

New contracts raise questions

On 19 February, just as the last PTUA News was being mailed out, the State Government announced the awarding of new contracts to private operators Connex and Yarra Trams. Under the deal, Connex will take over all Melbourne train services and Yarra will take over all tram services from mid-April.

There's a lot to like in the new contracts: there will be more staff on the system, a commitment to tram priority, some additional rolling stock, and – in a significant victory for recent PTUA campaigning – all night trains and trams until 2am on New Year's Eve. But this is the detail: the overall substance of the contracts raises more fundamental questions.

The item that has attracted the most comment is the massive increase in the subsidy to the train and tram operators, equivalent over five years to a \$1 billion rise, from \$1.3 billion to \$2.3 billion. The annual figure is a \$345 million subsidy to Connex and \$112 million to Yarra. These subsidies are additional to revenue from fares, which will now be split according to a fixed formula: 40 per cent to Connex, 40 per cent to Yarra, and the rest to the bus operators.

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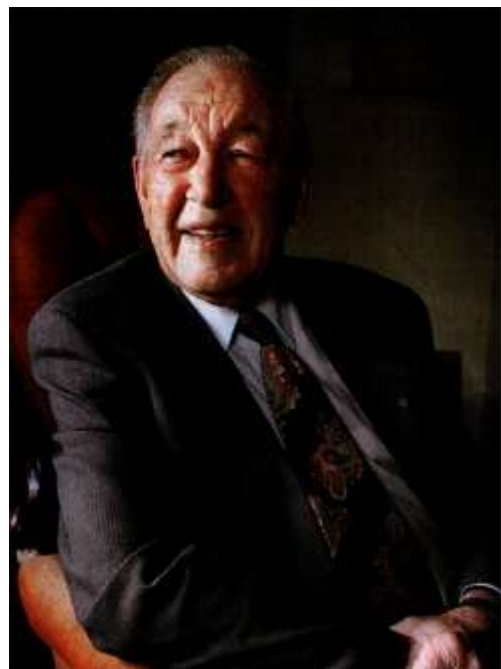
New Year's Eve – All night trains at last

The government has finally woken up to the fact Melbourne deserves a better deal on New Year's Eve. Thanks to a highly successful PTUA campaign (see last issue) we are now promised all night trains, and trams at higher frequencies until 2am.

This is a great win for people near train lines, but tram users will still be stranded when the pubs close at 3am. The Nightrider route network will be of limited use to inner city residents faced with premium fares and unfamiliar routes. And there will still be large tracts of outer Melbourne with no viable public transport at all, unlike Perth, Sydney, Adelaide and Brisbane.

We await more details later in the year - particularly whether route 69 and 79 trams will operate, whether train services will run timetabled services **from** and **to** the city, and whether better route and timetable information will be more readily available. Watch this space.

Vale Rupert Hamer



⇒ See page 4

(Picture: The Age/Craig Stilltoe)

Keeping in touch...

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Committee Meetings

Meetings are on the fourth Thursday of each month.
Members are welcome to observe. Please call or e-mail the office for details.

News in brief

PTUA Educates on Sustainable Transport

PTUA Secretary Tony Morton recently gave a presentation to students at RMIT, as part of a short course on integrated transport planning. Other presenters included Melbourne University lecturer Paul Mees and sustainable transport consultant Bill Russell.

We will be sending speakers to a number of meetings and seminars in the coming months.

Urban design in outer suburban areas

PTUA was invited to write a submission to a state government inquiry into urban design in outer suburban areas. Nowhere is the challenge of sustainable urban growth more keenly felt than in the burgeoning outer suburbs, which will house the majority of the city's population growth.

You can read our submission on our web site:
www.ptua.org.au

Festival activities

Over the past few months we have participated in two community festivals. The Sydney Road festival attracted hordes of people and was a very successful event. We distributed plenty of membership leaflets and handed out lots of information. Students were particularly interested in our campaign on the Swanston Street tram terminus.

