



The first 100 days

Three months after being elected in November, the new Baillieu Government has attracted criticism for having ‘hit the ground reviewing’. With some notable exceptions, the government is commissioning reviews to guide its new policy initiatives, rather than carrying them out immediately.

With regard to transport policy, the reviews are appropriate. The problems with our public transport stem from a ‘can’t do’ culture that permeates the entire governance structure, from the Department of Transport to private operators and consultants. The new government could not act immediately on any initiative without relying on advice from this same technocracy. This would simply perpetuate the record of failure no matter how well-intentioned the initiatives.

Ten years ago, we saw exactly this story play out with ‘Regional Fast Rail’, the initial promises on rail to Rowville, and then *Melbourne 2030*. If we are to avoid the same occurring this time around, more careful action by the government is required.

At the same time, the community will be holding the new government to its promises, and has limited patience after suffering the effects of mismanaged public transport for too many years. While immediate decisions cannot be expected, the government needs to ensure it has the reliable, independent sources of advice it needs to progress matters beyond the current entrenched malaise.

In mid-February the government announced the commencement of work on a feasibility study for the Rowville rail extension. This is expected to be the first of many such studies promised into long-overdue extensions of the rail network, including to Doncaster and to Melbourne Airport. The PTUA has defended these extensions for the past two decades, emphasising the role of a comprehensive heavy rail network as the backbone for a multimodal public transport system that competes effectively with car travel.

For the time being, however, the Rowville study will be directed by the same bureaucrats in the Department of Transport that have spent the last two decades resisting

major improvements to public transport, and rail extensions in particular. As a matter of urgency, the Minister for Transport needs to seek out and engage independent, internationally recognised experts to direct the study.

These same experts can then turn their attention to the redesign of the Regional Rail Link, to ensure the separate objectives—of boosting rail service to the western suburbs, and improving the performance of regional trains—work in tandem with one another rather than being implacably opposed, as at present. These initial, urgent tasks would also help assess the experts’ suitability for senior roles within the Public Transport Development Authority, for which legislation is still promised by June this year.

The PTUA is in ongoing discussions to ensure progress on these vital public transport initiatives. Members, meanwhile, should keep in mind what this government was elected to do, and keep the pressure on their local MPs to fight for better public transport.

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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

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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

PTUA plans for 2011

As is customary at the start of each year, the PTUA Committee has been formulating its strategic plan for the year ahead.

It is clear that our strategic priorities for this coming year will be dominated by the actions of the new Coalition Government and its promised reforms to public transport governance and the rail network. The new Public Transport Development Authority is the key to these reforms and we will campaign strongly to ensure best practice is followed in setting this up. Meanwhile we will seek a voice in the feasibility studies to be conducted into new rail extensions, on which the PTUA has long campaigned.

At the same time it is important not to lose sight of serious 'tactical' issues within the transport system itself. Tram and bus priority is of vital importance to the effectiveness of the system. Public transport is unlikely to become competitive with car travel if buses and trams are routinely subjected to long delays at traffic lights programmed to favour

cars. Nor can these services be operated efficiently, with optimal utilisation of vehicles and staff, if the traffic system continues to randomly inject long delays into schedules. The new government, through its strong stance on extended clearways (which had no substantial effect on tram speeds), has provided the opportunity to clarify thinking on this issue, and the PTUA intends to play a pro-active part in this debate.

Other 'live' issues on which the PTUA will be active this year include the overhaul of Swanston Street, the new station promised at Southland shopping centre (fulfilling another decades-old PTUA policy), and the prospect of high speed trains linking major Australian cities.

Binding all these initiatives together is an understanding of the importance of good network planning. Our 'Every 10 Minutes to Everywhere' message will continue, as a statement of how the world's best networks operate.

As always, we welcome member suggestions and feedback on the PTUA's activities. Please email office@ptua.org.au or phone the office with your comment.

Members' meeting: 'Smart' roads of the future?

Our first regular members' meeting for 2011 is scheduled for **Thursday 24 March**, at 6pm in Ross House. Our guest will be Andrew Wall of Vicroads, who will explain the new Network Operating Plan, better known as 'SmartRoads'.

The idea of SmartRoads is to classify Melbourne's roads according to the priority to be given to various transport modes. So there will be priority pedestrian zones, priority cycle routes and priority public transport routes, as well as priority routes for cars and trucks. Naturally this leaves some unanswered questions in the detail: how are incompatible priorities resolved within the overall network? How will priority actually be managed at intersections, which is where modes come into conflict in practice?

