

All Change

Important changes to transport planning are likely as a result of Victoria's first 'public transport election' since 1982.

Eleven years after the Kennett Government was replaced by the ALP under Steve Bracks and John Brumby, Victoria has a new Coalition Government; a new Premier, Ted Baillieu; and a new Transport Minister, Terry Mulder.

There is widespread agreement that the state of public transport, and the Coalition's promises to improve it, were decisive in handing victory to the new Baillieu Government. The Coalition had waited until two weeks before the election to make its major policy announcements, but when they came they were dramatic: a Public Transport Development Authority to coordinate the system; feasibility studies for the construction of rail extensions to Rowville, Doncaster and both airports; a new Southland station; and the purchase of 40 additional trains.

Not since 1999 has any major party made such commitments in key areas of PTUA policy. But unlike in 1999, the sheer weight of public transport issues in changing people's votes makes it likely that the new government will be compelled to act on its mandate for change.

That the Coalition owe their victory in large part to their proactive stand on public transport was underlined by *The Age's* disclosure of internal ALP polling in a 30 November report. The polling focussed on those who were changing their vote from Labor to the Coalition and their reasons for doing so. Next to the general, widely-acknowledged "time for a change" factor, the polling reported public transport as the next largest influence on swinging voters.

This election was also significant when placed in a longer historical context. The last time public transport changed votes to this extent in a Victorian election was in 1982, when the focus was on defending the system from massive cuts foreshadowed in the 1980 'Lonie Report'. Folklore records that each MP whose electorate included a train line facing closure lost their seat in that election. This time around, the mandate is to do *better* than the *status quo*. The seats that changed hands were clustered along the Frankston and Belgrave train lines; the ones that have suffered the greatest deterioration in performance under privatisation and bureaucratic neglect.



Of course, the Coalition policy is far from perfect: a push to complete the Dingley Freeway is likely, and bus lanes in Stud Road are under renewed threat. And as we report on Page 5, it is disappointing that the election campaign saw very few specific promises on buses or trams from either major party.

But on balance, the PTUA believes the election of the Baillieu Government—clearly a very different political animal than its Kennett predecessor—holds great promise for positive action to transform the public transport system.

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Keeping in touch:

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Membership Enquiries

Call or email the office (see above).

Commuter Club

PTUA members can obtain cheap yearly Myki Passes. 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
Tim Hoffmann
Ian Hundley
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Jason King
Tim Long
Rob Meredith
Tim Petersen
David Robertson

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
Check our February 2011 newsletter for details

Eastern Suburbs

Third Tuesday of every month, 7pm
Regular meetings will resume in February 2011. Please check our website or the next PTUA News for details.

Geelong

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

PTUA Annual General Meeting

The PTUA's Annual General Meeting on Thursday 2 December was attended by a broad cross-section of the PTUA membership.

President Daniel Bowen gave a report highlighting the PTUA's campaigning over the last year, particularly in the leadup to the State election. A selection of news reports were screened (demonstrating with the benefit of hindsight how the change of government could have been foreseen and explained).

Secretary Tony Morton presented a

brief report on the PTUA's internal affairs, noting our stable membership numbers, and our bimonthly members' meetings attended by prominent guest speakers. Treasurer Kerryn Wilmot presented the 2009–10 financial statements, demonstrating that the PTUA remains in a healthy financial position, with a sizeable surplus to cover election campaign expenses.

Many Committee members continue in their roles from the past year (see above). The PTUA welcomes back to the Committee our former Treasurer

Tim Hoffmann, who helped coordinate the PTUA's first Outer East campaign in the 1990s. Outgoing member and former Secretary Vaughan Williams was voted Life Membership of the PTUA for his contributions since joining the Committee in 1997.

A discussion followed on the foreshadowed policy for accepting hospitality from industry 'stakeholders', which will be a key item in the Committee's business for 2011. Members wishing to contribute to the ongoing discussion should email office@ptua.org.au.

Commuter Club goes Myki

The Transport Ticketing Authority has announced that as of December, all Commuter Club tickets will be issued as Myki Passes. This does not fundamentally alter the offer to PTUA members, who will still be able to obtain yearly travel with the same substantial discount as before, which provides

very good savings even taking into account your annual PTUA membership. However, there are two significant changes members should be aware of. First, the Myki cards will be mailed directly to you by the TTA, rather than being issued through the PTUA office. Second, the Commuter Club Myki will be automatically registered to you: the TTA are not providing us with any choice in this regard, though you will

have the choice whether or not you would like your name to be printed on the card.

