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Public transport: Priorities for 2010-2014

With strong patronage growth in recent years, public transport in Melbourne and around Victoria is enjoying a renaissance. But the system is now struggling.

Recent growth in passenger numbers is now slowing as many discover the system is not able to cater for their needs. They are forced back into the private motor car, in situations where public transport should be available to them as the less costly and more efficient transport option.

Travellers into Melbourne's CBD are using public transport in vast numbers, dwarfing car users, but the reverse is true for most suburban trips. To boost suburban usage, more frequent services are required, particularly on the bus network, and running 7-days-a-week, to provide Melbourne with a cohesive network of frequent services serving all suburbs.

In this document we have not sought to re-list projects already underway in the Victorian Transport Plan, such as the Sunbury rail electrification and DDA compliance upgrades, but rather to highlight further priority upgrades.

In many cases, highly-beneficial improvements are possible without expensive capital projects, by making better use of existing fleets and infrastructure, and thus providing a better return for Melbourne's already considerable investment in public transport.

We have therefore placed a particular emphasis on the provision of more frequent services across Melbourne, 7 days-a-week.

Contents:

Boost services: Cutting waiting times and crowding, spreading peak loads

The PTUA believes that in the next four years, significant steps can be taken towards providing all of Melbourne with frequent services (running every ten minutes or better) every day, from early until late.

This should start straight away with improvements to train, tram and Smartbus routes, using existing infrastructure and train, tram and bus fleets.

For too long many of Melbourne's bus routes have not provided well timed connections with trains[1]. Frequent services mean connection times are reduced and with it total trip time for passengers. They also promote a "turn up and go" mentality where passengers need not look at a timetable before they travel.

Better bus/tram services also have the advantage of providing effective feeder services into railway stations, which helps relieve station car parks, as well as cutting waiting times for local trips.

Upgrade suburban train services (except single line sections) to run at least every 10 minutes until at midnight, 7 days-a-week.

This would provide Melbourne with true "Metro"-style rail services, cutting long waiting times, encouraging patronage outside peak times and spreading the peak load. This is possible now on most of the network with the current train fleet and infrastructure[2], requiring only extra drivers and maintenance.

Single line sections should be upgraded (see Infrastructure section) but could initially run at lower frequencies.

Upgrade all tram services to run at least every 10 minutes until midnight, 7-days-a-week.

Cut waiting times, particularly in the evenings, when at present 20-30 minute frequencies are common. This upgrade is possible on the entire tram network outside peak times, using the current fleet and infrastructure. A small number of extra trams – less than the fifty currently funded[3] – would be required to upgrade routes 78 and 82 to ten minute services at peak times[4].

Implement all of the metropolitan Bus Service Review recommendations.

Reviews of suburban bus routes have been completed recently with significant community input, and worthwhile recommendations made to simplify routes, boost service operating hours and frequencies, improve bus fleet efficiency and grow patronage. However many of the recommendations have not been implemented due

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[1] PTUA: Poor connections leave passengers waiting
http://www.ptua.org.au/2010/05/09/train-bus-connections/
[2] It's called Metro, let's run it like a Metro http://www.ptua.org.au/2009/12/01/run-it-like-a-metro/
[3] 2010 Victorian State budget
http://www.budget.vic.gov.au/domino/Web_Notes/budgets/budget10.nsf/d6e571e551bef80eca2572bb
002bcea7/baee162a283b4c2dca25771900012d7d!OpenDocument
[4] Tram route 78 currently runs every 12 minutes at peak times. Tram 82 currently runs every 15 minutes at peak times. Other routes run every 10 minutes or better at peak times.

to a lack of funding, which means the coherent network of services envisaged has not been realised[5].

Implementing all the recommendations would mean significant improvements to local bus services, making the network easier for users to understand and negotiate, cutting waiting times and helping to boost patronage.

The PTUA believes one caveat should be applied: where the Bus Service Review report notes that a sub-optimal route has been selected due to residents wanting an existing service <u>removed</u> from their local street, this should be further reviewed to ensure the best outcome for current and potential bus passengers, and to maximise patronage and bus operation efficiency.

Upgrade all Smartbus services to run at least every 15 minutes until midnight, 7-days-a-week, and commence bus purchases to further upgrade to every 10 minutes.