At the end of March we were also present at the St Kilda Garden Global party. Here we sold a number of copies of our publication *It's Time to Move* and also handed out plenty of membership material. We would like to thank David Cook and Nick Bishop for their very enthusiastic assistance. If anyone would like to help with stalls in the future please send Tim Hoffmann an email at tim.hoffmann@ptua.org.au or leave a message for him with the office.

Copy deadline for the next PTUA news is 1st June 2004

Newsletter contributors: Daniel Bowen, Peter Cook, Tim Hoffman, Chris Loader, Alex Makin, Tony Morton and Peter Parker. Printed on recycled paper by Flash Print, Collingwood.

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

New contracts raise questions (cont'd from page 1)

It is clear that the Kennett contracts with their declining subsidy levels were financially unsustainable without the kind of massive patronage boost that a free-market system could never deliver. This increase brings subsidies to the same or higher level they were at under public ownership (allowing for inflation). From this it is now abundantly clear that public transport privatisation is not saving Victorians money, which begs the question: why are we persisting with private operation?

There is one instance in which we would not oppose the private provision of public transport services, and that is where the service is contracted on a strict fee-for-service basis. This means that a public authority sets the fares, the routes and the timetables – the private operator provides the vehicles and drivers.

At first glance it appears the new contracts might be saying something like this. The public documents state that the government is responsible for the “strategic planning of the network” and the operator is responsible for “service delivery”. But it is still all too vague. Between the decisions whether or not to build new rail lines, and the rostering of train drivers, is a huge gap in responsibilities. Who will decide how frequently services run? Can routes be split or joined at the whim of the operator? We are still waiting for the detail of the contracts to be released so we can see who does what.

We fear it will turn out that the split of responsibilities is no different than under the Kennett contracts: that the operators will be left to do what they like subject only to inadequate and poorly enforced service requirements. If

this is the case, and without Kennett’s financial incentives to increase patronage, we cannot see the necessary push for supply-led patronage growth coming from anywhere.

In any event the new contracts are limited to the next five years, after which there will be another opportunity to reassess privatisation.

In the meantime the government might like to consider scrapping one persistent annoyance to public transport users (particularly train users): the requirement to revalidate already valid tickets. Since there is no longer any need to count passengers in order to split up ticket revenue (and it never did provide reliable figures anyway), no-one can even try to argue that this measure serves any purpose at all.

Station staff return... sometimes

The news of increased staffing levels on trains and stations is certainly welcome. We are told that all trains after 9pm will have security staff on-board for at least 80% of the trip. And a selection of the busiest currently unstaffed stations will gain staff during the

morning peaks or for a period during the afternoon.

Obviously any increase in staffing on the system is welcome. But this limited staffing does not go far enough. Most stations will continue to be unstaffed at the

times when people feel most unsafe: after dark. And the part-time station staff will not be able to sell tickets or even give change for the ticket machines – which surely limits their usefulness.

Bendigo line fast rail heats up

Concerned residents along the Melbourne to Bendigo line continue to gain support for their efforts to preserve double track between Kyneton and Bendigo. This section will be reduced to single track later this year as part of the State Government’s fast train project.

The PTUA remains unconvinced that faster trains with a handful of extra services a day will attract significant long term patronage

gains. If the goal is to carry a significant mode share, and make it relevant to the population, the Government-run V/Line needs to replace the present infrequent and often nonexistent service into a frequent, reliable service, similar to CityRail services from Sydney to Newcastle. Reducing the line to single track will make it particularly difficult to ever run sufficiently frequent services on the Bendigo line.

Meanwhile, Transport Minister Peter Batchelor has confirmed that he has no intention of reconsidering the decision to single track the Bendigo line. Considering that the Premier insists that his Government listens, it’s anyone’s guess what this government’s definition of listening is.

Bendigo Rail Action Group
⇒ www.ptua.org.au/allies/brag

Vale Rupert Hamer – 1916-2004

The PTUA is saddened at the loss of one of its patrons, former Victorian Premier Sir Rupert Hamer, who died suddenly at his home aged 87 on Tuesday 23 March.