Come along and have your chance to ask questions of one of the scheme's main architects.

Whither the Regional Rail Link?

The revelation by the transport minister, Terry Mulder, of the \$800 million cost blow-out in the cost of the Regional Rail Link (RRL), coupled with a federal funding deferral of \$500 million, has provided a welcome opportunity for the project to be critically examined in a way that it has never been.

However the review of the RRL should not be done by the bureaucrats and engineers who have put the scheme together in its currently flawed form. The government must engage independent experts to properly evaluate all the options for reducing congestion and improving punctuality in rail system to the west.

The RRL scheme has been flawed

from its inception. The Eddington Report contained a completely perfunctory analysis of the various alternatives for improving rail capacity west of Melbourne. Since then, the planning and design of the project has proceeded in a disorganised fashion.

Various parts of the RRL plans have been released in dribs and drabs, with the Footscray land resumption fiasco being only the most obvious. There have also been changes when it became clear that what had been proposed or sketched out couldn't actually be delivered. Even now, three years after the announcement of the project, we have no idea how train services on the line are to be run.

However we do know that what has

been proposed so far will leave a significant minority of passengers worse off, and if running times on the Tarneit diversion do indeed turn out to be longer than on the present route, the majority of them will be disadvantaged. That would be a damning result for a project that is to cost well in excess of \$5 billion.

The combination of the new government and the funding crisis provides a fortuitous chance to strip away the humbug, secrecy and confusion that has plagued the RRL from its inception. The chance to do an objective analysis of the project, and to come up with better and possibly cheaper options, must not be missed.

Network planning: setting the scene

Metro Trains chief Andrew Lezala has said several times that he is pushing for ten minute train services across Melbourne. These would be most welcome, but of course are only a part of the picture.

Most of Melbourne does not have, and will never have train services. Not everyone can walk to the station, and the car parks are full by 8am, so another way has to be found to get people to the station. Better services connecting and feeding the train lines are vital.

Melbourne-wide network planning is what's needed: making sure that the trains, trams and buses all connect properly. A PTUA study last year proved conclusively that they don't.

Trams must be extended to more logical interchange points. Too many of them terminate in the middle of nowhere, falling short of local railway stations and major shopping centres.

Bus routes must be reformed. The Bus Reviews held recently show the way forward, but in many areas only a small proportion of review recommendations have been implemented. The network

will never work effectively while so many bus services follow long meandering confusing routes.

Services must be timed to connect—or they must run frequently enough that it doesn't matter.

Nobody is responsible for this kind of network-wide planning at the moment. It's just the sort of thing that a Public Transport Authority can and should be doing, and it's imperative that the Coalition government get on with the job of establishing such a body and ensuring that it has the powers and expertise to do so. Without it, our public transport will remain a fragmented mess.

This year, while campaigning to ensure the opportunity is seized to create a Public Transport Authority in the best way possible, the PTUA will also be emphasising the need for network planning reforms more generally. We would welcome your own suggestions of planning failures that need fixing: please email office@ptua.org.au with your stories.

⇒ www.ptua.org.au/campaigns/every10minutes



Membership fees to rise in July

After more than 5 years, the PTUA Committee has decided on a small increase in annual membership fees.

The purpose of this increase is to engage a paid office manager for one day a week on a financially sustainable basis, to ensure our office is consistently staffed and routine organisational tasks are properly attended to. For some time this has proved very difficult for us to manage from our volunteer resources.

The fee rise will take effect from 1 July this year. The basic Bronze rate will increase from \$25 to \$30, with proportionate rises in other rates. Members are able to renew at the old rates until the end of June.

The future of Myki and fares

By the time you read this, we expect to have learned whether the government intends to keep the Myki ticketing system, or scrap it in favour of a less expensive alternative.

As we go to press, this much is certain: if Myki is to be kept, changes will be needed to ensure seemingly minor problems don't grow into big ones as hundreds of thousands of passengers migrate across from Metcard.

Any decision on ticketing will have to keep in mind the actual objectives of a ticketing system: to collect revenue from passengers in a hassle-free and cost-effective manner; to make the transaction as easy for passengers as possible; and to make it as difficult as possible to avoid paying a fare.

