

News

Public Transport Users Association

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Aston by-election

The sad and unexpected death of local MP Peter Nugent means a by-election in the Knox-based seat of Aston. This is, of course, the heart of the area affected by the debate between supporters of improved public transport and the Scoresby Freeway lobby. The PTUA has been campaigning for improved public transport in Knox since 1995, and the by-election provides a never-to-be-repeated chance to demonstrate that the public are nowhere near as freeway-obsessed as those who claim to represent them.

The announcement, on 13th May, of \$220 million in Federal funding for the freeway by Prime Minister John Howard means we have to make the by-election a referendum on transport policy.

The PTUA will be joining with community and environment groups in a "Vote 1 public transport" campaign in Aston. If you are able to help - by staffing a stall, distributing leaflets or staffing a polling place on election day - please contact the PTUA office.

Please send your petitions back

We have had a fantastic response to the 'Put Public Transport First' petition, with over 2000 signatures collected so far. We now need to present the petitions to Federal Parliament, so please try to return your to the office by the end of May

Country Trains to Return

Eight years of campaigning by the PTUA have been rewarded by the announcement this week by the State Government that passenger trains will return to Ararat, Bairnsdale, Mildura and Leongatha.

Passenger services were removed from these lines by the previous Liberal government and replaced by buses (other services, to Warrnambool, Swan Hill, Shepparton and Albury were saved after heavy campaigning).

This week's announcement includes an allocation of \$33 million in the State Budget for capital works and subsidies. Apparently, deterioration of the lines has meant that trains cannot be immediately returned. New trains will also be purchased to operate the Mildura and Leongatha lines.

The PTUA is very pleased by this positive contribution to public transport by the State Government. In his press release, the Premier stated that train times would be faster than before the cuts. The PTUA looks forward to working with the government to ensure that frequency and connectivity are upgraded as well.

One lesson can be drawn from the fact that three of the lines pass through the electorates of independent MPs and the remainder through an electorate (Ripon) in which a coalition MP was unseated by a huge swing. The lesson is that a strong protest vote concentrates politicians' minds enormously. The PTUA will be seeking to apply this lesson in the Aston by-election.

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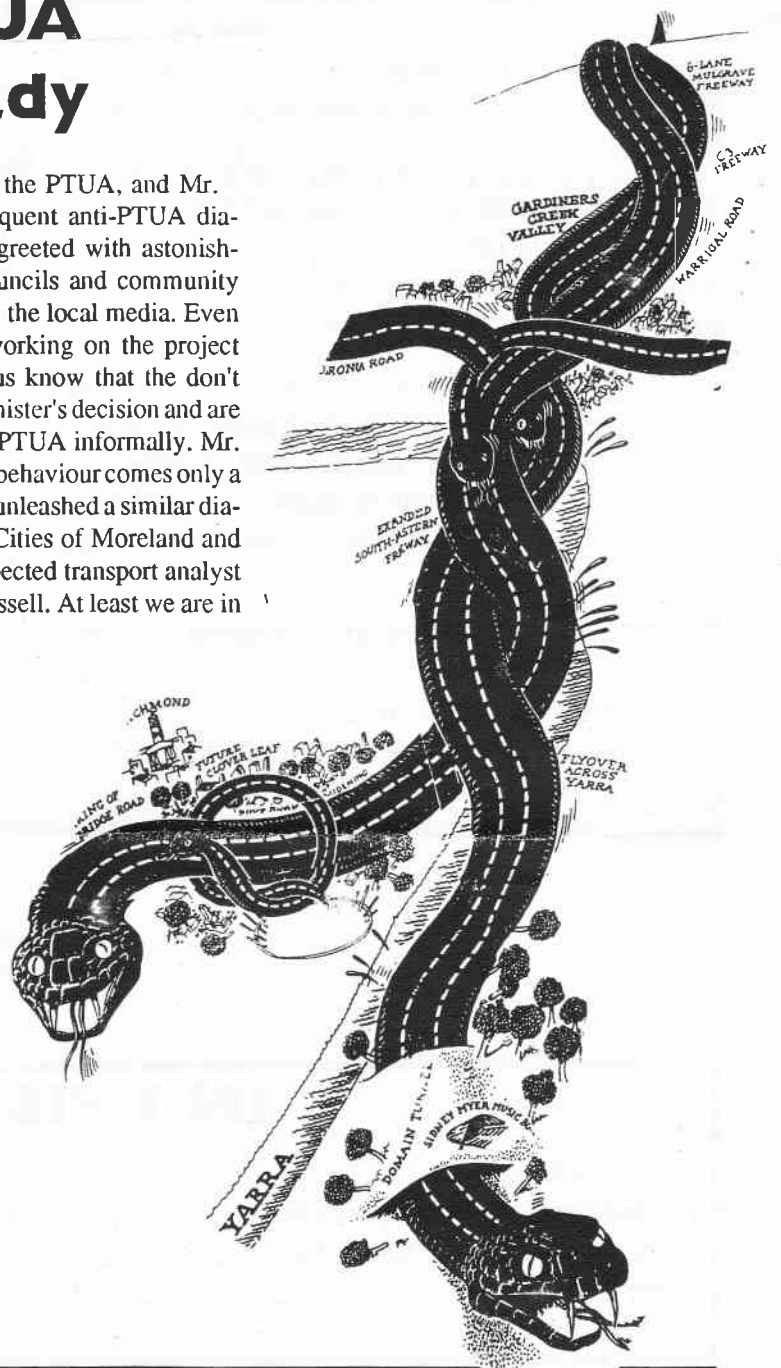
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Batchelor bans PTUA from transport study

