

2014 a watershed year for PTUA

As we embark on a new year of campaigning, sustainable transport advocates face a crucial period in what will be Victoria's most important political debate around transport in a generation.

At stake is the ploughing of some \$16 billion of public money into the destructive East West toll road project: some of it directly, and the rest over decades as 'availability payments' or 'shadow tolls' to a private operator. As the late Paul Mees famously declared, this is \$16 billion that will not be available in coming decades to invest in 21st century public transport to keep Melbourne and Victoria liveable.

The PTUA has fought such retrograde proposals before: the Eastern Freeway extension 25 years ago, CityLink 20 years ago, the Yarra Valley ring road 15 years ago and Eastlink 10 years ago—not forgetting East West Link's earlier incarnation at the turn of the century. Of course, many of these ultimately went ahead, through sheer political effrontery and despite strong community resistance, and we have reaped the consequences in chronic traffic congestion (which we have to remember was not a feature of Melbourne outside peak hour prior to the 1990s).

This time, however, the stakes are higher: both the 'upside' and the 'downside'. Thanks in part to those earlier campaigns, there is great public awareness of the importance of public transport to liveable cities, and a mainstream political constituency for public transport. There's clear understanding that public transport, walking and cycling need to be prioritised ahead of motorways to support sustainable urban mobility and the city we want in the 21st century.

We saw the full reality of this constituency for public transport in the 2010 state election, where it is generally agreed that promises to fix public transport were decisive in key marginal seats, such as on the Frankston train line. Sadly it's now clear Victorians bought into a false promise as the government presses ahead with the East West Link, in direct contradiction to its statements before the election, and in the face of poll after poll revealing clear majority support across Victoria for prioritising public transport ahead of new roads.

Yet while the government resists it, the public transport alternative has been brought into sharper focus. Major projects to revitalise the Melbourne rail network and overhaul buses have been clearly articulated and have the kind of outspoken mainstream support that appeared to elude advocates even a decade ago. They include the Melbourne Metro rail tunnel, but also high-capacity signalling upgrades, level crossing grade separation, suburban rail extensions and bus route reform.

Our *Public Transport Not Traffic* campaign, in alliance with Friends of the Earth and dozens of transport, environment, climate action and residents' groups across Melbourne and Victoria, is right now mobilising thousands in support of public transport alternatives to the East West Link. Our aim is to pressure the government to delay signing contracts for the road until after November's state election, so Victorians have the opportunity to exercise a political choice about their transport future.

(continued on next page)



Keeping in touch...

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Membership Enquiries

Call or e-mail the office (see above)

PTUA members can obtain cheap yearly Myki passes – see www.ptua.org.au/members/offers

Internet

Our web site 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:

www.ptua.org.au/members/resources

Committee

- Anthony Morton – President
Tim Long – Secretary
Phil Bourke – Treasurer

Daniel Bowen

Alison Clarke

Matthew Ferrantino

Ian Hundley

Yvonne Kirk

Jeremy Lunn

David Robertson

Nalla Sivarasa

Bruce Sutherland

Branch convenors:

Paul Westcott – Geelong

Terry Konstandelis – Eastern Suburbs

Member meetings

Melbourne:

See below for details of upcoming meetings

Eastern Suburbs:

Fourth 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

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After 50 years of neglect, denial and bureaucratic opposition, 2014 might finally be the year when Victoria turns its transport policy in a sustainable direction, the way Perth did years ago, and many American and European cities did earlier still.

Of course, there's also a downside. If the government signs contracts a week before the election, and a new or re-

elected government washes its hands of that decision and allows it to proceed, the future for Melbourne and Victoria is bleak. Rearranging a few inner-city traffic bottlenecks won't prevent the state (and its increasingly underemployed workforce) being choked by a too-congested road network and a rail network that is literally falling apart.

We also have to contend with a Prime Minister who insists

urban public transport is “not in the knitting”. But it is a healthy sign of the times that the Federal Government stands widely condemned for this stance, when less than a decade ago it was simply accepted as the default position.

Our campaign will need your help over the coming months. Please read on to see how you can contribute and be part of the change!

Geelong Branch report

Our members continue to strongly resist the effort by elements in the Geelong Council to remove the bus interchange from Moorabool Street after only four years. PTV says that bus usage has risen by 20 percent since the interchange was reinstated in September 2009, but that cuts no ice with some.

