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# News

Newsletter of the  
Public Transport Users Association

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## PTUA honours longest-serving campaigner

*Patrick O'Connor 31/3/1931-23/3/1998*

Our Lady of Mount Carmel church in Middle Park is a big venue, but it was filled by the hundreds of people who attended the funeral of the PTUA's longest-serving committee member Patrick O'Connor on 26th March. Patrick was known to Melburnians for more than 20 years as the face, and even more so the voice, of public transport activism. But as the long procession of visitors who crowded his bedside during his last weeks in the Alfred Hospital and Bethlehem Hospice testifies, Patrick brought his special brand of commitment and enthusiasm to many areas of Melbourne life ranging from the courts to charity to opera.



Patrick was born on 31 March 1931 in Wexford, Ireland, to James and Mabel O'Connor. The family had a long involvement in the legal profession; great-uncle James had been Chief Justice of Ireland. Patrick studied law at University College, Dublin, following schooling at the Jesuit-run Clongoweswood College, immortalised by old boy James Joyce in *A Portrait of the*

*Artist as a Young Man.* His uncle Desmond O'Connor SJ, visiting from Xavier College in Melbourne, encouraged Patrick to move to Australia. He arrived in 1957, took out Australian citizenship and came to see himself as an Australian.

Although Patrick started work at Payne's Bon Marche Department Store, he never lost his love of the law. In 1972 he commenced at the County Court as a tipstaff, a position he still held at the time of his death, making him the most senior tipstaff at either the County or Supreme Courts. Patrick's deep respect for the institution of the court, together with his enthusiasm and sense of humour, ensured that he was well-liked by judges, court staff and legal practitioners.

In Ireland, Patrick learned Gaelic and

acquired a love of cricket and classical music that never left him. He was involved as a volunteer publicist with the Dublin Grand Opera Society and, in Melbourne, found a home with the Loyola Musical Society, which he served for many years as Vice President and public relations manager. Patrick

was a tireless worker for public causes and the disadvantaged. A special interest with Loyola was arranging concerts to bring music to the sick, elderly and disabled, and he became famous as the white-coated director of traffic at the Xavier Maytime Fair. In recent years, his concern was expressed in support for the Save Albert Park campaign, of which he was a founding member and enthusiastic worker.

Patrick's interest in public transport dated back to the 1940s when, as a boy, he rode the last tram to run in Dublin. He regarded the loss of Dublin's trams as a tragedy: one of the things that delighted him about Melbourne was the fact that trams

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## Keeping in touch...

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### Committee Members

Paul Mees — President  
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Les Chandra — Secretary  
Tim Hoffman — Treasurer  
Mary Jamieson Peter Dann  
Wendy Everingham Alan Hardie  
Anthony Morton Christina Sindt  
Demitri Pimenides Gerry Warren

## PTUA renews call for rail extension

The PTUA has continued to push for the extension of the Glen Waverley rail line, saying that Rowville residents deserve better than the peak-hour express bus service to Glen Waverley station that the bureaucracy has condescended to give them.

We have always maintained that a radial rail link is by far the most promising solution to Rowville's transport problems. Apart from local trips, most trips in the Rowville area are towards the city. The train would get people from Rowville to Glen Waverley in seven minutes, much better than any feasible alternative. A bus service is just not good enough, and politicians are deluding themselves if they think people will be attracted to such a service. Travel trends these days are towards more travel in off-peak periods, on evenings and weekends. A service that caters only to peak-hour commuters, and has to fight traffic jams on the way from A to B, simply will not sustain itself. People will find it easier to drive their cars.

Local MPs are gravely mistaken if they think the provision of a bus service will appease the PTUA and the many other groups calling for a rail link. The transport bureaucracy thinks it can fob off residents with a cheap third-rate substitute for a proper public transport link to Glen Waverley and the city, while it lobbies for \$800 million of public money to build an unnecessary freeway.

What the outer east needs is high-quality local bus services feeding into high-capacity radial rail links. For much less than the cost of the freeway, the entire City of Knox could have public transport of a standard that people closer to the city take for granted. This would be better for Knox residents, and better for Melbourne as a whole.

