

And so it begins: Is this the oil crunch?

Only a few short years ago, in the first months of the new millennium, oil prices were rising. The world was in the grip of an energy crisis, then President Clinton tapped the strategic reserve, with breathless speculation that oil prices might soar to... wait for it... \$30 a barrel.

How times have changed. At the time of writing, oil prices are hovering in the high 50's, with futures trending upwards towards \$60 a barrel, meaning the market is betting on rising oil prices for several months to come.



This is reflected in petrol prices now routinely above \$1.00 per litre, not only in regional areas but also in Melbourne. Prices of \$1.10 or more are not unusual.

Could this be the beginnings of Peak Oil?

Peak Oil (also known as the Hubbert Peak) is the point at which oil production peaks, and then starts to decline as extraction becomes harder and more expensive.

On 15 March, oil ministers from two OPEC members admitted to the world that OPEC had done all it could to boost oil supplies. Since then, other OPEC members have tried to back-pedal on this admission, simply because with no swing production left to manage, OPEC has nothing to do.

Gradually, this message is sinking in - between surging Chinese and Indian demand, and the depletion of various producing regions, the world is either at or close to a production ceiling. Worse, if it has not already, production of oil will soon commence a terminal decline.

There are alternatives to our prolific addiction to petroleum. But implementing them will take time and effort. In this country, we are fortunate to have retained our extensive urban rail networks – governments state and federal must urgently invest in expanding and upgrading them to meet the task. Bus networks need to be overhauled, to be made direct, frequent and easy to understand (more like trams).

And the conversion of buses to natural gas needs to be implemented as an urgent priority (it should have started ten years ago, but now is better than waiting until diesel is subject to physical shortages as well as high prices).

Urban car travel is one of the least justifiable uses of our dwindling oil resources, and as skyrocketing petrol prices encourage people back to public transport, it is vital that the system is in place to absorb them. Otherwise, the freed up capacity on the roads will encourage those who can afford it to drive more, compounding the problem.

That Peak Oil will cause some greater or lesser extent of economic and social upheaval is virtually certain. But how severe that upheaval will be will depend on how quickly we move in reducing our dependence on imported, scarce oil. The clock is ticking, and it's later than we think.

⇒ www.peakoil.org

It's time to move in South Morang

Things have been hotting up in South Morang, with a chorus of community groups calling on the State Government to honour its 1999 election promise of extending the Epping rail line to South Morang. The PTUA is a member of the South Morang Rail Alliance calling for the extension, together with the Friends of South Morang, City of Whittlesea Ratepayers Association, and the Mernda and Districts Residents Association.

An extension of the Epping line to South Morang is vital to making sustainable transport an option for current and future residents of the fast growing region.

The campaign has been boosted by a petition organised by the Whittlesea Leader newspaper. Over 5600 signatures were collected and recently presented to Transport Minister Peter Batchelor.

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Keeping in touch...

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Our web site is at www.ptua.org.au

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

Stay up to date with PTUA events, and view
archived newsletters online via the PTUA
News mailing list
www.yahogroups.com/group/ptua-news

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All committee members can be emailed at the addresses given
above, or by the format: *firstname.lastname@ptua.org.au*

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.

Cheap yearly Metcards

The PTUA is pleased to be able to offer members yearly
Metcards at a significant discount off the normal yearly
price. All zone combinations are available, and the cost
works out to be about the same as 9.5 monthlies. The
only catch is having to pay up front for the year.

If you have friends who are not members, you may like
to mention to them that the cost of PTUA membership
plus a discounted yearly ticket is well below the retail
cost of a yearly, or 12 monthly tickets.

For more information, email tickets@ptua.org.au or
contact the Office.

“The End of Suburbia” – free screening

Are high oil prices a temporary blip or a sign of things to
come? What does it mean for the Western way of life?
What are the implications for public transport?

Free member screening of The End of Suburbia - a
documentary exploring “the American Way of Life and
its prospects as the planet approaches a critical era, as
global demand for fossil fuels begins to outstrip supply”
– followed by discussion of local implications,
especially for transport.