In fact, the councillor with responsibility for the city centre told us the other day that although the return of buses to Moorabool Street had “worked well for bus users”, it was not working well for the rest of the 150,000 people in Geelong! That strange logic was not explained.

The final form of the new Grovedale station has been

revealed and it is still in the minimalist form released for comment six months ago. Despite objections from ourselves and others, it features only one platform, not two as V/Line preferred.

Buses will stop in the road outside the station, not beside the station building, meaning that bus passengers will have to cross a road and car park to get to and from trains. PTV has justified this by saying that buses could only pull up next to the station if it was a terminating stop. Again, the logic escapes us.

The short-sighted and unexplained bypass of North Melbourne station by Geelong line trains has already drawn complaints from users, in particular from people who use (or

formerly used) the 401 bus. One has told us that her journey from Geelong to Melbourne Uni now took over 20 minutes longer.

The final switch-off of paper tickets on V/Line on 24 February unfortunately marks the disappearance of the last form of short-term ticket available to Victorian public transport users in areas served by Myki.

STOP PRESS: The draft G21 Public Transport Strategy has just been released and is open for comment until 28 March. Please have a look at it and provide some feedback. You don't have to live in the Geelong region. The Strategy can be found at: www.g21transport.com.au

Dr. Paul Mees OAM, 1961-2013

We are pleased to note the awarding on Australia Day of the Medal (OAM) of the Order of Australia to Dr Paul Mees, who died sadly in June 2013 after a battle with cancer.

Paul had a long involvement with the PTUA and was its President from 1992 to 2001. He deserves much of the credit for inspiring the Association, and the broader sustainable transport advocacy movement in Australia, with a robust strategic vision together with strong intellectual leadership.

Paul continued his advocacy work outside the PTUA after 2001 and was pivotal in raising the political



profile of public transport to the point where the issue now decides Victorian elections. In his final public address last June, only a short time before he died, Paul

emphasised the threat posed to Victoria's public transport renaissance by the diversion of funds to the East West Link road project.

Paul's camaraderie and insights on the Australian transport debate are highly valued and sorely missed by the Association. We offer our congratulations and support to Paul's wife Erica, and to his family and friends.

The video of Paul's last appearance—a message recorded for the Trains Not Tollroads public meeting in June 2013—can be viewed via our website at www.ptua.org.au/2014/01/26/paul-mees-oam

2014 election: the state of play so far.

It's an election year, and with the vote set for November, public transport is a key issue once again. We've reviewed the record and policies of the two major parties to date, and plan to do the same for other contenders as their policies emerge later in the year.

COALITION

Coalition transport policy is dominated by their almost obsessive promotion of the East West road tunnel stage 1, an \$8 billion project, which they describe as "city-shaping" and "congestion-busting".

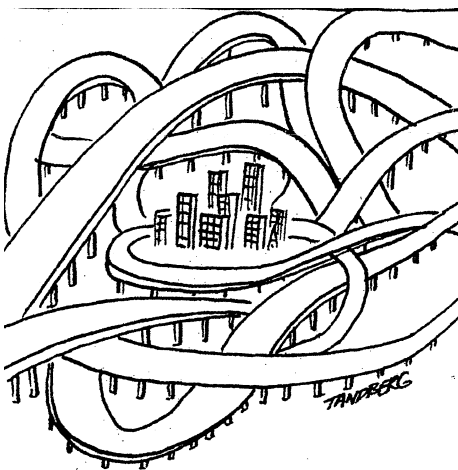
Having tracked the history of these mega-road projects, we know that such huge boosts to road capacity are only likely to be "city-shaping" in that they entrench car dependence, and any "congestion-busting" is short-term, as induced traffic fills the new and existing roads. That's not just our view but also the consensus of experts going back decades.

On public transport, very little has been announced. But we looked again at their 2010 promises, and how well they've performed:

- The promise of an independent public transport authority resulted in PTV, but the government clearly still holds all the cards when it comes to senior appointments and funding, and on these crucial matters it's very much the *status quo*. There has been none of the fundamental transformation in transport leadership that led to successes in Perth and Vancouver.
- Seven new trains were promised in the first term of government (with 33 in the second term).

Those seven were funded, and eight more have been added, making this a rare good news story.

