

Funded: South Morang rail, Sunbury electrification, Tarneit/Regional link – but at what cost?



The State and Federal budgets in May have brought billions of dollars in funding for rail projects across Melbourne.

First the State budget, handed down on 2nd of May, which saw the ten-year-old Labor promise to extend the Epping line to South Morang finally fulfilled. With it came a massive \$562 million price-tag, some five times the per-kilometre cost of the Craigieburn electrification which opened just eighteen months ago, and some fifteen times the cost of Perth’s Mandurah line, which opened shortly afterwards.

The electrification to Sunbury has also gained funding. This has caused some controversy in Sunbury itself, where some locals are keen to protect the amenity of their current V/Line service. This of course is understandable, but the conversion to suburban trains will result in much more frequent services (around three times the present number) and only a marginal difference in travel times.

The State budget also included confirmation that another 20 suburban trains (on-top of the 18 already on order) would be funded. The first of the new trains arrives late this year, and they will continue to be delivered through 2010, many of them on the tracks in time for the state election.

The Federal budget on 12th of May brought more funding – including the first Commonwealth funding of urban public transport in more than a decade – in the form of \$3.2 billion for the Regional Rail Express project, the rail line which would see Geelong trains divert through new suburbs around

Tarneit, joining Ballarat and Bendigo trains on dedicated tracks into Southern Cross.

Of course it makes sense to separate express V/Line trains and metropolitan trains like this. It allows both services to run more frequently and more reliably.

But there are question-marks over the route. It appears to skirt the edge of the urban growth boundary, rather than serving new suburbs effectively with centrally located stations. Geelong passengers are not expected to save any time, particularly if their trains have to share the track with other slower trains serving Tarneit. And of course there’s the \$4 billion total cost, for a line half of which runs through currently empty fields.

These concerns aside, the Federal government are to be congratulated for finally providing a substantial amount of funding into urban public transport infrastructure – not just in Victoria but around the country. It makes big change from the many billions of dollars poured into motorways in the last fifteen years.

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Keeping in touch...

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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. Members can also view archived newsletters online:

www.ptua.org.au/members/resources

Committee

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Branch convenors:

Paul Westcott – Geelong
Jeremy Lunn – Outer East

Committee members can be emailed using the format:
firstname.lastname@ptua.org.au

Member meetings

Melbourne:

Second Monday of every month, 6pm
Ross House, 247 Flinders Lane
(Note date change: 15th of June)

Outer East:

Third Tuesday of every month, 7pm
“The Barn” (behind Box Hill Baptist Church)
3 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

Coming events

Member meetings

Come and discuss public transport issues, and how you can help get them fixed, with the PTUA committee and with other members.

Where: Ross House, 247 Flinders Lane, Melbourne

When: 6pm, Monday 8th 15th of June (and planned to be regularly on the second Monday of each month)

Note: You must be a current PTUA member to attend these meetings.

More events

For more events related to sustainable transport, check the event calendar at:

⇒ www.ptua.org.au/about/calendar

Watching over the fleet



In March, PTUA President Daniel Bowen and Treasurer Kerryn Wilmot got a tour around the Yarra Trams Fleet Operations Centre, which is used to monitor trams and traffic around Melbourne. Unfortunately the staff have limited influence over traffic light systems, though they are able to communicate directly with VicRoads staff.

Copy deadline for the next PTUA news is 30th June 2008

Newsletter contributors: Daniel Bowen, Tony Morton, Paul Westcott.

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Parliamentary Select Committee on Train Services

The PTUA will be making a submission into the inquiry on train services, which will focus on the large numbers of cancellations and line suspensions last summer, but will also look more broadly at problems on both the suburban and regional networks.

The problems that plague our train services ultimately stem from management shortcomings and a failure-oriented culture in public transport in Victoria, and our submission will be pointing this out.

Other specific issues we will note in our submission include:

- track buckling, and the concrete sleeper programme (which won't be finished for some 15 years)
- train fleet shortcomings, including the failure of Comeng train air-conditioning in hot weather
- maintenance practices
- the poor quality of alternative routes, such as cross-town bus services between lines

- inadequate peak services, leading to crowding and a bigger impact from cancellations
- infrequent off-peak services, which discourage people from moving their trips outside peak
- operating patterns, and the inefficient use of infrastructure

Concerned train users are encouraged to make a submission. There are more details on the web site below.