Peter Batchelor has established a "community reference group" to work with Department of Infrastructure road engineers on the study of transport options in the "inner northern corridor" between the Eastern and Tullamarine Freeways. The group is very large, with some 25 representatives including councils, residents' groups, government bureaucrats, the RACV and trucking lobby peak group the Victorian Road Transport Association. The consultants wanted the PTUA included, but Transport Minister Peter Batchelor, in a fit of pique, intervened and had us excluded.

The exclusion of the PTUA, and Mr. Batchelor's subsequent anti-PTUA diatribe, have been greeted with astonishment by local councils and community groups, as well as the local media. Even the consultants working on the project have quietly let us know that they don't agree with the Minister's decision and are happy to consult PTUA informally. Mr. Batchelor's latest behaviour comes only a fortnight after he unleashed a similar diatribe against the Cities of Moreland and Darebin, and respected transport analyst Professor Bill Russell. At least we are in good company!



Heidelberg meeting overwhelmingly opposes freeway

Concerned residents of the Yarra Valley voted overwhelmingly to rebuke the State Government for its plans to build a freeway linkage through the sensitive Yarra Flats riverland. The public meeting, held in Heidelberg on the 26th of March surpassed organisers' expectations by first exceeding the capacity of the hall being used for the event, and by later producing a more strongly-worded motion than the organisers had been prepared for.

Several local community groups initiated the meeting, which featured a number of speakers who stated the cultural, environmental and historical importance of the Yarra Flats region to Melbourne. PTUA President Paul Mees spoke to the meeting about the plans for the freeway link, which are part of long-buried plans by VicRoads to build a single ring-road surrounding Melbourne.

As mentioned before in the PTUA newsletter, this freeway would almost certainly be built to link the controversial Scoresby Freeway (in reality the Eastern Ring Road) with the Western Ring Road, and would be an unsightly and devastating above-ground road that runs through miles of present-day parkland.

Residents were urged not to be conned by the claim that the worst effects of this

bypass could be avoided by making a large portion of it run underground. Such a tunnel would end up facing the same problems as the disastrous Burnley Tunnel, while costing three billion dollars, and all the time keeping only a tiny portion of the freeway hidden from view. Residents were urged by organisers to send a message to their local councillors and state and federal representatives by voting for a motion opposing these plans.

