

Connex and Yarra Trams cancelled – but will it make a difference?

The long-awaited announcement on the future of Melbourne's trams and trains finally came on June 25th, with both Connex and Yarra Trams (or to be precise, TransdevTSL) dumped.

Connex's ousting came as no surprise. With increasing public disquiet, the government had to be seen to be acting on the myriad of problems the train system has had over the past few years.

But the removal of Yarra Trams came as a shock, not just to observers who noted the company had managed to avoid the criticisms heaped on Connex, but also to the operator, who said they were "shocked and disappointed" in a statement.

The new train operator will be Metro Trains Melbourne, a joint venture between Hong Kong's MTR Corporation, John Holland, and United Group. The trams will be run by Keolis Downer EDI, headed up by French company Keolis.

For the government, it's a clean sweep. But are the travelling public so easily fooled?

The debate has changed. While a year or two ago, Connex in particular was widely blamed by commuters for the woes on the public transport network, most realise now that it's the government that is responsible. Issues with lack of trams and trains, unreliable signalling, track problems (particularly in the heat) and a lack of network planning are all down to government inaction, and any operator is severely limited in their influence over these things.



The operator can only play with the cards they're given. If the fleet and the infrastructure are not up to scratch, there's nothing they can do. If the station carparks are packed because nobody's making sure the buses are timed to meet the trains and trams to give the city a cohesive overall public transport network, there's nothing they can do.

The government has made noises about taking up the task of tactical planning, but we are yet to see firm evidence that this will happen in any meaningful way.

Some commuters have hailed MTM as a saviour, noting MTR's enviable reliability record. But most must surely realise that the Hong Kong network is completely different from Melbourne's, being just 30 years old, and built specifically as a mass transit railway ("MTR") with no level crossings, few junctions, a fleet of high-capacity trains and none of the single-track sections that play havoc with punctuality and reliability here.

The writing is on the wall. The underlying issues of inadequate tram and train fleets which drive overcrowding, the infrastructure failures which cause cancellations and the lack of centralised planning and management which has given us a fractured network have all got to be solved.

Some of Melbourne's trams and trains have seen four different sets of colour schemes and logos over the last decade. If another set of logos are all that Melbourne's public transport users see in the next twelve months, while the problems continue, the government will surely feel an impact at the ballot boxes in November 2010.

Keeping in touch...

PTUA office

Ross House,
247 Flinders Lane, Melbourne
Telephone (03) 9650 7898
e-mail: office@ptua.org.au

Membership Enquiries

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

Daniel Bowen – President
Tim Petersen – Vice President
Anthony Morton – Secretary
Kerryn Wilmot – Treasurer

Myles Green
Mark Johnson
Jason King
Tim Long
Rob Meredith
Bronwen Merner
Fiona Rae
David Robertson
Vaughan Williams

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 (see below for details)

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: Second Monday of each month, 6pm to 7:30pm

- August 10th
- September 14th
- October 12th
- November 9th – Annual General Meeting
- December 14th – Christmas gathering

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

Details of Outer East and Geelong branch meetings are above.

More events

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

⇒ www.ptua.org.au/about/calendar

Train Services inquiry heats up

The inquiry heated up last week with the Department of Transport and Connex called to give evidence.

Connex’s submission had confirmed what was already widely known – that the Comeng air-

conditioning problems which caused havoc last summer had been known in advance, but that the government did not make upgrading them a condition of the train operator’s contract.

Submissions and (in due course) hearing transcripts will be on the web site:

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

Copy deadline for the next PTUA news is 15th September 2009

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

Printed on recycled paper by Flash Print, Collingwood. Our thanks to Margaret Pullar and the dedicated mailout team.

After eight years, Daniel Bowen is handing over the newsletter editor’s baton to Tony Morton, who will from next edition face the challenges of cramming all these words into seven pages and getting it all to the printers on time.

CBD tram changes expose fleet shortage

Recent works in Spring Street have installed new points to allow tram 48 to be routed via Collins Street into Docklands from September.

