



Connex Siemens debacle

Regular train commuters know full well that it's been a horror summer this year. While the Siemens trains first showed problems with their brakes when they started service in 2004, it's now evident that Connex ignored the problem, hoping it would go away.

It didn't go away. Continued problems meant trains from the fleet started being withdrawn in November, and by mid-January almost half the Siemens fleet was out of action, causing widespread chaos to peak hour services.



The obvious question must be: why did Connex sit on the problem? If they knew of the brake problems years ago (and the incident of a Siemens train failing to stop at the end of the line at Williamstown in 2004 should have been evidence enough) why wasn't it properly fixed then? Did they think they could avoid the expense of proper investigation and repairs and it wouldn't matter?

Worse, not only did Connex fail to ensure the Siemens trains were running reliably, they also (with the full approval of the Department of Infrastructure) had almost all of the Hitachi trains scrapped. The Hitachi trains, which have a reputation among train drivers for reliability, could have been used to increase the size of the overall train fleet, improving frequencies and relieving overcrowding, and cutting the number of cancellations necessary when the Siemens trains were withdrawn.

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The minister writes for you

Following a meeting between PTUA and Lynne Kosky in January, the new Public Transport Minister agreed to write for us.

As the newly appointed Minister for Public Transport, my task is to deliver a public transport system that meets Victoria's needs over the next 25 years.



This means addressing current requirements as well as looking ahead and planning for the benefit of generations to come.

In recent years, Victoria has experienced rapid population growth and new commuting patterns in our major regional centres and outer suburbs, with new suburbs stretching well beyond the reach of our established radial fixed-rail public transport network.

Faced with the challenge of meeting Victoria's current and future public transport needs, the Bracks Government has created a \$10.5 billion blueprint, *Meeting our Transport Challenges: Connecting Victorian Communities*.

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Call or e-mail the office (see above)

PTUA members can obtain cheap yearly Metcards – see

www.ptua.org.au/members/offers

Internet

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

The minister writes for you (Cont'd from page 1)

Released in May 2006, this historic statement sets out a strategic, long-term and funded plan for Victoria's transport system. This is Victoria's single biggest transport investment program, and includes:

- More than \$2 billion to boost capacity on our rail network,
- \$1.3 billion to be spent on new suburban trains and trams,
- \$660 million for an cross-town orbital SmartBus network,
- \$650 million to improve local metropolitan bus services,
- \$280 million for rail safety and security systems, and
- \$264 million for new high-tech control and communications systems.

In boosting the capacity of the metropolitan rail system, we are addressing the most urgent needs of the rail system for more tracks and better signalling. Other works include new and upgraded stations, enhanced stabling facilities and station works that improve the overall operation of the system.

At the same time, we are boosting Melbourne's bus network to service commuters who do not have ready access to rail. By working with local communities, we are tailoring routes to the specific needs of these communities. We're extending hours of operation and frequency of service – buses will become a viable alternative to the car.

It's clear we have a lot of work ahead of us. But I was glad to hear the views of Vancouver public transport academic Gordon Price, at a recent public transport forum. Mr Price described Melbourne as an exciting place from a transportation view, saying that the system "works great". This is reassuring, given that Vancouver is widely recognised as having one of the world's best public transport networks.

I welcome the opportunity to work with the Public Transport Users Association and to hear the views of Victorian commuters.

– Lynne Kosky

PTUA's response to the Meeting Our Transport Challenges statement can be found in the May 2006 newsletter, and in our extensive critique:

⇒ www.ptua.org.au/publications/real-transport-challenges

Copy deadline for the next PTUA news is 30th April 2007

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PTUA meets the PT players

It's been a busy few months for the PTUA committee; apart from handling media and other duties, we've been meeting the new government team, and catching up with some of the other main players to promote our ideas for improvement and extension of the public transport network.

Lynne Kosky (Public Transport Minister)

In early January PTUA met at Nauru House with the new Minister for Public Transport, Lynne Kosky, who was accompanied by her advisers and by the Director of Public Transport, Jim Betts.

