

News

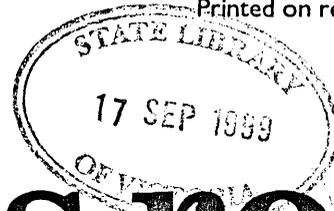
Newsletter of the
Public Transport Users Association

ISSN 0817 - 0347

Volume 23 No. 4 September 1999

Printed on recycled paper

REF
388-409945
PIP



Road plans row

JAMIE DUNCAN reports.

A GREEN wedge ring road connecting Greensborough and Ringwood, and a link from Greensborough Rd to the Eastern Freeway is firmly back in the political arena, despite persistent State Government denials.

An indication that the road projects were still under consideration came to light last week in a VicRoads map projecting Melbourne's road system in 2011, handed to a Melbourne University PhD student in an apparent administrative bungle.

Public Transport Users' Association president Dr Paul Mees said he was in the audience at the university last month, in his role as a lecturer in transport planning with the university's Faculty of Architecture and Planning, when the student presented his paper on air pollution, and showed the map.

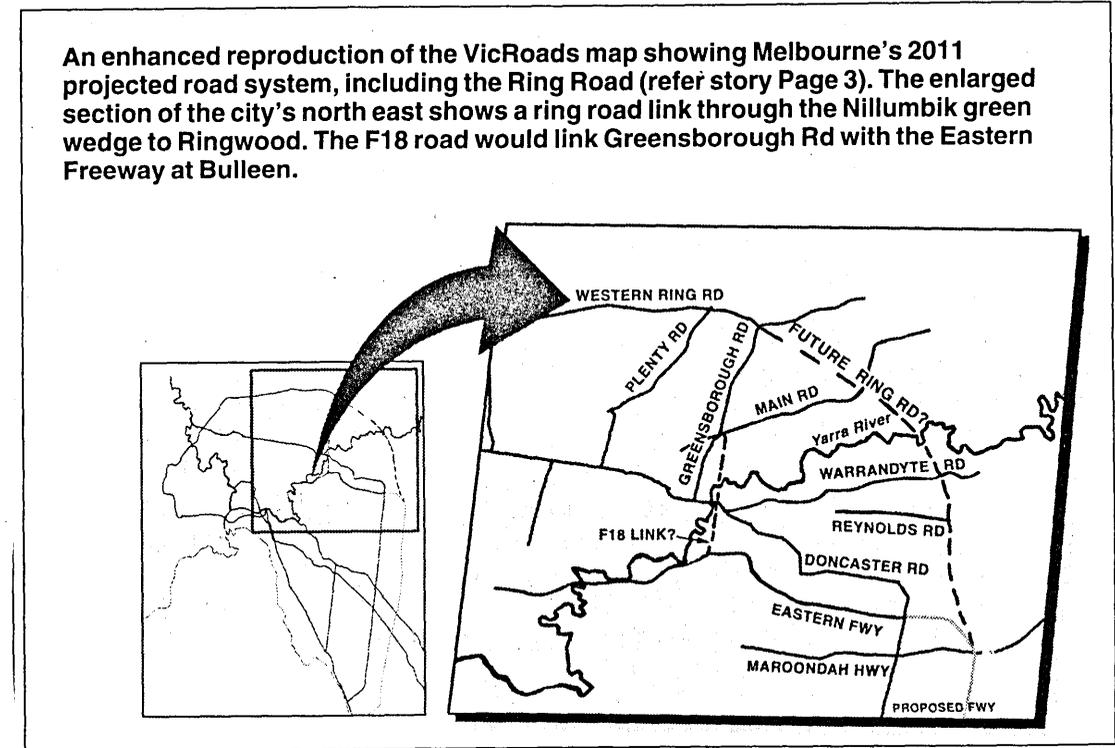
Dr Mees said the student did not realise the significance of the map he had obtained from VicRoads.

"For years we have had circumstantial evidence (that the roads were being planned), and now we have the smoking gun," he said.

The schematic VicRoads map, without road names or watercourses marked, shows the ring road arcing across the Yarra Valley, and following a much more direct line than concept plans completed in the mid-1970s.

But last week member for Eltham Wayne Phillips angrily denounced Dr Mees' claims as an "election stunt", saying the map was 10 years old (see story right).

The map shows the road crossing



the Greensborough Bypass at the end of the existing ring road, following a south-easterly line through St Helena, and intersecting Diamond Creek Rd and Main Rd at the north end of Eltham. It then crosses the Yarra River east of Sweeneys Lane, and follows the line of the Mullum Mullum Creek valley, with interchanges at Warrandyte Rd and Reynolds Rd, before ending at the junction of the Scoresby Freeway and the Eastern Freeway, west of Ringwood.