## Knox residents demand better public transport

At the 28 April meeting of Knox Council, the PTUA and other community groups presented a petition bearing 3000 signatures from concerned residents, demonstrating that support for better public transport in the City of Knox and opposition to the proposed Scoresby Freeway is more widespread than politicians and the bureaucracy care to realise. The petition calls for the council to oppose the freeway, to withdraw from a ratepayer-funded pro-freeway lobby group, and to instead support improvements in public transport for the region.

Members will recall that ratepayers in the outer east have for some years now been subsidising the Eastern Ring Road Steering Committee, established by unelected commissioners to lobby for the Scoresby Freeway. But the last thing the residents of Knox or any other city need is another traffic sewer. The propaganda produced at great expense by the steering committee feeds the false impression that if the freeway is built, each person will derive benefits as though they were the only car on the road. But it is commonly accepted that new roads generate new traffic until the roads fill up again.

"The truth is, when every household needs two or three cars as a basic necessity and children must be chauffeured by their parents from A to B to Z, car dependence winds up costing more in time and money than the alternatives," said PTUA President Paul Mees, presenting

the petition on behalf of the PTUA. "More roads means more traffic, more pollution and more car dependence, not just for Knox residents but also for those in other parts of Melbourne, as shops and businesses relocate from the centre. Road engineers may want Melbourne to become a carbon copy of Los Angeles, but they shouldn't expect the community to feel the same way."

Community support for public transport suggests the key to breaking the vicious circle of car dependence in Knox. As is explained in the PTUA publication *Making Connections*, all that is required is some modest but long-overdue improvements in the public transport network, to bring to Knox the sort of service that people over the creek in Glen Waverley or Burwood take for granted. The improvements called for in the petition will cost \$200 million, a quarter the cost of the freeway.

People in Knox, and throughout Melbourne, are asking for a rethink in transport planning priorities. They are sick of having the policy agenda dictated by bureaucratic road engineers and their political cronies, without any genuine community input. In particular, they are sceptical about the prospect of spending \$900 million of taxpayers' money on a freeway which will not solve all their problems but rather create new ones.

• ***Making Connections* is available for \$5 from the PTUA office. Ring 9650 7898 for your copy now!**

## Thank you, Ross House

The Public Transport Users Association would like to thank the many Ross House people who have expressed their sympathy at the passing of Patrick O'Connor. Patrick had been a stalwart member of the PTUA committee for over 20 years. The PTUA recognised his great contribution to the fight for better public transport with a life membership in 1996.

Patrick first contracted cancer about two years ago, but got himself back to full health with his usual energy and determination. Early this year his health declined again, and he died peacefully on Monday 23 March after only 3 weeks in hospital. Patrick will be sadly missed.

## City Link Court Action Update

The last issue of *PTUA News* reported a significant win in Peter Allan's case against Transurban City Link. As reported then, Peter has now won 'standing' to challenge the legality of Transurban's tax concessions in the Administrative Appeals Tribunal. This invalidates a key point made in Transurban's prospectus, that no legal challenge to the tax breaks would proceed because no-one would be able to establish standing.

A directions hearing has been scheduled in the AAT for Thursday 14 May, at which Peter will seek to have a date set for the full hearing.

Meanwhile, after nine months we are still awaiting the "speedy" retrial of Phil Morey's Trade Practices case against the City Link prospectus. Phil claims that investors in Transurban have been misled by inflated revenue projections in the prospectus.

Catch the next *PTUA News* for progress on both Peter and Phil's cases.

# Patrick O'Connor

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had been saved. In 1976 he attended the public meeting which established the Train Travellers Association, which in 1984 became the Public Transport Users Association. He joined the inaugural committee and served as public relations officer from that time until a few weeks before his death. He seemed to have a particular genius for coaxing journalists toward a story: it was sometimes questioned whether Patrick had some covert arrangement with the ABC for a permanent guest spot on the Sunday radio news! His secret was an almost maddening persistence that frequently extended to barrages of calls beginning as early as 5am, coupled with an unfailing ability to produce a quotable comment.