Smartbus services have proven to be a success, with strong patronage growth on upgraded routes, particularly on weekdays when frequencies are generally every 10-15 minutes[6]. A further frequency boost would build on that success, putting Smartbus on an equal footing with tram services, and encouraging more people to use the services, particularly on weekends and evenings when many buses currently sit idle in depots.

- *703 Middle Brighton to Blackburn via Monash University*
- *900 Caulfield to Rowville via Chadstone and Monash University*
- *901 Frankston to Melbourne Airport via Dandenong, Ringwood, Epping*
- *902 Chelsea to Airport West (and proposed extension to Werribee)*
- *903 Altona to Mordialloc via Chadstone, Box Hill and Northland*
- *Proposed Blue Orbital Smartbus*
- *Doncaster Smartbus services 905, 906, 907, 908*

Completion of the 902 Green Orbital Smartbus through to Werribee.

Originally proposed to run to Werribee[7], the 902 Smartbus was cut short at Airport West. Completing this upgrade would bring frequent services to new and established suburbs currently lacking quality public transport, including Tarneit, Derrimut, Deer Park, Kings Park, Delahey, Taylors Lakes, and Keilor.

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[5] BusVic figures indicate the number of recommendations implemented is 25% of Operating Hours changes; 24% of Routing changes; 14% of Frequency upgrades. In some areas, as few as 5% of the total changes have been implemented.
[6] Current Smartbus standards: every 10-15 minutes peak; 15 minutes off-peak; 30 minutes evenings and weekends; see
http://www.transport.vic.gov.au/web23/Home.nsf/AllDocs/78AABB7DA0FF404CCA25766600142F23?OpenDocument . However, Smartbus 703 does not meet the evening/weekend standard; see
http://www.ptua.org.au/2009/11/22/smartbus-stops-short/
[7] For indicative route of full Green Orbital from Airport West to Werribee, see:
http://j.mp/smartbus-routes-2006

Implementation of the Blue Orbital Smartbus.

The Blue Orbital Smartbus[8] was proposed in the 2006 Meeting Our Transport Challenges document, but was dropped in the 2008 Victorian Transport Plan.

Implementing the Blue Orbital would make it possible for more passengers to make cross-suburban trips without having to use inner-suburban trains or trams via the CBD, cutting travelling time, reducing over-crowding on the busiest parts of the train and tram networks, and making more public transport trips time-competitive with car travel.

Upgrade frequent, non-Smartbus services to proposed Smartbus standards (at least every 15 minutes, 7-days-a-week, with bus priority measures and real-time information at major stops), and commence bus purchases to further upgrade to every 10 minutes.

A number of trunk bus routes in Melbourne already run to a high standard, but do not have Smartbus facilities such as real-time information. Upgrades would improve reliability and customer information, and make these routes a more prominent part of the frequent network, helping to boost patronage and better reach their potential.

Frequent services that should be upgraded and re-designated as Smartbus routes include[9]:

- *216/219 Brighton to City to Sunshine*
- *220 Sunshine to City to Gardenvale*
- *223 Yarraville to Highpoint*
- *232 Altona to City*
- *246 Elsternwick to Clifton Hill*
- *279 Box Hill to East Doncaster*
- *402 Footscray to East Melbourne*
- *410 Sunshine/Maidstone to Footscray*
- *451 Sunshine to Deer Park North*
- *465 Keilor Park to Essendon*
- *467 Aberfeldie to Moonee Ponds*
- *472 Moonee Ponds to Williamstown*
- *506 Moonee Ponds to Westgarth*
- *508 Alphington to Moonee Ponds*
- *513 Eltham to Glenroy (Rosanna to Glenroy section)*
- *527 Gowrie to Northland*
- *552 Northcote to Reservoir*
- *605 Gardenvale to City*
- *630 Elwood to Monash Uni*

Mernda TrainLink bus.

The 901 Orbital Smartbus service will be extended from Ringwood via Greensborough, South Morang and Epping to Melbourne Airport from late September 2010. This will overlap with the existing 571 TrainLink bus, providing

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[8] For indicative route of Blue Orbital, see: http://j.mp/smartbus-routes-2006
[9] Some to be re-structured with implementation of the Bus Service Review recommendations

excessive numbers of buses between South Morang, Epping and Roxburgh Park, while other areas are lacking.

Once the 901 is extended, resources currently devoted to the Epping to South Morang TrainLink service should be diverted to provide a frequent route running from Epping Station to Mernda (with possible express running between Epping and South Morang), and modified once South Morang station opens to be a TrainLink bus service to and from South Morang to Mernda, meeting every train.

