



\$105 million – for what?

In late February it was announced that the Bracks government would pay an additional \$105 million to the three rail/tram operators, over the remaining life of their contracts. Obviously this casts into doubt the forecasts of the massive savings predicted by the former Kennett government as a result of privatisation.

The private operators' financial difficulties provided a unique opportunity to take back control of the system. For the last two years the Bracks government has used the contracts entered into by the previous regime as an excuse for doing nothing about the system's many problems. The private operators attempt to change the contracts should have been the government's cue to assert control over the system and secure the operators co-operation.

Instead, the government wrote the operators a blank cheque and obtained nothing in return. With the operators' backs to the wall, instead of acting in the public interest, a cosy deal was done behind closed doors and an opportunity was wasted.

It is unclear whether the operators are still in financial difficulty after this taxpayer-funded handout. If they are, they will almost certainly bring their begging bowls back to Mr Batchelor again in the near future. This bailout was described as an "interim" measure, suggesting the government is likely to throw good money after bad. It is to be hoped that when this situation next arises, the government of the day will have enough fortitude to obtain a better deal for the travelling public and taxpayers of Melbourne and Victoria.

Forcing the operators to provide an increase in operating hours and service frequencies, additional staff, system extensions or infrastructure improvements would all go towards aiding patronage growth, something which the companies need to achieve to avoid more government handouts.

City of Yarra goes green

PTUA is very pleased with the outcomes of its recent Yarra Council campaign, which involved close collaboration with Friends of Merri Creek and the Yarra Community Bicycle Advisory Committee. Many of the new councillors made public commitments to improving sustainable transport in the municipality.

The Greens candidates showed a good understanding of PT-related issues, and put together a very convincing response to our agenda. They were rewarded with four seats in the nine-member council. Some Greens candidates in the areas where we campaigned won primary votes of more than 45%. Were these results to be repeated in the State election, the Greens would win the seat of Richmond.

From a PTUA point of view, however, the purpose of our campaign was not to have candidates from a particular party elected but to attempt to set the agenda in terms of transport priorities in a key municipality. We believe our campaign has put us in an excellent position in this regard.

Of course making commitments in an election campaign is a very different business to implementing reforms and so we strongly encourage PTUA members who live in, work in or travel through Yarra to lobby councillors to implement the sustainable transport plan (see the PTUA website for details). Members who are interested in further action should contact John Cox on 9419 6787.

Thanks to John Cox and all who helped with the organisation of the campaign.

The Met coming back?

The public transport operators have announced they will be switching back to using a single brand name for Melbourne's public transport. While precise details are not yet available, it appears this will involve common signage and liveries, and other initiatives making the system easier to use. The PTUA congratulates the operators on this decision – something we have been campaigning for since the splitting up of The Met some years ago.

We urge the operators to implement other improvements such as timetable co-ordination and uniform operating hours, to give Melbourne a truly usable integrated public transport system, one that really is, as Yarra Trams chief Hubert Guyot says, as easy to use as a car.

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Keeping in touch...

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Stay up to date with PTUA news via the PTUA
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Daniel Borowski – Treasurer
Daniel Bowen – Newsletter editor
John Cox
Hayden Jones
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Bronwen Machin
Tim Mattingsbrooke
Anthony Morton
Tim Petersen – Convenor, Geelong branch
Miriam Powell
David Robertson
Luke Savage

Committee Meetings

Third Thursday of each month. Members are welcome to attend. Please call the office for details

From the President - It's a Team Thing

Some people will have noticed something of a change of style in the way the PTUA has been presenting itself to the world in the past few months, with different faces appearing. I'd like to take up some of your time and say a few words on how we are organising ourselves this year.

Over the past few years, the President has been the most high profile representative of the PTUA, in the press and in campaigns. Unlike our previous president, I have the disadvantage of working in the suburbs and in a job which does not allow me to 'pop out' of the office whenever I like.

For this, and other, reasons, we have decided to take a new approach this year.

