

New train timetable frees up ‘nonexistent’ capacity

Next month, train operator Metro releases a new timetable for Melbourne’s trains. The real importance of this won’t be seen for a while yet—at any rate, not until more new trains arrive. But with this timetable, the operator has ‘found’ a lot of space to run additional peak hour trains, that the government and Connex two years ago were saying didn’t exist.

In 2008, Sir Rod Eddington’s *Investing in Transport* report called for \$8 billion of expenditure on a rail tunnel linking Footscray and Caulfield. Astoundingly, it made this recommendation despite forecasting no overall increase in mode share for public transport between 2008 and 2031. The tunnel was needed, apparently, because the inner-city rail network would soon reach the limit of its ability to handle even modest growth in peak-hour patronage.

Eddington came to this conclusion by relying on advice from the State Government. Consultants to the Eddington study, meanwhile, had pointed out that there were many opportunities to release wasted capacity in the core network. Possible measures included running a mix of Loop and direct services, simplifying stopping patterns, and making driver changeovers more efficient. These contrary views were echoed by former PTC executive Ed Dotson, in evidence to last year’s Parliamentary inquiry into train services. A new rail tunnel makes sense, Dotson said, but probably only *after* 2030, once all that spare capacity is used up.

The 2010 train timetable represents the first big step toward taking the consultants’ advice. Initial changes have focussed on the Caulfield group, which serves a major growth corridor. The result is that in the busiest hour of the morning peak there will be 12 trains on the Frankston line and 15 on the Dandenong line: a 35% increase since 2005 when it was first claimed the system was ‘at capacity’. Simplified operating patterns also promote greater reliability, so we will be expecting fewer delays and hence less crowding (which often results simply from uneven arrival patterns).

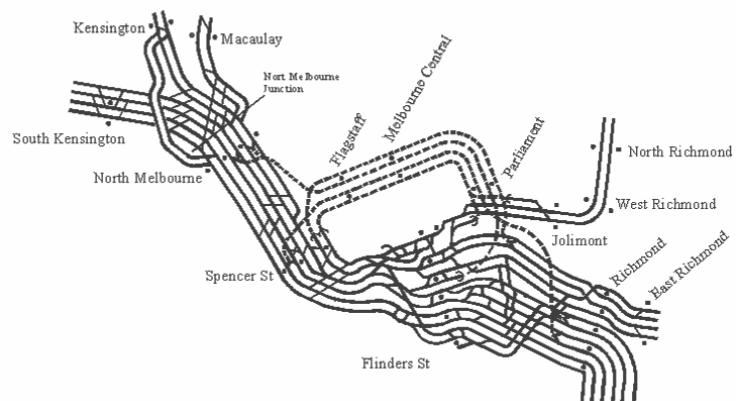
Unfortunately, the focus on one group of lines has resulted in some drawbacks. Frankston express trains will run direct to Flinders Street and not via the Loop, and we are not yet promised any cross-city linkages to Southern Cross and the

western suburbs, as was normal prior to 1993. Much of the resulting inconvenience could have been avoided by a more thorough reworking of the timetable, taking in all lines.

But this highlights the other impediment to boosting peak hour trains: that the trains aren’t there to run, thanks to poor planning. The addition of new trains to the system still goes on at an agonisingly slow pace, which means the benefits of timetable revisions aren’t being seen quickly enough. We are still suffering from awful decisions taken 10 years ago—starting with the one to privatise the rail network.

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PTUA members can obtain cheap yearly Metcards. See www.ptua.org.au/members/offers.

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Our website 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. See: www.ptua.org.au/members/resources.

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Contact

All committee members can be emailed using the format `firstname.lastname@ptua.org.au`.

Member Meetings

Melbourne

Thursday 1 July, 6pm
Ross House
247 Flinders Lane, City
More details: see below

Eastern Suburbs

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

Meet Metro Trains CEO Andrew Lezala: 1 July

The next PTUA Members' Meeting will take place on Thursday 1 July at 6pm at Ross House.