The new Baillieu Government intends to review Myki, and potentially even scrap it if it can't be delivered cost-effectively. We would encourage members to provide feedback on their experiences.

⇒ www.ptua.org.au/members/offers

Roads: a new direction or back to Detroit?

There was another telling fact in this election: the party with the strongest commitments to new motorways is the one that voters rejected.

Since 2000—just a year after being elected—the Bracks and Brumby Governments have engaged in a decade-long binge of motorway development, which has led to ever higher levels of car dependency across Melbourne. In its election campaign the ALP made clear this was set to continue, promising a feasibility study into its planned North East Link through Bulleen, Heidelberg and Rosanna.

But the 2010 campaign and its aftermath were to focus on road issues on a much smaller scale. Upon assuming office incoming Victorian premier Ted Baillieu said: “We will be seeking to immediately overturn the new clearway restrictions in inner Melbourne.” The extension of clearway times was an act of desperation by a Labor government which was seeking to reduce travel times during peak hours, but was not prepared to follow the example of Vancouver (the only city known to have successfully done so) by encouraging further mode shift from private cars to public transport.

In accordance with the ALP’s spin-driven approach to public transport, clearways were also promoted as a measure to improve running time for trams and buses, which share the same road space. Subsequent PTUA research revealed that extending clearway times did little to improve running times for trams.

It should be remembered that the 1999 election was also ‘quiet’ on the subject of big new roads. The incoming Bracks Government had promised that any proposal for a new freeway would be considered having regard for all alternative options “including the provision of public transport services.” The outgoing Kennett Government spent much of its losing 1999 campaign lauding the sup-

posed virtues of the soon-to-be-opened CityLink.

Of course, Labor did not honour its 1999 election promise, and within a couple of years was pursuing freeway projects that even the Kennett Government had not openly supported.

The car dependency that resulted from business-as-usual road expansion is especially high in middle and outer suburbs, which have been left with poor to mediocre public transport offerings, and accompanying economic and social disadvantage. One of the collateral effects of this has been the clogging of inner urban arterial roads, and a policy response of desperation to extend clearway times. This measure, where implemented, has reduced the amenity of the areas affected and raised the ire of local businesses.

This decade of neglect leaves much work for the incoming government, which is committed to an expanded Urban Growth Boundary and anticipates further significant population growth. It would be most unfortunate to see a repeat of 1999, where an incoming government succumbed with little resistance to the blandishments of the road lobby and their superior organisation within the government bureaucracy.

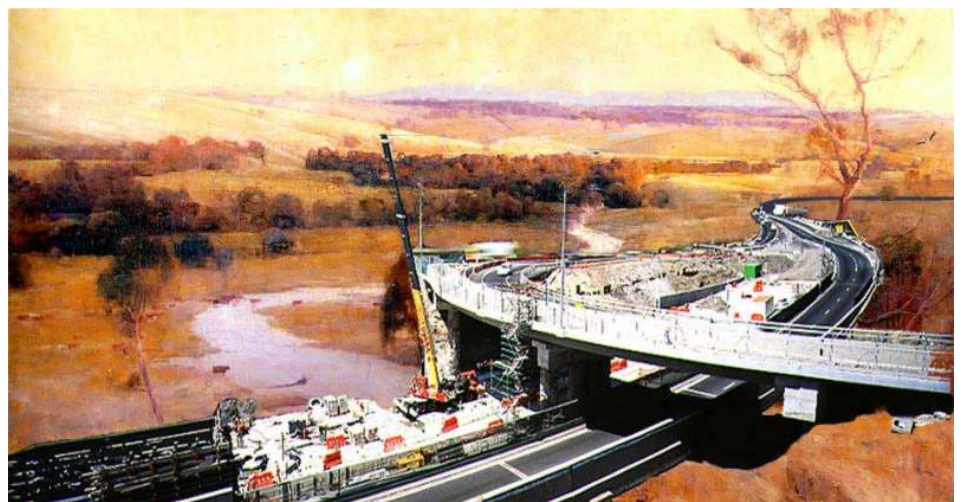
As a matter of practicality and evidence, there is less reason to expand motorways in Melbourne now than ever before. Petrol consumption in Australia fell 5.2% between September 2009 and

September 2010, reflecting an established trend of moderation in car use since 2005. Political support for road-building at the expense of public transport is also in decline: the latest survey by the University of Sydney found that just 11% of Victorians want road transport to take priority over public transport alternatives (compared to 73% wanting priority for public transport).