Such an upgrade would boost currently poor services along Plenty Road, relieving growing traffic congestion, and provide a quality service until the South Morang to Mernda rail line is constructed.

Huntingdale Station to Monash University TrainLink shuttle bus.

Monash University (Clayton) students and staff currently face long waits for over-crowded buses at Huntingdale Station, with Monash University forced to fund additional bus services[10].

Emulating the successful model of the 401 bus (which runs every 3-6 minutes from North Melbourne station to Melbourne University), a dedicated shuttle bus along Wellington Road should be provided, with sufficient buses to meet trains and cope with growing passenger loads.

Bus stops at Huntingdale should also be reconfigured so that all buses departing for the University depart from one stop, rather than the two separate stops used at present. Current part-time bus lanes should be made full-time.

Upgrade all current "minimum service" 7-day-a-week bus routes to run at least every half-hour on weekends and all evenings until midnight.

A large number of bus routes have been upgraded since 2006 to run on Sundays and in the evenings for the first time, which is to be commended. But evening and weekend frequencies are mostly hourly, which is inadequate. An upgrade to half-hourly services at these times is possible using the existing bus fleet, cutting waiting times and encouraging more passengers to use local bus services.

Upgrade V/Line short distance services to run at least every 30 minutes from 7am to 9pm, 7-days-a-week where possible, or hourly where not possible.

With strong patronage growth, V/Line train services are increasingly overcrowded not just in peak times, but also at off-peak times, and waiting times (mostly hourly) are excessive, particularly for trips between Geelong and Melbourne, which are relatively short distances.

Likewise, services to Melton, Rockbank, Deer Park and Ardeer are within zone 2 and considered part of metropolitan Melbourne, but have gaps of up to three hours between trains. Upgrading Bacchus Marsh services would fill those gaps and provide suburban-like services for growing suburbs in Melbourne's west, including to the new station to be built at Caroline Springs (ahead of electrification of the Melton line).

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[10] The Age: Monash goes private as staff, students struggle with delays
http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/20100417-slj0.html

An off-peak upgrade to consistent half-hourly services within the commuter-belt (where the infrastructure allows it) would help spread the peak load, and encourage more off-peak patronage.

Where half-hourly services are not possible, infrastructure upgrades such as duplication should be undertaken.

Introduce pilot Smartbus routes for Geelong and Ballarat.

Following the successful rollout of Smartbus routes in Melbourne, it is time to introduce Smartbus to the biggest regional cities.

- *Geelong: Corio via CBD to Waurn Ponds/Deakin University*
- *Ballarat: Stockland Wendouree Shopping Centre via Ballarat Station and CBD to University of Ballarat Mt Helen campus*

Planning and management

Set up an authority to properly coordinate and run public transport, recruiting the best experts from locally and abroad to proactively plan and manage the network. The authority would take ultimate responsibility for making public transport work across greater Melbourne.

Establish a Greater Melbourne Public Transport Authority, constituted along similar lines to equivalent bodies now operating in Brisbane and Perth and proposed for Sydney. Commence an international recruiting effort to place recognised network planning experts in senior management positions in the new authority. Subsequent to this, transfer to the authority the metropolitan network planning and timetable coordination functions currently vested in the Department of Transport (which will continue its contract administration role), and the statutory powers currently vested in the Director of Public Transport with regard to Metropolitan Melbourne.

Abolish the Public Transport Division in its current form and replace it with a scaled-back transport contract management agency until the current franchise agreements expire or are renegotiated with the new authority.

Infrastructure Australia has noted the importance of governance reform of this type, and in its report to COAG recommended consideration of:

> *An overarching transport planning and management agency, with some degree of independence from the government of the day[11]*

Proactively establishing such an agency would eliminate the risk to the State of a PTA being made a requirement of federal funding, as has been proposed[12].

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[11] Infrastructure Australia, report to COAG, June 2010
http://www.infrastructureaustralia.gov.au/files/Report_to_COAG_2010.pdf - p21.
[12] Senate inquiry into Investment of Commonwealth and State Funds in Public Transport Infrastructure and Services, which notes "*Australian Government funding for transport initiatives should be conditional on reforms to state and territory transport and planning departments to create central coordinating agencies along the model of the Public Transport Authority of Western Australia*".
http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/rrat_ctte/public_transport/report/

Geelong: Armstrong Creek study.