While it makes sense to push trams further into Docklands as the area is developed, and the infrastructure changes will enable Flinders Street trams to divert in the case of disruption, this change is likely to have other consequences:

- it will split the frequent (and thus popular) City to Bridge Road services (48 and 75) across two different city streets;
- junctions on Collins Street (eastbound) and Wellington Parade (westbound) are likely to lead to delays as route 48 trams wait to turn;

- there will be no stop on route 48 between Collins/Spring Streets and Lansdowne Street; and
- some passengers may be confused by the additional complexity added to the network (no longer will it be possible to catch any eastbound Collins Street tram to St Vincent's, for example).

On the plus side, the 48 will provide a useful link for passengers from the Clifton Hill rail lines heading to Parliament in the morning, helping them avoid going all the way around the loop.

Overall though our view is that it would have made more sense to split route 112 back into its two

halves, running route 12 from St Kilda to the City, and route 11 from West Preston to Docklands. This would also have allowed the use of larger capacity trams on the busier West Preston half of the route.

The PTUA understands that this was considered, but that with passenger growth across the network, there is now a lack of trams available in peak hour, which precludes this option.

Instead we've ended up with a solution that has not only required expensive trackworks, but also appears to be providing a less than optimum solution for passengers.

Every ten minutes to... Werribee

From time to time the government spin machine refers to Melbourne's train system becoming a European-style "metro", usually when trying to talk up the north-south rail tunnel, as if the most important component of a metro is underground trains.

We already have underground trains, of course. In actual fact the biggest difference Melburnians see when they use metros overseas is that the trains run every few minutes, 7-days-a-week, until late at night.

The government could give Melbourne its "metro" now, simply by hiring more drivers and maintenance crews and running trains every (say) ten minutes, 6am to midnight, seven-days-a-week, on every part of the network that can handle them – as recommended in the PTUA campaign *Every 10 Minutes To Everywhere*.

Well, they say the journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. As of July 20th, the Werribee line now has trains every 10 minutes (or so) on weekdays

between the peaks, giving it the best off-peak service on the network.

Unfortunately there are some issues with the implementation which may prevent patronage growing to its full potential:

- Because this is effectively a bolt-on to the old timetable, the frequent services run in the middle of the day, but don't apply in peak periods. This means that a number of stations will get less frequent services during peak and shoulder-peak hours.
- The single track on the Altona loop, which is not being duplicated as part of the Laverton rail project, limits the upgrades, and means that the extra trains runs direct from Newport to Laverton, resulting in uneven frequencies.
- Worse still, the government and Connex have chosen to run the new trains direct to Flinders Street, while leaving the existing ones running via the loop, making for confusion amongst passengers, and

meaning that trains will leave from two different platforms at Flinders Street.

The net result is that while the Werribee line will get six trains an hour, they will not be at even frequencies, and will run to confusing and inconsistent stopping patterns.

All the same, we are hopeful that the patronage growth resulting from the service boost will show its worth, just as the upgrades to trains every 15 minutes in the eastern suburbs in the 1990s was, and we look forward to the rollout of 10 minute services across the rest of the rail network, in conjunction with a wholesale timetable re-write.

With the government hotly rumoured to include the term "metro" in the new name for Melbourne's metropolitan train service, running services every 10 minutes, 7-days-a-week until midnight across the rail network would give the city a service that lives up to the name.

Action stations!

It's not too long ago that the only visible infrastructure project underway on the rail network was the Craigieburn electrification. This is no longer the case. Say what you like about the government, but it is undeniable that a number of projects have now been funded, right across the rail network.

But are they the right solutions? And are we getting our money's worth?

This map summarises what's going on where, when each project will be finished, and how much it'll cost.

