



Government's transport plan flops **20% by 2020 target dumped**

The government's long-awaited transport plan "Meeting Our Transport Challenges" was released on 17th of May.

But far from being the all-encompassing solution for Melbourne (and Victoria's) problems with transport that they had promoted it as being, the government has missed the mark.

While there will be a number of improvements for people lucky enough to live on a train, tram or Smartbus route, many of these changes will be a long time coming, and for everyone else services will continue to be inadequate.

There will be no rail or tram extensions for at least ten years. SmartBus routes will be extended, but only on four orbital routes around Melbourne.

Two-thirds of Melbourne will continue to be car-dependent, with only hourly or half-hourly bus services serving them. This means the government's goal of 20% of motorised trips on public transport by 2020 is effectively dead (indeed, it's not mentioned in the document at all), and they are providing no solutions to the problems of traffic congestion and spiralling petrol prices.

To make things worse, the government will spend billions on expanding the Westgate and Monash freeways, in a futile attempt to build their way out of congestion. They appear oblivious to the fact that this will only result in more induced traffic using those roads, with a negative effect on public transport modal share.

The operation of the privatised public transport network is set to continue into the future. There will be virtually no change to how transport is managed in the state – 300 bureaucrats will continue to administer Byzantine franchise contracts. A Co-ordinator-General of Infrastructure will provide guidance over future infrastructure projects, but this

role is yet to be fully defined, and may have no real power over agencies such as VicRoads.

On the announcement of the plan, the PTUA reacted swiftly and publicly called for the resignation of transport minister Peter Batchelor, for poor targeting of the massive expenditure and spectacularly failing to improve upon previous efforts over the last 7 years.

(Premier Steve Bracks was later to claim that we had not read the plan when we commented. This is incorrect.)

Other groups joining the call include the Better Rail Action Group (Bendigo) and the South Morang Rail Alliance, who are outraged that their rail extension, promised in 1999, has been delayed until at least 2016.

Some welcome upgrades

It's not all bad news. For the first time, local bus route upgrades mean that almost all Melbourne households will have 7-day-a-week services (albeit hourly in many cases) within 400 metres. This significantly reduces the problems of social exclusion due to lack of public transport.

Duplication of the Hurstbridge line between Clifton Hill and Westgarth should help more trains run on the line during peak hours. Replacement of Metrol and selected signalling should facilitate higher train frequencies across the network, and the (eventual) addition of a few stations will be welcomed by residents of those suburbs.

The tram network will gain more DDA-compliant (wheelchair accessible) stops and trams, which is to be welcomed (subject to specifics, such as tram stop design and rationalisation). And more funds will be provided for tram and bus priority.

More on the government's plans ⇨ Pages 3-4

Keeping in touch...

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

The PTUA runs email lists for member discussions, and to stay up to date with PTUA events, and view archived newsletters online:

www.ptua.org.au/members/resources

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Committee Meetings

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

Rowville free film screening

What will peak oil mean for Knox?

Free screening of the documentary ‘The End of Suburbia’ about the end of the age of cheap oil.

Sunday June 4, 1:30–3:30 pm
Rowville and District Neighbourhood House, 20 Fullham Road, Rowville (Melway 81 K1)

Introduced by weatherman and environmental ambassador Rob Gell.

The film screening will be followed by a discussion about how we can adapt our communities, transport choices and lifestyles to living with less and more expensive oil.

Co-hosted by the PTUA, Knox Environment Society and Environment Victoria.

For further information contact: Louise Sales:
louise.sales@envict.org.au, 9341 8109 or see:

⇒ www.endofsuburbia.com

PTUA web site gets a makeover

The PTUA web site recently got a makeover, with a new design which allows us to more quickly update the site to reflect the latest news and events.

The new site also has RSS feeds, so those computer users who are RSS-literate can easily keep up to date with new developments.

Some of the older content is still being migrated to the new “look”. We encourage members to look around the web site, and let us know your comments.

⇒ www.ptua.org.au

As part of the renovations, we have published the full text of the PTUA’s 2002 book “It’s Time To Move” on the web site. This is now available free as a PDF download. (Members who prefer the traditional method of reading can still obtain a paper copy via the Office, for \$7.50).