The organisers were heartened by the large turnout (around four hundred) which meant that many people were forced to stand in the aisles or listen from outside the open doors. They were then even more pleasantly surprised when those attending voted to change the wording of the prepared motion to many it more explicitly condemn the plans.

Local Labor member Craig Langdon not only attended the meeting, but also helped to publicise it in a letter to local residents. He was obviously surprised by the sheer level of opposition being shown and has since made efforts to gauge public opinion about the proposed freeway.

The meeting approved the formation of a group to coordinate the community's opposition to both the Scoresby

Freeway and the Heidelberg Freeway. The group is now meeting and planning a more extensive campaign that will include a public meeting in July. (Details in next issue).

Lalor residents grill Batchelor

On Monday 7th May 100 people gathered in Lalor to hear Prof Bill Russell talk about the freeway and the alternative package that his team developed. The night was organised by the Lalor group People Of Whittlesea Refusing Entry (POWRE).

At the end of the meeting a show of hands was taken about 'who wanted a freeway' only 3 people said they did - a man sitting next to Peter Batchelor, and the owners of the truck wreckers in Cooper St Epping.

Peter Batchelor the local MP responded to heated criticism from the organisers and audience. An eyewitness reports: "Most of what he said did not wash with the residents. People felt that they had been excluded from decision making."

PTUA forces Batchelor to announce outer east public transport study

The transport policy Labor took to the 1999 Victorian election promised a series of community-based transport studies designed to improve public transport and reduce car dependence, beginning in the outer eastern suburbs. On being elected to office, Transport Minister Peter Batchelor dropped this promise and supported the Scoresby Freeway. The work program for the Department of Infrastructure's strategic planning section for 2001 made no mention of the promised study.

In March, the PTUA issued press releases to local papers pointing out that the gov-

ernment had failed to honour its election promises. On 2nd May, Peter Batchelor announced that \$2 million would be allocated to fund a study of outer eastern public transport.

While generally supportive of this move, the PTUA does have concerns. In particular, we need to be reassured that the study will be genuinely community-based and that it will be directed to reducing dependence on cars. We have concerns about the possibilities for reduction of car dependence, because the Transport Minis-

ter's press release seems to imply that the Scoresby Freeway is not going to be assessed as part of the study. Given that the Kennett Government's 1998 Environmental Effects Statement found that the freeway would increase car use, we believe it should be on the study's agenda too.

The PTUA is also concerned that projects like the tram extension to Knox, which were firm commitments in 1999, appear to have been downgraded to "feasibility studies".

COUNTRY VICTORIA

PTUA seeks comments on rural transport paper

The PTUA is inviting members to comment on its draft *Connecting Victoria* paper. The paper will form the Association's policy on public transport in rural Victoria.

For the first time in many years there is a real political desire to improve public transport in country areas. However *Connecting Victoria* warns that current plans to introduce fast rail services to regional cities, will fail unless matters such as network coverage, service frequency, co-ordination with buses and convenient links to town centres are addressed.

Connecting Victoria points out that though Australia is one of the world's most sparsely populated countries, much of Victoria has population densities comparable to parts of Western Europe that enjoy good public transport. *Connecting Victoria* examines public transport examples from around the world and proposes an efficient and affordable statewide transport system for Victoria.

History

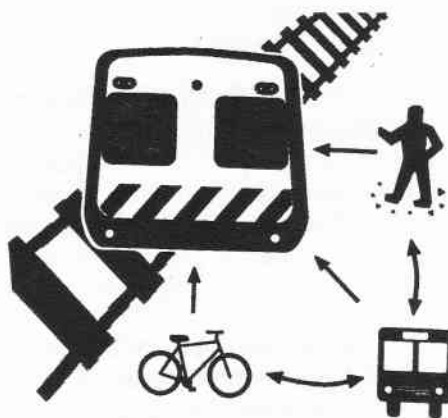
Before World War II, most Victorian towns and cities had passenger rail links to Melbourne. Services remained infrequent, slow, and uncomfortable. They proved no match for the private car running on continually expanding publicly funded roads. As a result train patronage declined.