- Feasibility studies into rail to Rowville, Melbourne Airport, Doncaster, and a Geelong-Ballarat-Bendigo link were all promised. However every single study concluded such lines are too expensive - some using doubtful assumptions - and none has gone anywhere, despite the rhetoric before the election.



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- Grovedale station: this has been funded and is being built.
- Southland station: despite an ironclad promise this modest but strategic project would be built in the government's first term, there has been no noticeable progress, although an unspecified amount of funding was in the 2013 budget.
- Avalon Airport rail: the promise was a study (which has progressed) and early works, but this has always been seen by observers, including ourselves, as not at the top of the priority list.

- A promise to expand the tram order by 10 (from 50 to 60 in total) is not yet funded, despite continuing crowding on trams, and a need to increase the number of accessible trams.

- Regional level crossing upgrades at up to 75 locations: 50 crossings upgraded so far. The government expects the rest to occur this year and next.

- The controversial PSOs program is rolling out as promised. While anecdotal evidence suggests most passengers are pleased to have a security presence after dark, it's unclear if this has made any difference to patronage. Meanwhile we argue that quieter stations don't need two armed officers (but would benefit from regular platform staff), while other trouble spot stations need security from first to last train.

- Level crossing eliminations at Mitcham and Springvale are funded and underway.

Other changes were not specifically promised during the 2010 election campaign, but delivered by the Coalition in their first term:

- Huntingdale to Monash shuttle bus, which has been a huge success for students and staff alike.
- The Bayside Rail Improvement package, consisting of signal, track and station upgrades along the Frankston, Williamstown and Werribee lines. This aims mainly to provide operational flexibility by allowing the Alstom trains to run on these lines (they can't at present), and has little in the way of direct passenger benefits.

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2014 election: the state of play so far.

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- More funding for Regional Rail Link, which has resulted in additional level crossing grade separations at Sunshine.
- Delivery of 10 minute weekend services on the busiest three suburban rail lines is a big piece of good news, though there has been virtually no promotion of this to help build patronage - vital if we are going to see frequent all-day services on other lines.
- Let's not forget that after much lambasting of Myki from opposition, in 2011 the Coalition decided to actually make the system worse for passengers, by deciding to remove the short term ticket option from the system. It also opted out of providing ticket machines on trams. The government is relying on a still-secret report from Deloitte as the pretext for these reductions in scope, which have not come with any reductions in the budget.

Notable in recent weeks is the Coalition's downplaying of the Metro rail tunnel, with scaremongering in mid-February on the prospect of Swanston Street being dug up and closed for up to two years during construction - a doubtful claim. This is surely a sign that they have little interest in building it and the tunnel is being used once again as a political tool to resist any major improvements to metropolitan rail infrastructure.

It's worth remembering that while projects such as Regional Rail Link, South Morang, Sunbury electrification and several suburban stations have been completed or

have progressed well under the Coalition, this government has not funded any new rail lines or extensions themselves.

They have also put on hold plans for Caroline Springs station, and rolled-back Labor's 2010 funding of 20 additional Premium Station upgrades, despite explicitly telling the PTUA this would not happen.

LABOR

Meanwhile, Labor has announced an initial batch of policies for November.

- 50 level crossings around Melbourne to go, with 40 targeting the ALCAM priority list. Labor will announce another 10 as the year progresses.
- Build the Metro rail tunnel, though the funding for this is unclear.
- The Labor policy also states that the Metro rail tunnel is a prerequisite for extending rail to Mernda, which is odd, as the two projects are (literally) not linked.
- Westgate Distributor - part of Labor's defunct Truck Action Plan, which aims to move trucks off inner-western suburban streets.
- Widening the Tullamarine Freeway.
- More station car parking.
- Labor's plans will be largely funded by leasing out the Port of Melbourne.
- 24-hour train and tram services at weekends, with all suburban rail lines and selected tram routes running hourly overnight, and some late-night bus services to regional centres.

Labor's initial policy splash is a good start, but what they haven't yet come up with is a comprehensive public transport blueprint to repair the disappointing legacy of the 2008 Victorian Transport Plan. There is nothing yet on trams or buses, and no mention of service upgrades on existing routes, such as continuing the popular (but under-publicised) ten minute train frequency now seen on some lines.

Widening the Tullamarine Freeway is ultimately the old way of thinking. Experience shows that the new lanes will quickly fill with traffic.