Patrick was at the core of all the PTUA's battles, from the campaign against the rail and tram closures recommended in the Lonie Report of 1980, to the scratch ticket dispute of 1990, to the campaign to save the historic W-class trams from the scrapheap. One of his more dramatic pieces of direct action—one that illustrates Patrick's unique, but very Irish, combination of properness and cheek—occurred in the early 1980s on the number 12 tram to St Kilda. The crew announced that the tram was to be short shunted, leaving passengers stranded in the cold and wet well short of their destination. Patrick refused to leave the tram and loudly advised his fellow passengers that they were legally entitled to be carried to their destinations. The other patrons joined in this peaceful mutiny and shamed the crew into continuing to the terminus!

When Patrick was diagnosed with cancer in 1995, there was an outpouring of sympathy not just from fellow-workers in his many causes, but even from politicians and bureaucrats whose policies he had criticised publicly, but who recognised his courtesy and integrity.

By sheer willpower, it seemed, Patrick recovered, but a few weeks ago, his illness returned. Fortified by his strong Catholic faith and the support of dozens of friends and colleagues, Patrick died peacefully on Monday 23 March. He is survived by sisters Kitty and Mabel, his twin brother Jimmy and 15 nephews and nieces, not to mention countless god-children and his two 'honorary' grand-children, Elsie and Grace Millington.

Patrick could be very serious about things that really mattered, like the independence of the Auditor-General and the rights of the disadvantaged, but with a twinkle in his eye that revealed an ability to laugh at himself. Patrick was aware that many people thought his sometimes frantic activity on behalf of such a range of causes a little eccentric, but he was undeterred. Shortly before his death, he advised a friend from Save Albert Park that he would be "up there" urging his compatriots on, but that there would be "no more 7am phone calls."

### A personal note

Patrick and I worked together on the PTUA committee for 12 years. We worked together on many famous battles, enjoying victories and suffering defeats. We often argued during this time, but with a shared commitment to the PTUA's goals. I remember early in 1990 being convinced that we had lost the battle against Jim Kennan's scratch ticket system. Patrick insisted that we fight on, and we did—and won. One of Patrick's unsung achievements was the support and cultivation of people within the Association. I would probably never have joined the Committee in the first place had Patrick not "spotted" me at an annual general meeting, encouraged me to stand for election and shepherded me through the first few meetings.

Paul Mees

**A function in honour of Patrick will be organised by the PTUA for later this year. See the next edition of PTUA News for more details.**

# Editorial

Metcard has just arrived on my tram route. Having heard others express their frustrations at automated ticketing, I now get to experience it first hand.

I am a regular but infrequent public transport user. Five or six days out of seven I'm on my bike. But I nonetheless rely on the system for the other one or two days. This means it's not worth my while to buy periodical tickets; I have to buy dailies as I need them.

Last Thursday was typical. I had to go from my home in East Brunswick to a meeting in Dingley, via Melbourne University. Up to now this had been easy; I'd walk to the tram stop, board the tram, buy a daily Zone 1+2 ticket from the conductor and that was that. Apart from showing my ticket to the odd bus driver or ticket inspector I didn't have to jump through any hoops for the convenience of the bean counters running the system. I'd just sit back and enjoy the trip.

Last Thursday though I had to rethink. The tram doesn't sell daily tickets anymore and there are no railway stations in East Brunswick; I'd have to go to a retail outlet. Fortunately there's one

not too far from my tram stop, though it's on the opposite corner of the intersection and the lights take forever to cycle. I ask at the newsagent for a daily Zone 1+2 ticket. Sorry, comes the answer, we only sell tickets for Zone 1. That figures, I retort, but I buy a Zone 1 ticket anyway. No point taking out my frustrations on some poor shopkeeper.

Next problem occurs at Flinders Street Station when the daddy of all ticket machines refuses to sell me the Zone 2 extension ticket I need. Perhaps at this point I should have gone hunting for a human being who could have sold me a real ticket. But my train was leaving in three minutes, I risked being late for my meeting if I missed it, and there was no indication of where to look. I went on through the barriers with my Zone 1 ticket. It seemed clear to me that I was given no "reasonable opportunity" to buy the Zone 2 portion of my fare, and I would have said as much had the ticket inspectors got on at one of the four stations between Bentleigh and Cheltenham. No such luck; I walked out of Cheltenham station and bought a Zone 2

ticket on the bus to Dingley. Funny that you can buy daily tickets on buses but not on trams.