Practicalities are one thing: behind the scenes activity quite another. Despite Baillieu Government support for rail to Melbourne Airport and to Doncaster, VicRoads is developing plans to further widen the Tullamarine Freeway in anticipation of continuing road traffic growth to the airport and the northern suburbs, and is seeking Federal funding for the North East Link and further Eastern Freeway widening.

Completion of the now half-built Dingley Freeway has been promised by both major parties. But the Coalition has stopped short of committing to the North East Link. It should now scrap it as expensive and unnecessary, and review all other planned motorway projects against sustainable alternatives.

We stand at a turning point. Continuing the historical bias towards roads and cars by successive Victorian governments will in pretty short order make the previous government’s clearways policy look benign in comparison—and the adverse effects would be felt well beyond the inner suburbs of Melbourne.



Shaping a new Public Transport Authority

The most significant policy commitment of the incoming Baillieu Government is the creation of a Public Transport Development Authority for Victoria. Getting this one right will make all the difference between Victoria having some of the best public transport in the world, and a continuation of the current mediocre, politically poisonous setup.

The good news is that Transport Minister Terry Mulder now has a wealth of interstate and overseas experience to draw on when constituting and recruiting the government's PTDA. Zurich, Vancouver, London, Perth and to some extent Brisbane all provide good examples of what to do. While they embody a number of different specific organisational structures and relationships, they share common features that make them successful. For the benefit of PTUA members, we list these briefly here.

Full coordinating responsibility

A successful PTDA is a 'one stop shop' for system planning and operational coordination. Individual operators work under contract to the PTDA, with the PTDA being the single point of contact for the public and for other public authorities, including the Department of Transport. This contrasts with the current arrangement where over 100 entities share final responsibility for aspects of the system (see diagram below).

Statutory authority

The PTDA should be constituted as a statutory authority under an amended Transport Integration Act, with equivalent standing to Vicroads, and an independent board like that of Vicroads.

International expertise

Senior personnel must be recruited from the best network planning talent avail-

able internationally, not merely within Australia and not by redeploying local resources.

