



It's official: Myki more expensive than staff

When it was announced in 2005, the Myki smartcard system was said to be costing \$494 million over ten years – an enormous amount of money in anybody's language.

But it's now been revealed that this figure has blown out to around \$1 billion over ten years. The government are now claiming that the original figure did not include running costs.

If this is the case, it's not clear why they kept it quiet until now, almost three years later. Perhaps because they knew that if they proclaimed that the system would cost a billion dollars, there would have been an outcry. It's not as if this billion dollars is being spent on fixing the worst problems of public transport: poor quality services.

Such a huge cost destroys the only rationale for having automated ticketing in the first place: that it's cheaper than having staff check people's tickets. Machines have disadvantages compared to staff, of course. They can't provide assistance to passengers, their presence can't create a safe travelling environment, and when did you last see a ticket machine catch a fare evader?

For some time the PTUA has been pointing out that the net cost of bringing back conductors on most trams and staff at all stations is around \$20 million a year, once the reduction in fare evasion is taken into account. This is a bargain even compared with the initial advertised \$494 million cost of Myki. But the new cost estimate of \$1.13 billion over 10 years exceeds even the gross cost of full staffing - that is, the raw cost of paying the 1200-odd staff that would be required. At a fairly conservative \$70,000 each for salary plus on-costs, this gross cost sits at \$84 million: that is, nearly \$30 million a year less than the bill for smartcards.

The conclusion? Relative to myki, tram conductors and station staff will save us money - even if they



don't collect an extra cent in revenue! This of course blows the cost argument for smartcards out of the water.

What of the convenience aspect? Even with contactless cards, we still don't believe passengers will find it the least bit convenient having to scan *twice* on each vehicle, once when boarding and again when getting off.

If we spend some of that extra \$30 million a year refurbishing the existing Metcard system, we can preserve all the

most convenient aspects of this system (such as the automated gates at major stations, which can check tickets more efficiently than staff), and *additionally* have all the convenience of a staff presence. Tram passengers could ask directions without distracting the driver. People confused about which ticket to buy could get advice from a real person. And fare evasion would reduce markedly, as passengers would face ticket-checks on almost every trip.

It is tempting to ask what planner in their right mind would continue to push the smartcard technology given the attractiveness of the alternative, in terms of both taxpayer value and passenger convenience.

But this presumes that planners are actually guided by considerations of cost and convenience, and not by a deep-seated bureaucratic infatuation with technological gadgetry. Unfortunately the past 20 year history of ticketing 'innovations', from scratch tickets to Metcard to Myki, would suggest otherwise.

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

Branch meetings

Outer East:

Third Tuesday of every month, 7pm
Box Hill Baptist Church
Ellingworth Parade (off Station St)
Box Hill

Geelong:

First Saturday of every month (except Jan), 10:30am
Multimedia Room, Courthouse
Youth Arts Centre
Corner Gheringhap and Little Malop
Streets, Geelong

PTUA at Sustainable Living Festival

The PTUA once again had a stall at the Sustainable Living Festival from February 15th to 17th. Happily for our merry band of stall staffers, the weather was more agreeable than last year, when searing heat kept the crowds away.

Our presence at the festival is a reminder to Melburnians that it's not enough to change lights to efficient bulbs and recycle newspapers. With transport accounting for around half the average household's carbon emissions, public transport and other alternatives to driving are vital for a sustainable future.

This year's stall was shared with the Metropolitan Transport Forum, who continued gathering signatures for their PT4ME2 Doncaster Rail petition.

Thanks to all PTUA members who dropped past the stall to say hello – and to those who helped run it.

⇒ www.slf.org.au/festival

⇒ www.pt4me2.org.au



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Bike ban embarrasses minister: Time for some better advice

Just four years ago, the government relaxed the conditions for carrying bicycles on peak hour trains. Previously you needed to pay a concession fare for the bike (whether going into or out of the city); but as of 2004 the bike could be carried for free. It therefore came as a surprise when the government announced a total ban on carrying bikes on peak hour trains in the peak direction, effective 1 January.

