

Transport Minister Meets PTUA Members

There was a good turnout at the August PTUA meeting to hear Public Transport Minister Terry Mulder address members and answer questions.

Mr Mulder started with a presentation on current government priorities. He was unapologetic for an initial focus on rail services, which he said had suffered from reliability and crowding problems, but said that the new timetable had improved punctuality while providing extra services.

Other topics flagged by the Minister during his speech included:

- The expanding train fleet, with 38 trains ordered by Labor, and another seven added by the Coalition since coming to power.
- Protective Service Officers for railway stations.
- More funding for rail maintenance.
- The prototype design for the fifty new trams has been reviewed by stakeholders, and was to be displayed at the Melbourne Show.
- CBD road speeds, including those for trams, may be reviewed.
- Rail grade separations, which were noted as being high cost, but good return.
- Manual enforcement of bus and tram lanes is difficult, and there may be a technological answer.
- V/Line's Ballarat East maintenance facility should improve reliability.
- The Overland now includes a dedicated carriage for V/Line passengers to Stawell.
- The forthcoming Metropolitan planning strategy.
- Development around (and above) stations.
- Rail to Avalon airport, which is designed to help position Avalon as a competitor to Tullamarine.

He also flagged that the Coalition believed there had been a shift in sentiment towards public transport, and they had said "no" to the road lobby ahead of the 2010 election.

The Minister then fielded questions from members. These included queries on track standardisation (not considered a high priority), including future provision on Regional Rail Link (he'll look at it), space for bicycles on country trains, and the Altona Loop.

Doncaster rail, Vicroads, Metcard/Myki and timetable data were also raised. The Minister noted that the PTDA legislation would be introduced later in the year, with former PTC head Ian Dobbs as inaugural CEO. (The legislation has now been introduced: see page 3.)

It appears Mr Mulder fully realises that there are a lot of problems on the public transport network, and much to do to improve things, and we're sure that members appreciated him attending and responding to questions.



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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
Mark Johnson
Jason King
Tim Long
Rob Meredith
Tim Petersen
David Robertson
Malcolm Simister

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 and opposite

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 8 December at 6:30pm**, in the Hayden Ray-smith Room, 4th floor, 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 25 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)

Legislation for public transport authority introduced

Legislation establishing the Public Transport Development Authority was introduced to State Parliament on 14 September.

On this vitally important policy initiative the government is proceeding broadly in the right direction. The structure and powers of the PTDA in this legislation largely mirror those of Vicroads. The PTDA will have its own Board, including one position reserved for a community representative.

That said, we are obviously keen that the PTDA's enabling legislation should be as good as it can be, and viewed in this light there are some important shortcomings.

Both the PTDA and Vicroads are required to exercise their powers "subject to the Department [of Transport]'s planning framework". The precise meaning of this requirement, dating from the final year of the Brumby Government, is still being established. But a comparison of Vicroads' actual functions with the new PTDA legislation indicates that Vicroads does still enjoy some wider powers.

In particular, existing legislation cites one of the functions of Vicroads as to "develop and implement operational policies and plans, including through legislation, regulations, standards, guidelines and practices, for the road system...". But the new legislation makes clear that the responsibilities of the PTDA do *not* extend to development of legislation or regulations regarding public transport. Instead, its

role is limited to providing advice to the Transport Department.

Another asymmetry that remains between Vicroads and the PTDA is that Vicroads is governed by a single CEO appointed by the "Governor in Council"—that is to say, the Cabinet—while the PTDA has a Board appointed by the Minister, and a CEO appointed by the Board with the Minister's approval. This has its good and its bad aspects. The notion of an independent Board is one that we have championed, but is compromised by having Board appointments essentially in the gift of the Minister. Preferable to this would be a merit-based appointment process similar to that used federally for ABC and SBS board appointments.

The Department of Transport also retains the key responsibility of preparing the 'Transport Plan'. This is the overarching plan which according to current legislation "must set the planning framework within which the transport bodies are to operate". This makes sense if the plan merely sets a broad strategic framework, consistent with planner Vukan Vuchic's concept of 'strategic level' planning. But what the legislation actually calls for are "priorities and actions" and "a short-term action plan that is regularly updated".

Unfortunately, it appears a lot of power is being left in the hands of the bureaucracy, with the PTDA being less independent than many of its overseas equivalents. While it is important that transport authorities work within a 'whole of government' strategic framework, the scope for direct political con-

trol over public transport planning is still broader than necessary.