Apart from some innovations in the 1980s, the general response to the challenge posed by the car was to reduce services further and replace trains with buses. Not surprisingly this led to further patronage loss. More recently, train and coach services were corporatised and then privatised. Evidence that these reforms improved service levels or operational efficiency appears lacking.

Current government proposals

Labor won office largely due to large

swings in country areas. It promised the provision of 'fast rail' services along four corridors (Melbourne to Geelong, Bendigo, Ballarat, Traralgon). \$550 million has been pledged towards the project. The benefits of parts of the 'fast rail' plan are questionable. For example it is proposed that tracks be removed from the Bendigo and Traralgon lines. This would make it impossible to run frequent trains in both directions throughout the day, hamper freight traffic and require trains to wait in passing loops. Furthermore, the



current proposals emphasise commuters from the larger centres, and could disadvantage those whose towns are bypassed or suffer reduced service frequencies if intermediate stops are removed.

Alternatives

To examine alternative approaches we looked at best and worst public transport examples in the UK, US, France and Switzerland.

UK: Competition

The UK deregulated regional city buses and transferred rail services to the private sector in the 1980s and 1990s. Passengers wishing to transfer between services are particularly disadvantaged due to a lack of timetables or fare co-ordination. Services on quieter routes declined as companies scrambled to compete on the main routes.

The rail system appears to have become less efficient as fares and subsidies paid to private operators have both risen. Safety has emerged as a major concern, with Britain suffering several serious rail accidents in recent years.

US: Commuter rail

Many US cities do not have urban rail services throughout the day. Instead 'commuter rail' services are offered. These are peak-hour trains between a dormitory suburb and the CBD in the morning and back again in the afternoon. Service at no other times is provided. Commuter rail makes little contribution to public mobility, entrenches car-dependency and is very expensive to run.

France: Fast trains

France's TGV trains provide fast transport between major centres. The system required the construction of expensive new lines, which bypassed smaller towns. The train turned many towns into dormitory suburbs of Paris. Initially services were concentrated in peak hours, though hourly services now exist on some lines.

Switzerland: A network solution

Instead of spending billions on new track, Switzerland improved services on existing lines. Interchanges in major cities receive services every 30 or 60 minutes. Careful planning has created rail, bus and taxi services that together form an integrated network covering the whole country. The result is a go anywhere anytime system that meets many public travel needs at reasonable cost.

A transport network for Victoria

Population density is often cited as the main reason for rural Victoria not having good public transport. However, if the less settled half of Victoria is excluded, the remainder has population densities more than twice that of Sweden and over half that of countries such as Ireland, Spain and Austria. There are over 20 regional towns with populations exceeding 9 000. Therefore Victoria can have effective rural public transport, provided services are properly planned and do not

duplicate one another fund a model. These are:

1. All-day operation: early morning to midnight for key services
2. Frequent service: at least hourly, except in remote areas
3. Quality rail: to link regional cities to Melbourne and provide network 'backbone'
4. Convenient buses: to link regional centres with easy to understand routes that reflect local travel needs
5. Statewide coverage: all but smallest towns receive service
6. Easy transfers: Able to be made at rail and bus route junctions. Services to operate to 'pulse timetable' to reduce transfer times.
7. Quality interchange facilities: Transfers be as easy as possible.
8. Priority for buses in urban areas .
9. Fares to compete with the car: with free transfers, easily purchased tickets and sensible discounts for regular travellers
10. Safe, clean, comfortable and reliable

transport: these matters to be taken seriously, with adequate staffing and facilities

Proposed services

Connecting Victoria proposes a core network of hourly bus and train services. These provide convenient linkages between large rural cities and with Melbourne. The network will also allow cross-country travel without going via Melbourne.

Most services outside the core network will run every two hours. Remote areas will receive three services per day. All services will be timetabled to allow convenient transfer to other routes.

The third component is intra-town buses. These need to run frequently 7 days per week. Fares and timetables should be integrated with the statewide system described above.

