



‘Public Transport Victoria’ commences service

The Coalition’s promised Public Transport Development Authority has finally materialised, under the brand name Public Transport Victoria (or PTV for short).

Perhaps it was with some irony that the first many people saw of PTV was new logos on tram and bus stop signs around the city on April Fool’s Day. In fact PTV did officially start on schedule the next day, 2 April, taking over all the functions of Metlink and most functions of the Public Transport Division of the Department of Transport.

Victorians will now be counting on PTV to fix the state’s many public transport woes. As the PTUA has repeatedly emphasised, everything from information, to connections, to timetables, to fleet and infrastructure planning, needs attention.

Will PTV make a difference? It’s too soon to tell, but we know CEO Ian Dobbs has made much of his ambition to improve connections, improve system efficiency, and run a more customer-focussed organisation.

While the PTUA has insisted on the need for a strong authority like PTV to take charge of planning the entire transport network, we also stressed the need for a change in institutional culture to accompany the move to the new authority. Essential to this is the recruiting of ‘outsiders’ to at least some senior positions, to bring in new ideas and help combat the poisonous, negative bureaucratic ‘groupthink’ that has built up in Victoria’s transport management over decades.

Unfortunately, the government failed to seize this opportunity, and has confined its senior appointments in PTV almost entirely to those in the current transport bureaucracy, or those who were associated with it in the recent past. While this does not at all preclude the kind of culture change we need in Victoria, it does raise the obvious question how we may expect such change to occur from what is now little more than a ‘rebranding’ exercise. As CEO, Mr Dobbs will assume great responsibility in meeting public expectations for change.



PTV can perhaps claim one minor success in its first weeks. It has been almost two years since Smartbus services started running along Lonsdale Street, but only in early April did the departure sign outside the County Court start working!

However on the minus side, the publication of the first PTV-branded Metro timetables in early April included numerous errors in the section listing train-bus connections. It is these connections that function as the key indicator for successful network planning. Yet in only recent months, bus operators have started dropping connecting train times from their own timetables as they cannot rely on getting up-to-date information from the train operator. Clearly there is a lot of work to do.

⇒ **Meet Public Transport Victoria CEO Ian Dobbs at our members meeting on 3 May. See page 2 for details.**

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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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Contact

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

Member Meetings

Melbourne

Thursday 3 May
Ground Floor, 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



Members' meeting with Ian Dobbs

Our next members' meeting on 3 May features as guest speaker the inaugural Chief Executive of Public Transport Victoria, Ian Dobbs.

The meeting takes place from 6pm at Ross House in Flinders Lane. Members should use the ground floor (main) entrance, where we will have signage and volunteers to give directions.

Ian Dobbs worked in British Rail from 1977 to 1993, when he was head-hunted by the recently installed Kennett Government to run the Public Transport Corporation (better known as 'The Met'). Dobbs' tenure at the PTC came after the worst service cuts to the system under Kirner and Kennett in the early

1990s, but he is remembered for pursuing 'efficiencies' in operations throughout the Kennett era before preparing the PTC for privatisation in 1999.

After 1999 Mr Dobbs returned to the UK, becoming chief executive of the private operator Stagecoach in 2005.

Although Mr Dobbs is closely associated in the public mind with Kennett-era cutbacks and privatisation, we can also look back to this period as one of remarkable cost control. Perhaps nothing illustrates this better than the 1998 Boronia crossing project, which sunk an entire railway station below a major road intersection and rebuilt a bus interchange for \$28 million. A similar project today in Melbourne would claim to cost five times as much. We look forward to hearing Mr Dobbs' insights on this and other pressing issues.

March meeting

In March the Public Transport Ombudsman, Janine Young, presented to our members' meeting. It was worthwhile to hear what her office can offer public transport users to resolve problems with the system and operators. A PowerPoint copy of her presentation is available for members.

Janine committed to following up some of the questions raised with her. One of them was whether there was any control available to prevent Southern Cross Station impeding passenger access, safety and station visibility with their new commercial developments in the station. She has sent us their response, available on request. It seems they need to be hearing more clearly from any users affected by their works, so get emailing and phoning.

East West road threat crystallises

Motorway projects are like zombies: they never really die.

So it is with the so-called East-West tunnel. Not only is it back on the agenda, but the Baillieu Government is now referring to it as its highest priority for infrastructure spending. This is despite the fact the Eddington report effectively conceded the project has only a 50% benefit-cost ratio by a conventional analysis or 70% with the inclusion of “wider economic benefits”—making the project an egregious waste of taxpayers’ money.