'Announced' may be the wrong word. In fact word leaked out from some V/Line staff to the general public, with the PTUA getting wind of this and ensuring it got coverage in the media.

Apparently, the government didn't want to announce the ban at all – they expected people to just discover it with the release of the new *Fares and Ticketing Manual* for 2008. According to some reports, not even train operator Connex was informed of the ban prior to it coming into effect.

An outright ban is a blunt instrument: it provides absolutely no flexibility where someone depends on a bike at both ends of their train journey, and where a particular train isn't so crowded. And it came as just the wrong Christmas message from a government that wants to encourage the use of bikes as sustainable transport.

That much was clear from the many angry letters to papers and statements from community leaders following the announcements. The ban was going to force some people to hang up their bikes and drive cars instead - a positively retrograde outcome.

In the weeks that followed, the PTUA joined with cycling activists to oppose the ban. It has long been PTUA policy that bicycles be allowed on trains at all times, even if subject to restrictions in peak hour. And there is no evidence of a

rush by cyclists to occupy peak hour trains en masse. On the other hand, we are aware of cases where people depend on being able to do so. In some cases there simply is no alternative transport at the destination - this is a particular problem in regional Victoria.



The opposition culminated in protest actions at Castlemaine and Bendigo on 23 January, when local activists turned up at railway stations with cardboard bikes.

The day before the action, Transport Minister Lynne Kosky confessed to having been 'misinformed' by her bureaucracy about the process. Apparently the Minister was advised that there had been extensive consultation that found strong support for banning bikes in peak hour: in reality, there had been limited discussions with one cycling group.

To her credit, Minister Kosky acted: she suspended the ban and announced a full review. Perhaps this is the start of a welcome new responsiveness to public input in transport planning.

As part of the Ministerial review, key campaigners were invited to put their position directly to the Minister, and the PTUA has restated our own policy. This can be found on our website, but the main points are:

- No outright ban on bikes in peak hour. Appropriate measures may be used to discourage bikes on crowded services without resorting to a blanket ban.

- Bikes should continue to be permitted free of charge at non-peak times, and in the counter-peak direction.

- Rolling stock needs to cater for those who have a need to carry bulky items; this includes bicycles but also prams, luggage and wheelchairs. Provision for bulky items on replacement bus services also needs greater consideration.

- Folding bikes should be subject to no restrictions. However, the availability of folding bikes should not be used as a justification for increasing restrictions on conventional bikes.

- Ample, secure and sheltered bicycle parking should be provided at all railway stations. Rollout of free bike lockers should continue, though secure cages may be considered as an alternative if they genuinely present no increased risk of theft. Procedures for access to lockers must be simple and clearly communicated to staff.

- A voluntary reservation system should apply to V/Line trains to ensure those travelling to a specific schedule can be accommodated.

On Friday 15th February the government announced the ban had been lifted. They recommend cyclists use the rear carriage of trains, and specifically avoid the front where wheelchairs are loaded.

This is a win for both the PTUA and cycling groups. While it was the PTUA who raised it originally with the media, it was the cycling community (in particular the Bin The Bike Ban campaign) who kept the issue alive over the following weeks, kept up the pressure and ensured that the government backed down.

⇒ www.binthebikeban.org

Focus on traffic congestion – but what is the fix?

The PTUA was among a number of groups represented at a roundtable discussion hosted by Premier John Brumby at Treasury Place on January 22nd. While we've been asked not to talk about the specifics, it's no secret that the discussion was based around short to medium-term measures to help solve traffic congestion.

While undoubtedly we need more trams, trains and buses, short-term measures could include better traffic priority for trams and buses – to get more out of the fleet – a revamp of train timetables, and on all modes, running more services in off-peak and peak shoulder periods, giving more people the option of travelling outside peak hours, without penalising them with long waiting times.