Our three main office bearers - myself, Vice President Anna Morton and Secretary Vaughan Williams - are all authorised to speak to the press. Since Vaughan and Anna are often easier to contact than me (especially for TV) you may find their voices being heard more often. You can be sure we are all communicating frequently so that the PTUA continues to speak as one.

We are also running several campaigns this year, and each campaign has its own team leader. Our first campaign in the City of Yarra is now drawing to a close, and I would like to thank John Cox for the wonderful work he has done co-ordinating this campaign.

Our late-night services campaign is now getting off the ground under the watchful eye of Martin Koval. I am sure he would be keen to hear from anyone with ideas or offers of assistance. We are also getting more and more rumbles of discontent from the northern fringe suburbs and I would be interested in hearing from anyone in the Broadmeadows/Craigieburn area who would be interested in getting involved in a campaign there.

The long running outer-eastern suburbs "PT-First" campaign is this year being coordinated by the Monash University environment group; Hayden Jones and Tony Morton are the PTUA's committee reps in the organising group for that campaign.

Tim Petersen is continuing his tireless efforts in Geelong.

All these campaigns are being guided by the committee and by office co-ordinator Lucy Oates and the team of office volunteers.

Finally, mention must be made of the excellent work being done by other groups around Victoria. In particular, the Rural and Regional Access to Public Transport campaign being run by Environment Victoria.

So in short, this year, the PTUA is very much being run in teams. I hope this not only reflects the breadth of talent within the PTUA, but also ensure that the widest range of issues and interests are covered for the benefit of public transport in Victoria.

- Les Chandra
President 2002

Copy deadline for the next PTUA news is 15th May

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Our thanks to the dedicated mailout team.

Yarra Trams' Quest for Power

With the continued failings of the Metcard ticketing system, Melbourne's private operators have decided the quite considerable powers of their inspectors are not adequate and have begun lobbying the state government to increase them.

The PTUA agrees with the tram operators that greater enforcement of the "fairway" system and of traffic laws in general is needed for both the safety of tram passengers and the speed and reliability of services.

We believe that tram drivers (or conductors) should routinely take registration numbers of offending vehicles and pass these to the police.

The police should then normally forward the owner of the vehicle a formal written warning, but fines and licence suspensions would be appropriate for repeat offenders.

However, the PTUA does not believe that ticket inspectors' powers when dealing with tram passengers should be extended.

Indeed, we believe these police-like powers are already too extensive given that ticket inspectors do not have the thorough training and accountability of Victoria Police.

Yarra Trams has called for powers of questioning that would amount to a serious attack on civil liberties (see guest editorial by the Consumer Law Centre, right) - effectively, an abolition of the right to silence and the privilege against self-incrimination which are retained by people suspected of much more serious crimes.

The PTUA again calls on the government and the private operators to reconsider their stubborn persistence with an enforcement approach which punishes passengers for an inadequate and unreliable system.

The only solution to fare evasion, vandalism and safety is to return conductors and station staff to the system.

Are conductors affordable?

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Fare evasion: "Rights blitz"

(from the Consumer Law Centre Victoria)

The Consumer Law Centre Victoria and the Public Transport Users' Association are planning to release a leaflet that will set out the travelling public's rights when using public transport in Victoria. This leaflet is to be launched as part of a "Rights Blitz".

The Victorian Magistrates' Court recently heard a case in which a Mr Lafayette claimed that because he had no coins, but only notes with him when he was travelling on a tram, he was unable to purchase a ticket (it should be noted that the Centre has not acted for Mr Lafayette at any stage). Mr Lafayette was subsequently fined, and contested the fine. It was held that Mr Lafayette had an honest intention to pay and that the offence was not made out.

We would like to remind readers that whilst section 221 of the Transport Act provides that public transport users must travel with a valid ticket (a law that represents what most Victorians take for granted - that people should pay their fare for using public transport), it is not an offence to travel without a ticket if:

1. prior to commencing a journey, all reasonable steps are taken to purchase a ticket; and

2. there is no reasonable opportunity to purchase a ticket whilst making the journey; and

3. on completion of the journey, all reasonable steps are taken to purchase a ticket.

These exceptions represent the sensible, common sense position that people should not be found to have committed an offence (and fined) if the system does not allow a reasonable chance to purchase a ticket.

