

Train woes continue



Train passengers – particularly on the former M>Train lines – continue to suffer from a rash of train cancellations due to driver shortages and maintenance problems.

Connex have advised that there are no quick fixes to these problems – in particular that drivers take some 68 weeks to train, and until this is done, there is likely to be little relief.

To a certain extent we sympathise with Connex. These problems are largely to do with neglect of the former M>Train half of the system during 2003 (see *PTUA News* June 2004, page 7), when M>Train was under administration and being run by the government. Ironically, Minister Batchelor said at the time that the multi-billion dollar re-privatisation deals being set up would ensure continuity of service.

While we appreciate that Connex are doing everything they can to alleviate the problems (including re-training former-Connex network drivers for the former-M>Train lines), one thing they could be doing is to resume publishing line-by-

line performance figures, as M>Train was required to do. At present the overall train performance figures mask the real situation, and prevent those on the worst-affected lines from claiming compensation.

The PTUA compiled figures for the Frankston line (one of the worst affected) for June. While for the month, the number of services that actually ran was 96.6% (only just higher than the 95% trigger point for compensation), there were two days (the 21st and 23rd) when the services that ran fell to as low as 88% - in other words, one in eight trains did not run.

Clearly this is not good enough. Commuters will not stand being crammed sardine-style into trains day after day. And while Connex may be working on fixing problems, in the meantime fully reporting line-by-line statistics and offering compensation would at least help placate customers.

Public meetings: Make your voice heard

In the coming few weeks, there are two public meetings taking place in support of improved public transport:

- **City of Yarra** – 6:30pm, Monday 23rd of August, North Carlton Baptist Church, 526 Nicholson Street – see page 4
- **Outer Eastern suburbs** – 7:30pm, Tuesday 31st of August, Croydon Library – see page 5

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Keeping in touch...

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The PTUA members' discussion list is at
www.yahogroups.com/group/ptua

Stay up to date with PTUA events via the PTUA
News mailing list
www.yahogroups.com/group/ptua-news

Committee

Daniel Bowen – President, Newsletter editor
Anna Morton – Vice President
Anthony Morton – Secretary
Peter Cook – Treasurer
Alex Makin – Convenor, Outer East branch
Tim Petersen – Convenor, Geelong branch
Matthew Cook
John Cox
Beth Driscoll
Tim Hoffmann
Chris Loader
Jeremy Lunn
Tim Mattingsbrooke
David Robertson
Vaughan Williams

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.

Wanted

Do you have an old unwanted Windows computer that you
would be willing to donate to the PTUA? If so please
contact Peter Cook: peter.cook@ptua.org.au

Annual General Meeting – 16th of September

The PTUA Annual General Meeting will take place on
Thursday 16 September at 6:30pm at Ross House: 247
Flinders Lane, Melbourne.

The election procedure allows for the AGM to elect a
President, Secretary and Treasurer and up to nine
ordinary Committee members.

Nominations must be on the form attached and signed
by the nominator and the candidate, both of whom must
be current financial members of the PTUA.

Nominations must be received by the PTUA Secretary
(Ross House, 247 Flinders Lane, Melbourne 3000) by
hand or by mail by 4:00pm on Friday 10 September.
Nominations will not be called for at the AGM unless
nominations received by this closing date are
insufficient to fill all positions.

PTUA Committee Nomination Form

I, _____ of _____

nominate _____ of _____

for election to the position of: President Secretary Treasurer Committee member

Signed: _____ (nominator) _____ (candidate) ___/___/____ (date)

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

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Oil: Why we must do more with less

OPEC oil supply constraints, instability in the Middle East and questionable renationalisation practices in Russia have raised the spectre of another 'oil shock' similar to those that occurred in the 1970s. Global oil prices have pushed through the psychological US\$40-a-barrel barrier, and this has translated to retail petrol prices regularly above \$1 a litre.