Where: Ross House, 247 Flinders Lane, Melbourne

When: 6.30 for 6.45pm, Thursday 12 May 2005

Cost: PTUA members free, non-members entry by gold
coin donation

RSVP: Phone the Office or email office@ptua.org.au

Public meeting: Yarra

A disastrous increase of traffic is headed our way if the
Eastern Freeway extension goes ahead. The road lobby
is trying to revive plans for an extension of the Eastern
Freeway through Yarra, while the privatised
multinational tram company is proposing to close a third
of our tram stops. Meanwhile, the five ALP and
conservative Yarra councillors have voted against doing
anything serious to fight the traffic threat.

Councillors Jenny Farrar, Steve Jolly, Kathleen
Maltzahn and Gurm Sekhon, together with the Public
Transport Users Association, Friends of the Earth and
Campaign for a Better City, have convened this public
meeting to plan the way forward.

Where: North Fitzroy Bowls Club, Brunswick St (tram
stop 20)

When: 7pm to 8:30 pm Thursday 5 May 2005

Speakers:

- Gordon Price (by video link from Vancouver) –
Gordon is a former councillor, academic and veteran
anti-freeway campaigner.
- Steve Jolly will outline the state of play with Yarra
Council
- Fraser Brindley is a Green councillor from
Melbourne, who has been working to save tram
stops in Collins Street from closure.

It's time to move in South Morang (cont'd from page 1)

There has been extensive coverage of the issue in the local press.

Unfortunately, the Government is focussed on excuses as to why the extension cannot be built. They cite the need for track works at Jolimont, Clifton Hill and Keon Park. We believe the extension can still be built without these works, through maintaining the existing timetable with trains continuing to South Morang. Indeed a claimed city loop capacity issue could be fixed by simply running Epping and Hurstbridge trains around the city loop clockwise at all times – no expensive infrastructure or further investigation required! Unfortunately such lateral thinking didn't make it into the Department

of Infrastructure's December review of the Epping and Hurstbridge lines.

In place of the train extension, the government launched an 'interim' TrainLink bus service that supposedly meets every train at Epping. Unfortunately this bus is poorly timetabled (often missing connections), passenger information at stops is rare, and the bus provides poor services beyond the Mill Park shopping centre.

The PTUA has called on the State Government to extend the line in the 2005 state budget. A simple one station extension would cost in the order of \$20-30 million, while a two or three station extension to Mernda with grade separation at

road crossings would cost around \$80 million.

While the local ALP member Lily D'Ambrosio can't seem to secure \$20-30 million for the promised rail line, she is happy to advocate in parliament for duplication of Plenty Road, at a cost of over \$40 million. It's a clear example that the state government's funding priorities do not lie with public transport.

If you'd like more information or would like to get involved in the campaign please email chris.loader@ptua.org.au.

Outer east – there's more to do!

The Outer East Branch is focusing on a number of key projects this year.

The Stud Road SmartBus is likely to emerge from the upcoming State Budget. Failure to get funding for this in the budget will mean that the State Government will be forced to admit it has no vision for public transport in the outer east.

We have continued to highlight the need for community consultation

over the Ringwood Transit City and due to these efforts a Community Reference Group was established which will be seeking public transport improvements. The PTUA Outer East Branch is represented on this group.

Plans are on the way to reinstate the Rowville rail campaign particularly focusing on the long silent Monash City Council.

Other projects we are involved in include the Knox 75 tram extension; the Doncaster 48 tram; and Nunawading and other level crossing eliminations.

If you would like more information or can get involved in campaigning, please contact Alex Makin: alex.makin@ptua.org.au or call 0409 136 213.

⇒ www.ptua.org.au/outereast

Tram 48 rolls on to Doncaster: Have your say

The Manningham and Boroondara councils have agreed to pursue a feasibility study be done for the extension of the North Balwyn tram (route 48) along Doncaster Road through to Doncaster Shoppingtown. For both municipalities there are many benefits, and Traders' associations and local residents have also expressed interest in the extension.

The Doncaster 'Park+Ride' – touted to solve many of the problems with public transport in

Manningham – is now full to overflowing most weekdays, though with few night and weekend services and poor general timetabling the area continues to struggle with public transport.

