

State election to test transport policy

As November’s State election approaches, calls for an overhaul of public transport management are growing in volume, and still more stories of failure are biting the government.

The PTUA’s long-standing call for an independent public authority to plan public transport is now firmly entrenched in the political and news agenda, ever since the Victorian Greens pledged in August to create such an authority as part of their election platform. Transport spokesman and upper house MP Greg Barber is regularly quoted raising the issue of a planning authority in the media, alongside calls for services every 10 minutes, and pointing out—along with the Liberal / National opposition—the need for trains and buses to coordinate as a multimodal network.

It is a sign that the political focus in the public transport crisis has moved on from being simply about overcrowded peak hour trains. As we forecast in May this year, performance on the train network has improved as a result of new train timetables that make better use of the system’s inherent capacity. In September, operator Metro finally reached its official punctuality target for the first time since taking over from Connex last year.

Of course, crowding problems are far from solved. Patronage on all modes of public transport is still growing strongly, just not at the extraordinary levels seen prior to the global financial crisis. Thanks to the lack of forward planning, we will still have to wait years before our train and tram fleet is back at levels commensurate with the size of our system. And bureaucrats seem to have no answers for the crowding problem emerging on buses, even on weekends—see our Page 3 article.

Our system still manages to combine the worst aspects of public-sector bureaucratic management with the worst aspects of private-sector fragmentation. The latest in a litany of system failures is a new bus route from Hurstbridge to St Andrews, negotiated between the community and the private bus operator, which had to be scrapped at the last minute on 4 October because the operator had not lodged competition policy paperwork with the Department of Transport. This is despite

the area having no regular transport service. Local media report that schoolchildren waiting to catch the new service on the first day of term were left stranded as a result of this bureaucratic bungle.

Apparently, the local community had been forced into convincing the private operator to run the service (at its own risk) after failing to get action from DoT bureaucrats. This is another case where a planning authority, with a set of universally applicable service standards and a board that meets in public, would have produced an outcome better reflecting the community’s wishes.

Meanwhile, there is no danger of any risk being faced by the private consortium building the Peninsula Link motorway. In return for funneling more cars onto the Peninsula, the Southern Way consortium is guaranteed \$2.3 billion in taxpayer funds. A fraction of that sum would have given the Peninsula a world-beating public transport network; as it is, action on the region’s woe-ful bus services has been mired in bureaucratic inertia while the government boosts car travel.

Public transport now rivals hospitals and schools as an election issue for a reason. November’s election will be fought on choices of policy direction which will shape the way we travel in Victoria in decades to come.

Roads get rich, buses suffer ⇒ Page 3

Our demands ⇒ Page 4

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Keeping in touch:

PTUA Office

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

Membership Enquiries

Call or email the office (see above).

Commuter Club

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

Internet

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.

Committee

Daniel Bowen—President
Tony Morton—Secretary
Kerryn Wilmot—Treasurer
Michael Galea
Myles Green
Ian Hundley
Mark Johnson
Jason King
Tim Long
Rob Meredith
Tim Petersen
David Robertson
Vaughan Williams

Branch convenors

Paul Westcott—Geelong
Jeremy Lunn—Eastern Suburbs

Contact

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

Member Meetings

Melbourne

Dates / times as advised
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

Notice of Annual General Meeting

The Annual General Meeting of the PTUA will be held on **Thursday 2 December at 6:30pm**, in the Ground Floor Back Meeting Room, Ross House, 247 Flinders Lane Melbourne.

Finger food and light refreshments will be provided for members.

The election procedure allows for the AGM to elect a President, Secretary and Treasurer and up to nine ordinary Committee members. Nominations must be on the form attached below (a photocopy is acceptable) and signed by the

nominator and the candidate, both of whom must be current financial members of the PTUA.

In accordance with the PTUA's rules, to be eligible for election a candidate:

- must not be a sitting MP;
- must be a member of at least 12 months' standing, and must not be a local councillor (unless the Committee waives this requirement); and
- must disclose to the Secretary if they are a member of an MP's or council-

lor's electoral staff, or a candidate for election to political office. (General council employees not directly employed by councillors are exempt.)

Nominations must reach the PTUA Secretary by hand or by mail (Ross House, 247 Flinders Lane, Melbourne 3000) by 4:00pm on Friday 26 November. Nominations will not be called for at the AGM unless nominations are insufficient to fill all positions. There is no proxy voting in the event of an election.

