



Bus Plan on the road to nowhere

Melbourne’s most revolutionary public transport initiative in decades, Bus Plan, looks set to remain languishing on the shelf, as the government has yet to commit to implementing it, or indeed to even officially release it.

Bus Plan (see PTUA News, May 2003) would finally make public transport usable throughout Melbourne’s middle and outer suburbs, by extending weekend and evening services beyond the reach of rail stations, and making bus frequencies comparable with trams.

Over the past few decades, bus services have steadily degraded, with the last major round of cuts in 1991 effectively killing them as even peak hour feeders to the rail system. While some gains have been made recently in service improvements (including the SmartBus services, but also on some other routes), a major overhaul is needed to bring genuine transport choice to more Melburnians.

More than any other single initiative, Bus Plan would help bring about the government’s 20% by 2020 target by making it possible to use public transport for most trips, most of the time. It would mean you can get from anywhere to anywhere else in Melbourne without requiring infinite patience and a packed lunch.

We do believe there are a few things about Bus Plan that could be tweaked to dramatically cut the cost – such as concentrating on main road routes rather than those which detour down side streets, just as the highly successful tram network does. But what is critical is that the government realise the strategic importance of the plan. This is just what Melbourne needs to boost patronage (not only on buses, but also on trains and trams) and make public transport truly effective.

All change at PTUA HQ

The PTUA has some new faces with the retirement of two prominent campaigners at the AGM in September. Amongst those opting not to stand again were PTUA President Les Chandra, and Secretary Vaughan Williams.

At the meeting PTUA members elected Daniel Bowen as President and Tony Morton as Secretary for 2003-04. Both are experienced campaigners, with Daniel editing PTUA News since 2001 and Tony serving as the PTUA’s Policy Director for a number of years.

See also ⇒ [AGM report, page 2](#)

More calls for staff

With the leaking of public transport crime figures recently, there have been more calls for staff to be returned to the system. Along with the PTUA, the Rail Tram and Bus Union and the Police Association also want station staff to be returned. Opposition Transport Spokesman Terry Mulder also called for the issue to be investigated.

PTUA figures show the total cost of staff would be in the vicinity of \$75 million per year, but that because it would solve many of the problems of fare evasion, vandalism, security and customer service, and would encourage more new users onto the system, would be close to revenue neutral.

These are all problems which must be solved to boost patronage. New users simply will not venture onto public transport if they have difficulty with the ticket machines, if they are unable to get advice and assistance en route, or if they feel unsafe.

We urge Minister Batchelor to consider this issue carefully, do the sums on how little it would really cost, and to weigh up the benefits brought from investing in staff, rather than allowing millions to be spent on a fancy new ticketing system that solves none of these problems.

See also ⇒ [SmartCards offer no security, page 5.](#)

Also in this issue

Contract negotiations / Regional fast rail	3
Late night / Knox	4
Smartcards / Suburban trains / Geelong	5
W-Class trams / Tram seats	6
In brief / What you can do for better PT.....	7

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Peter Cook – Treasurer
Tim Petersen – Convenor, Geelong branch
Matthew Cook
John Cox
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Tim Hoffman
Jeremy Lunn
Tim Mattingsbrooke
David Robertson
Vaughan Williams

Committee Meetings

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

AGM Report

From the outgoing secretary

The PTUA's AGM was held on Thursday 11th of September at Ross House.

This year saw the retirement of some long-serving, high profile office bearers. The retiring office bearers and committee members were thanked for their service to the cause, and outgoing President Les Chandra was presented with a life membership. Les is moving to Perth to pursue a new career opportunity, while Secretary Vaughan Williams has moved to a general Committee position due to commencing full time employment. Treasurer Daniel Borowski has also decided that this is an appropriate time to move on.

The Committee listed at the top of this page was elected for 2003/04.

Our guest speaker Ingrid Svendsen of the Melbourne Times led an interesting discussion on the use of the media by community organisations to bring about change. Ingrid believes the PTUA is a very high-profile organisation for its size and offered some useful perspectives on how to improve this and use it more effectively.