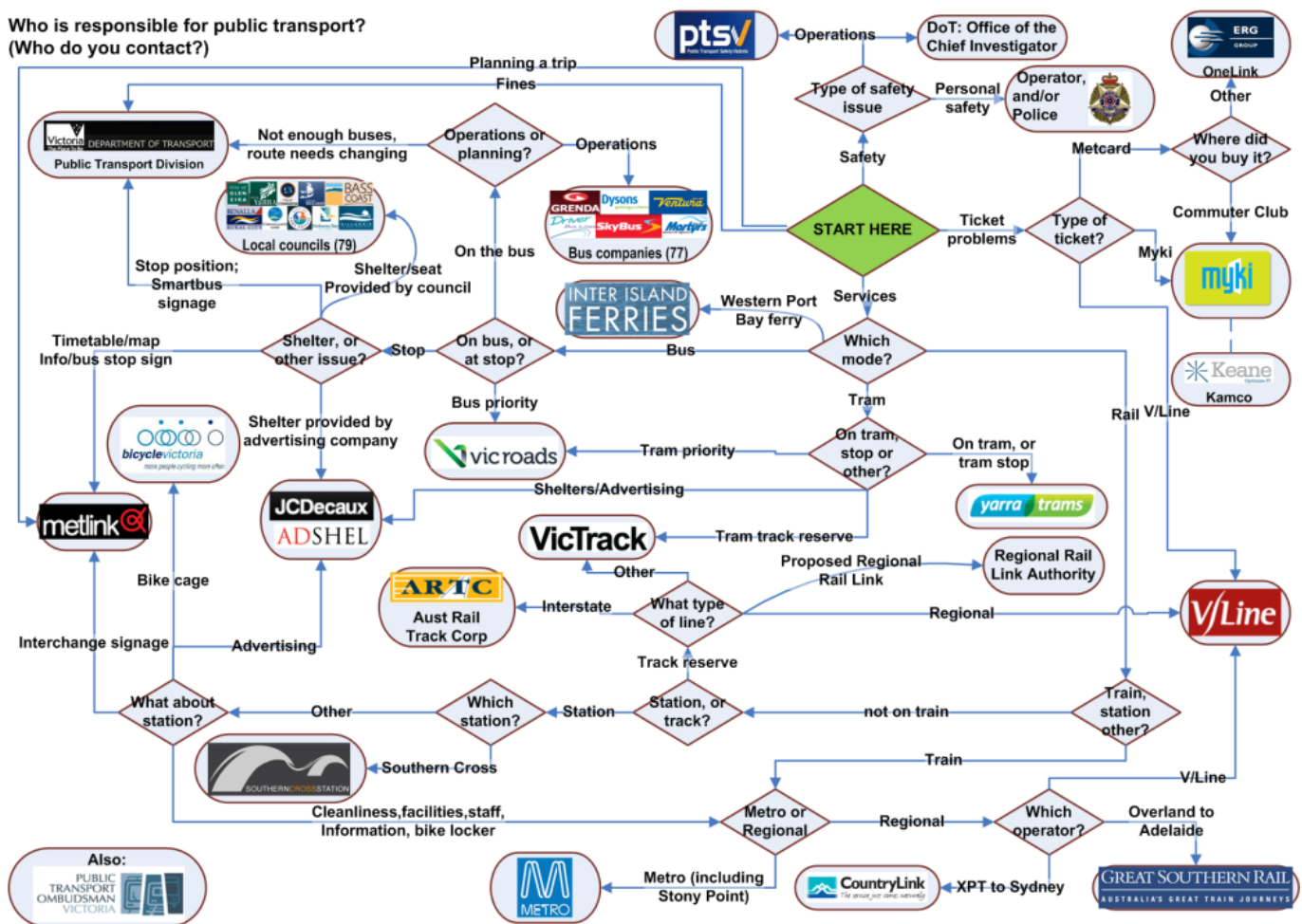
Community engagement

The PTDA board should conduct its meetings in public, the way a municipal council does. Following the example of Vancouver Translink, meetings should allocate a session where submissions can be received from the public.

Superseded bureaucracies

Planning functions currently vested in other entities such as the Transport Ticketing Authority, Metlink and the Director of Public Transport should be transferred to the PTDA, with the other entities reverting to service delivery and contract management agencies.

More details => www.ptua.org.au/campaigns/govern



Suburban rail extensions to see light of day at last?

For the first time in decades, large scale expansion of the Melbourne suburban network is on the agenda.

While the Coalition didn't pledge to actually build new rail lines, they campaigned strongly on them, with full feasibility studies promised into all the PTUA's long-advocated extensions: Rowville via Monash University, Doncaster, and Melbourne Airport.

There is real hope that these are not just promises for the sake of winning votes, but actually have well-rooted support from local Liberal MPs (in the same way that local MPs have acted as well-placed lobbyists for big road projects).

The justification for carrying out further studies before sending the bulldozers out to start construction is that the projects still have unresolved questions

over the detail of where they should go, or what form they should take. This appears entirely reasonable: prior studies for the Rowville line, for example, have alternately recommended construction in a cutting or as an elevated railway. The critical point is that the studies be carried out with a view to actual construction, in the same way that road projects have proceeded in the past.

It is also critical that the right experts do the studies, and that construction costs are reined in to keep them viable. The Baillieu Government would be well-placed to draw on expertise from WA, where there is both an incumbent Liberal Government and a sound track record of delivering successful rail projects on time and on budget.

The big question will be how quickly

the funding follows to actually build the new extensions once studies are complete. The people of Victoria should expect to see these three rail projects in next year's Victorian Government submission to Infrastructure Australia, at the very least.

There was also a Coalition pledge to both study and start construction of a link to Avalon Airport. This raised some eyebrows, as while rail service would undoubtedly be useful, not many would see it as the first priority. There are questions over whether Geelong trains would have to be diverted, adding to passengers' travel times.