PTUA Committee Nomination Form

I, _____ of _____ (nominator)

nominate _____ of _____ (candidate)

for election to the position of: President Secretary Treasurer Committee Member

I declare that the candidate is not a current Member of Parliament; is / is not a Mayor, Councillor or equivalent office holder of a municipality; is / is not employed by a sitting MP or Local Councillor; and is / is not currently a candidate for a political office. (delete as appropriate)

Signed: _____ (nominator) _____ (candidate) ____ / ____ / ____ (date)

First the police, then the taxpayer bill for Peninsula Link

Police intervened at Victorian government direction in late September to break the community picket which was protecting the bushland of the heritage listed Westerfield property against the bulldozers clearing land for the Peninsula Link freeway.

In an intimidating display, about 100 police showed up on 28 September to confront 20 or so mainly elderly protesters. Five arrests were reported. The picket was established in July to protect the Frankston South property. In another twist, the actual level of taxpayer funds committed to the project over its life has been reported (*The Age*, 29/9) at \$2.3 billion. These “availability payments” (the purpose of which is to guarantee a risk-free cash flow to the private operator) will reportedly be made in 98 quarterly instalments over 25 years.

This is about \$93 million per year for a road, in a region where a bus every 70 minutes and a train every two hours is held up as acceptable public transport. Last year the Victorian government could only find an extra \$1 million to boost bus services on the Peninsula and in Frankston.

These lucrative financing arrangements reflect the fact that the project would never have been viable as a toll road: there simply isn't enough traffic. Despite the periodic traffic jams in Frankston, much of this travel is local in nature, fed by a lack of public transport alternatives. As with Eastlink and Stud Road traffic, this Peninsula Link is unlikely to ‘solve’ congestion in Frankston either. Meanwhile we are privatising roads and subsidising operator profits with public money, without even a pretence at transferring ‘risk’ to the private sector.

And of course a lot can change in twenty-five years. There is a serious risk that, after assigning a very substantial flow of taxpayer funds to unsustainable transport activity on the Peninsula and severely damaging the natural environment in the process, when peak oil and carbon pricing hits we will find the Victorian government has handed us a white elephant.

In the meantime, there are signs that the road lobby is girding its loins to have the freeway extended to Rye.



SmartBus caught by dumb traffic planning

The Government's Smartbus programme is again failing to keep up with its name, with growing problems besetting the 'flagship' 903 orbital service introduced last year. The problems are familiar, and arise from our dysfunctional planning culture.

Buses are regularly overcrowded near the Chadstone Shopping Centre, both on weekdays and (especially) on weekends. The bus route is an essential stepping stone to reach Chadstone from the rail network at Holmesglen or Oakleigh stations. However, the service also has a good ‘base load’ across the route and it is not uncommon to find nearly all seats full at any point on the route.

PTUA Outer East Convenor Jeremy Lunn has found no shortage of crowded buses around Chadstone and has taken many pictures such as that opposite, showing passengers forced to stand and hang from the straps on Saturdays and Sundays, and off-peak on weekdays.

The main reason for the crowding on weekends is the lack of frequency, resulting from the failure of the government's touted ‘demand responsive’ planning. On Saturdays the service operates between Heidelberg and Mordialloc on a 15–15–30 minute service pattern (three services an hour). On Sundays the service is half-hourly.

Regional MP Brian Tee proudly proclaimed frequency was the “secret to the success” of this service at a forum in August. Yet on weekends the buses are far from frequent, even if crowded.

The buses are also extremely slow. The 3km journey from Holmesglen to Oakleigh can take 21 minutes on weekday afternoons according to the timetable: an average speed of 8.6kph.

Most of the time is wasted at the intersections of Waverley Rd, Monash Fwy and Princes Hwy, and negotiating access in and out of Chadstone. A jumpstart lane at Princes Hwy has made a

slight improvement for buses heading north into Chadstone, but the biggest delays are to buses heading south.

The continually slow travel times are all too familiar to us from studies of the tram network, and show that further traffic priority works are urgently needed. Yet Vicroads has insisted it is not working on further bus priority in the Chadstone area at this time.



Is your bus, tram or train regularly crowded? We invite members to send photos like this as they are valuable when lobbying for upgrades.

PTUA goes to politicians with public transport vision

Trains, trams and Smartbuses every ten minutes, all stations staffed, V/Line trains every half-hour on main commuter routes, 'Tram-cams' to catch careless motorists, and a Public Transport Authority to better plan and manage public transport all feature in the PTUA's call to the political parties in the run-up to the state election in November.

The PTUA believes that in the next four years, significant steps could be taken towards providing all of Melbourne with frequent services, running at least every ten minutes, seven days a week.