Numerous factors have contributed to the squeeze on oil prices, including the onset of the annual 'driving season' in the US, speculation on futures markets, the war in Iraq and OPEC production quotas. But a large factor is the uncertainty hanging over future oil supplies. Saudi Arabia has promised to increase the rate at which it is pumping oil, to help bring the price down. But it is the only major producer left that still claims it is capable of doing so. Even this is questionable, as their spare capacity appears to mostly be heavy sour crude, which requires significant additional refinery capacity and equipment to convert to petroleum.

Further, in recent weeks, it appears that the Russian Government is attempting to reassert control over former USSR oil fields now controlled by YUKOS. On 29 July, a mere threat from a Russian court that YUKOS may be barred from selling oil pushed prices above US\$43-a-barrel, the highest price since the Iranian supply crisis of 1981.

The world is still a long way from running out of oil, but this is not the chief concern, nor was it ever really a serious one. The world will never actually run out of petroleum. The problem we face is that the cheap oil looks set to run out sometime between now and 2020, and we will all have to make do with a lot less.

The reason for this is that oil wells don't produce oil at the same rate

through their whole lives. The extraction rate peaks when the well is about 50 percent used up, then declines. Apply this across all the world's oil fields, and the result is that oil production will peak and then decline, long before the remaining reserves appear to be running low.

"The oil price is very high, it's crazy. There is no additional supply" – OPEC President Purnomo Yusgiantoro, telling reporters OPEC could not dampen oil prices by increasing output.

- Reuters, 3rd August 2004

We have already seen this effect (known as 'peak oil' or the 'Hubbert Peak') for specific regions of the world that have been major oil producers in the past. Production from the 'lower 48' states of the US peaked in the early 1970s; the UK sector of the North Sea peaked in 1999 and is now in steep decline. Australian production peaked in 2000 and is also in steep decline. European scientists have established a group to study the phenomenon, which has a website at www.peakoil.net. Their latest estimate has the global oil peak occurring in 2008. Estimates tend to move earlier and earlier due to the ongoing escalation in the demand for oil. And of course the closer we get to the peak, the greater the threat posed by instability in major oil-producing regions like the Middle East and Former Soviet Union.

Australia is no longer self-sufficient in oil; we import petrol from South-East Asia, and heavy crude for diesel from the Middle East. Federal Transport and Primary Industries Minister John Anderson himself admitted in the Sunday Age on 30 May that global oil production will peak "in the next 20 to 30 years" and that "at some stage in the next few years we may reach the point where we

don't see petrol prices come down".

Governments can act now to preempt a global economic collapse when the oil peak does eventually arrive. With judicious application of thought and action the transition need not, at least locally, be quite as painful as the more pessimistic commentators would have it.

For the last half-century our entire economy has been built around cheap oil, from agriculture to freight transport to plastics manufacturing. The changes necessary to wean our various industries off cheap oil will be slow and difficult, and leave us vulnerable in the meantime. We should instead be trying to reduce demand in the area where we use by far the most oil, and have the most discretion to use less; private car transport in urban areas.

Melbourne is potentially in a quite enviable position when it comes to withstanding an oil shock. We already have most of the infrastructure necessary to provide most of the population with a convenient alternative to car transport that is much less reliant on cheap oil supplies. All that is lacking is the government action necessary to fill the remaining gaps in the rail network and oversee the competent provision of fast, frequent, full-time public transport services throughout Melbourne. In regional cities, much can be done simply by installing frequent, comprehensive and easy-to-understand town bus networks.

Victorians should not have to wait until they are paying \$1.50 a litre for petrol before they are given an alternative to car dependence. It's time to divert that freeway money to fixing public transport; our future selves will thank us for it.

More councils supporting better PT

Local government is becoming more active in lobbying for better public transport.

The City of Knox led the way by commissioning a study into the construction of a railway to Rowville. This project, which has long been advocated by the PTUA, would fill one of the major gaps in Melbourne's rail network.

The latest council to join this welcome trend has been the City of Hume. Hume commissioned consultants to examine the extension of the Route 59 tram to

Gladstone Park in Tullamarine. Though the extension (costed at \$40 million, which is almost certainly more than required) would provide slower travel to the city than the alternative of upgraded feeder buses to the nearest railway station, it could ultimately feed in to a future heavy rail link serving the airport via Broadmeadows.