Conclusion

Connecting Victoria will be the PTUA's policy paper for rural transport. Your comments on the draft paper would be invited. Please contact the Association office to obtain a copy. We wish to complete the paper shortly, so would appreciate member comments as soon as possible.



George Yule

1919 - 2001

George Yule's obituary in *The Age* touched on his work as an inspiring church leader, historian and teacher, but he was also one of the PTUA's most valued long-time members.

George and his three sisters and brother were brought up in the semi-rural environment of *Doncaster* in the 20s, where the rolling hills of Doncaster, covered with orchards and remnant bushland, made one of the most attractive landscapes in Australia. His childhood play with a model Hornby train layout based on Grimsby had developed into a fascination with British railways, and he explored the British Isles from north to south.

While he lived simply, George enjoyed many of the pleasures of life. First came his family, Esther, Peter and Cathy - a fourth child, Patrick, died as a baby - and seven grandchildren. He enjoyed the bush, and in his later years he gained great pleasure from helping to restore the Valley bushland reserve in Mt Waverley. He loved music, and Bach, Handel and Mozart were a constant background in his home.

George was active in the PTUA, Amnesty and community issues, always willing to offer advice, send letters to papers or politicians and help out with fundraising appeals. In 1993 he travelled to Ararat to speak on behalf of the PTUA at a rally to save the local train service (George would have been very happy to hear the announcement of the line's re-opening this month). Many of us fondly remember his largely extempore presentation two years ago at the panel hearing into the Scoresby Freeway. With a characteristic mixture of affability and seriousness, George outlined the deprivation of outer suburban residents trapped in their homes by inadequate public transport, a problem he had encountered repeatedly in the course of his ministry.

George will be remembered for his gentleness, kindness and humour, and for the infectious enthusiasm he brought to his preaching and teaching, and indeed to everything he enjoyed, from medieval churches to clearing weeds from native parks. He died peacefully after a short illness, at home, surrounded by his family, with Bach playing.

City Link case heads to High Court

West Brunswick resident Peter Allan's challenge to the City Link tax breaks is listed for hearing in the High Court in Canberra on 23rd May. Some readers may have seen the report on Peter's case on Insight on SBS on 10th May. It's probably a good time to briefly recap on what the case is about.

In 1996 Transurban City Link was awarded a certificate entitling it to tax breaks, which allow banks who lend money to the project to receive interest tax-free. The breaks have also been used to pay tax-free dividends to shareholders. The total value of the tax breaks is unclear, but current estimates are \$800-\$1200 million.

The tax breaks were awarded under a scheme set up by the Keating government, in the Development Allowance Authority Act 1992. In 1997, the Howard government abolished the scheme, because it was being used for tax avoidance (mainly using City Link as a vehicle), but people who already had tax breaks got to keep them.

Section 93O of the Development Allowance Authority Act states: "If.. there is in force... a law that... will prohibit or restrict the operation of other facilities in competition with the infrastructure facility concerned, the DAA must not issue the certificate."

But there are restrictions on competing facilities, as was dramatically demonstrated in February, when Transurban claimed \$36 million in compensation from the Victorian government for road improvements that it claims have diverted traffic away from City Link. Of even greater concern are other parts of the City Link agreement, such as that entitling Transurban to compensation if the government restricts central city car parking, introduces free or cheap public transport or builds a freight-carrying heavy rail line

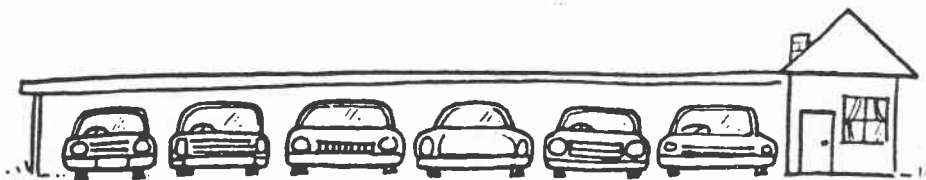
to the Airport.