⇒ www.parliament.vic.gov.au/council/trainservices

Senate inquiry probes Federal funding

On March 30th PTUA President Daniel Bowen and Secretary Tony Morton appeared before the Senate's *Inquiry into the investment of Commonwealth and State funds in public passenger transport infrastructure and services* hearing in Melbourne.

The PTUA was there to highlight some of the shortcomings of Melbourne's public transport, and where the Commonwealth might assist by funding public transport infrastructure, as well as other issues such as the reform of Fringe Benefits Tax, which costs billions each year while encouraging people to drive.

The Commonwealth has also funded billions in road infrastructure in the past decade, with rail funding generally limited to freight – at least until this year's budget funding of the Regional Rail Express project.

The senators in attendance – three from Western Australia, one from New South Wales – showed a good understanding of the issues involved. And unlike some visitors to Melbourne with an interest in public transport, they realised that just because trams arrive every minute or two on Collins Street, and an MCG crowd is cleared quickly by train services, doesn't mean that

high-quality services are offered throughout the city and its suburbs.

We noted that a simple inner-suburban cross-town trip from Collingwood to Carlton could easily see a passenger waiting half-an-hour for a bus, and that while provision for special events often works well for clearing crowds from venues, people often have long waits ahead of them if they have to transfer to another service to get home.

The transcript from the hearing is online, and can be viewed at:

⇒ www.aph.gov.au/Senate/committee/rrat_ctte/public_transport

South Morang not far enough

While it's pleasing to see the South Morang project get funding in this year's state budget, there is widespread concern about the cost. Coming out at \$562 million (down slightly from the "more than \$650 million" quoted in last December's *Victorian Transport Plan*, but only because the earlier cost included some operating expenses) the initial reaction of many is to assume that the extension will have gold-plated tracks.

As we noted in our December newsletter, this is significantly higher than other recent rail projects, even by Victorian standards, where a single station can cost \$33 million (Coolaroo) and a relatively simple grade-separation costs \$50 million (Taylors Road, St Albans).

The line also, of course, doesn't go far enough. Extending to South Morang might have been sufficient ten years ago when it was first promised by Labor. But urban

growth has continued, and by 2014 when the line opens, thousands of residents will have moved into areas further north, right up to Mernda and the Laurimar Estate in Doreen.

This virtually guarantees the South Morang station car-park will be full from day one, doing nothing to relieve traffic on Plenty Road, and ensuring that the rail service is unusable after morning peak hour for most residents beyond walking distance of the station.

Connex trials modified train

In mid-April Connex had a public display of its test train layout. The test carriages are three cars of a Comeng train - you can see some pictures here.

The PTUA's view is that the current design of most carriages on the Melbourne train network is inefficient for peak hour usage.

Standing passengers naturally gravitate around the doorways where it's easier to hold on, slowing down boarding and alighting ("dwell times"), which impacts service punctuality and reduces the number of trains that can run on the available track capacity.

This re-design removes a moderate number of seats (roughly 15 in each carriage) but still leaves plenty of places to sit, as well as more handholds further into the carriage which should encourage standing passengers to move away from the doorways.

Ideally no seats would be removed, but it has to be recognised that during peak times, most passengers don't get to sit anyway, and the bigger problem is that at some stations, people have real difficulty in even boarding.

We are concerned that trying to keep the space behind drivers' doors clear won't work. Drivers rarely have to exit their cabs this way, and under crowded conditions, passengers are unlikely to stay clear of this area.

And there will be an impact outside peak hours, with less people able to get seats. Boosting services (for example to every ten minutes) would counter this, as well as cutting waiting times outside peak hours.



More photos, and a video are on our web site:

⇒ www.ptua.org.au/2009/04/23/connex-demo-train

Members are encouraged to give their feedback.

In the shorter-term, Connex is also introducing more hand holds on about half the Comeng fleet (the former M>Train sets). These will be installed in doorways, and will be completed by June.

Flags for Footscray

For April Fool's Day, *The Age's* Diary page published a PTUA proposal to relocate the flags atop the Westgate Bridge over to Footscray Station, in recognition that more people come through Footscray on trains in peak hour than cross the bridge.