The southern link from Greensborough Rd follows the old F-18 reservation, and crosses the Yarra River near the Banyule Flats reserve, but then runs east of Bulleen Rd to join the Eastern Freeway at the Thompsons Rd interchange.

"VicRoads is either incompetent, or they have been lying about this — and they are not incompetent," Dr Mees said. The indicated route was less environmentally sensitive than the 1970s proposed routes, he said.

Dr Mees scoffed at Wayne Phillips' assertions the map was 10 years old. "The map was given to this student because he asked for it, and my understanding is that it was given to him by VicRoads late last year because he wanted the most current map (for his paper)," he said.

Dr Mees said he was convinced the map was much less than 10 years old because the final route for the Citylink project, also marked on it, was not finalised until 1994 or 1995.

Courtesy of The Diamond Valley News.

SPECIAL ELECTION ISSUE

Focus on policy: Coalition

The present Coalition government has been in office for seven years, a reasonable time after which to review its achievements on public transport. The Liberal Party were unable to provide the PTUA with any policy on public transport, which leaves us to judge them on their record.

The new government that came to power in 1992 immediately tried to decimate the public transport system. There were plans to scrap all long-distance passenger trains and some suburban services, and effectively shut down the suburban rail system after 8pm. Extensive campaigning by the PTUA and other local groups reduced the severity of these cuts. Still, train services to many important towns in country Victoria such as Ararat, Bairnsdale, Dimboola, Horsham, Leongatha and Mildura were axed. The Kew-Doncaster-Templestowe bus services of the PTC (originally taken over from a bankrupt private operator in the 1960s) were sold to the privately owned National Bus Company, causing patronage to fall by close to 25% in the first year of operation.

During the first term of office, this position slowly changed and Transport Minister Alan Brown oversaw some improvements to services and reliability on trams and trains. Off-peak suburban services were upgraded from a 20 minute to a 15 minute frequency and the long-neglected Upfield rail line, after being slated for clo-

sure, was saved and upgraded. The government went to the next election promising continued improvements to services, and corporatisation (*not* privatisation) of the tram and train system.

Since that time, Minister Robin Cooper has presided over marginal improvements to services and on trams and trains, such as improved Sunday afternoon services, but at the same time has gone back on election promises and privatised the remaining PTC buses, trains and trams.

The Metcard debacle and the jettisoning of conductors has undermined safety, security and fare collection on trams and led to enormous difficulty in getting the system to work. The privatisation of trains and trams is an attempt by the government to wash their hands of public transport entirely. However, as public money is involved as a subsidy in providing a public service, the buck must stop with the government ensuring an acceptable level of service.

The Coalition government flagged an unprecedented program of freeway construction in Linking Melbourne, which has included City Link and the extension of the Eastern Freeway to destroy the Koonung and (soon) Mullum Mullum valleys. It is now planning to build the totally unnecessary and extravagant Scoresby Freeway through the eastern suburbs, as well as another freeway down the Merri Creek.

These projects have a vast financial, social and environmental cost. In the case of the Scoresby Freeway, a panel of independent experts has affirmed that money would be better spent improving public transport than on an unnecessary and environmentally damaging road. The government has ignored the panel's findings and community concerns, and is promising to seek Federal funding (again) to build the freeway at taxpayers' expense.

Meanwhile, transport services for country and regional Victoria have been ignored. For a while, the government was raising country people's hopes by suggesting that the new private operator of V/Line *might* consider reinstating the lost services, just as Melburnians' hopes were raised by the suggestion that private operators *might* consider putting conductors back on trams. No doubt this helped enlist public support for an otherwise unpopular privatisation, but once the tenders were announced it became clear that the new operators had no such intentions. So, country Victoria remains without its vital rail services, and public transport staff remain limited to passenger-hostile ticket inspectors and security guards.

In summary, the Coalition's record is disappointing and one can only presume it will continue to be so. Although policy-wise the Coalition may have a slight edge on Labor, the PTUA cannot support a government that undermines public transport in this way.

Focus on policy: ALP

It has often been suggested that the PTUA is in some way sympathetic to the ALP and tends to support them in preference to the Liberal Party. If this has ever been the case, it would have been because of their policies rather than any partisan loyalty.

The ALP does not receive our support unless their policies are consistent with ours. Unfortunately, one only needs to read the State ALP transport policy to see that this is not the case. Despite the PTUA's accepted position as key advocacy group for public transport, the ALP did not see fit to advise us of the development or release of this policy: we had to go and buy it ourselves.

This seriously flawed document clearly shows that the ALP has not learned from the 1995 fiasco, when they launched the infamous Access 2000 document. Access 2000 was supposed to be the ALP's answer to CityLink. In it they promised to construct all the roads that the Coalition government was proposing, only with

lower environmental and engineering standards, and paid for with public funds instead of tolls. It was roundly criticised and died a well-earned early death.