Both councils are pursuing the State Government to fund the study though it is possible that they may choose to fund it themselves.

The PTUA is also delighted to see the local community taking an active lead with the issue of public

transport in Manningham and applauds the Doncaster branch of the National Seniors Association for holding a forum on the issue.

PTUA members and locals are invited to participate in the Manningham Public Transport Forum, to have their say on the future of Melbourne's transport-starved North East.

Where: Bulleen Heights Special School, Pleasant Road, Bulleen (Mel. 32 F6)

When: Wed May 25th, 7:30pm

Common myths about public transport: Density

The PTUA has launched a web site debunking common myths about public transport. The site is available at www.ptua.org.au/myths

Over the next few months, we'll be highlighting some of those myths in the newsletter.

MYTH: Melbourne's outer suburbs aren't suited to public transport use

FACT: Melbourne's outer suburbs are built to the same density as inner and middle suburbs with higher rates of public transport use. There is little difference in form between older 'train' suburbs like Mitcham and Frankston and newer 'car' suburbs like Rowville; the only difference is historical, between public transport provision in one, and non-provision in the other.

Closely related to the common idea that Melbourne's suburbs can't support public transport because they're too spread-out and low-density is the idea that there are really two Melbournes: the inner city, historically older, built to high densities, and eminently suited to public transport; and the outer suburbs, built to low densities during the age of the car, and irredeemably car-dependent.

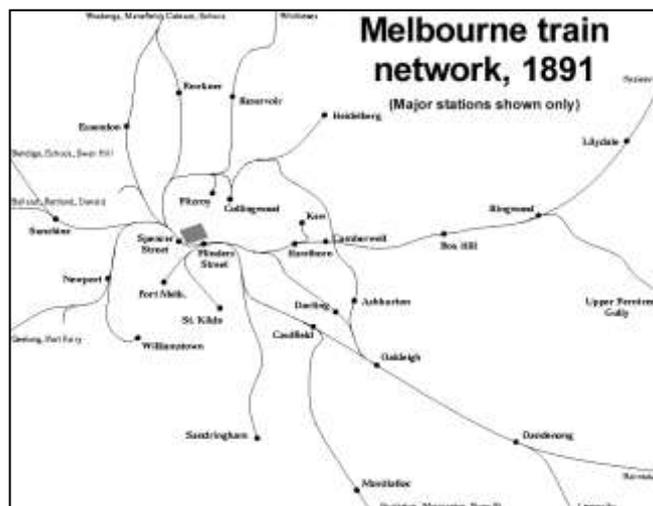
Thus, a common theme in newspaper reports, academic papers and planning documents is to proclaim that public transport in Melbourne is doomed because of all the new housing construction taking place on the urban fringe.

"Plans to limit Melbourne's sprawl and to tempt 20 per cent of people to use public transport by 2020 are doomed to fail, new research shows. The great Australian dream of owning a big suburban home and multiple cars is flourishing in Melbourne...."

"The research shows young people are buying into estates on the fringes, with about half aged 18 to 34 and 90 per cent under 50. Almost 80 per cent of households own two or more cars, with about two-thirds of residents happy to travel more than 10km to get to work. And 95 per cent of them drive to work."

---"No end to sprawl", Herald Sun, 26 December 2004

Shocking as this is supposed to sound, all it does is restate the same statistics about transport habits that have applied in virtually every new Melbourne suburb since the 1950s. All such suburbs record extremely high levels of car use, and the reason is not lifestyle choices: most Melburnians have



favoured big houses in the suburbs ever since the 19th century. The real reason is even simpler. Newer suburbs were never provided with a decent public transport alternative, and still remain without usable public transport to this day.

While the 'two cities' story may apply to many American cities, the history of suburban development in Melbourne is quite different. The basic form of Melbourne, with its radial corridors interspersed with 'green wedges', dates back to the 1880s land boom, and many quite distant suburbs can trace

their origin to this period. These suburbs owed their existence to public transport, as it was the train services that allowed people to live in the suburbs and commute to work in the city long before anyone had cars. As the diagram shows, nearly all of Melbourne's train system was in place prior to the end of the 19th century, as were outlying suburbs such as Lilydale, Epping, Ferntree Gully and Mordialloc.