More services, running more often, is the key to getting more passengers on board. Services every ten minutes would fix problems with connections between modes, and give passengers a 'turn up and go' service that means they never have to look at a timetable.

The PTUA's *Priorities for 2010–2014* document also includes calls for:

- the full implementation of the Bus Service Reviews, to untangle the bus network and make it more usable;
- completion of the Green Orbital Smartbus to Werribee, and implementation of the inner-suburban

Blue Orbital Smartbus (both proposed in 2006 but scrapped by the government in 2008);

- Skybus to accept Met (zone 1 and 2) fares, to increase patronage and better gauge demand for a future airport rail link;
- a multi-modal public transport system map to be published, highlighting frequent routes and available on vehicles and stations, and online;
- duplication of high priority single track sections of the rail network to improve reliability and allow more frequent services;
- funding for proposed rail extensions to Mernda and Clyde (Cranbourne East), and a full independent feasibility study to establish the preferred option for building the Rowville rail line;
- a railway station at Southland shopping centre;
- tram extensions to major shopping centres and railway stations; and
- more grade separation of level crossings.

In many cases, highly beneficial improvements could be made to the public transport network without expensive

capital works. Most of the train network can already run every ten minutes, and getting more buses out of depots at off-peak times would cut evening and weekend waiting times.

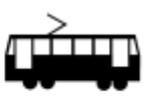
In the case of the Bus Service Reviews, many of the route changes would be cost-neutral, yet would bring major benefits to passengers. One case highlighted by *The Age* in September showed how the re-organisation of buses 732 and 695 in Melbourne's outer-east would provide easier access to Knox Shopping Centre for residents east of Ferntree Gully, not by running more buses (though that would help), but by providing a more logical route structure.

Overall the key is to get more services running more often, to cut waiting times and get more people out of their cars. That's the challenge for politicians of all sides, and we hope they get on board.

The complete document is available from our web site. Keep visiting, as we'll also be tracking and scoring policies as the election draws closer.

⇒ www.ptua.org.au

How you can help: Write to your local and daily newspapers, ring in to radio talkback, and contact your local politicians. Let them know how important public transport is to you, and your vote.

 Every **10** minutes 
 to **10** everywhere

Metro tunnel planning continues

Preplanning for the Metro rail tunnel has been continuing, with the state government asking for comments on the project, specifically the proposed placement of new stations.

The PTUA takes the view that the tunnel mostly replicates existing public transport services while much of Melbourne and Victoria has no adequate services, and that capacity gains can be brought about through better optimising train, tram and bus services in and around central Melbourne, for a fraction of the cost of the tunnel.

There may well be a time in the future when all other options have been exhausted, and major infrastructure upgrades are required. But there is still a concern that there is a lack of published evidence that the tunnel is the best, most cost-effective option.

But given the premise that the tunnel will go ahead at some stage, it is worth planning well in advance. Such advance planning is in stark contrast to the Regional Rail Link project, which appears to have gained more than \$4 billion of funding on the basis of a sketch on the back of a napkin.

In that context, the proposed new underground station locations make some sense. 'Arden' station would be reasonably expected to stimulate redevelopment of old industrial land. The drawback is that it does not provide interchange to North Melbourne. We cautiously accept that this does not pose a significant barrier given the interchange opportunities at other locations.

Parkville station would serve the hospital and universities precinct, and stations underneath the existing Melbourne Central and Flinders Street sta-

tions provide interchange to all other metropolitan rail lines. Under Stage 1, the line would terminate at Domain, allowing future expansion to continue towards Caulfield.

The PTUA has emphasised to the project team the importance of high quality, efficient interchanges from the tunnel to other rail lines, and to adjacent tram and bus services. High frequency services are needed at all hours, otherwise residents around the Arden development are likely to be as car-dependent as people elsewhere in Melbourne.

In the mean time, we'll continue to push for better use of our existing rail infrastructure, and for more frequent services all day every day, which is what 'Metro' rail systems are really about.

⇒ www.transport.vic.gov.au/melbournemetro

Regional Rail Link: from bad to worse

The deficient planning of the \$4.3 billion Regional Rail Link (RRL) has been further exemplified by revelations in recent weeks.

The debacle involving the acquisition of properties in Footscray has been well publicised. But more importantly from the point of view of passengers, it has now been confirmed that there will be no RRL platforms at North Melbourne.

This is a disastrous situation given the crucial nature of North Melbourne as an interchange point. Not only does every regional rail service currently stop at North Melbourne inbound in the morning and outbound in the afternoon—the government has recently spent \$13 million enhancing the station's role as an interchange.