Metro Trains' chief executive, Andrew Lezala, has agreed to address the mem-

bership at this meeting, and to take questions from members. He will discuss the changes Metro is making to the suburban train system, in particular the new train timetables.



PTUA's train-bus connections study

It's no great secret that Melbourne's buses aren't very well coordinated to the trains, but a new PTUA study has proven it.

Analysis of train arrival times and bus departure times (taken from Metlink data released by the government as part of its 'App My State' initiative) has found that just 37.5% of train arrivals have bus connections at stations: 39.8% on weekdays, 32.3% on Saturdays, and just 25.3% on Sundays.

Of those connections, 42.5% require passengers to wait more than 10 minutes: 39.7% on weekdays, 56.7% on Saturdays, and 58.6% on Sundays.

The average connection time is 11.2 minutes: 10.3 on weekdays, 12.6 on Saturdays, and 14 minutes on Sundays when fewer buses run.

The best connections were the Train-Link buses in Epping and Cranbourne, with other frequent routes (including SmartBuses) also performing well.

Good connections are vital for public transport, because many trips simply can't be made using a single service. To make connections quick and easy, the network *either* has to have careful timetable coordination, *or* have frequent services. But most of Melbourne's public transport has neither.

As part of our *Every 10 Minutes to Everywhere* campaign, the PTUA has called for frequent services every 10 minutes or better on train, tram and main bus routes, seven days a week until late.

We're also continuing to call for a shake-up of the management of public transport, to ensure that bus routes (particularly minor infrequent routes) are co-ordinated with train times to ensure quick and easy connections.

See all the details of the study, and look up the connections at your local station or on your bus route:

⇒ www.ptua.org.au/2010/05/09/train-bus-connections

Transport disadvantage in outer Melbourne given airing at Mornington forum

Transport disadvantage and social exclusion in Melbourne's outer suburbs was under the spotlight at a forum held in Mornington on 11 May. The forum heard speakers from PTUA, the Bus Association, Monash Sustainability Institute, Melbourne Transport Forum, Department of Transport and the Planning Institute.

Several PTUA members from Frankston and the Peninsula attended and made their voices heard. Concern about the poor quality of local bus services was palpable, with strong criticism of the 788 Portsea service in particular. This is one of the most highly patronised services in Melbourne, yet only runs every 45 minutes on week-

days. The forum was told the 788 is often overcrowded to the point where would-be patrons have been unable to board.

Bizarrely, funding for new bus services across Melbourne under the \$38 billion Victorian Transport Plan is drying up just as population pressures build in outer Melbourne. This is a major concern because car dependency is especially high in outer suburbs and ruinously expensive for household budgets. Lack of transport is a major cause of social isolation and seriously limits access to employment.

Speakers also highlighted high per capita use of motor vehicles as a major reason why Australia's trans-

port greenhouse gas emissions are relatively high internationally. There was discussion of the urgent need for more effective development and investment in public transport to halt urban sprawl and protect Melbourne's green wedges.

A second forum is expected to be held in Whittlesea in late July. Both have been organised by the GAMUT centre at Melbourne University in collaboration with local councils. PTUA members are encouraged to attend and be heard.

The presentations made by speakers at both forums, together with ideas for reform put forward by participants, will be published on the GAMUT website.

Mornington electrification on the agenda?

The *Frankston Independent* on 11 May reported that "the state Department of Transport has a long-term plan to electrify the rail line between Frankston and Baxter and eventually the spur line to Mornington."

This appears to have come to light as a side effect of the Peninsula Link motorway construction. In an unusual display of forward planning, a large fly-over is being provided where the motorway crosses the disused railway in

Moorooduc. This contrasts with previous examples of poor planning, such as the failure to grade separate the Burke Road level crossing in Glen Iris when the parallel Monash Freeway was bridged in the mid-1990s.

Extension of the Frankston line along the existing easement to Mornington is long-standing PTUA policy. Unfortunately, its presence in long-term plans doesn't bring it any closer. But the need is clear, given the presence of a Monash

University campus near the old station at Leawarra, and the ongoing development of housing in the Baxter region.