So much for not having to jump through hoops. Aside from going through all this rigmarole where before I'd just buy one ticket from a conductor, I must now validate my ticket every time I board a tram or bus, or enter a railway station. When my trip involves all three modes and two separate tram trips each way, that's a lot of validating to do. I concur with those who say it's virtually impossible on a crowded tram. And there's no good reason to have to do it, other than facilitating the carve-up of the PTC.

Metcard has proven itself to be the worst thing that's happened to our public transport system since scratch tickets. Opposition to scratch tickets forced the resignation of a Transport Minister, but now, a Transport Minister backed by a stubborn Premier is forcing the public to swallow a similarly inadequate system. I would suggest the public respectfully spit it back in Mr Cooper's face.

**Tony Morton**

## Scoresby Freeway: Politicians' Priorities Confused

The PTUA has publicly criticised the bloody-minded lobbying by Victorian Liberal MPs for federal funding of an \$800 million freeway to slice through their electorates.

The MPs have failed to respond to community concern over transport issues, and are instead creating the illusion of support for the freeway to further their own agenda. During this week's Liberal Party conference, state MPs took Federal Transport Minister Mark Vaile on a helicopter ride over Melbourne's outer east as part of their lobbying efforts. "It just goes to show how confused these politicians' priorities are, that they would go to such lengths to lobby for an unnecessary, expensive and environmentally damaging freeway, when public calls for even modest improvement to public transport in the region are simply ignored," said PTUA president Paul Mees

in an article printed in the *Maroondah Mail* on 31 March.

"The party propaganda maintains that people in the eastern suburbs are clamouring for a ring road like the one the western suburbs have got," he continued. "This is a first for the Liberal Party—holding up the western suburbs as a model for the rest of Melbourne to emulate. What people in the east are clamouring for is better public transport. For a quarter the cost of this freeway we could be running trains to Rowville and trams to Knox, with a comprehensive bus network to feed people to and from the rail services."

For the present, it seems our politicians are intent on not listening. "They'd rather spend these peoples' tax money building more traffic sewers and creating environmental problems with no solution," Paul concluded.



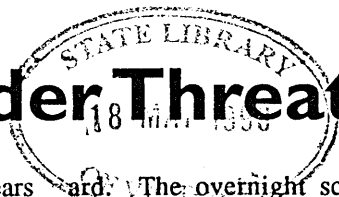
### FREE STICKERS!

We have included some free stickers with this edition of *PTUA News* as part of our automated ticketing campaign.

Members and their friends are encouraged to use these stickers to advance the campaign against substandard fare collection policies.

Note, however, that although stickers of this sort have been placed on ticket machines in the past, the PTUA does not encourage such illegal activities.

# Overland Service Under Threat?



Press reports late in March suggested the new 'Overland' operator Great Southern Railway might close this service at the end of the two-year period the company had agreed to when they won the contract to run the Indian Pacific, the Ghan, and the 'Overland'.

The press quoted Mr John Finnin, group chief executive in their reports. A day or so later, both Melbourne papers had large advertisements from Great Southern denying any plan to close the 'Overland' service. Incidentally, the

photo used in the advertisement appears to be of very run-down rail track on a branch line deep in the New Mexico or Arizona desert!

This seems like a classic 'try on' and the PTUA remains to be convinced that Great Southern has long-term plans for the 'Overland'. We certainly share Great Southern's concerns about the state of the standardised track, particularly in Victoria where the money ran out before the new standard gauge route was brought up to full mainline stand-

ard. The overnight schedule of the 'Overland' is currently close to an unattractive 13 hours, when near 10 hours is possible with good-quality track. (See below.)

The PTUA is disappointed by the shabby state of the 'Overland' carriages, and while the other Great Southern trains are being promoted in the media, the 'Overland' appears to be forgotten. The huge advances in service that privatisation is supposed to bring are once again not happening.

## Rail Investment and Scarce Capital

This is an edited extract from a letter by Andrew McLean to *Railway Digest*, March 1998.