On 28 March 2002, the Victorian Minister for Transport announced that leave would be sought for the decision in Mr Lafayette's case to be reviewed by the Supreme Court.

For most Victorians, however, whether the government wins or loses will not be the major issue. The real issues are: private operators are unaccountable, the ticket system does not work and, as a result, the travelling public are completely disaffected. These issues will not be solved by court cases; rather, they will be solved by government action.

Help wanted

The PTUA and CLCV will be conducting a joint project in early May, blitzing train stations and city tram stops with a "your rights" leaflet. Volunteers are needed to help distribute leaflets - the blitz is likely to take place at suburban train stations in the morning peak, city tram stops at lunchtime, and city train stations in the evening peak.

If you can help at any of these times, or would like to know more, please contact us at office@ptua.org.au or call the office on 9650 7898 to let us know of your availability. Volunteers will be briefed by a CLCV lawyer on the legal aspects of the blitz to help you answer any questions.

Late night services

Buoyed by strong input from members, we have started preparations to launch the late night transport campaign later this year.

Planning is well under way, with the next stage being community consultation. We are developing surveys which will help us determine the extent of demand for late night public transport.

Some key questions we will be posing include:

- Are current late-night transport services such as the NightRider buses adequately servicing the community?
- Which demographic groups show demand for late-night transport?
- What areas of Melbourne should be covered?
- What frequency of service is needed and how late should it run?
- What fare levels would passengers be willing to accept?

We will be conducting surveys in key Melbourne night spots such as Brunswick Street, St Kilda, Chapel Street, the Crown Casino precinct and the CBD.

Based on the results of our surveys, as well as our research into the cost and feasibility of extending various modes to run at night, we will develop a series of detailed proposals for improvements to late-night public transport. The campaign will be launched later in the year.

How you can help

Since we are targeting several areas of Melbourne for our surveys, we would appreciate the help of our members.

We will be carrying out surveys over several nights in May. If you could spend a few hours one night helping us with our surveys, please contact Lucy at the office on (03) 9650 7898 or by email: office@ptua.org.au

MCG parking ban?

Once again Melbourne City Council plans for a parking ban in Yarra Park (at the MCG) have come under the media spotlight. There seems to be some disagreement within the MCC itself on whether or not they are proposing such a ban, and if so, when it would be implemented.

Yarra Park holds around 5000 cars. This would indicate that for most medium to large sized events, the majority of MCG patrons do not arrive by car. The removal of cars from Yarra Park may well make the trip to the MCG more enjoyable for those walking or using public transport, as well as making it possible for the park to be further developed as parkland, unhindered by having to cater for cars on event days.

However, consideration of any such ban must look at what needs to be done to improve public transport to the ground so that those the people driving those 5000 cars do not simply flood surrounding streets in Richmond and East Melbourne.

While train services to the north-eastern and eastern suburbs are quite good at event times (though frequently overcrowded), connections to the western suburbs are patchy, often with no direct or additional services to cope with crowds. This can result in long waiting times, especially for those going home after evening events.

Services for events that may run after midnight (for instance the Australian Open tennis) are also inadequate, with patrons understandably unwilling to risk being stranded and having to queue and pay for a taxi home.

Media reports also hinted at plans to include space for 4500 cars in a Commonwealth Games village project at Jolimont. The provision of these spaces will do little to reduce traffic congestion in the area.

In fact, if the spaces proposed at Jolimont are permanent (as opposed to Yarra Park's event-day-only spaces), then such a move would be actively encouraging more car use on non-event days – and more traffic is surely

something the inner suburbs do not need.

Sydenham services successful

The extension of suburban trains to Sydenham has proved a success with more than 4000 people daily using the new service. The new service, which opened in January, means that local residents now enjoy service comparable to other parts of the suburban rail network.

Weekend services were most improved, with the number of trains in each direction increasing from six to 52 on Saturdays and 42 on Sundays.

The new Watergardens station is most popular, with 2600 passengers per day using it. Approximately 1600 customers use Keilor Plains Station daily. We consider that this excellent result.