Craigieburn stabling (2009)

- ✓ More train stabling
- ✓ Driver facilities to help move changeovers from Flinders St
- ✗ Should have been done with electrification

Coolaroo Station (\$36 million; 2010)

- ✓ Better rail access for residents
- ✗ High cost due to being done separately to Craigieburn electrification

Sunbury electrification (\$205 million)

- ✓ More trains to Sunbury and Sydenham

Caroline Springs Station

- ✓ Better access for residents

Regional Rail Link (Tarneit) (\$4.3 billion)

- ✓ Separate regional and suburban trains
- ✓ More consistent times from Geelong, Ballarat, Bendigo
- ✓ Trains to new suburbs
- ✗ Longer travel time from Geelong?
- ✗ Geelong to Werribee passengers cut off?
- ? Details lacking

Williams Landing Station

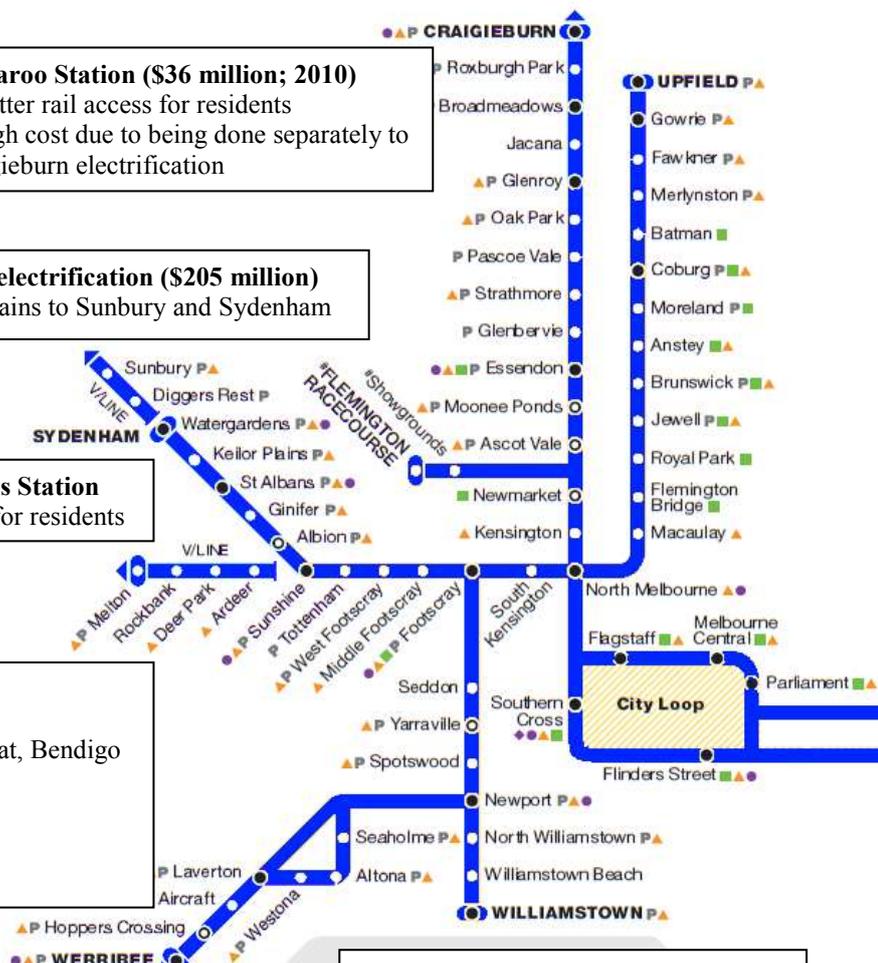
- ✓ Built with new suburb and town centre

Laverton turnback (\$93 million; 2011)

- ✓ Allows more trains on Werribee line
- ✗ Doesn't fix Altona loop single track

What's missing?