Aside from the question of the PTDA's powers, the other main area we would want to see strengthened is that of transparency. The best transport authorities are those that publish their plans and deliberations, make data on system performance and timetables generally available, and allow the public to observe their meetings. These do not appear as requirements in the legislation, nor is there any obligation to publish the PTDA's "statements of corporate intent", which are the closest things the PTDA will have to formal 'plans'. Matters of clear public interest, such as the Deloitte review of Myki, could still be kept secret under this legislation.

Community representation in the PTDA's governance is also limited to the one community representative position on the Board. There is no separate community advisory committee (such as does exist in the case of Vicroads), or any provision for community input into decision-making processes, such as facilities for receiving public submissions.

Ultimately, however, it is the people as much as the formal structures that will determine how the PTDA plays out in practice. The challenge for inaugural CEO Ian Dobbs will be to ensure the PTDA disowns the culture of the 'bad old PTC'—a concern frequently expressed by those who argued against an independent planning authority. We would recommend he look to his WA counterparts for a paradigm example of a competent authority in action.

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

Rowville Rail update

The PTUA is participating in the public consultation process for the Rowville Rail study.

As part of this participation we took the opportunity in August to meet study leader William McDougall from consultants SKM. Our campaign team had a wide-ranging discussion, stressing the importance of multimodal network planning and the need to scrutinise transport modelling assumptions. On the basis of our meeting we are cautiously optimistic that Mr McDougall and his team will be giving due consideration to these matters.

In the PTUA's view there is a strong *prima facie* case for a study outcome favouring a 'Perth solution' for public transport to Rowville—based on an extension of the train network with a massive upgrade to feeder bus services interchanging at the new stations.

This is technically and economically superior to the alternative 'Brisbane solution' which puts passengers on buses all the way into the city, or to an intermediate interchange. The latter, judging from recent Brisbane examples, has not fulfilled its promise of being substantially less costly than a rail extension: meanwhile it is less attractive to passengers, making recovery of those costs more difficult. It also lacks the carrying capacity for the future needs of the corridor—as evidenced by the busway congestion problems now occurring in Brisbane itself.

From a technical standpoint, planners in the past have been led to recommend busways over rail extensions because their computer models assumed high 'transfer penalties'. In other words, passengers are assumed to place a high cost on transferring from bus to train, to the extent they would prefer to stay on a bus all the way to their destination rather than cover even a large part of the trip by train. As we have pointed out

many times, this transfer penalty is inferred from the observed behaviour of passengers in cities like Melbourne that lack effective coordination of bus and train services. The reluctance of passengers in this situation to use feeder buses has been attributed to their dislike of transferring *per se*, rather than a rational reaction to low bus frequencies compounded by failure to accommodate transfers in timetable design.

Fortunately, there are signs Australian transport planning is finally beginning to catch up with best practice in Europe and North America. We are cautiously optimistic that the profession has moved on since the late 1980s when the WA government was advised—by another study team led by Mr McDougall—to build a busway instead of the Joondalup rail line.

Recent events have moved passenger rail expansion into the political mainstream—a situation that could not be more different to that just 5 or 10 years ago, when every major transport study from the Scoresby Environment Effects Statement to the Northern Central City Corridor Study was hamstrung by bureaucrats to close off rail options from the start. The Rowville team, by contrast, has been briefed specifically to consider the heavy rail option, by a government charged with a specific mandate to build rail to Rowville.

Needless to say, this does not mean the government's Rowville promise is at all certain of being delivered. Severe risks remain, but are of a different kind than before.

Of greatest concern is the ongoing tendency of planners to draw unwarranted links between urban density and public transport use. It must be stressed that the Rowville line is now 40 years overdue, and should stand on its merits independently of what new urban development is being considered in the corridor.

The recent train patronage boom was not brought about by apartment construction, but by a relatively small shift in travel habits away from the private car. (Even so, it is still biased toward peak periods, and needs to be encouraged with service improvements outside peak hours to get the most from our rail infrastructure. If planned properly, the Rowville corridor might set an example for what needs to be done.)

The other danger stems from the rail-hostile mindset that still exists within the State bureaucracy. Right now, we have every reason to believe this is outweighed by the political imperative to deliver the promised suburban rail expansion. We are also inclined to believe the Rowville study team (unlike all those preceding it) has enough independence to draw its own conclusions without undue interference. But the proof of the pudding is in the eating, and the critical test will be the ability of both the Rowville team and the new PTDA to steer clear of the old bureaucratic culture, and ultimately deliver on projects such as Rowville.

The PTUA will continue to engage with the Rowville study team and make the case for our preferred outcome, in public and in private.

If you feel able to contribute to our Rowville campaign, please contact the Outer East branch:

outereast@ptua.org.au.



New record set for fare evasion

New figures released in late August have shown that fare evasion has grown to some \$80 million of revenue lost each year.