Any alternatives which might be provided will be inferior to the current arrangements. Yet we don't know what these might be because, contrary to logical planning principles, decisions are not being made about the services to run

on the RRL until design of the infrastructure has been completed.

Planners have also confirmed that all Geelong line trains will bypass Werribee, and that the electrified Werribee line will not be extended to the proposed Wyndham Vale station. The only alternative offered is a bus connection between Werribee station and Wyndham Vale. So V/Line passengers to and from Werribee will suffer a change of mode and a journey lengthened by 20 minutes at least—a perfect recipe for pushing people into their cars.

It is remarkable that this huge sum of money is being spent on a scheme that leaves a significant number of passengers worse off.

At the same time as the North Melbourne and Footscray decisions were revealed, previously published plans for the Tarneit diversion of the Geelong line suddenly vanished from the government website. A few weeks later an artist's impression of the proposed Wyndham

Vale station appeared, suggesting that the original plans had been significantly altered. It seems clear that cost savings are already having to be made.

The animation depicts the station in a long cutting with only two tracks and facing platforms. Under earlier plans, the corridor was to be configured to accommodate four tracks: two regional and two suburban. The latter were to be built first, and space left to allow the extra 'regional' tracks to run straight through the middle.

If that was actually going to be done, any cutting should be initially constructed to allow for four tracks, with the station site being wide enough to permit the two additional tracks to run through the centre. The touted flexibility of separating express and stopping trains on the Tarneit diversion appears to have been ditched due to cost pressures—despite the huge budget available.

Geelong Branch report

A new round of bus improvements, after all

We are keenly anticipating the inauguration of Stage 2 of the changes to Geelong's bus network on 25 October. We know what most of the route changes are to be because the maps were made available at the launch of Stage 2 by the Minister in mid-September.

While most changes are sound, there's still a reluctance to achieve area coverage with simple, logical routes, and so regrettably some 'magical mystery tours' of new subdivisions have been created—the very thing some of the other reforms are designed to eliminate!

Unfortunately none of the new timetables are yet available, and neither are the inset maps of towns on the Bellarine Peninsula. Apparently the bus routes in some of these towns haven't been finalised. We do know that the new bus interchange at Ocean Grove will open at a temporary site on 25 October because the necessary decisions will not have been made by then.

Cycling event disruptions

The disruptions to normal bus operations in Geelong were considerable during the recent UCI bike championships, but the alternative arrangements were, despite some obvious exceptions, quite impressive. It is clear that the introduction of Viclink (aka Metlink) into the process of providing the necessary information at bus stops and online has been positive. However people who aren't connected to the internet had trouble getting information.

Part of the alternative arrangements involved the setting up of two central bus interchanges. As one of the bus operators noted with irony, it was good to have buses arriving and departing from consolidated central locations. Of course that was a foretaste of what is to be re-established in Moorabool Street from 25 October, after a six year hiatus.

Election update

Now we have the State election following hard on the heels of the Federal one.

The latter retained the political status quo in the region. Unsuccessful Liberal candidate for Corangamite, Sarah Henderson, says she found it almost impossible to get any media interest in her querying of aspects of the Regional Rail Link.

Few, if any, policies have yet been revealed for the State election. The Branch is continuing the process of meeting as many of the candidates as possible to push our ideas.

We seem to have chalked up one win already, however: as mentioned above, the cutbacks to the funding of Stage 2 of the bus improvements, revealed in June, now seem to have been reversed, following lobbying and publicity. Bizarrely, a number of the key players now effectively deny that any cutbacks had ever been mooted!

The PTUA Geelong Branch meets monthly in Geelong city; see Page 2 for details. Paul Westcott is the branch convenor.

The Stud Road bus lane debacle

If there is ever yet another example of what not to do, it's the government's handling of bus lanes in the outer east on Stud Road.

Bus lanes are an essential priority measure to ensure bus services are not impeded in their task of moving large numbers of people so as to compete with car travel. But the PTUA maintains that the provision of bus lanes needs to be justified with the provision of frequent services—every ten minutes throughout the day as a minimum. Normally this means that the implementation of bus lanes should be explicitly linked with major upgrades to service frequency.

This is particularly the case when existing road space has been turned over to buses. The government needs to sell the fact that public transport can pro-

vide an alternative to driving and actually shift cars off the road. This is a hard sell when the improvements don't go far enough, so that Stud Road for example is still limited to four buses an hour at the best of times.