Sir Rupert led a long and varied life. Born in Kew in 1916 and educated at Melbourne Grammar, Geelong Grammar and Melbourne University, he fought in numerous campaigns in World War II and was a participant in the Normandy landings. Later married with four children, he entered Victorian politics in 1958 as the member for East Yarra province. During this time he also served on the Melbourne University Council.

After switching to the lower house in 1971 as member for Kew, Sir Rupert succeeded Henry Bolte as Premier of Victoria in 1972, and continued as Premier until 1981 without losing an election. As Premier he transformed the Victorian political landscape, from the hard-headed pragmatism of the Bolte years to an enlightened concern with people's quality of life. Both during and after his premiership he championed causes in the environment, the arts and social justice. After his retirement he volunteered for numerous community groups, and was a patron of the PTUA from an early stage in its 28-year history.



(Vision Australia/Tilly Ashton collection)

The Age says of Sir Rupert that "his interests were the arts, gardens and fountains rather than the crass art of scoring political points". To this should be added his interest in environmentally friendly transport. One of his first actions after becoming Premier was to order a review of the 1969 freeway plan for Melbourne. This US-style road plan would have seen Melbourne criss-crossed with 500 kilometres of freeway, turning it into a clone of Los Angeles or Detroit.

In 1973 Sir Rupert struck the first major blow for sustainable transport in Melbourne by cancelling half the freeways in the 1969 plan. This single decision not only saved many of what are now Melbourne's most prized urban neighbourhoods, but also made it less likely that Melbourne would fall victim to the US tendency toward de-centred, irredeemably car-dependent urban development. Reinforcing this decision was a shift in the planning landscape under Hamer from top-down decree toward public participation – a shift that sadly was not to last.

It is also to Sir Rupert that we owe Victoria's reputation as the 'Garden State'. This label resonated with Victorians during his time as Premier, amid the push to conserve open space and expand the system of national parks. It has since been revived in response to more contemporary concerns, particularly over the appropriation of public parkland for commercial uses, and the threats to Melbourne's prevailing house-and-garden urban form.

Sir Rupert is survived by April, his wife of sixty years, and their four children. His public legacy survives in Melbourne's ongoing reputation as one of the world's most liveable cities.

Geelong branch update

The Geelong Branch was delighted to see Shadow Transport Minister Martin Ferguson state that federal Labor was not prepared to fund half of the estimated \$380m cost of Geelong's western outer freeway. In calling on the State Government to accept its responsibilities, he said that he didn't want to see a repeat of the Scoresby freeway saga. His comments came on top of an earlier dismissal of the freeway by Federal Transport Minister John

Anderson as a "state responsibility".

On hearing the news, the branch issued a media release calling for the state government and the city council to 'sober up' to the lack of federal funding and get serious about providing a public transport alternative to driving in the region. Meanwhile, the outrage and hand wringing orchestrated by local media and the City of Greater Geelong's sustained campaign for

the freeway continues. Both local federal and state MPs seem too scared to do anything but outdo each other in the 'pro-freeway' stakes.

The Branch's policy paper on fast rail service upgrades for the Geelong line, calling for more frequent and reliable services, fare integration and bus connections to stations has been sent to all local MPs and can be viewed at www.ptua.org.au/geelong

VCAT approves tram stop sabotage

On 5 March, VCAT handed down its decision on the appeal against the reconstruction of the Melbourne University tram terminus. As explained in our previous newsletter, M>Tram wants to enlarge the Swanston St shunting area and force pedestrians to detour even further south to catch trams or cross to Carlton. Melbourne City Council has supported this move by M>Tram, despite it being contrary to the spirit of the Council's own urban design guidelines.

VCAT has denied the appeal, lodged by Melbourne University lecturer and former PTUA president Paul Mees. However, in doing so it appears to have simply repeated the arguments of M>Tram and the Council without discussing any of the contrary evidence.