We were pleased to establish a direct relationship with her and to renew our relationship with her department. The meeting gave the Minister an opportunity to inform us of her priorities and her views on the challenges of the portfolio.

The conversation ranged over current public transport issues. The Minister told us that she wanted the portfolio. She wants to make the system more customer-focussed and is committed to MOTC.

Full bus reform is a priority for the government as is park and ride, though we pointed out this could only ever serve a minority of passengers. They have an interest in engaging local communities through local councils and indicated support for Transit Cities and Melbourne 2030, confirming that they would be doing regular audits against 20/2020. The Minister agreed that the State should be seeking more Federal funding for public transport.

Meredith Sussex (Co-ordinator-General of Infrastructure)

An innovation from MOTC is the position of Co-ordinator General of Infrastructure "to improve the coordination and integration of

transport and land use planning and policy". In January PTUA met with Meredith Sussex who has been appointed to the role.

She defended the current DOI/DSE land use/transport arrangements but was interested to hear of any examples of poor planning or integration. We explained the rationale behind our criticism of MOTC and provided her with copies of our key documents. The discussion included issues with funding arrangements and with current infrastructure.

We were pleased with Ms Sussex's general familiarity with transport infrastructure matters and look forward to regular meetings with her.

Rob Hudson (Parliamentary Secretary for Infrastructure)

In welcoming Rob Hudson to his new position, PTUA presented a number of our ideas to him, including the need to upgrade services on all modes across the city, extend the network, reform the bus network, improve on-street priority for trams and buses and review the current privatisation arrangements.

Dennis Cliche (CEO Yarra Trams)

We met with Yarra Trams in February to discuss developments on the tram system.

One topic raised by us was the poor frequencies on Sunday mornings causing overcrowding and some passengers to be left behind on route 16 to St Kilda. Following our meeting and some local media attention, we have heard Yarra Trams intend to increase the level of services, subject to DOI approval.

We also discussed the next crop of new trams, tram priority, and platform stops including

developments in St Kilda Road and the Toorak Road terminus. While understanding the benefits of platform stops, we made it clear that we do not want to see more stop deletions to achieve it, and that the current Toorak Road design is far from ideal for passengers changing between services.

Metlink

We've met a number of key staffers from Metlink over the last few months, including deputy CEO Anne Randall, who let us know about developments in Metlink's promotion of public transport.

And we've been working with Metlink's people to try and improve the quality of information about the system – helping to correct errors in print, on-system and online, as well as giving our views on their web site (including its response during major incidents).

Think Tram

As an identified stakeholder, PTUA responds to consultation requests regarding infrastructure planning.

We are in continuing discussions with VicRoads over Think Tram, recently we have met with consultants preparing the City of Stonnington Draft Structure Plan for Chapel Street, raised issues with proposals for the Toorak Road terminus, and we were interviewed about our vision for the Domain Interchange. We will keep you informed as plans firm up; look for announcements and comments on our website.

Others

We've also recently met with new Roads minister Tim Pallas, and with the office of Planning Minister Justin Madden.

We'll continue to lobby for the interests of public transport users with the various players in government and industry.

Connex Siemens debacle (Cont'd from page 1)

By mid-February the trains were all back on the rails, though at the time of writing the root problem is still not fixed.

The PTUA is satisfied that the precautions in place (slow speeds into stations with level crossings; booms down earlier; trains run as six cars only) are appropriate to prevent accidents. While the media were keen to talk up the risk, we argued there would be far more risk of injury and death if scores of train services were cancelled each day and we consequently had thousands of more cars on the roads.

Connex's response

Questions remain about Connex's response during the crisis. It should have been apparent as early as November that there would be a severe shortage of trains in the following months. But throughout the period that commuters were suffering in sardine-like conditions due to dozens of daily cancellations, two Comeng trains remained unused, undergoing light maintenance in sidings at Brighton Beach. It's unclear if Connex sought to bring them back into service.