Significantly, however, the idea has now morphed to include more at-surface sections in an effort to cut costs (see *The Age*, 31 March)—putting at risk suburbs in Melbourne’s inner north, parts of which may be obliterated to make way for the road and its interchanges.

We know of course that far from solving the traffic jams on the Eastern freeway, it is likely to merely flood the inner city with even more cars, as the majority of traffic from Bulleen, Templestowe and Doncaster is not heading across town to Sunshine and Melton, but to the CBD.

The solution for getting those people out of traffic is a Doncaster rail line.

The government is also talking-up the road’s importance as a freight route, and as a “back-up” for the Westgate bridge.

This is nonsense. A new road could not be a back-up unless it was built but then kept closed until there was a problem. No: once it’s built it will be used, and the inevitable traffic that increases to fill it will render it useless in the event of issues on the Westgate bridge.

While in the current fiscal environment there is probably not much danger of the state or federal governments funding such a project, moves to make it more attractive to private investors as a toll road mean that those concerned about it should mobilise now.

PTUA is participating in a community campaign against this motorway. Can you help? Contact office@ptua.org.au.

Come to a public meeting to oppose the road at the Dan O’Connell Hotel (Canning Street, Carlton) on Wednesday 2 May at 7pm.



Views of Sydney’s ‘underground’ Cross City Tunnel. Is this the future of Melbourne’s inner north?



Ignore the nay-sayers: Doncaster / Rowville can have rail now

Bad advice from a do-nothing State bureaucracy is likely to sabotage the promised Doncaster and Rowville rail projects unless the community demands independent analysis.

When rail extensions to Rowville and East Doncaster first appeared in the Melbourne Transportation Plan in 1969, the plans made clear what work would be needed on the existing train network to fit these lines in: the underground City Loop, plus an infrastructure upgrade on the Dandenong line to carry more trains.

This advice is scarcely less valid today—and we now have a government promising to build these long-overdue extensions. However, the consultants investigating how this might be done are

relying for advice on the same bureaucracy that has spent the last 30 years finding excuses *not* to build them.

The Department of Transport is not the least bit interested in extending train services to suburbs that do not already have rail access. What they want instead is the \$5 billion inner-city ‘metro tunnel’—a project cooked up in the last 5 years and set to soak up all public transport expenditure in Melbourne for the next two decades.

They are therefore advising anyone who will listen that there is no room on the network for trains to Doncaster or Rowville, and will not be until 2025 or later, when the metro tunnel is built. This contradicts the advice from their predecessors in 1969. It also ignores

the fact that the tunnel would provide no capacity boost in the Clifton Hill direction, and fails to solve suburban rail bottlenecks, which are mainly due to inadequate signalling.

Signalling on the Clifton Hill line is already adequate to fit in trains every 10 minutes to Doncaster. In the case of Rowville, we recommend a package that includes signalling upgrades and some level crossing elimination on the Dandenong line. This would still cost far less than either an east-west road or a metro rail tunnel.

Further details will be made available on our website: see www.ptua.org.au for more.

Myki mayhem!!!

In recent weeks the use of Myki has ramped up, with weekly and monthly Metcards withdrawn from sale in March. We understand that by the end of March, the number of trips being made on Myki exceeded those on Metcard for the first time.

With it has come problems, particularly at city stations during morning peak, as passengers queue to touch-off and exit. Problems are also evident in the evening peak at some suburban stations.

Increases in passenger numbers had already seen some stations under strain at peak times, and Myki has exacerbated this problem.

Not helping are the 'Frankenbarrier' retrofitted Metcard gates at inner stations, which do not work well with Myki. These are to be replaced, but in the meantime passengers are frustrated by slow and unresponsive gates, and no help understanding problems.

Metro responded at one stage by declaring that all city station gates would be

left open in peak hour—crowding or no crowding—a kneejerk response which risked increased fare evasion, particularly in the evening peak.

The silver lining is that the old gates will ultimately all be replaced, and new gates will have better Myki readers and more informative displays. But we still don't know when this is to occur.

Rather than wait until the end of the year when Metcard is completely phased out, it would be prudent to move ahead quickly with the replacement, as well as (where at all possible) increasing the number of gates.

Similar action is urgently needed at suburban stations. Work has gone into building additional exits in some places, to ease queues (see photo).



At some stations there are still insufficient numbers of readers, for instance McKinnon, where the main platform has just a single reader. We understand more will eventually come, but this process needs to be accelerated.