It's not clear yet what the government will do as a result of the discussions, but it's encouraging to know they are looking at all the options, and we certainly hope that they realise the best way to relieve traffic congestion is to get cars off the road, and the best way to get cars off the road is to give more people better alternatives to driving.

Some call for still more roads

On the same day as the Premier's powwow, the RACV was out talking up freeway projects to the media: specifically the city end of the Eastern Freeway (eg the East-West cross-city road link) and the "missing link" through Melbourne's northeast green wedge.

With Eastlink nearing completion, this latter road is being now described by the roads lobby as "completion of Melbourne's ring road", which almost makes it sound like if this was built, they'd never want any more freeways ever again.

Except of course there are plenty of other proposed freeways to build after that, many of which still have reservations ready and waiting,



including the Frankston freeway, Dingley freeway (neatly connecting existing quasi-freeways such as the South Road and Westall Road extensions and the Dandenong Southern bypass), Mornington Peninsula freeway, Healesville freeway, and the E14 (from Broadmeadows to Craigieburn).

And those are just the ones already in the Melway – who knows how many more are sitting in the bottom drawer at Vicroads, or, like the outer western ring road reported by the Sunday Age on February 17th, are still at the design stage.

There are also any number of long-term Vicroads plans to widen existing roads, including bulldozing dozens of houses in the Prahran area to widen Punt Road.

Each of these projects uses up billions of dollars worth of transport funding – for example, the cost of the Monash widening, at over \$1 billion, could pay for rail lines to Doncaster and Rowville.

These projects also directly undermine public transport and lead to increased traffic by making it easier to drive.

And each project moves us closer to being a city dominated by motorways (though given Melbourne already has more roads per person than many other cities, perhaps we're already there).

Broken promises

Many will remember that Citylink was meant to provide trouble-free motoring, with bold predictions of shortened travel times.

The figures below for trips on Citylink in the morning peak hour were predicted in 1998, before the tollway opened:

- Springvale/Ferntree Gully Roads to Docklands 20 minutes
- Dandenong to Port Melbourne 28 minutes
- Toorak to Melbourne Airport 23 minutes
- Pascoe Vale Road to City 13 minutes

(Source: Citylink, published in The Age 16 November 1998)

⇒ Continued next page

Focus on traffic congestion – but what is the fix? (Continued)

And these predictions from 1999, also for morning peak hour via CityLink:

- Oakleigh to City 13 minutes
- Gladstone Park to City 26 minutes
- Dandenong to Melbourne Airport 39 minutes

(Source: RACV, published in The Age, 27 May 1999)

Show any Melburnian (particularly a motorist) these predictions today and they'll quite rightly laugh in your face.

These predictions might have been accurate... if the opening of the road had not resulted in any extra cars. But as we know, major road

upgrades always *do* result in more traffic.

And just like Citylink before them, the motorways recently opened and now under construction or being widened – Eastlink, the Deer Park Bypass, the Pakenham Bypass and the Monash – are all doomed to congestion as more cars pour onto them every year. To continue large-scale road building is to throw good money after bad.

Calling RACV members

While the RACV makes positive noises about supporting public transport in their *Royal Auto* magazine, their advocacy where it counts – to the media and to the state's powerbrokers – is all about roads.

Many members of the RACV join up purely for the road service, and don't really want their member funds going towards advocacy for new freeways. We'd urge all such members – and we know that includes a number of PTUA members – to consider where their money goes to, and to consider alternatives.

The answer

Ultimately, fifty years of building freeways has proven that the answer to traffic congestion isn't more roads. The best way of fixing traffic congestion is to give more people a viable, time-competitive alternative to driving.

Geelong branch report

In early December, Tim Petersen and Paul Westcott met the Mayor of Geelong, Bruce Harwood, to discuss Geelong's public transport problems, particularly the opposition from elements within the council to the return of an effective bus interchange to the central city.

They argued strongly that the City of Greater Geelong had to become a much more active advocate for improvements in the region's public transport, and noted some basic actions which could be taken.