Because of its extensive suburban rail network, 'Marvellous Melbourne' was at the turn of the 20th century one of the most spread-out, sprawling, low-density cities in the world. But this 'sprawl' was serviced by, and made possible by, public transport.

Contemporary accounts sound uncannily similar to comments made about urban sprawl today - despite the fact that cars had barely been invented, let alone seen in Melbourne:

"[The city] spreads around over an immense area of ground."

– Mark Twain (visiting Melbourne in 1891) from *More Tramps Abroad*

"Nearly everyone who can lives in the suburbs, and the excellence of the railway

system enables them to extend much farther away from the city than in Sydney or Adelaide....almost every class of house is detached and stands in its own garden."

– R.N. Twopeny, *Town Life in Australia*, 1883

Similarly, the advent of electric tramways in the early 20th century extended the 'sprawl' to the land in between the rail lines, greatly enlarging existing suburbs and creating entire new suburbs such as Balwyn, Niddrie and East Brighton. This pattern of

development lasted until the middle of the century, by which time all the land within what is now Zone 1 had been developed.

Since then, there has been remarkably little change in the style of development in Melbourne: new suburbs have extended out from old suburbs in a contiguous manner, filling in many of the remaining gaps between the train lines, just as the pattern was in the first half of the 20th century. The main difference has been that planners, mesmerised by the promise of the motor car, ceased to insist that public transport services be extended to new subdivisions before people moved in. So the new suburbs built since 1950 have become car-dependent, not because of their particular form, but through a lack of provision of transport alternatives.

It can come as quite a surprise that 'new' suburbs on the urban fringe have roughly the same population density as 'old' suburbs in the inner city. Nonetheless it turns out that although houses tend to be larger in the outer suburbs, they also have more people living in them compared with the one or two-bedroom terraces of the inner suburbs, so the overall population density works out the same. The following table compares two specific suburbs: Kings Park (a recent subdivision near St Albans, about 20km from the city) and

North Fitzroy (a 19th-century suburb about 5km from the city).

	Kings Park	North Fitzroy
Area (ha)	239	219
Population	9949	9159
Private dwellings	2721	4497
Population density (persons/ha)	41.6	41.8
Dwelling density (dwellings/ha)	11.4	20.5
Persons per dwelling	3.7	2.0
Travel to work by PT (%)	16.1	27.6
Travel to work by foot/cycle (%)	1.0	13.2
Travel to work by car (%)	81.1	56.8

Source: ABS Census data, cited in Mees, A Very Public Solution

The situation in Melbourne contrasts markedly with most United States cities, which remained relatively compact until well into the twentieth century, then spread outwards rapidly under the influence of the car. Urban development in these cities proceeded in a haphazard manner, with new residential subdivisions springing up in rural locations quite remote from the existing urban area. The term 'urban sprawl' was originally coined to

describe this kind of unplanned, non-contiguous development.

By comparison, Melbourne's urban development looks quite orderly. The spread of the urban area occurred much earlier than in US cities, and under the influence of public transport rather than car travel. Even when Melbourne's urban planning became subservient to the car, the city continued to develop as a contiguous built-up area, and with block sizes rather smaller than their US equivalents. As a result, Melbourne even now retains an urban form in which large-scale public transport networks are viable.

In conclusion, Melbourne needs better public transport in its outer suburbs *because* people prefer living in detached houses, not despite this. We know public transport in these suburbs is viable both from overseas experience, and because Melbourne itself boasts successful tram services in some inner suburbs that have the same built form as the outer suburbs. All that is keeping the suburbs car-dependent is planning inertia, not tired academic arguments about detached houses making car use compulsory.

More myths debunked:
 ⇒ www.ptua.org.au/myths

Geelong report

Bus stops at the Moorabool Street Interchange are being shifted again, this time due to extensive street works that are expected to take around two years.

The interchange looks set to be shifted to Yarra and Little Malop Streets on the edge of the CBD and even further away from the railway station. The branch will be looking for a public undertaking from Council that the move will only be temporary.

The Geelong Branch has almost finished consultation with its members about its response to V/Line's draft 2006 timetable for the Geelong line. The submission will be released shortly.