The new PTUA team looks forward to further success in 2004.

- Vaughan Williams

St Paul's tram "stop"



The ex-tram stop outside St Paul's Cathedral. Most trams still stop at the traffic lights – they just can't pick up passengers anymore.

Copy deadline for the next PTUA news is 15th November 2003

Newsletter contributors: Daniel Bowen, Matthew Cook, Peter Cook, Beth Driscoll, Anna Morton, Tony Morton, Peter Parker and Vaughan Williams. Printed on recycled paper by Flash Print, Collingwood.

Our thanks to Max Nicholson and the rest of the dedicated mail out team.

Contract negotiations – why the secrecy?

The Bracks Government is currently finalising negotiations with Connex and Yarra Trams to run our public transport for the next five years.

In a repetition of the failed privatisation experiment conducted under the Kennett Government, the Minister seems determined to avoid at all costs the need to accept responsibility for public transport by reprivatising, whether or not it makes any sense to do so. The experience of privatisation, in Melbourne as well as overseas, has been unaccountable private

operators failing to meet passenger expectations, together with escalating costs for passengers and taxpayers.

If the Government insists on keeping the private operators involved (it might, at this point, make more sense to send them home and dismiss privatisation as a failed experiment), the PTUA believes this should be strictly on a fee-for-service basis, with management, planning, scheduling and marketing reverting to a central government authority. This is the only form of contracting out public

transport services that has been successful anywhere in the world.

The PTUA has been attempting without success to provide scrutiny and input into the re-franchising process, but there appears to be a great deal of secrecy surrounding the shadowy bureaucratic mechanisms behind the process.

The only thing that seems clear at this stage is that a lot more taxpayer funds will be going to the private operators, and it is unclear what benefits will be coming back to passengers.

Regional fast rail update

Line closures

Service Outages have commenced in anticipation of major works on the Regional Fast Rail project. Public transport users can now look forward to two years of persistent service disruptions in anticipation of a handful of slightly faster trains a day that won't even stop to serve the communities en route.

Work underway so far is mostly minor preparatory work, re-laying level crossings on the Ballarat line at Ballan and Dunnstown. The timetable for major works, already well behind schedule, is still unknown.

Interruptions are also expected during the re-development of Spencer Street Station.

Signalling

It has recently come to our attention that the efficient operation of longer intercity services could be being compromised in the Fast Rail project. A new on-board signalling system will control high speed operations and allow trains heading towards each other on single or bidirectional track to pass each

other safely and without slowing unnecessarily.

The 38 new "V/Locity" railcars under construction will have this system. But is uncertain whether they will be fitted to existing Sprinters and Loco Hauled trains, which number over 40, or to freight trains.

If the older trains are not upgraded, they would become an operational nuisance at a time when they can easily be called upon to provide new or additional services to regional centres such as Bairnsdale, Maryborough, Swan Hill, Echuca and Warrnambool. Trains to all of these locations will need to use the fast track at some point along the way. Delays to intercity services are inevitable if they can't use the fast track, and delays to corridor services would occur if intercity services aren't able to interface with the high speed signal system.

The only other alternatives for Sprinters would be to run them on intra-regional services, and possibly some suburban runs. Loco hauled trains would either have to be restricted to lines that don't interface with fast trains, converted

to Standard Gauge, to run interstate services and possibly also Portland services, or decommissioned. The first option is unrealistic, as Albury and the Goulburn Valley are the only such lines and we are talking about a lot of trains here. The second option has merit but is unlikely. The third would be an unacceptable waste of perfectly good trains.

The PTUA supports upgrading entire V/Line fleet so it can operate alongside the fast trains, and provide the increase in service frequencies that will make the trains so much more usable for regional Victorians.

Have your say

A number of groups are planning a public meeting to discuss Regional Fast Rail during December. If you are interested in attending, make sure you are on the *PTUA News e-mail list* (see page 2) for more information on this as it happens – or contact the office in early December.

See also ⇒ [Geelong](#), page 5.

Summer nights are coming – but how to get home?

