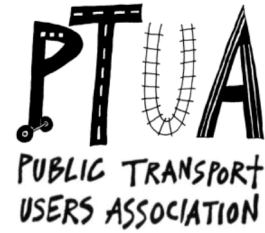


Public Transport Development Authority: what's needed?



Key points

The PTDA should:

- be directly responsible for planning public transport infrastructure and services at strategic and tactical levels (see definitions below), and also oversee operators' operational planning;
- control allocations for public transport operations and routine maintenance within the budget set by the State government. The agency will also collect ticketing revenue;
- recruit experienced professionals from some of the best performing public transport agencies interstate and overseas with proven track records in multimodal network planning;
- be constituted as an independent statutory authority, equivalent to VicRoads;
- be governed by an independent and competent board which includes community representatives, holds its meetings in public, and routinely seeks feedback from the public and stakeholders;
- regularly publish planning documents, from strategic plans to timetable updates, for the consideration by both the Minister for Transport and the public;
- chair a taskforce for on-road public transport priority measures, and review the design of all subdivision and major developments to ensure that they can be provided with efficient public transport; and
- absorb responsibilities from existing distinct bodies, including the following: ticketing from the Transport Ticketing Authority; passenger information from Metlink; and VicTrack for land and infrastructure management.

Establishing the PTDA

- An expert task force should make recommendations to the Minister on refining the proposed PTDA's interim and long-term responsibilities, its organisational and legal structures, and the recruitment of key personnel. Without pre-judging the recommendations of this task force, this document indicates likely directions.
- The taskforce should include local experts in matters relating to public transport governance and the structure of public transport authorities. This may include present or former practitioners and transport academics, such as:
 - Edward Dotson (former advisor to the World Bank)

- Peter Kain (Bureau of Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Economics)
- Paul Mees (RMIT University)
- John Stone (Centre for Governance and Management of Urban Transport)
- The Department of Transport should be maintained for the main purpose of providing advice to the Minister for Transport, including on the broad relationship between road and public transport policies and arising from research on travel patterns.
- While the new agency is being set up, the Department should also manage existing contracts with private operators, so that PTDA staff are not distracted by the minutiae of contract administration.
- The contract management role, however, should be wound down and transferred to the PTDA after it is established so the new authority can work directly with operators.

Scope and functions

The PTDA should have singular responsibility for the public transport system. It should have direct responsibility for 'strategic' and 'tactical' planning of the public transport network, including decisions on fares, routes and timetabling strategies. It should also oversee operational planning, but leave operational tasks such as rostering and vehicle maintenance to individual operators.

Vuchic¹ differentiates the layers of planning as follows:

- strategic planning - 'implement policies to integrate transit services' for the customer across the entire system;
- tactical planning - 'plan lines and networks using optimal modes and state-of-the-art technology; prepare coordinated schedules';
- operational planning - 'organize efficient services by one or more providers'.

It is essential that the new organisation engage in tactical planning so that it can make sure that services connect, ensure that existing infrastructure is being used efficiently, and then recommend building the highest priority new infrastructure.

The information provision functions of Metlink should also be given to the PTDA, as it will be the main agency responsible for communicating with customers and providing them with multimodal information on services and connections.

Expertise

A successful public transport system is based around a comprehensive and well-integrated *network* of services that facilitates rather than discourages journeys requiring a transfer to a connecting service². Such networks do not happen by accident, but require network planning skills that are largely absent or under-developed in Victoria due at least in part to the "confusing structure of multiple agencies and authorities" inherited from the previous

government³. “Ensuring services are integrated”, as the incoming government has tasked the PTDA to do, will therefore require recruitment of experienced network planning professionals from world-recognised agencies with a strong culture of high service standards and integration.

While there should be no presumption of staff transfer into the PTDA from DoT, Metlink or other agencies, nor should such transfers be precluded where the Board is satisfied that the staff member possesses the necessary skills and commitment to deliver the PTDA’s objectives and a public recruitment process reveals no preferable candidates. We would encourage the incoming government to establish reassignment processes for affected DoT staff that support their career development goals.

Statutory powers

The PTDA should be a statutory authority, constituted in law and effectively owned by the people of Victoria, as distinct from a company constituted under the Corporations Act and/or owned by third party operators.

The authority’s statutory powers should be similar to those of Vicroads. Until recently Vicroads has enjoyed an independent statutory role with its own planning powers and Ministerial access independent of the Department of Transport. It now retains this role only with respect to road safety matters, and reports through the Department Secretary on other matters. The PTDA should operate in a similar manner, consulting with the Department on strategic issues related to the broader transport system, but also holding statutory powers with regard to road and traffic management and land use planning inasmuch as they impact on public transport operations.

Operator contract changes

Operator contracts should be renegotiated to ensure that operators focus on their main role under the PTDA, which is operating services efficiently at low cost to the taxpayer. With strategic and tactical planning the responsibilities of the PTDA, operators’ contracts should be reduced in scope and complexity to focus mainly on service delivery. Contracts should include measures to monitor and enforce performance targets for aspects of service delivery that are within the operators’ control. They should also include a framework for reimbursing operators’ costs when the PTDA orders additional services. Fare revenue should be retained by the PTDA, rather than split between operators, so that the benefits from improving services can be returned to the system to fund further improvements and incentives to improve services are not diluted by sharing increased revenue with other operators.

Public participation

"Accountability and transparency will be the principles that underpin our government" (Ted Baillieu, 29/11/2010)⁴

Much of the public discontent with transport in Victoria can be traced to the inadequate engagement and influence of the public in decision making. For example, the consultation process for *Melbourne 2030* during 2001 found that the public prioritised issues such as:

- Management of urban growth to protect the natural environment and neighbourhood character; and
- Increased emphasis on public transport and cycling facilities, instead of roads⁵

However over the following decade local communities fought a constant battle over what they regarded as inappropriate development; urban sprawl swallowed more productive farmland⁶; and construction of major freeways took precedence over expanding the rail network⁷. At the same time, a succession of transport plans emerged over the 11 years of the Bracks/Brumby government that showed little evidence that public submissions were taken seriously in their development.