Comeng trains sitting unused at Brighton Beach, 6th February

Connex also found itself unable to make effective use of buses provided by the bus operators. These could have been used most efficiently to substitute for train services at the outer ends of lines, where loads are generally light and the buses wouldn't get caught in inner-city traffic. This would have freed-up trains to concentrate on the crowded inner-ends of the lines. But Connex said they simply couldn't do this. And nor were they able to



equip their staff with information to accurately direct passengers to where the buses were running. In summary, despite the efforts of the bus industry, most of the buses ended up being wasted.

In contrast, Yarra Trams was able to provide extra services to relieve some inner-suburban stations, a move which was well-publicised and appreciated by users.

Aftermath

A lot of residual anger remains among train travellers. With weeks of misery and only (if they are monthly or longer ticketholders) a free Daily ticket as compensation, the question many of Melbourne's commuters are asking is whether Connex deserves to continue to run the train system.

Connex has been unrepentant, claiming that it is not unreasonable to expect cancellations every day:

"It's important for people to understand that cancellations will always occur. Every rail operator in the world has to cancel services at times... and unfortunately we're no different. We're looking at getting to a more realistic daily average of 20 or so, roughly 1 per cent of the trains that are running."
– Andrew Cassidy, Connex spokesperson, MX 12/2/2007

Many passengers would argue that if Connex honestly thinks they can't

do better than that, they should walk away now.

Where to from here?

It's clear that the privatisation of public transport, as it stands now, has failed. The franchise model in particular doesn't work. And what's important now is that the government learn from this. Even if it doesn't want to take the trams and trains back into public hands, it should restructure the contracts to ensure this kind of debacle never happens again, so that tighter control is kept over operations. As happens in many other cities, Connex would lose managerial control, and simply run the trains on a fee-for-service model.

Central control from a strong public transport agency, running the system for the public interest, would avoid the problems of insufficient maintenance being done on the trains; would properly manage the growth and usage of the train fleet as patronage increases; would make sure trams, trains and buses could be properly co-ordinated; and would make sure that Melbourne had a fully integrated public transport system that was ready to tackle the issues of traffic congestion, pollution, climate change and increasing petrol prices.

March fare changes welcomed

Welcome changes to the fare system took place in early March.

The removal of zone 3 represents a big price cut for those in the outer-eastern suburbs, and the cuts to V/Line fares should also be welcomed by regional travellers.

Rationalisation of bus fares is also a plus. Making Metcards valid on the Nightrider buses not only simplifies arrangements, but makes night travel cheaper.

There is a catch however: all tickets, including 2 hour tickets bought after midnight, expire at 3am. This means some Nightrider

users who need to catch multiple buses will end up paying twice.

The other change in bus fares is the removal of National Bus-only section fares. While the PTUA supports this for consistency and simplicity reasons, it does represent a price rise for some users. We'd like to see further reforms so that those National Bus ticket users would be no worse off.

More needs to be done to make public transport fares more competitive with car travel. Further reforms should include:

- enlarging the zone boundary overlap, so relatively short trips

such as Camberwell to Box Hill or Moorabbin to Caulfield are no longer multi-zone trips;

- aligning zone 1 fares with zone 2, which would make more trips cheaper
- in light of the forthcoming smartcard system, consideration of flat fares on trams and buses (except the long-distance Eastern Freeway routes) to avoid expected problems (particularly in peak times) with passengers having to scan-off – a measure London has implemented with their new ticket system

In brief

Expert raises eyebrows

Visiting Canadian expert Gordon Price raised some eyebrows in February when he was quoted in the free MX newspaper praising Melbourne's public transport. It appears the quote was taken directly from one of Gordon's presentations, and was somewhat out of context of his broader comments, that Melbourne's CBD and inner-suburbs have reasonably effective public transport, but that in the middle and outer suburbs, genuine alternatives to car travel are rather more scarce.

East-west study launched

As foreshadowed in last year's Meeting Our Transport Challenges statement, the government has recently launched the East West Needs Assessment. This assessment follows a range of previous studies into travel needs in the area, which have invariably found that a major freeway link from the Eastern Freeway to the Tullamarine freeway is unwarranted and therefore a tremendous misallocation of resources.