As we move into the warmer months, the thoughts of many Melburnians turn to balmy evenings, parties, concerts and late night revelry. Melbourne is one of the world's pre-eminent cities for culture and entertainment, and its citizens are keen participants. The problem, of course, is getting home afterwards.

While some people are able to find a cab in the wee small hours, for many this is not an option. Either they cannot get one at busy times such as Cup Day, the Australian Open or New Year's Eve, or they are low-income earners and cannot afford a cab.

In Melbourne, trams and trains cease operating around midnight. Most bus routes stop well before this time – often as early as 6pm. After midnight, the only public transport option is the Nightrider bus. While Nightrider is better than nothing, it provides services only every hour, and requires a

special ticket – even for those who already have a Metcard.

Matt Bell, 26, is a North Carlton resident who keenly supports local live music. He has frequently been stranded when pub gigs have run past midnight – the time when tram services to the inner city cease. As a student with a poorly paid part time job, Matt often had no alternative other than walking home. Now that he's earning more, he was able to get a taxi home recently after a Thursday night concert in Northcote. There were no PT options.

If Melbourne is to maintain its status as a leading 21st century city, it needs to provide a 24-hour, 7-day service on key routes. New York and Chicago provide round-the-clock train services. London and Sydney use buses to replace trains after midnight, 7 days a week, with standard daily tickets accepted. Toronto runs a normal service until 1.45 every night of the week, with a more limited

service taking over until dawn. Melbourne should be providing similar services.

The PTUA believes that improvements must be made to Melbourne's late night public transport. Nightrider buses should be extended, to more suburbs, running on more nights of the week, and more frequently than just hourly. Trains should run after midnight, particularly on the weekend. We should also re-introduce and properly publicise a skeleton all-night tram network linking major nightlife spots such as St Kilda, Southbank and Fitzroy.

Such developments would not only minimise the road toll by discouraging drink driving, but would also promote social equality and enhance the vibrancy of Melbourne.

What do you think about late night travel? Fill in our online survey at www.ptua.org.au/surveys

Knox council to study train line

The City of Knox has set aside \$40,000 from its budget to conduct an independent study into the feasibility of a Rowville rail extension.

The Rowville line is at the top of the list of proposed projects in our policy document, *It's Time To Move*. It is intended to run along the Wellington Road median between Huntingdale station and Stud Park, serving Monash University, Mulgrave and Wheelers Hill en route. Our costing of \$120 million for the line

is based on work done as part of the Scoresby Freeway Environment Effects Statement, and is equivalent to about 3000 metres of freeway.

The Knox study will more carefully examine the costs and benefits of the Rowville line, including its capacity to boost public transport use and alleviate traffic congestion and pollution in the south-eastern suburbs. It is the study that the State Government ought to have done as part of the Scoresby Freeway assessment

process, but refused to allow once it became clear that public transport improvements could have a more beneficial effect than the freeway.

The study is an initiative of PT-friendly councillors Mick van de Vreede, Ben Smith and Adam Gill. Watch this space for further developments.

Copies of *It's Time To Move* are available for \$10 (members) or \$15 (non-members). Contact the office for details.

Smartcards offer no security

Funds earmarked for the proposed multi-million dollar smartcard ticketing system should instead be spent on tackling real problems on public transport.

As we pointed out in July's PTUA News, smartcards will not stop fare evasion. Neither will they enhance security and reduce crime. Yet we know that security is a major issue that is causing people who would otherwise use public transport not to do so. Not only should this worry passengers; the government too should be concerned as it jeopardises the achievement of its "20% by 2020" patronage target.

Assertions by government and operators that travel is safe are routinely debunked by statistics and eyewitness reports. Transit police figures reveal Melbourne's train commuters have suffered 216 assaults, six rapes, 19 other sexual

assaults, 115 robberies and 1004 car thefts this year alone. The wariness of many people towards public transport use, particularly train travel at night, is thus well-founded, and not just a baseless "perception".