The former rail reservation into the centre of Mornington was long ago sold off for shops and car parks. Fortunately, land has been reserved near the Nepean Highway in Mornington East, which would provide a conveniently located interchange for western Peninsula bus services.

Myki still AWOL from trams and metro buses

Almost halfway into Myki's first year on Melbourne trains, and there's still no sign of when it will be rolled-out onto trams, buses and V/Line services.

Budget papers suggest Myki may not work on trams until September, which must worry the government in an election year.

Passengers won't be holding their breath waiting for it, and the government must surely be wishing they

hadn't insisted on building a brand new ticket system from scratch, instead of buying one from elsewhere that already works—or embracing a lower-tech solution that might have gone down better with passengers and taxpayers.

No touch-off on trams?

A recent news story (*Herald Sun*, 16 May) reinforces earlier rumours that the government is moving Zone 2 sections

of tram routes into the Zone 1/2 overlap, to remove the unworkable requirement to 'touch off' on trams.

The PTUA has made suggestions of this sort in the past, to try and limit the damage from Myki. But any such tinkering with fare boundaries must be done in a consistent manner: it won't do to make some travellers but not others pay for two zones, just because trams run some places but not others.

State budget

May's state budget, as widely expected, brought further funding for some elements of the Victorian Transport Plan.

The good news

\$807 million has been allocated to the purchase of 50 new trams, and a new tram maintenance facility and depot at Preston. The new trams are expected to start replacing the oldest of the Z-class trams, but should also help relieve overcrowding, as they will be substantially bigger.

\$83.7 million will pay for 20 more stations to have full-time staffing ('Premium' status). This appears to be a political response to counter the Opposition's plan, to have Protective Service Officers on all metropolitan (and some regional) stations from 6pm to last train. Metro has confirmed further upgrades of another 22 stations to AM peak-hour staffing ('Host' status); this was originally announced last year when their contract was signed.

(In related news, police numbers will be boosted, and although the government claimed this would help improve safety on public transport, it will be for Victoria Police command to determine where new police are deployed.)

In a welcome move for some local residents, four new railway stations will be built in suburban growth areas on existing lines: Cardinia Road (Pakenham line), Williams Landing (Werribee line), Caroline Springs (V/Line Melton line) and Lynbrook (Cranbourne line). Some level crossings will also be upgraded.

And the bad

What's missing is any significant upgrades to bus services—highlighting a key deficiency of the Victorian Transport Plan itself.

While a handful of basic regional inter-town bus links have been funded, there will be no further upgrades to Melbourne and regional town buses, beyond the upgrades already underway (such as Doncaster's DART and the

final orbital Smartbus route, to open next year). Many suburbs will continue to be served by infrequent local buses running every 30 to 60 minutes.

This is particularly surprising given how successful SmartBus has been. Patronage on the upgraded routes continues to grow, and while services at weekends may be lacking, the frequent weekday services have proven that if you provide quality public transport services, people will use them.

Silence from Canberra

The Federal budget has included no new funding for Victorian public transport. However, the Victorian government took the chance to re-announce the \$4.3 billion Regional Rail Link project, most of which was funded in last year's Federal budget.

With the revelation that Footscray residents may lose their homes to the RRL, it is a still greater indictment of our flawed planning processes that the need for this link has yet to be adequately demonstrated.

Metro's performance now officially as bad as Connex. . .

Performance figures for April have shown that punctuality continues to be a problem on the metropolitan train network. It marks the eighth month in a row (under both Connex and Metro) that the target (88% of trains within 5 minutes) has been missed.

The silver lining is that after March's low of 80.5%, April showed an improvement at 84.5%, and the number of overall cancellations remains low, with 'service delivery' at 99.4%, the highest figure since June 2009.

The fact that performance under Metro is not dissimilar to that in Connex's last months underscores that you can't just put new logos on the trains and expect them to run on time.

The infrastructure and timetable upgrades that are happening now are the government playing catchup after

decades of neglect of the rail network. Passengers are entitled to expect big improvements when new timetables commence in June, and in the future.