Although the government claims to be giving equal consideration to public transport options, the study overview reveals a host of misconceptions about the need to cater for ever-expanding volumes of motor vehicle traffic, and the desirability of doing so given pressures on oil supplies and the global climate.

Public submissions can be made until May 2007. For more information, see

⇒ www.doi.vic.gov.au/eastwest

Suburban branches

South East branch

Although it has been meeting regularly for some time to discuss issues in Melbourne's south east, the PTUA's South East branch has only recently been convened officially. The convenor is June Whitton, who has been busy meeting with locals and getting media attention on issues in the area, including the need for more station staff, and better services.

Outer-East branch

Regular branch meetings have recommenced for the year as we continue to lobby for real transport choice for Melbourne's eastern suburbs.

Residents of Knox, Manningham, Maroondah and the Yarra Ranges are increasingly frustrated by poor public transport particularly amid another round of rising petrol prices.

Priorities for the branch this year include:

- The 48 tram extension to Shoppingtown, which would help spur revitalisation of the Doncaster activity centre
- Continuing to push for a full feasibility study into the Rowville rail line from Huntingdale via Monash University

⇒ www.ptua.org.au/outereast

Peak oil – been and gone?

With climate change going mainstream thanks to Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth*, peak oil has somewhat faded from vogue in the last couple of years. Oil prices seem to have stabilised at \$60 a barrel, which despite being double the \$30 that was regarded as sky-high a decade ago, is now considered fairly cheap.

Production data suggests that peak oil hasn't gone away, though. In the last few years, more and more producers appear to have moved over the top of their production curve, with the production from the second-largest oil field in the world (Cantarell, in Mexico) declining by more than a quarter during 2006. And recent data suggests that the peak has also been and gone for another major producer - Saudi Arabia.

The biggest member of OPEC, Saudi Arabia is coy about its oil reserves and how much it is producing. Production figures reported by OPEC, however, show Saudi production at 9.4 million barrels per day in 2005, trending down through 2006. In January 2007, Saudi production was down to 8.7mb/d. As if this was not enough, the Chairman of the state-owned Kuwait Oil Company said late in 2005 that his company has 'exhausted' the main Kuwaiti oil field.

A few more months of data will be needed to confirm that Saudi Arabia and Kuwait have passed their production peaks. If they have, the world will have as well.

Australian of the Year Tim Flannery suggests that fossil fuels

(particularly coal) are, like asbestos and tobacco, losing their social licence to operate. The fact that some of them will be in short supply as well tells us that reducing our dependence on them is becoming more and more pressing.

Unfortunately, power generation seems to be getting all of the attention in the current climate change debate, with transport emissions being practically ignored.

The PTUA hopes to change this in the lead up to the federal election: governments at all levels need to start preparing now for when oil becomes so expensive most of the population can't afford to drive. If we are not ready, the economic and social costs will be enormous.

Geelong branch news

The Geelong Branch is meeting all newly-elected or re-elected politicians in the region. We are making them aware of the significant public transport issues and presenting them with a five-year plan of suggested initiatives, including a proposal to establish a Geelong Regional Transport authority. This authority would coordinate, manage and publicise public transport services in the Geelong region. At the moment this function is theoretically performed by the South Western Office of the Department of Infrastructure, but it

has proved itself either unable or unwilling to do the job effectively.

The G21 Alliance of five local regional councils has decided that something will have to be done urgently to get action on the Public Transport Strategy which was completed in December 2005. For the last sixteen months the Strategy has become lost inside the DOI, who have the responsibility to actually put the initiatives into action. Despite a number of undertakings, the DOI has not formally endorsed any of the

proposals in the Strategy, let alone implement them.

Lorne has lost one of its two V/Line bus stops due to a roundabout being constructed by VicRoads at the intersection of the Great Ocean Road and Deans Marsh Road.

While discussing this unsatisfactory situation with the DOI South Western office, we were told that more bus stops mean more passengers wanting to board and so buses won't be able to keep to schedule. Sir Humphrey Appleby couldn't possibly better that one!