Labor has now had seven years to review the portfolio, consult with community and experts, and determine appropriate transport policies. Given the Coalition's attacks on public transport, the community is entitled to expect an alternative vision from the Opposition. Instead, we have a document that promises certainty to the road industry, and more vague "considerations" for public transport users.

On the road front, the ALP promises a "ten year plan for road construction in Victoria" and all road works are to be funded from the public purse. The Coalition's environmentally and socially destructive *Transporting Melbourne* policy (including a ring road around all of Melbourne) is embraced without any review. The residents of the 'green wedge' of

Eltham and Warrandyte have every reason to be afraid of a Labor government!

By comparison, a state Labor government would merely give "consideration" to a remarkably limited range of public transport projects. Some are sensible, others just trivial (such as extension of the Airport West tram route 100m into a shopping centre carpark). A rail extension to Rowville, a project with huge public support, is not even mentioned in the list of considerations, despite costing under \$100 million, or a fraction of the bill for the promised Geelong Road upgrade.

The issue of Automatic Ticketing has raised condemnation from users and experts alike as totally unsuitable for Melbourne. As the ALP has not thought it important to consult with anyone when preparing its policy, it is not surprising that there is not one mention of ticketing in it. They have not promised to return conductors to trams. They view the removal of rail station staff as irreversible, and are recommending "commercial development" instead.

STOP PRESS: ALP revises transport policy

While this newsletter was in press, the Victorian ALP issued a revised transport policy for the State election. The PTUA was provided with a copy, courtesy of Opposition Transport Spokesman Peter Batchelor.

The new policy is a substantial improvement on the policy we reported on in the newsletter. The ALP have at last listened to the community and, while they still promise plenty for the road lobby, have made genuine commitments on the public transport front.

The new policy commits funds (rather than just "considerations") for many worth-while projects, including suburban rail extensions, more expresses and high-speed links to regional cities. Many of the proposals are in line with PTUA policy, although the ALP remains silent on the crucial issue of service frequency. Elements of our *Making Connections* plan for the Outer East have been embraced, including an overhaul of bus services and a commitment to the Knox tram extension. A comprehensive transport plan for the outer east is promised, which will "identify a preferred train route to Rowville via Glen Waverley or Huntingdale".

Most welcome is the promise to return up to 100 tram conductors and 100 additional station staff to the system. There is also a firm commitment to the multimodal fare system, a promise to reduce the price of tertiary student concession cards, and an "examination" of automatic ticketing.

A major disappointment in the revised policy is its lack of commitment to restoring country rail services axed by the Kennett government. Here there seems to be little change from the old policy: Labor will "review the operation" of replacement bus services and enter "partnership arrangements" to restore services subject to "service needs and community demand". We believe that the need and demand for services has been clearly demonstrated already!

The title of one of the two policy papers, *Rebuilding the Transport Network*, indicates that the ALP, like the Coalition, remains focussed on building its way out of transport problems. It still promises a bonanza for the road lobby, including construction of the Dingley 'Bypass' and the catch-all "construction of link roads in Melbourne's growth suburbs" (including the Green Wedge?). It will seek a greater share of Federal road funding, presumably so that more roads can be built than ever before.

In summary, despite the continued commitment to more roads and the lack of promises on off-peak frequency and country rail closures, the ALP now appears to have an edge on the Coalition when it comes to concrete policies.

18 September is Independents Day

With the major parties abandoning public transport, perhaps it is time to look to independents to make a stand. The last election saw one independent returned, and a by-election since has returned another. No doubt there will be a large number of independent candidates standing at this election. Here is a review of a few that we know have policies favourable to public transport.

Russel Savage MP (Mildura) started the trend at the last state election. He campaigned heavily on the issue of returning the *Vinelander* to Mildura: even going so far as to print his how-to-vote card like a train ticket. He was successful in winning the seat with a huge swing away from the coalition. We spoke to Russel a few months ago, and he assures us that his commitment has not wavered.

Although she did not campaign as a 'public transport' candidate at the by-election that elected her, **Susan Davies MP (South Gippsland)** has since adopted improved public transport as a major issue for her electorate, which covers the South Gippsland region from Leongatha through to Sale, as well as high profile tourist destination Wilson's Promontory.

Definitely a public transport candidate is **Roberto D'Andrea**. The former

tram driver and conductor has announced his candidacy for **Monash Province**. D'Andrea, 38, said that the "I prefer a tram conductor" group was hopeful of wresting the Upper House seat from the Liberal Party. D'Andrea said he was seeking to highlight the need for a return of tram conductors, protection and restoration of tramways history, and a better public transport service for all. Monash Province includes Port Melbourne, Prahran, St Kilda, Malvern and Caulfield, with more than a dozen major tram routes. It also has the highest rate of public transport usage in Melbourne.