- Network planning to co-ordinate buses and trains
- Funding for Cranbourne East/Clyde extension
- Doncaster gets more buses, not rail
- Rowville rail
- South Morang rail should go to Mernda to meet urban growth
- Re-write of train timetable to simplify and better use track capacity
- Commitment to operational improvements such as more staff on stations
- Most suburbs still have no trains, no trams, only infrequent buses
- Government road-building programme still zooming ahead



South Morang extension (\$562 million; 2013) (See also article p6)

- ✓ At long last
- ✓ Upgrades elsewhere on Clifton Hill lines
- ✗ High cost
- ✗ Falls short of urban growth; should go to Mernda

Eltham stabling and signal upgrades (part of South Morang project)

- ✓ Allow more trains to run
- ✓ Driver facilities to help move changeovers from Flinders St

Springvale Road grade-separation (\$140 million; 2010)

- ✓ Improved safety
- ✓ Reduce delays for new Smartbus
- ✗ Station design poor
- ✗ Double the cost of Middleborough Road

Westall rail upgrade (\$153 million; 2011)

- ✓ Allow more trains on Dandenong line
- ✗ High cost

New stations

- ✓ Cardinia Road (Lakeside) and Lynbrook

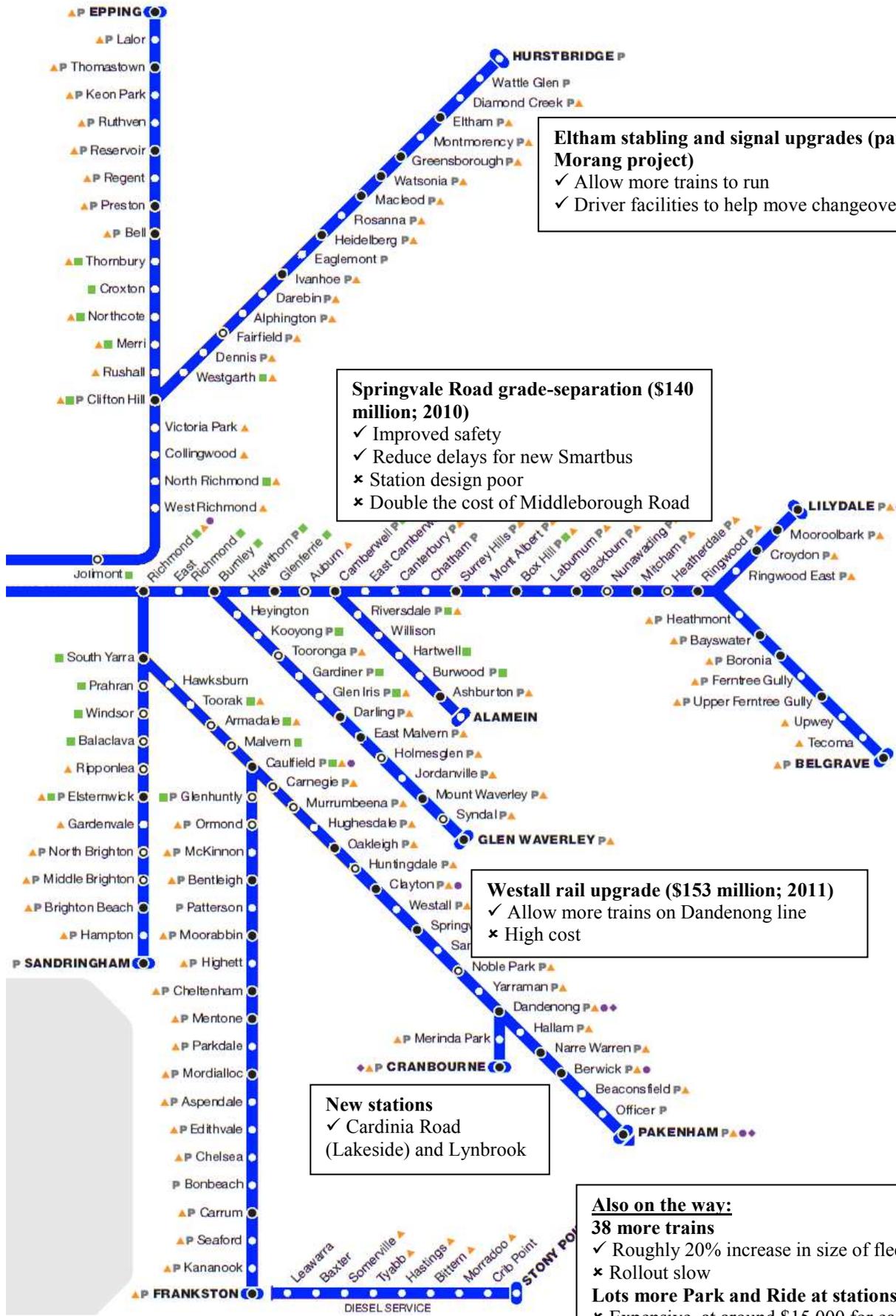
Also on the way:

38 more trains

- ✓ Roughly 20% increase in size of fleet will cut overcrowding
- ✗ Rollout slow

Lots more Park and Ride at stations

- ✗ Expensive, at around \$15,000 for each single car space



The truth behind South Morang revealed

Ever since the Victorian Transport Plan last December flagged that the South Morang rail extension would finally be built, there has been speculation as to why the cost was so high.

At \$650 million for a 3.5 kilometre extension, many pondered if it would include gold-plated rails and platforms. Even counting the duplication from Keon Park to Epping at the same per kilometre cost as the extension, it was still five times higher than the cost of the Craigieburn project completed just two years ago.

In an *Age* feature article on the topic in June, the Department of Transport would say little more than that the project was a “more holistic approach to scoping the expansion of the Epping line”.

Subsequently we met with the Department, and finally discovered the real truth behind the term “holistic”. It turns out the scope of work is much bigger than announced, and includes:

Keon Park to Epping

- duplication
- two or three pedestrian grade-separations
- station upgrades, and an additional platform at Thomastown
- upgrades to 4 level crossings
- resignalling the line almost down to Clifton Hill

- stabling at Epping, with driver facilities
- extra substations

Epping to South Morang

- dual track, overhead, signalling, with modifications to the old track alignment
- Dalton Road grade separation, which due to proximity of the Epping train maintenance facility is said to be reasonably complicated, on a similar scale to Springvale Road grade separation
- 3 bridges over creeks including bike/pedestrian path
- grade separation of Pindari Avenue and Civic Drive
- a new substation
- communications systems including radio towers
- South Morang station, including bike, bus, car parking, and provision for further extension to Mernda.

Hurstbridge line

- signalling upgrades to help harmonise frequencies with the South Morang line
- stabling at Eltham, which will require the moving of some existing trackwork

Driver facilities will also be built at Eltham and Epping as part of a move to relocate driver changeovers out of Flinders Street to the outer-suburbs.



The scope of works goes some way to explaining the cost. Perhaps it doesn't bring it down to the level of Perth's Mandurah line, but at the very least it brings it back down to somewhere near Planet Earth.

It seems to make some sense to include in the project scope upgrades that will help the rest of the Clifton Hill group run better. If things turn out to plan, in 2013 (just in time for the 2014 state election) the benefits should be felt not just to residents in South Morang, but also elsewhere along the Epping and Hurstbridge lines.

What is a real mystery is why the Department doesn't publicise the true scope of the project. While the information is apparently no secret, as a number of groups have been briefed on the project breakdown, neither has it been made public.

Surely flagging the real scope of the project, with all the resultant benefits, would be better for the government than people assuming huge cost overruns and incompetent project management.

PTUA welcomes Victoria Walks initiative

Walking is an inevitable part of any public transport trip, and we welcome the new Victoria Walks initiative, which aims to make our streets and neighbourhoods better for walking.

Walkable neighbourhoods help with healthier lifestyles and more sustainable transport, by

encouraging more people to leave the car at home more often and walk, cycle and catch public transport to their destinations.