While we don't really think the flags should be located, there's an important message here: even the most expensive pieces of motorway infrastructure are in no way as efficient as high capacity rail lines.

A single rail line, even in Melbourne (which is not exactly the model of efficient rail infrastructure) can carry 20 trains an hour -- even at the "desirable" level of 798 passengers per train, this is almost 16,000 people.

In contrast a lane of motorway can carry only about 2000 cars an hour, or 2,260 people based on the current peak-hour level of vehicle occupancy of 1.13.

(The actual estimated figures show the two suburban lines through



Footscray Station carrying about 20% more people in peak hour than the Westgate freeway's 8 lanes.)

Right around Melbourne, the train network in peak hour is carrying more people than the adjacent freeways.

⇒ www.ptua.org.au/2009/04/01/station-gateway-flags/

Northeast standard gauge project welcomed

Last year, as the PTUA had been advocating, the state government leased the deteriorating broad gauge line from Seymour to Albury to the federal Australian Rail Track Corporation for upgrading and conversion to standard gauge.

The ARTC has basically finished the conversion from Seymour to Wodonga after almost exactly four months work; an impressive rate of progress, especially considering that the project included a total re-sleepering in concrete. Trains will be running on the newly-converted line in a few months. After that, the existing standard gauge line, which was opened in 1962, will be extensively upgraded.

From Wodonga to Albury the line will run on a new by-pass line which is under construction. It will be double-tracked, the specification having been changed from single track a few months ago.

Unfortunately this by-pass will mean that the formerly centrally-located Wodonga station will be replaced by one on the outskirts of the city.

Once all work is completed, there will be a high-quality double track standard gauge line from Seymour to Albury. From Seymour south to Melbourne, the standard gauge line will remain a single track, but long "passing lanes" are being installed at Kilmore East, Tallarook and

Donnybrook to allow trains to pass without stopping.

A northern extension of V/Line train services to and from Wagga has already been the subject of discussion between V/Line and NSW operator Countrylink. We understand that agreement has been reached for that to occur.

The branch line from Benalla to Oaklands, which would have been isolated by the gauge conversion, will also be converted to standard gauge. Work has now started on that project.

Geelong: buses to be upgraded

Bus route reform on the way

The local Department of Transport tells us that the new bus route structure for Geelong is to be introduced in two stages. The first one, involving all routes in East Belmont, Grovedale, Waurin Ponds, Whittington, St Albans & Breakwater, will commence in August this year, with the remaining routes to be changed in March 2010. Clearly, the new

central interchange won't be completed by the time Stage 1 is introduced, so we need to clarify exactly what will happen at first.

The Branch is apparently going to be included in a reference group for the design of the interchange.

Successful forum

PTUA member Jan Testro recently organised a very successful forum at Barwon Heads to discuss PT on the Bellarine Peninsula.

The huge effort she made certainly paid off, with about 60 people, including the local city councillor, attending the event on a sunny Saturday afternoon. Jan has provided a summary of the outcomes to the DoT office in Geelong who have undertaken to make use of them in future planning.

⇒ www.ptua.org.au/geelong

Multi-million dollar Myki rolls on

Geelong

Without any warning, the Myki ticketing system was introduced on all urban Geelong bus routes on Monday 2nd March. Clearly, Kamco and the Transport Ticketing Authority were very wary of building up any anticipation in case of problems.

Nevertheless, we discovered that the TTA had paid a large printing and distribution firm to deliver explanatory brochures to households "near bus routes" but none of them had been sighted. The Branch surveyed our local members to help the TTA find out what had happened. We are told the TTA has now "come to an agreement" with the firm (which recently went into receivership), and still no-one has seen any of the brochures.

Myki was the source of many complaints and problems in the early days. It was hard to judge which of these were teething problems and which were likely to be on-going. TTA CEO Gary Thwaites got in touch with the Branch asking for direct feedback, and we also had discussions with the Department of Transport's ticketing policy supremo.

While Geelong bus passengers are becoming used to Myki and its quirks, it is still annoying in many

ways. The biggest problem continues to be the length of time it takes for the card readers to respond – something which will have grave consequences for Melbourne's much busier system if not fixed.

Another one is the similarity of the successful and unsuccessful acknowledging beep, as is the regular breakdown of all or part of the on-bus systems.