Forming a prototype for identifying the public transport needs of future new developments, conduct a study on the future service patterns and infrastructure required to serve Armstrong Creek[13] by rail (and connecting bus services). This is needed before a large group of suburbs are built around a major shopping centre, which is located on a proposed short stub line for which there has been no feasibility/pre-feasibility study done.

Fares, customer service and safety

Restaff all suburban stations from first to last train, and locate police at "hotspot" railway stations.

Even when current funded upgrades have been completed, only 48% of metropolitan stations will have fulltime staff, and there are gaps of up to seven consecutive unstaffed stations on the network[14].

Putting staff back onto all Metro stations from first to last train will boost security at other locations, and improve customer service, encouraging greater off-peak patronage which will itself boost security and maximise value from the State's substantial investment in infrastructure and rolling stock.

Meanwhile, figures indicate[15] that around 45% of assaults on railway stations take place at the following 10 locations: Flinders St, Dandenong, Broadmeadows, Footscray, St Albans, Ringwood, Bayswater, Frankston, Southern Cross, and Thomastown. 48% of assaults occur during daylight hours (before 6pm). Ensuring a fulltime police presence (from first to last train) at these stations would dramatically improve safety on the rail system by targeting these hotspots.

Police deployment should include a mechanism for radio contact between patrolling police officers and station booking office staff, and be regularly reviewed to ensure chosen locations remain appropriate, with possible expansion if required.

Communications and emergency service response times should be reviewed to ensure that staff at all stations can quickly get police or ambulance attendance when required.

Railway station CCTV connections to police stations.

CCTV feeds from railway stations to local police stations have been trialled on the Melbourne train network at several locations. This better integration of CCTV assists with security, by ensuring police can remotely monitor and respond more rapidly.

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[13] About Armstrong Creek http://www.geelongcity.vic.gov.au/armstrongcreek/armstrong/
[14] PTUA: Call to staff all stations http://www.ptua.org.au/2010/08/15/call-to-staff-all-stations/
[15] PTUA: Crime stats highlight station hotspots http://www.ptua.org.au/2010/09/12/staffing-crime-stats/

More such connections, prioritising known troublespots, will improve security on the rail network, and will make better use of recently-upgraded higher-quality digital cameras[16].

Integrate Skybus into Met fares (zone 1+2).

Skybus to Melbourne Airport provides fast and frequent services from the CBD, but fare levels are well above comparable trips by public transport, with a one-way trip costing $16, more than double the cost of a zone 1+2 ticket, which discourages use. The need to buy a separate ticket is also a barrier.

Abolishing premium fares for the service will allow a better assessment of the true demand for a future Airport rail link.

"Tram cams", motorist education and enforcement to improve safety.

At the majority of Melbourne's tram stops, alighting and boarding passengers have to step into traffic. While vehicles are required by law to stop, this poses a significant risk due to motorist behaviour, and serious injuries and fatalities have resulted[17].

Yarra Trams has trialled on-board cameras, but the results are unclear. With little or no enforcement of the laws, many motorists continue to endanger tram passengers. Regular enforcement action is an established deterrent to unsafe road behaviour, and should accordingly be elevated in relation to tram operations.

Fitting more trams with video cameras, to be reviewed and actioned in a similar way to red light cameras, and combined with a motorist education campaign, would improve passenger safety.

Current procedures for reporting and prosecuting motorists who endanger passengers are also inadequate – these should be reviewed and improved.

Publish a public transport system map.

For some years, no multi-modal public transport system map has been available in Melbourne, resulting in passengers being often unaware of the availability of connecting services, particularly buses.

To provide better information for passengers, a multi-modal system map should be published, with the emphasis on frequent services, showing all trains, trams and Smartbus (or equivalent, frequent, 7-day-a-week) services, and with other services less prominently displayed. This map should be designed for on-system use, for publishing online for access from desktop computers and portable devices, and on paper for passengers to carry.

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[16] Upgrades to digital CCTV on railway stations were completed in early-2010.
http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/20100518-vas0.html
[17] The Age: Tram stop safety warning
http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2003/03/05/1046826441956.html

Infrastructure: Improving reliability, capacity and coverage

Duplicate rail lines: Dandenong to Cranbourne, Gowrie to Upfield, Deer Park (west) to Melton, Cave Hill Station (Lilydale line).