The Crime Victims Support Association, PTUA and transport unions agree that returning staff to the system will go a long way to improving passenger safety. The majority of criminals will only offend when they can do so without getting caught. Because it is now largely un-staffed, the public transport system and its passengers are seen as "soft targets", where the chance of apprehension is low.

Apart from the higher passenger confidence that staffing will bring, there are other benefits too. Vandalism and graffiti will be reduced, cutting maintenance costs

and further increasing perceptions of safety. Fare evasion will also fall, as the opportunities for it will be much diminished.

The main objection that many may have to restaffing the system is cost. A PTUA study has found that that the cost of staffing railway stations and trams would be almost recouped by reduced fare evasion. Hiring 1000 conductors and 420 station staff, enough to fully staff all railway stations and most trams, would cost around \$75 million per year. But in doing so the current estimated \$50 million per year in fare evasion would be slashed to a fraction of the current level and the proposed multi-million dollar Smartcard system would not be needed. Along with the aforementioned safety advantages, we think this makes re-staffing the system is a bargain!

Suburban trains – Upfield upgrade as Hitachis dumped

With the arrival and introduction of the first of the new Siemens trains, M>Train is shortly to start upgraded trains on the Upfield line. Peak hour trains will at last run as 6 carriages, relieving peak overcrowding.

The Upgrade Upfield Coordinating Committee, who along with the PTUA were instrumental in saving the Upfield line in the 1990s, have

launched a new campaign to increase frequencies on the line, initially from 20 to 15 minutes. For more information contact Denis Watson on 9380 8628.

Meanwhile Hitachi trains have begun being withdrawn from service. While the government has wisely decided to order 5 (6 car) more new trains than it is withdrawing, these will go to make

up the numbers for the Upfield line and the extension to Craigieburn. The scrapping of the entire Hitachi fleet does seem to be missing the opportunity to refurbish and keep some for relieving peak overcrowding on other lines, to help grow patronage further.

Geelong update

The Geelong Branch recently decided to put its healthy scepticism aside and join the process for a Geelong regional development strategy, called "G21". Auspiced by the City of Greater Geelong, and largely funded by the State Government, it was meant to come up with a vision and a set of important projects for the region.

Dominated by the usual suspects, and lacking any commitment to ecological sustainability, we nevertheless managed to get a plan for increasing public transport's modal share on the Transportation group's agenda. Getting a commitment for a plan could be the start of a long process towards improving public transport in Geelong.

Unsurprisingly though, the road-obsessed Transportation group also found it necessary to call for billions of dollars of freeways to completely encircle Geelong, including a road over or under Corio Bay!

The six million dollar trams

The PTUA has welcomed the return of 53 W-Class trams to service. The government says the trams will return next month subject to several restrictions on allowable routes and maximum speeds.

W-Class trams will be used on route 30 along La Trobe Street from St Vincent's Plaza to Docklands and 78/79 along Church and Chapel Streets. However they will be driven by specially-trained drivers at speeds of no more than 40 km/h. There will be limited integration with other trams, pantographs will replace poles and speedometers will be fitted.

In June 2000 the trams were withdrawn after a series of accidents, following modifications to the braking systems. All 53 trams have since had new high-tech "track brakes" installed at a total cost of \$6 million. Had the original brakes been left intact and a handful of brake maintenance staff at two depots been retained, this expenditure and delay would not have been necessary at all.

The PTUA supports fuller use of the W fleet on more routes. Despite their lack of air conditioning (which is no worse than other newer non-air conditioned trams), they are necessary to provide needed service frequency increases and relieve overcrowding. Their space layout is also efficient, with more seating room per square metre of floor space than other tram models.

However we are concerned about the use of pantographs, given that both previous attempts to use them on Ws failed due to the lack of strength in the tram's roof. We also see no need for the 40km/h speed limit given their good safety record in the decades since the trams were first introduced.

Route 30 cut short



Yarra Trams is already running some route 30 services as W-class trams. Unfortunately because of wiring at St Vincent's Plaza, they cannot make the entire trip, terminating at Nicholson Street (as seen here). This leaves some passengers having to walk up to two blocks to make connections with other trams.

How many seats?