One of the recurring stories of Australian railways is the lack of capital to make things better. Much could be achieved in the Adelaide Hills with a paltry (by freeway standards) \$90 million. If only the 'Feds' would come good with \$90 million to spend on the Melbourne-Adelaide railway.

Of course it was just a few short years ago that National Rail did have money to spend and they built another line to North Geelong instead. Since the extra cost of building the standard gauge via Cressy was just about the same as the proposed Adelaide Hills improvements, it seems fair to compare the two to see which should have had priority.

In the Hills, \$90 million would see:

1. 60 minutes saved per freight train;
2. 1 million litres of fuel saved a year;
3. loco-kilometres greatly reduced;
4. many sharp curves eliminated; and
5. the Overland accelerated by 45 minutes.

Whereas according to National Rail, the Cressy route promised:

1. no time saving for any trains; and
2. no fuel saved either, except for slow freights.

And in fact, the introduction of the Cressy route has seen:

1. all trains slower;
2. many sharp curves added; and
3. loco and wagon-km increased.

When it ran via Ballarat, the Overland was given 3 hours 3 minutes to Ararat, 112 minutes faster than the present Cressy timing. If the Ballarat route had been kept as-is and 45 minutes saved in

South Australia instead, the westbound train would now be 157 minutes faster.

But since an NR-hauled eight-car Overland could reach Ararat via Ballarat in just 2 hours 20 minutes, a realistically-timetabled Overland could be 200 minutes faster now—if only National Rail had spent their money getting rid of old curves near Adelaide instead of building new ones near Melbourne.

One of the myths that National Rail are trying hard to foster is the idea that everything will be alright once the Cressy route is brought up to scratch.

But pouring money into the Cressy route to accelerate speed-priority traffic is lunacy. National Rail should be forced to explain why, after spending all their money, the Overland still takes nearly 13 hours to Adelaide, when it could so easily be under 10.

If \$90 million to fix up the Adelaide Hills to save the Overland 45 minutes is good value, what about the \$30 million or so to standardise and straighten the best route to Ararat via Ballarat, saving a further 170 minutes?

Andrew McLean

### The PTUA sent the following letter to Mr John Finnin, Chief Executive of Great Southern Railway.

Dear Mr Finnin,

The Public Transport Users Association as the main consumer organisation for all forms of public transport in Victoria has noted with concern the recent press reports suggesting the future of the privatised 'Overland' service is not secure.

First, we are concerned regarding the state of the unfinished standardisation project on the new Cressy route to Ararat. Clearly the 'Overland' schedule is hours slower than it needs to be if this project were complete. The PTUA opposed standardisation of the Melbourne-to-Adelaide line on the basis passenger service to western Victorian towns would be lost. As a fallback position we called for dual gauging of the direct mainline standard route via Ballarat to Ararat and beyond. Now western Victoria has lost its V/Line trains and the 'Overland' is endangered. While the 'Overland'

now travels via Geelong no provision has been made for a stop in that city.

Secondly we feel that refurbishment of carriages could improve patronage on the 'Overland' and that the advantages of overnight sleepers and the Motorail service could be promoted. You will have noted the unflattering Saturday 'Age' article describing an 'Overland' trip. The PTUA believes that the service should remain overnight as that meets the needs of more of the travelling public than a day service. The PTUA would be interested to see your recent paper to the Rail 2000 conference.

We will also be writing to federal and state transport ministers expressing the above views, with particular emphasis on the state of the Cressy route track.

Yours sincerely,  
John McPherson,  
Vice president.

# Letters to the PTUA

## In memoriam

Dear Editor,

The Train Action Group (Mildura Corridor) expresses deep sadness in the passing of Patrick O'Connor.

Patrick's dedication to helping Sunraysia get "back on track," saw Patrick arriving in Mildura from time to time speaking to anyone who would listen. His constant telephone calls to TAG coordinator Father Dan Murphy and secretary Mary Jamieson with ideas, and constant media coverage, kept everyone on their toes.

Patrick O'Connor was an inspiration to everyone and we will miss him greatly. Let's get back a passenger rail service in Mildura: Patrick will be smiling.