The evasion rates (which include travelling without a ticket, and using an expired or incorrect ticket, including concession fraud) are 20.3% on trams, 9.8% on trains, 9.2% on buses, with an overall rate of 13.5% across the metropolitan network.

The Coalition government declared they would crackdown on cheats, but have not expressed what they actually

intend to do, with no additional funding provided to operators to extend inspection blitzes.

What seems clear is that repeated advertising campaigns by Metlink to try and embarrass or guilt evaders into paying has not worked.

Last year the Metlink Revenue Protection Plan document published by *The Age* revealed that only 2.39% of tram passengers have their tickets checked.

With no other checking mechanism—unlike trains where fare gates block most non-payers travelling through

major stations, and buses where passengers show tickets to drivers as they board—perhaps it's not surprising that tram fare evasion remains high.

More advertising and blitzes will not do the job. Only more consistent ticket checks will fix this problem. If people expect to get their ticket checked on every trip, they will pay. Given the huge continuing cost of fare evasion, it's clearly time to look again at the idea of returning conductors to tram services.

State searches around for PSOs

The state government has started recruiting for Protective Service Officers to patrol railway stations after dark.

The officers will be on every metropolitan railway station and four major regional stations from 6pm to last train, 7 nights a week.

PSOs' powers have been clarified, with them having the ability to board trains and police the areas around stations.

Victoria Police force command have

said that the initial deployments will be to central and inner-suburban stations, and then to known troublespots, and that officers will only be deployed to stations that have toilet facilities of some kind. This implies that toilets will be built or re-opened at all stations to cater for them, and raises the obvious question of whether those toilets will also be available to passengers—at the very least when officers are on duty.

As noted in the last newsletter, crime

figures indicate that officers at some stations may be kept busy, and others may have nothing to do.

We would call on the government to continue to review the PSO policy and to not be afraid to make changes if it becomes clear that the PSOs will have a greater impact on crime and passenger safety if instead of the 'one size fits all' approach, they are deployed to stations and during times where they will have the greatest impact.

Progress on tram priority, but it's a slow exercise

Action to speed up trams through improved traffic management is heading in the right direction, but much more slowly than passengers would prefer.

The PTUA Committee has been briefed by senior Vicroads personnel on its latest initiatives in tram and bus priority. This included a technical overview of the operation of the 'SCATS' traffic light control system. SCATS stands for Sydney Coordinated Adaptive Traffic System. It was developed by the NSW Roads and Traffic Authority and is in use in a number of cities around the world.

The system is certainly very impres-

sive technically, and by all accounts, works reasonably well at what is a very complex and demanding task. However, in essence it remains based on a 'clockwork' approach to traffic light control that constrains the ability to schedule *ad hoc* green phases for trams. Intersections are controlled according to a limited number of phases, rotating through a sequence defined by transition rules. This works well as a control system for continuous streams of car traffic, but deals awkwardly with discrete events, such as a single tram wanting to pass.

Our understanding of alternative signal control systems, such as the SESAM

system in Zurich, is that they rely on a more loose definition of a 'phase', which provides greater technical flexibility in scheduling. The Zurich system, in particular, focusses on maximising the efficiency of traffic flows in 'cells' made up of small groups of intersections.

Improvements in the application of SCATS now being undertaken by Vicroads are likely to take us some way toward Zurich's highly efficient system. Unfortunately though, it appears that without a detailed rethink of the control methodology Melbourne may always fall short.

Geelong Branch report

Moorabool Street interchange to expand

We are pleased that the City of Greater Geelong's review of the recently opened Moorabool Street bus interchange recommended retaining and expanding the facility, and that the Council has accepted the recommendations.

The Council has now asked the State government to commit the bulk of the funds required to implement the recommendations.

The interchange is certainly performing the important function of making public transport in central Geelong more visible and easier to use, but there are a number of shortcomings, at least some of which aren't expensive to fix. Providing an increasing number of buses with side destination displays is welcome, but there's a lot more to do.

Armstrong Creek development

On a negative note, the state government has announced that—contrary to the vision that the new southern suburb of Armstrong Creek would represent a model of sustainable development—no local public transport will be provided for the residents when they first move in. When we asked the local Liberal MP what was meant by his statement that bus services would be made available when Stage One of the development was “completed”, he said that was what he had been told by the DoT! He did promise to look into it.

On the subject of Armstrong Creek, Planning Minister Matthew Guy is still sitting on the advisory panel report on Section 4C of the Geelong Bypass, despite the passage of over three months. It is rumoured that the panel recommended no change to the existing plan, but that the minister is looking for a compromise to placate the local residents whose activism led to the panel

being set up. Apparently the Minister has been stung by the strong residents' response to his intervention promoting development in the Spring Creek valley at Torquay, which is also in the marginal Liberal electorate of South Barwon.