The most recent plan - the Victorian Transport Plan - was released following an invitation to make submissions in response to a different document, the final report of the more narrowly-focused East-West Link Needs Assessment⁸. Despite a large amount of support for the Doncaster rail line in submissions, this option does not appear to have been examined seriously by rail experts. On the other hand, projects that did become "part of the plan" created significant uncertainty for affected communities who were not properly engaged prior to media announcements by the government⁹. An independent expert also reviewed those projects and concluded that there had been inadequate exploration of the alternatives¹⁰.

In contrast to the Department of Transport's poor practice, effective public transport authorities institutionalise public participation as part of their operations and seriously consider the options brought forward.

"...public participation legitimizes policy decisions, strengthens relationships between stakeholders and promotes sharing of knowledge."¹¹

In line with best practice and the principles espoused by the new Premier, Victoria's Public Transport Development Authority should be governed by a representative and appropriately skilled board which holds its meetings in public.

Vuchic¹² gives the following as "the necessary or desirable qualifications and capabilities" of PPA board members:

- Strong civic interest (the position usually brings only nominal remuneration), regional orientation (rather than representing interests of a local area only);
- Technical knowledge, or at least good understanding, of transit system operations, such as technical issues, economic aspects, management, and personnel characteristics;
- Use of and interest in transit system, positive attitude, activism and initiative;
- Absence of potential conflicts of interest or strong involvement in a political party.

The board should ensure effective and transparent consultation processes are built into transport planning and be guided by transport network planning professionals with the skills to deliver an effective multi-modal network¹³.

The PTDA can be guided by the example of similar agencies overseas. For example, Vancouver's authority - TransLink - routinely invites stakeholders to "be part of the plan" rather than simply presenting the plan as a fait accompli¹⁴. The TransLink board meets in public every two months and publishes meeting agenda and summaries on its website¹⁵. The Toronto Transit Commission (TTC) also meets in public and offers the public the opportunity to address the members of the Commission on matters of concern¹⁶. Transport for London publishes board meeting agenda, papers and minutes on its website¹⁷ and its board includes representation from disability groups and other users, local government and the transport sector¹⁸. An extensive consultation process guides the development of the city's transport strategy¹⁹.

¹ Vuchic, V. *Urban Transit: Operations, Planning and Economics*. Wiley (2005), p.457.

² In this context 'network' has a specific meaning whereby a diverse range of journeys can be made by transferring from route to route with minimal inconvenience and waiting. See:

- pages 4-7 of:
http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/rrat_ctte/public_transport/submissions/sub136.pdf
- <http://www.ptua.org.au/2010/05/09/train-bus-connections/>

³ <http://www.ptthatworks.org.au/mess.html>

⁴ 'What you see is what you get': Baillieu pledges no hidden agenda, *The Age*, 30 November 2010, <http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/20101130-18ekz.html>

⁵ Delahunty, M. & Batchelor, P., 2002, Trams, Trees and Neighbourhoods: Melburnians set their priorities for the next 30 years, media release, 31 March, 2002
http://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/domino/Web_Notes/MediaRelArc02.nsf/ebfd7a9e83f839b34a2568110023b2e3/3fa6d84315565d2dca256b8f0006a869!OpenDocument&Click=

⁶ "The unending urban sprawl and the grab for resources such as productive farm land and water which has typified Melbourne's growth is unsustainable in the future." Darren Chester MP, first speech, 26 August 2008,
<http://www.nationals.org.au/News/LatestNews/tabid/94/articleType/ArticleView/articleId/432/Darren-Chester-MP-First-Speech.aspx>

⁷ <http://www.ptua.org.au/2008/05/05/spending-comparison/>

⁸ Government seeks Victorians' views on East-West Report, media release, 2 April 2008,
http://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/domino/Web_Notes/newmedia.nsf/8fc6e140ef55837cca256c8c00183cdc/c2b47f2242cccf35ca2574200000e0c1!OpenDocument

⁹ Lucas, C., 2010, 'Residents not told their homes will go', *The Age*, 13 July,
<http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/20100712-107w1.html>

¹⁰ Dotson, Edward (2008) East West Link Needs Assessment Recommendations 1, 2, 3 & 6 – Review of the Assumptions, Data And Analysis – Final Report. August 26th 2008, see e.g. p. 17 on the RRL.

¹¹ Kennedy, C., Miller, E., Shalaby, A., McLean, H. & Coleman, J., 2005, 'The Four Pillars of Sustainable Urban Transportation', *Transport Reviews*, Vol.25, No.4, pp.393-414

¹² Vuchic, V. *Urban Transit: Operations, Planning and Economics*. Wiley, 2005.

¹³ See note 2.

¹⁴ <http://www.translink.ca/en/Be-Part-of-the-Plan.aspx>

¹⁵ <http://www.translink.ca/en/About-TransLink/TransLink-Governance-and-Board/Meetings-and-Reports.aspx>

¹⁶ http://www3.ttc.ca/About_the_TTC/Commission_reports_and_information/Making_a_deputation.jsp

¹⁷ <http://www.tfl.gov.uk/corporate/about-tfl/boardandchiefexecutives/papers/1438.aspx>

¹⁸ <http://www.tfl.gov.uk/corporate/about-tfl/boardandchiefexecutives/1432.aspx>

¹⁹ <http://www.tfl.gov.uk/corporate/11610.aspx>