**Mary Jamieson**

Secretary, Train Action Group and Committee Member, PTUA

Dear Editor,

Very sorry to learn of Patrick O'Connor's death as he was the one who 'recruited' me to the PTUA (after I wrote a letter to *The Age*).

I particularly valued the wealth of detail on his early life in the Herald-Sun obituary, also the splendid obituary in *The Age*, beautifully written.

**Agnes Harrison**

Dear Editor,

We would like to express our sorrow at the recent passing of Patrick O'Connor.

Patrick was a great inspiration and source of practical help and advice to our group in our efforts to return the train to Bairnsdale. While we are sure that we will have a Bairnsdale-to-Melbourne rail passenger service once V-Line is privatised it is a great pity we will not be able to celebrate our victory with Patrick.

The group has sent a donation to the Anti-Cancer Council in memory of Patrick.

**Ms E.A. Munro**, Secretary,

**Mr A. Cracknell**, President,

Bairnsdale 'Save Our Train' Community Action Group

## Fare anomalies

Last week, for the first time since the introduction of the new ticketing system, I needed to catch a National bus to Collingwood and back. I usually travel by tram and so I keep a supply of Met day tickets. I boarded the bus expecting to have my ticket validated. The driver looked at my ticket, nodded and indicated that I should sit down. On the way back the same thing happened so I arrived home with my ticket not validated. The following Wednesday when I had to take the bus again, I presented the same ticket and received the same response. On the way home I asked the driver if it was possible to validate my ticket. He said "No, I'm sorry," and once again my ticket was not validated.

As a member of the Australian Greens I believe in the importance of public transport. I am quite prepared to pay my fare, but on both these occasions I got a free ride. I am mystified. Does the Met have a hidden agenda to phase out the universal ticketing system? Is the system so inefficient that anomalies such as this are undetected? In the long term, unless the Government is committed to a strong, efficient public transport system, the people of Melbourne will suffer from the increase in air pollution and the cost of funding passengers who don't pay.

**Anne Beuchat**

*Ed—the PTUA shares Anne's concerns. That Metcards apparently cannot be validated on National buses is particularly worrying, given that National is reimbursed by the Government for every Met passenger it carries. Despite the multimodal fare system having been the most successful initiative ever in boosting public transport patronage, a number of economic rationalist think-tanks have suggested it be scrapped so that private operators have the freedom to drive each other bankrupt through price wars. The PTUA fears that public transport revenue will suffer a massive decline as a result of replacing staff with machines, just as it did on the East Burwood tram route when the system was trialled there, and that this may provide a pretext for closing less profitable routes and/or scrapping the multimodal fare system entirely. Watch this space for further developments.*

The removal of the 5-card or '5 pack' transport tickets from newsagencies, pharmacies and other retail businesses is a back-door price rise for the regular transport customer.

The purchase of the 5-card allowed regular customers a 10 per cent reduction in the price of tickets when these were purchased in multiples of five from retail outlets.

The introduction of the Met ticketing system has disadvantaged regular travellers who, for whatever reason, are not able to take advantage of weekly or monthly discounts.

Parents who would buy tickets to give to their children are also disadvantaged by this back-door price rise.

If the introduction of automated ticketing is so expensive that regular customers, who honestly purchase tickets, are not encouraged in their efforts then the system should have been made 'free travel for all' and the costs of automated ticketing would have been avoided.

(name withheld by request)

## Another West Coast story

Your recent article on the West Coast railway made me think of a journey I had in mid-March.

The fun and games commenced at Spencer Street where the train was delayed for about 15 minutes. The next 'pleasant' surprise occurred in the buffet car where the hot food options comprised of microwaved pies and/or pasties. Not unusual you might say, but it's not that simple. The items were the sort you often see frozen in supermarkets retailing for between 25 and 50 cents, yet here they were being sold for 2 dollars, a huge markup. Now you see why privatisation is a goldmine for its beneficiaries.

Coming back to Melbourne the problems continued with an unscheduled stop at Winchelsea which had us delayed for around 45 minutes. Apparently this is a regular feature, or so a passenger embarking told us. At least we didn't have the heating problems John described in his article.