Another very pro-public transport candidate is Anti Ring Road campaigner **Margaret Jennings**, running for **Eltham**. With VicRoads pushing for a ring road through the Green Wedge, and Labor and Liberal candidates unwilling to take a stand, she hopes to bring the issue to the political forefront and stop the freeway juggernaut.

These candidates are all worthy of consideration for your vote. Wherever you are in Victoria, you should look closely at the list of independents. There may well be one who has the policies that are sorely lacking in the ALP and Coalition.

from previous page

Residents of country Victoria are equally ignored. There has been outrage in rural and regional Victoria over the Coalition's axing of country passenger rail services. The loss of these services has been a major factor in two country electorates changing to independents. Local shire councils have conducted major reviews showing the damage loss of rail services has caused to local economies. The ALP should be aware of this demand and be able to go to the electorate with a clear promise to restore country rail services. Instead, it promises to "review" the need for reinstatement of services "subject to local commitment". It might then "enter into partnerships" with private companies to operate services. Apart from the fact that it is current Coalition policy anyway, this policy shows again that the ALP hasn't bothered to listen to local communities and is unable to take a positive stand on an issue.

The final issue where one might expect a difference between the Coalition and the ALP is privatisation. The ALP is op-

posed to privatisation but falls well short of taking any steps to reverse it. Its only promise is, once again, to develop "partnerships between the private and public sector": exactly the same as current Coalition policy. It seems unlikely that public transport users would take much comfort in the moral objection of any Labor government to its own policy.

In summary, the ALP position on public transport is unimpressive. Despite seven years in opposition, Labor hasn't been able to learn from its mistakes and produce a plausible policy document. Many of the mistakes that have been made in this document would have been avoided if the ALP had bothered to consult with people, such as the PTUA and regional rail groups, who could and would have made positive, concrete recommendations. Instead, the ALP appears to have spoken to a few insiders and made a few guesses.

While some encouraging comments have been made recently, on the basis of published policy the PTUA cannot support Labor at this election, and it is most unlikely that the public will either.

EDITORIAL

On September 18, the Liberal-National coalition will go to the polls asking the voters of Victoria to re-elect them for a third term. At the same time, the ALP will ask voters to vote for a change of government. The question of Public Transport is very much on our minds, and halfway through the campaign we have been able to review the position of the two major parties. We have also had a look at what independents and others may have to offer. Our opinions are printed in this special issue of PTUA News.

Over the remaining half of the campaign new issues may come to light and a clear leader in public transport policy may become apparent. On present information, we recommend that you vote first for a good independent candidate (if there is one in your electorate) and then for whichever of the major candidates you feel to be best for your area.

SECRET PLAN TO DESTROY YARRA VALLEY

PTUA investigation has revealed secret VicRoads plans for not one, but *two* roads across the Yarra valley: one through the Yarra Flats and Heidelberg and one through Eltham and Warrandyte (see cover).

Although local (Liberal) MPs have rejected the plans as a fabrication, they have been verified as correct by planners within VicRoads. We're not sure which is worse; whether the MPs are uninformed or just 'economical with the truth'. In either case, it is clear that the lungs of Melbourne are now under total threat.

We call upon the Government and the Opposition to come forth and put a stop to these appalling plans, and we urge all residents in the area to vote for candidates who will promise unconditionally to stop the destruction of the Yarra Valley 'Green Wedge'.

PTUA News

Newsletter of the Public Transport Users Association, A-6256L
Print Post: Publication No. PP 331088/00009
If undeliverable, return to:
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**Notice of
Annual General Meeting
Wednesday 27 Oct 1999 at 7pm
Ground Floor Meeting Room
Ross House, 247 Flinders Lane Melbourne 3000**

Nominations for the PTUA committee

The current election procedure allows for the AGM to elect a President, Secretary and Treasurer and up to nine committee members. Nominations must be on the form attached, and signed by the nominator and the candidate, both of whom must be members of the PTUA. Nominations must be received at the PTUA office (ground floor, 247 Flinders Lane Melbourne) by hand or by mail by 4.00 pm Wednesday 20 October 1999. Nominations will not be called for the AGM unless fewer than 12 nominations are received by the above date.

Motions on notice

To confirm the minutes of the Annual General Meeting of the PTUA, 21 October 1998.

Proposed: Les Chandra (secretary 1998-99)

Seconded: Wendy Everingham (treasurer 1998-99)

To receive the annual reports of office bearers.

Proposed: Les Chandra (secretary 1998-99)

Seconded: Wendy Everingham (treasurer 1998-99)

PTUA Committee Nomination Form

I _____
of _____
nominate _____
of _____

for election to the position of:

Committee member

President

Secretary

Treasurer

Signed _____

Date _____

Nominee's signature _____

Date _____