The Victoria Walks website has an extensive range of resources and tools to assist people to work together to make their

neighbourhoods better for walking (both socially and physically).

We encourage our members to set up or join an existing walking action group as an effective means to tackle pedestrian issues in your area.

⇒ www.victoriawalks.org.au

Geelong branch – focus on bus route reform

Now that Geelong Council has agreed to reinstate a central bus interchange, we are focussing on the implementation of the bus system reforms. It's vital that such a considerable undertaking is carried out in a planned and trouble-free fashion.

We have started a push to make local bus contracts more open when they are renewed in a year's time. It has become painfully apparent over the last nine years that the commercial-in-confidence nature of the current bus contracts makes it very difficult for both passengers and advocates to identify who is responsible for what, or to get hold of pertinent facts and figures about the operation of the bus system.

At his request, we put in a submission on the issue to local DoT head Richard Sloane. Although he agrees that more transparency is warranted, he isn't

allowed to tell us when tenders are going to be called or how they will be structured. Ben Sangster of McHarry's Buslines says we are wasting our time because bus contracts in Victoria have always been commercial-in-confidence. We are doing the rounds of local state MPs to brief them on the issue. Those spoken to so far have been sympathetic, but it's uncertain how much help we can ultimately expect from them if the government stands firm.

Garry Thwaites, CEO of the Transport Ticketing Authority tells us that a number of the on-going weaknesses of the Myki ticketing system will be dealt with in a forthcoming change to the "human data machine interface" (HDMI) (i.e. what passengers experience when using the system). Because HDMI updates are expensive, the TTA doesn't do them frequently. Mr Thwaites has undertaken to let

us know when the upgrade is imminent.

The Branch has raised its concerns in the local media about the lack of information on the basic infrastructure and services to be provided on the new Tarneit line. Public Transport Minister Lynne Kosky says Geelong trains using the line will take "a few seconds longer", but we don't know how she can make any prediction of that sort. Despite some recent information about the configuration of the Tarneit section of the line, many fundamental questions about it remain unanswered. We have advice from an experienced rail engineer that the additional travel time will be about 10 minutes for expresses, and 15 minutes for stopping trains.

⇒ www.ptua.org.au/geelong

Outer east: Bus lanes coming

After much lobbying by the PTUA Outer East branch, the state government has announced that the installation of bus lanes on Springvale and Stud roads will be completed by the end of 2009. The news is very much welcomed by the PTUA.

Part-time bus lanes will operate along sections of Springvale Road, while Stud Road will feature sections of full-time bus lanes, helping bus passengers avoid traffic congestion, and cutting travel times.

However the Springvale Road bus lanes are to be watered down by ending the 'set-back' bus lanes 100m – 470m short of signalised intersections. Such a move is unfortunate as the approach to intersections is likely to be where buses experience the longest delays.

If a strategic approach were being utilised, the priority would be installation of jump-start bus lanes

on the exact sections of road that are proposed to be without bus lanes. It has further been suggested by VicRoads that they aim to get buses through these intersections within two traffic light cycles – which is likely to result in frustrating delays for bus passengers.

It would seem that VicRoads' objective is to be seen to be installing bus lanes, but in reality to maintain the capacity of Springvale Road to carry cars so as not to upset motorists. Having buses joining queues at intersections behind single occupant vehicles is obviously not the textbook definition of *public transport priority*.

Despite the drawbacks, however, there will be an overall benefit to



bus passengers, particularly on Stud Road. We also hope that bus services will be upgraded to a minimum 10 minute service to take advantage of the sections of public transport priority that will be created, as well as helping with compliance, as nothing underscores why bus lanes are present like buses rolling past every few minutes.

⇒ www.ptua.org.au/outereast

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PTUA office

247 Flinders Lane, Melbourne
Telephone (03) 9650 7898
e-mail: office@ptua.org.au

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Responsibility for electoral comment in PTUA News is taken by Vaughan Williams, 247 Flinders Lane, Melbourne.