Some councillors have said that public transport is a state government responsibility and have labelled local government

support for public transport a waste. However, in an apparent example of double standards, they have not been backward in having their council's campaign for more expensive taxpayer-funded freeways. That more local governments are now calling for better public transport is a positive trend that indicates that councils increasingly recognise the importance of public transport and want State Government action to upgrade services in their area.

...but what about Yarra?... Let's get Yarra moving!

Last year, the City of Yarra held two public forums where residents were asked what the council should be doing about transport and traffic problems. Residents and traders told the council they wanted the City of Yarra to campaign against the extension of the Eastern Freeway and get public transport improved.

Now a year has passed and we've heard nothing.

According to the Northern Central City Corridor study, extending the Eastern Freeway from Mitcham to Frankston would dump at least 28,000 more cars a day at the

Hoddle Street end. The inner suburbs just can't absorb that much extra traffic.

It's time our local councils started campaigning for alternatives to freeways. Right now public transport is so bad it's difficult even to get from Collingwood to Fitzroy after dark.

Nothing happened last year; but this year, the council is up for re-election.

In the 'aspirational' outer suburbs, the City of Knox is spending \$40,000 campaigning for a train line to Rowville and a tram to

Knox City. What is Yarra council doing? Let's get Yarra moving. Come along and add your voice to the call for change.

Public Meeting

Join host Rod Quantock, and speakers including Tony Morton (secretary of the PTUA) and Paul Mees (transport planning lecturer and Fitzroy resident).

**6:30pm Monday 23rd August
North Carlton Baptist Church
526 Nicholson Street (corner
Tempany Street)
Melway 2C A1.
Tram 96 from Bourke Street**

Ombudsman appointed

Former County Court CEO James Hartnett was announced as the Public Transport Industry Ombudsman (PTIO) in late-July, finally drawing to a conclusion the establishment of the Ombudsman's office, which has taken almost two years to complete.

While the PTUA was involved in the working party for the Ombudsman's office, this wound up some time ago, and when the board was appointed we noticed

with some alarm that among the three consumer representatives there was a bare minimum of public transport experience, and absolutely no consumer advocacy experience (see *PTUA News* June 2004, page 1).

Also controversial is the decision not to allow the PTIO to investigate complaints related to ticket inspectors, which will continue to fall under the auspices of the State Ombudsman. While the State Ombudsman's office has

assured the PTUA that they are putting adequate resources into this task, it does seem incongruous that a newly appointed ombudsman dedicated to public transport issues cannot investigate what is probably the most common complaint from public transport users.

Nevertheless, we wish Mr Hartnett well in his role, and we hope that the Ombudsman will be an effective avenue for public transport users to seek redress.

Outer East: Public transport – is it moving you?

Outer East Branch announces public meeting for Croydon

Comprised entirely of outer eastern residents, the newly formed Outer East Branch is the voice for public transport in Melbourne's outer east providing a local voice for local residents.

To achieve this aim the Outer East Branch has announced a series of public meetings to highlight the continued neglect of public transport in the outer east.

It is time to hold all levels of government accountable over their continued inaction.

- Unlike Knox and even the Yarra Ranges, the local

government of Maroondah maintains an obstructionist attitude towards public transport (while campaigning strongly for the Mitcham-Frankston Freeway).

- The state government continues to provide no additional funding for bus services Maroondah, the Yarra Ranges or Knox, where 80% of services finish before 7pm and do not run on Sundays.
- The Federal Government, despite having ample opportunity with the AusLink program, is still ignoring calls to support public transport.

The first of these meetings will be held in Croydon, jointly with the

Croydon Conservation Society. Details are as follows:

7:30 – 9:00 pm
Tuesday 31st of August
Glenn Frost Room
Croydon Library
Melway 50 K4.

The Glenn Frost Room is situated nearby to Croydon Station (10 minute walk). Bus routes 690 and 737 run until about 7:30pm.

Like most venues in the outer east where alternatives are not provided, ample car parking is available.

All members are encouraged to attend, please e-mail alex.makin@ptua.org.au or call the office to register your interest.