Opportunities for further improvement lie in making feeder buses more frequent, and extending their service to Sundays and evenings to better serve people's travel needs.

The Sydenham rail extension was completed ahead of time and within budget. It has delivered real benefits for residents of this growing area and demonstrated that public transport can work in outer suburbs.

We consider that it should be a positive example for other suburban transport projects, including much-needed train and tram extensions, such as the long proposed electrification to Sunbury.

Are conductors affordable?

Conductors and Station Staff – Would they bleed the system dry or are they worth their weight in gold?

In response to recent calls by the PTUA for the return of conductors and station staff to Melbourne, Transport Minister Peter Batchelor made the extraordinary claim that this would force ticket prices up by between 25 and 40 percent.

Applying some basic mathematics to this claim reveals that the Minister's claims are nonsense. Perhaps members can tell us if we have missed something here.

To work out the cost of returning staff to the system, we must inflict some figures and so the readers indulgence is requested. All figures are approximate.

First, we need to work out how many staff are needed. There are currently between 400 and 500 trams in service including the 43 revenue W-class currently out of service for modifications. For the purposes of this calculation we could assume all 500 are in service 20 hours a day, 7 days a week, but we know this isn't true.

Once we take account of the fact that some quiet routes wouldn't need conductors on weekends and that fewer trams run outside peak hour, 2 shifts per tram or 1000 conductors should be more than enough. For trains, there are 140 non-premium stations in metropolitan Melbourne. At three shifts per station, this requires 420 station staff. Less the 200 staff already budgeted for and not being used for their intended purpose, this means 1220 additional staff are required.

We will assume these staff are fairly well paid and allow \$60k per employee (salary, overtime, super, payroll tax, and perhaps a small margin for administrative costs). This gives a total cost of \$73.2m (\$75m in round figures) to fully staff the system in accordance with PTUA policy.

We can then factor in some tangible offsets:

- The operators claim to be losing \$50m a year from fare evasion, and the PTUA believes this figure is probably accurate. A full re-staffing of the system could conservatively be expected to cut fare evasion by 80%, saving \$40m.
- With conductors on trams and staff at stations, the roving ticket inspectors would become redundant. This would conservatively save \$5m a year even if a few are retained for special events.

There are also several intangible benefits:

- Increased patronage through improvements in actual and perceived safety, cleanliness, slightly faster trams, fewer unpleasant incidents, and general commercial goodwill
- Reduced vandalism
- Scrapping ticket machines on trams (saved maintenance/ servicing cost, and room for a couple of extra seats)

Based on this back-of-the-envelope calculation the total net cost of a complete re-staffing of the system may be \$30m p.a, but this figure is probably too high given increased patronage has not been considered and the figures used are conservative.

Given that total fare revenue is in excess of \$300m p.a, if this initiative were funded entirely through a fare increase, the increase would be less than 10%. Of course, the initiative shouldn't be funded by a fare increase. The Medicare levy isn't increased every time a new public health initiative is announced, nor are petrol taxes increased every time a new road project is funded.

The net cost is minimal and well within the state's capability, and the Minister's talk of 40% fare increases is nonsense.

Geelong branch report

A big thank you to all the members who helped out at our stall at the Barwon Heads Sustainable Living Expo on Saturday 16 March. We heard a number of stories about the appalling public transport on the Bellarine Peninsula.

Representatives of the Geelong Branch will be meeting with top bureaucrats on the evening of April 9 to discuss the Geelong Fast Rail Project. This is the first round of community consultation at the initiative of the Rail Projects Group that we have seen since the project began!

We hope to stress the importance of service frequency, stops at intermediate stations. This is of particular concern, as current government literature reveals there are plans for welcome peak service increases on all the Fast Rail Project lines *except* the Geelong line. We also think that off-peak service increases need are needed to encourage overall patronage.

We are also concerned about the current lack of bus connections to stations and the need for fare price reduction and integration with the metropolitan network.

Finally, the Geelong Branch is just about to release our proposal for a Sustainable Transport Strategy for the Geelong region. We'll keep you posted.