So Transurban have been granted perhaps a billion dollars to taxpayers' money they were never entitled to!

Peter Allan has applied to review this decision. If he succeeds, the decision will be reversed retrospectively and Transurban will have to pay all the money back. However, the real issue (whether Transurban were entitled to the tax breaks) has not yet been addressed. Instead, the case has been fought on the technicality of 'standing to sue'.

Initially, the DAA denied Peter standing. He appealed to the (Commonwealth) Administrative Appeals Tribunal and lost. He then appealed to Justice Mansfield of the Federal Court and lost again. A further appeal to the Full Court of the Federal Court was successful (decision given Feb. 1998). The case was sent back to the AAT, which denied standing again, on a different ground. He appealed to Justice Merkel of the Federal Court, who upheld the appeal and sent the case back to the AAT, telling the AAT to stop wasting time on preliminary points and decide the real issue. Transurban then appealed, successfully, to the Full Court (comprised of different judges from last time). Peter applied for leave to appeal to the High Court, and the High Court granted leave on 8th September 2000.

The PTUA has been helping Peter with the costs of the case, thanks to generous donations from members. Peter has also been able to secure the pro bono services of three barristers: Mark Dreyfus QC, Mr. Rob Heath and Ms. Dinusha Joseph. A decision is expected 3 to 6 months after the hearing. If Peter wins on standing, he then has the right to go back to the AAT for a hearing on the merits (i.e. into the question whether Transurban were actually entitled to the tax breaks).



In Brief.....

Perth to expand rail network

The WA Government has approved further expansion of Perth's passenger rail network. A new line to Mandurah, 80 kilometres south of Perth, and expansion of the northern suburbs line to Butler are part of the \$1.47 billion project. Other initiatives include a doubling of the train fleet with faster trains capable of speeds of up to 130 km/h and two new stations on existing lines.

Work on the project will start immediately. The northern extension will open in 2003 and the Mandurah line in 2005. The plans are part of a government strategy to boost patronage by 60 per cent to 50 million annual passenger trips by 2006. On current trends, this will give Perth the second-highest per capita use of rail in Australia after Sydney (yes, higher than Melbourne).

Connex stops shopping express

Connex has ceased running its eastern suburbs shopper service. This hourly weekday service provided express travel between Ringwood, Mitcham, Blackburn, Box Hill and Camberwell. The last ran on Friday April 27.

Connex Managing director, Bruce Hughes said that poor patronage led to the decision to cease running the service. "When we launched the service on 2 January 2000 we said we would run the service for at least 12 months to give people an opportunity to get used to the service," Mr Hughes said. "Despite innovative marketing, patronage remained very disappointing.

The PTUA is concerned that the service has been removed without the approval of the Director of Public Transport or the Public Transport Customer Charter Consultative Committee.



Tram conductors or ticket inspectors?

In the December 2000 PTUA News, we cautiously welcomed the return of tram conductors, but expressed concern that the private operators may attempt to use them as ticket inspectors. Unfortunately, the early signs indicate that our concerns were well-founded. The "tram attendants" appear to be roving in groups of two or three, and checking, rather than selling, tickets. If this continues, it means that the private operators have sneakily negotiated an increase in their subsidy, since they are supposed to pay for inspectors from their own pockets. The PTUA calls on Transport Minister Peter Batchelor to intervene to make sure that public money is not diverted for private purposes and that we get the tram conductors we were promised.

PTUA seeks printer donation

The PTUA is seeking a donation of a computer printer for its office. If you have a spare printer, please contact the office.

Risson centenary

The Transport Research Centre at RMIT hosted a commemoration of the centenary of the birth of Major General Sir Robert Risson on 20th April. Risson, who died in 1992, was the Chairman of the Melbourne and Metropolitan Tramways Board from 1949 to 1970 and played a key role in the retention of Melbourne's tram system, the only complete tram network to survive in the English-speaking world.

Copy Deadline for the next PTUA News is 15th June

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