All-night weekend public transport is likely to be popular, though given the huge cost of support staff and PSOs (which Labor has said they will keep), hourly services are an inefficient use of the available resources and may not generate the patronage to produce good cost recovery (as was seen with the original hourly Nightrider buses a decade ago). These should be at least half-hourly to attract more late-night revellers.

For public transport users, a significant chink in Labor's armour is their refusal to back away from the incredibly expensive and wasteful East West Link if the Coalition manages to get some contracts signed before the election.

Nevertheless, it's early days, and policies from both sides will be interesting to watch over the coming months.

Public Transport Not Traffic's *Take PT to Parliament*

People strategically positioned themselves on the platform for a delayed and overcrowded peak hour service. Yes, commuters face this reality daily, but this day was a little different. The “Take Public Transport To Parliament” involved politicians from across Melbourne traveling with local constituents to Spring Street.

While travelling on public transport during the morning peak residents and Members of Parliament discussed the various improvements required across the network. The morning was an

upbeat, positive and engaging community event.

I met with my local Legislative Council member, Sue Pennicuik, at Elsternwick station. A daily train user, Sue knows first hand the challenges commuters face. Sue is a fantastic advocate for sustainable transport and we enthusiastically discussed improvements needed on the Sandringham Line.

Clem Newton-Brown, the Liberal member for Stonnington, initially agreed to travel with me, but somewhat controversially pulled out, which attracted the attention of *The Age* (“State Liberal MP makes East-West gaffe”, Jan 31,

2014). It was disappointing that no Liberal members took part in the day as the shared traveling experience offered an opportunity for engagement that you can not replicate in an office.

PT to Parliament was a great way to start the year for the Public Transport Not Traffic campaign. It is going to be a busy year with public transport again the number one election issue. I encourage everyone to get on board with the events going into the future. Sign up for information at www.ptnt.org

Mil Urban, PTUA Member and PTNT Campaigner



More campaign news...

The *Public Transport Not Traffic* campaign has started the year with a bang. We have almost 2000 supporters already and a growing list of supporting community groups.

As well as the *Take Public Transport to Parliament* event,

the campaign has launched a *Public Transport Not Traffic* CrowdSpot. This interactive online map allows people to mark improvements they would like made to Victoria's public transport network. Jump on line and add your thoughts or vote

for some of your favourite spots at ptnt.crowdspot.com.au

This campaign has a great deal of momentum and therefore the best way to keep up is to sign on as a supporter or volunteer at www.ptnt.org

Summer transport pain

Summer holiday timetables cut trains on some lines by as much as 50% between Christmas and late January, causing severe overcrowding on some services. This was the first 'summer timetable' imposed on trains since the overcrowding crisis of 2007-08, and it has as little justification now as it did then.

The PTUA released photos and video showing crammed

conditions, broadcast by Channel 7 on 9 January. Passengers reported packed services on many lines, including Frankston, Hurstbridge, Ringwood and all trains through North Melbourne.

While it was understandable that major works have required some lines to use bus replacement services, or reduced numbers of trains, other lines saw reduced services for no good reason.

We understand that one factor causing such a prolonged period of cuts is that Metro's driver recruitment is still lagging, forcing them to have many drivers on leave during January.

Whatever the reasons, Metro and the government need to fix this problem. Such deep cuts, and such bad overcrowding, should not occur on the rail system.



Passengers also had challenges dealing with heat-related disruptions, particularly in mid-January. On the hottest days over summer, Metro and V/Line implemented speed restrictions. The reduced timetables in January meant this did not cause undue network congestion, though this was cited in December as justification to proactively cancel trains.

Upgrades to tracks and train air-conditioning in the past few years

appeared to improve reliability compared to the pre-Black Saturday heatwave of 2009, but the system did suffer power supply problems.

On several occasions in January, Metro took the unusual step of publicly calling for city commuters to go home early if they could, to avoid the worst of the crowding and disruptions during evening peak.

Yarra Trams also suffered disruptions, and at one point

replaced all route 82 trams with buses, which they said would help free up extra trams for busier routes at times of reduced fleet capacity due to heat-related faults.

With Victoria likely to suffer from increased numbers of hot days in the future, the government will need to ensure that investment is made to ensure the public transport system keeps running.

-> See www.ptua.org.au/2014/01/09 for more pictures and video of summer train crowding.

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