20% by 2020: Making it happen

The State Government is to be commended for setting a target of 20 per cent of trips in Melbourne to be taken by public transport by the year 2020. If this is to be achieved, this will represent a doubling or trebling of public transport patronage over the next eighteen years. Though it appears ambitious, overseas cities with well-developed public transport routinely meet or exceed this target.

So how will this be achieved in Melbourne? A key area of potential patronage growth is in our middle suburbs. Most are within 5 kilometres of one or more railway lines and have a grid street layout favourable to fast, frequent and direct bus routes. However the poor quality of most bus services means that public transport usage collapses as soon as one leaves the inner suburbs mostly served by tram.

People simply do not want to wait up to half an hour (or more) for a bus trip that might be only half that long. Yet the standard weekday service frequency for many buses in the middle and outer suburbs is 30 minutes. For many services this also applies during "peak" hours, often with the last bus leaving the station just after 6pm, missing most of the evening peak hour travellers returning to their homes. In some suburbs this results in heavy traffic congestion caused by people with no other choice but to drive to and from their local stations every day.

Evening and weekend services in most suburbs are even worse, with many bus services only hourly on Saturdays and not running on Sundays. These unusable or non-existent services on the busiest shopping days of the week routinely result in traffic congestion and parking problems in suburban shopping centres all over Melbourne.

The public transport system in the middle and outer suburbs needs a radical overhaul. It needs to provide services that people will actually want to use. This means reasonably fast, direct and frequent service to a range of destinations. To cater for modern travel needs, these must be provided every day and evening; not just during

peak periods. Fortunately Melbourne has sufficient trains, trams and buses to provide the more frequent services required. This is particularly true for buses, many of which sit idle for eighty hours per week or more.

Urban planning also has a role to play, particularly in the developing outer suburbs. For public transport's modal share to increase these areas, suburbs must be planned around pedestrian, bicycle and public transport accessibility. This means street layouts suitable for buses, and community and retail facilities clustered around railway stations or bus routes, similar to those in well-established suburbs. It is also important that public transport services be introduced as soon as people move into these areas, to ensure that a pattern of car-dependence is not established at an early stage.

We are fortunate that we already have most of the required fixed-rail infrastructure in place. The only new lines needed to Doncaster and to Rowville. Apart from this only minor extensions are needed to the train and tram networks.

Route operating times, frequency and timetable co-ordination are the most important service quality issues for public transport in Melbourne. Other matters such as service reliability, tram and bus priority, route design, ease of interchange, perceived passenger safety and ticketing are also important. All must be taken seriously if the Government's 20 per cent patronage target is to be achieved.

The PTUA again commends the government for setting a public transport patronage target. We would now like to see real government commitment towards its achievement, with support for service improvements that will see public transport be a viable choice for everyone – not just those who don't have a car.

Rowville bus changes: opportunities missed for real improvement

Rowville bus travellers wishing to travel to Glen Waverley could still face hour-long waits despite service changes introduced last month.

Changes to Route 754 were launched with great fanfare at Transport Minister Peter Batchelor and bus company representatives at Stud Park Shopping Centre. The changes add some additional off-peak weekday services and introduce Saturday operation. Evenings and Sundays remain without service.

The PTUA particularly welcomes the introduction of Saturday service on the route. However we are concerned that the service level provided is unlikely to meet passenger needs. The main difficulty with the new timetable that the headways do not permit good connections with trains that run every 20 minutes. Times are also not easy to remember, and are so infrequent that the service is likely to attract very little patronage.

The PTUA considers that the introduction of more frequent services properly co-ordinated with trains and trams will increase the patronage potential of this and other bus routes all over Melbourne.

Such improvements are essential if the government is serious about meeting its recently announced target of 20 percent of all trips being on public transport. Modest service improvements along the lines suggested above would also be consistent with community support for improved public transport as expressed at numerous Melbourne Metropolitan Strategy forums and other public meetings.

Letters to the Editor

Letters may be sent to the office, or e-mailed to newsletter@ptua.org.au – no attachments please. Note: letters may be edited for reasons of space or clarity.