Single line sections of metropolitan rail lines form a significant bottleneck, leading to reliability problems, since a small delay can easily compound, delaying services right across the group. Duplicating these sections of line would allow more frequent and reliable services.

In the case of Melton, electrification should also be carried out, to add growing western suburban areas such as Deer Park to the metropolitan rail network. Cranbourne duplication should be carried out with extending the line (see below). Construction of a two-platform station at Cave Hill on the Lilydale line would improve service reliability and enable more frequent trains, as well as serving the local community, ahead of full duplication of the line at a later stage.

Metropolitan rail extensions: Mernda and Clyde (Cranbourne East).

Extending rail services in line with the Urban Growth Boundary[18] is important to offer residents of new suburbs viable alternatives to using their cars for all of their travel.

While the South Morang rail project will extend services from Epping to South Morang by 2013, currently a further extension to Mernda is not scheduled until 2027 – far too late to influence land use decisions and travel patterns. This should be brought forward, with construction to commence immediately once South Morang station has opened.

The Cranbourne East extension is included (with no funding or current timeline) in the Victorian Transport Plan, but the PTUA proposes that this should be brought forward to integrate with development in the area, now that the Cranbourne East Precinct Structure Plan has been approved by the Minister of Planning, and extend to Clyde, closer to the new Urban Growth Boundary.

Full feasibility into Rowville Rail line.

Notwithstanding proposed upgrades to Wellington Road bus services, a full independent feasibility study into rail services from Huntingdale via Monash University to Rowville should be undertaken, with community consultation to determine the optimum route and design.

Tram extensions to major shopping centres.

A number of tram routes fall short of major traffic generators at their suburban ends, resulting in services which are very busy at the CBD end, but under-used and over-resourced at the suburban end. Extensions of these three routes would make better use of the tram fleet, while providing high quality frequent services into three of

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[18] Urban Growth Boundary
http://www.dse.vic.gov.au/CA256F310024B628/0/E7200B0B1C5CE1B0CA25776D0017A655/$File/Melbourne+Map+-+updated+27+July+2010.pdf

Melbourne's busiest shopping centres and growing residential precincts, and better connections to Smartbus and other transport services at those centres.

- *Tram 48 to Doncaster Shoppingtown*
- *Tram 75 to Knox City*
- *Tam 3 to East Malvern station and Chadstone*

Short extensions to the tram network.

In a number of cases, tram routes end a short distance from logical terminus points, such as local railway stations. The distance, often only a few hundred metres, prevents public transport services linking to form an effective network.

- *Tram 6 to Glen Iris station (with possible later grade-separation and extension to Ashburton station)*
- *Tram 67 to Carnegie station*
- *Tram 8 along Toorak Road to Hartwell*
- *Tram 5 to Darling station*
- *Park Street, South Melbourne extension to St Kilda Road – enabling an east-west route to serve Albert Park, South Melbourne, Domain and South Yarra*

Build a new railway station at Southland on the Frankston line to serve the shopping centre.

The Frankston line runs past the rear of Southland Shopping Centre[19], but with no station, and poor bus services, particularly from the north, most trips to the centre are by car, resulting in traffic congestion on the Nepean Highway and a motorists spending long periods of time hunting for car parking.

A railway station adjoining the centre is urgently required to allow more patrons to arrive by fast, frequent public transport.

Grade separation: instead of building Westlink, use funds to kickstart grade-separation across the metropolitan area, targeting level crossings serving trams, current and proposed Smartbus routes, and the highest-frequency rail lines, to improve service reliability and safety for all public transport users, pedestrians and motorists

Westlink, at an estimated cost of up to $5 billion, but with benefits of only $1.1 billion[20], is likely to flood inner-Melbourne with vehicles from the western suburbs, bringing widespread traffic congestion into the docks, North Melbourne and Docklands, as well as significant impact and exposure to traffic pollution for residents in Sunshine and Footscray.

Diverting this money towards grade separation would fund the removal of over thirty-five level crossings around metropolitan Melbourne[21], providing significant benefit to public transport users, pedestrians, cyclists and motorists alike.