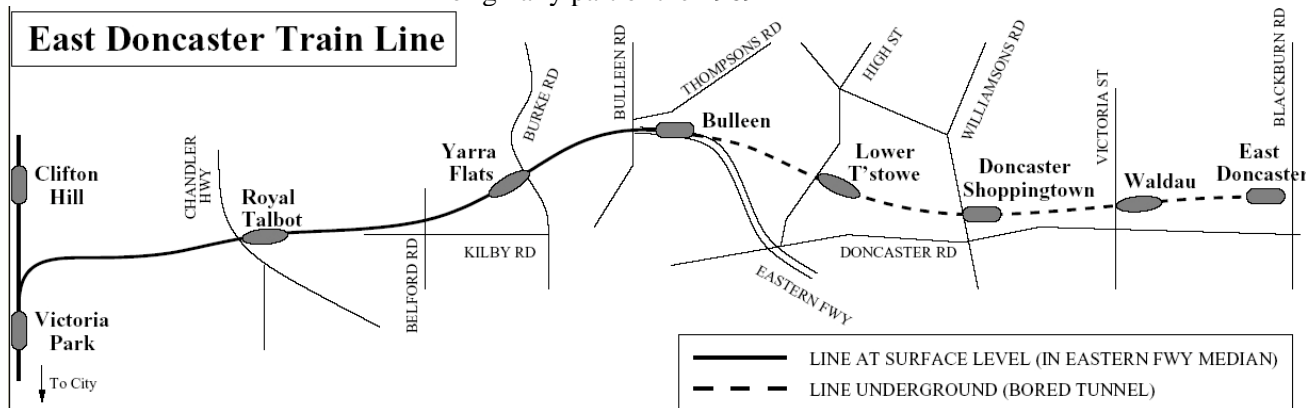
Doncaster rail line

In late 2003 the Eastern Coalition of Transport and Environment (ECTE) submitted a response to the state government's Northern Central Corridor Strategy (NCCS) questioning the study's findings and its almost outright rejection of a heavy-rail link to Doncaster East.

The ECTE's submission contended that that the proposed Doncaster East heavy-rail line was the only viable solution for the Doncaster area to ensure fast and efficient travel for residents.

Transport Plan, although like the other public transport initiatives proposed it was neglected while freeway projects were being funded.

The Doncaster East rail line was originally part of the 1969



A map of the proposed Doncaster East rail line from *It's Time To Move*.

The PTUA supports the Doncaster East heavy-rail line (see 'It's Time to Move') and has repeatedly called upon the state government to provide a real public transport solution to an area that has

continually faced public transport neglect.

While often touted as a remedy, light-rail is not adequate for a catchment area with a geographic

size and population base similar to the Glen Waverley line. The people in Manningham deserve nothing less than a heavy-rail line.

Federal money for public transport?

An anonymous source states that an ALP government would divert the \$445 million allocated to the Mitcham-Frankston Freeway to public transport projects.

As reported in the Maroondah and Knox Journals (Tuesday July 6), a Federal ALP government would redirect the \$445 million allocated to a non-tolled Scoresby Freeway to public transport projects in the outer east.

Unfortunately Martin Ferguson (the Shadow Transport Minister) has not confirmed this initiative, despite several state and federal

ALP figures claiming their support for this allocation.

It must be asked – just why is Martin Ferguson unwilling to release this policy?

The Federal Government provides funding for roads yet it provides nothing for public transport and the AusLink program ignores urban public transport completely.

Through using this money for public transport infrastructure the federal ALP would demonstrate it has a solution to the current stand-off and would ensure that the

money remains in the outer east, while finally completing a crucial backlog of public transport projects.

Furthermore it would honour previous promises made in 2001 (at the time of the Aston by-election) where Kim Beazley as opposition leader announced funding for the Knox tram extension and the Rowville rail line.

The clearest way to demonstrate the current failings of AusLink would be to use this money to fund public transport.



More freeways will only lengthen this traffic jam. A few modest Federally-funded public transport extensions would give people the choice to avoid it entirely.