A large part of the problem, once again, is lack of coordination. After all it is Vicroads who is responsible for installing the bus lanes and the Department of Transport for upgrading services. This means that decisions on infrastructure changes are made independently of, or prior to, decisions about the service upgrades that would justify the new infrastructure. This is likely to continue as long as there is not a single authority responsible for public transport planning.

The end result is that many motorists are irate because they cannot perceive

the benefit of the lanes—unlike the way most inner-city motorists and residents accept the benefit of tram lanes, for example. Local papers are full of letters from such motorists, leading the newly elected Liberal candidate for Aston, Alan Tudge, to call for the Stud Road bus lanes to be scrapped. Cr Joe Cossari, who sits as the Mayor of Knox and is opposed to the bus lanes, even went as far to say that bus services should be reduced.

The larger Knox Council, meanwhile, still supports the bus lanes. PTUA members are encouraged to continue writing letters to local papers, defending bus lanes from their critics and emphasising the need to increase bus services as soon as possible to make full use of them.

Budget-standard 901 bus not so smart

The extended SmartBus 901 service from Ringwood to Melbourne Airport commenced on Sunday 26 September.

It links with the rail network at Greensborough, Epping, and Broadmeadows. Major centres connected include The Pines, Epping Plaza, and Roxborough Park shopping centre. The run from Ringwood to the airport takes up to two and a half hours.

The route has got off to a slow start: when our correspondent rode the 901 during a weekday peak in its first week, just 14 passengers boarded the bus over the full journey. This raises questions about the effectiveness of any marketing undertaken by the Department of Transport. The PTUA takes the view that marketing efforts for public transport need to be directed at promoting new or improved services to people who would otherwise be unaware of them (rather than often-futile efforts at persuading people to use existing unchanged services.) The direct marketing material for the April launch of the 902 SmartBus included insufficient service-related information and appeared to be directed at a political audience rather than potential customers.

Similar to the 902 SmartBus when it commenced (see our July issue), much of the roadside infrastructure for the 901 had not been installed. Some stops

were missing or only partially completed; announcements and displays worked for only part of the journey.

Airport lunacy

Controversy has surrounded the number and placement of bus stops at the airport for this service—seemingly at the behest of the privatised airport operator that profits from car parking and taxi levies. The brickbats are richly deserved based upon our experience.

On the airport approach the bus turned left off the freeway toward the cargo area, and then into Melrose Drive to join a line of slow moving taxis. Passengers were set down and boarded in Service Road near Grants Road.

This location is relatively close to the Tiger Airways terminal, but many hundreds of metres away from the main international and domestic terminals. There was no directional signage for potential users of the service. It should be noted that Skybus has access to both Terminal 1 and Terminal 2, while even the sporadic local bus service from Essendon has stopped outside Terminal 2 for many years. (Rumour has it that this stop will also be moved to the Tiger terminal, ostensibly to stop buses being caught in general airport traffic.)

For travellers between the airport and the city, the connection at Broadmeadows station will work during peak periods when train frequencies are high,

although it will be a 20 minute bus trip from the airport followed by 26 minutes by train to North Melbourne. At other times of the day the connection is as bad as everywhere else, as the 15 minute bus service meets a 20 minute train service.

The competing SkyBus provides a 10 minute service frequency with an advertised travel time to Southern Cross station of 20 minutes; however, in peak hour traffic this can blow out to 40 minutes or more. The adult single fare on SkyBus is \$16 compared with the equivalent Metcard fare of \$5.80.

For the medium term the 901 should be viewed as just one interim measure to counter spiralling car use at Melbourne Airport—provided it is run properly and gets people to where they want to go. It is self-evident that the airport needs to be linked into the rail network not only with current traffic conditions but more particularly to meet the forecast doubling of airport business over the next two decades.



901 bus stop at Melbourne Airport.

Private toll roads on the nose

Recent months have seen a splurge of red ink from private tollway operators as ambitious traffic forecasts fail to materialise.

Worst affected is RiverCity Motorway, operators of the 'Clem7' road tunnel in Brisbane. In a statement on 30 September, RiverCity flagged that it may be necessary to wind up before the end of next year, after posting a \$1.67 billion annual loss in August. Similar troubles also plague operators

of Sydney's Lane Cove and Cross City Tunnels, and Melbourne's own Eastlink consortium. Traffic on Eastlink is still at only two-thirds its forecast level, and shares in ConnectEast have languished at half their initial offer price. Meanwhile, traffic on the 'bypassed' arterial roads is as bad as ever.

Copy deadline for the next PTUA News is 5 November 2010.

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

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