Evidence was presented by Dr Mees, PTUA Secretary Tony Morton (in his capacity as an engineer), and Kim Dovey (Professor of Urban Planning at Melbourne University).

The evidence clearly established that the design would have adverse effects on pedestrian safety and convenience, and that potentially viable alternative designs existed. It was further demonstrated that neither the effects on pedestrians nor the merits of alternative designs were seriously considered by the Council or by M>Tram. The proponents produced no evidence against any of these contentions, instead relying on guesswork or on managerial opinions unsupported by expertise.

The VCAT decision appears to turn all this on its head, accepting

the speculative opinions of the proponents over the evidence led by the objectors. The latter is almost entirely ignored.

The decision has now been appealed to the Supreme Court, on the grounds that the decision is not based on the evidence before VCAT. While the PTUA is not a party to the court action, we will follow the case with interest.

It is likely that the effect of the court appeal will be to delay the reconstruction, rather than to prevent it happening. Thanks to the new contracts, the decision whether to proceed ultimately rests with Yarra Trams and its CEO, Hubert Guyot. There is still hope that a proposal so hostile to pedestrians and to good urban design will not survive the change of management.

Federal money should fund PT

It is the policy of the Victorian Government to increase the use of public transport to 20 per cent of all motorised trips by 2020. Yet our Minister seems unconcerned that the Federal Government isn't contributing one cent toward the improvement of public transport services.

Instead, we're still hearing that Victoria supposedly doesn't get enough road funding: Peter Batchelor has again trotted out the old line that Victorians pay 25 per cent of petrol tax but get only 15 per cent of Federal road funds.

It's an argument that falls over on closer scrutiny. The 15 per cent figure talked about doesn't include the Federal operating grants to the

states and local councils, which pay for the vast bulk of our roads.

And one only needs to glance at a map of Australia and the national highway network to see why big states like Queensland and Western Australia get more than their share in population terms, with Victoria getting less!

But even if it were true, Mr Batchelor is forestalling the debate we need to have about what kind of transport system we want in Melbourne.

The road lobby wants more Federal money to pay for a swag of 1960s freeway projects whose obvious effect will be to reduce public transport use and increase

car dependence, further entrenching the least efficient, most expensive, most polluting method of moving people around our cities.

The government pays lip service to public demands for better public transport but has shown no interest in obtaining Federal money to support this. Instead it mimics the road lobby, contrary to its own policy objectives.

Freeways absorb money that could instead give us public transport equal to the best in the world, and still have plenty left over to rescue our state schools and public hospitals. On sustainable transport, it's time the government's actions matched its rhetoric.

Outer east

As a result of PTUA campaigning in the outer eastern suburbs (see last issue), it appears that eight local councils in the outer east have re-formed the Eastern Region Integrated Transport Group (ERITG), essentially a forum for local councils to discuss public transport issues.

Like other similar forums, there is the risk that this group will

become another voice for the road lobby, which in the past has led to fundamental infrastructure projects such as rail lines to Rowville and Doncaster being relegated to the backburner.

This group needs to remain focussed on public transport improvements – not only bus services but significant infrastructure improvements such

as the Rowville and Doncaster rail lines, and members in the area have a vital part to play.

To register your interest, e-mail alexander.makin@ptua.org.au or leave a message for him with the office (see contacts on page 2).

Let's ensure that the public transport voice is well represented in the outer east!



A train line to Rowville via Monash would prevent problems such long queues and overcrowding on the 630 bus.

Avalon airport

Jetstar, Qantas's new budget airline, will operate a number of its flights out of Avalon Airport.

As there are only four return services to Brisbane and six return services to Sydney scheduled to operate from Avalon, the impact of Jetstar passengers on nearby transport infrastructure will likely be minimal. A few buses a day from Spencer Street and from

Geelong should be sufficient to cater for initial demand. However, should operations at Avalon ever be expanded, we would certainly hope to see that the Skybus services be replaced by shuttle services from the nearby V/Line station at Lara.

