a drop of 150 passengers a week using buses to access the High Street, Belmont, shopping centre.

It was very pleasing that, after we have campaigned about it for a decade, the duplication of the rail line from South Geelong to Waurn Ponds was firmly on the federal election agenda, with both major political parties committing to federal funding for the project.

Following her re-election to federal parliament, we wrote to Sarah Henderson, federal member for Corangamite, thanking her for taking the lead in promoting the

plan, even in the face of initial scorn from the state government.

However, we noted that after the long effort to get the scheme on the radar, and before any planning has been done, the project might be affected negatively due to an attempt by the local state Liberal MP, Andrew Katos, to be alarmist, by claiming that it could involve so-called skyrail. Despite her efforts in promoting the project, Sarah Henderson quickly tweeted her support of Katos's claims.

We still don't know whether the addition of a fourth weekday Warrnambool train service will mean that all four services will be run by a Geelong-Warrnambool shuttle. Following the Minister's undertaking to find out what the plans are, we have written to her office, but have not yet had a response with the information we're seeking.

Trees vs. transport infrastructure

We have long lamented the way road projects ride roughshod over precious remnant native vegetation, or trees that have substantial heritage significance. Recently this has included Peninsula Link's destruction of native woodland at Westerfield south of Frankston, the loss of many kilometres of remnant red-gum woodland adjacent to the Western Highway near Ararat, and the destruction of a century-old lemon scented gum in West Parkville that long functioned as a gateway to the City of



A mature lemon scented gum (photo from Wikimedia Commons)

Melbourne for travellers from the north west.

Sydney has just witnessed the destruction of a rare remnant Castlereagh ironbark woodland for a temporary construction car park for the Westconnex project. East West Link, had it proceeded, would have obliterated thousands of trees in Royal Park and adjacent suburbs.

But we can't neglect the fact that precious trees can be lost to public transport projects as well.

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Night Network trial continues through summer

In August, the government announced that the trial of the Night Network, originally planned to run 12 months from January to December this year, will be extended until June 2017.

The extension to cover the entire summer period makes sense, given this is the peak season for night-time activity, and coincides with major events like the Australian Open.

Operating through the first half of 2017 will also allow direct year-on-year comparisons to see if there is evidence for a 'ramp-up' of patronage on night services.

The Night Network is an ambitious experiment, clearly aimed at encouraging after-dark revellers often affected by alcohol or fatigue

to avoid driving and endangering themselves and other road users.

It has been something of a mixed success: a number of routes are well-patronised, but others - particularly buses in the outer suburbs and in regional Victoria - reportedly have very low patronage levels.

The PTUA supports continuing the Night Network in the longer term with adjustments to improve cost-effectiveness. While we are generally sceptical of 'on demand' replacements for regular fixed-route transport, we can accept that more demand-responsive options such as subsidised taxi or Uber rides may work after midnight in some suburban areas where there are genuinely few people

travelling. It can also be argued that some quieter branch lines could be operated overnight as buses rather than trains.

Such measures may be considered for the future provided they can demonstrate substantial cost savings. Part of these savings could then be used to address what we consider the greatest shortcoming of the initiative, which is that night trains run to an hourly frequency rather than half-hourly as the Nightrider buses did.

The incremental cost of running half-hourly is expected to be small, since all the fixed costs of staffing the system are already covered, and many services currently spend very long periods laying over at termini.

Trees vs. transport infrastructure

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A large number of established red gum trees are, or will be, lost as part of the Dandenong line grade separations, particularly in the vicinity of Murrumbeena and Noble Park stations. Other significant trees are likely to be threatened by grade separations at Alphington and Rosanna.

And in central Melbourne, there are growing concerns and an emerging community campaign around the loss of grand old trees in St Kilda Rd, the Domain and Fawcner Park as part of the Metro tunnel project. In this case, the extent of losses may turn on the details of construction methods, and the use of shallow versus deeper tunnels. Neither

governments nor public transport advocates can lightly dismiss concerns over the loss of significant trees. There is the consolation that at least the loss is for the sake of substantial public benefit in the future - unlike with most road projects, whose main future legacy is the entrenchment of greater congestion and urban decay.

Such losses can only be defended, however, if all reasonable steps have been taken to minimise them - and this has been clearly demonstrated to the community at the planning stage.

Minimising damage is one of many reasons we have come to support the government's elevated 'Skyrail' solution for the Dandenong line

grade separations. Lowering the railway in this corridor would likely have threatened a much larger number of established trees and homes (as we are coming to see on the Frankston line).

Other mitigating measures include the use of offsets. While this cannot fully compensate for the loss of heritage or remnant trees, projects such as the restoration of Clayton's Avenue of Honour are welcome initiatives.

The EES panel hearings now under way for the Metro tunnel project should provide a valuable forum for considering design changes and improvements that will avoid tree removal and other open space losses at reasonable cost.

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