Metcard machines and gates have already been removed at some stations. This is proving difficult for passengers, particularly occasional users and particularly where there are no station staff. Little information is provided to help people make the switch to Myki.

Myki is here to stay, that much is clear. The question is how the continuing roll-out is handled, and whether enough is done to make the transition as smooth as possible for passengers.



Doncaster rail public workshops

Government consultants led by URS conducted workshops in March to seek community feedback on the three proposed options for a rail line between Doncaster and the city.

These were conducted at Richmond Town Hall, the Marwal Centre in North Balwyn and Manningham City Council. The latter two were well attended: the Richmond workshop somewhat less so. A separate forum sponsored by Doncaster MP Mary Wooldridge also attracted large numbers.

The strong attendance at these events was in sharp contrast with earlier workshops, a strong indicator that people are now galvanised in their determination to see a good rail service introduced in Manningham.

The three options are as follows:

1. Via the Eastern Freeway reservation to the intersection with Doncaster Road (also known as the "rapid transit theme");
2. Along the 48 tram corridor through Kew and North Balwyn and on to Doncaster (described as the "local access option"); and
3. A link from Doncaster Hill to the Ringwood line at Box Hill (described as the "orbital network").

The latter two options would be almost entirely in tunnel, while option 1 requires a tunnel in Doncaster.

The PTUA's preferred option 1 was also clearly preferred at the Doncaster and North Balwyn forums. An attendee from Bulleen specifically declared this was the only option that would work for

people in his suburb. The consultants, however, suggested a lack of capacity on the Clifton Hill network would be a potential difficulty (see page 3).

The consultants also appear concerned about patronage on a service running in the Eastern Freeway corridor, citing low patronage on the DART bus services introduced in October 2010. These concerns are belied by the Perth experience with the hugely successful Joondalup line which also runs in a freeway corridor. The key, obviously, is the provision of frequent feeder bus services taking local travellers to their nearest railway station.

A draft report is imminent, and will be made available for public feedback before a final report is presented to the government in late 2012.

Thirteen years late, but South Morang opens: next Mernda

Almost 13 years after the initial promise by the Bracks-led opposition leading into the 1999 election, the new South Morang station opened for service on 22 April (while this PTUA News was in press).

The newly appointed PTV also hosted an open day on Saturday 14 April, where a special shuttle train ran to and from Epping to see the new route.

Although the State bureaucracy is still obscuring the cost of the actual extension, we now have a better idea of what the original (staggeringly high) \$650 million price tag has actually paid for. As we now know, the 'South Morang Extension Project' was in reality a package of works to aid in providing better services to the entire Clifton Hill group (Hurstbridge and Epping lines). The package included:

- New bridge and duplication of track between Clifton Hill and Westgarth (the 'Stage 1' works, completed in 2009);
- Track duplication between Keon Park and Epping stations;
- A rebuild of Epping station below ground level;

- The extension proper, 3.5km of dual track to South Morang;
- Grade separations at Pindari Avenue and Civic Drive;
- The new South Morang station, with 12 bus bays; and
- Signalling upgrades and new stabling on the Hurstbridge Line (still under construction).

Accompanying the opening of the station is a restructuring of the buses in the area to coordinate better with trains to and from South Morang. Unfortunately this route change process has not involved the public to anywhere near a sufficient extent (as would be routine in a city like Vancouver); as a result there is palpable public anxiety.

Some of the route changes are clearly inappropriate—specifically the axing of a run along Mill Park Drive, which should be reinstated. But for the most part, residents should see an overall improvement to their bus services, particularly the directness of the new routes which will save passengers substantial time compared with the previous long, meandering routes. The routes focus on the new station, ensuring the network functions to connect all points as

efficiently as possible, even if a change from one service to another will sometimes be required.

Importantly, the route 562 Mernda services that were cut some months ago (see our December issue) have been reinstated. Curiously though, the Plenty Road works that according to the Dyson Group "forced" the service cuts are still ongoing, and look to remain until at least the end of the year.

The PTUA will be campaigning on further development of the bus network to improve coverage for local residents.

The rail extension is critical to the South Morang area. When first promised in 1999 the urban sprawl along Plenty Road was already in full swing, with estates popping up on both the east and west sides. The 13 year delay in achieving this milestone now sees the requirement for rail stretching a further 7km up the road to Mernda and Doreen (as we foresaw back in 2004).