It's also a good opportunity to step back and consider what tweaks should be made to the fare system, to support and encourage use of public transport by passengers, as well as to keep ticketing simple. Many of the problems of Myki stem from the requirement to constantly touch-on and off. Touch-off in particular is likely to cause delays, particularly on busy bus routes, and suburban stations. (Thanks to a sensible decision last year, touch-off is not required on

trams.) Even assuming users are meticulous in their touching on and off, correct charging has been a problem, particularly on trams and buses.

Periodical tickets (Myki Pass)

One of the best ways to minimise these problems is to encourage more people to use periodical tickets. In the Myki lexicon this is known as Myki Pass—and does not require touch-off when travelling in a zone covered by the Pass. As a general matter, periodical tickets avoid messy charging problems, because the travel has been prepaid. The other huge benefit is that they encourage loyalty to public transport. A regular weekday user on a periodical ticket discovers they get bonus travel on weekends, and—if the services are adequate—choose to use that benefit more often, rather than driving.

Unfortunately Melbourne's periodical fares are high by world standards. A monthly fare costs the same as 20 days of Myki Money, when the typical figure in comparable cities is 13 days. There is simply no incentive for many 9–5 commuters to switch. Improving the discounts for Weekly and especially Monthly tickets (or 28+ day Myki Passes) would encourage a lot more people to use them.

Short term tickets

One other 'feature' of Myki stands out

as needing a second look: Short term tickets. These are for occasional users who don't wish to buy a reusable Myki card. They are not yet available in Melbourne, but are found in regional cities.

They have a myriad of problems. There are no identifying features (such as zones covered, fare paid, or expiry time) marked on them, making them very user-unfriendly. They require validation before use (as with Metcards), which has confused many train passengers. To cap it all off, they are said to cost 35 cents each to produce, which in some cases is up to 40% of the fare collected.

Other systems around the world use paper tickets for this purpose. While they may not work in station gates (requiring a staff member to check and let passengers through), they solve all of the above problems. Myki machines already provided on buses and stations are capable of producing such tickets with a software change, as they currently print paper receipts for card topups.

Other changes

Other changes that could be made include automatic compensation to eligible cardholders, better education about when touch-off is not required, and of course putting more staff on the system to ensure that ticket checking is more consistent. These would all help in making a smooth transition either to Myki or to whatever replaces it.

Swanston Street: getting it right

Recent media reports indicate the makeover of Swanston Street is on hold, after the intervention of Transport Safety Victoria.

The intervention follows concerns about conflict between tram passengers and cyclists at the new 'super' tram stops planned for the street. As has been raised by PTUA members and the cycling community (see our May 2010 issue), bike lanes are proposed to run straight past the 'door zone' of trams where passengers board and

alight. This poses a hazard as cyclists in this environment may not register the need to stop for stationary trams.

Melbourne City Council must now demonstrate to TSV how bike lanes are to be routed around tram stops (as occurs in northern Europe), or what equivalent steps are to be taken to minimise conflict between cyclists and tram passengers.

Last year, we also wrote to the Council to express our concern at the location and size of the proposed tram stops.

We noted that convenient interchange to buses in Lonsdale Street will completely disappear under the plan, while at other locations passengers will routinely walk half a block to change trams. Thus far, the City Council has not responded to our concerns.

This is a pity, as on a high level the vision for Swanston Street is the right one. What will be important now is to get the detail right, not only to promote safe travel, but also to retain a convenient network for passengers.

The new government's feasibility studies: opportunity for public transport, but a rocky road ahead

The failure to deliver on public transport was instrumental in the defeat of the Victorian state Labor government. Electors did not believe that the extensively and expensively promoted *Victorian Transport Plan*, heavily laden with road projects and with no demonstrated understanding of what it takes to develop an efficient Melbourne-wide public transport network, was up to the task. Labor was deservedly punished at the November poll.

It was therefore refreshing that the incoming Liberal–National party coalition chose to make few specific promises on major new roads and freeway projects, and promised instead to investigate extensions of the heavy rail network to Melbourne Airport, Doncaster and Rowville. While this still falls far short of a commitment to construction, it represents the strongest political commitment to rail extensions since the time of Henry Bolte.

At the time of writing it appears that preparations are most advanced for the feasibility study of a rail line to Rowville in Melbourne's outer east: the centre for significant potential population and commercial growth. Commencement of work was announced by the government to the local press on 17 February.

The terms of reference and the capabilities of chosen consultants are vital to the success or otherwise of feasibility studies for rail projects. Examples abound of studies that were either stymied at the outset by unclear ground rules, or otherwise 'designed to fail'.