The message seemed to have got through, although only in a crude sort of way, because at the Council meeting the next evening the Mayor got a lot of publicity by blasting Geelong's bus system as "rubbish".

Unfortunately, despite the suggestions raised at the previous day's meeting, he didn't outline any real ideas for improvement. It seems that more comprehensive education will be needed.

The Branch has worked with the local bicycle users group to oppose

the ban on carrying bikes on peak hour V/Line trains.

The ban was all the more flawed in the case of country trains because the morning peak for V/Line is defined as any train arriving in Melbourne before 9am. Therefore the policy entailed a ban bicycles on the seven V/Line trains which arrive in Melbourne before 7am.

⇒ www.ptua.org.au/geelong

In brief

Outer east branch

Over the summer, the branch has been busy raising issues such as Rowville rail, the need for upgraded train services, bus priority and the lack of toilets at Box Hill station. Improved train frequencies and ensuring a good outcome from bus reviews are among the higher priorities for 2008. The branch has a new meeting venue – details on

page 2 – and the next meeting is on Tuesday, March the 18th.

North Melbourne shuttle

The new North Melbourne to University shuttle bus service will start operating soon. This will be a limited-stops route designed to provide commuters from the north and west with a faster way to the university and hospital district than

going via the City Loop and changing onto a tram.

It's hoped this route will relieve pressure on the northern loop trains at North Melbourne. Buses will run from 7am to 7pm, every three minutes in peak hour, every six minutes outside peak. We will watch this development with interest.

PTUA launches governance paper

‘Good governance’ of public transport systems means having the appropriate organisations with the necessary powers, skills and responsibilities to deliver services that compete effectively with the private car option.

The PTUA has campaigned strongly on this issue. Specifically, we maintain that the current ‘net cost franchised’ (or in plain language, ‘privatised’) arrangements for public transport are failing the public interest.

The way public transport is managed fosters a culture of buck-passing, ad hoc priorities and a lack of concern for passenger needs, which can lead to a dysfunctional travelling experience.

We have now published a position paper which sets out in detail our diagnosis of the problem, and our recommended solution, based on

international expertise and experience.

The PTUA’s proposal is that the current mish-mash of departmental agencies and divisions be largely replaced with a new independent transport authority. This would have a mandate to turn our confusing array of train, tram and bus services into a coordinated network that is managed according to the needs of passengers – giving priority to questions such as travel time, coverage, traffic priority and cost recovery. With this in place, it no longer becomes necessary to fight the system in order to get real improvements to public transport: the system would lobby for them of its own accord.

Other Australian cities are already moving toward this model. Perth has had such an authority since

2003; Brisbane is to establish one this year.

Even in Sydney, where the ‘culture of failure’ is even more evident than in Melbourne, the State Opposition has identified such reform as a key plank of its transport policy.

In the paper, we have outlined and responded in detail to the main ‘urban myths’ surrounding our public transport management: that the huge increase in subsidies to private operators is justified by service improvements; that the current arrangements leave the government in charge and are therefore already putting the passenger first; that it's all a matter of petty distinctions in contract wording; and that our public transport is actually the best in the world.

⇒ ptua.org.au/campaigns/govern

Federal budget

Australia's peak public transport advocacy groups, including the PTUA, recently made a joint federal budget submission calling for national investment in public transport.

The submission calls for a national ‘Cutting through Congestion’ program to expand urban rail networks and provide road priority for buses and trams so that more people can leave their cars at home and free up road space for those that need it.

The submission also calls for greater investment in the national rail network so that more freight can be shifted by rail and intercity passenger services can regain some of their market share that has been lost to the rapid growth in air travel which is one of the fastest growing greenhouse gas sources.

The submission notes that many billions of taxpayer dollars are given away each year in the form of fuel tax credits and rebates, and that Fringe Benefits Tax rules encourage

additional motor vehicle use. Reforms to these perverse subsidies would provide both environmental and economic benefits, so should be a priority for the new Treasurer.