⇒ www.ptua.org.au/publications/ittm

The PTUA committee would like to extend its thanks to Shaun Ashdowne, who managed the PTUA web site from 2001 to 2006.

Copy deadline for the next PTUA news is 30th June 2006

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Meeting Our Transport Challenges... does it?

Key questions about the government's plan:

Will the plan get people out of their cars and onto public transport?

No, it is quite likely to do the opposite. The plan increases the capacity of one of Melbourne's largest freeway corridors by 50%. Any gains in public transport patronage from a handful of extra peak train services, and hourly buses for seven days will quite likely be wiped out by people moving away from the currently overcrowded train systems and into their cars on improved freeways and arterial roads.

Does the plan support Melbourne 2030?

Overall, no. Melbourne 2030, the government's metropolitan plan for 'sustainable growth', relies on significant increases in use of public transport, walking and cycling. The 20/2020 target is necessary (though not sufficient) for the success of Melbourne 2030 but seems to have been completely abandoned.

Will the plan reduce greenhouse gas emissions or improve air quality?

No. As explained above, the plan is very unlikely to change the modal shift of people using cars and public transport.

Will the plan try to build our way out of congestion?

It has of course been well accepted in transport circles that you can't build your way out of congestion. But with plans to expand existing freeway capacity, and a possible future east-west freeway link, the answer has to be yes.

Will the plan reduce traffic congestion?

No. While there may be short term congestion reductions on the

Westgate-Monash freeways, this will trigger induced traffic which is very likely to significantly increase congestion in the inner city and the CBD.

Will the plan provide better integration of public transport services?

This is unclear. Alluded to in the document is better timetable coordination, but there are no pointers to how this would be achieved. Trains, trams, SmartBuses, and local buses will continue to have largely incompatible frequencies.

On the other hand, money has been allocated to improve public transport interchange facilities, easing transfers.

Does the plan relieve pressure from high petrol prices, or prepare Melbourne for Peak Oil?

No. As stated above, the plan will not provide attractive alternatives to the motor car for the vast majority of transport trips in Melbourne. The plan will not reduce Melbourne's dependence on motor cars for transport. While bus services will be available in more suburbs for longer hours, these will not be viable alternatives for busy people due to the very low frequencies. With oil production not keeping up with demand, the price of oil is set to continue growing strongly, dramatically eating into household budgets.

Will the plan support the transport needs of Melbourne's Growth Areas?

Only to a limited extent. There will be new local bus routes in growth areas, though most will be only hourly or half-hourly, appealing to few people who have the choice of car travel. Some areas may get SmartBus routes, which will be of a higher frequency, and are likely to

be competitive with car travel, at least on weekdays.

Will the plan improve access for people with mobility impairments?

Yes, but this is in fulfilment of legislative requirements and behind the original timeframes. It appears the majority of bus stops and train stations will be made DDA compliant by 2011. However the program only tackles 350 'easy' tram stops, those which have little impact on road traffic. Clearly there is a reluctance to reallocate road space to public transport, despite the overtures to improved on-road priority for Melbourne's trams.

Will the plan provide more options for the transport disadvantaged?

Yes. One of the strengths of the plan is that it will provide a basic public transport option to within 400 metres of most homes in Melbourne 7 days a week until 9pm. While hourly services are far from ideal for people who value their time and have the choice of car travel, they at least mean people who have no other option, now have some transport means.

Will the plan help more busy people switch to public transport?

Yes for some people who live near a SmartBus service or one of the handful of new train stations, when these are eventually provided. No for everyone else.

Was the plan put together with public involvement?

No. While the government claims to have read and reviewed all proposals put before it by various community, local government, and business groups, at no stage did the government come to the public and ask for feedback on a draft plan.

It's all about the management

Over the past seven years the Bracks Government has developed a problematic record of announcing a 'major transport plan' every 18 months on average, only to consign it to the wastepaper bin after a couple of years of fits and starts.

We saw this with Linking Victoria in 2000, then with Connecting the Suburbs in early 2002, Melbourne 2030's stillborn Train Plan, Tram Plan and Bus Plan in 2002-03, and Linking Melbourne in 2004.

The planning of public transport in Victoria is riddled with systemic problems. New public transport initiatives do not enjoy the same level of bureaucratic support as road projects, and so there is no level playing field for assessing them.