. . . But compensation will be none too certain

With the change from Connex to Metro, there was a slight change in the compensation scheme, which applies for monthly and longer ticketholders.

The eligibility criteria now includes a requirement that Metcard tickets must have been "active for the first day of the compensation month in question."

This means that, unlike under Connex, a monthly ticket bought and used from the 2nd of April is not strictly eligible for compensation for poor performance during April.

Of course it also means that a passenger is likely to have disposed of their monthly ticket by the time it is possible to use it to claim compensation. The cynical might think it is a good way to reduce the number of compensation tickets handed out.

We are unaware if Metro has rejected claims on this basis, but would be interested to hear from any users who have made claims recently (whatever the outcome). Email office@ptua.org.au.

(Note the eligibility for a Myki is different, and requires a Myki Pass of 28 days or more that has been used on at least 10 days of the compensation month. It is not clear how rigidly this is enforced either, since a Pass might be activated on the 20th of April, but only used on weekdays, and thus valid for more than 10 days, but only used on 8—taking into account Anzac Day.)

New suburban train timetable: the fine print

The first timetable change since Metro took over commences in early June, although we understand much of the planning work was done by Connex before their departure.

The biggest shakeup is for the Caulfield lines. Recognising that the Dandenong line (Pakenham and Cranbourne) carries about double the number of passengers as the Frankston line, more Dandenong trains will run express between Malvern and South Yarra, with more Frankston trains stopping.

Stopping patterns on both the Frankston and Dandenong lines have been revised, cutting the number of variations markedly.

In peak hour, most trains from Pakenham will skip about half the stations between Dandenong and Caulfield. Cranbourne trains, and other trains originating at Dandenong, will stop all stations. From Caulfield all will run express to South Yarra.

On the Frankston line, peak hour ex-

press trains will be more consistent, and will not run via the loop, instead running direct to Flinders Street. Stations between Highett and Glenhuntly will be served by trains stopping all stations, running via the loop.

Some Frankston passengers, particularly those travelling from zone 2 into the loop, may not be happy with these changes. They will either have to catch a slower train, or change for the loop, or walk from Flinders Street.

But we can understand the motivation for this change: to simplify the stopping patterns, to even out the frequencies on both lines, to reduce congestion in the City Loop, and to even out the train loads and reduce overcrowding.

The change will allow a number of extra services on both lines to run, although some stations will see the same number of trains.

We'll be monitoring the situation closely to check that the expected outcome (improved punctuality and less

crowding) is actually achieved. Meanwhile, Metro will need to ensure that information (particularly for Frankston line passengers) is effectively communicated about the changes.

Other lines will get minor changes. The Hurstbridge line gets two extra services after the evening peak, and other lines will see minor tweaks, with Coolaroo station on the Craigieburn line opening, and Alamein and Blackburn trains returning to platform 4 at Flinders Street.

Another change expected later in the year will concentrate on the western suburbs.

Full timetable and FAQs:

⇒ junetimetable.metrotrains.com.au

In tandem with the Metro changes, V/Line will introduce a new regional timetable with some altered times.

⇒ www.vline.com.au

Got feedback on the new timetables?

⇒ office@ptua.org.au

Geelong Branch report

Five year plan Mk II

G21, the alliance of government, business and community organisations in the Geelong area, has initiated the process of formulating another five-year plan for the region's public transport. The reality is that getting any meaningful action relies heavily on the State government and the Department of Transport.

We may hope that the forthcoming process will be a happier one than that involved in the drawn-out evolution of the previous, failed G21 PT Strategy—the one rather hyperbolically dubbed an 'Action Plan' when finally released by the DoT after almost a two year gestation.

Work starts on central interchange

Work has at last started on the central bus interchange in Moorabool Street. It is the only feasible location for the facility, and the passenger facilities to be provided seem reasonable. However the Branch is not confident that the layout being provided will allow enough room for all the buses which may descend on the interchange at any given time, and the lack of dedicated stands for particular bus routes will surely cause difficulties for the vision impaired in particular.