Shuttles would cater for both Jetstar passengers and airport workers alike, and avoid buses

unnecessarily duplicating services on the Geelong line. And with the apparent expansion in airport operations, we once again question why no rail link is planned for Tullamarine.

Information on the services to be provided to Avalon can be found at on Skybus's web site.

Skybus ⇒ www.skybus.com.au

Sydney Road: remove clearways, fix tram priority

The City of Moreland has joined traders in their push to remove clearways on Sydney Road, but both are being blocked by the State Government. The government gives as its reason for opposing clearway removal that trams would be delayed. This is only true if the clearway removal is done in the absence of tram priority – something it is within the government's power to introduce.

All clearways do is allow popular shopping streets to become sewers for car-based inner-city commuters at the expense of local traders, their customers, and the viability of public transport. Clearways are actively lobbied for, and defended once in place, by Vicroads. This kind of pressure may be the real reason the government doesn't want the Sydney Road clearways removed.

The package of measures required to revitalise Sydney Road includes proper tram priority, clearway removal, usable east-west bus routes and frequency increases on both the Sydney Road tram and the Upfield train. We will continue to press for implementation of these upgrades.

High density: not the miracle cure for poor patronage

Increased densities around railway stations will not automatically boost patronage and could exacerbate traffic congestion unless public transport services are improved.

Quality service rather than residential density is the key factor that influences public transport patronage. Residents of suburbs like Camberwell are right to be cynical about the sort of high-density development being proposed for their area. If the problem we are trying to solve is that of traffic congestion and car dependency, the solution is public transport services that meet people's needs.

You could pile people into tiny high-rise apartments above Camberwell Station, but it doesn't mean they'll be willing to wait up to 40 minutes for a train. The lesson from high-rise developments such as Southbank is that people will keep and use their cars if public transport access is relatively poor. High-density

development by itself does not automatically reduce car dependence and increase public transport use if quality public transport is absent.

The PTUA supports the vision of increasing public transport to 20% of all trips by 2020; but believes considerable service upgrades are required to make this a reality.

If the state government is serious about increasing public transport use in the eastern suburbs it will now promise to build the Doncaster rail line with a station at Burke Road plus an extension of the 72 tram northwards from Camberwell to North Kew, terminating at the rail line and southwards to Caulfield Station.

The Doncaster rail line was proposed as part of the 1969 Transport Plan, along with the Eastern Freeway. While the Freeway was built (with remaining sections to be completed by 2008), the corresponding rail line wasn't. Doncaster Hill is another

designated principal activity centre, yet is several kilometres from rail and tram services.

The misconception that higher density development brings greater public transport usage seems to have persisted. People will use public transport if services are competitive with car travel, regardless of housing density. This was confirmed in the early 1990s when rail services were upgraded on the Sandringham line, which serves predominantly low-density suburbs. The modest service improvements (20 to 15 minutes day, 30 to 20 min night) increased patronage by 38 percent while costs rose by only 20 percent.

Camberwell residents, led by actor Geoffrey Rush, have a right to be concerned about planned development around Camberwell. Not only could it risk reducing liveability, but it will not convince people to use public transport while services remain poor.

Victoria Parade solution blocked by Vicroads

A proposal to fill in the median at the intersection of Victoria Parade and Clarendon Street to prevent conflict between cars and trams has led to a stand-off between Yarra Council and Vicroads. Despite the relatively low volume of traffic in this part of Clarendon Street and the close proximity of easy U-turns, Vicroads is opposed to banning right hand turns at this

intersection and wants traffic lights installed instead. Operator Yarra Trams is reported to be supporting the council in its push for turn bans.

Tram/car accidents along Victoria Parade are common, and the intersection is currently considered a blackspot – though ironically a blackspot warning sign is visible only to tram drivers. Our concern

with traffic lights is that cars will become “trapped” in the intersection, and as a result trams would be blocked for long periods.

Delays will also result if tram priority is not programmed into the signals. On balance we lean toward supporting turn bans in this location as the measure that keeps overall inconvenience to a minimum.



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