The lack of any information, when using either the ongoing or short-term Myki, about when the two-hour cap will expire is a clear reduction in the conditions formerly enjoyed by local PT user. Bus drivers have been unhappy about many of their experiences with the new system. Due to their concerns about the ergonomics of the driver's console, they are giving short term Mykis to passengers and indicating where they have to be scanned on, rather than doing it themselves.

More cities

At the time of writing, Myki has also been introduced in Ballarat and Seymour.

This has resulted in a new problem being found – despite the system's



aims to eventually work in most (but not all) regional cities across Victoria, one user found that his ticket was rendered inoperative after attempting to use it in both Geelong and Ballarat!

Promotional wristbands – wasted money?

One notable find during the initial rollout in Geelong were wristbands – commonly used to promote causes such as "Make Poverty History" – freely available, which have such memorable slogans as "Scan on, scan off" as well as the Myki web site address.

While we are prepared to be proven wrong, it is very difficult to imagine the younger generation getting enthused enough about a new ticketing system that they would wear these.

Connecting to the Future: Our transport alternative

The PTUA's alternative to the Victorian Transport Plan, *Connecting to the Future*, has now arrived. The document, which sets out our analysis of Victoria's transport woes and our 'best practice' solution, is available for free download from the PTUA website.

Central to our current transport problems, and fundamental to the solution, is the way we currently mismanage transport planning in Victoria. Our current privatised and bureaucratised arrangements continually put forward the wrong solutions in service of the wrong interests, and ensure that the one group of people left out of decision making, blamed for the problems and disadvantaged by the solutions are the passengers themselves.

This is the complete opposite to the way public transport is planned and managed in those parts of the world that have worked out how to do public transport right. Public transport in those cities and regions is fast, frequent, clean, reliable, safe and cheap: ours is by and large slow, infrequent, dirty, late, expensive, and increasingly unsafe after dark. And if we let the government continue with business as usual, it will get no better.

The *Connecting to the Future* report outlines the dimensions of the transport crisis: the obsession with building motorways that don't cure traffic congestion, the threat of climate change, the peaking of global oil supplies, and the wasting of capacity in the train system. It explains how transport managers have disguised the absence of solutions with urban myths and spin, and led us down one blind alley after another, to ensure that nothing changes.

But the government can lift us out of the crisis tomorrow, as the WA

Government did in the 1980s, by bringing new talent into the transport portfolio and building a planning culture that puts the passenger first. We might then hope for more real changes on the ground:

- Train, tram and main road bus services every 10 minutes throughout Melbourne.
- Suburban rail extensions to Rowville, Doncaster, Clyde, Mernda, Tarneit and the Airport.
- Rail improvements and tram extensions to give a solid 'backbone' to the transport network.
- Restoration of more country rail lines.
- Frequent bus services in and between our regional towns.
- Return of tram conductors and station staff, and a ticketing system that works.
- Greater focus and proper funding for walking and cycling initiatives.
- Real action to shift freight from road to rail where possible.
- Redirection of road freight to existing motorways with carrots (priority lanes) and sticks (truck bans on more urban roads).
- Targeted road network improvements that avoid generating more traffic.
- Greater community control over urban planning, following the example of Vancouver.

In total, our proposed package of infrastructure measures has an estimated cost of \$16 billion (using costings from Perth's recent rail projects), compared with \$38 billion for the Victorian Transport Plan. With a reduced emphasis on new

CONNECTING TO THE FUTURE



The Alternative to the Victorian Transport Plan



PTUA
Public Transport Users Association

roads and greater patronage on public transport around the clock, the recurrent budget for transport need be no greater than it is now.

You can help bring this vision about by seeking more information, making your voice heard in the media and directly to politicians, and by joining one of the many local community campaigns. Public transport, and the way it's managed, is set to be one of the big election issues next year, and real change can happen if we keep demanding real solutions rather than spin.

You can read the report on our web site, or request a paper copy from the PTUA office. A fee of \$5 for members (\$10 for non members) is charged for paper copies to cover the cost of printing and postage.

⇒ www.ptua.org.au/publications/connecting

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Inside:

- Rail to South Morang, Tarneit, Sunbury funded
 - Government inquiries get under way
- Connecting to the Future document now available

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