Letter to the editor: Ticket protest

PTUA member Barbara Hall has written to tell us of her continuing protest against the lack of staff on the public transport system. She has been buying tickets every time she travels, but refusing to validate them:

I decided during the 1990s as ticket machines were introduced, guards on the backs of trains were eliminated and conductors sacked that I would become a conscientious objector to validating my ticket. So that there would be no thinking that I wanted to cheat the system I kept all my tickets and have them now.

Barbara was fined in June for failing to validate. She appealed, and her case went to court on February 26th. The magistrate described her as "community minded", and she was given a one year good behaviour bond. Have any other members been protesting as Barbara has?

PTUA at Sustainable Living Festival

The annual Sustainable Living Festival was held in Federation Square over three very hot days 16th -18th February. This year's festival had a strong transport focus with relevant stalls grouped in a "transport hub" and many of the talks on related topics.

For the first time PTUA had a stall at the Festival, with information on how to make public transport work in Melbourne, the true cost of motoring, why more roads equal more traffic, and drawing the links between unsustainable transport and climate change.

We had two open letters for people to sign. One calls on the Victorian government not to renew Connex's contract, but to re-structure the privatisation to make the system run more effectively. The other calls on the Federal government for better equity in funding public transport against the huge spending and tax incentives for roads and cars.

Our Carbon Conundrum board game was available to engage people to think about where their household carbon impacts come from*. Our "More Trains/ Trams/ Buses = Less Traffic" stickers again proved popular.



If you would like to sign our open letters drop into the PTUA office, or phone us to have copies sent to you to collect more signatures. Stickers are still available –contact us if you would like more.

(*The answer is: substantially from transport.)

PTUA planning weekend

It's a sad fact that even with ten times the resources, the PTUA would still not be able to campaign properly on every issue of concern to sustainable transport advocates. At this year's planning weekend at Commonground near Seymour in January, we identified three strategically important events, around which we will focus our primary campaigns.

'D-day' (decision day) is 30 November, by which time the government must tell Connex and

Yarra Trams whether their franchises will be extended or allowed to expire.

Another significant event is the Federal election due in the second half of the year. While the Federal government is pouring billions into freeways, it is putting nothing into urban public transport.

The third is the East-West Needs Assessment being carried out by Sir Rod Eddington. This is widely understood to be a final gambit by the road lobby to justify a pointless multi-billion dollar extension of the Eastern Freeway through Fitzroy

and Carlton to the Tullamarine Freeway, and the terms of reference do nothing to dispel our concern. Our goal here will be to avoid a repeat of the Cross-City Tunnel debacle in Sydney, and to build on the momentum for public transport alternatives to more freeways.

Of course other issues, including this year's Melbourne 2030 audit, introduction of Smartcards (Myki) and service quality will continue to get our attention, and we encourage members to get involved in our campaigns.

PTUA membership

Joining/renewing made easier

An online joining form is now on the PTUA website making it much easier to renew your membership. Encourage your friends and colleagues to join – we rely entirely on our members for funding which enables us to speak freely and frankly in the interests of public transport users.

⇒ www.ptua.org.au/join/

Cheap Yearly tickets

PTUA offers discounted yearly tickets via Metlink's Commuter Club. The discounted tickets cost less than 10 monthly tickets, so it's a great deal for regular travellers. The calendar year counts from first validation and tickets are refundable pro-rata from Metlink under certain circumstances. With the price rise due in June orders need to be placed and paid for before 10th May 2007 to take advantage of current prices:

- Zone 1 \$960
- Zone 2 \$645
- Zones 1+2 \$1480

This offer is valid with PTUA Bronze (Regular), Silver, Gold or Family/Household memberships.

Order and pay online at www.ptua.org.au/members/offers or email tickets@ptua.org.au or contact the Office.

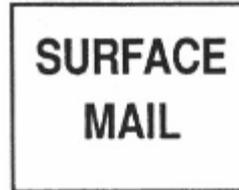
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