Please show your support for this critical extension by joining the Facebook group www.facebook.com/merndarail or by printing out and signing the petition at www.lenjet.com/petition.pdf.

What's in the April timetable

Metro's new timetable from 22 April brings some changes, with three new stations opening, and changes to weekend services on the busiest lines.

The South Morang line finally opens, with trains every eight minutes during peak. Cardinia Road (Pakenham line) and Lynbrook (Cranbourne line) also open, providing more public transport options for local communities. (But we must still wait for proper feeder buses, in these or any other areas.)

Equally welcome is the introduction of services every ten minutes on weekends between 10am and 7pm on the three busiest lines: Ringwood, Dandenong and Frankston. This is the first ma-

ior weekend boost to train frequencies since 1999.

These lines suffer from weekend overcrowding (see photo), and so it is not surprising they should be prioritised for upgrades. But the government and Metro should continue to introduce frequent services at all times, improving the connectivity of the network and encouraging more people onto public transport by cutting waiting times.

There is a minor change to weekend loop direction for the northern group (now running clockwise to help clear crowds from Southern Cross during big events) and Hurstbridge line trains will now stop all stations outside peak hours,

to provide a ten minute service to stations between Clifton Hill and Jolimont.

It's expected that the Sunbury electrification project will be completed later in the year, triggering another round of timetable changes.



Geelong Branch report

Short Term Tickets

Over 60% of Geelong bus passengers currently use short term Myki tickets. The government has now decreed that short term tickets will not be introduced in Melbourne, and will be abolished on regional city bus systems.

To scrap people's preferred ticket option is extraordinary, and has never been properly explained. (The non-release of Deloitte's report into Myki, despite a promise to do so, is the subject of court action by Greens MP Greg Barber.)

The Branch has contacted Terry Mulder more than once to find out what the state government intends to do after ditching short term tickets. All we are told is that options are being examined.

We suggested that thermally-printed short term tickets should be introduced, using the existing printing facility on the bus driver's Myki console, and would cost only a fraction of a cent each. This was rejected on the grounds that these "would not provide passengers with the same benefits as those using Myki".

Bus passengers now using short term tickets are obviously uninterested in making use of most of Myki's options. They just want to turn up, pay, and go—with the majority of them making only a single trip, and not needing or bothering to touch off at the end.

The fact that thermally-printed short-term tickets will deny users all of the "features" of Myki might even be an incentive for some to change to Myki, but without the coercion and annoyance involved in summarily abolishing their preferred ticket option.

Note that V/Line passengers are currently allowed to use their paper tickets to get access to other parts of the public transport system, which seems to place no extra burden on bus drivers, station staff, or the system as a whole. We also understand that it was recently decided that the emergency relief ticket to be issued by charities under the Myki system will be a paper ticket.

Geelong train disruptions

In recent weeks Geelong-Melbourne

passengers have suffered a number of significant disruptions due to signalling malfunctions. These culminated in the appalling events of the evening of 3 April, caused by a failed underground power cable south of Little River.

Five peak trains came to a halt along the line, with some passengers being confined in trains for five hours. The V/Line board has admitted the situation was completely mismanaged and that trains should have been organised to move at slow speed, at least to the nearest station.

The problems don't seem to result from the age of the systems involved, with the unstable signalling at Newport having been upgraded only last year. The cable that failed on 3 April was about 35 years old, and the failure attributed to careless installation of an adjacent communication cable as part of the 'Regional Fast Rail' project 6 years ago.

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

Regional Rail Link update

While he was in opposition, we had a couple of discussions with Public Transport Minister Terry Mulder about the problems we saw with the Regional Rail Link (RRL) plans gradually emerging.

He was certainly aware of the importance to regional passengers of North Melbourne station and the implications of plans to not provide RRL platforms there, even though the line will run immediately adjacent to the station.

So it is very disappointing that Mulder has fallen totally into line with the previous government's flawed plan. In fact he has come up with his own crude piece of spin to justify the bypass of North Melbourne by the RRL.

He told Geelong radio listeners recently that platforms could not be pro-

vided at North Melbourne because the popularity of the station meant that it was too crowded. He said fewer passengers used Footscray, so it would be preferable as the interchange point for regional passengers, once it had two new platforms added to it.

This is patent nonsense. North Melbourne is certainly popular, and for good reason. As an interchange point it's as convenient as you are likely to get. The compact station layout links regional passengers with three other suburban rail lines, two of which run through the City Loop. It also provides a link with the very successful 401 bus to the hospital and university precincts, and with Royal Show and race trains when they run.