Warrnambool line: damage must be undone

West Coast Rail, a poster child for rail privatisation under the Kennett Government, is no more. Owing to problems with maintenance of locomotives which have resulted in the temporary replacement of Warrnambool trains with buses, WCR will not be renewing its Warrnambool franchise.

The withdrawal of the train service is unsatisfactory and reflects the poor state to which the entire Victorian rail system has been

allowed to deteriorate under a combination of government neglect and private-sector cost cutting. Patronage on the replacement coaches has nosedived. Transport Minister Peter Batchelor must now commit to restoring a functional Warrnambool train service under V/Line control, sooner rather than later.

We are hearing reports that V/Line plans to permanently combine

some Geelong and Warrnambool train services together, meaning a cut in train capacity between Melbourne and Geelong, as well as a longer (and less conveniently-timed) trip for passengers from beyond Geelong. If true, this would be unacceptable cost-cutting at the expense of those in the south-west, who have already put up with months of interruptions to their trains.

In brief

More bike lockers at stations

Bike-train commuters will welcome the decision to fund 250 new bicycle lockers at suburban railway stations. This will bring the total to 850 bike lockers (compared with 23,000 car parks). Also, from next year the lockers will be free of charge, subject to lodging an application and providing a key deposit.

With more lockers available, bike-train users who would prefer not to

carry bicycles on fully loaded peak-hour trains will increasingly be able to store them securely at the station instead.

Should demand for the new lockers outstrip supply, we hope the government and Connex will further increase locker numbers. The outcome is certainly more environmentally friendly than increasing the sizes of station carparks.

Bendigo line: single-minded mania

Better Rail Action Group is ramping up their campaign to maintain the double track from Melbourne to Bendigo. They have a number of items on their web site, including an article by Andrew McLean that convincingly argues that the government's plans to convert the line to mostly single track is simply to reduce future maintenance costs.

⇒ www.ptua.org.au/allies/brag

Increased fines to have little impact

Fare dodgers who get caught have had to pay increased fines from last month. First offenders now face fines of \$150 instead of \$100. A second offence will cost \$200 and third and subsequent offences \$250.

We consider that these rises will have little impact while the chance of being caught remains so low; dishonest passengers will tolerate the occasional fine as a small price for having 'free' public transport.

Fare evasion will only be stopped when it no longer pays. This means making it easier for people to pay for their trip and restaffing stations, trains and trams so that passengers can expect to have their ticket checked each time they travel.

This is opposite to current arrangements, which combines a user-hostile ticket selling system with a low chance of detection. The recent high rate of train cancellations has fuelled passenger disrespect and increased the temptation to avoid paying for a substandard service.

Though we support a graduated scale of penalties, we consider that

the \$150 penalty for a first offence is too high. This is because it has the potential to affect occasional passengers who are unfamiliar with various quirks of the ticketing system that can make ticket purchase difficult. These include: tram ticket machines accepting coins only; even the large railway station ticket machines not taking \$50 notes; ticket machine breakdowns (though reliability has improved lately) and the limited number, opening hours and range of tickets carried by some off-system ticket retailers.

The two usual suggestions from the operators and the government on reducing fare evasion include encouraging off-system ticket purchases and smartcards. Off-system purchasing does not help new, occasional or tourist passengers who expect to be able to buy tickets at a railway station or on board a tram. Smartcards are expensive to implement, have little potential to reduce evasion and offer none of the advantages of a staff presence, such as passenger safety and security.

Instead we advocate measures that will curb fare evasion by making it

not pay. The ingredients of a sound compliance strategy include (i) restaffing the system so passengers expect ticket checks every time they travel, (ii) improvements to make ticket purchase easier, and (iii) encouraging regular passengers to use periodical tickets to increase compliance while providing them value for money through unlimited use.

We also note with disappointment recent deceptive media comment on the matter of ticketing obligations. Several media reports have recently stated that it is a legal requirement that passengers carry a valid ticket.

This is not the case. The requirement is that people make all reasonable efforts to procure a valid ticket. There is an important difference, and suggestions that passengers should walk to retail outlets when a vending machine is out of order are both contemptible and counterproductive. For further information on the rights and responsibilities of public transport users, please visit:

⇒ www.ptua.org.au/rights.shtml

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