The federal budget will be handed down in May, so you are encouraged to contact your federal MP soon and urge them to back federal investment in public transport and rail freight..

⇒ ptua.org.au/campaigns/federal

‘Obey the yellow’ campaign on the right track

The government and Yarra Trams have launched a campaign called “Obey the Yellow”, which seeks to remind motorists of the laws around tram lanes.

Regular tram users know it's only too common for their tram to come to a halt, bell dinging, because a car

is illegally blocking the tracks. We are hopeful that education, accompanied by enforcement of the laws, will reduce the number of delays due to errant cars venturing into tram lanes.

For the smooth running of the tram network, it is vital that tram lanes

are observed, and where appropriate, their use broadened.

Trams carrying dozens or even hundreds of people should not be impeded by mostly single occupant motor vehicles.

⇒ www.thinktram.vic.gov.au

Five borrowed French trams on the way

In February the government announced the leasing of five trams from Mulhouse, France. Mulhouse is undergoing an expansion of its tram system, but construction is running late, and the five trams are not currently needed.

These trams will be placed on route 96, notorious for its peak-hour overcrowding (and the subject in 2003 of a PTUA campaign featuring sardines and commuters bringing their own seats).

The trams will eventually return to France, but it is expected by that time that our own fleet's next batch of new trams will be arriving to permanently expand capacity.

In the mean time, there is more the government can do: tram priority, if implemented properly, can not only speed trams through intersections and reduce delays, but would also mean that our existing tram fleet could run more frequent services, thus relieving overcrowding.

As a PTUA study last September revealed, trams spend up to a third of their time sitting, waiting at traffic lights. Active traffic light priority, which detects approaching trams and switches traffic lights to green (or holds them at green for the tram to pass) would help us make the most of our trams and tram drivers.

⇒ www.ptua.org.au/2007/09/27

Level crossings: More work (and education) needed

A spate of level crossing accidents recently – many of them fatal – has underscored the need for more to be done in this area.

Despite a new campaign reminding motorists to slow down and take care on crossings, many continue to ignore warning signs and flashing lights, with deaths recently on the Stony Point line and near Bendigo.



Herald Sun, 14th February

The rules are clear: trains have absolute priority over road traffic.

But no matter who is responsible for a car/train accident, the education of motorists and the upgrading of crossings should continue to make them as safe as possible.

Rumble strips, better signage, lights and booms should continue to be rolled out, along with grade separation at metropolitan locations and busy rural crossings. And there

should be reviews of visibility at crossings, to ensure motorists can see trains approaching, unimpeded by obstructions or sun glare.

Recent level crossing incidents have included:

- 4th January, Oak Park – train crashes into broken-down van
- 16th January, Red Cliffs (near Mildura) – freight train crashes into B-double truck
- 31st January, Dingee (near Bendigo) – motorist killed
- 28th January, Tyabb – motorist killed
- 8th February, Baxter – car crashes into train, then drives off
- 11th February, Ingleton (near Ballan) – freight train hits car parked too close to track
- 11th February, Glen Huntly – car drives through lowered boom barrier, smashing it, then drives off

Kerang report released

The report into last year's Kerang tragedy was released in mid-February. It makes a number of

sensible recommendations, including reducing the speed limit for motor vehicles over level crossings, investigating possible improvements to enhance the crashworthiness of train carriages, and some minor changes to V/Line's emergency procedures and equipment on board trains.

The safety regulator appears to have conducted a thorough and competent investigation of the incident and identified all the contributing factors. The report recognises that ultimately road users need to stay alert and pay attention when approaching a level crossing.

Motorists can never assume that a train isn't coming – they need to slow down and look, just like they have to do at every roundabout and every stop sign.

If there is anything missing from the report, it's a more explicit recognition that motorists failing to give way at crossings is illegal and extremely dangerous, and that more rigorous enforcement is needed.

But it's pleasing that the government has accepted the recommendations which should help prevent more accidents.

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