\$30 million was recently spent *enhanc-*

ing North Melbourne's interchange role and catering for whatever crowds there might be. And if two new RRL platforms were built a North Melbourne it would, of course, increase the station's capacity by one third.

Meanwhile a possible glimpse at what services might be run on the RRL has come from a very unlikely source—the Rowville Rail Study Draft Report. It includes a table indicating potential train movements on the suburban network in ten years time.

The document postulates that by 2021 four Geelong trains an hour will run on the Tarneit bypass, stopping at the new 'suburban' stations being provided at Wyndham Vale and Tarneit. In peak times these will be supplemented by additional express trains.

Chadstone redevelopment goes to panel hearing

On 2 April the Stonnington City Council resolved to formally request the Minister to refer the Chadstone Shopping Centre application for a \$500 million expansion to a Panel hearing.

Even with the additional 1,400 car spaces sought by the centre, the ratio of car spaces to retail space will diminish under this proposal. Yet it offers nothing significant to transfer trips to public transport.

The PTUA lodged a submission to the council opposing the initial application. It argued for an extension of the Alamein rail line to Chadstone and a robust transport mode-shift plan which would shift car trips to public transport.

Of course, this would need to be much better than the plan written for Chadstone for its last expansion in 2003. The stated objective of that plan was limited to “improved travel options for visitors and staff to encourage the use of more sustainable modes of travel,” and in practice led only to the provision of public transport information with the centre’s promotional material.

The PTUA will be making a further submission to the panel hearing, which commences on Monday 14 May.

The panel is not a decision making body, but provides an independent public forum for evidence to be presented and argued. The final decision will be made by the council and the Planning Minister, based on advice from the panel. (The PTUA used a similar panel hearing back in 1998 to publicise our case against what is now Eastlink.)

There were 128 submissions made to Stonnington Council by members of the public, government organisations and community groups. Most opposed aspects of the development. Opposition centred on the social and environmental costs associated with growing volumes of road traffic which accesses Chadstone daily, and the very poor provision of public transport.

On 2 April the Council declared general but conditional support for the amendment to the Planning Scheme. A number of issues remain outstanding, including important questions related to transport.

While the council appears supportive of the idea of an integrated transport plan, it has strangely drawn comfort from advice from the Department of Transport which considers the proposal “complements” the objectives and principles of

the Transport Integration Act 2010. The council’s consultants themselves have queried whether greater bus usage (in particular) will be forthcoming under the proposal. This issue will be at the centre of our own submissions.

Stonnington Council is also seeking a ‘Transport Modal Shift Feasibility Study’ for Chadstone. According to the council this should be a separate exercise to the Planning Scheme Amendment, and would aim to make Chadstone more sustainable from a transport and access perspective. However, the proposed study would simply consider options for a medium-term shift away from private car access. In plain language, it puts the issue on the never-never.

Public transport has been delivered on a wing and a prayer ever since Chadstone opened half a century ago. In reality, to save this area of Melbourne from transport disaster, the Planning Scheme Amendment itself must ensure that proposed transport solutions are viable and are delivered. Extension of the Alamein line and development of a transport mode-shift plan would provide the necessary level of certainty.

In brief. . .

Leongatha line ripped up

Reports came to us in late March that the tracks and station platform for the former Leongatha rail line at Koo-Wee-Rup were being removed, as part of the ongoing dismantling of the railway and conversion to a bike path.

According to local campaigner Max Semken, the line at this point had already been severed by the building of

a new toilet block partly across the old tracks. Ironically, the toilet block has apparently been built for the convenience of ‘rail trail’ users!

Hosts’ hands tied by Myki

‘Station Hosts’ are used at many locations in Melbourne to assist passengers, but are frequently blocked by the system from doing their jobs properly. The latest example of this is malfunctioning Myki readers: according to

several sources, Hosts are not permitted to attach notes to readers informing passengers they are not working. This has led to a number of difficult situations where one passenger after another must be told by the Host not to use the reader in question.

We would expect that the new PTV authority would be able to exercise its power to permit Hosts to use their own discretion in cases like this.

Copy deadline for the next PTUA News is 15 June 2012.

Newsletter contributors: Matt Ferrantino, Tony Morton, Daniel Bowen, Paul Westcott and Kerryn Wilmot.
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Responsibility for electoral comment in PTUA News is taken by Tony Morton, 247 Flinders Lane, Melbourne.