The G21 regional Public Transport Plan will soon be underway when one of the three DoI-approved consultants is chosen to undertake the study. Unfortunately, given the proposed short time-frame of the study (intended to be finished by

August) and an expectation of limited community involvement in aspects like setting service levels, there is unlikely to be a revolution in the region's public transport.

However, there should be improvements in basic operational issues like bus connections to trains.

More information
 ⇒ www.ptua.org.au/geelong

Our assessment of Bracks: the government replies

Our damning assessment of the Bracks government's performance in public transport last issue drew a swift response from the government. We present it here for your interest (*in italics*), with further notes from us on their points.

All Governments are judged according to their record, and the Bracks Government is no exception to this rule. Fair judges, however, are prepared to look at a Government's record in its totality. The February edition of the PTUA News declared that the Government was a "wolf in sheep's clothing" in regard to public transport, and contained list of so-called "broken promises". This list contained many factual errors and was misleading in many of its claims. To cite just one example, the Smartcard Ticketing Project was listed as by the PTUA News as being "poorly implemented", even though the project is on schedule, is currently going through a normal tender process and will not be rolled out for another two years.

PTUA: The Smartcard implementation includes passenger-hostile features like Tag-On/Tag-Off, so yes, according to the ordinary sense of the word it's 'poorly implemented' whether it's delivered on time or not.

When making their own judgments members of the PTUA should remember that the Bracks Government inherited a public transport system in crisis, and had to act quickly and decisively to save our public transport system from going into meltdown. In fact, since 1999 the Bracks Government has invested around \$3 billion in public transport. This has included significant new infrastructure, such as the redevelopment of Spencer Street Station, extending suburban rail services to Sydenham, and extending tram

services to Box Hill and Vermont South.

PTUA: The Sydenham and Box Hill extensions were projects originated by Kennett. The Vermont South extension doesn't go far enough (all the way to Knox was promised), and the Spencer St development, while welcome, is over budget, behind schedule and causing massive inconvenience to train passengers.

The high-tech SmartBus program on Blackburn road and Springvale Road has been rolled out, leading to patronage increases on those routes of 20-30 per cent;

PTUA: It's worth noting that until the PTUA intervened, the Department of Infrastructure planned to implement electronic signs but no additional services.

Undoubtedly the SmartBus programme is worthwhile, but it is proceeding at a glacial pace of about one route per year.

More than \$60 million has been spent on new and enhanced bus services;

More than 80,000 households in Booroondara, Darebin, Moonee Valley and Maribyrnong have benefited from, or will benefit from the Travelsmart program, which assists households to reduce their dependency on private car travel by providing them with practical information on local transport services;

PTUA: But they're not actually getting any additional services, they're just being bribed to use the existing inadequate ones. Try and travel across Darebin from east to west and back again on a Sunday and it can be seen why this won't work.

The \$30 million Tram Priority Program has been developed to improve tram travel times and reliability in the face of increasing congestion;

PTUA: While the aims of this initiative are laudable, it has been hijacked by road engineers who are prioritising the needs of motorists over tram passengers.

Punctuality and reliability of services improved by an average of 35 per cent between 1999 and 2002;

PTUA: However it is well known that punctuality and reliability, particularly on the train system, has plummeted in the last two years.

Customer satisfaction increased from 61 per cent before franchising to 68 per cent in 2003;

Patronage is increasing at around 3 per cent a year – about twice the rate achieved under public operation in the 1990s;

PTUA: Even if we accept this as accurate, 3 per cent per year is nowhere near the rate needed to achieve the 20% by 2020 target, which requires a doubling of patronage in fifteen years.

Industrial peace has been maintained across the public transport system;

In the 03-04 budget, the Bracks Government allocated \$1.41 billion to public transport and \$725 million to roads. In other words the Government is spending more than twice as much on public transport as it is on roads.

PTUA: No it's not. Under accrual accounting, budget figures don't correspond to actual expenditure. Actual subsidies to the public transport operators are around \$600 million a year, much of which is wasted on managerial overheads and profit margins.