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[19] See aerial photo http://www.ptua.org.au/2010/07/21/call-for-southland-station/
[20] The Age, 21/5/2010 http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/20100520-vovs.html
[21] Based on costing of Middleborough Road grade-separation at $66 million
http://www.johnholland.com.au/Project.asp?Action=Project&PID=28

Level crossings which should be considered a priority include those serving current tram and Smartbus routes, or large numbers of bus routes, including proposed Smartbus routes:

- *Anderson Road, Sunshine (Buses 216, 400, proposed Smartbus 451, 456)*
- *Balcombe Road, Mentone (Smartbus 903, bus 708)*
- *Bell Street and Munro Street, Coburg (one project; Smartbus 903, proposed Smartbus 513, bus 527)*
- *Bell Street, Cramer Street and Murray Road, Preston (one project; Smartbus 903, Proposed Smartbuses 513 and 527)*
- *Buckley Street, Essendon (Smartbus 903, bus 475)*
- *Burke Road, Gardiner (tram 72 and trains currently subject to speed restrictions)*
- *Camp Road, Campbellfield (crossing elimination and new railway station on the Upfield line; Smartbus 902, bus 538)*
- *Centre Road, Bentleigh (Smartbus 703)*
- *Cherry Street, Werribee (Buses 439, 443, 441, 446)*
- *Clayton Road, Clayton (Smartbus 703, bus 631, 733, 733)*
- *Ferguson Street, North Williamstown (Buses 415, 472/Smartbus proposed Blue Orbital)*
- *Glenferrie Road, Kooyong (tram 16 and trains currently subject to speed restrictions)*
- *Glen Huntly Road and Neerim Road, Glen Huntly (one project; tram 67 and trains currently subject to speed restrictions, bus 623, 624)*
- *Keon Parade, Keon Park (Smartbus 902)*
- *Mount Derrimut Road, Deer Park (Bus 400, Smartbus 902 proposed extension)*
- *North Road, Ormond (Proposed Smartbus 630, bus 627)*
- *Riversdale Road, Camberwell (tram 70 and trains currently subject to speed restrictions)*
- *Springvale Road, Springvale (Smartbus 902, bus 813, 814)*

Melbourne's four tram/train crossings are a bottleneck for both modes of public transport, and also to motorists and pedestrians. Trains have to slow to as little as 10 km/h over the crossings, which has an obvious impact on travel times, and trams are prone to derailments at these locations, causing long delays[22].

Other crossings to be prioritised would be along rail lines with the highest frequency peak hour rail services.

Upgrade tram and bus priority to get public transport moving through traffic more quickly

A single tram or bus could be carrying 50, 100 or even 200 people in it, and should have priority over single-occupancy cars to allow us to move more people on our roads more efficiently. On some tram routes, delays at traffic lights account for up to a third of tram running times[23].

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[22] Metro delays after tram derails at crossing – The Age, 2/7/2010
http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/ 20100702-zr30.html
[23] PTUA study of tram delays http://www.ptua.org.au/2007/09/27/dead-time-tolls-trams/

Active traffic light priority, which can detect an approaching tram or bus to ensure it gets the green through an intersection, could dramatically cut "dead time", enabling better use of the fleet and drivers, and providing faster and more frequent services that are more competitive with car travel.

To get effective tram and bus priority, the government should establish a Tram and Bus Priority Committee comprising senior personnel from the Department of Transport (and/or Public Transport Authority when established), VicRoads, Yarra Trams, Bus Association of Victoria, City of Melbourne and Victoria Police, together with local council and community representatives, to be charged with coordinating the research, planning and implementation of operational and law enforcement measures to minimise unproductive delays to public transport vehicles in the road network.

Selected signalling upgrades.

Investigate and fund signalling upgrades on the suburban rail network to enable greater throughput of trains at peak times on the busiest lines. Prime sections of the network for consideration should include:

- *CBD area, including the City Loop*
- *Caulfield to Dandenong*
- *North Melbourne to Newport*
- *Sydenham line*

Regional rail gauge standardisation, starting with the Shepparton line.

Rail freight is currently crippled by a lack of gauge standardisation, which is worse in Victoria than in any other state. While services from Seymour to Albury are moving to standard gauge, plans for further standardisation have not been made public.

Conversion of the line from Melbourne via Shepparton to Cobram, Tocumwal and Dookie to standard gauge would provide greater capacity and reliability for passengers and freight on this major interstate route and ensure a more cohesive rail system in the northeast of the state, and act as a first stage of standardisation of remaining regional rail lines across the rest of Victoria[24].

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[24] See section 3.5.3 of the PTUA's Submission to Infrastructure Australia (October 2008) http://www.ptua.org.au/files/2008/PTUA_Infrastructure_audit_submission_2008-10-15.pdf