Even when the rare public transport initiative gets to the stage of seeing work commence, the result all too frequently comes in over time, over budget and with serious design compromises. Meanwhile, subsidies to the private operators have doubled since 1999 without any doubling in service delivery.

To see what's wrong we need only compare Melbourne with Vancouver and Perth, which are both advancing toward their mode share targets and moving up the 'liveable city' rankings.

Melbourne has more train tracks per person than either, it has a popular tram system (which these other cities lack), it is spending more per capita on transport, and it has a higher population density. There are no urban form or infrastructure issues that stand in the way of Melbourne achieving 20% of travel by public transport in less time than Vancouver or Perth. Yet it is clearly taking longer. A straightforward process of elimination reveals the management of public transport as the chief obstacle to further progress in Melbourne.

In order to have a credible 'fix' for Melbourne's transport problems, the government had to outline a programme to address these systemic problems. Following the release of a review of privatisation by four Melbourne transport experts, the PTUA believes that real progress will only be made when Melbourne's public transport management changes from the current privatised arrangements to coordination by an efficient public agency, with the same authority and Ministerial access now granted to Vicroads.

But the statement contains nothing here, other than an endorsement of privatisation and a proposal to add to the existing bureaucracy a

'Coordinator-General' with a role as yet undefined.

The most charitable explanation is that the government sees the need for change but hasn't worked out how to do it yet, in which case "Meeting Our Transport Challenges" is merely a plan to have a plan; after having seven years to observe the examples of Vancouver, Perth and Zurich, the public deserves a lot better. However, we suspect that the Coordinator-General announcement, coming as it has out of left field, is merely another attempt to deflect criticism.

The statement is also silent, despite purporting to be a 25 year vision, on the rather important question of how public transport will be managed after the franchise contracts with private operators expire in two years' time. The Minister himself told a Stateline interview on 19 May that he hasn't yet made up his mind on this point.

While this means it is still possible to move away from privatisation despite the Minister's enthusiasm for it, it is an indictment of "Meeting Our Transport Challenges" that it supplies no answer to this crucial question.

Why the PTUA slammed the plan

There is no doubt that the PTUA's strong reaction against the plan, and calling for the minister's resignation, raised eyebrows in government circles. It serves as a reminder why it is vitally important to have a fully independent voice in the transport debate.

The bottom line that the "Meeting Our Transport Challenges" document, which maps out the government's transport plans for the next 25 years, had to answer the basic questions posed on page 3 of this newsletter. It also had to

address the systemic management problems that have clouded almost all of the government's previous public transport plans and projects, and will cause this one to fail likewise if nothing is done.

More than anything else, it had to provide the kind of public transport that would result in modal shift – getting people out of their cars. On this point, it fails miserably.

Residents and visitors to those two-thirds of suburbs that currently have inadequate services will continue to

have inadequate services. For most, this means no choice but to drive. The ongoing consequences to Melbourne's liveability and dependence on oil are obvious.

The PTUA will be issuing a detailed analysis of the government plan. Keep an eye on our web site in the next few weeks.

⇒ www.ptua.org.au

You can read the government's plan for yourself on the DOI web site:

⇒ www.doi.vic.gov.au/transport

V/Line fare integration welcomed – Geelong branch

The Geelong Branch was delighted to see the first stage of fare integration introduced on 22 April for all V/Line tickets. This was based on the concept it put forward in its 2003 Fare Reform Discussion Paper, and its implementation can be considered a real win for the PTUA.

V/Line tickets now include travel on public transport at the origin and destination of each trip; for example on Geelong bus services and within Zone 1 for a ticket from Geelong to

Melbourne. Unfortunately, travel on buses is not yet included in tickets from Melbourne to Geelong's northern suburbs, due to a conflicting local fare structure. Rather than reducing fares for Geelong travellers to fix the problem now, the Department of Infrastructure has advised that the problem will be rectified when the costly new 'Smartcard' ticketing system is introduced.

In other positive news, the Sunday magical mystery tours once endured

by urban Geelong bus travellers have now disappeared. However, buses still only run hourly with the first services arriving in the city just before 10am and the last departing just after 5pm. The services are still clearly not up to a standard that most passengers with a choice would use. The appalling level of bus services will be a particular focus of the Branch's campaign in the lead up to the election.