Even if Victoria is allocated just a 15 per cent share of the Australian road deficit, Victorian motorists are subsidised by \$2.2 billion a year at the absolute minimum. For the public transport subsidy to be

comparable, Victoria would have to spend around four times as much on public transport as it does now.

Of course the Bracks Government recognises that there is much more to do, and we have set ambitious targets to meet, such as an increase in the proportion of trips made by public transport from 9 per cent to 20 per cent by the year 2020.

PTUA: Setting a target is all very well, but you also have to say how it's going to be achieved. Otherwise it's just a PR stunt. If patronage is only increasing by about 3% a year (see above) when it needs to double in the next fifteen years, it's clearly not going to reach that target.

Increasing the use of public transport across Melbourne is essential to building a more sustainable city, and through the Metropolitan Transport Plan and

Melbourne 2030 we have put in place a comprehensive planning framework to manage the future development of our metropolitan public transport network.

PTUA: It's pretty clear that despite the public forums emphasising improved public transport, Melbourne 2030 is the status quo plus more freeways and glossy photos. The Metropolitan Transport Plan is a slap in the face for public transport users, who were expecting actual improvements to public transport beyond one new SmartBus every couple of years.

Equally, public transport is essential to life in regional areas, which is why we have invested so heavily in projects such as Regional Fast Rail and the Spencer Street Station redevelopment.

PTUA: But if people in regional areas had actually been asked what

they needed, we'd still have two tracks to Bendigo, we'd have fixed the speed restrictions in the metro area instead of straightening tracks around rural stations where trains have to stop anyway, and there's a chance that sometime in the future we could return to having a uniform rail gauge in Victoria.

The Bracks Government is proud of its achievements to date, and we are determined to continue to build a better public transport system for all Victorians.

PTUA: Judged purely on the government's actions to date, it appears they are content for car use to continue to increase at the expense of public transport use. As long as the government is content to spend real money to improve the road system but not to improve the public transport system, this kind of rhetoric will continue to look rather hollow.

Going loopy: You can't get there from here!

As many regular V/Line travellers know, there is an inherent silliness in the interaction between V/Line ticketing and where city services actually go.

V/Line tickets to Spencer Street include train travel around the city area. This was a first step towards integration and it was taken some time ago.

However, it appears they never actually thought it through. Most V/Line services go directly to Spencer Street. But on weekday mornings, you can't get a train from Spencer Street into the City Loop. And during the afternoon, you can't get a train from the City Loop to Spencer Street.

The City Circle tram used to partially cover this gap, but it no longer runs past Spencer Street station.

When the City Loop first opened, it was intended that about 40% of

services would continue to run direct to Flinders Street, so it made a certain amount of sense to run the loop in different directions during the day. But this is no longer the case. Flinders Street remains the most popular city station to this day, and Spencer Street is the city's regional rail terminal. These important stations are afforded the longest journey times inbound in the morning and outbound in the afternoon.

Most cities worldwide would never reverse their rail loop direction. It causes significant confusion – even most locals don't understand it. Heaven help you if you're a tourist.

It also creates bottlenecks. DoI bureaucrats and politicians are using the city loop direction switch at Jolimont as an excuse to deny services to the urban growth corridor from Epping to South Morang. Running the Jolimont

loop permanently clockwise would eliminate this bottleneck.

The Caulfield loop could run anti-clockwise, and the Burnley loop clockwise as is done at weekends presently. Running the Northern loop clockwise would avoid some conflicting movements with interstate trains in the evening peak.

All of these changes would be dependent on avoiding timing delays at Flinders Street, but would simplify things greatly, and allow easy access to and from Spencer and Flinders Street stations from any other station on the network. If the Government is spending \$700 million on Spencer Street redevelopment works, the least they could do was make sure you could travel both to and from it from nearby rail stations at all times of day.

⇒ www.railpage.org.au/railmaps/cityloop.htm

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Inside:

- Is this the oil crunch?
- Public meetings: Manningham, Yarra – and free film screening
 - Common myths about public transport

Copy deadline for the next PTUA news is 30th May 2005

Newsletter contributors: Daniel Bowen, Peter Cook, Chris Loader, Alex Makin, Tony Morton, Tim Petersen, Chris Trikalis 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.

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