Sandringham line

Many commuters and myself are getting increasingly annoyed that Sandringham line trains do not run through the City Loop, and we have had to put up with it since early 1996. Due to the new timetables being introduced on the 27th January I wrote to M-Train to request that Sandringham line trains run through the City Loop. The response I received from M-Train was most unsatisfactory. In the letter they admitted that it would be more convenient for commuters if Sandringham line trains ran through the City Loop and that to access the City Loop it is necessary to cross the pathways of many other lines, however it only crosses one line and that is the Frankston "up" track. I ask all PTUA members who live on the Sandringham line to lobby for City Loop trains by writing letters to their local members of Parliament, Newspapers and M-Train.

Blake Zent, Hampton

Editor's note: *The PTUA does believe that the current timetabling of all Sandringham and Caulfield trains has benefits because of consistency. It is far easier to remember which trains run direct and which run via the Loop. But we also believe that work should be done to make interchange to/from loop trains at Richmond easier and quicker, particularly in the evening peak to reduce waits for Sandringham line commuters returning home.*

Late night services

The idea in the latest newsletter of skeleton late night services linking major nightlife precincts, and generally improved services into the night would be a strong step in the right direction.

Having services stop round midnight and only the night rider buses and taxis

after seems to me a patriarchal, conservative or puritanical curbing of late night drinking, dancing and debauchery. As a customer and soon to be owner of a nightclub, the question of 'how will we get home?' often influences one's choice of destination. People have great acquaintance of the regular daytime services and are scared and inhibited to use the Nightrider buses.

Connex trains seem to have gained surveillance cameras in some carriages and that would aid an argument to run them hourly through the wee small hours. If trams are to run all night, the drivers need to have greater power to enforce safety and security on the tram.

I went out with some people recently; round 2:30am, we spent over half an hour trying to get a taxi from the corner of Collins and Exhibition. I got the Eltham Nightrider bus home soon after; they had to wait in McDonalds till after 5am to get the tram home to Brunswick.

G Katsir, North Fitzroy.

Quotable quotes

"But Geelong already has a reasonable urban bus system"

- Andrew Neal, Assistant Director of Public Transport (in response to a comment from PTUA Secretary Vaughan Williams that improved local buses would avoid the need for more parking at Geelong station)

"We are proposing a frequency of 20 minutes on most bus routes in the region."

- DOI head of strategic planning, Ray Kinnear, in reference to the eastern suburbs (the connecting trains all run every 15 minutes)

"Of course, all this (improvements to Sydney's Parramatta Road) presumes the traffic is here to stay. Which, under the circumstances (and given the ever more striking resemblance between the roads lobby here and the gun lobby in the United States), is probably the case."

- Urban design writer, Elizabeth Farrelly, in Sydney Morning Herald, 22/1/2002

"We want those trucks off the long-haul routes.....because the damage they are doing to the road system is enormous. And the cost of repair of the road system is far greater than the cost of upgrading and maintaining rail."

- Lang Corporation's Mr. Chris Corrigan, in Sydney Morning Herald, 2/2/2002.

"There's no demand for train services to Craigieburn - the trains we run only have 7 people on them"

- National Express, not considering that a station inconveniently located away from the town, with non-existent feeder services, might be an impediment to their customers.

Diary

On Sunday 21st April, the PTUA will be participating in the "Global Garden Party" at the St Kilda Botanical Gardens. Timed to coincide with Earth Day 2002, the festival is a celebration of being green and has a grassroots philosophy. The PTUA will be in attendance in the sustainable transport area. There should be heaps of interesting events and stalls so come and say hello!

Stay up to date by e-mail

To allow PTUA members to stay more up to date with PTUA campaigns (particularly at times between newsletters) we have established the PTUA Announcements e-mail list. This will be used for occasional campaign-related announcements. All members who have previously provided e-mail addresses to us will be added to this list - if you are on the list and would prefer not to be, please let us know. If you want to make sure we have your e-mail address to add to the list, please send a blank e-mail to ptua-news-subscribe@yahoogroups.com. Rest assured that your e-mail address will not be disclosed to any other party.

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