Parliamentary inquiry

The Branch has made a submission to the forthcoming inquiry by the Rural and Regional Committee of the State

Parliament on 'The Extent and Nature of Disadvantage in Rural and Regional Victoria', following an invitation from the Committee to do so. Poor public transport provision is obviously a major contributor to disadvantage, and the submission also took the chance to argue the PTUA's case for institutional reform in the planning and running of public transport services. Tim Petersen kindly contributed insights gained from the pertinent work he has been doing for his forthcoming doctoral thesis examining the provision of public transport in rural areas. **The PTUA Geelong Branch meets monthly in Geelong city; see Page 2 for details. Paul Westcott is the branch convenor.**

Letter to the Editor

Proposals for Swanston Street Tram Stops

Swanston Street is Melbourne's civic spine. It is the centrepiece and busiest part of the tram network, and a major bicycle route. Various traffic calming and restricting measures have been put in place, including a 30km/h speed limit, and now at last it is to be closed to through car movements.

Platform stops have revolutionised tram travel, making it more convenient, safe and disabled-accessible, especially in conjunction with new low-floor trams. Installed in Collins Street at longer intervals than the old ones, they have improved efficiency and carrying capacity: the same will apply to the well-chosen new locations in Swanston Street.

Here above all, though, tram passengers and cyclists must be kept apart, since making them share a section of road would disadvantage everybody:

- Passengers would be in constant fear of being hit by cyclists who fail to give way.
- Cyclists would be obstructed, and at risk of being prosecuted or sued if they caused injury; there would be plenty of verbal abuse, and sometimes worse.
- Such conflicts would create an extra burden for the police; and they would find it hard to identify absconding offenders, since cycles, unlike cars, have no registration and tend to look much the same.
- Tram drivers would watch in anger as cyclists intimidated their passengers or dodged on to the tracks.
- Emergency vehicles would find it hard to get through.

Increased numbers of both groups in Swanston Street are to be expected and welcomed, however the elimination of cars will surely make some

cyclists even more arrogant and impatient, while improved accessibility will encourage those with wheelchairs, walking-sticks, prams etc. to come on board. All these factors would lead to a chaotic, dangerous, stressful situation if the two were mixed in together.

Option A was the best of the final four, with walled-off platforms and bicycle lanes alongside, rather like the 'super-stops' seen elsewhere. Its one flaw was that it allowed access only at the ends of the 100 metre long platforms. I suggested doubling the access with pedestrian crossings at the 30 and 60 metre marks, with stripes on the road and flashing lights.

These would make cyclists more likely to give way, and pedestrians to watch out for them, maybe courteously wave them through. At a less friendly level, they would be suitable places for plain-clothes police or council officers to stop heedless riders or walkers.

The bicycle lanes could also be borrowed by emergency vehicles, since cyclists could quickly vacate them when necessary. They would need to be 3 metres wide to accommodate fire-engines; along with 2m wide platforms to accommodate the crowds, this would leave about 6m for footpaths.

Trams and bicycles, so strongly associated with Melbourne's liveability, are enjoying a resurgence as appreciation grows of their planet- and people-friendliness, their role in saving cities from being choked by unsustainable car driving. It would be a tragedy if their users were to be forced into escalating confrontation in our most important street.

Paul D. Prentice, Fitzroy North
20th April 2010

PTUA Secretary Tony Morton responds:

We can only agree with Paul's concern over conflict between tram users and cyclists in a redesigned Swanston

Street. The conceptual design is one that appears to funnel cyclists along the same platforms where people would be waiting for trams, and to do so even when there are stopped trams adjacent. We are not aware of any existing design for shared pedestrian/cycle space along these lines.

At the same time, we cannot support a design that would result in fences down the entire length of Swanston Street; this would only replicate the supremely pedestrian-hostile environments seen in many British cities. Far simpler designs than these are common in places with high rates of both cycling and public transport use, such as the example below from Århus, Denmark. Here the bike lane curves around the bus stop, so that bus passengers can wait, board and alight without coming into conflict with cyclists.

We are also deeply concerned at the removal of the stop at Lonsdale Street (the only one where interchange with buses is possible), and the excessive length of the stops which will often necessitate walking half a block to change trams at the same intersection. We will be raising all of these issues with the City of Melbourne during the design process for Swanston Street.