DoT changes

We discovered recently that, arising from last year's Transport Integration Act, the structure of the DoT office in Geelong and other non-metropolitan regions will change in October. Two new positions have been created to replace the current regional manager position. We are not disappointed the present local incumbent will now fade into the sunset. How this restructure might relate to any changes with the imminent formation of the Public Transport Development Authority is unknown.

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



Design concept for Williams Landing station (Source: DoT)

Station User Panel update

The Station User Panel (SUP) continues to develop principles for the design of new railway stations.

The principles are still expected to be ready by the end of the year. We are pushing for them to be ‘performance based’, which means engineering details are left to others while ensuring that the right outcomes exist for passengers.

At our last meeting the Department of Transport's Social Transit Unit, which deals with accessibility, presented a policy they are developing to describe DoT's requirements for train stations.

This work is running parallel to that of the SUP. The presenter challenged SUP to “define what success should look like”.

Last month the Panel visited Nunawading and Westall as recent examples of new stations, then went on to view the site of the proposed Southland station to understand its practical constraints. The Panel has been discussing how much the station should service the neighbourhood rather than just the shopping centre, and whether or not local bus routes should be integrated and ‘kiss-and-ride’ facilities provided.

At the last meeting we were also presented with plans for the new Williams Landing station. It will have ramps and stairs at more friendly gradients than others built recently, as well as lifts. Next month we will be looking at the proposal for Grovedale.

The Panel would be pleased to receive any anecdotes via the PTUA about the useability (or otherwise) of stations that could be used to illustrate its report. Send your stories to the PTUA office.

⇒ office@ptua.org.au

Forming a view on interstate fast rail

In July, the Commonwealth Department of Infrastructure and Transport released its initial study into a high speed passenger railway (HSR) between Melbourne, Canberra, Sydney, Newcastle and Brisbane.

Further studies will be undertaken before a decision regarding construction is made.

The initial study proposes running trains at 350km/h, although the alignment would be designed for 400km/h. This foresight is welcome, as by the time the line is built the technology may have advanced sufficiently for the higher speed to be financially viable.

The route is only broadly determined, but would likely run via Albury, Wagga Wagga, Canberra, Sydney, Newcastle and on to Brisbane by way of Beaudesert or the Gold Coast. The connection to Canberra may be via a spur line (though this is not the PTUA's preference) and the route to Sydney may possibly take in Wollongong.

Sydney Airport is not on the proposed route, but Melbourne Airport could be.

Though we have no firm view on an additional stop at the airport, it may be possible for a future Melbourne Airport rail link to share infrastructure with the HSR line.

Access to the city centres is likely to be via tunnel, with the study finding the cost would be comparable with the land acquisition required for new surface routes. Oddly, the study canvasses non-CBD locations for the city stations, including North Melbourne and Parramatta in place of Sydney Central. The PTUA considers that CBD locations are vital to ensure HSR retains its advantage over air travel. The most viable location for an HSR terminus in Melbourne is Southern Cross station, which the study acknowledges as an option.

The government envisages the first section to be constructed would be Sydney–Newcastle, owing to existing congestion on both rail and road routes. Although we are sympathetic to the argument, we would suggest that an initial Sydney–Canberra section would provide a greater source of revenue that could help fund the Newcastle section.

The greatest traffic benefit, however, will only follow once the HSR reaches Melbourne.

The study estimates a total construction cost between \$61 billion and \$108 billion for the entire Melbourne to Brisbane route. It does not discuss ways of offsetting those costs, such as through associated land development. Patronage estimates in the study appear conservative: for example, only half the projected air passengers between Melbourne and Sydney are assumed to transfer to a HSR alternative. With a sub-three hour transit time, greater convenience and comfort, rail could well attract significantly higher patronage—elsewhere, HSR services such as Eurostar have reduced air travel on the same routes to fringe status.

As we go to press, the PTUA is finalising a submission to the Department including a suggestion that the alignment be used not only for an HSR but also for separate freight train tracks. The study can be accessed at: http://infrastructure.gov.au/rail/trains/high_speed/



Photo: Peter Christener via Wikipedia

Spain's high speed AVE trains operate numerous services, including from Seville to Barcelona via Madrid, a comparable distance to that from Melbourne to Sydney.

Copy deadline for the next PTUA News is 11 November 2011.

Newsletter contributors: Tony Morton, Daniel Bowen, Paul Westcott, Kerry Wilmot and Tim Petersen.

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Inside . . .

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