The Department of Transport has honed this into an art form, as seen most recently with studies for restoration of train services to Leongatha and Mildura, and with the feasibility of a rail link to Melbourne Airport. Indeed, shortly after the government backed away from the latter, work commenced on a very expensive expansion of the

Tullamarine / Calder Freeway interchange. VicRoads is now undertaking another project which anticipates the further widening of the Tullamarine Freeway.

PTUA is determined to do what it can to ensure that this unhappy history is not replicated with these feasibility studies and has written to the Minister for Transport, Terry Mulder, for an assurance that the Rowville study will be conducted by a competent independent party that has proven relevant experience in assessing projects of this type. We have asked that the study should assess the potential for the project to drive mode shift from private motor vehicles to public transport in the area, and the freeing of capacity in existing transport infrastructure.

We have stressed that full regard should be had for maximising public transport networking benefits in association with the line, especially with linking buses. Frequent co-ordinated feeder bus services would significantly enhance the catchment of the line, providing access to convenient public transport for the majority of the outer east. Buses would also cater for local transport needs, therefore benefiting the local economy.

We have also asked the Minister for open public input into the study, including the publication of all submissions

received and prompt release of the report upon completion. PTUA is hopeful that the Rowville rail study will be a good model for the other studies to come.

It would be disastrous if these studies were to fail and be able to be used to legitimise the expansion of road capacity at the expense of the development of an efficient public transport network in these areas in particular and in Melbourne generally. However, this remains a very genuine threat whilst the weight of capability in the Victorian bureaucracy remains so heavily skewed in favour of accommodating private motor transport.

This is especially reflected in the substantial resources available to VicRoads and other roads agencies to generate new road plans for government sign off for the purported purpose of 'solving' road congestion. In the meantime no such organisational capability yet exists to deliver the broader vision of a public transport network to meet the social and economic needs of a growing city.

The PTUA Outer East Branch will be monitoring the progress of the Rowville feasibility study, and will continue to seek the assurances requested in our letter to the Minister. Stay tuned to *PTUA News* for updates.



Geelong Branch report

The two new bus interchanges in Moorabool Street, opened in October, have been a clear bonus for Geelong public transport, as we knew they would be. Apart from anything else, the system is now 'visible' again. However there have been problems with how the facility is operating, many of which could have been avoided if the Department of Transport (DoT) had actually consulted users beforehand.

Following complaints led by disability advocacy groups, some improvements are to be introduced. There will be visual and audio advice about the next five buses due to depart, destination displays on the side of buses, and Myki machines installed (the latter presumably depending on the system's future).

But even after these changes, vision-impaired passengers still won't be able to tell which bus is going where. Staff to assist passengers at the two stops, promised by the DoT and Council, have only been occasionally sighted. It could improve things if dedicated stands were provided for groups of routes. That would at least narrow the choice of buses which have to be made.

We have continued to highlight the problems for Geelong rail passengers with the Regional Rail Link (RRL) as it is currently configured, and there seems to be an increasing realisation that the scheme is flawed.

When we met the new Liberal MP for South Barwon, Andrew Katos, we explained the problems with the RRL and

urged him to support changes to it.

We also highlighted the gradual abandonment of the commitment to make the Armstrong Creek development south of Geelong a model of sustainable suburban design. Instead of usable public transport being provided from the outset, it seems that only the usual indirect and infrequent bus service will be provided, at some unspecified time in the future.

We earlier met the re-elected MHR for Corangamite, Darren Cheeseman, and raised the same issues.

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

Travellers Aid: Volunteers Ready to Assist Regional Medical Travellers in Melbourne

Travellers Aid Australia will launch the Medical Companions Project in early March 2011.

It will bring a dedicated team of Melbourne volunteers together with regional Victorians in need who are travelling to Melbourne for medical appointments. 'Medical companions' will meet travellers at Southern Cross or Flinders Street Station and accompany them to and from appointments in the CBD.

An estimated 50,000 people from rural and regional Victoria travel into Melbourne each year to seek medical treatment that is not available in the area that they live. Many of these travellers are frail, aged, or people living with a disability. They otherwise rely on family members to drive or accompany them to Melbourne. When assistance is not available, many people risk their health and delay their appointments or don't come at all.



The Medical Companions Project will provide a valuable new resource for regional people who would like to be able to travel to Melbourne for appointments independently using public transport, but feel anxious or nervous about using transport services alone. While promotion will focus on regional Victoria, Travellers Aid Australia also hopes that metropolitan people will take advantage of this service.