**Glen Davis**



## In Brief...

- On 15 April, VicRoads called for nominations to a Community Liaison Group with reference to the Eastern Freeway Extension (Springvale Road to Ringwood). The advertisement baldly states that the overall scope of the project has been already determined—including route, number of lanes, and so on. The Liaison Group is for window-dressing—making recommendations on landscape concepts, 'noise attenuation', pedestrian and bike paths, and other such matters. This is a lesson in 'consultation', VicRoads style.
- Municipal Councils in the southwestern region of Victoria have called for standardisation of all rail lines in their area that have not been converted already, mainly the Warrnambool line (*The Age*, 13/4). Unfortunately further standardisation is not likely to do anything for the passenger services lost on the western main line beyond Ballarat to Ararat, Horsham and Dimboola. Standardisation so far has not even included a connection to the Port of Geelong so that western Victorian wheat can access a second port. The councils' focus seems to be on saving their disintegrating secondary roads from an onslaught by more large trucks. But, Greater

Geelong Council is also calling for more freeways to Melbourne and has yet to appreciate the huge transport capacity of the three track mainline up to the capital!

- The results of the 1996 Commonwealth Census for Melbourne were released on 13 April. As Jon Faine on radio 3LO peered at the summary maps, he pointed out—quite unprompted—how high public transport usage tends to cluster around the quality public transport corridors: the suburban rail lines and the tram routes. Of course in middle suburbs, at least, very infrequent bus services are claimed to fill the gaps in public transport provision between the rail lines. The PTUA has always contended that the quality of service offered is the most important factor predicting the level of public transport usage.

- The 1998 State Budget included \$10 million for a badly needed upgrade of the Geelong–Warrnambool line used by private operator West Coast Rail. An extraordinary \$37 million will reroute the Wattle Park tram in the sports precinct to accommodate the City Link Exhibition Street extension and Federation Square, but not improve service provision by one extra tram! Public transport fares are set

to rise by 3% as well.

- The State Government has announced the sale later this year of its rail freight operator, V/Line Freight. The sale will include a 15-year renewable lease over the tracks, which will remain in Government ownership. It is unclear whether V/Line Freight will be responsible for the maintenance of the track: the Minister's press release states that the lease "will give the company management responsibility for the country rail network on which it depends." The PTUA is concerned that if track maintenance becomes the sole responsibility of a private freight operator, there will be no incentive to maintain the track to passenger standards (which are necessarily much higher than freight standards).

- Sometimes even the aviation-oriented travel writers in major newspapers can get excited about the possibilities of public land transport. Gary Walsh writes on Zurich in *The Age's* Travel Miniguide on 11 April, noting that "trains really do run on time in Switzerland, so don't be late. Within the city, use the excellent and extensive tram system if you're not walking."

## TGV or not TGV?

Dear friends,

Congratulations on an excellent issue of PTUA News. (One brief suggestion: please include a coupon for joining the PTUA in every issue. I try to use them to get people to join and it helps if there's a coupon ready to go.) Congratulations too on the success of the City Link campaign.

I write, however, to ask that, for future work in the area of improvement to national train services, you reconsider your opposition to high-speed rail in the French (TGV) style or at least the tone of your submission to the House of Representatives committee. There are two issues here.

The first issue is substantive: as some of you know, I disagree strongly with this stance and indeed it was one reason for my ceasing active service with the association. It is no accident that countries like France that have developed a high-speed (300kph) rail network also have the best and most extensive networks of 200kph services and the highest use of rail as against air and car for domestic travel. The French TGV system was designed so that the train sets could run comfortably on regular routes and thus continue beyond the new track running at 200kph on good quality traditional track, thus enabling the high-speeds to profit many more people. The speed and the pricing policy (main-

taining the same price for the TGV as for regular services) attract many ordinary people as well as business travellers and help maintain rail travel as a viable option in the face of air and car. In the interest of the environment and simply as a cost-effective transport system, using the TGV for the spine areas of high interaction such as Lyon-Paris, with the train sets running far beyond, has resulted in an enormous transfer from air to rail. Surely that is a good thing, even if many of the new rail travellers are business people!