Meanwhile Melbourne Airport, Doncaster and Rowville have waited too long for their rail services. We hope they are all now much closer to fruition.



Trams, buses play second fiddle in public transport election

While the rail system came under much-deserved scrutiny during the election campaign, trams and buses have largely missed out.

The Greens proposed numerous relatively cheap but useful tram extensions, but the big two parties confined themselves to symbolic pledges to keep more W-class trams in service. While undoubtedly an important heritage consideration, the result was that other important issues were ignored: tram delays in traffic; the inefficiency of routes terminating short of major destinations and interchanges; overcrowding; and the rollout of more accessible tram stops.

On the buses, again the Greens led the way with proposals for all suburbs to have at least one frequent service, and a Bus Taskforce to review the network. Labor pledged a modest package of bus

improvements, including some local bus upgrades and major improvements to Centre Road and Monash University services. The latter would rid the Huntingdale interchange of the kind of embarrassingly long queues and overcrowding highlighted by the PTUA in April—though not in a way that would benefit passengers from east of Monash University.

Despite acceptance by both Labor and the Coalition that the introduction of frequent Smartbus services have been a success, neither side pledged any new Smartbus routes. In fact the Coalition barely mentioned bus services at all.

Reform of bus services is critical. Most suburbs of Melbourne will never have trains or trams, not even under the most enthusiastic pro-rail government. They must rely on bus services, which

still suffer from poor service quality, low frequencies, and a confusing route structure. Of the many sound recommendations from the previous government's bus reviews, very few have actually been carried out.

'Smartbus' now shows the way forward. While weekend services need a boost, the reasonably high frequency on weekdays proves that if services are good enough, people will use them.

The crucial silver lining is that if the Coalition's Public Transport Development Authority is done right, with expert advice, public input, independence from government and proper funding, it should recognise the obvious shortfalls in bus and tram services, in particular low frequencies and poor connections, and work to fix them.

Geelong Branch report

Election result

The Branch is pleased about the narrow win of the Coalition at the election, mainly because of the new government's undertaking to establish a public transport authority. In recent months the Branch had multiple meetings with new Public Transport Minister Terry Mulder, particularly to advocate for an authority. We like to think we had some effect on the final outcome.

However we are unsure how any authority will manage *regional* public transport services, and we hope that it includes a mechanism for bringing public transport planning closer to people in the Geelong region.

One possibility is for the authority to have separate 'urban' and 'regional' divisions, reflecting the division in operational responsibilities between V/Line and the Melbourne operators. There would also likely have to be a distinct role within the regional division for the coordination of town bus services in the

regional cities, which are quite distinct from regional coach services.

Geelong buses: not all good news

The need for better, more accountable planning of our system has been all too apparent recently. The introduction of the second stage of changes to the Geelong bus system in late October means that all the modifications to the system are now in place. They represent the biggest alteration to the system in 30 years. The Moorabool Street central interchange has been reinstated after six years; there have been modest service increases; new routes have been established; some rationalising of impenetrable route structure has occurred; and many 'clockface' timetables have been introduced.

However the lack of openness about the whole process has resulted in some unpleasant surprises. Despite the endlessly-repeated slogan "more buses,

more often", service frequency has decreased on some services, including a halving of the former 40-minute Newtown service.

In addition, some of the clockface timetabling is overly rigid. This means in particular that there are no extra services at peak times. While departure times are now easier to remember, actual service frequencies are still unusable on almost all routes (our best is a 20 minute service on one route) and most of the new routes have hourly services.

Although a number of routes have been untangled, the Department's obsession with coverage over simplicity means that a few new complications have been added, which results in buses meandering around some new suburban developments.

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

Regional Rail Link needs a rethink

It is not too late for a thorough review of the planning, design, operation and functions of the \$4.3 billion Regional Rail Link.

The Regional Rail Link is the equivalent of three Myki projects. While it does at least hold the promise of improved public transport services on the ground (unlike Myki), it stands in serious need of the kind of critical review the new Baillieu Government has promised for Myki.