Transport Connections, who works with regional and rural communities to find local transport solutions, has recognised a need for this service since 2008. They have provided funding so that Travellers Aid Australia may pilot the project

from March–December 2011. Travellers wanting to use the service will need to call in advance to book a trained volunteer, who will be waiting for them when they arrive in Melbourne. The project is free of charge.

If you would like to volunteer or find out more information about using the service when it is launched in March, please email Fran Henry, MCP Coordinator, Travellers Aid Australia, on fran@travellersaid.org.au or call 03 9654 2600.

This article has been contributed for PTUA News by Travellers Aid. Please contact Travellers Aid as above if you seek further information.

Southland station: doing it right

Residents in south east Melbourne will be keen for the new government to move quickly on a new station at Southland.

The station will provide a big boost to public transport access to Southland Shopping Centre, which is plagued by poor bus services and clogged car parks, particularly on weekends.

The PTUA believes Southland station should be located directly adjacent to the centre, providing quick access for train passengers, and should not impinge on neighbouring parkland. It should not affect neighbouring Highett and Cheltenham stations, which serve different users. It should also not provide commuter parking, as this is provided elsewhere.

The Coalition's cost estimate was well below Labor's, in part because Labor

envisaged moving the existing bus interchange. This is not a high priority, as most bus routes already provide connections with the Frankston line elsewhere. However, the existing Bay Road routes (827 and 828), and perhaps a re-routed 822, could stop at the station *en route* to the bus interchange.

We are hopeful that the government will push ahead on development of the station.

High speed rail on the agenda?

In a media release on 1 February, Federal Transport Minister Antony Albanese announced the commencement of a feasibility study into a high speed rail network connecting Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane.

The consultants, led by AECOM (formerly Maunsell), will begin by identifying possible route and station options, and thereby determine indicative transit times and construction costs. This first stage is expected to be completed by the middle of this year. The second stage will determine an optimum route alignment, identify patronage levels, develop robust cost estimates and investigate financing options. Full terms of reference are available at: www.minister.infrastructure.gov.au/aa/releases/2011.

Notably absent from these terms of reference are any requirement for examination of environmental or social issues. The focus for the study is almost solely on finance and economics.

In previous iterations of this process dating back to the 1980s, the PTUA has been justifiably sceptical of a rail link on such a grand scale, since it would undoubtedly involve huge costs:

money that could be better used improving more mundane public transport services within urban areas. Indeed, this cost barrier has been the main reason all previous studies have come to nought.

That said, it is fair to reconsider the case for high speed rail given the evolving context. Popular high speed rail links now exist, or are planned, in numerous European countries and even the United States. In general these projects have not displaced funds from urban public transport: their avowed competitors are air and car travel, with significantly higher greenhouse emissions per passenger even considering the higher energy demands of high speed trains.

High speed rail now lives on the same tier as "nation building" projects like the National Broadband Network. Costed at up to \$40 billion, the NBN has been justified by our same federal government, at least in part, on the basis of social benefits such as the mitigation of geographic isolation. As long as fares are reasonable, high speed rail could bring a huge swathe of east and south east Australia—with a population of at least 12 million—all within at most 2 hours of a large metropolitan centre. Neither planes nor private cars can offer this speed of access to so many.

High speed rail should not result in closure of existing intercapital rail routes,

the way TGV services have decimated local train service in France. The existing network should service smaller towns using XPT-class trains, following the German model. The same tracks would be available, with further upgrading, to assume a higher proportion of the intercity freight burden. At present, freight is uneconomically skewed towards road transport.

The most likely Melbourne–Sydney–Brisbane route would divert south of the Hume Highway to Canberra, head west to Wagga Wagga, then south to Albury and the north-east corridor in Victoria. North of Sydney, the Pacific Highway route is almost certain, as it would serve all the coastal, high growth 'sea change' centres, as well as major centres in Newcastle and the Gold Coast.

Minister Albanese has placed first emphasis on the Sydney–Newcastle route. This is understandable (though disappointing from a Victorian point of view) as the current Sydney–Newcastle route is packed with passenger and freight traffic following a slow alignment. Minimum travel time is 2.5 hours; almost double the time now achieved on V/Line over the same distance.

The Victorian Department of Transport has responded to Mr Albanese's initiative by appointing a senior officer to liaise with the Commonwealth efforts.

Copy deadline for the next PTUA News is 1 April 2011.

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