The comparisons with Switzerland, the UK, and the US are terribly wrongheaded. If have just travelled extensively in France, the UK and the US. Only in France is rail maintaining a position as the first choice of many ordinary people. In the UK, privatisation has made the services appallingly expensive and many people are being pushed to drive. In the US, the North-East Corridor from New York to Boston won't be finished for another 18 months. But the Amtrak pricing policy is heavily dissuasive. They offer the fast (200kph Metroliner) services only at a price premium with a very discouraging system of reservation and quasi-airline boarding that kills most of the advantages of rail travel. If you want to travel at reasonable prices, you take the slow trains. And the Metroliners don't operate the through services. If you want to travel

from Washington to, say, Providence, you have to take a slow train all the way. Finally, in terms of freight carried by rail, the French railways have maintained a much higher market share than the UK or US. (The TGV has enabled the introduction of a fast parcel service and while freight trains don't travel on the new track, they continue to travel at very good speeds on the old track and both TGV and freight share track beyond the new track corridors.) So, contrary to your examples, neither the UK nor the US provide good models. I would urge you to look more at France, Belgium and the Netherlands, all of which are moving to TGV for the high speed corridor service coordinated with the kinds of improvements you call for, on which of course we all agree.

Coupled with this substantive issue is one of politics. It simply doesn't help the case for rail to be knocking high-speed rail; rather it justifies a general dismissal of rail. Politically, you're much more likely to succeed in getting government on

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# PTUA News

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## TGV or not TGV? (contd.)

side with an exciting and dramatic proposal. The lack of success of the PTUA approach is a case in point: the TGV came far closer to reality than the PTUA approach has ever done. But if the PTUA maintains the current approach, why knock high-speed rail? That only helps the real enemies, the air and road lobbies. Instead, present this approach as a cost-effective improvement that could, if need be, benefit the TGV if introduced by providing feeder and extended service.

Could you publish the above in the next issue? Also, I'd be happy to attend a meeting to discuss this.

Yours sincerely,

**Charles Sowerwine**

### Editor's Note:

Although the PTUA submission to the House of Representatives Committee was critical of TGV-style rail investment, the PTUA does not have a policy of opposing such developments. We welcome any investment in rail infrastructure which is of real benefit to ordinary users and which has the potential to attract people away from private cars; this includes TGV-style services. Our submission nonetheless expressed the view that there are more beneficial, cost-effective alternatives to ultra-fast trains, a view with which I agree for a number of reasons.

First, I do not believe that speed is the primary concern for the majority of intercity travellers. Rather, their concern is with service levels and cost. Charles is quite right to point out that high costs are driving UK and US travellers away from the rail system, but this is a consequence of structural changes (chiefly privatisation in the UK) which have driven down service standards and increased costs, rather than the lack of TGV-style serv-

ices. As long as air travel in Australia remains expensive and time-consuming at source and destination, travellers will continue to be attracted to land transport, where the main competition is between trains and private cars.

Second, there are mixed feelings about TGVs even in France. In 1991, the National Institute for Transport and Safety found that only 10% of TGV passengers were former road users, and 20% former air travellers. Of the rest, 40% were existing rail users, while the remaining 30% were 'induced traffic': people who took advantage of the service to make journeys they wouldn't have considered otherwise. This increase in underlying travel subtracts from the benefits of the 30% mode shift. Wolfgang Zuckermann, a transport researcher who lives in the south of France (in a village with no public transport) points to the hundreds of traffic-choked French towns with derelict railway stations on abandoned railways which could have used some of the billions of dollars that have been spent speeding up existing rail links with TGV services.

Third, on the political front I grant that politicians can sometimes allow an obsession with technological wizardry to cloud their judgement on transport issues. The Onelink automated ticketing system provides a case in point. Nonetheless, we should be as much concerned with promoting cost-effectiveness in transport as politicians are with promoting cost-effectiveness in other areas. My instinct says that as long as politicians are reluctant to spend money on rail improvements, it makes sense to recommend improvements that are cheap yet effective.

Charles' suggestion of a coupon for joining the PTUA is a good one; we will investigate this for the next issue of PTUA News.

— Tony Morton

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### Members' Meeting

Wednesday 27 May, 7pm

Back Meeting Room, Ground Floor, Ross House

We will be screening a transport video from London:

**City Transport: The Way Forward**