Passengers breathing easier

Tram shelters, bus shelters and undercover areas of railway stations recently became smoke free. The ban, which came into effect on March 1, means that smoking is only allowed out in the open. No-smoking signs were erected in many locations to advise people of the

ban. This was backed up by posters at railway stations, tram stops and a media advertising campaign. Public transport authorised officers have been given powers to enforce the ban.



Box Hill renovation needed

Built in the 1980s, the Box Hill public transport interchange was touted as a modern attempt to integrate public transport modes. However, anyone familiar with Box Hill would know how flawed the design is and realise that it is actually disintegrated.

The centre consists of a railway station buried away underground, a bus terminal placed out of the way on the roof and a layer of shops in between. Getting from bus to train involves descending a narrow set of escalators, not even wide enough to pass those standing, followed by a stroll through the shopping centre with various obstacles and finally another escalator.

To make matters worse, the station and bus interchange have been left to decay over the years. Filthy, dark

and dingy are all words that describe it and even the cash-strapped Nauru Government could be invited to mine the phosphorous from years of pigeon crystallisation! The adjoining shopping centre was upgraded almost 10 years ago, yet neglect continues over the public transport areas.

The inadequacies have been further highlighted with the Middleborough Road level crossing grade separation. The government has realised they can't easily get rail replacement buses into Box Hill, to transfer passengers from bus to train. So it's rumoured that instead they will waste millions constructing a temporary "Box Hill East" station for this purpose.

With a further upgrade of the shopping centre likely, it is time for

a redesign. The bus terminal should be moved to ground level at Station Street, with direct access to train platforms. This would also solve longstanding problems with buses being held up in Carrington Road and would greatly improve pedestrian access to the interchange.

The station was brought into the spotlight recently following a fatal stabbing and the closure of the Bingo centre next to the bus terminal due to safety concerns. Federal Labor MP Anna Burke has joined calls for the upgrade, by launching petition to State Parliament. The PTUA encourages all members to sign the petition, which is available from Anna Burke's office on 9898 0675 or our website.

⇒ www.ptua.org.au

Games success shows the way forward for PT

The Commonwealth Games showed once and for all that not only is better quality public transport possible if the government commits to it, but that the people of Melbourne will use it where provided.

While many Games ticket holders and volunteers were using the system, most passengers during the Games period were not getting free transport.

Despite (or perhaps in part because of) dire warnings of traffic snarls and overcrowding during the

Games period, the system coped admirably, apart from some relatively minor delays following major events.

With frequency improvements during off-peak times, particularly evenings, the government has shown it has both the capacity and the budget to provide better public transport.

For the sake of a few dozen extra drivers on each of the train, tram and bus networks, it could be like this all the time, and provide the way forward for further upgrades.

During the Games you were able to catch a train after 7pm without having to wait half an hour or longer. In many suburbs you were able to catch a bus home from the station, as late as 1am, a vast improvement over the typical bus finishing times of around 7pm.

It's initiatives like this that makes public transport usable for more trips, and is what all of Melbourne needs all the time.

St Kilda Road needs priority, not shuttles

The PTUA notes with concern Yarra Trams' proposal for shuttle services along St Kilda Road. We believe that this approach both fails to address capacity issues along the corridor and would impose significant inconvenience on tram users which is likely to discourage patronage growth.

Indeed, it seems odd to consider such a radical alteration to the operating patterns of Melbourne's most successful tram corridor.

Anybody who travels by tram knows of the long delays while waiting for traffic lights and cross-traffic.

There are significant benefits that could be obtained for tram services by more aggressive implementation of tram priority measures along St Kilda Road and more broadly across the tram network.

Tram running times, frequencies and reliability could all be improved by ensuring that road-based public transport benefits from dynamic signal priority and the enforcement of existing tram fairways.



Obviously tram priority done right would allow a boost to services using the existing network and tram fleet, while avoiding the inconvenience of mid-journey transfers for a large proportion of passengers.

Metlink launches journey planner

Metlink has launched a test version of their online journey planner, accessible via their web site.

Some PTUA members have already had a good look at it, and although it has some quirks, this planner is streets ahead of any similar tools previously attempted in Melbourne.