Another 'Smart' orbital bus route commences

PTUA Committee member Ian Hundley travelled on the Chelsea–Airport West 902 SmartBus twice in April (the first on launch day, 5 April), between Doncaster Shoppingtown and Airport West.

On the second trip, 29 people caught the early morning service, mostly west of Greensborough. Many passengers bought cash tickets, suggesting they are not yet regulars. The driver was unable to change \$20 for one passenger and another was asked to “bring something smaller” next time. (The driver cash float is \$50, for security reasons.)

A driver who had been on the route since the start said that patronage has grown strongly. He reported growth had been especially strong in the west where no comparable service existed before, and that there was a mix of commuters, shoppers, and students, with some shoppers travelling a long way to locations such as Westfield Doncaster.

Roadside infrastructure

As of late April significant roadside infrastructure was still missing, especially on the western part of the route. There was still no bus stop or timetable at Greensborough station, a major interchange. As a general rule the SmartBus follows a sensible pattern of using existing stops; one passenger however got a telling-off for wanting to alight at a local stop not designated as a SmartBus stop. (This was just west of the Hume Freeway; the next installed SmartBus stop is quite a distance from there.)

All the bus priority signals are now said to be working except for a few at the western end of the route. Drivers expressed concern that stops were poorly lit, which meant they sometimes miss or overshoot them at night.

Running time

One driver reports that there is no ‘fat’ in the schedule, making it difficult at

times to keep to the timetable. Fewer cash ticket sales would assist, as would anticipated improvements in bus priority. (One bus priority lane in Gladstone Park, taking in a major roundabout, is still under construction.)

Despite this being a ‘SmartBus’, there is no on-board electronic display for drivers showing actual against scheduled running time on the route. Instead, drivers consult a paper timetable. As is the case with some tram and bus services, late-running buses will sometimes resort to running in ‘set down only’ mode: one such bus was observed at Shoppingtown.

Another driver observed that the bus interchange at Doncaster becomes very congested during the day. When the shopping centre was expanded two years ago, a major opportunity was missed to upgrade the bus station. As a consequence the complex is even more car centred than before, with an increase of about 150% in near-free car parking.

In brief. . .

Airport gets (half) a cross-suburbs bus service

A recent bus review in the eastern suburbs has confirmed that the 901 Frankston–Ringwood SmartBus will be extended to Melbourne Airport early next year.

The new route is planned to travel via Blackburn, Templestowe, Eltham, Greensborough, Plenty, South Morang, Epping, Somerton and Broadmeadows. While not perfect, the service will be of use to airport workers, whose options have been too long overlooked.

Single authority for rail freight needed: Naphthine, councils

A single authority to coordinate all rail

freight in Victoria has won the support of councils and the State Opposition.

A recent forum in Williamstown, reports the *Weekly Times* on 7 May, heard from the Alliance of Councils for Rail Freight Development that a single rail freight governing body was needed, to sort out a “fragmented” situation with freight operators and reverse the steep decline in rail freight transport.

Opposition ports spokesman Denis Naphthine backed the call, saying the decision of the Kennett Government to privatise V/Line’s freight operations and track access was “a poor decision. . . and [we] have to admit it.”

The call for a single authority was supported by a discussion paper prepared by Professor Bill Russell of Melbourne University. Although no-one report-

edly drew the analogy, the governance problems with rail freight exactly parallel those with urban transport in Melbourne, which would be best solved with a single coordinating body.

Senate rejects Very Fast Train

The Federal Government and Opposition have combined to vote down a Greens motion to conduct a feasibility study into a high-speed rail service between Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane.

The study was purportedly rejected on the basis of cost (for the feasibility study, not the project) despite the government having recently given \$2.3 billion to Victoria’s Regional Rail Link on the strength of little more than a concept plan.

Copy deadline for the next PTUA News is 2 July 2010.

Newsletter contributors: Tony Morton, Daniel Bowen, Ian Hundley, Paul Westcott and Tim Petersen.

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