As things stand, it is still far from clear to communities in Geelong and southwest Melbourne just how the 'Tarneit Link' section of the project is to solve the problems it purports to solve, without introducing new ones. The motivation for the Tarneit line, if we may recap, is twofold. Firstly, to provide a regional express rail service between Melbourne and Geelong with-

out clashing with frequent suburban services between Melbourne, Werribee and Williamstown. Secondly, to provide a rail backbone to serve entire new urban areas brought into being by the extension of the Urban Growth Boundary further into Tarneit and Wyndham Vale.

Logically, the appropriate response to the second problem is an electrified suburban line through Tarneit, connecting back into Werribee at the far end so that communities have a fast link to the nearest established district centre. Simply diverting Geelong V/Line trains to stop in these locations does not meet these needs, and incurs a cost for Geelong passengers.

The first problem arises chiefly due to the scheduling difficulties on the suburban double track between Footscray and Altona Junction. When one has

\$4.3 billion to spend on the entire project, there are clearly other *prima facie* sensible solutions that do not involve Geelong trains bypassing Werribee, which has become established as a significant destination for Geelong residents in its own right.

As former government planner Ed Dotson told the Upper House inquiry into train services last year, it does not appear that alternatives to the Tarneit diversion received any serious consideration; a scandalous situation when such a massive budget is being allocated to the project.

The planning of the Regional Rail Link in all its aspects—the Tarneit section in particular—is a worthy candidate for early study by the new Public Transport Development Authority once it is in place.

Time to revive rail to Mildura

The PTUA is lodging a submission with the new government to help revive the process for restoring passenger trains to Mildura.

The submission relates to a severely flawed study by the Department of Transport which questioned the viability of a restored service. Its chief problem was failing to consider enough options: on the one hand it over-reached by proposing a deluxe high-speed ser-

vice, and on the other failed to meet people's needs by proposing a version of the old Vineland ultra-slow overnight train.

To be competitive with car travel and attract some passengers who currently feel compelled to fly, the service needs to be conceived on the Goldilocks principle: not too hot, not too cold. We would propose the existing line be upgraded to a design speed of 100kph

for both freight and passenger services, avoiding the need to build new tracks to Swan Hill.

It is easily forgotten that Mildura is Victoria's fourth-largest regional city, with an active Passenger Train Action Group that continues to fight for the return of its rail service.

⇒ www.mildurapassengertrain.org

Outer East Branch in 2010

The Outer East Branch has been particularly busy campaigning this year. This was particularly important in the lead up to the election, where a number of key seats changed hands in the east.

A key campaign issue was train services on the Belgrave and Lilydale lines past Ringwood. Both lines suffer from a half-hourly service between the peaks on weekdays, which is well below urban standards. The Belgrave service is particularly bad: it drops off sharply soon after 8am, before peak hour is even over. The service is clearly designed to cater for nine-to-five CBD commuters only, and goes against the notion of developing major activity centres in Ringwood and Box Hill, and of catering to part time workers who could be travelling at any time in the day.

All urban lines in Melbourne, including the outer east, should have a 'Metro' service running every 10 minutes. Our call for upgraded services was supported by Liberal MPs Christine Fyffe (Evelyn) and David Hodgett (Kilsyth).

Our campaign for Chadstone also continues. We expect to see an upgraded 903 bus service on weekends and improved traffic priority. Our latest work

on this issue is a YouTube video produced by the branch, showing the lack of traffic priority: www.youtube.com/watch?v=BFcibdE9He4

We also campaigned against the North East Link motorway, which continues to pose a threat and could even kill the Doncaster rail proposal. We hope that the incoming government won't waste money pursuing this project as Labor did. More cost-effective public transport improvements include fixing up the Hurstbridge line, construction of the Doncaster line and improved buses.

The branch welcomes the Liberals' commitment for a study on the Doncaster line. This is the first time there has been a serious commitment to this project for decades.

We are also looking forward to the commencement into the study on Rowville rail which should begin around March 2011. We will be closely monitoring both these projects.

Many thanks to the help we have received from branch members in 2010. 2011 should be an interesting year!



Copy deadline for the next PTUA News is 28 January 2011.

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

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Season's Greetings to all our members

Inside. . .

Victoria's public transport election: the first since 1982

How a Public Transport Authority should work

Trains, trams, buses, roads: what to expect from a Baillieu Government

A regional rail rethink

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