Having accurate, easily accessible travel information is an important part of encouraging patronage on the public transport network. New and occasional users need to be able to plan their trips with confidence, and this tool appears to go a long way towards filling that need.

We would encourage members to take a look and provide their feedback to Metlink.

⇒ jp.metlinkmelbourne.com.au

Transport myths: free public transport

Myth: *Making public transport free will encourage use*

Fact: *It's not the cost of public transport that puts people off using it. Just eliminating fares without improving services won't shift the habits of enough people to justify the cost. But if service improvements can attract more people to public transport, we might as well maintain reasonably cheap fares so as to recover some of the cost.*

A popular suggestion is that more people would be persuaded to leave their cars at home and use public transport, if public transport were free. One can also make a case for free public transport on social grounds, by analogy with free health care and free public education.

However, the difficulty with this idea is its effectiveness, when compared with the cost. What primarily deters people from using public transport is not its cost but factors like flexibility, convenience and door-to-door travel times. If you live or work in one of the many Melbourne suburbs with no usable public transport at all, the fact that it's free isn't going to make it any more attractive.

I would love to get the bus to wherever I want to go, and I'm more than happy to pay for it. But it has to exist first! The bus services here are hopeless, every hour on a Saturday, not at all on evenings or Sunday. Oh, and only one route. Too bad if you want to go anywhere other than Southland. Free transport will only benefit those who have a good choice already. – Gillian Scott (Aspendale Gardens), The Age, 12 March 2006

Economists acknowledge the existence of these non-financial barriers when they say that public transport has a low 'price elasticity of demand'. What this means is that, all other things being equal, a 10 per cent drop in price causes less

than a 10 per cent increase in patronage. Thus Adelaide, despite having Australia's cheapest public transport fares, also had Australia's most steeply declining public transport patronage through the 1990s, and today has a low (albeit stable) modal share by capital-city standards.

So, if the objective is to maximise public transport patronage, eliminating fares on its own is a rather ineffective strategy.

An Age article in March 2006 estimated that free public transport would cost about \$340 million a year. Logically, this has to be weighed up against the alternative, which is to spend an additional \$340 million a year on improved services. This would likely boost patronage more than free public transport would, and because more passengers means more fares collected, there would be increased revenue allowing services to be improved further still.

On the other hand, once you've made public transport free, the money for any additional services has to be found in government budgets. This means that the more well-used the system is, the more it costs the taxpayer - quite the reverse of the world's best public transport systems, which come close to covering their costs (often despite relatively low fares) because they attract high patronage and hence high fare revenue.

International experience with free public transport in large cities is rare. The one example usually cited is Hasselt in Belgium, a city of 70,000 people (roughly the size of Bendigo) where buses have been free since 1997. As a measure to revive a declining city centre by encouraging people to visit more often it has been an outstanding success. But it has been less successful at encouraging a shift to sustainable transport. A survey of bus passengers a year after

implementation found that 18% were former cyclists, 14% former pedestrians and 23% former car users. In other words, the free service was actually more successful at reducing walking and cycling than at reducing car travel. Hasselt's buses now serve an average of 12,000 trips per day, and while bringing much-needed custom to the city centre, are not the majority mode of transport even for locals (let alone the 200,000 daily visitors from the wider region, who either drive or pay to use trains and regional buses).

Notwithstanding all this, it's certainly true that public transport fares in Melbourne are higher than they should be. For many years Melbourne has had the highest fares in Australia relative to journey length, and recent fare increases have outstripped both the rate of inflation and the change in the cost of owning and operating a car (which actually decreased at the time the GST was introduced in 2000). They are now at the level where many trips can be made more cheaply by car. For this reason, at least part of the dividend from future patronage increases should be applied to reducing fares to competitive levels.

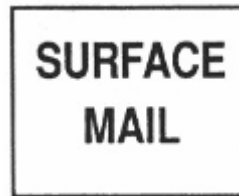
International experience points to a more effective strategy for shifting travel habits than just axing fares. It involves such measures as high service frequencies, central coordination of timetables, traffic priority for trams and buses, and a conspicuous staff presence. Provided fares are set at a level competitive with car travel, these measures have been proved more effective in boosting public transport use than making public transport free - and at a much lower cost to the public purse.

More transport myths:

⇒ www.ptua.org.au/myths

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