Have you noticed recently that as each new tram arrives, it seems to have fewer and fewer seats?

Tram class	Length and number of seats
W*	 14.2 m 50 seats
Z1/2	 16.6 m 46 seats
Z3	 16.7 m 40 seats
A	 15.0 m 41 seats
B	 23.6 m 74 seats
Citadis	 23.0 m 40 seats
Combino	 20.0 m 36 seats
Five section Combino	 29.8 m 64 seats

*Varies slightly between types of W-class.

News in brief

Yarra campaign revs up

A transport campaign is shaping up in the north-eastern suburbs of Melbourne in response to the Federal Court finding earlier this year, that construction of the Mitcham-Frankston Freeway is "highly likely" to cause a freeway to be built through Bulleen and Heidelberg.

The Court's finding of fact largely invalidates the environmental assessment of the freeway that the Bracks Government was required to provide under Federal law. The assessment failed to consider the flow-on effect on the Yarra Valley and was therefore determined by the Court to be misleading. To remedy the situation, a new assessment is required that properly accounts for the likely completion of the Ring Road through Bulleen.

Federal Environment Minister David Kemp has refused to act on the Court's finding despite having a clear responsibility to do so. This new campaign aims to put pressure

on members of the Federal Government to call a full judicial enquiry into the freeway plans. It is being coordinated by local community groups in collaboration with the PTUA and the Latrobe University Environment Collective.

If you are able to assist with the campaign, please contact the PTUA office on 9650 7898 and leave your contact details. We will need volunteers to assist with publicity and conducting public meetings in the area. More details in the next newsletter – and keep up to date with the PTUA News e-mail list (see page 2).

Victoria Street

Various proposals have recently been raised to help cut tram travel times in Victoria Street. One such plan involves moving tram tracks to the curb – an expensive move which would affect shopper amenity in the area and see cars zooming through Richmond. Another proposal involves

clearways being instituted. This would have similar problems.

The PTUA believes window shopping and al fresco dining is not a pleasant experience with vehicles of any sort whizzing past centimetres from you. Rather than removing the parked cars, which serve as a buffer between the footpath and the traffic, we would rather see solutions which aim to discourage car traffic through Victoria Street, aiming to move those trips to other roads, or better still, onto the tram.

Victoria Parade

Similar proposals are afoot in Victoria Parade, with a bus lane mooted. Of course we thoroughly support speeding up of public transport, but believe local amenity would be best preserved by leaving the parked cars next to the kerb, making the next lane over a bus lane, and if necessary restricting parked cars from the right hand lane next to the median in peak times.

What you can do for better PT

We have a lot of members contact us asking what we are doing about particular issues, or why we aren't doing anything about a particular issue which they believe to be important.

Being an organisation run entirely by volunteers, with most of our committee members working full time, members must appreciate that we can't launch a march on Parliament for every issue that comes up. We spend a lot of time at committee meetings trying to prioritise our campaigns so we concentrate on what we consider to be the most important issues at the time. There are still a lot of important issues that we don't have time to deal with, and this is where members can help us.

If there is an issue in your area, or even a more general issue, there are a number of things you can do to try and bring about change. The first is to write to, or even better to arrange a meeting with, your state Member of Parliament. It is their job to represent their constituents, so if you have concerns with the public transport system, this is the place to start.

Writing to the relevant transport company and the Transport Minister can also help. To gain publicity for an issue, a letter to your local paper, if it is a local issue, or *The Age* or the *Herald Sun* for a more general issue, is a very good move. You are much more likely to get a letter published in your local paper, and if they think

the issue is important enough, they might even do a story on it.

The way to get things changed is to let those in charge know people aren't happy, so if there is something out there that annoys you, why not do something about it yourself.

The more letters the Minister receives, and the more dissatisfied constituents a Member of Parliament sees, the more likely they are to do something. Just because we don't seem to be doing anything on an issue doesn't mean you can't, so get out your pens and let your representatives know what you want!

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Inside:

- Bus Plan on the road to nowhere
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 - More calls for staff
 - W-class trams return

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